

Duty to refer: making the prevention of homelessness everyone's business

1. Background

On 3 April 2018 the [Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) came in to force, placing a duty on local authorities to agree a plan with residents who are at risk of homelessness to prevent or relieve their homelessness. The Act includes a "[duty to refer](#)", which from 1 October 2018, requires [certain public authorities](#), to refer people they are working with who they consider may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to the local authority.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) expects local authorities to "incorporate the duty to refer into their homelessness strategy and establish effective partnerships and working arrangements with agencies." This builds on the Prime Minister's statement at the launch of the Homelessness Prevention Programme which she said aimed to create "a fresh government approach to tackling homelessness by focusing on the underlying issues which can lead to somebody losing their home."

2. Newcastle context

In Newcastle our aim is for the prevention of homelessness to be everyone's business. We know that residents face interconnected challenges that cannot be responded to by single service silos and that we best help residents by working cooperatively. Our [Active Inclusion Newcastle](#) (AIN) partnership approach provides a framework to improve cooperation to prevent homelessness and supports the Council's aim to maximise our collective resources to support residents maintain the foundations for a stable **life**:

- somewhere to live
- an income
- financial inclusion
- employment opportunities

In 2017-18 AIN's partners helped Newcastle to prevent 4,876 cases of homelessness. The value of this work is seen in the 69% reduction of evictions from Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) since 2008 and Newcastle jobcentres Work Coaches identifying over 400 cases of potential homelessness in the last year. By working together at the earliest opportunity, we can better stop a problem like debt, that could lead to a crisis like homelessness.

3. Partnership arrangements

In Newcastle the duty to refer will supplement, not replace, our existing AIN [partnerships](#) and [protocols](#), like the [Sustaining Tenancies Guidance](#) which was the foundation for the reduction in YHN evictions and our [Hospital Discharge Protocol](#), which has helped to ensure that no one becomes homeless as a result of leaving hospital, will remain in place.

Similarly, partners should continue to use the [Newcastle Gateway](#), as they have since 2010, to directly refer to accommodation and support services without requiring their client to go through a statutory homelessness assessment by the Council.

We appreciate that agencies like the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Justice will develop a national form for the duty to refer. Whatever way the referral is made we will continue to work with partners to agree the partnership arrangements that will provide the best outcomes for residents and the duty to refer will be incorporated into our workforce development and support to help partners to prevent and relieve homelessness.

4. How we will work in partnership on the duty to refer

The Council and YHN work together to reduce the risk of homelessness through the framework described below. We will continue to work together to develop partnership arrangements that help residents to have a stable life and reduce the risk of homelessness.

We will work with partners to develop proportionate partnership arrangements based on the scale of the risk of homelessness their clients face and the opportunities to work together to reduce those risks. The framework below describes how we work proportionately at different levels with partners at the following levels.

Primary – for all public authorities who have a duty to refer and other agencies that work with residents who may be at risk of homelessness, we will provide:

- A referral system to notify of the risk of homelessness – online, by phone and in person
- [Information](#) and support – consultancy line and [resources](#)
- [Training](#) – online and face to face
- [Quarterly reviews](#) and [opportunities to jointly plan](#) through our [partnerships](#)

This will include:

- Prisons
- Armed forces
- Police Service
- National Probation Service
- Community Rehabilitation Company
- Community and voluntary sector groups
- Private landlords

Secondary – in addition to the primary offer described above, where the agency works with a higher volume of residents more likely to be at risk of homelessness, we will also provide:

- [Protocols](#) – agreed ways of working that give consistent governance and practice
- Tailored training, e.g. with Jobcentre Plus for 134 work coaches
- Single points of contact for designated liaison, including joint case management
- Information sharing and case recording arrangements
- Co-located staff and participation in multidisciplinary teams

This will include:

- Adult Social Care
- Children's Social Care including Early Help
- Health: hospitals, GPs and navigators
- Mental health services
- Youth Offending and Leaving Care Teams
- Addiction services
- Registered housing providers
- Asylum and migration services
- Crisis and Shelter
- Jobcentre Plus
- Discretionary Housing Payments and Crisis Response Scheme

Officers from the Active Inclusion Service will meet with you to agree how we will incorporate the duty to refer into our shared partnership arrangements. Referrals can be submitted to dutytorefer@newcastle.gov.uk, via the online form or alternatively contact our specialist telephone number on 0191 277 1050.

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