

Newcastle's Homelessness Strategy 2014-19: Executive summary

1. Introduction – why we have a homelessness strategy and the policy context

Newcastle City Council is committed to tackling inequalities that prevent people from achieving their potential. Homelessness is often a product of inequality and becoming homeless can exacerbate inequality if people get into a downward cycle where there is a greater chance of homelessness leading to other problems or worsening existing problems.

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires councils to produce homelessness strategies based on a review of homelessness. The Act made councils consider homelessness as a form of social exclusion rather than just a housing supply problem. Our 2013 Review and the full Strategy can be found at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-for-professionals

Our first Homelessness Strategy in 2003 was produced in the context of increased resources and encouragement for councils to develop strategic approaches. We are developing this strategy at a time of the largest public sector and welfare cuts in 60 years. Our primary challenge is to maintain our high levels of homelessness prevention in the face of these cuts. This Strategy describes how we will build on and improve our partnership framework to increase opportunities to prevent homelessness, inform future commissioning, enhance resilience and meet the challenges identified in our Homelessness Review 2013.

This strategy sits within Newcastle's wider partnership, led by the Wellbeing for Life Board. The key underpinning principles, described in the Wellbeing for Life Strategy, are those that we also work to to prevent homelessness. This is available online at: www.wellbeingforlife.org.uk/our-strategy

2. Our resources

In Newcastle partners responded positively to the new demands created by the public sector cuts. Despite the 24% reduction in funding there will only be a net loss of three bed spaces of supported accommodation in 2014-15. There will be 838 units of accommodation and up to 1,081 people provided with floating support. Information on our homelessness services is available at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-for-professionals/newcastle-gateway. Newcastle has retained a budget of £5.5 million of externally commissioned services, in addition the service providers secure over £10 million per year through other sources.

3. Our outcomes and achievements since our Homelessness Strategy 2008-13

The Newcastle Homelessness Review 2013 highlighted many positive actions undertaken in the last five years by the Council and partners. These include:

- Closing Hill Court which was notorious as poor accommodation and opening Cherry Tree View, the Council's first purpose built statutory emergency accommodation, in 2012;
- Attracting £8.5 million capital funding for nine "Places of Change";
- Re-launching the Prevention from Eviction and Repeat Homelessness Protocol as the Sustaining Tenancies Guidance with Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) to reduce evictions;
- Re-launching the Pathways protocol with the Supported Housing Move On Protocol in 2012 to increase planned move ons from supported housing to independence;
- Introducing the Care Leavers' Transition to Independence project in 2013 to support care leavers to move to accommodation that they are better able to sustain;
- From 2010 Changing Lives have been developing Newcastle's Housing First project;

- Providing outreach for rough sleepers and meeting our No Second Night Out commitment;
- Being DCLG's Homelessness Champions in 2008 and Rough Sleeping Champions in 2009;
- Using no bed and breakfast accommodation since 2006.

However we have not achieved all our aims: in the 2008 strategy we spoke of the need to improve engagement with service users. We have made a start on this but we acknowledge that the lack of a coordinated approach to involving service users has been a weakness. We also need to do more to improve the systematic access to training and employment.

4. Our aims, outcomes and principles for preventing homelessness

Our aim is to ensure that no one in Newcastle needs to be homeless. We will do this by building on partners' previous good performance and facilitating a cooperative partnership approach to secure the following outcomes for people.

We aim to increase the number of people:

- **For whom we prevent homelessness;** 405 cases in 2005-6 to 3,673 cases in 2012-13;
- **Who don't face repeat statutory homelessness;** 13 cases in 2007-8 to 0 in 2012-13;
- **With homes and services that they believe work for them;** we have attracted over £13 million to improve homeless accommodation;
- **That move on from supported accommodation to sustained independence;** 149 cases in 2008-9 to 230 in 2012-13;
- **Who are involved in meaningful activities and entering employment;**
- **Who use homeless services that we engage with to seek their views.**

We aim to maintain low numbers or further reduce the number of people:

- **Becoming statutorily homeless;** 1,038 cases in 2003-4 to 220 in 2012-13;
- **Evicted from all forms of housing;** YHN evictions have decreased from 197 cases in 2007-8 when we started our prevention protocol to 85 in 2012-13;
- **Requiring crisis accommodation or statutory emergency accommodation;** 2,418 admissions in 2003-4 to 1,311 in 2012-13;
- **Who sleep rough and are experiencing multiple exclusion;** we know that no one sleeps rough because of a lack of accommodation;
- **Placed in bed and breakfast accommodation;** this has not been used since 2006.

We aspire to a consensual approach that aligns partnerships and commissioning with services that respond to individual needs, based on the following principles:

- An understanding of the structural and individual causes of homelessness;
- A life course approach to preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity;
- An asset based approach that builds on people's and partners' strengths;
- Understanding the value of, and the difference, our interventions make;
- Integrating our responses to people's social, health, housing and financial needs;
- Providing places to live that create hope and inspire change;
- Humanely responding to crises when we fail to prevent homelessness;
- Learning from these crises to prevent reoccurrences.

The above are demonstrated through our work over the last ten years and are consolidated in our strategy as we describe the components of our approach to preventing homelessness.

5. Newcastle's partnership approach to preventing homelessness

Working in partnership is at the core of our approach to preventing homelessness. This was recognised in the research by Heriot-Watt and Northumbria Universities that concluded that our homelessness prevention work, particularly YHN's, was "highly effective". This is available at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-for-professionals

Our strategic approach is based on maintaining and strengthening the following:

5.1 An evidence base – quarterly homelessness reviews

We want all partners in the city to play a part in preventing homelessness and do this through developing a consensus about the causes of homelessness and how we use our resources to meet our challenges. This is informed by our quarterly reviews which cover the following:

- Stage 1:** Information about what works, the causes of homelessness, new initiatives, and policy and legislative changes;
- Stage 2:** Developing a better understanding of our performance management information with practitioners, service users, providers and stakeholders;
- Stage 3:** Publishing a briefing that provides an analysis of challenges and responses;
- Stage 4:** Demonstrating how we are going to make a difference through our action plan;
- Stage 5:** Reporting to Council Cabinet members.

5.2 Homelessness policies and protocols

Where an issue is of repeated significance as a cause of homelessness we have developed protocols that explain how partners will respond. This facilitates getting the right people involved in working together. We have found it most effective when we can apply our policies to people; if we know the person's name we stand a better chance of helping them. These are available at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-for-professionals

- Sustaining Tenancies Guidance
- Supported Housing Move on Protocol
- Preventing Evictions from Supported Housing Protocol
- Hospital Discharge Protocol
- Drug Management Protocol
- Housing and Returning Prisoners Protocol
- Care Leavers' Transitions to Independence
- Prohibitions Order Protocol
- Clean Homes Protocol

These protocols contribute to joint planning, improved responses to crisis, and commissioning. We will review these with partners at the Homelessness Prevention Forum.

5.3 Partnership working arrangements

We have found that bringing partners together builds trust and established the meetings, described below, to facilitate partnership responses to cross cutting issues. More detail is available at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-for-professionals

We know that there will be increased challenges, not least the Government's Welfare Reforms that have increased the risk of homelessness. Information about our approach to Welfare Reform is available at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/drupalncc.newcastle.gov.uk/files/wwwfileroot/benefits-and-council-tax/newcastles_approach_to_welfare_reform_-_january_2014.pdf

Our cooperative partnership arrangements make finding solutions to complex performance requirements easier and more attractive than disengagement. The right feedback loops reduce

the need for cumbersome alignment mechanisms and oblique performance indicator tools. See for more detail: www.newcastle.gov.uk/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-for-professionals

Strategic partnerships

The meetings listed below bring together partners to consider cross cutting issues and to review performance, challenges and potentially preventable crises.

- **Financial Inclusion Group** – meets quarterly, bringing together over 50 agencies;
- **Homelessness Prevention Forum** – meets quarterly, bringing together over 40 agencies;
- **Refugees and Migrants Coordination Group** – meets bi-monthly.

These meetings inform action plans and agree the prioritisation of activities. Homelessness is also represented in the partnerships below, which contributes to the wider resilience agenda.

- **Children’s Trust Board;**
- **Employability Review;**
- **Reducing Reoffending;**
- **North East Regional Housing Group;**
- **Welfare Reform Board;**
- **Wellbeing for Life Board;**
- **Youth Offending Team Board.**

Delivery partnerships

These meetings consider joint working to respond to agreed challenges:

- **Gateway Users Group**
- **Newcastle Advice Compact**
- **Private Rented Liaison**
- **Youth Independence Forum**

The above have agreed action logs, joint working initiatives and inform strategic action plans.

Case management arrangements

These meetings focus on specific clients’ needs and provide a feedback loop to help us learn from crises and to inform whether there is a need for improved cooperation.

- **Care Leavers’ Transitions to Independence**
- **Homelessness and Lettings**
- **Multiple Exclusion Common Case Management**
- **Supported Housing Move-on**
- **Emergency Accommodation Coordination and Progress**

5.4 Active Inclusion Newcastle – financial inclusion and homelessness prevention

Active Inclusion Newcastle (AIN) is a partnership approach developed in 2013. It responds to the growth in demand for information, advice and support for financial inclusion and helps us make the most of limited resources to maintain the foundations for stability:

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

From April 2013 the AIN Unit has coordinated activity across:

- **Statutory emergency accommodation**
- **Crisis Support Scheme**
- **Housing, debt, welfare rights advice**
- **Multiple exclusion**
- **Pathways and transitions**
- **Refugees, asylum and migration**
- **Floating support**
- **Supporting Independence Scheme**
- **Supported accommodation**
- **Debt collection**
- **Financial inclusion**

The aim of AIN is to facilitate partners to respond to inequality by supporting them to be part of identifying and preventing the risks people face at the primary, secondary and crisis levels.



Primary prevention activities

The AIN Unit supports partners who are not specialists in financial inclusion and homelessness prevention by providing the information they need to understand where the problems are that can lead to homelessness and empowering the right people to make good choices to prevent those problems escalating and supporting non-specialist agencies to:

- **Identify the risk of homelessness earlier;**
- **Prevent homelessness through non-specialist early interventions;**
- **Make considered referrals to our limited face to face specialist services;**
- **Learn together from preventable crisis.**

The AIN Unit supports partners that are not specialists in housing, welfare rights, debt or employment. We call this support the Active Inclusion Newcastle “Offer”, which includes:

- **Trigger point conversations** – available at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefits-and-council-tax/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/information-professionals-and-volunteers ;
- **Briefings and toolkits** – available at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/debt-toolkit-mar14 ;
- **Consultancy lines and email contacts** – where workers can get expert help;
- **Spectrum of advice** – information on Newcastle’s advice and support;
- **Targeted advice and support** – expert advice, accommodation and support;
- **Communications** – examples are available at: www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefits-and-council-tax/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/benefits-information
- **Partnerships and governance** – opportunities to work together;
- **Protocols, action plans and strategies** – formal arrangements;
- **Quarterly reviews** – of the effectiveness of our responses.

We will promote the AIN “Offer” with all primary level partners.

Secondary prevention activities

At the core of the model are our specialist services that community based primary services can turn to. The information below shows the scale of support provided in 2012-13:

- **Homelessness and housing** – 3,783 households given advice;
- **Welfare rights** – our Advice Compact helped 15,871 people get £24,142,256 of benefits;

- **Debt** – our Advice Compact advised 5,415 people;
- **Gateway** – 2,274 placements made to supported accommodation and floating support;
- **Supporting Independence Scheme** – 578 resettlement support packages in 2013-14.

Crisis activities

These are the acute services that support people facing destitution when community and preventative support fails to prevent crises. In 2012-13 crisis services provided:

- **Emergency accommodation** – 395 households with statutory accommodation;
- **Crisis Support Scheme** – 2,676 households with food, fuel, clothing and travel;
- **Rough sleepers** – outreach and support that helped 164 people off the street.

Wherever possible we seek to prevent crisis and we have a good record in doing this. However, we also must learn from the crises that have not been prevented. Our strategic framework does this through feedback loops that expose partners as directly as possible to the consequences of their actions that can lead to homelessness and then provides support to prevent a reoccurrence. Where we fail through our existing provision we feed into the commissioning process to develop new responses, this means creating a feedback loop to our performance management arrangements. Positive examples of this are the work with YHN that has halved evictions and the commissioning of the new service for people experiencing multiple exclusion.

The primary, secondary and crisis areas are linked together by the AIN Unit which allows us to learn from potentially preventable crisis and to improve the targeting of support.

6. Our challenges in preventing homelessness

This section summarises the challenges identified in our Homelessness Review 2013.

6.1 Cross cutting issues

We identified the following challenges that affect and apply to all groupings and partners:

Maintain and build on our integrated partnerships for preventing homelessness – Consolidating partnerships to maintain high levels of homelessness prevention.

Make the prevention of homelessness everyone’s business by supporting non-specialist partners to prevent homelessness – The AIN “Offer” is the core of our support.

Improve data collection – This will include creating a single framework that incorporates commissioning, Gateway, and operational information.

The policy, economic, demographic, housing market and Welfare Reform context – We will work with partners to embed the principles of the Wellbeing for Life Strategy into our partnerships and processes, including adopting “asset based practices”. We will also:

- Strengthen the integration of employment and homelessness services;
- Work to ensure access to sustainable private rented accommodation.

Make the best use of our resources to prevent homelessness – By demonstrating the value of prevention and showing that we support people at the right time in the right way.

Provide more coordinated responses to people who are experiencing multiple exclusion

– A small number of people sleep rough, often due to exclusion from supported accommodation.

Improve service users' involvement in planning to meet these challenges – Build on our pockets of excellence to embed this into our homelessness reviews.

Develop flexible responses to changing political and market challenges – The public sector cuts, the Welfare Reform programme, and an increase in interest rates may put thousands at risk of homelessness. The introduction of Universal Credit in 2016 will require greater integration of financial inclusion, employment and digital inclusion support. In Newcastle homelessness prevention is considered in the citywide responses to these issues.

Improve the wellbeing and health of vulnerable people – We will build on our close working relationships with our Public Health Division and partners in the Health Service to improve the health of homeless and vulnerable people.

6.2 Challenges facing core homeless groups

In addition to the cross cutting challenges, we recognise that tailored responses are required for the sub-groups of people affected by homelessness. Differentiating between the risks of homelessness helps to develop realistic options that include the wider aspects of social and financial inclusion. We use the following groupings to aid our analysis and responses:

People who are owed the full homelessness duty

To maintain the 80% decrease in households owed the full homelessness duty since 2003 we need to sustain our high levels of homelessness prevention. Our Review found that the groups most at risk of becoming statutorily homeless are families with support needs, people from abroad and people leaving private rented accommodation. Our action plan focuses on:

- Using the AIN “Offer” to promote preventing homelessness in families;
- At-risk groups, such as people with mental health issues and migrants;
- Maintaining the low number of full homelessness duty acceptances for under 18s and the benefits of the peer education and family support work of YHN’s Young People’s Service;
- Improving the allocation of support and building resilience in the private rented sector;
- Learning from every episode of crisis at HAC and Cherry Tree View.

People at risk of homelessness

This covers people at risk of homelessness who are not owed the full statutory homelessness duty. Our Review found that those most at risk are people who have been asked to leave by their family and friends or have lost private rented accommodation or supported accommodation. Our action plan focuses on:

- Improving our understanding of the causes of non-priority homelessness to identify opportunities to intervene earlier to prevent crises;
- Building resilience, particularly in response to the work-related conditionality in the Welfare Reforms, by further integration of housing and employment support;
- Developing self-help opportunities for clients and staff to promote financial inclusion;
- Working with YHN to maintain low numbers of evictions from YHN properties;
- Understanding why 9% of households in this group made repeat presentations to HAC;
- Understanding the needs of the 250+ households who are excluded from YHN;

- Improving engagement with vulnerable people living in houses in multiple occupation;
- Developing a Newcastle support services framework in readiness for Universal Credit.

People living with housing-related support

This focuses on people living with housing-related support. Our Review found that the groups requiring housing-related support were single people who have been evicted from supported housing or been asked to leave by their family and friends. Our action plan focuses on:

- Improving our analysis of multiple presentations;
- Working with supported housing providers to create a culture of prevention and understanding of the causes of homelessness;
- Increasing the numbers of people moving on to independence by supporting providers to improve pre-tenancy support packages;
- Reducing evictions from supported accommodation and evaluating short term options, e.g. spot purchasing and developing alternatives for people for whom hostels are unsuitable;
- Providing long term solutions for people who are not able to move to independence;
- Building on our Pathways to prevent homelessness, especially of people leaving institutions;
- Working with Jobcentre Plus and providers to reduce sanctioning.

People experiencing rough sleeping and multiple exclusion

Our Review found that our most acute problem is people with multiple unmet needs who have been evicted from our hostels. We have found that for some people hostels don't work and a different offer is required and from June 2014 there will be a dedicated offer for people experiencing multiple exclusion for whom existing services are not successful. Our action plan focuses on:

- Developing the 60 Housing First units to be provided as part of the re-commissioning;
- Developing common definitions and improving the consistency of our recording;
- Maintaining our coordinated approach to resolving rough sleeping;
- Ensuring there is daily meaningful dedicated outreach support;
- Formalising common case management framework links with safeguarding arrangements;
- Exploring intensive support methodologies, e.g. multi-systemic therapy.

7. Conclusion

Newcastle is committed to working in partnership to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. When crises happen and homelessness isn't prevented we are committed to responding humanely and effectively, and to learning from these cases to prevent reoccurrences. We recognise that we cannot predict every risk and scenario in the next five years covered by this strategy, so our aim is to consolidate and build on our partnerships that have reduced homelessness. This helps us to create a consensual, integrated framework for working with partners to support individuals and to respond to changing circumstances. We believe this will help to maintain and build upon the substantial improvements we have made in supporting vulnerable people in our city who experience or are at risk of homelessness.

8. How to get involved

The consultation on this strategy involved partners in our Homelessness Prevention Forum, Financial Inclusion Group and the Active Inclusion Newcastle network. If you would like to attend the Forum or have any queries, comments or questions about this strategy please contact the Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit at activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk.