Newcastle's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

Contents

Foreword

This is Newcastle's fourth homelessness strategy and in line with government guidance it is a homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. I welcome the recognition that rough sleeping is a different structural problem, as well as the support of the government's Rough Sleeping Advisors in developing responses to resolve rough sleeping that recognise that more than just crisis accommodation is needed.

This strategy builds on our 2014-19 strategy and our quarterly homelessness reviews[1]. I am very grateful for the hard work and compassion of everyone who helped to make our responses to homelessness relatively successful over the last five years. This work led Heriot-Watt University's (2019) research into homelessness prevention in Newcastle[2] to find that:

> *"The headline story is of a city facing an extremely challenging context, but managing to maintain extremely low and stable levels of homelessness."*

This strategy sets the scene for major strategic change, from making it everyone's business to prevent and relieve homelessness to ending homelessness. This means moving from less large hostels and to more people living in their own homes and making homelessness, rare, brief and nonrecurring. I am grateful to the charity for homeless people, Crisis, for raising our aspirations and translating our values of inclusion and equality into a clear aim to work in partnership with them and everyone else affected by homelessness, over the next 10 years, to be a city that ends homelessness.

2016 was the 50th anniversary of 'Cathy Come Home', which contributed to creating the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Over the last 50 years, our responses to homelessness have been based around crisis-based, institutionalised approaches that inadvertently 'lock' too many people into homelessness.

I know ending homelessness won't be easy. Particularly when we have faced unprecedented Government funding cuts, which have been exacerbated by the costs of responding to the coronavirus pandemic. In turn, we aspire to end homelessness while knowing that the causes of homelessness relate to complex structural issues that can compound individual inequality and disadvantage, beyond the power of any council alone to change.

Why then, do we aspire to end homelessness? Something many think is impossible. Because, it's the right thing to do and we know that just focusing on responding to crisis homelessness, inadvertently perpetuates crisis. We want to build on our place based partnerships, the council's convening role aligned to our specialist advice, support and accommodation services and come together to maximise the value of our local investment to do all we can to end homelessness and when this is not enough clearly show where national government need to act to support us.

In aspiring to end homelessness, I accept we will be judged against an aspiration that we will sometimes fail to meet. We will try to understand why we fail and to learn from our

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[1] www.newcastle.gov.uk/HPF
[2] https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Homelessness%20prevention%20in%20Newcastle%20-%20Examining%20the%20role%20of%20the%20local%20state%20-%20full%20report.pdf

shortcomings. At times this will mean accepting that some factors are currently outside our control. In particular, I recognise that it will be difficult to balance urgently responding to crisis homelessness whilst simultaneously developing new ways of working.

This strategy doesn't list detailed actions based on predicting the future, it outlines our approach to building on partners' good work to shape our future and to create the conditions needed for locally relevant agile collaboration. Detailed work will then be required to learn together to create the infrastructure to facilitate the proportionate partnerships needed to provide good support and suitable and sustainable homes.

Aspiring to end homelessness means literally redefining what we do and integrating services for all residents to have a more **stable life**: somewhere to **l**ive, an **i**ncome, **f**inancial inclusion and **e**mployment opportunities. It means that whilst it remains important to respond to every instance of crisis homelessness, it becomes even more important that we create rapid rehousing pathways to help people leave the cycle of repeat homelessness and be part of our wider community.

I am given hope that we can start to end homelessness by the good work over the last five years, that shows that we can translate our strategic aspirations into material differences that improve lives. This includes retaining specialist advice, support and accommodation that facilitated a 91% reduction in people found sleeping rough during the coronavirus lockdown, and Your Homes Newcastle's 75% reduction in council housing evictions. We developed the Street Zero partnership [3], our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach and our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme to create personalised and coordinated partnership responses to mitigate the challenges of austerity and the welfare reforms. Earlier this year, Changing Lives closed Elliott House, our largest homeless hostel, and next year it will reopen as 35 self-contained flats and Crisis announced a three year £3m Housing First programme.

One of the strongest senses of the positive feelings that occur when we realise our strategic aspirations for good quality accommodation and support was articulated by someone who experienced homelessness and, unsolicited, in November 2019 wrote:

> *"When I needed help, Cherry Tree View, were there. I thought that I would be going into a very uncertain place but thankfully it was a safe haven, a place of comfort and kindness. I was initially welcomed; the facilities were not shared and I had freedom to be alone and collect my mind and thoughts without any input of others. There was a beautiful large window, and amongst all else, I felt like I was able to heal in peace"*

Finally, I want to, again thank everyone who has worked to prevent and relieve homelessness in Newcastle, who helped to make thousands of our fellow residents feel safer and to have more stable lives and who have made it possible to raise our hopes and aspirations to believe that we can be a city that ends homelessness.

Cllr Linda Hobson, Portfolio Holder for Housing

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[3] http://streetzero.org/

1. Introduction

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to carry out a homelessness review and formulate a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review every five years[4]. In August 2018, the Government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy[5] for England, in which they stated their commitment to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. This strategy also places a requirement on local authorities to 'rebadge' their local homelessness strategies as homelessness *and rough sleeping* strategies.

This strategy is informed by Newcastle's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019, which explored our progress since our 2014-19 Homelessness Strategy and looked at the current profile of homelessness in the city. In Newcastle, we aim to continuously learn and develop our approach to preventing and relieving homelessness through our quarterly homelessness review process[6], rather than simply conducting 'point in time' reviews every five years. Therefore, this review drew heavily on the trends, successes, challenges and deficits identified through these quarterly reviews. It also drew on independent research we have conducted over the last year, as part of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme[7].

Local authorities are empowered to conduct homelessness reviews and publish homelessness and rough sleeping strategies more frequently than every five years if they wish. On 20 June 2019, Newcastle City Council entered into a partnership with Crisis (the national charity for homeless people) to end homelessness in the city altogether. This partnership commits us to a public service transformation programme, which will be underpinned by an understanding of what causes homelessness and how we collectively respond. We will begin by undertaking a comprehensive review of homelessness in the city in 2020[8]. That review will inform the development of a strategy to end homelessness in the city over ten years.

We know that the underlying causes of homelessness can be complex for each individual. However, we also know that there are clear and consistent trends that have helped us to focus our responses. Bramley (2017)[9] highlights that poverty is the important driver of homelessness in all forms. More specifically, the availability and affordability of housing, the range of prevention measures employed by a local authority, and the supply of homelessness accommodation are all key in determining levels of homelessness, as are demographic factors such as age, household composition and the prevalence of complex needs. In Newcastle, we have retained a relatively large stock of council housing and commissioned homelessness accommodation. We have also invested in upstream prevention measures, as well as dedicated responses for adults with more complex needs. For these reasons, we have maintained low and stable levels of homelessness within an

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[4] www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-2-homelessness-strategies-and-reviews
[5] www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy
[6] www.newcastle.gov.uk/HPF
[7] www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/newcastles-homelessness
[8] https://crisis.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/crisis-and-newcastle-city-council-launch-evidence-review-of-homelessness-within-the-city/
[9] www.crisis.org.uk/media/237582/crisis_homelessness_projections_2017.pdf

extremely challenging context (Watts et al., 2019). The review we will undertake in 2020 will help us to take the next step to ending homelessness, distinguishing between the roles of the local authority, national government, public agencies, voluntary sector organisations, faith groups, businesses and the public.

Unfortunately, the review and strategy we are undertaking as part of our partnership to end homelessness can't be completed in time to fit with the statutory requirements outlined in the Homelessness Act 2002. Therefore, the purpose of this statutory Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is to provide an overview of our broad strategic direction over the next five years, before we develop a more detailed strategy focused on ending homelessness in the city altogether.

This strategy begins by outlining our core aim of ending homelessness in Newcastle. Section 3 outlines our progress since 2013, emphasising our relative success in preventing and relieving homelessness. Section 4 describes our key challenges and obstacles before section 5 sets out our key priorities. Section 6 broadly outlines the key aspects of our approach to ending homelessness in Newcastle. Finally, section 7 outlines the initial steps we will take towards ending homelessness.

2. Our core aim: ending homelessness in Newcastle

On 20 June 2019, Newcastle City Council entered into a partnership with Crisis (the national charity for homeless people) to end homelessness in the city altogether[10]. The partnership creates a realistic and exciting opportunity to unite the city to make responding to homelessness everyone's business. In turn, enabling us to align our resources to do more of what's right by making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring in Newcastle.

We define 'ending homelessness' as:

- **No one sleeping rough**

- **No one forced to live in transient or dangerous accommodation, such as tents, squats and non-residential buildings**

- **No one living in emergency accommodation, such as shelters and hostels, without a plan for rapid rehousing into affordable, suitable and sustainable homes**

- **No one homeless due to leaving a state institution, such as prison or the care system**

- **Everyone who is immediately threatened with homelessness gets the help that prevents it from happening**

- **Everyone known to be at greater risk of homelessness due to affordability or vulnerabilities is proactively targeted with advice and support to reduce the possibility that they become threatened with homelessness at an earlier opportunity than 56 days**

This partnership builds on the aim in the Crisis report 'Everybody In – How to end homelessness in Great Britain'[11] that proposed how homelessness can be ended in local areas. In Newcastle, this means developing a place-based approach based around an improved understanding of the needs and circumstances of the residents we serve. This place-based approach will need to go beyond requirements and standards set out in legislation, policy, and guidance. It will also require us to consider how we maximise the value of public sector and charitable investment in the city to make the most of our collective resources to end homelessness.

As outlined in section 3, we have a good record of going beyond the minimum legislative requirements in our work on homelessness prevention and relief. We will build on our relative successes over the last five years and our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach. However, we will shift our primary focus from prevention and relief to the more ambitious aim of ending homelessness altogether. There are risks in the ambition of our partnership; seeking to do more than the minimum, in the context of austerity and localism. However, the risks of short-term approaches that do not address the underlying causes of homelessness are more significant. We also risk being judged in the short-term against

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[10] www.newcastle.gov.uk/citylife-news/newcastle-council-retains-local-authority-year-title/new-partnership-aims-end
[11] www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/the-plan-to-end-homelessness-full-version/

our longer term ambitions of ending homelessness in the next ten years. We will mitigate these risks by transparently showing that we are doing the best we can with our limited resources, whilst building proportionate partnerships to better align the resources in the city to work together to end homelessness. Doing so will also help us to demonstrate where central government needs to act to end homelessness.

3. Our progress since our last strategy

Since we published our last Homelessness Strategy in 2014, we have sought to help residents and organisations transition to the challenges brought about by localism, austerity and the welfare reforms. At the same time, we have had to respond to these changes and the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017[12].

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019 describes how our retention of homelessness accommodation and support services and work with Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), the arms' length management organisation responsible for managing council homes on behalf of Newcastle City Council, created the platform for developing the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach. This partnership approach helped to improve the consistency and coordination of information, advice, support and accommodation available to residents facing interconnected challenges of disadvantage, poverty and the welfare reforms. In turn, supporting organisations in our city to adapt to these challenges and move towards maximising the value of our collective investment to prevent and relieve homelessness and promote financial inclusion[13].

Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer[14] funding from central government allowed us to build on the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach through a public service transformation programme that involved a range of projects spread across four key themes:

- Responding as consistently and effectively as we can to residents who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness

- Working towards more integrated responses for residents

- Moving towards outcomes focused commissioning

- Improving our collective understanding

This programme helped us to consolidate the good work in Newcastle to make it everyone's business to prevent and relive homelessness. It also allowed us to develop this work by creating successful examples of how we can better integrate our services and make better use of evidence to support residents to develop and maintain the foundations for a stable life – somewhere to live, an income, financial inclusion and employment opportunities.

We have a range of secondary prevention and relief services in the city, as well as the even wider range of services who take part in our primary prevention activities[15]. We are proud to have retained a good range of accommodation and support services staffed by committed, knowledgeable and compassionate professionals. However, we also know that these services are most effective when organised into partnerships, based around policies and protocols that lead to targeted pathways of response that respond to individual

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[12] See chapter 1 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019 for more detail on our structural context

[13] See section 3.1 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019

[14] https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/wwwfileroot/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/dclg_homelessness_prevention_trailblazer_-_briefing_note_october_2016.pdf

[15] See sections 3.2 and 3.3 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019

residents. In turn, it is essential to support these partnerships and pathways with a range of information, guidance and training and to iteratively interrogate and develop our responses through our periodic review processes. All of these activities require dedicated staff whose job it is to develop, support and maintain partnerships, policies, pathways of response and review structures. In Newcastle, this is the role of the Council's Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit.

We have a relatively good record of homelessness prevention and relief. Heriot-Watt University's recent study of homelessness prevention in Newcastle in the context of welfare reforms and austerity found that *"the headline story in Newcastle is of a city facing an extremely challenging context, but managing to maintain extremely low and stable levels of homelessness"* (Watts et al., 2019[16]). Watts et al. looked at our levels of homelessness across a wide range of measures and found that, in contrast to other Core Cities and the English average, we had managed to maintain extremely low and stable levels of homelessness. Alongside this independent overview, there are also some particular measures outlined in chapter four of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019 that indicate that Newcastle is relatively successful in preventing and relieving homelessness:

- The **highest rate of homelessness preventions** of any of the Core Cities. This rate of prevention activity is more than double that of the Core City average, and more than four times the rate in England as a whole

- The **second lowest rate of temporary accommodation use** of the Core Cities (only Leeds has a rate lower that that seen in Newcastle)

- We have maintained a record of **zero households being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation** to fulfil our statutory homelessness duties **since 2006**. This is in contrast to a significant increase in the Core Cities' average since 2013-14

- A **71% reduction in YHN evictions** since the introduction of the 2007 Prevention from Eviction protocol *"Your Homes Newcastle has seen evictions reduce from 197 in 2007/08 to 61 in 2017/18"* (Watts et al., 2019: 63)

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[16]https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Homelessness%20prevention%20in%20Newcastle%20-%20Examining%20the%20role%20of%20the%20local%20state%20-%20full%20report.pdf

4. Our key challenges and obstacles

Despite this relative success, there are also a number of areas in which we face challenges and where we want to improve our responses[17]:

- **Continuing to manage the impact of austerity and the welfare reforms** – preventing and relieving homelessness is made more challenging by the ongoing demands created by reductions in our budget and the Government's welfare reforms. Maintaining, integrating and improving our collective responses will be vital if we are to continue to maintain low and stable levels of homelessness. Our responses have been based around upstream prevention (responding before someone is immediately threatened with homelessness). However, since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, we aren't able to report these upstream preventions back to central government. This makes it more difficult to evidence the value of earlier prevention.

- **Preventing homelessness from the private rented sector** – eviction from private rented accommodation has consistently been one of the main causes of homelessness in the city. We have a relatively good range of services, but we need to do more to identify the risk of homelessness at an earlier stage and to work to a shared purpose. In the absence of legislation that strengthens tenant rights in the private rented sector, we also want to do everything we can to improve the regulation of private rented accommodation in our city by extending selective licensing.

- **Enabling residents to move from relief and supported accommodation to suitable and sustainable homes** – we have made progress in reducing evictions from crisis and supported accommodation since 2013. However, we still face challenges in maximising positive move-on from congregate accommodation. The current national funding model incentivises full occupancy in congregate accommodation and disincentivises timely and positive move-on. This also limits the available accommodation to provide somewhere safe to stay for people who become homeless. We have sought to develop local responses to encourage positive move-on and are moving towards a housing-led approach to making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

- **Supporting residents who sleep rough and are multiply excluded** – among those residents who are already homeless, we also know that there is a significant minority who experience severe and multiple disadvantage. These individuals face repeated exclusion from homeless accommodation and services, as well as having broader experience of other forms of deep social exclusion. We have a range of specialist provision but need to improve the coordination and personalisation of our support to provide these individuals with a foundation for recovery from the multiple needs that have been compounded over many years of exclusion. As a significant proportion of people who have slept rough in the city don't have a local connection to the city, we also need to explore how we can ensure rapid reconnection to an area where that person has a local connection.

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[17] Each of these challenges are described in more detail in section 5.3 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019

- **Preventing homelessness for residents who are leaving asylum accommodation** – those in receipt of asylum support cease to be entitled to accommodation and financial support 28 days after being granted refugee status. We believe this period is insufficient and at odds with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. In the absence of a change in central government policy, we seek to develop local responses to help these residents to access suitable and sustainable homes in a safe, inclusive and welcoming City of Sanctuary[18].

- **Supporting residents who are experiencing domestic abuse** – violent relationship breakdown has remained a prominent cause of homelessness for households for whom we have accepted the full statutory duty to accommodate. However, we have experienced limited availability of specialist domestic abuse refuge spaces in recent years, making it more difficult to provide the specialist professional support these households require. In turn, as any resident who is already experiencing domestic abuse should be considered as homeless, we also face unique challenges in developing pathways and partnerships to help us prevent homelessness for these households.

In each of these areas, the challenges we face emanate from broad structural problems and national policy that is contradictory to a proactive and preventative local response. In the absence of changes in central government policy, we have sought to find local solutions that maximise the value of our collective resources. However, we know that more needs to be done if we are to overcome these challenges and end homelessness in Newcastle. In the future, there are a number of key structural and systemic obstacles we expect to face:

- **An uncertain economic and policy context** – over the last five years we have faced an extremely challenging context in which to prevent and relieve homelessness[19]. Longstanding issues of poverty and deprivation have been exacerbated by austerity and the welfare reforms causing increased hardship and confusion for residents and services. The economic and social impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is likely to place more residents at risk of homelessness.

- **Conflicting funding mechanisms** – over recent years, central government funding has been short-term in nature, focused on delivering pilot programmes for specific groups (e.g. people who are sleeping rough). This funding is welcome. However, it isn't conducive with enabling the long-term system change required to end homelessness. Sustainable funding sources are required to develop good quality services and, more importantly, link those services together into a system of response. In turn, the current funding model for supported accommodation makes it more difficult to incentivise positive move-on to suitable and sustainable homes[20].

- **Fragmented service responses and information systems** – through our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach, we have made good progress in developing proportionate partnerships across the public and voluntary sector. However, there is far more work to do to break down silos between different disciplines

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[18] www.newcastle.gov.uk/our-city/newcastle-city-sanctuary
[19] See section 2 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019 for an overview of our local context
[20] See section 5.3 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019 for a more detailed description of the issues with the current funding model for supported accommodation

and sectors, to better focus our resources on individuals who need us to work collaboratively to support them. In turn, more can be done to develop more consistent responses across our own council services and across our Active Inclusion Newcastle partners. We don't necessarily lack service responses. However, in a complex and challenging context, we need to develop our capacity to join these services up into organised pathways of response, underpinned by a strong collective understanding of what is causing homelessness and the effectiveness of our responses.

- **The localism agenda** – at the same time as implementing austerity policies, central government introduced the Localism Act 2011. This is part of a wider localism agenda that has shifted more responsibility to local authorities at a time of reduced funding and increasing demand. These changes mean there is very little incentive from central government for local authorities to focus on early prevention or retaining a large stock of council housing to provide suitable and sustainable homes to residents who can't afford local market rents. The result is an uneven landscape of homelessness provision across different local authorities in England.

5. Our key priorities

This section highlights our five key priorities as we move towards our aim of ending homelessness in the city. These priorities align with the perspectives of professionals and volunteers who attended our Homelessness Prevention Forum meetings in December 2019 and March 2020. We asked them what the "opportunities to improve" our approach to preventing and relieving homelessness were. There were seven main themes in their responses:

Perspectives of professionals and volunteers

- *"More of the same"* – consolidate our good systems and services to prevent and relieve homelessness by developing our preventative partnership approach, using continuous learning to review and improve the value of our collective investment to make a difference to people facing homelessness

- *Improve our physical environments* – particularly our Housing Advice Centre, drop-in centre for people who are rough sleeping and our temporary accommodation. Professionals highlighted that Cherry Tree View provides a best practice model of good quality temporary accommodation

- *Develop coordinated multidisciplinary responses for adults with interrelated needs (e.g. 'multiply excluded homeless' adults)* – particularly important is specialist mental health and substance misuse support, and taking a psychologically informed approach in our support to these individuals

- *Move toward a housing-led approach* – a clear pathway to suitable and sustainable home should be the default for all residents, and we should minimise time spent in any form of homelessness, including homelessness accommodation. In turn, high fidelity Housing First should be the default approach for 'multiply excluded homeless' adults

- *Explore opportunities to prevent evictions from the private rented sector* – while acknowledging the challenges outlined in section 5.3.2 of our review, we should put additional effort into finding creative solutions to developing a more structured approach to preventing evictions from the private rented sector

- *Focus on the people behind the numbers* – it is important to not only look at the numbers of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, but to understand and respond to the real people behind these numbers

- *Learn from people with lived experience* – more can be done to rigorously involve people with lived experience in a meaningful way. Doing so could enrich our understanding of how to best support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Priority 1 – Building a place-based and housing-led approach to ending homelessness

After ten years of austerity, welfare reforms and localism we know that if we are going to end homelessness then we have to focus on what's best for Newcastle and maximise our collective resources in the city. Our partnership with Crisis is based on a shared commitment to ending homelessness in Newcastle through a housing-led and place-based approach.

A **place-based approach** means going beyond the minimum standards and broad guidance set out in national legislation and policy. Instead, we must be guided by more detailed understanding of our local context, the residents we serve and the effectiveness of our responses. This understanding will allow us to do what's right for Newcastle. In developing this approach, we have strong foundations to build on. We have a relatively large stock of council housing, a good range of services to prevent and relieve homelessness, and an infrastructure that allows us to bring these services together. However, in a complex and challenging context we need to develop our capacity to join these services up into organised pathways of response, underpinned by a strong collective understanding of what is causing this form of homelessness and the effectiveness of our responses. We are hopeful that the additional capacity provided by Crisis will allow us to create these improvements.

A **housing-led approach** means making independent accommodation the norm across our homelessness system. This means continuing be proactive in our attempts to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity, with personalised and holistic support to help residents to develop and maintain the foundations for a stable life. We can build on our approach to upstream prevention, including the work of YHN's Support and Progression and Financial Inclusion Teams to further develop our ability to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity and keep people in their homes. When homelessness does occur, we need to be able to quickly relieve this homelessness by offering residents good quality temporary accommodation, which enables rapid and positive rehousing into suitable and sustainable homes at the earliest opportunity.

In 2019, we recommissioned our homelessness accommodation and support contracts[21]. These recommissioning plans describe our aim to move from a hostel to housing-led system of responses to homelessness. We know this will be challenging and we can learn from previous attempts and examples of good practice, such as our purpose-built homelessness prevention hub, Cherry Tree View, which provides high quality self-contained temporary accommodation. Our Street Zero partnership has helped us to secure £713,386 of government funding to reduce rough sleeping and we are working with YHN to pilot a Housing First scheme and to improve move-on for those living in hostels.

Ultimately, we know that we need to **move away from large hostels towards high quality, self-contained temporary accommodation with the right support** as part of a **rapid rehousing pathway** that makes residents' experiences of **homelessness rare, brief and non-reoccurring**.

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[21] See section 3.4.2 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019 for more information

Priority 2 – Ensuring all residents have access to suitable and sustainable homes

To end homelessness through a housing-led approach we need to ensure that all of our residents have access to suitable and sustainable homes. There are three key aspects to our approach to suitable and sustainable homes:

- establishing clear local definitions of suitable and sustainable homes
- improving our understanding of the needs and circumstances of each household
- improving our rapid rehousing pathways to suitable and sustainable homes

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 created a duty for councils to agree a plan with residents to prevent or relieve their risk of homelessness through the provision of suitable and sustainable homes. However, the Government's definition of suitable and sustainable is based on the minimum property standards set out in the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012[22] and doesn't include affordability. We want to go beyond the minimum standard set out by the Government and **establish local definitions of suitable and sustainable homes**. YHN are the most significant contributor in the city to supporting residents to have a stable life. We are working together to consolidate and further evolve this positive work into consistent standards which represent our aspirations for fairness and preventing homelessness. This involves strengthening the alignment between YHN and the Active Inclusion Service through shared pathways, definitions, data and performance measures, strengthening case coordination arrangements and applying our checklist for suitable and sustainable homes to residents transitioning from the asylum process and homelessness.

A local definition and checklist will give us a foundation for establishing standards for suitable and sustainable homes. However, exactly what constitutes a suitable and sustainable home will be different for each household. Therefore, we need to **start from an understanding of each household's needs and circumstances**, gathered in a compassionate and insightful way. For the majority of residents who become homeless, we will begin to build this understanding through our statutory homelessness assessment process. In Newcastle, this is one part of 'Our Inclusion Plan', which we developed through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme with frontline practitioners in our Housing Advice Centre and Cherry Tree View[23].

However, preventing or relieving homelessness involves a range of different accommodation and support providers. We know that each of these providers use different assessments and support plans and record on different databases. We want to **align our assessments and support plans across the city**, so that we can improve the continuity of support planning, avoiding residents having to re-tell their story, and moving towards a single shared understanding of residents' needs and circumstances and how we can collectively respond to end homelessness for that household.

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[22] www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/2601/pdfs/uksi_20122601_en.pdf

[23] The process for developing 'Our Inclusion Plan' can be found here:
www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/'Our%20Inclusion%20Plan'%20-%20presentation%20on%20using%20service%20design%20to%20support%20service%20development.pdf

Once we have set out local definitions and built a stronger shared understanding of each household's needs and circumstances, we can **better understand what barriers exist that prevent some households from accessing suitable and sustainable homes and create the pathways and partnerships to overcome these barriers**. We will use this understanding to find solutions for each individual household. It will also help to build a stronger evidence base from which to make local policy changes and to advocate for the national policy changes required to ensure all residents can access suitable and sustainable homes.

Priority 3 – Developing proportionate partnerships based around residents' needs

If we are going to ensure all residents have access to suitable and sustainable homes, then we will need to provide more than just housing-related support. We know that homelessness is more than a simple housing issue. The causes of homelessness are wide ranging and the residents we serve also experience a wide range of different needs and challenges. To provide the support residents need to access and maintain suitable and sustainable homes, we need to work in partnership.

In our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019 we outlined our partnership approach in the city, describing how this is structured across strategic, delivery and case management levels[24]. We also outlined how we have sought to develop more integrated responses through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme. Our approach of **developing and maintaining proportionate partnerships is based on aligning responses to residents' needs**. For some residents, access to universal information through our website is sufficient mitigation; for others, targeted advice and support is sufficient. However, for those residents with more complexity in their lives we have developed more integrated responses to improve our engagement and the support we provide. Through the Council's Life Chances fund, we have been able to extend both our nationally recognised partnership with Jobcentre Plus, YHN and Crisis, and our Active Inclusion multidisciplinary team until 2020-21. The multidisciplinary team now includes an Early Help worker and continues to provide direct support to some of the city's residents most adversely affected by transitioning to a reduced welfare state, using this learning to inform local and national policy and practice. We have also developed partnership arrangements around rough sleeping, building closer working relationships between our commissioned Multiple Exclusion Team, Rough Sleeping Coordinator, Housing Advice Centre and the Police, focused on coordinating personalised responses for each of these individuals.

Each of these proportionate partnerships are focused around responding to the needs and circumstances of residents in our city, in the context of maximising the value of our limited resources. In turn, they help to inform our broader transition to a place-based approach that maximises the value of our collective investment by showing us how we can work together in more innovative ways. Over the next five years, we want to maintain and strengthen these partnerships further. **We also want to build new proportionate partnerships with other agencies across the public, private and voluntary sector**. In

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[24] See section 3.2.1 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019

particular, we know that more can be done to **integrate more closely with health and social care**. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness commonly face a range of health and care needs that require specialist support to help them develop and maintain the foundations for a stable life. Providing suitable and sustainable homes is essential, but is only part of the solution.

Priority 4 – Reviewing our debt collection processes to help us move from collection to connection

One key area in which we can work better together to maximise the value of our collective investment and respond to residents' needs is around debt. Over the last five years, cuts to income due to the Government's welfare reforms and changes to how benefits are paid have contributed to the growth in poorer residents' debt. In turn, debt is a key underlying cause of homelessness, often acting as the mediating factor between poverty and homelessness.

In Newcastle, rent and Council Tax arrears have grown, as have forbearance, discretionary and temporary funding to offset the cuts. Therefore, our Cabinet agreed to **a review of corporate debt in the context of the whole cost of debt to the Council**, including lost income, collection, forbearance, discretionary payments, advice, support and recovery action.

The aim of the review is to **identify opportunities to prevent debt from occurring**, and to practically and fairly respond when it does to **agree an achievable and sustainable recovery plan**. This includes workforce development and partnership support to make it everyone's business to respond to debt by understanding income and expenditure and supporting residents to meet their financial obligations from the earliest opportunity.

This review is being informed by the Active Inclusion multidisciplinary team who are targeting proactive, preventative advice and support to families who have Council Tax and YHN rent arrears and a Housing Benefit overpayment. Analysing these cases, alongside providing direct support, is improving our understanding of residents' circumstances and the effectiveness of our interventions. This work will be aligned to the proposed changes to YHN's rent collection processes, which aim to improve the earlier provision of financial inclusion support.

Priority 5 – Consolidating our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach

Our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach is based on a principle of continuous learning and iterative service improvement. Watts et al. (2019) described our approach as having four core characteristics:

- It is weighted towards **early prevention** and the mitigation of early signs of homelessness risk – before the Government's 56 day target

- It is **partnership-driven**, reflecting the view that homelessness prevention is – and in a context of austerity must be – 'everyone's business'

- It is **proactive** at the policy and practice level

- It is **data and evidence-informed**, with a **strong focus on continuous learning and service improvement**

Over the next five years, we want to strengthen this partnership approach and shift its focus from preventing homelessness to ending it altogether. Achieving each of our other priorities will rely on having dedicated resource to maintain and develop our partnership arrangements, pathways of response, workforce development and review processes.

In particular, our quarterly review processes are central to our focus on continuous learning and service improvement[25]. These review processes enable a structured approach for the analysis of data from each of the areas of response. They also provide forums for professionals and volunteers from across the city to be involved in shaping our responses. In turn, this helps to build a collective understanding of what causes homelessness and how we respond.

We want to develop these review processes by aligning them to our definition of ending homelessness and **better incorporating the views of residents with lived experience**. Through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, we also funded the first stage of our Newcastle Voices project. In this first stage we commissioned Groundswell[26] to deliver a peer research project to explore how people who are experiencing homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness, can participate in the design, delivery and decision making in support services. This research and the recommendations in the toolkit[27] produced will act as the starting point for the next stage of embedding the voice of residents with lived experience of homelessness, or the risk of homelessness, in our quarterly homelessness review process.

We also want to **incorporate better use of qualitative data** to allow us to explore causational relationships in more depth.

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[25] See section 3.2.4 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019 for more detail on our review processes
[26] https://groundswell.org.uk/
[27] www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Newcastle%20Voices%20Toolkit%20-%20Final.pdf

6. Our approach to ending homelessness

This section sets out the broad approach we will use to achieve our priorities and core aim of ending homelessness. The key aspects of our approach are apparent across our priorities and will be developed further through our partnership with Crisis.

6.1 – Working in partnership

We can't end homelessness alone, which is why we have sought to make homelessness everyone's business through our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach. We will continue to work in partnership to move towards our core aim of ending homelessness in Newcastle. In line with priority 3, we will develop proportionate partnerships that are guided by an understanding of our local context and linked to clear and measurable goals. We will work with partners to develop proportionate partnership arrangements based on the scale of the risk of homelessness residents face and the opportunities to work together to reduce those risks. These partnerships will extend from the broad strategic level, such as our partnership to end homelessness with Crisis and our Street Zero partnership to end rough sleeping by 2022[28], to service delivery partnerships, such as our homelessness prevention pilot with Jobcentre Plus[29] and Active Inclusion multidisciplinary team[30].

We will develop and support these partnerships by consolidating our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach (see priority 5) and building on our current governance and partnership arrangements[31] (see priority 3). 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 referral systems, information resources and training, and joint review structures. Where the agency works with a higher volume of residents more likely to be at risk of homelessness, we will also explore joint protocols and pathways of response, tailored training offers, single points of contact and joint case management arrangements, information sharing and case recording arrangements, and co-located staff and participation in integrated multidisciplinary teams.

Through the partnership to end homelessness with Crisis, we are establishing an Integrated Team who will work across the formal partnership focused on ending homelessness in Newcastle. This team will build on our Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit and expand our capacity to develop, support and maintain partnerships, policies, pathways of response, information resources, training and review structures.

6.2 – Improving our understanding

Improving our collective understanding will continue to be central to our approach. Our partnership with Crisis will begin with a comprehensive evidence review of homelessness in Newcastle.

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[28] http://streetzero.org/
[29] www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Pilot%20with%20Jobcentre%20Plus%20-%20report.pdf
[30] www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Multidisciplinary%20team%20-%20Summative%20Report.pdf
[31] See section 3.2.1 of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019

While the review will provide us with evidence to inform the development of a strategy for ending homelessness, it is unlikely to give us prescriptive solutions. We will need to use a flexible approach to test new approaches, iterating and learning throughout the ten years in order to end homelessness in Newcastle. In doing so, we will seek to improve our collection and use of data across our system so that we are better able to understand the relationship between supply and demand for our services:

- **Data collection and recording** – working to move closer to 'real time' recording so we can more easily match demand to supply and respond better to residents who are homeless. To do this, we need to begin by working with frontline practitioners to understand how we can support them to record accurately and in 'real time'

- **Linking data together** – exploring opportunities for linking different information systems to help us to build a clearer picture of residents' needs and circumstances, as well as helping us to coordinate our responses across different organisations and disciplines

- **Data analysis** – expanding our analysis to better incorporate qualitative data and develop our quarterly review processes to increase the active participation of residents with lived experience of homelessness (and the risk of homelessness) and frontline practitioners

- **Measuring performance** – establishing robust measures for each of the six aspects of our definition of ending homelessness, linked to lists of residents so we can coordinate our responses to meet their needs

- **Combining research and practice** – improving the use of data in frontline case management and coordination, following the 'By Name List'[32] approach to develop a conclusive approach to preventing or relieving homelessness for each household

6.3 – Having good quality accommodation and support environments

As outlined in priority 1, we aim to transition to a housing-led approach where independent accommodation dispersed in the community is the response for the majority of residents. We aspire to have good quality accommodation for all residents, regardless of their needs and circumstances. By establishing local definitions and standards for suitable and sustainable homes (priority 2), we aim to ensure that this accommodation is suited to each household's needs and circumstances and is good quality. In doing so, we will also need to explore the barriers to accessing suitable and sustainable homes for our residents.

However, we will still need temporary accommodation to allow us to quickly accommodate households who are literally homeless. We currently commission 16 'emergency rooms' within our commissioned homelessness accommodation to try to ensure that we have rooms available. However, limited capacity in the rest of our commissioned accommodation means that some people staying in these emergency rooms are unable to progress into other forms of temporary accommodation and on to suitable and sustainable homes. As a result, we have less capacity to respond to people who are literally homeless. As highlighted in priorities 1 and 2, we need to **strengthen our pathways to enable rapid rehousing from emergency accommodation into suitable and sustainable homes** to develop local solutions to these obstacles.

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[32] https://toolkits.homelessness.world-habitat.org/start-making-changes/by-name-list-details/

Our purpose built statutory temporary accommodation, Cherry Tree View, provides an example of good quality accommodation with a service model that ensures we have rooms available to respond. We will seek to **identify opportunities to gain capital funding to develop another statutory temporary accommodation project based on Cherry Tree View**.

We will also **work with providers to explore opportunities to gain capital funding to improve the quality of our commissioned homelessness accommodation**. There are positive examples of how we're making progress to create these changes. In February 2020, Changing Lives began work on converting Elliott House, a 56-bed hostel into 35 self-contained flats. Elliott House's capacity for relieving crisis homelessness will be replaced by dispersed smaller hostels. Our aim is to provide every resident who becomes homeless with good quality, self-contained accommodation that is part of a rapid rehousing pathway that supports people to move back into suitable and sustainable homes as quickly as possible.

We will also **explore opportunities to improve the quality of our other environments**, such as our Housing Advice Centre. When residents come to our Housing Advice Centre, they do so at a time of distress and uncertainty. It is essential that they not only receive compassionate and knowledgeable support, but that they receive this in a positive and welcoming environment.

6.4 – Providing personalised and holistic support

Providing good quality accommodation is an essential foundation to either prevent or relieve a resident's homelessness. However, to ensure that this accommodation is sustainable we need to respond to the underlying causes of homelessness for each resident. As the exact nature of these underlying causes will differ, we need to provide personalised support.

For the majority of residents, support around housing and finances will be enough to prevent or relieve their homelessness. For others, other forms of specialist support may be required to help to address other needs. **For a significant minority of residents who have multiple and interrelated needs, much more intensive support will be required**. Among those residents who are already homeless, we know that there is a significant minority who experience severe and multiple disadvantage, with population rates[33] appearing far higher than in England and among the highest in the Core Cities. These individuals face repeated exclusion from homeless accommodation and services, as well as having broader experience of other forms of deep social exclusion, such as substance misuse, histories of institutional care, mental health issues and 'street culture' activities. The needs of these individuals extend far beyond housing, but they often end up living in homeless accommodation.

For these individuals, **we will develop our Housing First[34] provision, so that it meets their needs**. We will do so because we know that, when delivered correctly, this model is

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[33] Per 1,000 of the working age population in each city
[34] https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/what-is-housing-first/

very successful in ending homelessness for people with high support needs[35]. Housing First aims to overcome homelessness by offering immediate, independent accommodation in the community. In doing so, the model seeks to provide a foundation for person-centred support that enables recovery from the 'multiple and complex' needs that these residents often have. **As part of our partnership to end homelessness, Crisis have committed to fund a high-fidelity Housing First service in the city**. This will improve our ability to offer suitable and sustainable homes and personalised and holistic support to residents with multiple and interrelated needs. To fully realise the potential of Housing First, we will need to develop proportionate partnerships with health, social care and criminal justice based around the needs and circumstances of each individual.

As we continue to improve our collective understanding of the residents we serve, we can continue to tailor our broad offers of support to groups of residents. Doing so will require us to build proportionate partnerships with other organisations and disciplines to deliver integrated responses.

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[35] https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/what-is-housing-first/the-evidence-for-housing-first/

7. Our initial steps

Ending homelessness in Newcastle will be a journey that will take time and will require us to adapt our approach based on what we learn. We start from a good position, with low and stable levels of homelessness, a good range of accommodation and support services, a conducive housing market, and a strong and well supported partnership approach. This section outlines the initial steps we will take in moving from our strong record of preventing and relieving homelessness, to ending it altogether.

7.1 – Building on what we have learned from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has shifted our focus and more of our resources to responding to those residents who are homeless or are immediately threatened with homelessness. However, our preventative and partnership driven approach has meant that we were able to adapt quickly to the challenges presented by the pandemic with:

- **Rapid rehousing pathways building on the Emergency Housing Panel** – the numbers of evictions from our council housing stock were already low, but we were able to quickly stop all evictions and our strong partnership between Newcastle City Council's Active Inclusion Service, Fairer Housing Unit and YHN meant that we could also suspend our social housing allocation policy. In its place, we quickly implemented an Emergency Housing Panel which has allowed us to focus our attention and resources on residents who are homeless; prioritising, reviewing and reaching consensus about those residents daily to enable moving them into independent housing quicker than we ordinarily would have been able to do. From 30 March to 16 June 2020, 192 households were accommodated through the panel. The panel has strengthened collaboration and enabled a clearer pathway between our supported homelessness accommodation and general needs social housing. As a result, it has been promoted as good practice by the Local Government Association. Strengthening this approach will help us to bridge the gap between these sectors. It should also help to identify how much emergency and supported accommodation we need.

- **Individual solutions for people who are sleeping rough** – During the lockdown we saw an 89% reduction in people found sleeping rough[36]. This reduction was achieved for two key reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, all of our specialist homelessness accommodation remained open during lockdown, allowing a safe and suitable place for people who were homeless. This was only possible due to the commitment and responsiveness of our partners, and the heroic efforts of frontline staff working in those accommodation projects. Secondly, our partnership arrangements with our Rough Sleeping Coordinator, Housing Advice Centre, Changing Lives' Multiple Exclusion Team, and the Police have allowed us to coordinate more personalised responses for each individual person sleeping rough. We want to build on this partnership work to realise this opportunity to achieve our Street Zero vision of ending rough sleeping in Newcastle by 2022. Funding through the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative has already helped us to expand our outreach support to people sleeping rough in the city and to develop a Housing First pilot with YHN. As part of our approach we will explore

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[36] 59 people were found on 130 instances 30 March to 9 August 2020 compared with 169 people found on 1,157 instances from 17 November 2019 to 29 March 2020.

how we can work as a city to best respond to people who have no recourse to public funds.

- **Opportunities to better target support** – we have been able to quickly develop and implement processes to direct specialist advice and support to individuals identified through Newcastle City Council's newly established Citylife Line[37]. Between 24 March and 31 May 2020, Citylife Line received 2,470 requests for support, including 1,070 requests from residents saying that they didn't have means to pay for food and 451 requests for financial support. We have also worked with partners to identify residents who are at greater risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) due to underlying health conditions, so that we can put measures in place to reduce this risk. The Government's three month ban on evictions from private rented accommodation[38] has also protected many tenants. However, we know that we will need to provide proactive support to many of these tenants when this ban is lifted. We want to use each of these opportunities to identify how we can better target preventative advice and support to residents. Through our Active Inclusion Newcastle multidisciplinary team, we have developed a case finding approach that can be adapted to target support to these residents[39].

7.2 – Conducting a review of evictions

We can build on our learning outlined in section 7.1 to better manage the post-pandemic transition and uncertainty about the impact on vulnerable residents. **The Council and YHN will work together to further reduce evictions and develop an approach to no evictions into homelessness**, through improved collaboration, to act as an exemplar for all landlords. This will ensure potential evictions are reviewed by a multi-agency panel. It is important to note this doesn't mean that there will be no evictions; an eviction may still be necessary, but the outcome could be a move into alternative accommodation rather than homelessness.

Between 2008 and 2020 YHN evictions reduced by 75% through the adoption of the Sustaining Tenancies Guidance[40], which focuses on testing financial inclusion responses before resorting to possession action. The work of YHN's Financial Inclusion and Support and Progression Teams and the Active Inclusion multidisciplinary team shows that proactively providing financial inclusion advice and support is effective at reducing rent shortfall, increasing rent payments and preventing homelessness and the associated costs and misery of eviction.

Our learning from the pandemic shows that proactive collaboration to respond to residents facing an acute challenge at a known trigger point is an opportunity to strengthen the alignment with multi-agency advice and support and discretionary funding, such as Discretionary Housing Payments. Further testing a panel arrangement to develop personal

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[37] www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/public-health-wellbeing-and-leisure/public-health-services/coronavirus-covid-19/citylife
[38] www.gov.uk/government/news/complete-ban-on-evictions-and-additional-protection-for-renters
[39] www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Multidisciplinary%20team%20-%20the%20principles%20and%20practice.pdf
[40] www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sustaining_tenancies_guidance_city_council_version_december_2012_0.pdf

plans to sustain the tenancies of residents at risk of eviction will support the delivery of suitable and sustainable homes (see priority 2). **Extending the work of the Emergency Housing Panel to strengthen collaborative multi-agency panel responses to key personal trigger points** through updated Sustaining Tenancies Guidance will better align financial support, advice and care for those at risk of eviction.

Our approach will consider the human, organisational and financial costs of eviction in the context of the wider impact on residents, the Council and society. We have worked successfully with YHN on the Emergency Housing Panel and this work will build on the success of that panel, ensuring a supportive approach to sustaining tenancies.

The review of evictions will complement our corporate debt review (see priority 4). The pandemic has seen the strengthening of the alignment of financial support that Revenues and Benefits provides with our advice services. We are extending this work to help us to better understand and reduce problem debt.

7.3 – Developing a review and strategy to end homelessness

In 2020, **we will undertake a comprehensive review of homelessness in the city**. The review is intended to help us to better understand the scale and nature of homelessness within Newcastle, the effectiveness of our responses, what drives organisational and professional behaviour, and what needs to be done differently to end homelessness. The review will consist of six key elements:

1. Analysis of how homelessness provision and associated **services** currently operate in Newcastle, exploring their contribution to preventing and relieving homelessness

2. Participatory research with residents who have **lived experience** of homelessness or the risk of homelessness, exploring their personal experiences and priorities

3. Analysis of the current **expenditure** on homelessness provision and associated services. This element will help us to better estimate the costs associated to implementing a new housing-led model, as well as the transitional arrangements needed

4. Analysis of the **causes, levels and types of homelessness** in Newcastle (using the partnership's definition of ending homelessness). This element will go on to explore how we can improve data collection and analysis over the course of the ten-year partnership

5. Analysis exploring the impact of all relevant **local organisations' policies and central government policies** that relate to homelessness (or the risk of homelessness) in Newcastle. This element will go on explore how we can influence these policies so that they better align with the aim of ending homelessness

6. The final element of the review will focus on the **public perceptions of homelessness** among residents in Newcastle, as well as their views on whether they believe homelessness can be ended in the city

Findings from each element of the review will be used to inform the development of the partnership's strategy for ending homelessness in Newcastle in ten years.