

December 2019

Newcastle's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019

Reviewing progress since our 2014-19
Homelessness Strategy and exploring the
profile of homelessness in the city



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Acronyms

ALMO – Arm's Length Management Organisation

DHP – Discretionary Housing Payment

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

H-CLIC – Homelessness Case Level Information Collection

LAASLO – Local Authority Asylum Seeker Liaison Officer

MHCLG – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

NCC – Newcastle City Council

YHN – Your Homes Newcastle

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 years¹. In this statutory homelessness review we will explore progress since our 2014-19 Homelessness Strategy and look 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 process², rather than simply conducting 'point in time' reviews every five years. Therefore, this review will draw heavily on the trends, successes, challenges and deficits identified through these quarterly reviews. It will also draw on independent research we have conducted over the last year, as part of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme³.

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 (NCC) entered into a partnership with Crisis (the national charity for homeless people) to end homelessness in the city altogether. The partnership commits us to a brave and ambitious public service transformation programme, which will be underpinned by an understanding of what causes homelessness and how we respond. We will begin to develop this understanding through a review of homelessness in the city in 2020. The review will inform the development of a strategy to end homelessness in the city over ten years which, in turn, creates a realistic and exciting opportunity to unite the city, enabling us to do what's right by making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring in Newcastle.

Unfortunately, the review 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, we intend for this statutory homelessness review to provide a detailed starting point for a more comprehensive review in 2020 focused on ending homelessness in the city altogether`.

1.1 – What the review covers

The review begins by covering the economic and policy context in which we have sought to respond to homelessness over the last five years. Chapter two begins by highlighting that Newcastle has relatively high levels of poverty and deprivation and a labour market that is weaker than the English average. However, Newcastle's more favourable housing market context has provided an opportunity to prevent and relieve homelessness more effectively. As highlighted throughout this review, Newcastle has utilised this opportunity

¹ www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities/chapter-2-homelessness-strategies-and-reviews

² www.newcastle.gov.uk/HPF

³ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/newcastles-homelessness

by retaining control of its council housing stock and developing a close partnership with our Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO), Your Homes Newcastle (YHN). Section 2.2 explores the policy context in which we have sought to prevent and relieve homelessness over the last five years. Section 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 describe what has been a period of significant reductions in NCC's budget and in welfare benefits for residents in the city, each of which have compounded the longstanding issues of poverty and deprivation described in section 2.1.1. It highlights the huge scale and pace of change for residents and organisations in adapting to these changes. In addition to the welfare reforms and austerity, the last five years have also brought the most significant change in homelessness legislation since 1977, with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Section 2.2.3 details the benefits and challenges of this change in legislation. Section 2.2.4 then highlights a renewed focus on rough sleeping with the publication of the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy. We conclude chapter two by focusing on the relationship between the asylum system and homelessness. In doing so, we highlight that changes in homelessness policy and legislation have not been complemented by changes in the notice period for residents receiving refugee status.

Chapter three of this review describes how we have sought to organise our responses for residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to adapt to this challenging context. Section 3.1 describes our overall approach to homelessness prevention in the city and how we have developed this further through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme. Through this approach we have sought to support organisations in the city to transition to the scale of challenges outlined in chapter two. In doing so, we have begun to move toward maximising the value of our collective resources to better prevent and relieve homelessness in the context of austerity. We describe how supporting this transition has required dedicated capacity to both develop the range of activities and to keep them relevant and up-to-date.

Section 3.2 describes our primary prevention activities, including our structured partnership framework and shared policies and protocols. This section also describes how we have provided information, guidance and training to organisations in the city to better identify and respond to the risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity. Section 3.2 concludes by describing how we have developed a series of periodic review processes that enable a structured approach to the iterative analysis and dissemination of evidence. Section 3.3 outlines our secondary prevention activities that are focused on proactively identifying and supporting residents who are 'at risk' or immediately 'threatened' with homelessness. It describes how we seek to identify residents by using 'touch and trigger points', working with partners and by using data. It then describes the collection of prevention services we have in our city and how we have sought to organise these into pathways of response that are targeted towards groups of residents known to be at greater risk of homelessness. Section 3.4 then summarises our crisis relief activities include our homelessness advice and assessment services, as well as our statutory and commissioned accommodation and support services. It shows that we have maintained a relatively good offer of face-to-face advice and assessment and accommodation to provide temporary relief from homelessness.

Chapter four explores the levels, types and causes of homelessness over the last five years, including a specific focus on the year since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Section 4.8 compares Newcastle to the English, North East and Core Cities' averages across a number of key indicators and reaffirms Watts et al.'s (2019) findings that Newcastle has relatively low and stable levels of homelessness. However, earlier sections in this chapter indicate ongoing, albeit improving, challenges around evictions and the move on from our crisis and supported accommodation in the city.

Chapter five describes in more detail our relative success in preventing homelessness before recognising and describing the key areas in which we still face challenges. In each of these areas, the challenges we face are associated to a combination of structural challenges linked to national government policy and local challenges within our own system of response. A common theme running across these sections is that, in spite of austerity, we have managed to maintain a good range of services. However, these services are not always as joined up or proactive as they need to be to move from a good record of preventing and relieving homelessness, to ending it altogether.

Chapter six provides a conclusion to the review. It summarises the positive progress we have made since 2013 through our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach and through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme. However, to continue this work we need to invest in good quality accommodation and support, as well as in infrastructure support that helps to further develop the partnerships, shared policies, pathways of response, review processes and information and training needed to truly maximise our collective resources and end homelessness in the city. Chapter six concludes by outlining some of our key priorities going forward: consolidating our proportionate partnerships approach, embedding our partnership approach to suitable and sustainable accommodation, reviewing our corporate debt collection to move from collection to connection, and moving to a place-based and housing-led approach to ending homelessness.

2. Context

This section describes the extremely challenging structural context in which we have sought to prevent and relieve homelessness over the last five years. In doing so, it provides a foundation for understanding the levels, types, and causes of homelessness in Newcastle, the effectiveness of our responses and our key challenges and deficits.

Professor Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights who visited Newcastle in November 2018, described this context as follows⁴:

“Although the UK is the world’s fifth largest economy, one fifth of its population (14 million people) live in poverty, and 1.5 million of them experienced destitution in 2017. Policies of austerity introduced in 2010 continue largely unabated, despite the tragic social consequences. Food banks have proliferated; homelessness and rough sleeping have increased greatly. For almost one in every two children to be poor in twenty-first century Britain is not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster”.

NCC commissioned I-SPHERE⁵ at Heriot-Watt University to conduct a study into homelessness prevention in Newcastle, considering the current economic, social and policy-related context⁶. The academics found that *“the current context in which Newcastle is seeking to prevent homelessness is extremely challenging”* (Watts et al., 2019: 8). In describing this extremely challenging context, Watts et al. discussed both the longstanding challenges associated to Newcastle’s economic and social context, as well as the more recent impact of the government’s welfare reforms and austerity that has compounded these structural factors. This section seeks to summarise and build on Watts et al.’s analysis, rather than duplicating it.

2.1 – The economic, housing, and labour market context

This section explores the structural context in Newcastle, focusing on economic, housing and labour market-related factors that are most associated to homelessness.

In Newcastle, there are two broad ‘groups’ who are at risk of homelessness. Firstly, thousands of residents who are at risk of a crisis in their lives (mainly due to poverty exacerbated by the welfare reforms). Secondly, a much smaller group who live a life in crisis because they have had a life of severe and multiple disadvantage that leads to repeated social exclusion over their life course. Watts et al. highlight that, in common with other Core Cities, Newcastle faces a more challenging context than the rest of England in relation to levels of poverty, destitution, and severe and multiple disadvantage, increasing the scale of these challenges.

⁴ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/112/13/PDF/G1911213.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ www.i-sphere.hw.ac.uk/

⁶ See Watts et al., (2019) [*Homelessness prevention in Newcastle: Examining the role of the ‘local state’ in the context of austerity and welfare reforms.*](#)

2.1.1 – Poverty and deprivation

Bramley and Fitzpatrick's (2018)⁷ seminal article underlined the centrality of poverty in determining an individual's risk of homelessness. In particular, they highlighted the importance of childhood poverty as well as the wider impact of broader labour and housing market contexts. In line with Bramley and Fitzpatrick, we understand poverty to be the key structural driver of homelessness in Newcastle.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (2019)⁸ shows that Newcastle is the 74th most deprived local authority in England, placing it among the 25% most deprived local authorities in the country⁹. However, there is evidence to suggest that this rank may underestimate the level of deprivation that is concentrated within particular areas of the city. 8.8% of neighbourhoods¹⁰ in Newcastle are among the 10% most deprived in the whole of England. In turn, 47% of neighbourhoods in Newcastle are among the 20% most deprived in England. When we compare Newcastle to other local authorities, Newcastle ranks 23rd for the proportion of neighbourhoods that are in the 10% most deprived nationally. Newcastle ranks particularly low on the 'health and disability' (30th), 'crime' (54th) and 'income' (74th) indices, but significantly better when it comes to the physical and financial accessibility of housing and local services (240th). It also ranks significantly better when we look at the specific indices that measure the quality of the living environment in the city (272nd).

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) allows us to look more closely at childhood poverty in the city. The IDACI shows a slightly worse picture when it comes to childhood poverty, ranking Newcastle 51st when it comes to the proportion of children living in deprivation¹¹, placing it among the 20% most deprived.

The IMD cannot measure absolute change in deprivation over time. However, comparing these figures to the IMD (2015), there are some indications that levels of deprivation may have worsened in Newcastle, relative to other local authorities. In 2015, Newcastle was the 92nd most deprived local authority. In turn, Newcastle ranked 30th for the proportion of neighbourhoods that are in the 10% most deprived nationally. Newcastle was also ranked 60th local authority in the IDACI. In addition, Newcastle's average score in the IMD and IDACI have both worsened in the city since 2015.

Watts et al. (2019) looked more specifically at the incidence of severe and multiple disadvantage¹² and destitution¹³ in Newcastle, comparing the city to other Core Cities.

⁷ See Bramley, G., & Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) *Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?*. Housing Studies, 33(1), 96-116.

⁸ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019

⁹ This is calculated using the average 'rank', rather than the average 'score' measure

¹⁰ 'Neighbourhoods' are defined as lower super output areas (LSOAs) in the statistical releases on which this report draws

¹¹ Children are defined as those aged 0 to 15 years old

¹² See [Bramley et al., \(2015\) Hard Edges: Mapping Severe and Multiple Disadvantage](#) for more information on the definition of and methodology used to estimate levels of severe and multiple disadvantage

¹³ See the '[Destitution in the UK: 2018](#)' report for more information on the definition of and methodology used to predict levels of destitution

They found that Newcastle is in the top decile for predicted destitution overall and for destitution associated to complex needs. However, the authors did also highlight that other Core Cities seemed to experience higher levels of destitution than the national average. The authors identified the existence in Newcastle of a significant group of individuals with complex needs facing severe and multiple disadvantage, with population rates appearing far higher than in England and among the highest of the Core Cities.

2.1.2 – Labour market

Watts et al. found that for Newcastle unemployment rates came down gradually from 11% in 2010, but the decline was slower than in many other cities and parts of England, until 2016. After that, unemployment fell more quickly to 2018, putting the rate at around the average of other Core Cities, at around 6%.

Newcastle also has a higher proportion of households who are ‘workless’ than the national average, with 21.1% of households in this situation in the city in 2018, compared to an English average of 13.9% and a North East average of 20%. These levels have reduced slightly over the last five years from 22.5%. However, this seems to be in line with a wider national trend¹⁴.

However, unemployment or longer term worklessness are not the only labour market factors that have affected residents’ abilities to meet their housing costs. Watts et al. (2019) also highlighted that low pay and working hours seem to be a serious and perhaps worsening problem in Newcastle. They looked at typical pay for workers in the median and lowest deciles across all those in paid work, using the government’s Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. They found that for those in the lowest decile in Newcastle, wages have fallen in real terms by 17% from 2009 to 2018. This is compared to a national average of just 1.1%. This means workers at the bottom end of the labour market in Newcastle earn an average of £125 per week, £22 less than the English average for the bottom decile. The authors suggest that these findings indicate that Newcastle has been particularly impacted by the rise in part-time, ‘flexible employment’ and ‘self-employment’, often on low or sub-minimum wages.

All of these factors suggest that it is particularly difficult for households in Newcastle to meet their housing and wider living costs. They also indicate that, in comparison to the national average, a greater proportion of households in Newcastle are reliant on a welfare safety net that has been significantly reduced since 2013, as a result of successive governments’ welfare reforms (discussed further in section 2.2.1). As a result, there is strong evidence to suggest that labour market factors are a significant contributor to increasing the risk of homelessness in Newcastle, particularly for those at the bottom end of the labour market and those who are not in employment.

A more detailed analysis of the labour market in Newcastle and how this relates to levels of homelessness is available from page 45 of Watts et al.’s (2019) report.

¹⁴www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/workingandworklesshouseholdsalltables

2.1.3 – Housing market

The availability and affordability of housing have a significant impact on homelessness in an area. Therefore, it is important to consider the housing market context in the city in our homelessness review.

Newcastle's revised Housing Statement¹⁵ highlighted that in July 2018 there were around 124,000 units of housing in the city, made up of:

- a large amount of social housing at 27%, compared with the English average of 17.7%
- a significant amount of private rented accommodation at 19.1% compared with our near neighbours, and slightly more than the English average of 16.8%
- a lower than average owner-occupied sector at 49.5% compared to the North-East average of 57.6% and the English average of just over 63%

As highlighted in section 2.1.1, Newcastle scored significantly better around access to housing and local services in the Index of Multiple Deprivation, whilst facing high levels of income deprivation.

In turn, Watts et al. (2019) suggest that Newcastle's housing market context is much more conducive to preventing homelessness than its economic context. The authors found that real median house price has remained relatively low and stable in Newcastle. Changes in house prices indicate pressure in the housing market, which can contribute to increasing the general risk of homelessness in the city. However, across England the ending of private rented tenancies has been the biggest cause of statutory homelessness in the UK over recent years¹⁶. Therefore, it is important to explore the affordability of private rented housing in the city. Watts et al. (2019) found that Newcastle has among the lowest private rent levels of the Core Cities. In turn, these levels have remained relatively stable over the last five years, each indicating a relatively affordable private rented sector. However, it is important to recognise low private rents still may not be affordable for residents who have faced a reduction in their benefit receipt or in their wages. If we look at private (mean) average rents for Newcastle in 2017 against the North-East average, then this shows an average private sector rent in Newcastle of £677 against the North-East average of £529. However, in Newcastle this figure is skewed by the diverse private sector offer in the city, including high-end quayside apartments and the student rental market. Private sector rent levels more in keeping with the North-East average can still be found in certain quarters of the city, allowing for an affordable housing offer in the private rented sector for those who need it.

Newcastle, along with other university cities nationally, has seen a rapid growth in the number of students in the last 17 years, leading to a subsequent increase in demand for shared accommodation. The two universities alone currently host around 47,000 full-time students. The increased number of full-time students studying in Newcastle is consistent with the overall rise nationally. This rise in the number of full-time students coming to Newcastle to study led to a growth in private renting from 2001 onwards. Indeed, Newcastle is ranked as number one in the UK of multi-person households (shared houses) containing full-time students per head of population. To keep pace with demand Newcastle witnessed a rapid expansion in the number of purpose-built student bed spaces

¹⁵ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2019-01/Housing%20Statement%20Refresh%20July%202018.pdf

¹⁶ www.crisis.org.uk/media/240419/the_homelessness_monitor_england_2019.pdf

to cater for this sector. Between 2004 and 2017, there were a total of 12,621 new purpose-built bed spaces for students in the city and, as of April 2018, the total potential of future purpose-built bed spaces (under construction, under construction with planning consent and pre-application) stood at 8,789.

Newcastle also has social lettings rates that are three times the English average and twice those in most other northern Core Cities. Further, Newcastle has generally maintained this rate over the last five years, whereas in most other Core Cities and in London, social lettings rates have been reducing. Newcastle retains a stock of around 26,000 council homes, which are managed by our ALMO, YHN, who are the key delivery partner in Newcastle's homelessness prevention responses. Retaining political control over a significant stock of council homes allows much greater control over our local housing market, allowing us to prevent and relieve homelessness more effectively.

A more detailed analysis of the housing market in Newcastle and how this relates to levels of homelessness is available from page 39 of Watts et al.'s (2019) report.

2.2 – Policy context

Watts et al. (2019) highlighted that Newcastle has *“experienced a triple burden since 2010, facing amongst the most severe cuts in local authority budgets, among the worst impacted by welfare cuts, and one of the first areas to experience Universal Credit and its attended implementation and design challenges”* (p.39).

The authors go on to note that: *“All of these factors, separately and together, are seen to escalate the risks of homelessness faced by residents, and to constrain the ability of the local authority to prevent and respond to homelessness. On the other hand, this challenging context can also be seen to have increased the imperative to prevent homelessness and avoid the additional costs to local services, as well as to households themselves”*.

This section specifically focuses on the impact of the government's welfare reforms and reductions to local authority budgets on the homelessness in Newcastle. The specific changes brought about by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 are then described, as is the introduction of the government's rough sleeping strategy. Finally, the interrelationship between the asylum system and our responses to homelessness and the risk of homelessness are outlined.

2.2.1 – Welfare reforms

The overall financial impact of the welfare reforms

Since 2010, the UK government have undertaken unprecedented changes to the welfare system (National Audit Office, 2015). Beatty and Fothergill (2016) estimate that between 2010 and 2021, £27 billion a year will be lost from benefit entitlements, equivalent to £690 a year for every adult of working age. As with local authority cuts, the authors also highlight that, as a general rule, the more deprived the area, the greater the financial loss. As with local authority budget cuts, Newcastle is among the worst affected of the Core

Cities by the welfare reforms (Watts et al., 2019). NCC estimate an annual loss of £122 million in working age benefits amongst 40,000 Newcastle residents by the end of 2022-23. Given the evidence outlined above, it is perhaps unsurprising that Watts et al. (2019) note that Newcastle appears to be receiving among the greatest impacts across the Core Cities for the combined impact of the local authority cuts and the welfare reforms (£838 per capita, around £2,100 per household).

The additional complexity brought by the welfare reforms

The scale of the reductions to welfare benefits is significant. However, it is also important to recognise the intensity of the rate of these reforms. Between January 2014 and December 2018, NCC have identified over 120 important benefit changes that have affected residents in the city¹⁷. No single household will be affected by all of these reforms. However, the scale and frequency of these changes places greater pressure on residents (and the services supporting them) to identify, understand, and transition. Since 2010, there has also been an “*expansion and intensification of welfare conditionality*”, placing greater responsibility on claimants to move towards employment (Dwyer et al., 2018). However, the Welfare Conditionality Study found that this was largely ineffective in facilitating people’s entry into or progression within the paid labour market over time¹⁸.

The impact of specific welfare reforms

In addition to the overall scale and rate of reform, particular reforms have also had a significant impact in Newcastle. At 31 September 2019, there were 2,326 residents affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy (commonly referred to as the “bedroom tax”) across the city¹⁹. In a qualitative study of the impact of the “bedroom tax” in Newcastle, Moffatt et al., (2015) found that it has increased poverty and had broad-ranging adverse effects on health, wellbeing and social relationships within this community. At 31 September 2019, there were also 200 households known to be subject to the benefit cap in Newcastle²⁰. NCC argue that the benefit cap can place some vulnerable residents at risk of homelessness and destitution (Horton, 2018b). In their report from the re-opened benefit cap inquiry, the Work and Pensions Committee (2019) recognised “*the work that many local authorities are doing – often at the expense of their own resources – to identify and support capped households is a vital tool in mitigating some of the hardship the cap creates*”.

Newcastle is also the first of the Core Cities to have the Universal Credit ‘full service’ in all our Jobcentres. The Universal Credit ‘full service’ was introduced at Newcastle City Jobcentre in May 2016, at Newcastle East Jobcentre in February 2017 and at the now closed Newcastle West Jobcentre in March 2017. As of 12 September 2019, there were 20,471 people on Universal Credit in Newcastle, according to official Universal Credit

¹⁷ [Newcastle City Council - Important Benefit Changes and News – Timeline.](#)

¹⁸ www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/publications/final-findings-report/

¹⁹ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/welfare-benefits/housing-benefit/housing-benefit-and-ctr-facts-and-figures-2019-2020

²⁰ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/welfare-benefits/housing-benefit/housing-benefit-and-ctr-facts-and-figures-2019-2020

statistics²¹. The most recent data on the rollout of Universal Credit (May 2019) shows that caseload rollout is 46% complete in Newcastle, compared to 28% across Great Britain²². Watts et al. (2019) described this as contributing to a triple burden of challenges in homelessness prevention for the city (alongside the overall impact of the welfare reforms and local authority cuts).

Our own experiences of Universal Credit are that it:

- Increases financial pressure on residents in a number of ways, including:
 - Someone making a standard Universal Credit claim has at least a five week wait for their first payment
 - Short-term benefit advances are available but are deducted from up to the first 12 months of a claim
 - The modification of Tax Credit legislation for residents claiming Universal Credit means that historical Tax Credit overpayments are deducted automatically from Universal Credit payments
- Increases the likelihood of residents falling in the gaps between services and processes in a number of ways, including:
 - Council Tax Reduction is not part of Universal Credit and residents must make a separate claim to the council
 - The vulnerability 'flags' used in the legacy benefit IT system aren't replicated in the Universal Credit IT system. This, added to local authorities not receiving information from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about residents who are claiming Universal Credit, reduces the opportunity to identify residents who need additional support
- Increases pressure on YHN:
 - At 31 August 2019, YHN tenants on Universal Credit owed a total of £3.51 million. The YHN rent arrears attributed solely to Universal Credit were £1.29 million

The impact of the welfare reforms on homelessness has been limited by Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). As a result, DHPs have been referred to as a 'sticking plaster', providing temporary relief for long-term rent shortfalls caused by welfare reforms (Watts et al., 2019). Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, central government allocation of DHP funding to local authorities in Great Britain rose from £30 million to £166.5 million²³. Over the same period in Newcastle, spending rose from £94,326 to £1,169,857²⁴. National funding has dropped significantly in 2019-20 to £153.5 million, with a drop to £932,043 in Newcastle. Given the importance of DHPs in preventing residents with significant shortfalls falling into homelessness, this policy change is particularly concerning.

²¹ <http://dwp->

[stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f90fb305d8da4eb3970812b3199cf489](http://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f90fb305d8da4eb3970812b3199cf489)

²² <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/social-policy/welfare-pensions/benefits/constituency-data-universal-credit-roll-out/#caseload>

²³ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06899/SN06899.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-subsidy-circulars-2019>

2.2.2 – Austerity

Local authorities in England experienced a 49% reduction in government funding in real terms between 2010 and 2018 (National Audit Office, 2018). Central government departments have not been immune to cuts either; the Department of Work and Pensions experienced a reduction in spending of 31% between 2010-11 and 2015-16 (National Audit Office, 2015), at the same time as delivering the unprecedented welfare reforms described section 2.2.3.

In turn, the level of cuts has varied significantly between local authorities. Perhaps the most striking trends are that, as a general rule, the higher the level of deprivation, destitution, and severe and multiple disadvantage, the more severe the cuts (Hastings et al. 2015; 2017). Watts et al. (2019) find that Newcastle is one of the very worst affected local authorities in England, with real cuts of 32% or £461 per head between 2010 and 2018. NCC's medium term plan for 2020-21 estimates a £327 million reduction in our budget by 2022-23, due to government cuts and increasing cost pressures²⁵. Newcastle has faced cuts that are more than twice the national average since 2010 and by 2019-20 the city will be in the ninth year of austerity. As a result of cuts to funding, between the financial years 2013-14 and 2019-20 the council has had to make savings of £4.4 million across the Active Inclusion Service and the third-party commissioning spend for homelessness-related services.

We have been relatively successful in attracting additional short-term funding from government to offset these cuts (e.g. in 2016, we received £936,000 to be one of three 'early adopter' Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers²⁶ and in 2019, we secured an additional £713,386 for responding to people who sleep rough). However, demand for our services continues to rise. The number of vulnerable adults and vulnerable children are all increasing. The scale of the cuts to local authority budgets is great, particularly in Newcastle. In providing evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee (2019) Professor Tony Travers from the London School of Economics highlighted that the scale, intensity and the long time period over which the reduction in local government spending has taken place is without parallel in modern times. The next section outlines a similar picture in relation to the extent, intensity, and scale of the welfare reforms across the UK, and in Newcastle in particular.

Watts et al. (2019) highlighted that, in comparison to other Core Cities, Newcastle is noteworthy for how it has managed the cuts it has faced. In particular, the authors highlight that Newcastle has not cut children's and non-school education budget and has cut Supporting People funding and mental health services significantly less than other Core Cities.

²⁵ www.newcastle.gov.uk/local-government/budget-performance-and-spend/budget/shaping-our-future-together-our-medium-term

²⁶ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Overview%20of%20Newcastle's%20Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer.pdf

2.2.3 – Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017²⁷ came into force in April 2018. The Act started as a Private Members' Bill, with all-party support, and is the most significant homelessness legislation for 40 years. The Act is accompanied by a new code of guidance and monitoring system (Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC)) for councils.

The Act created the following main changes²⁸:

- councils must assess and agree a personalised plan for all eligible applicants who are at risk of homelessness within 56 days that covers:
 - the circumstances that caused the risk of homelessness
 - housing needs of the applicant, and
 - what support would be necessary for the applicant to be able to have and retain suitable accommodation
- councils must provide tailored information and advice for groups considered more likely to be at risk of homelessness
- councils must take reasonable steps to relieve homelessness
- applicants will be expected to cooperate with the council
- councils must establish a system for the acceptance of referrals from
- public agencies to work with those at risk of homelessness (delayed until October 2018)
- the “full homelessness duty” comes in where prevention or relief fail

The Act is broadly welcomed in Newcastle, but we feel that the ambitions of the original Bill provided a much better opportunity to build a stronger, society-wide response to preventing homelessness. For example, it was proposed that public bodies should have a duty to cooperate in the prevention of homelessness, in recognition of the complex individual and systemic causes of homelessness.

The primary focus of the final Act is on councils' duty to respond to crisis, albeit extended from 28 to 56 days, to assess prevent and / or relieve homelessness. The Act's focus on only preventing homelessness within the 56-day window has disincentivised upstream homelessness prevention. In Newcastle, we have reduced evictions from our 26,000 council homes by 71% since 2008, due to our focus on preventing the risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) interpretation of the Act puts this upstream performance at risk.

Nevertheless, the Act has facilitated the development of more person-centred approaches through the personal housing plans – in Newcastle we call these 'Our Inclusion Plans'²⁹ – which have helped us to work towards the continuity of support planning for residents and

²⁷ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/13/contents/enacted

²⁸ <https://democracy.newcastle.gov.uk/documents/s123954/Newcastles%20response%20to%20the%20Homelessness%20Reduction%20Act%202017.pdf>

²⁹ https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/our_inclusion_plan_v1_3_current_-_290818.pdf

for this to form the basis of an ongoing support plan that better ties together local responses to help address the underlying cause of homelessness. However, this has doubled the time it takes to conduct an assessment as it requires a more sophisticated response to understanding the causes of homelessness and aligning this to responses to prevent or relieve homelessness. This is a positive change, but the additional capacity required is greater than the additional staff paid for through the Act's new burdens funding. Managing the expectations of advocacy agencies has also been more time consuming; there have been misunderstandings about what the 'reasonable steps' are that the council should take to prevent or relieve homelessness and confusion about whether the Act creates a right to housing for homeless people.

2.2.4 – Rough Sleeping Strategy

In August 2018, the government published its Rough Sleeping Strategy³⁰ for England, in which they stated their commitment to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and ending it by 2027. In this strategy, the government announced £100 million of funding over the first two years of the strategy. Around £45 million is being allocated to local authorities through the Rough Sleeping Initiative³¹, which initially focuses on those authorities with the highest numbers of people sleeping rough.

The strategy demonstrates an increased focus on rough sleeping by the government and we welcome the differentiation between homelessness and rough sleeping. 'Prevention' is a key aspect of the Rough Sleeping Strategy. However, the primary focus is on prevention activity that takes place within the 56-window outlined by the Act, with no explicit mention of prevention at an earlier stage. The strategy also places a requirement on local authorities to 'rebadge' their local homelessness strategies as homelessness *and rough sleeping* strategies. In Newcastle, we have committed to a vision of ending rough sleeping in the city by 2022, called Street Zero³².

2.2.5 – The asylum process

Newcastle is a [City of Sanctuary](#), which is a network of places of safety and welcome for people who are new to the country. Our vision is for Newcastle to be a safe, inclusive and welcoming city, where people new to the city are provided with the support and advice that they need and where links between new arrivals and existing communities are fostered. Whilst those seeking asylum have no choice over where in the UK they are dispersed to, we take pride in the fact that many refugees chose to settle here once their claim for asylum is determined. Our strategic work on asylum and migration is co-ordinated by a Cross Council Migration Group. This group provides the council with a coordinated and cooperative platform with which to meet the political priority of Newcastle being a City of Sanctuary.

The best available data to explore the number of asylum seekers dispersed to Newcastle, compared to other areas is the government's immigration statistics for households in

³⁰ www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-rough-sleeping-strategy

³¹ www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-allocated-for-councils-to-help-rough-sleepers

³² <http://streetzero.org/>

receipt of 'section 95' accommodation and support³³. However, it should be noted that this data does not represent all people seeking asylum who are dispersed to Newcastle. This data highlights that between 2014 and 2018, the number of households seeking asylum in receipt of 'section 95' accommodation and support and dispersed to Newcastle has increased by 142.7% between 2014 and 2018. This is a faster rate of increase than that of the North East (75.7%) or the UK (57.6%) over the same period. In turn, the proportion of households seeking asylum dispersed to Newcastle as a proportion of the overall number dispersed to the North East has increased from 15.9% in 2014 to 21.9% in 2018.

As described above, Newcastle is a City of Sanctuary and we aim for our city to be a safe, inclusive and welcoming one for anyone who comes to live here. However, we believe changes in national government policy would allow us to better support this increasing number of people seeking asylum. Since 2012, accommodation for residents who are asylum seekers has been outsourced to private contractors who are commissioned by the Home Office. This leaves local authorities limited influence over how and where people seeking asylum will be accommodated in their areas during their asylum claim. In addition, under the asylum dispersal process the local authority has very little information about, or control over, the support being offered to people seeking asylum who are dispersed to their area. As a result, we are often unaware of vulnerable people being accommodated in our city. This restricts our ability to offer integration support or early preventative services.

Once the Home Office have reached a decision on a household's asylum claim, they notify the resident and the accommodation provider that their asylum accommodation will no longer be available after 28 days. NCC then liaise with these accommodation providers to offer support to access suitable and sustainable accommodation and prevent homelessness. Unfortunately, the Home Office are not required to give 56 days' notice of an asylum decision, which is at odds with the requirements outlined in the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) and more specifically the Duty to Refer for public authorities. As a result, the time we have to help residents who have received refugee status to find accommodation is restricted.

2.3 – Conclusion to context chapter

This chapter has shown that Newcastle faces an extremely challenging context in which to prevent and relieve homelessness. Section 2.1 highlighted Newcastle's relatively high levels of poverty and deprivation, including destitution and severe and multiple disadvantage. It also showed that those at the bottom end of the labour market are particularly disadvantaged, compared to other Core Cities.

However, Newcastle's more favourable housing market context has provided an opportunity to prevent and relieve homelessness more effectively. As highlighted throughout this review, Newcastle has utilised this opportunity by retaining control of its council housing stock and developing a close partnership with our ALMO, YHN.

³³ www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release

Section 2.2 highlighted how this already challenging context has been exacerbated further by central government policies since 2013. Newcastle is among the worst affected of the Core Cities by welfare reforms and local authority cuts. This brings a significant financial impact in reducing the supply of services in a time of increasing demand. In particular, there is evidence to suggest a significant population of individuals with complex needs are likely to be disproportionately affected by poverty, welfare reforms and austerity due to their reduced ability to cope with changing circumstances.

However, the financial impact only tells part of the story of the impact of policy changes since 2013. Adapting to the scale and pace of change in recent years has perhaps been the most significant challenge posed by the welfare reforms and austerity. The scale and frequency of welfare reforms places greater pressure on residents (and the services supporting them) to identify, understand, and transition. In turn, cuts to public spending direct time, effort, and resource into managing these cuts, at the expense of developing public services. The intentions of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 are welcomed. However, it is important to recognise that this has placed further pressure on already stretched local authority services to adapt to the changes in legislation. In turn, the Act has primarily placed additional duties on local authorities, rather than addressing the wider underlying causes of homelessness. Finally, some aspects of the Act are not in line with the notice of discharge from asylum accommodation, limiting our ability to prevent homelessness for these households.

The next section describes our responses to homelessness and the risk of homelessness over the last five years. It starts by describing our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach, which has had relative success in responding to the challenges outlined above. In doing so, it highlights the necessity of infrastructure support to support partnership working to maximise the value of our collective resources to make homelessness prevention everyone's business.

3. Our responses

In Newcastle, we aim to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity and to relieve homelessness humanely where we have been unable to prevent. To do so, we aim to make homelessness prevention everyone's business and maximise the value of our collective resources. As outlined in section 4, Newcastle has a relatively good record on preventing homelessness. This record is based on long-term committed political leadership, council housing, investment in accommodation, advice and support services, and an infrastructure that facilitates consensus and partnership working.

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; and it is data and evidence-informed, with a strong focus on continuous learning and service improvement.

In 2018-19, this approach meant that 32,855 residents were advised by our Active Inclusion Newcastle partners. This included helping 21,670 residents to secure £31,171,014 in welfare benefits and providing 4,895 residents with debt advice. These interventions helped us to prevent 4,233 cases of homelessness in 2018-19.

This chapter describes how we have sought to prevent and relieve homelessness in Newcastle. Section 3.1 describes our broad approach to homelessness prevention as part of our Active Inclusion Newcastle³⁴ partnership approach before describing how we sought to build on and strengthen this approach through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme. Sections 3.2 to 3.4 describe how we target advice and support to residents to prevent and respond to homelessness and to help make the prevention of homelessness 'everyone's business'. This is structured by three broad categories³⁵; primary prevention activities, secondary prevention activities and crisis relief activities.

Section 3.2 describes how we support the aim of making homelessness prevention everyone's business and facilitate consensus and partnership working through our primary prevention activities. Section 3.3 then focuses on our secondary prevention activities through which we seek to proactively identify and support residents who are 'at risk' or immediately 'threatened' with homelessness. Section 3.4 describes our 'crisis' activities, through which we seek to humanely relieve homelessness and help residents to move into suitable and sustainable accommodation. Finally, section 3.5 describes our specific responses for adults who are rough sleeping or could be described as 'multiply excluded'³⁶.

³⁴ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/HPF/AIN%20briefing%20note%202019-20.pdf

³⁵ See [Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick \(2008\)](#) for the theoretical approach that we have based our homelessness prevention structure on

³⁶ Our definition of 'Multiple Exclusion Homelessness' is based on a UK wide study of the same name: https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/479212/MEH_Briefing_No_1_2012.pdf

Our secondary prevention and crisis activities, as well as our responses for residents who are 'multiply excluded', are described in greater detail in our 'pathways' resource³⁷. This resource clarifies our responses for residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness into a form that is clear and understandable to practitioners.

3.1 – The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach

Our approach to preventing and relieving homelessness is guided by our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach.

Active Inclusion Newcastle is a partnership approach developed as part of NCC's 2013-16 budget setting process. It responds to the:

- growth in demand for financial inclusion and homelessness prevention information, advice and support when resources and certainty are reducing
- transition residents and organisations need to make to a reduced welfare state
- scale of poverty and disadvantage many Newcastle residents face
- need to change our culture, to promote preventative and partnership responses

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach is guided by our local politicians' values of fairness, inclusion and social justice and contributes to NCC's priorities of employment, education and skills, and housing. Through this approach we aim to maximise our resources to support residents to maintain the foundations for a stable **life**:

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

As outlined in chapter 2, delivering this aim is challenging, but also essential in the context of the government's welfare reforms and cuts to NCC's budget³⁸. Many residents face interconnected challenges that cannot be effectively responded to by single service silos. Since 2013, we have made good progress in promoting the means and benefits of service coordination. Our next step is improving service integration, which is difficult when the legislative, financial, information-sharing and support planning frameworks don't yet match our aspirations. We are applying the principles of public service transformation to our partnerships to change culture, behaviours and expectations; making understanding the context we're working in, cooperation and prevention the norm, and crisis the exception.

Active Inclusion Service

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach is supported by NCC's Active Inclusion Service which provides governance arrangements, policy and sector leadership to build trust, encourage collaborative working and support compromise. In doing so, they also provide a framework to improve the coordination and consistency of information,

³⁷ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/pathways-clarifying

³⁸ see section 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 respectively for more information on the impact of the welfare reforms and reductions in local authority budgets in Newcastle

advice and support, helping partners to increase residents' financial inclusion and to prevent homelessness.

We believe that it essential to invest in this type of infrastructure to maximise our resources to support residents to maintain the foundations for a stable life. This is particularly true given the scale and complexity of the challenges we face in preventing and relieving homelessness.

Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit

The Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit was established in 2013 to support the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach and service. The Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit provides policy and sector leadership to build trust, encourage collaborative working and support compromise to help partners to promote financial inclusion and to prevent homelessness. They do this in a number of ways:

- **Developing and supporting partnership arrangements**, to better identify the proportionate role of each partner in preventing and relieving homelessness and tailor our partnership arrangements accordingly. Partners have different roles to play in ending homelessness, that range from receiving information to working as part of a multidisciplinary team – to maximise our collective resources we need to be clear about what our partners need to contribute and what their contribution will be
- **Developing the policies and protocols that align to these partnership arrangements** and help us develop agreed local rules in different areas of our response – this means improving outcomes for residents by working cooperatively beyond silos (e.g. as has happened through our Sustaining Tenancies Protocol that has led to a 71% reduction in evictions from our 26,000 council homes over the last ten years)
- **Developing pathways of responses that are aligned to agreed policies and procedures** and organise individual services so that they work together to end homelessness – to make more of our touch and trigger points to act to respond to the risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity
- **Consolidating and enhancing our review structures** to help us to build on our iterative approach to improving our accommodation and support services to prevent and relieve homelessness
- **Developing and maintaining information, advice and training** for partners in the city so that we can help everyone to play their proportionate part in ending homelessness
- **Developing, managing and maintaining the Newcastle Gateway**³⁹, a secure web-based single access point where professionals working with Newcastle residents at risk of homelessness or financial exclusion can refer to local homelessness accommodation and housing-related support services, employment, debt, and benefits advice services, and make applications to the Supporting Independence Scheme. This also provides a case management system for a number of our housing and homelessness services

³⁹ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/newcastle-gateway

3.1.1 – Newcastle’s Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer

On 17 October 2016 the Prime Minister launched a new Homelessness Prevention Programme. Newcastle was announced as one of three Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer ‘early adopters’ to pilot new initiatives to tackle homelessness in local areas. The Prime Minister stated that this was “*a fresh government approach to tackling homelessness by focusing on the underlying issues which can lead to somebody losing their home*”. In announcing Newcastle as an ‘early adopter’, the government acknowledged the strength of our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach.

Our £936,223 Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funding has supported a public service transformation programme from 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2019, focused on system change and supporting homelessness prevention at an earlier stage by working with a wider group of residents at risk before they reach crisis point. This has contributed to trialling the delivery of frontline services in a different way and provided additional capacity to improve our understanding and embed the transition to making the proactive prevention of homelessness the norm and reactive crisis-based responses the exception.

We knew that some residents experience lives dominated by crisis, some have occasional crisis in their lives and some just manage. The premise of our approach has been to get a deeper, collective understanding of this by:

- Strengthening our understanding of residents’ lives, to help us to adapt where we can to make working together easier
- Strengthening residents’ understanding of the changed context that they are living in, so that we can support them to respond to changing demands
- Using this understanding to inform local and national policy and practice

This was particularly important given the dynamic context we are working in:

- National policy is regularly changing, especially in the areas of welfare benefits, housing, homelessness, employment, finance, asylum and migration
- Organisations, services and staff are regularly changing, especially due to austerity and different funding requirements and models
- Residents’ personal circumstances are regularly changing

Given the above, we can no longer have static responses. However, as issues are also often tangled as well as interdependent, we do need structure to avoid confusion, conflict and chaos. Our approach has been to develop a flexible framework, organising our interconnected responses to identify risks and to support residents to face their challenges, making the most of the opportunities to prevent crisis.

To meet our aspirations to strengthen our citywide culture that makes the prevention of homelessness everyone’s business and homelessness crisis the exception, our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme included a range of different projects within the following 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

More information on Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer is on our website, alongside a suite of reports and resources produced from the projects that were part of the programme⁴⁰.

3.2 – Primary prevention activities

Our primary prevention activities are focused on providing governance arrangements, policy and sector leadership to build trust, encourage collaborative working and support compromise. They also aim to provide a framework to improve the coordination and consistency of information, advice and support, helping partners to promote financial inclusion and prevent homelessness. The majority of these activities are supported by the Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit.

3.2.1 – Partnerships

We support a range of partnership arrangements aimed at preventing homelessness and promoting financial inclusion in the city. 134 different services and organisations take part in our partnership arrangements, which are structured across three levels:

Strategic partnerships: our strategic partnerships coordinate our citywide approaches to key areas of our work; homelessness, financial inclusion, migration and the welfare reforms. These partnerships are aligned to periodic review processes that allow us to consistently and collectively analyse and improve our responses.

Delivery partnerships: our delivery partnerships focus on the operational issues. They mainly focus on coordinating face-to-face advice and support to residents to develop a consistent approach across providers in the city. However, certain groups focus on coordinating specific partnerships such as with NCC's Private Rented Service, YHN's Support and Progression team and with users of the Newcastle Gateway.

Case management coordination: Our case management coordination partnerships focus on our responses for specific groups of residents, where regular, structured coordination focused on specific cases is required. Examples of these partnerships include our 'Multiple Exclusion Common Case Management' group and our 'Supported Housing Move On Panel'.

⁴⁰ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/newcastles-homelessness

More detail on our partnership arrangements is on our website⁴¹.

3.2.2 – Policies and protocols

Our partnership arrangements are linked to “*an array of city-level protocols and policies [that have] been developed to seek to avoid homelessness at various known trigger points for it wherever possible*” (Watts et al., 2019: 144).

The policies and protocols are used to develop common understanding and consistent practice. We have taken a proportionate response to the development and review of these processes. For example, our work on preventing evictions and responding to rough sleeping is reviewed more frequently and has more rigorous data collection than the Clean Homes Protocol that is used infrequently. Our homelessness prevention protocols are on our website⁴² and are outlined in appendix 2.

3.2.3 – Information, guidance and training

Information and guidance

We seek to make the best use of the limited face-to-face specialist advice services in Newcastle by helping other non-specialist services to prevent and respond to financial exclusion and the risk of homelessness. This means moving from signposting to proportionate responses in which all partners can play a role.

Our aim is to help volunteers and professionals working in related disciplines to identify and prevent the risk of homelessness and financial exclusion as part of their everyday practice. For example, by incorporating prompts and questions into their conversations and the support plans they make with residents. By raising awareness of the risk of homelessness, providing training on how to identify and respond to it, and embedding this learning into routine practice, we believe that we will make the most of the contacts that multi-agency staff have with residents who might be at risk of homelessness. This should contribute to achieving our aim of making it everyone’s business to prevent homelessness. It also helps our collective understanding of the role, and possible role, that each person plays in supporting the people who they work with.

To help us to meet this aim, we have developed a ‘spectrum of advice’. This describes three broad tiers (general information, general advice and specialist advice) and acts as a guide to help us to better understand where organisations fit into our provision in Newcastle and what support they need to do this⁴³. To complement our ‘spectrum of advice’ we develop and maintain information resources, consultancy telephone lines, and

⁴¹ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/active_inclusion_newcastle_partnership_arrangements_-_december_2018.pdf

⁴² www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals-homelessness-prevention

⁴³ The ‘spectrum of advice’ for housing and homelessness is on our website: www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/spectrum_of_advice_-_housing_and_homelessness_may_2015_draft_3.pdf

deliver training in welfare benefits, debt advice, and housing and homelessness. In 2018-19 we provided our universal advice and information to 3,550 subscribers and there were 76,937 visits to access the information on our website pages dedicated to homelessness prevention⁴⁴ and financial inclusion⁴⁵.

More detail on the information, guidance and training we provide through our workforce development programme is available on our website⁴⁶.

As part of the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, we have also produced a number of factsheets to give more information to groups of people who are particularly at risk of becoming homeless. Each of these factsheets are available on our website⁴⁷. A key theme of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer was to respond as consistently and effectively as we can to residents who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness. This funding allowed us to utilise service design approaches to develop:

- **‘Our Inclusion Plan’** to meet our local aspirations as well as new statutory requirements – this involved designing an assessment and planning framework in conjunction with residents, frontline practitioners, managers, Crisis and Shelter using service design principles. We then tested the prototype documents with residents being assessed in the statutory housing advice and assessment service in advance of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 being introduced, taking feedback from residents and practitioners and incorporating changes into revised prototypes before agreeing a final version for translation onto our Newcastle Gateway case management system
- **A ‘pathways’ resource** for multi-agency staff to clarify our responses to homelessness in Newcastle. We worked with frontline staff to identify, clarify and refine the pathways for residents who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness, consolidating our responses to homelessness (and the threat of homelessness) into a format which is clear and understandable to frontline staff. This resulted in the development of a navigable prototype document that was tested and refined with a range of multi-agency staff before publication on our website⁴⁸
- **A toolkit for improving resident participation** through our ‘Newcastle Voices’ project. We have been working with Groundswell since January 2019 to review our structure for supporting residents who have experience of homelessness to inform the design of our homelessness prevention system. We want to move beyond a representation model to embedding meaningful participation routinely across our review processes. To do this, it is important to ensure that the views of residents with experience of homelessness are embedded into our decision-making processes, rather than undertaking ‘one-off’ consultation exercises. To determine the best ways to

⁴⁴ www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals

⁴⁵ www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals

⁴⁶ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Workforce%20development%20-%20overview%20of%20our%20routine%20approach%20and%20accompanying%20resources.pdf

⁴⁷ www.newcastle.gov.uk/homeless

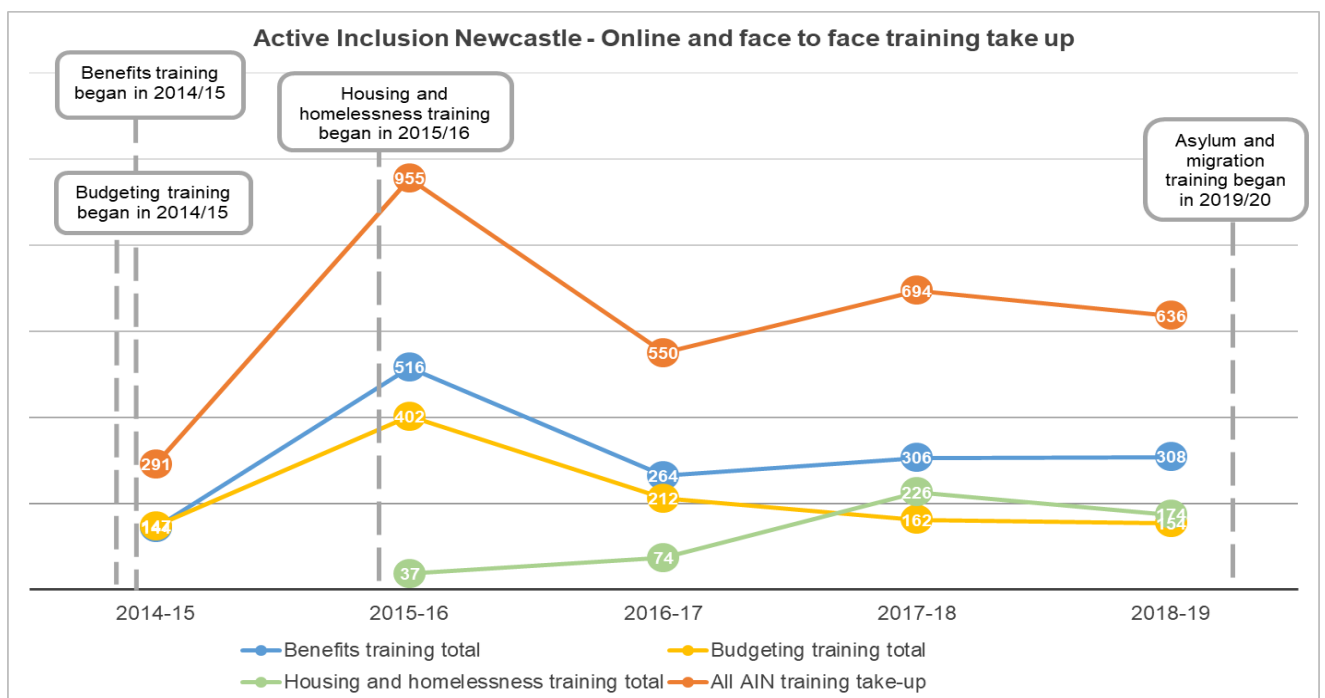
⁴⁸ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/information-professionals/pathways-clarifying

embed resident participation in our partnership approach we have worked with Groundswell to implement the first stage of the 'Newcastle Voices' project. Through this first stage we produced a report, recommendations and toolkit for participation of people with experience of homelessness. The toolkit produced through this first stage is available on our website⁴⁹.

Training

To complement our 'spectrum of advice' we hold quarterly training sessions on welfare benefits, budgeting, housing and homelessness, and preventing sanctions. Figure 1 (below) shows the take-up of our training, drawing together both our online and face-to-face training.

Figure 1 – Active Inclusion Newcastle training take-up



Some professionals or volunteers have accessed both our online and face-to-face training. Therefore, this figure counts the number of instances of someone taking part in training, not the number of individuals who have accessed our training.

Our 'Introduction to Housing and Homelessness in Newcastle' training sessions for those working in tier 1 and 2 offer a basic overview of homelessness legislation, an explanation of the different kinds of housing tenure and the rules that govern them, how to apply for social housing, and how to query and challenge housing and homelessness decisions. We also cover practical information about the role of the Housing Advice Centre and the policies and procedures that we and partners in Newcastle follow to prevent homelessness.

⁴⁹www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Newcastle%20Voices%20Toolkit%20-%20Final.pdf

Through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme we sought to target our workforce development programme to specific groups of staff, including Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches, drug and alcohol treatment providers, and services working with children, young people and families. We have had more limited success with the targeting aspect of our workforce development than we hoped we would have. This is partly due to not having dedicated capacity for this area of work, but also due to having limited control or influence on different services and organisations. Coupled with significant organisational transitions and other priorities, this has meant that some services have felt unable to prioritise workforce development. However, we still believe that it's the right thing to do to maximise the contacts that services have with residents by raising awareness and knowledge of how to identify and respond to issues that increase the risk of homelessness or financial exclusion. We have continued with both the delivery of our routine quarterly training programme and the targeting of workforce development to specific groups beyond the end of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme.

Local Welfare Assistance funding

In addition to these primary prevention activities, NCC also provides Local Welfare Assistance to residents in need of financial support. We have maintained these schemes despite the removal of ringfenced funding by the government.

Our Supporting Independence Scheme⁵⁰, a targeted discretionary fund that replaced the Community Care Grant, is available to residents receiving specialist advice and support who are on low incomes to help them to set up or maintain a home.

The Crisis Support Scheme⁵¹ is a discretionary fund that provides food, fuel and clothing to residents who have suffered a crisis in their lives.

3.2.4 – Our periodic review processes

The partnership arrangements described in section 3.2.1 provide focal points for the dissemination and discussion of findings from our quarterly review processes. We run five quarterly review processes, focusing on the individual foundations of a stable life:

- **Somewhere to live:** our quarterly homelessness reviews cover our range of responses for residents who are homeless (including those who are 'multiply excluded'), threatened with homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The findings from our quarterly homelessness reviews are summarised into a briefing document that is publicly available on our website and are presented to our Homelessness Prevention Forum which meets quarterly⁵²
- **An income:** our quarterly welfare rights reviews cover the provision of welfare benefits advice and information in the city, focusing primarily on our Welfare Rights team. The findings from our welfare rights quarterly reviews are published in our financial inclusion quarterly briefing document which is publicly available on our website and

⁵⁰ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/housing-advice-and-homelessness/what-do-if-you-need-housing-advice-or-are-3

⁵¹ www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/benefits/crisis-support-scheme

⁵² www.newcastle.gov.uk/HPF

are presented at our quarterly Financial Inclusion Group seminars⁵³. They are also presented to the Newcastle Advice Compact, which brings together services and organisations providing benefits and money advice in the city to improve the consistency and coordination of our responses

- **Financial inclusion:** our debt quarterly reviews cover the provision of debt and budgeting advice and information in the city, focusing primarily on our Money Matters debt and budgeting team. The findings from our debt quarterly reviews are published in our financial inclusion quarterly briefing document which is publicly available on our website and are presented at our quarterly Financial Inclusion Group seminars. They are also presented to the Newcastle Advice Compact, which brings together services and organisations providing benefits and money advice in the city to improve the consistency and coordination of our responses
- **Employment opportunities:** we have a quarterly review process focused on our Supported Employment Service. The findings from this quarterly review are published in our financial inclusion quarterly briefing document which is publicly available on our website and are presented at our quarterly Financial Inclusion Group seminars

We also run a quarterly review process focused around **asylum and migration** in the city. This review process is disseminated through our Cross Council Migration Group. However, some of the data that is included in this review is sensitive and cannot be made publicly available. Therefore, we do not publish a briefing for this review process.

These review processes enable a structured approach for the iterative analysis of data from each of the areas of response. They are based around a series of internal meetings with senior management and frontline practitioners working in our services. They then culminate in strategic partnership meetings in which we involve professionals and volunteers from across partner organisations working in these areas. Our Homelessness Prevention Forums and Financial Inclusion Group seminars meetings are public forums and can be attended by anyone who wishes to.

Opportunities to improve our quarterly review processes – better involving residents with lived experience and frontline practitioners

These review processes focus primarily on analysing, disseminating and discussing quantitative data. Turning to homelessness, such analysis gives us a relatively good understanding of trends in the levels, types and primary causes of homelessness in Newcastle. However, these trends can also pose more questions than they answer, particularly around the causal relationships that explain how and why these wider trends exist. Exploring these causal relationships in more depth requires us to incorporate qualitative data collection and analysis into our quarterly review processes, alongside improving our ability to undertake more detailed quantitative analysis.

Through the work of our multidisciplinary team, funded through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, we have begun to develop examples of how we can improve our

⁵³ www.newcastle.gov.uk/FIG

use of qualitative data to better understand the factors that underpin wider trends in homelessness. In the multidisciplinary team, qualitative data collection and analysis has focused around drawing on the experience of frontline practitioners and residents to better understand their subjective perceptions.

Through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, we also funded the first stage of our Newcastle Voices project. In this first phase we commissioned Groundswell⁵⁴ 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. In particular, this project was focused on how we could better incorporate the participation of those with lived experience in our quarterly homelessness review processes. The peer research project involved a mapping exercise to establish current involvement and participatory work within homelessness services and to identify existing good practice and a peer-led research study with participants who are currently or at risk of being homeless. This peer-led research found that a high proportion of those residents who were surveyed do not feel involved in commissioning, policy or strategy around homelessness. However, the majority of respondents (95%) wanted to be involved when the council makes decisions about services. In turn, a high proportion of respondents wanted to be involved in research, either as a participant (58%) or as a researcher (61%). These findings indicate that there is a significant need and opportunity to involve residents with lived experience through qualitative research. However, it is important to do this in a considered, ethical and supportive way.

A report that outlines the findings from the peer research project⁵⁵ and a toolkit that includes recommendations on how we can embed participation⁵⁶ are both available on our website as part of the suite of reports and resources published through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme.

This research and toolkit are intended to be a starting point for the Newcastle Voices project. We intend to take forward the recommendations included in the toolkit in 2020, with a particular focus on embedding the voice of residents with lived experience of homelessness or the risk of homelessness in our quarterly homelessness review process.

3.3 – Secondary prevention activities

In Newcastle, we have a broad range of secondary prevention activities that are focused on proactively identifying and support residents who are ‘at risk’ or immediately ‘threatened’ with homelessness. In Newcastle, we classify residents as being ‘at risk’ of homelessness when they have a clear risk of homelessness (usually due to affordability issues or other vulnerabilities that make it more difficult for them to sustain their accommodation). We classify residents as being ‘threatened’ with homelessness when they may lose their accommodation within the next 56 days. Our definition of ‘threatened

⁵⁴ <https://groundswell.org.uk/>

⁵⁵ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Newcastle%20Voices%20Peer%20Research%20Report.pdf

⁵⁶ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Newcastle%20Voices%20Toolkit%20-%20Final.pdf

with homelessness' is aligned to the same definition as is in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Our secondary prevention activities complement our primary prevention activities. We have a number of core prevention services (outlined in section 3.3.1), each of which contributes to a number of prevention pathways that are targeted towards groups of residents who are at particular risk of homelessness.

Across these pathways there are three main ways that we identify residents:

- **Touch and trigger points** – our primary prevention activities (described in section 3.2) are intended to help other professionals from a wide range of related disciplines to identify when residents may be at risk of homelessness and to refer them to the appropriate support. In doing so, we aim to make preventing homelessness everyone's business and help residents to access support before they reach crisis point. One example of this work is the alignment of DHPs with support. DHPs are time-limited payments to help with housing costs and are usually combined with conditions intended to support recipients to be able to make up their rent shortfall. We have begun to align these payments and conditions with advice and support through our prevention services to help residents to adhere to the conditions set out and to adapt to the challenges of a reduced welfare state.
- **Working with partners** – where we know there is a greater risk of homelessness, we seek to establish more formal partnership arrangements with certain organisations. For example, we work with our ALMO, YHN, to identify and support residents who have rent arrears and may be at risk of eviction. We also work with local general needs and mental health hospitals to identify residents who may be discharged without suitable and sustainable accommodation available to them
- **Using data** – through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme (see section 3.1.1) we have been able to test the use of predictive analytics. In April 2018, the multidisciplinary team began to identify residents who may be at risk of homelessness using predictive analytics. The analytics are based on a range of local data including Housing Benefit, YHN rent, Council Tax arrears and Reduction Scheme and DHP data. This data is analysed against estimated changes in inflation on household goods and services and expected welfare reforms to predict which residents may be at risk of homelessness in the future

In addition to these three ways of identifying residents, we also maintain a face-to-face Housing Advice Centre in Newcastle city centre⁵⁷. Our Housing Advice Centre offers residents who are at risk of homelessness the opportunity to approach us for support.

3.3.1 – Our prevention services

⁵⁷ www.newcastle.gov.uk/homeless

As highlighted in section 3.2, there are a wide range of different statutory and non-statutory services in the city which contribute to preventing homelessness and promoting financial inclusion. Our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach and primary prevention activities aim to help maximise this collective investment.

This section summarises our core prevention services, including directly delivered services (either by NCC or YHN) and our commissioned services. Section 3.3.2 then describes how these services contribute to a range of pathways of response.

YHN's Support and Progression team: This team consists of 70 staff, including 37 Support and Progression Workers. This team maintain a wide range of different support offers, including support for residents moving on from supported accommodation, for residents who have recently received refugee status and for YHN tenants who are at risk of eviction.

NCC's Cherry Tree View's preventative outreach: Our statutory temporary accommodation service, Cherry Tree View, also maintain a preventative outreach service. Five Housing Support Officers provide the same range of advice and support given to residents who have been placed in Cherry Tree View to those who may be at risk of moving into statutory temporary accommodation in the future. This includes offering additional support to YHN tenants who have dependent children and are at risk of eviction (and, therefore, are at risk of being placed in Cherry Tree View). They offer a wide range of support to help prevent homelessness, including benefits and budgeting advice.

NCC's Housing Advice Centre: We maintain a face-to-face Housing Advice Centre in Newcastle city centre⁵⁸. Our Housing Advice Centre offers information and advice to residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Within our Housing Advice Centre are a team of Homelessness Prevention Officers and Debt Advisors (see below). Our Homelessness Prevention Officers are responsible for conducting statutory homelessness assessments and developing personalised plans to prevent or relieve homelessness. When someone presents as homeless, our Homelessness Prevention Officers will seek to relieve their homelessness into suitable and sustainable accommodation. However, many households will initially be placed in some form of temporary accommodation, depending on their circumstances. These households should then be supported to move into suitable and sustainable accommodation by their temporary accommodation provider.

NCC's Money Matters team: This is a team of seven Debt Advisors⁵⁹. Our Debt Advisors are co-located in our Housing Advice Service, alongside our Homelessness Prevention Officers. They are able to offer specialist debt and budgeting advice and support to residents to help deal with a range of problem debt, including rent arrears.

NCC's Welfare Rights team: NCC has maintained a large Welfare Rights team during a period of significant cuts to our budget (see section 2.2.2). This team has played a central role in supporting residents to understand and adapt to the government's welfare reforms.

⁵⁸ www.newcastle.gov.uk/homeless

⁵⁹ This includes one Debt Advisor who is outposted to our Active Inclusion multidisciplinary team

This team has 21 officers who offer specialist welfare benefits advice and support to help maximise residents' income by helping them to claim the benefits they are entitled to.

NCC's Local Authority Asylum Seeker Liaison Officers (LAASLOs): We have two LAASLOs recruited as a time-limited pilot ran by NCC and part-funded by the Home Office until September 2020 to support asylum seekers before and after they receive a decision on their asylum application. The support provided includes: support with immigration issues, accessing benefits and housing, opening bank accounts, accessing ESOL, training and employment advice, contributing to Early Help Plans, support to access health services (physical and mental), education, community services and volunteering opportunities and services, family reunification, applying for grants from charitable trusts to provide baby and child equipment and home furnishings for individuals. The LAASLOs are contributing to a national evaluation of the LAASLO pilot to evidence the structural barriers to transition / integration for asylum seekers and newly recognised refugees.

Preventative outreach: Between 2014 and 19, we commissioned a Citywide Floating Support service to provide 140 units of support to residents living in the private rented sector or a Registered Social Landlord tenancy. We also commissioned an additional 88 units of citywide floating support for people with mental health problems.

We have recently recommissioned preventative outreach as part of our new 'Homelessness Prevention and Relief' contracts⁶⁰ and now offer these services as part of 'homelessness prevention and relief hubs' in the east and west of the city. In total, there are now 137 units of preventative outreach available (60 in the west of the city and 77 in the east of the city).

Active Inclusion multidisciplinary team: The multidisciplinary team was originally developed and appointed as part of Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme (see section 3.1.1). The team secured additional funding from NCC's Life Chances fund⁶¹ to continue their work until 30 September 2020, incorporating Early Help support in their model.

The team is aligned to the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership aim of supporting residents to have a stable life and includes disciplines that provide specialist information, advice and support to contribute to delivering this aim. For the second phase, the team is comprised of the following specialist caseworkers:

- **Housing** – secondment of a Support and Progression Worker from YHN
- **Welfare benefits** – outposting of a Welfare Rights Officer from NCC
- **Debt and budgeting** – outposting of a Debt Advisor from NCC
- **Employment** – loan of a Work Coach from Jobcentre Plus
- **Early Help** – outposting of an Early Help Development Worker from NCC

⁶⁰ www.newcastle.gov.uk/business/doing-business/provider-information/review-homelessness-prevention-and-relief-services

⁶¹ www.newcastle.gov.uk/citylife-news/improving-life-chances-most-deprived

The team proactively identify residents facing certain issues or changes in circumstances, or where existing services aren't designed to meet the intensity of personalised support required. They then deliver integrated casework on housing, financial and employment issues to these residents to help them to achieve and maintain the foundations for a stable life. This team also seek to capture the learning from their ways of working to contribute to evidence on the issues that residents are experiencing and the challenges they face to inform local and national policy and practice. More information on the learning from the team's work can be found on our website⁶².

NCC's Private Rented Service⁶³: The Private Rented Service is part of NCC's Fairer Housing Unit. They seek to increase the standard of private rented accommodation and management in the city. Landlord services are targeted towards those landlords and agents managing properties with the most vulnerable tenants and within the most deprived communities and are designed to encourage voluntary good practice around property condition and management. The Home Finder Service provides a no upfront cost option for tenants seeking to rent from a private landlord by offering access to well managed properties without the upfront costs demanded elsewhere in the market. This includes access to a list of accredited properties with landlords willing to accept tenants without the requirement of cash deposits, fees, rent in advance and / or guarantors. In addition, the offer includes free reference checking and sign in, virtual deposit and support with tenancy management.

The Private Rented Service also runs the Newcastle Housing Accreditation Scheme. This is a voluntary scheme which is free to join and open to landlords and managing agents of properties within the city. The scheme helps to ensure that privately rented accommodation in Newcastle is safe, suitable and well managed, with standards that are designed to be fair, reasonable and appropriate. Since the launch of the scheme, successful compliance inspections have been completed for 1,317 properties which have been awarded their accredited status, along with the 361 landlords who manage them who have demonstrated that they are a fit and proper person.

3.3.2 – Our prevention pathways

This section describes how our prevention activities and services are organised into pathways of response, each of which are targeted towards groups of residents known to be at greater risk of homelessness. Each of these pathways seek to identify and support residents who are known to be at greater risk of homelessness and are aligned to key partnerships, policies and protocols (as described in sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2).

Arrears in rented, leased and owned accommodation

⁶²www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Multidisciplinary%20team%20-%20Summative%20Report.pdf

⁶³ www.privaterentedservice.co.uk/

Our most developed and effective responses for residents who have rent arrears are within our ALMO, YHN. These responses are aligned to our Sustaining Tenancies Guidance (see appendix 2) and involve a number of YHN and NCC services, including YHN's Support and Progression team and NCC's Homelessness Prevention Officers, Debt Advisors and Cherry Tree View's preventative outreach support.

These services seek to identify and engage with residents who have rent arrears at different points to prevent their arrears from escalating further. This approach has contributed to a reduction in evictions from our council housing of 71% between 2007 and 2019.

Leaving institutions

We have developed a range of responses for residents who are leaving institutions or some form of institutional support. Our responses for each of these groups are outlined below.

Residents leaving asylum accommodation

In 2018, we secured funding from MHCLG for two LAASLO posts. These officers are able to offer support to residents before they have received a decision on their asylum application. They can then continue this support with residents who are granted refugee status, liaising with YHN's Refugee Move On team.

YHN's Refugee Move On team are two officers working as part of YHN's Support and Progression team. They support newly recognised refugees with the transition from Home Office asylum support and accommodation into settled tenancies and mainstream support. The asylum accommodation provider notifies the Refugee Move on team when they are instructed by the Home Office to terminate the support for someone who has been granted refugee status. The Refugee Move On team support the resident to find suitable and sustainable accommodation before their 'notice to quit' expires. The support provided includes with housing applications, bidding for properties (the team will also arrange Band B or C priority when bidding), sourcing accommodation through 'always available' properties, opening bank accounts and applying for entitled welfare benefits.

As highlighted in section 2.1.4, we often have limited time to help residents find suitable and sustainable housing before they are required to leave their asylum accommodation. As a result, we have to prevent homelessness by paying asylum accommodation providers for continued occupancy or relieve homelessness by placing residents in our statutory temporary accommodation. We are working with YHN and looking at private rented accommodation to ensure that suitable and sustainable accommodation is available for residents who receive refugee status. Whilst the costs are considerable, they are less than having to pay for continued occupancy of Home Office accommodation.

Residents leaving hospital

Our prevention pathways for residents leaving general needs or mental health hospitals is aligned to our Hospital Discharge and Homelessness Prevention protocol⁶⁴. This pathway involves our Active Inclusion Service, YHN's Support and Progression team and the NHS. The pathway facilitates the early identification and notifications of those who are going to be discharged from hospital to ensure that they don't become homeless when they are discharged. Our AIN Unit and Housing Advice Centre liaise with discharge nurses on a weekly basis to identify residents who may be at risk of homelessness when they are discharged. Once a resident is identified, they are referred for support to our Homelessness Prevention Officers or YHN's Support and Progression team. There are three dedicated hospital discharge YHN Support and Progression Workers who cover both general needs and mental health inpatient wards to facilitate this pathway.

Residents leaving prison

Our Housing Advice Centre has established relationships with prisons in the North East, to help the housing support officers based in the prisons to seek assistance when the prisoner is approaching release. Our current level of cooperation exceeds that required to be Duty to Refer, contained within the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. However, there is not a formal pathway in place for residents who are due to be released from prison. A key barrier to establishing a formal pathway is the considerable variability in the type of housing support available to prisoners in different prisons as they approach release. Any formal pathway would require considerable resource and effort to overcome this barrier.

Residents leaving the care of the local authority

NCC's Leaving Care Support team in Children's Social Care are responsible for supporting residents who have previously been in the care of the local authority until they are 25 years old. YHN Young People's Support and Progression Workers work closely with this team. There are also service level agreements for referrals to specialist young person's workers to provide support and assistance for care leavers to access suitable and sustainable accommodation. For any young person aged under 18 years old who presents at our Housing Advice Centre, a YHN Young People's Support and Progression Worker is co-located and is able to offer advice and support, including mediation.

Residents who are former members of the Armed Forces

In addition to the national support services for serving and former members of the regular armed forces (e.g. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association, Veterans UK and the Joint Service Housing Advice Office), YHN's Support and Progression team provide an Armed Forces Outreach Service to help veterans make the transition from military to civilian life. They also support serving members of the regular armed forces and their families.

The welfare reforms and working with Jobcentre Plus

⁶⁴www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Protocols/Hospital_Discharge_Protocol_Oct%202018.pdf

NCC's Welfare Rights team take referrals from a wide range of partners to provide specialist welfare benefits advice and support to residents. However, we also have a range of other pathways to specifically target and support residents who may be at risk of homelessness due to the government's welfare reforms.

Residents affected by the benefit cap

In the Summer Budget 2015 the government announced a change to the benefit cap that was introduced in April 2013, lowering the cap on the maximum amount of out-of-work benefits working-age families can receive from £26,000 to £20,000 per year (£13,400 for single adults with no children), except in London where higher rents were recognised through a £23,000 cap.

The benefit cap has led to many households facing shortfalls between their Housing Benefit payment and their housing costs (Horton, 2018b). As a result, these households are at greater risk of homelessness. In Newcastle, we seek to proactively identify and support these households. NCC's Revenues and Benefits department identify residents who are newly affected by the benefit cap and alert the relevant advice and support provider, depending on their tenure. Residents who are tenants of YHN are supported by their Support and Progression team. Residents who are tenants of private landlords or registered social landlords are referred to NCC's Money Matters Debt Advisors, who may then involve NCC's Welfare Rights team if specialist welfare benefits advice and support is required. In addition to this pathway, the Active Inclusion multidisciplinary team also approached 61 residents who were affected by the benefit cap, had more integrated needs and who YHN's Support and Progression team had been unable to engage with.

Residents moving onto Universal Credit

As highlighted in section 2.2.1, Newcastle was the first of the Core Cities to have the Universal Credit 'full service' in all our Jobcentres. We offer advice and support to residents who require additional help to claim Universal Credit or who are experiencing financial difficulty due to Universal Credit.

In April 2019, the government introduced their 'Help to Claim' service⁶⁵ and announced that it would be delivered across the UK by the Citizens Advice Bureau. Prior to this, NCC had received funding from the Department for Work and Pensions to provide Assisted Digital Support and Personal Budgeting Support to residents moving onto Universal Credit. NCC have taken the decision to continue offering Personal Budgeting Support (which is not included in the new 'Help to Claim' service offer) and Assisted Digital Support, due to the limitations of the national contract with Citizens Advice. Jobcentre Plus work coaches refer residents who require financial assistance because of the move Universal Credit to Personal Budgeting Support, depending on their tenure. If they are a YHN tenant, then YHN's Financial Inclusion Team offer this support. Residents living in any other type of property are referred to NCC's Money Matters Debt Advisors,

⁶⁵ www.gov.uk/government/news/new-help-to-claim-service-provides-extra-universal-credit-support

who may then involve NCC's Welfare Rights team if specialist welfare benefits advice and support is required.

We also maintain some Assisted Digital Support for residents in the east and west of the city who can't attend Newcastle City Library, where this support is offered by Citizens Advice Newcastle, to help residents who require support to claim and manage their Universal Credit claim online. More information on our support for residents transitioning onto Universal Credit is available on our website⁶⁶.

Our Homelessness Prevention Pilot with Jobcentre Plus

In addition to our responses for residents affected by particular welfare reforms we have also developed a partnership with Jobcentre Plus, which has been highlighted as good practice in the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy. The Homelessness Prevention Pilot is at the centre of this partnership and was part of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme.

On 14 March 2017 the Homelessness Ministerial Working Group asked Newcastle to be a pilot city for a partnership between the local authority and Jobcentre Plus to prevent the risks of homelessness, with Newcastle being the first city to pilot:

- identifying and responding to the risk of homelessness related to benefit administration and unemployment
- reducing the impact that unstable housing can have on residents' search for work

The DWP, NCC, Crisis and YHN designed and delivered a joint training programme to 134 Jobcentre Plus staff. The training covered an introduction to homelessness legislation and policy, as well as the local arrangements for providing advice and support, sharing information and making referrals. Referrals were made by work coaches to either YHN, Crisis or NCC's Housing Advice Centre. In addition to this, YHN's Financial Inclusion Team also have officers co-located in the city's two jobcentres to help identify YHN tenants who may be at risk of homelessness. More information is available on our website⁶⁷.

3.4 – Crisis activities

As highlighted in the sections above, we have a range of services and pathways of response focused on preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity. Where we are unable to prevent, we seek to humanely relieve homelessness.

3.4.1 – Statutory homelessness services

⁶⁶ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Universal%20Credit%20-%20information%20on%20support%20arrangements%20in%20Newcastle%202019-20_0.pdf

⁶⁷ www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Pilot%20with%20Jobcentre%20Plus%20-%20report.pdf

Housing Advice Centre

When a person presents as homeless, our Homelessness Prevention Officers seek to relieve their homelessness into suitable and sustainable accommodation. However, many households will initially be placed in some form of temporary accommodation, depending on their circumstances. These households should then be supported to move into suitable and sustainable accommodation by that accommodation provider.

Cherry Tree View (statutory temporary accommodation)

For households who are owed the full homelessness duty, we maintain 45 units of purpose-built temporary accommodation. Advice and support is offered to residents by a team of five Housing Support Officers. A team of Housing Support Assistants support the operational demands of the accommodation project.

3.4.2 – Commissioned homelessness relief services

Our commissioned homelessness relief services between 2014 and 2019

In addition to our statutory temporary accommodation provision, we also commission a range of accommodation services to relieve homelessness. In 2014, NCC commissioned 'Crisis Response – Homelessness Prevention' services to enable accommodation and support to be provided to a range of residents who were homeless. This included:

- 130 units of crisis accommodation for single residents, couples and families who were homeless, including those with multiple needs
- 403 units of supported accommodation and resettlement support
- 68 units of supported accommodation and resettlement support for people with mental health problems
- 100 units of accommodation and support for young people (aged 16 to 24 years old)

Our commissioned homelessness relief services from 2019 to 22

Between 2018 and 2019, we conducted a review of these commissioned services as part of a re-commissioning exercise. These new contracts began in October 2019 and include:

- The development of homelessness prevention and relief hubs in the east and west of the city. In total, these hubs will provide:
 - 112 units of short-term relief accommodation
 - 15 units of Housing First accommodation
 - 16 emergency beds (plus 2 additional emergency beds provided by YWCA)
 - 137 units of preventative outreach (see section 3.3.1 for more information)
- 403 units of citywide supported accommodation
- Integrated accommodation and support for people with mental health problems, including 83 units of accommodation and 70 units of floating support

- Support for young people, including 96 units of accommodation (including two of the emergency beds). There are also 26 units directly delivered by YHN

These contracts have been developed in the context of our homelessness statutory duties and policy aims, including the priorities detailed below:

- **Moving from a crisis model to a prevention model:** building on our ambition to make the prevention of homelessness everyone's business, and maximising our collective skills, knowledge, experience and resources to help residents establish and maintain the foundations for a stable life
- **Becoming housing led: reshaping accommodation and support which promotes sustainable independence** – we want to move from a hostel by default model to a housing by default model, providing rapid rehousing into settled accommodation to help people move on from homelessness as quickly as possible
- **Better meeting the needs of people who are multiply excluded:** working together to routinely understand the causes of rough sleeping and multiple exclusion and aligning resources to respond to these needs. This includes:
 - Integrated street outreach to manage crisis and safety planning – housing, mental and physical health, addictions, offending
 - Designated care coordination for people who are rough sleeping, operating within multidisciplinary arrangements
 - Rapid rehousing
- **Continuing to develop our 'adaptive' management approaches:** building on the foundations of the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach by creating a culture of collaboration with commissioned service providers to support us in achieving our ambition to make the prevention of homelessness everyone's business. This includes outcome focussed service delivery models aligned to our statutory duties and policy aims, and being more responsive and seeking innovative ways of identifying risk and responding to crisis. By working together, strengthening our evidence base with robust data, we will better understand people's experiences of homelessness, including their journeys into and out of the homelessness 'system', so that we can jointly develop appropriate and humane responses
- **Housing as a human right:** The contracts are rooted in a human rights perspective that argues that all people have the right to housing that is safe, appropriate, affordable, suitable and sustainable, and that allowing people to fall into, and remain, homeless because of structural, systemic, and / or individual factors is not acceptable. Service providers will actively work to mitigate against evictions and risk of evictions to ensure that the right to housing is maintained, engaging with other partners within the Crisis Response and Homelessness Prevention system, including the Housing Advice Centre. Where there is a breakdown in the placement, people will be treated fairly and consistently across the system and will be informed of their rights to appeal an eviction decision.

More information on the development of our new commissioned ‘homelessness prevention and relief’ services is available on our website⁶⁸.

3.4.3 – Responses for adults who are multiply excluded

In Newcastle, we recognise that there is a relatively small population of residents who have experienced severe and multiple disadvantage over their lives, resulting in multiple and complex needs and maladaptive behaviours that are not adequately met by homelessness services. This group are more likely to experience the most severe form of homelessness, rough sleeping.

In 2014, we commissioned 120 units of citywide support for people who are multiply excluded, including outreach support and a Housing First service for up to 40 residents. We also have a drop-in centre for residents who are rough sleeping. As highlighted in section 3.4.2, we have included Housing First provision in our new contracts for our commissioned homelessness relief services from 2019 to 2022.

In 2017 NCC, in partnership with the Borough Council of Gateshead and the Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group, were awarded £1.54 million of outcomes funding from MHCLG to deliver a Social Impact Bond (SIB) service to offer personalised support to individuals entrenched within the homelessness system. The SIB service covers the geographic areas of Newcastle and Gateshead, as we recognised that these boundaries are blurred for people who sleep rough. This service is a time-limited pilot and only works with a pre-determined set of individuals who have been identified as ‘entrenched’ through data analysis focused on repeated interaction with homelessness services.

In 2019, as part of the government’s Rough Sleeping Initiative, we received funding to expand our outreach support to people rough sleeping in the city, helping them to access accommodation and support. We were also successful in gaining funding to pilot a Housing First programme, which is being delivered by YHN’s Support and Progression team.

3.5 – Conclusion to our responses chapter

In their recent study of homelessness prevention in Newcastle, Watts et al. (2019) found that Newcastle has maintained a range of services focused on preventing and relieving homelessness, with a strong focus on early prevention.

This chapter has outlined this range of services, demonstrating how we have sought to organise these responses within pathways that align to agreed partnerships, policies and protocols. In a number of areas, we have been able to develop effective pathways of response. However, there are some areas in which we need to develop or strengthen our responses. In other areas, such as for residents leaving asylum accommodation, there are key structural challenges which need to be overcome for us to improve our pathways of response.

⁶⁸ www.newcastle.gov.uk/business/doing-business/provider-information/review-homelessness-prevention-and-relief-services

Watts et al.'s primary recommendation was to maintain our strong emphasis on early homelessness prevention, where we have developed more robust prevention pathways. They also recommended that we strengthen and improve the support available to those at more immediate risk and already experiencing homelessness, including episodically and chronically homeless individuals with complex needs.

The next chapter looks at the levels and trends in homelessness in Newcastle over the last six years.

4. Levels, types and causes of homelessness in Newcastle

4.1 – The period of this review

This statutory homelessness review was conducted in 2019, meaning that we were able to look back on the six year period between 2013-14 and 2018-19.

In the final year of this period however, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was implemented and, as part of this, MHCLG created a new reporting specification. H-CLIC, a case level recording system, replaced the P1E quarterly returns and now includes data on all households owed a duty and any support needs members of that household have.

Whilst we have prepared a comprehensive review for 2013-14 to 2017-18 (the main period of this review), nationally Homelessness Reduction Act statistics are defined as 'experimental' and we are, therefore, unable to draw accurate comparisons for 2018-19 at this stage.

MHCLG are working with local authorities to improve data quality and we are expecting that published H-CLIC statistics are classed as experimental statistics for at least the next twelve months.

The following sections, from 4.2 to 4.8, will look at the main part of the review period between 2013-14 to 2017-18 with a brief commentary on 2018-19 in section 4.9.

4.2 – How we describe the risk of homelessness

Homelessness is used to describe a range of circumstances in which people have no safe and / or secure accommodation. This review covers the needs of around 10,000 people who require supported housing or who are at risk of or immediately threatened with homelessness. Most of the data we hold on residents relates to those who have received direct support to prevent homelessness, so does not necessarily reflect the needs of everyone at risk.

We aim to prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity. To do this we need to understand residents' needs before they present to us. We do this by trying to understand residents' life courses and the reasons why they have become homeless. However, individual circumstances are complex and gathering data that reflects this is currently still beyond our capacity. We do aim to make the most of the data we have, using it to facilitate debate with practitioners and residents to identify opportunities to prevent homelessness. For the purposes of simplification, we have broken our definitions into four groupings:

- People who are owed the full homelessness duty – who NCC has a duty to accommodate
- People at risk of homelessness who receive general advice or more comprehensive casework advice
- People living in supported accommodation or general needs accommodation with floating support

- People who are multiply excluded and / or rough sleeping

The following information shows that one of the challenges we face is the “churn” of people around the homelessness system. We know that we have to work with providers and commissioners to separate this churn from true demand and to follow the pathways of people through homelessness services. Therefore, whilst this measure helps us to understand need, we also have to be mindful of the need to support progress rather than perpetuating these cycles of repeat homelessness. We need to understand better why around 10% of clients appear to get “locked into” our homelessness services.

The statutory duties affect how NCC defines and responds to people who are homeless and the funding of the provision of accommodation. The limitations of the statutory duties, explained below, means that councils have a duty to provide advice to most people who are homeless but to provide accommodation for only a small number. Unlike most councils in the North East, Newcastle has over 700 beds that are predominantly used for homeless people who the council does not have a statutory duty to accommodate. This is due to locally made political decisions to provide services for all homeless people.

The council’s statutory homelessness duties are split into two main areas:

a. Statutory priority need households: people to whom the council owes the full homelessness duty under part VII of the 1996 Housing Act

NCC has a duty to assess and advise everyone who believes they are at risk of homelessness, and it owes the full homelessness duty to secure accommodation to households who are homeless, not intentionally so, have a local connection and where the household contains:

- Dependant children; and / or
- People who are young and elderly; and / or
- People who are acutely ill; and / or
- People who are fleeing violence, harassment or an emergency

NCC has a duty to secure accommodation for these households, but only has to give advice and assistance to other households who are homeless. This split complicates the council’s response to homelessness and invariably means focusing on meeting statutory duties first, which can be to the detriment of other homeless people.

b. Homelessness prevention

The 2002 Homelessness Act and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 widened the duty to prevent homelessness through a strategic approach. This was based on the recognition of the limitations of homelessness services alone in countering the causes of homelessness, much of which are affected by wider structural factors such as poverty and the housing market. We know that we must work in partnership to provide integrated responses to housing, employment, support, and care and health needs. Our strengths

have been predominantly in the housing-related partnerships and our challenge is to extend this to employment support, social care and health.

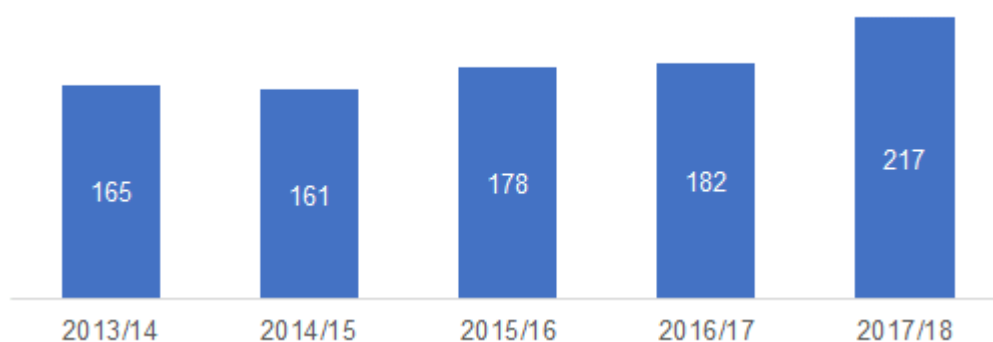
We aim to be as accurate as possible in this review whilst appreciating that we are not resourced to conduct academic level research and that there are limitations in our primary data sources. However, we balance this by testing the data with practitioners and by using the data to identify opportunities for prevention. As discussed previously, the data is a starting point for identifying our challenges and what has worked, and for developing a better understanding of the routes into homelessness.

4.3 – People who are owed the full homelessness duty

This category covers those households for whom the council has accepted the full homelessness duty to secure accommodation under part VII of the 1996 Housing Act. This is our most robust measure as it is based on statutory homelessness assessments by Homelessness Prevention Officers. However, it is limited by the statutory definition of homelessness (as outlined in section 4.2 above). This mainly covers people with dependant children or those who are acutely vulnerable. Households in this category often require support due to their vulnerability.

Chart 1 below shows that the overall trend in the number of full homelessness duty acceptances in Newcastle has increased over the period of this review, from 165 in 2013-14 to 217 in 2017-18. It should be noted, however, that this increase serves only to bring levels back to those identified in our 2013 review, which were seen to be comparatively low against both England and the Core Cities.

Chart 1 – Households owed the full homelessness duty



Newcastle's performance in this area is mainly attributed to the homelessness prevention activities described in sections 3.1 and 3.2. Homelessness prevention initiatives, such as debt advice services and early identification of at-risk households, assist residents to remain in their current accommodation where possible and, if this is not an option, help them to find alternative accommodation to prevent their homelessness.

A low rate of full homelessness duty acceptances could be argued to be the result of gatekeeping by denying people their rights. One way to check on the prevalence of gatekeeping is to understand the frequency of requests to review a decision and the

amount of court action. Newcastle has advocacy agencies, such as Shelter, working in the city. However, in 2017-18 there were no requests for a review and no court actions or judicial reviews. This low volume is indicative of our partnership approach and our success in finding sustainable outcomes for households to whom we owe the full homelessness duty.

The level of full homelessness duty acceptances in Newcastle is unlikely to reduce significantly without further, and perhaps disproportionate, investment. We currently have relatively low levels of resources to meet our statutory duties to respond to crisis and the impacts of the cuts to public services and the government's welfare reforms are likely to continue to create pressures. Despite this, our full homelessness duty acceptance level is still amongst the lowest in the country. Section 4.8 shows the trend for Newcastle's relative performance against the North East, Core Cities and England.

4.3.1 – Household composition

Table 1 below shows that in 2017-18 the majority of households owed the full homelessness duty were families (72%), with a significant number headed by lone parents who equated to over half of full homelessness duty acceptances (52%). Fewer single people are accepted as being owed the full homelessness duty, largely because of the legislative restrictions.

Table 1 – Households owed the full homelessness duty by household composition

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Couple with dependent child	30 18%	24 15%	57 32%	46 25%	43 20%
Lone parent with dependent children	87 53%	89 55%	80 45%	98 54%	113 52%
Childless couple with pregnant household member	4 2%	4 2%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Single pregnant female	6 4%	14 9%	9 5%	0 0%	0 0%
Families	127 77%	131 81%	146 82%	144 79%	156 72%
Childless couple	3 2%	2 1%	2 1%	0 0%	0 0%
Single male 16-17	0 0%	0 0%	1 1%	0 0%	0 0%
Single male 18+	15 9%	12 7%	6 3%	11 6%	15 7%
Single female 16-17	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Single female 18+	16 10%	12 7%	11 6%	16 9%	23 11%
Other	4 2%	4 2%	11 6%	11 6%	23 11%
Other	38 23%	30 19%	31 18%	38 21%	61 28%
All full homeless duty acceptances	165 100%	161 100%	177 100%	182 100%	217 100%

4.3.2 – Reasons for full homelessness duty acceptances

Table 2 shows the main reasons why households owed the full homelessness duty become homeless. The biggest single reason for homelessness among this group is the loss of private rented accommodation, accounting for just under a third of households in 2017-18, up from just 22% in 2013-14. This may be indicative of the continued economic pressures affecting both people renting and landlords. It also reflects the disparate nature of the private rented sector with over 20,000 landlords who don't necessarily have a social remit. There are inherent difficulties in developing prevention protocols with private landlords as effectively as we do with social landlords, as outlined in section 5.2.2.

The number of households accepted as being owed the full homelessness duty after being asked to leave by their parents has continued to fall over the period of this review, reaching a low of 17 in 2014-15. This reduction, combined with only one full homelessness duty acceptance for someone aged under 18 years old in the review period, highlights the benefits of early work with families and young people at risk. In particular, the work commissioned from YHN's Support and Progression's team to meet the needs of young people and families through the Young People's Service and the Family Intervention Project.

Table 2 – Reasons for full homelessness duty acceptance

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Loss of private rented	36 22%	48 30%	52 29%	70 38%	69 32%
Parents asked to leave	28 17%	17 11%	27 15%	20 11%	28 13%
Violent relationship breakdown	18 11%	17 11%	23 13%	21 12%	26 12%
Relatives / friends asked to leave	18 11%	18 11%	14 8%	16 9%	25 12%
Required to leave Home Office accommodation	9 5%	11 7%	18 10%	10 5%	13 6%
Other	56 34%	50 31%	43 24%	45 25%	56 26%
All full homeless duty acceptances	165 100%	161 100%	177 100%	182 100%	217 100%

4.3.3 – Social needs of full homelessness duty acceptances

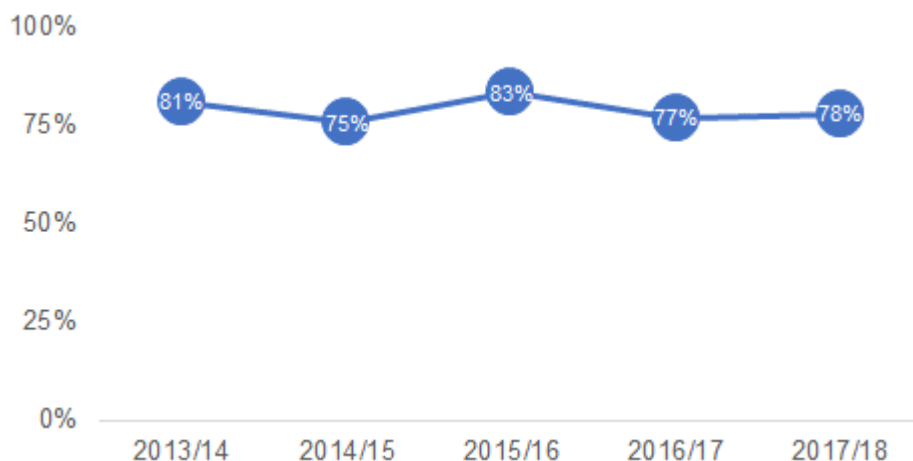
Over the review period, we have identified that mental and physical health problems are the main social needs of households who are owed the full homelessness duty, with each appearing in one in four full homelessness duty acceptances. People fleeing the risk of violence also appears as a consistent theme in almost one fifth of cases. Although numbers of those who fled a violent relationship breakdown have increased over the last five years, the numbers of households accommodated in domestic abuse refuges has dropped significantly over the period. In 2013/14, 20 households were accommodated in refuges to discharge our statutory temporary accommodation duty, whereas in 2017/18 only two households were. Section 5.3.6 explores some of the reasons for this reduction in placements in domestic abuse refuges at a time when demand increased.

For many people, support is needed during and after a stay in temporary accommodation and, in most cases, homelessness is a symptom of a range of problems rather than a causal factor.

4.3.4 – Outcomes

Chart 2 shows that for those households accepted as being owed the full homelessness duty, re-housing by YHN still makes up the vast majority of outcomes; an average of 79% of cases over the review period.

Chart 2 – Households owed the full homelessness duty who are rehoused by YHN



With increased pressure on household finances due to rising costs and welfare reforms, demand for low-cost, secure housing is likely to remain high. As a result, we need to identify alternative housing options to respond to the challenges of the welfare reforms and to avoid lengthy stays in emergency accommodation and the high costs associated with this.

Our full homelessness duty acceptances continue to be low, which may indicate that we are already making good use of our existing resources, preventative tools and alternative housing options. However, there may be some further reduction to be achieved by improving relationships with internal and external stakeholders with a view to earlier identification and interventions for households at risk of homelessness. We will continue to develop proportionate partnership responses to develop a shared understanding of people's life courses, the causes of homelessness and opportunities to create resilience.

4.4 – People threatened with homelessness

This data reflects the needs of all other households receiving advice from our Housing Advice Centre who have not been accepted as being owed the full homelessness duty. This includes those households where staff in our Housing Advice Centre have prevented homelessness, but does not include analysis of preventions by partner agencies. We think that the data presented is sufficiently representative to be indicative of trends and opportunities to prevent homelessness.

We acknowledge, however, that the number of households in Newcastle who are at risk of homelessness is likely to be higher than just the numbers who request assistance from the council.

Chart 3 – Presentations for housing advice or support from the Housing Advice Centre (HAC)

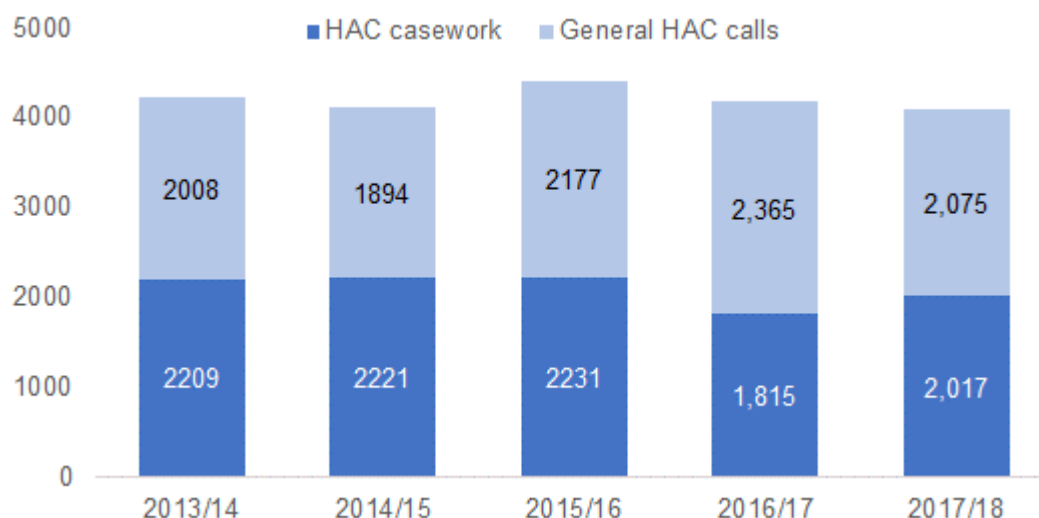


Chart 3 shows that in 2017-18 the Housing Advice Centre received over 4000 contacts from residents who were either at risk of homelessness or wanted housing advice (in addition to the households who were owed the full homelessness duty, discussed in section 4.3 above); a broadly similar position to the beginning of the review period in 2013-14.

The split between casework and non-casework advice is best understood in terms of the action required by the Homelessness Prevention Officer to address the issue: households requiring “one-off” advice or intervention are recorded as non-casework advice and households requiring additional work beyond the first presentation are recorded as casework advice.

For those who receive casework advice from the Housing Advice Centre, we record reasons for presentation and the outcomes, which enables us to build a more detailed picture of this group. The rest of the data in this section relates to the people receiving casework support, about whom we have more robust information.

4.4.1 – Reasons for presenting: casework

By far the greatest reason why people in this group attend the Housing Advice Centre is because they have been asked to leave their existing home either by their parents or other friends and relatives. This equates to 31% of recorded presentations in 2017-18, a broadly similar level to the rest of the review period.

The second most prominent reason is the loss, or the fear of loss, of a privately rented tenancy. This accounted for 16% of presentations in 2017-18, again similar to previous years where there was an average of 17%.

4.4.2 – Outcomes

Table 3 shows the most common outcomes achieved for households receiving casework advice from the Housing Advice Centre in 2017-18. The most common outcome was 'advice provided', which was the outcome for 31% of households. This includes providing information on housing options, such as information packs, and advice to enable people to resolve their own situation. 18% of households were rehoused to supported accommodation and 23% of households were rehoused to an independent tenancy.

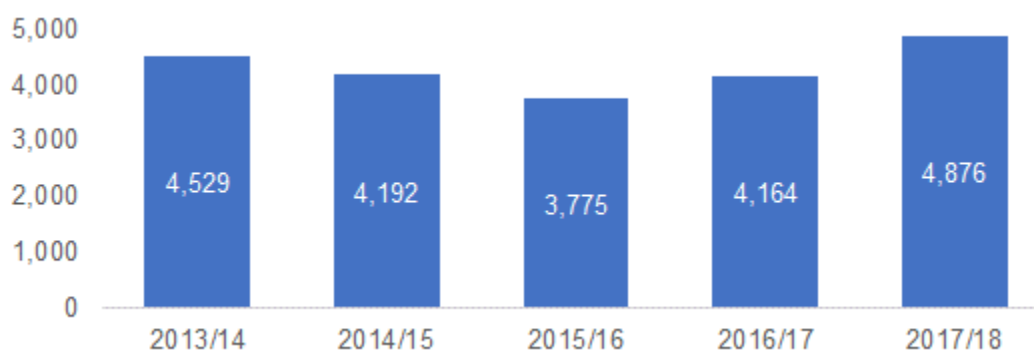
Table 3 – Outcomes of Housing Advice Centre casework

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Advice to remain in current accommodation	506 24%	680 32%	468 27%	470 37%	575 31%
Rehoused to supported accommodation	598 28%	485 23%	371 22%	290 23%	342 18%
Rehoused to independent tenancy	405 19%	398 19%	321 19%	228 18%	419 23%
Other	619 29%	574 27%	542 32%	270 21%	526 28%
All HAC casework outcomes	2,128 100%	2,137 100%	1,702 100%	1,258 100%	1,862 100%

4.5 – Homelessness preventions

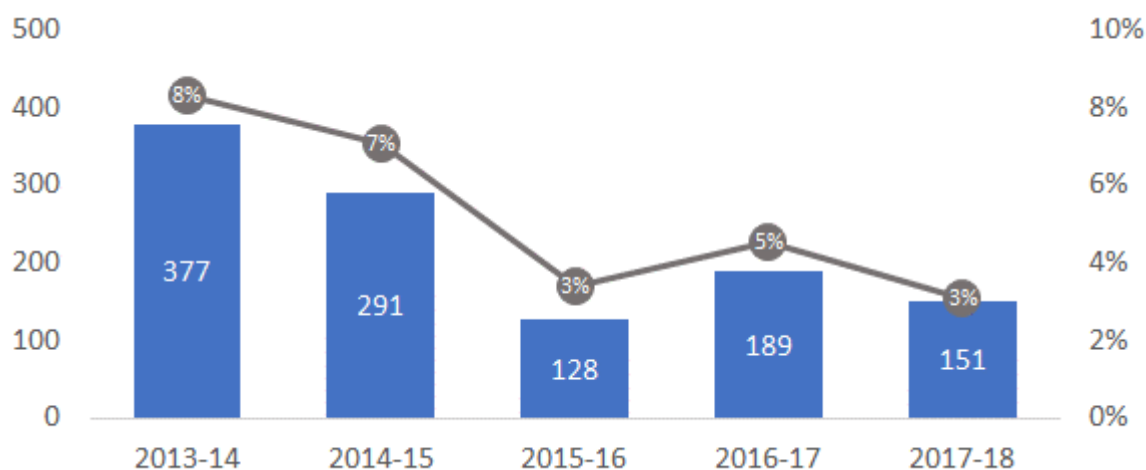
Chart 4 shows the number of homelessness preventions achieved in Newcastle based on the MHCLG's outcome definition of the prevention of homelessness; "where positive action provided on a casework intervention basis has prevented or relieved homelessness and it is likely that the accommodation available to the applicant as a result of the intervention will be sustainable for a period of at least six months".

Chart 4 – All MHCLG defined homelessness preventions



It is worthy of note that whilst our overall number of MHCLG defined preventions has risen, the relief element has decreased both proportionally and in absolute numbers between 2013-14 and 2017-18. Our homelessness prevention figures demonstrate that, using a citywide approach to the prevention of homelessness, Newcastle has seen a positive increase of 33% on recorded preventions since our previous statutory review, with cases of relief having more than halved.

Chart 5 – Newcastle’s relief activity in relation to total homelessness preventions



The figures above capture the value of numerous strands of homelessness prevention activity across NCC and YHN. The main services involved in this prevention activity are the YHN Support and Progression team, our Homelessness Prevention Officers and our Debt Advisors, which together accounted for 65% of homelessness preventions in 2017-18. 24% of all preventions are a result of direct intervention by the Housing Advice Centre, with the rest being achieved by services such as NCC’s Discretionary Housing Payments team (in the Revenues and Benefits department) and the Private Rented Service. There are also homelessness preventions by partner organisations using the Newcastle Gateway.

Prevention options for people at risk of homelessness include support in applying for low-cost general needs housing and referrals to specialist agencies such as Welfare Rights Officers, Debt Advisors, employment support, victim support services and agencies that can offer support with social needs including offending, drug and alcohol abuse and mental health. Other preventative options include negotiation with landlords to enable households to remain in their homes, family mediation and supported accommodation for those with additional needs. The range of prevention services and pathways we offer are described in more detail in section 3.2.

We aim to maintain our relatively good record in preventing homelessness. In particular, in the future it will be important to identify affordable alternatives to local authority accommodation, particularly in the private rented sector. We should also continue to proactively target support to residents who are at higher risk of homelessness.

4.6 – People living with housing-related support

Housing-related support is commissioned by NCC and is divided into two groups:

- Supported accommodation
- Preventative outreach (floating support services)

Supported accommodation services predominantly provide accommodation for single people or childless couples who are homeless or at risk of homelessness but to whom NCC does not owe the full homelessness duty to accommodate. Our preventative outreach services provide visiting support for single people or couples who are vulnerable to homelessness. The main aim of all these services is to build resilience and prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness by supporting people to achieve their optimum level of independence. More information on our commissioned preventative outreach and crisis and supported accommodation provision is in section 3.4.2.

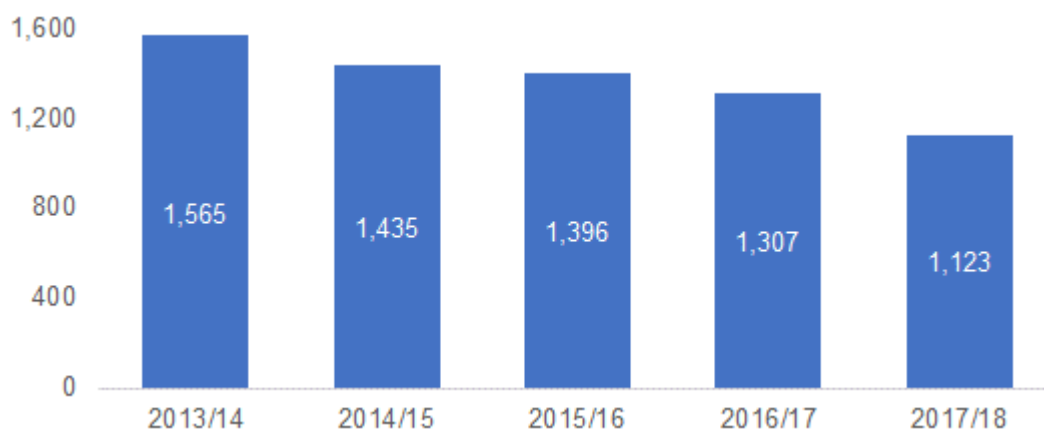
The number of units of support is not static as some services are commissioned to provide support per hour which means that the number of people supported by the service may vary, depending on the intensity of support needed.

Many floating support services provide a mix of both forms of support and there is also variation between services in terms of the number of contacts per week. All floating support services are expected to be short-term, providing support for a maximum of two years, after which people are expected to manage their tenancy independently or move to a long-term support placement. The next section covers people living in supported housing before moving to those living in independent tenancies with floating support.

4.6.1 – Supported accommodation

Chart 6 below shows the total number of people being admitted to crisis and supported accommodation services. This shows that there has been a steady decrease in the number of people accessing crisis and supported accommodation services over the period of the review with a total of 1,123 support placements in 2017-18, a reduction of 28% since 2013-14.

Chart 6 – Crisis and supported accommodation admissions



The most common reason for admission to supported accommodation was planned and unplanned moves from existing hostels, accounting for a recorded 30% of admissions. Whilst some moves are positive (such as moves to greater independence), the number of people who have multiple short-term placements indicates that many people are failing to sustain supported housing and illustrates the difficulty that services have in working with people with significant challenges.

Recording of information by referral agencies and commissioned providers remains an issue, with the non-recording of the reason for homelessness running at 10% in 2017-18. Whilst this is an improvement from 2013-14 where non recording was 20%, there has been slippage in recent years where 6% (2015-16) and 2% (2017-18) of reasons were not recorded. We acknowledge that sustained improvement is required in this area.

4.6.2 – Local connection

Historically, supported accommodation services have admitted high numbers of people from outside the Newcastle area, often without support services being in Newcastle, which made placements more difficult to sustain. This is related to the relatively low level of provision elsewhere in the region and Newcastle being the regional capital.

In 2004, over 40% of people admitted to emergency and non-emergency accommodation services did not have a connection to Newcastle. However, as previous reviews have highlighted, the local authority initiatives such as the introduction of the Gateway in Newcastle have helped to better manage the proportion of people with a connection to other areas accessing Newcastle accommodation services. In addition, we have a procedure for arranging cross-authority placements, which allows statutory services to approve any requests for people moving into Newcastle from outside the area to access local supported accommodation services in advance of their placement. We now know that admissions to Gateway services with a non-Newcastle area of connection were approved by local support agencies in advance and now account for just a handful of cases per year.

4.6.3 – Social needs

The majority of people who were assessed via the Newcastle Gateway prior to admission to supported accommodation had additional support needs. As table 4 below shows, in 2017-18 34% of people were involved with offender services and 21% were receiving support for mental health issues. This is a marked reduction from five years ago where the rates were 43% and 28% respectively. These figures relate only to people known to services at the point of assessment and may of course be an under-representation.

Table 4 – Social needs of people admitted to supported accommodation

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Offending	444 28%	358 25%	391 28%	375 29%	385 34%
Mental health	198 13%	204 14%	242 17%	192 15%	233 21%
Drugs	223 14%	185 13%	198 14%	159 12%	218 19%
Alcohol	137 9%	136 9%	99 7%	95 7%	97 9%
All admissions to supported accommodation	1,565	1,435	1,396	1,307	1,123

People whose needs were unconfirmed may have had historical issues, failed to meet the threshold for specialist support, have not yet attended an assessment for specialist support, been unable to access support services due to behavioural issues, have had

services withdrawn due to a failure to engage, or alternatively people may not agree that they have support needs in that area.

19% of people admitted to supported accommodation were accessing support for drug misuse and 9% for alcohol misuse, although it is likely that more people were identified as having substance misuse issues than were accessing support, for similar reasons to those identified above. A similar pattern exists in that five years ago these rates were 25% and 18% respectively.

There appears to be a strong correlation between unresolved drug and alcohol problems and repeat homelessness. Ensuring that residents who have drug and alcohol issues are able to access specialist drug and alcohol services could be one of the biggest steps towards achieving positive outcomes in health and wellbeing.

The people accessing supported accommodation resources have support needs beyond homelessness and, therefore, successful accommodation placements will depend on engaging people with support services and developing their skills to enable them to live independently once the placement ends.

4.6.4 – Move on destination

Table 5 below shows that only 18% of moves from supported accommodation were to an independent tenancy, a similar position as at our last review and still a relatively small proportion of all service outcomes.

Table 5 – Outcomes from supported accommodation discharges

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
No forwarding address	486 32%	336 24%	297 21%	285 22%	342 31%
Supported accommodation	418 27%	418 30%	365 26%	454 35%	302 27%
Independent tenancy	270 18%	261 19%	261 19%	224 17%	201 18%
Friends and family	244 16%	244 18%	223 16%	208 16%	141 13%
Other	111 7%	135 10%	252 18%	144 11%	132 12%
All discharges from supported accommodation	1,529 100%	1,394 100%	1,398 100%	1,315 100%	1,118 100%

31% of moves from supported accommodation were to no forwarding address, either as the result of people abandoning their property or being asked to leave the service; a rise of nine percentage points when compared to 2012-13. Over half of this category (55%) was due to eviction, discussed further below. These people are often re-admitted to alternative supported accommodation within a very short period. As stated above, 'churn' or repeat unsuccessful placements are a significant issue for this group, with 27% of people simply moving to different supported accommodation. However, we do know that around two thirds of these repeats are planned moves to enable greater independence.

4.6.5 – Evictions from crisis and supported accommodation

A Preventing Evictions from Supported Housing protocol was introduced in January 2013 (see appendix 2), which outlines a common process for agreeing evictions with the

Housing Advice Centre. As a result, evictions have fallen from 391 in 2013-14 to just 187 in 2017-18, accounting for 17% of all discharges.

Table 6 – Evictions from crisis and supported accommodation

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Evictions	391 26%	296 21%	251 18%	191 15%	187 17%
Other discharges	1,138 74%	1,098 79%	1,147 82%	1,124 85%	931 83%
All discharges from supported accommodation	1,529 100%	1,394 100%	1,398 100%	1,315 100%	1,118 100%

Evictions also now account for just over half (55%) of the discharges from supported accommodation where there was no forwarding address; a marked improvement from 80% in 2013-14.

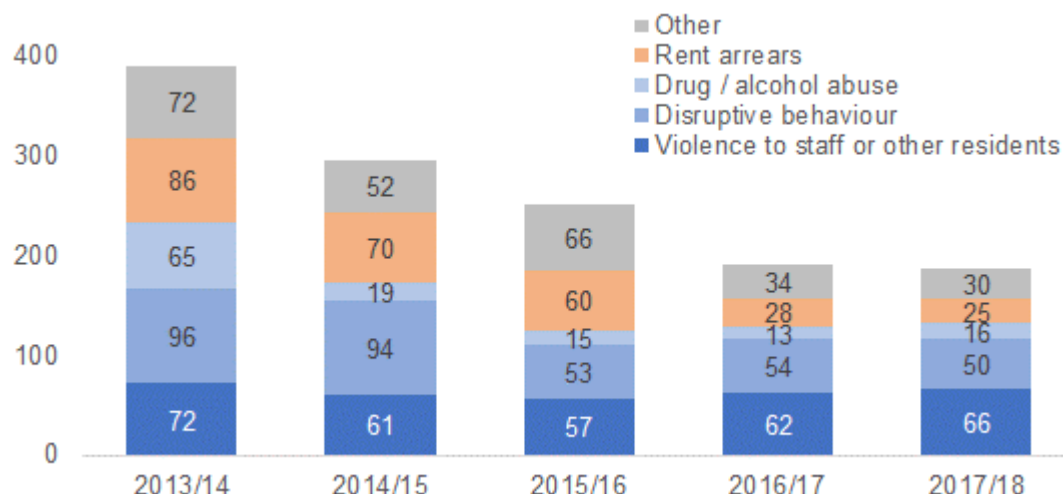
Table 7 – Discharges from crisis and supported accommodation with no forwarding address

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Evictions	391 80%	296 88%	251 85%	191 67%	187 55%
Other	95 20%	40 12%	46 15%	94 33%	155 45%
All discharges with no forwarding address	486 100%	336 100%	297 100%	285 100%	342 100%

The primary reason, in over 70% of evictions, concerns unacceptable and disruptive behaviour. This relates to behaviour that conflicts with the rules and norms set out by accommodation providers, including illicit drug use, reported aggression and threats of violence. However, significant improvements have been seen in absolute terms for evictions due to disruptive behaviour and drug and alcohol use, shown in chart 7 below.

We have also seen a significant improvement in the amount and rate of evictions in relation to non-payment of rent. This has fallen from 86 (22%) in 2013-14 to 25 (13%) in 2017-18.

Chart 7 – Evictions from supported accommodation



4.6.6 – Floating support services

2015-16 saw the first full year of a new commissioning arrangement for floating support services for people who are not YHN tenants. Previously, we commissioned a large number of individual projects, but these were replaced in July 2014 with two floating support contracts; one delivered on a citywide basis and the other specifically for people with mental health problems.

Between 2015-16 and 2017-18 an average of 775 placements a year were made across the two floating support services, slightly increasing year on year.

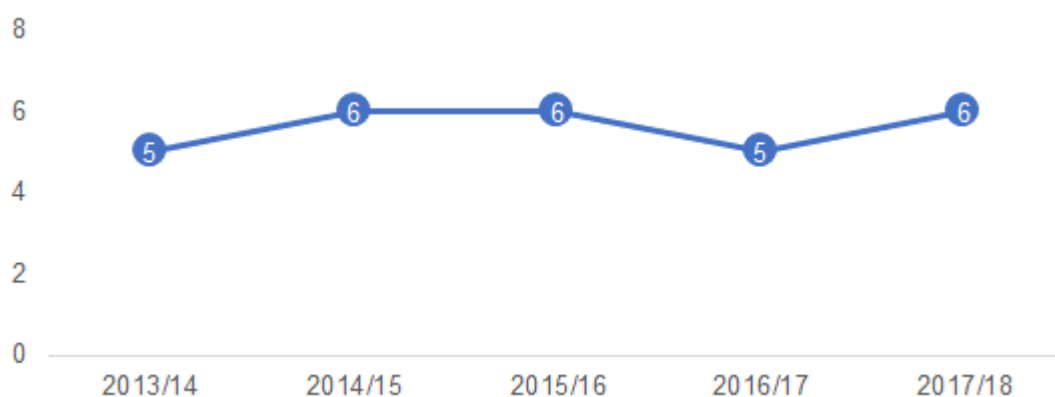
In 2019, new Homelessness Prevention and Relief contracts were commissioned which has given the opportunity for greater integration of floating support; with the aim of enabling early risk of homelessness to be mitigated and ensuring that the support offered is based on the needs of the individual to enable them to live as independent a life as possible. We are aiming, through improved data quality, to increase our understanding of who is using floating support services and to ensure our commissioned responses are meeting local need.

4.7 – People who are rough sleeping or are ‘multiply excluded’

This section focuses on two related areas; rough sleeping and the subset of that group who are people who repeatedly sleep rough due to multiple exclusion. This has historically been an area where Newcastle has been relatively effective. However, we recognise that these successes are indeed relative and that more work is to be done.

Most of our local knowledge of this group is based on the contacts gained through the street outreach team and the Multiple Exclusion Common Case Management Group (CCMG). Over the period of this review our outreach team have found a consistent level of people rough sleeping (bedded down) of between five and six per night (see chart 8).

Chart 8 – Average number of people found rough sleeping per night

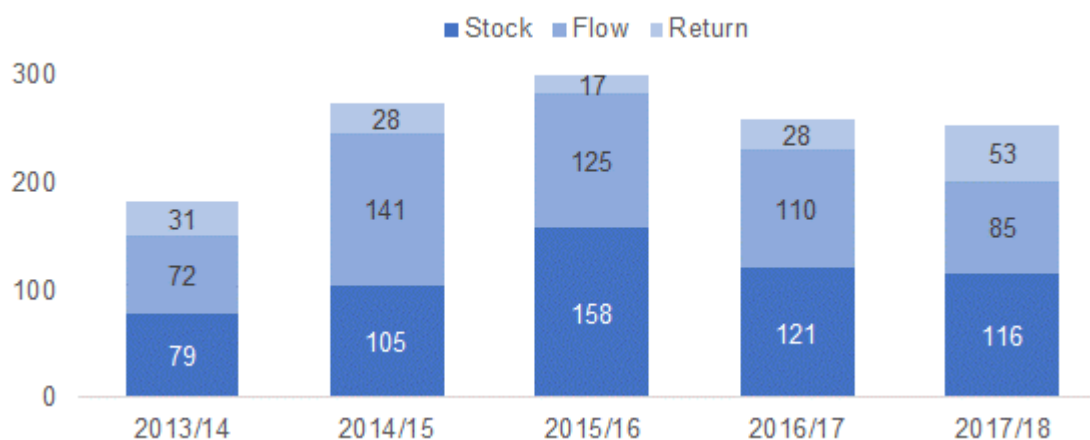


Every year since 2010, MHCLG has coordinated an annual national count of rough sleeping in an attempt to identify an accurate picture of the extent of rough sleeping across the country. Up until 2017, the annual counts in Newcastle found the number of people rough sleeping to be in the single digits; numbers not inconsistent with the daily figures collected by our street outreach team. In 2017 and 2018, however, the number of people found rough sleeping during the annual counts increased to 10 and 15 respectively (100% and 50% increases on the previous years). Despite the numbers still being relatively low, the percentage increases may appear to be significant when looked at without the context of our daily figures. We know that on occasions up to 30 people per night can be found in Newcastle. Therefore, it is our daily information that we rely on to identify trends rather than increases in our annual counts which may be outliers.

The people found rough sleeping in Newcastle are not a homogenous group and the reasons for rough sleeping, as well as the health and social needs of this group, are diverse and varied. We divide this group into the following categories:

- Stock – people who have slept rough the previous year as well as the year in question
- Flow – people who have had no previous records of rough sleeping
- Returners – people who have been seen sleeping rough previously, but not in the preceding year

Chart 9 – Number of people found rough sleeping by category



The stock group represents the most multiply excluded individuals in the city who continuously fail to make a permanent shift away from sleeping on the streets. This group experience extended periods on the streets interspersed with short stays in emergency accommodation, prison or hospital, as evidenced through the Gateway. The Gateway also shows that there is a high rate of evictions and abandonments from supported accommodation for this group of multiply excluded people who are rough sleeping, with the same apparent ‘churn’ as highlighted in section 4.6.

It is positive that the downward trend identified in our last review of the amount of people who sleep rough due to evictions from supported accommodation and prison release has continued to fall. The CCMG seeks to identify key individuals who have a history of rough sleeping and who are at risk of further exclusion. The reduction in evictions and unplanned

prison release can be partly attributed to the joint multi-agency planning of the CCMG, as well as the proactive support work for these people. It shows that this is predominantly a relatively contained group who are moving on a cycle around supported accommodation, prison and sleeping on the streets.

We know that the reasons why people sleep rough are varied, but that relationship breakdowns, release from custody and either being evicted from or abandoning accommodation feature prominently. Whilst these are the situations people find themselves in prior to sleeping rough, it is usually the case that these are not the overriding factors that determine whether someone spends a night sleeping on the streets.

It is also problematic when attempting to identify reliable outcomes for this group. Whilst data shows that accommodation is secured for around 20% of individuals and around 10% are returned to their existing accommodation, this can often be short-lived and the impact it has on overall rough sleeping levels is negligible. Due to the complex and multiple needs of adults experiencing multiple exclusion it is difficult to find long-term solutions to their problems. The engagement by specialist drug and alcohol services with people who are both rough sleeping and living in emergency accommodation is limited, as often their other needs and associated behaviours conflict with the norms set out by service providers.

Maintaining contact with people who are rough sleeping can be difficult. This partly explains the high percentage of presentations where the outcome is 'no further contact'. The transient nature of this population also results in individuals leaving the city before a tangible outcome can be achieved.

4.8 – Newcastle's performance in comparison with other areas

In this section, we consider how trends in full homelessness duty acceptances and usage of temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast in Newcastle compare to those of the other Core Cities in England, the North East and to England as a whole.

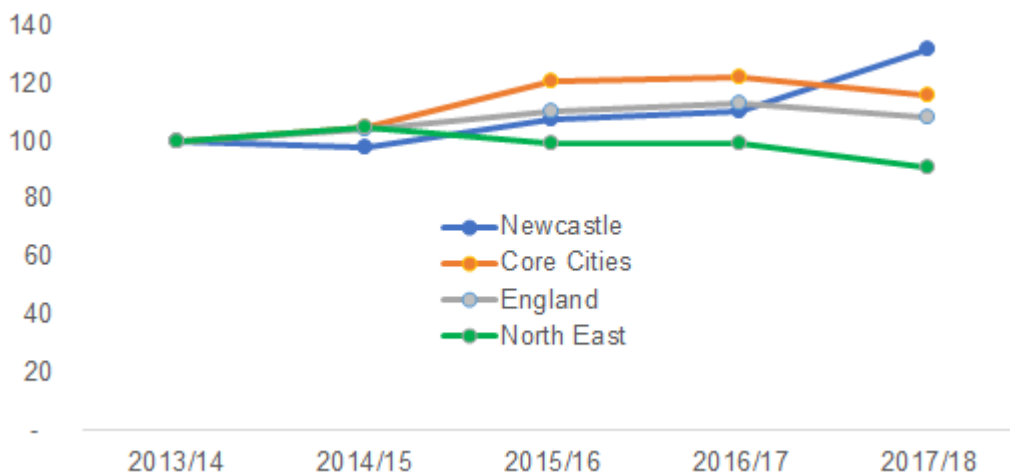
Core Cities are a self-selecting group of cities representing the ten largest city economies outside London, each having a large student population and likely to be regional capitals. For the purpose of comparison, we will only consider the eight Core Cities that are in England. When making comparisons it is important to bear in mind that it is the trends over time and percentages that are the main comparators rather than the absolute numbers, given the varying scale of these cities (with Birmingham the largest of the Core Cities and Newcastle the smallest).

4.8.1 – Full homelessness duty acceptances

Chart 10 below shows that the overall trend in the number of full homelessness duty acceptances in Newcastle has increased over the period of this review. Using 2013-14, the first year of this review, as a baseline of 100 it can be seen that the full duty acceptances for Newcastle have increased by 32%. This goes against the general trend of the North East, the other Core Cities and England as a whole. It should be noted,

however, that this rise serves only to bring levels back to those identified in our 2013 review, which were seen to be comparatively low against both England and the Core Cities. If, for example, the baseline for comparison was fixed in 2009-10 as in our 2013 review we find that full duty acceptances have actually fallen by 7%, although we do still see the recent trend diverging away from the comparators.

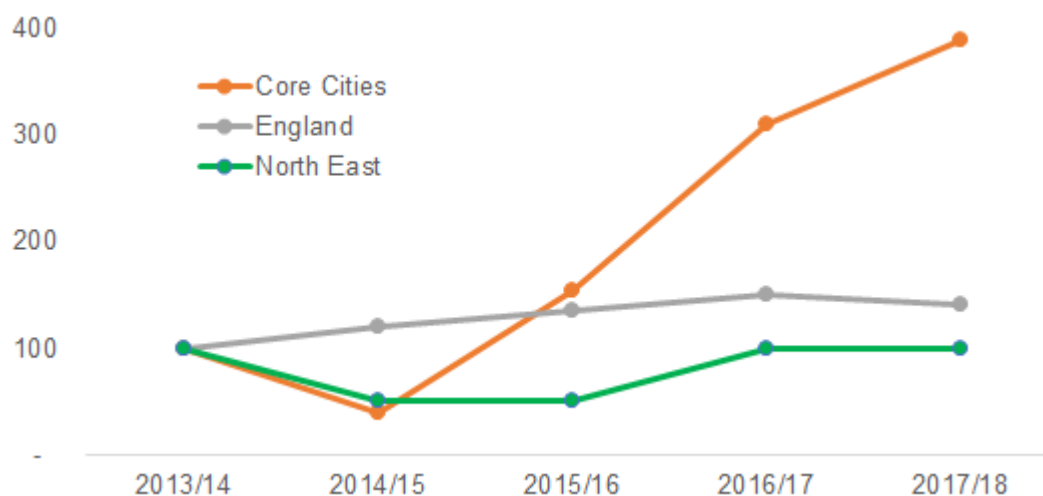
Chart 10 – Change in full homelessness duty acceptances since 2013-14 (baseline 100)



4.8.2 – Bed and breakfast

Use of bed and breakfast as a form of temporary accommodation has been zero in Newcastle since 2006. This remains highly encouraging given the consensus around its unsuitability, particularly for families with children. Over the period of this review, the only city from the Core Cities able to match this record is Leeds. It is a record we are particularly proud of, especially considering that usage in the rest of the Core Cities has increased considerably (with Birmingham and Manchester driving the increase).

Chart 11 – Bed and breakfast usage since 2013-14 (baseline 100)

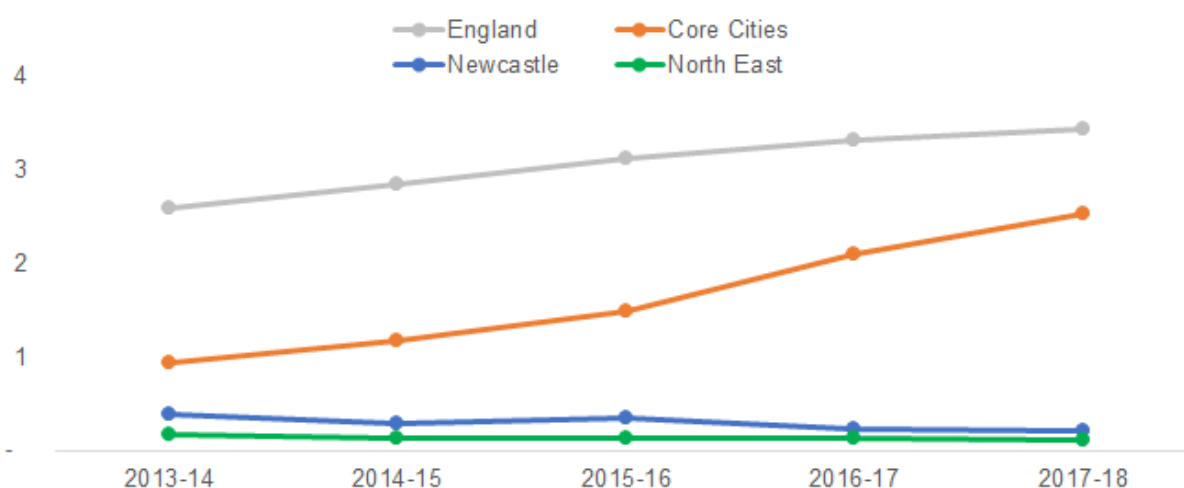


4.8.3 – Temporary accommodation

Turning now to total temporary accommodation placements, we can see from chart 12 below that Newcastle compares favourably against the other Core Cities when looking at the number of people in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households. Of the Core Cities only Leeds (at 0.12 households per 1,000) has a rate lower than that seen in Newcastle (0.22 per 1,000 households). Other Core Cities as a whole are running at 2.53 with Birmingham experiencing 4.72 and Manchester sitting as high as 6.65 placements per 1,000 households.

In absolute terms, the number of households who are placed in temporary accommodation in Newcastle has been at most 45 in the review period but has been fewer than 30 for the past two years.

Chart 12 – Temporary accommodation placements per 1,000 households



4.8.4 – Homelessness prevention

Over the period of this review Newcastle's total number of homelessness preventions has increased, despite a relatively large dip between 2014-15 and 2016-17.

Chart 13 – Total homelessness preventions in Newcastle

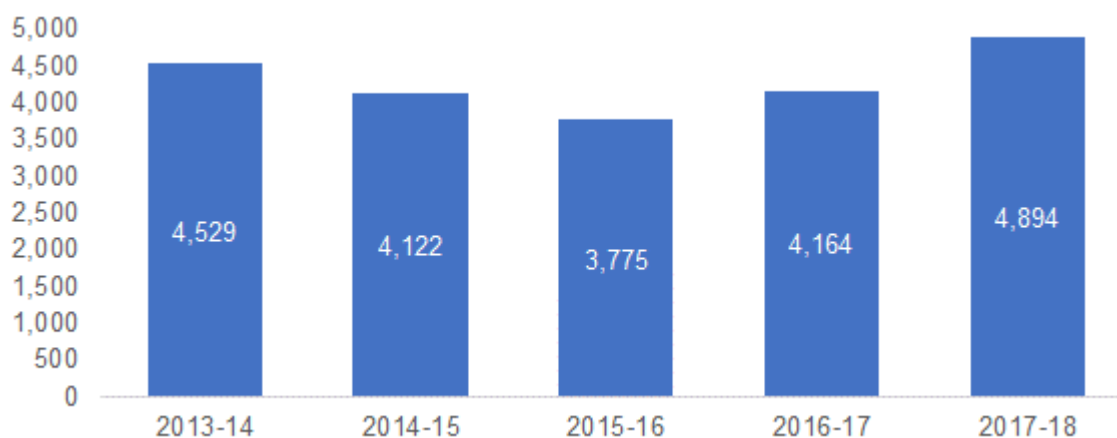
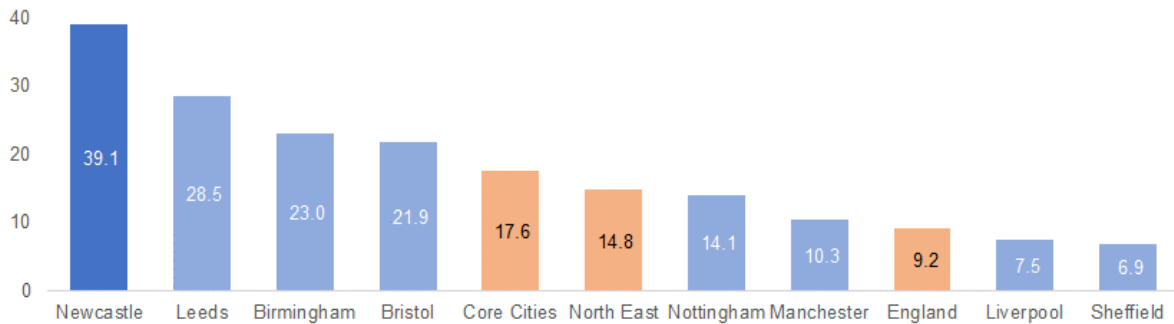


Chart 14 shows that Newcastle has the highest rate of homelessness prevention activity of any of the Core Cities, at just under 40 households per 1,000. In addition, this rate of prevention activity is more than double that of the Core Cities average, and more than four times the rate in England as a whole.

Chart 14 – Homelessness prevention rate per 1,000 households



National homelessness prevention figures are made up of both prevention and relief activities. It is important point to note from Newcastle's data that the proportion and amount of relief cases has consistently fallen over the review period.

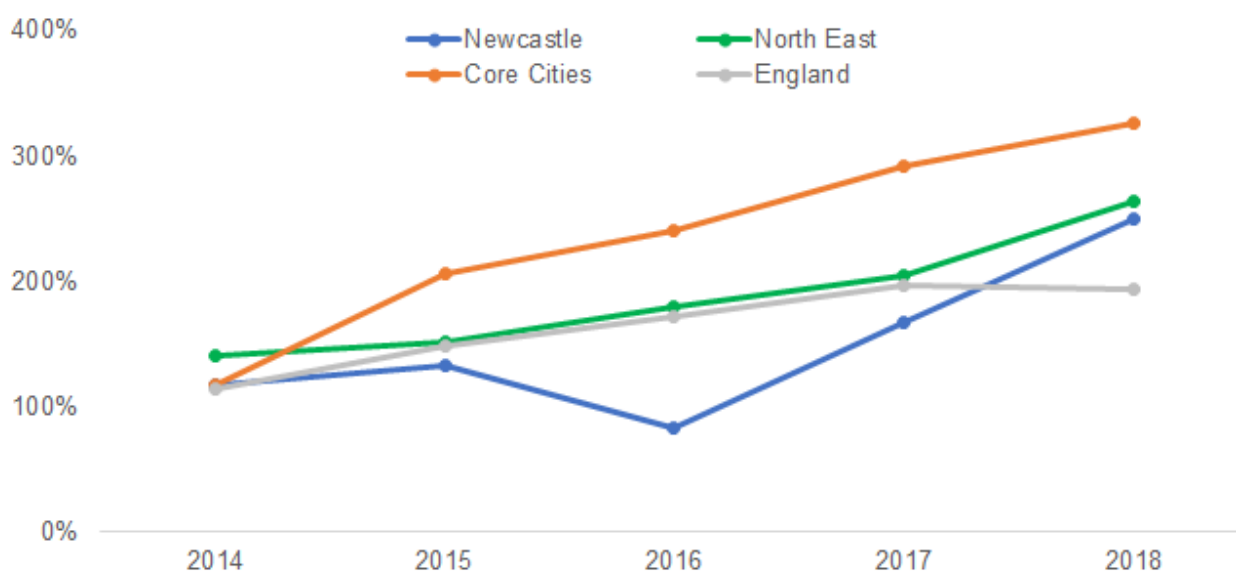
A reasonable interpretation of these overall statistical results would be that effective homelessness prevention practice in Newcastle is helping to achieve the low levels of full homelessness duty acceptances and temporary accommodation placements.

4.8.4 – Rough sleeping

Local authorities have individual ways of assessing the rough sleeping demand in their own areas, so the only consistent method of comparing performance between them is to use the MHCLG annual rough sleeping counts. We do this whilst appreciating the caveat that our own local daily counting has not experienced rises similar to those seen by the annual count.

Chart 15 below shows that since 2013 Newcastle has experienced a rise in the number of people found rough sleeping during the annual counts of 250%. The other Core Cities have on average seen rises in the same period of over 325%. These increases, however, should be considered alongside our relatively low numbers of individuals found in absolute terms, where even a small increase in number generates a large percentage swing. In the 2018 annual count, our highest in the period, only Liverpool had a count equally as low at 15. However, in previous years their counts were 33, 21 and 15 again in 2015, effectively demonstrating the swing.

Chart 15 – Rough sleeping increases since 2013



These annual counts provide data that can be compared with other local authorities. However, they only provide a snapshot of people found rough sleeping. Through our daily rough sleeping counts, we know that there is a subset of individuals for whom we have not been able to find sustainable solutions. These individuals are commonly referred to as being ‘multiply excluded’, referencing their repeated exclusion from homelessness accommodation and services, as well as their broader experience of other forms of deep social exclusion, such as substance misuse, histories of institutional care, mental health issues and ‘street culture’ activities.

We analysed data collected from our daily rough sleeping counts to improve our understanding of those residents who continue to sleep rough on our streets and why our attempts to find sustainable solutions for these individuals have not been successful. Our commissioned Multiple Exclusion Team have identified 30 people who were found rough sleeping in 2013-14 who were also found rough sleeping in 2018-19.

We have more to do to analyse our information, but this analysis shows that of these 30 people, five of these individuals are in the top 100 people who have been refused entry to our services by providers on our Newcastle Gateway system over the last five years. The use of our data to identify the areas we should focus on for this group will help to show what interventions they have had in the period and to understand our services haven’t worked for the most vulnerable group. Section 5.2.4 discusses in more detail the challenges we face in finding sustainable solutions for this group and some of our next steps for improving our responses.

4.9 – The first year of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 is one of the biggest changes to homelessness legislation for 15 years. As part of the introduction of the new act, MHCLG created a new reporting specification with H-CLIC replacing the P1E quarterly returns. H-CLIC now

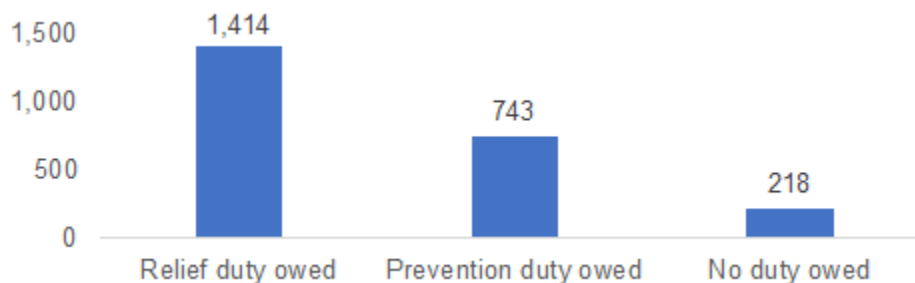
includes data on all households owed a statutory duty and any support needs members of that household have.

As the Act was implemented from 3 April 2018, data is not able to be compared against previous years, but where appropriate we have included information below from the first full year of the Homelessness Reduction Act in Newcastle.

4.9.1 – Initial assessments

In 2018-19, the Housing Advice Centre assessed 2,375 households potentially at risk of homelessness. Of these assessments it was determined that no duty was owed for 218 households and roughly one third of the remaining households were owed the prevention duty, with two thirds being owed a relief duty.

Chart 15 – Homelessness Reduction Act duties owed



The reasons for presenting are consistent with the main period of this review, with 24% of people no longer able to be accommodated by family or friends and 12% seeing the end of a private rented tenancy. Violent and non-violent relationship breakdowns were the reasons for 15% of presentations, with evictions from supported housing at 5%.

4.9.2 – Homelessness prevention duty

During 2018-19 there were 454 cases where a statutory prevention duty ended. Of these cases, 258 (57%) were effective in securing suitable accommodation for at least six months.

Chart 16 – Outcome of statutory prevention duty

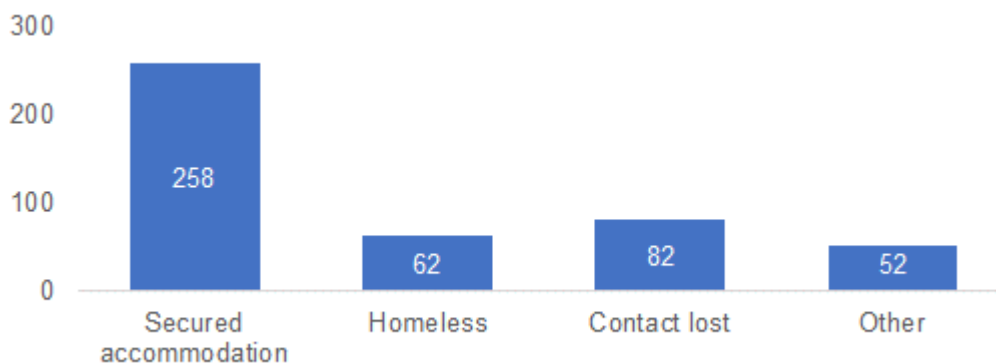
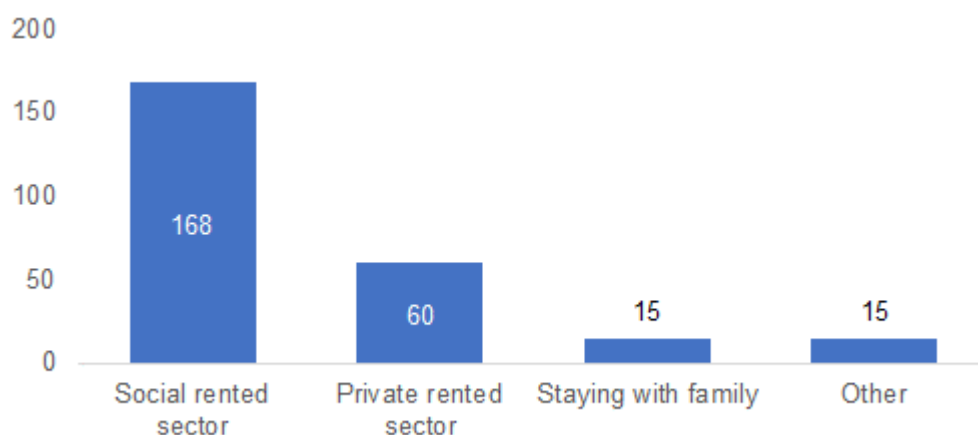


Chart 17 below shows that where the prevention duty ended with accommodation being secured, over 65% was by rehousing in the social rented sector.

Chart 17 – Accommodation type (where secured for at least six months)



4.9.3 – Statutory main homelessness duty and relief duty

During 2018-19, in the course of adapting to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 we began by interpreting the classification of preventing and relieving homelessness. Our original interpretation was that we classified relieving homelessness as when the council secured alternative accommodation for someone who had no right to occupy their current accommodation and otherwise would have become literally homeless, e.g. a household leaving the asylum process or asked to leave by family or friends. Subsequent liaison with MHCLG has clarified that the government want these cases to be classified as prevention, unless the household does become literally homeless and then they would be classified as relief when the council secures alternative accommodation to relieve their homelessness.

Due to the above, our 2018-19 figures in this review are a combination of both main homelessness duty and relief duties.

In 2018-19 there were 1,073 cases where the main duty or relief duty had ended for the household. Of the limited data we have on the main duty, 90% of households went on to accept an offer of social housing with the other 10% refusing the offer. For the relief duty, 56% of households went on to secure accommodation for at least six months with over 82% of these being from within the social rented sector. This is consistent with what we know from our data covering the main period of this review.

4.9.4 – Temporary accommodation

The number of households in temporary accommodation at 31 March 2019 was 24. This is lower than at any point over the past ten years and demonstrates our continued focus on preventative action.

MHCLG are working with local authorities to improve data quality and, as such, statutory homelessness statistics are being published as 'experimental' rather than official or

national statistics. The Scottish government's switch to a case reporting system and the introduction of new legislation in Wales meant their statistics were published as experimental statistics for the first year. Given this experience, the H-CLIC statistics are expected to be published as experimental statistics for at least twelve months.

5. Conclusion - our relative successes and challenges

This chapter summarises our relative successes and challenges in relation to preventing and relieving homelessness in Newcastle.

5.1 – Complex context, complex lives

This review began by outlining the extremely challenging structural context in which we seek to prevent and relieve homelessness. Section 2.1 confirmed that, in Newcastle, we have relatively high levels of poverty and deprivation. It also emphasised that this already challenging context has been exacerbated further by central government policies since 2013. Newcastle is among the worst affected of the Core Cities by the government's welfare reforms and local authority cuts. This brings a significant financial impact in reducing the supply of services in a time of increasing demand, but also creates more complexity and confusion for residents and organisations working to prevent homelessness. The scale and frequency of welfare reforms places greater pressure on residents (and the services supporting them) to identify, understand and transition. In turn, cuts to public spending direct time, effort and resource into managing these cuts, at the expense of developing public services.

We believe this context has caused more residents to become threatened with homelessness, and an even larger proportion to move into a position of being at greater risk of homelessness. However, we are particularly concerned that residents with more complex circumstances and needs are likely to be disproportionately affected by poverty, the welfare reforms and austerity due to their reduced ability to cope with changing circumstances.

Among those residents who are already homeless, we also know that there is a significant minority who experience severe and multiple disadvantage, with population rates appearing far higher than in England and among the highest in the Core Cities. These individuals face repeated exclusion from homelessness accommodation and services, as well as their 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 in homelessness accommodation. When in homelessness accommodation, their behaviour and needs conflict with traditional models of response, which emphasise compliance to structured treatment before housing. Those individuals who most commonly break the norms set out by service providers experience exclusionary consequences more frequently, acting to compound their already precarious situation. These consequences are partially designed to encourage individuals to change their behaviours. However, a 'hardcore' remain and experience the most severe forms of homelessness.

5.2 – Our relative successes

Chapter four demonstrated that 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). As outlined in section 2, this extremely challenging context is one of relatively high levels of deprivation that have been compounded by the reduced resource and additional complexity brought by austerity and welfare reform measures since 2013.

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 that indicate Newcastle is relatively successful in preventing and relieving homelessness. Firstly, that we had the highest proportionate rate of homelessness preventions of all Core Cities in 2018. Secondly, that we have not used bed and breakfast accommodation to fulfil our statutory homelessness duty since 2006.

We asked professionals who attended our Homelessness Prevention Forum⁶⁹ meeting on 11 December 2019 ‘what we should be proud of in our work to prevent and relieve homelessness over the last five years in the city?’. These professionals largely echoed Watts et al.’s findings, with the most common points raised being:

- Newcastle holistic approach to the prevention of homelessness, and that this was driven by partnerships between statutory and voluntary sector partners
- The ways in which the city’s political leadership had ‘coped’ with the cuts to the council’s budget (see section 2.2.2) and retained a commitment to face-to-face services, accommodation and homelessness prevention at a time when it would have been easy to restrict our focus to crisis management
- YHN’s commitment to homelessness prevention and their retention of staff and the ‘Sustaining Tenancies’ process to meet this aim
- The commitment shown by the council to develop an environment in which we could test new approaches and find solutions collectively. Professionals specifically highlighted the value of our quarterly homelessness reviews as providing a focal point for developing a collective understanding
- Taking a long-term, strategic approach to preventing and relieving homelessness and not being tempted by ‘quick wins’ such as the development of night shelters

We are encouraged by these relative successes. However, we still see it as an absolute failure that anyone sleeps rough in Newcastle. We also recognise that although we have well developed responses to homelessness, there are still a number of key areas in which we can improve our responses.

The following section uses the recommendations identified by Watts et al. (2019) as a starting point for identifying our key challenges in the city. These recommendations have been combined with a content review of the key challenges identified across our quarterly homelessness reviews over the last five years. Finally, we also explored these challenges with frontline practitioners in our statutory homelessness services in a number of participatory focus groups, as well as with professionals who attended our Homelessness Prevention Forum meeting in December 2019.

⁶⁹ www.newcastle.gov.uk/HPF

5.3 – Our key challenges

5.3.1 – Continuing to manage the impact of austerity and the welfare reforms

Maintaining a strong emphasis on early homelessness prevention and strengthening the support for those at more immediate risk or already experiencing homelessness is made more challenging by the ongoing demands created by reductions in our budget and the government’s welfare reforms. In turn, the government’s focus through the Homelessness Reduction Act on the prevention of homelessness within 56 days disincentivises earlier homelessness prevention and that activity is no longer recorded in national homelessness statistics.

Welfare reforms

One of the key recommendations made by Watts et al. (2019) in their study of homelessness prevention in Newcastle in the context of welfare reforms and austerity was that the government should urgently review the impact of post-2010 welfare reforms on homelessness and the risk of homelessness, including the benefit cap, “bedroom tax”, freeze to working age benefits, Local Housing Allowance caps and Universal Credit, and improve primary prevention measures at the national level by ensuring that social security entitlements cover households’ realistic housing costs and enable them to escape poverty and destitution. Professionals who attended our Homelessness Prevention Forum meeting in December 2019 also noted that this was the most significant challenge the city had faced in preventing and relieving homelessness over the last five years.

Our experience is that the changes arising from the government’s welfare reforms, particularly since 2013, are causing some households to fall into poverty and deprivation. We think this is particularly true if they had existing vulnerabilities, are impacted by more than one change and / or were already struggling financially. This is because of the significant reductions in income and the increased responsibility placed on residents who may not have the capacity, understanding or resources to do what is required of them.

We think that applying national policies with universal approaches without taking into account local context, such as the employment market, and without providing the specialist advice and support that residents need to understand their situation, their entitlement and their options creates risks for those residents and for the services that have to respond and, ultimately, fund the cost of preventing and providing crisis interventions.

As highlighted in section 2.2.1, DHPs have been an increasingly important tool in mitigating the financial impact of the government’s welfare reforms. Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, the central government allocation of DHP funding to local authorities in Great Britain rose from £30 million to £166.5 million⁷⁰. Over the same period, DHP spending in Newcastle rose from £94,326 to £1,169,857⁷¹. National funding has dropped significantly in 2019-20 to £153.5 million, with a drop to £932,043 in Newcastle. Given the importance

⁷⁰ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06899/SN06899.pdf>

⁷¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-subsidy-circulars-2019

of DHPs in preventing the risk of homelessness for residents with significant rent shortfalls, this policy change is particularly concerning.

Austerity

One of the key recommendations for national actors made by Watts et al. (2019) in their study of homelessness prevention in Newcastle in the context of welfare reforms and austerity was that central government should review the scale, distribution and impacts of local authority budget cuts, including on homelessness, homelessness prevention and housing support services, and recognise the challenges associated with multiple short-term, rigidly structured and narrowly focused funding pots in compensating for this. They went on to recommend that central government should ensure that local authorities have sufficient and sustainable funds to prevent and alleviate homelessness effectively.

In NCC's medium term plan, we note that these cost pressures will result in significant changes to the way NCC deliver some of our services. However, it also states a commitment to protect the most vulnerable in our city from the worst effects of government cuts. This commitment was evidenced in Watts et al.'s (2019) study of homelessness prevention in Newcastle, which highlighted that, in comparison to other Core Cities, Newcastle had somewhat protected services for the most vulnerable residents. In turn, the range of primary and secondary prevention and crisis activities outlined in chapter 3 of this review reflect this commitment. Maintaining, integrating and improving these responses will be vital if we are to continue to maintain low and stable levels of homelessness.

5.3.2 – Preventing homelessness from the private rented sector

In common with the rest of England, eviction from private rented accommodation has consistently been one of the main causes of homelessness in the city and has been identified as a persistent problem in our quarterly reviews over the last five years.

Watts et al. (2019) recommended that MHCLG should review the role of the ending of private rented tenancies in precipitating homelessness and seek to strengthen tenant rights to minimise the risk of homelessness for those residing in private rented accommodation. Frontline practitioners in our statutory homelessness services also identified this as a key factor that is contributing to higher levels of homelessness among residents living in the private rented sector.

Strengthening tenancy rights in the private rented sector (compared to those in social housing) is particularly important given the affordability challenges faced by many residents who are affected the government's welfare reforms. Frontline practitioners in our statutory homelessness services highlighted that welfare reforms such as Universal Credit, the benefit cap and the introduction of the shared accommodation rate for under 35s in receipt of Local Housing Allowance have caused particular issues for households seeking to access or maintain suitable and sustainable accommodation in the private rented sector. In relation to Universal Credit, practitioners highlighted that one of the key challenges was that this can cause problems with payments and lead to uncertainty for landlords, disincentivising them from accepting prospective tenants in receipt of Universal Credit. These factors make it more challenging for us to identify properties in the private rented sector that are suitable and sustainable.

While recognising these structural challenges related to national government policy, Watts et al. also recommended that NCC should develop mechanisms and protocols to enhance the prevention of homelessness caused by the ending of private rented tenancies, including by building relationships with private landlords.

Watts et al.'s focus on enhancing our current provision recognises that Newcastle already has a relatively good range of services in place to identify and support residents to find and maintain suitable and sustainable accommodation in the private rented sector. Frontline practitioners in our statutory homelessness services felt that we have good information available on our website for private rented tenants and landlords⁷². They also felt that we had relatively good provision to help people maintain and access private rented accommodation. However, they also felt that these services could work better together to identify the risk of homelessness at an earlier stage and to work to a shared purpose.

As well as enhancing our provision for private rented tenants who may be at risk of homelessness, Watts et al. also recommended that we should explore ways to better identify households at risk of homelessness in more 'hidden' situations, including among those living in private tenancies, sofa surfing / staying with friends and family, and or living with a partner but at risk of homelessness linked to violent or non-violent relationship breakdown. Professionals who attended our Homelessness Prevention Forum meeting in December 2019 also felt that this was a key challenge in this area. Through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, our multidisciplinary team tested the use of predictive analytics to target residents who live in the private rented sector and may be at risk of homelessness⁷³. In doing so, they encountered a common challenge in seeking to prevent homelessness in the private rented sector; a lack of available data to identify the risk of homelessness. As there is no centralised database of rent arrears information in the private rented sector, it is more difficult to identify those residents who are at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage. This means we need to explore more creative ways of identifying private rented tenants who may be at risk. This could involve working more closely with our colleagues in Environmental Health to identify and support residents living in poor quality private rented accommodation or using other forms of data that the council holds in the absence of rent arrears.

We seek to improve the support available to residents to access and maintain suitable and sustainable accommodation in the private rented sector. However, it is clear that support alone is not sufficient. In the absence of legislation that strengthens tenant rights in the private rented sector, we want to do everything we can to improve the regulation of private rented accommodation in our city. The vast majority of landlords act professionally and provide decent, well maintained homes. However, some landlords exploit tenants by letting unsuitable and / or dangerous accommodation. Therefore, we are in the process of

⁷² www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/housing/private-housing-general-information and www.privaterentedservice.co.uk/

⁷³ The summative report that details learning from the team's work over their initial Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funded pilot describes how we tested predictive analytics in more detail – www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20and%20homelessness/Homelessness%20Prevention%20Trailblazer/Multidisciplinary%20team%20-%20Summative%20Report.pdf

expanding our Selective and Additional Licensing Scheme⁷⁴, building on mandatory 'house in multiple occupation' HMO licensing and two small selective licensing schemes that are already in place in the city. Selective licensing requires landlords who rent out properties in an area that is subject to selective licensing to obtain a licence from the local authority for each of their properties. Implementing this scheme will help to ensure that private sector rented housing is well managed and good landlords are supported and we respond to those failing to meet their obligations.

5.3.3 – Enabling residents to move from relief and supported accommodation to suitable and sustainable accommodation

Newcastle is a supportive city where we aim for living independently to be the norm and living in congregate crisis accommodation the exception. Our aim is for people's experience of homelessness to be rare, brief and non-recurring, and for prevention to be at the core of the advice and support we provide to people threatened with homelessness. However, when we are unable to prevent homelessness, we know that we need appropriate, humane and person-centred responses to support people to move to sustained independence at the earliest opportunity.

Watts et al. (2019) recommended that voluntary sector partners and accommodation providers and NCC should improve the quality of congregate crisis and supported accommodation provision to minimise issues of abandonment, eviction and exclusion from these services and maximise positive move on, with a particular focus on episodically and chronically homeless individuals with complex needs.

Our quarterly homelessness reviews reveal that we have made progress over the last five years in reducing evictions from congregate crisis and supported accommodation in the city, with an overall reduction of 52% between 2013-14 and 2017-18. However, that still means that there were 187 evictions from these types of accommodation in 2017-18, meaning there is still considerable room for improvement. In turn, between 2017-18 and 2018-19 there was a 12% increase in evictions, indicating that more attention is needed to understand why these evictions are increasing.

The number of evictions from supported accommodation are decreasing. However, the number of residents who are moving from one congregate crisis or supported accommodation project to another has increased by 50% between 2013-14 and 2018-19. This may partially represent positive move on to a more appropriate form of supported accommodation. However, it may also represent residents "cycling" between different forms of crisis accommodation. Consequently, we need to better understand what underpins this trend. Professionals who attended our Homelessness Prevention Forum meeting in December 2019 described the problems with move on causing a "bottleneck" in our system of response, hindering our ability to respond to homelessness in a quick and effective way.

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<https://democracy.newcastle.gov.uk/documents/s143326/Selective%20Licensing%20Cabinet%20report%20June%202019.pdf>

One of the key challenges we face in maximising positive move on from congregate accommodation is the current funding model that allows accommodation providers to directly claim housing costs. The result is a financial model that incentivises full occupancy in congregate accommodation and disincentivises timely and positive move on.

In 2018, the government conducted a consultation on the allocation of funding for supported accommodation⁷⁵. In our response, we argued for funding to be allocated as grant funding to local authorities. This would have allowed us to develop a local funding model that encouraged providers to retain available beds so that we can quickly and effectively respond when a person becomes homeless to provide them with interim accommodation. This change would also have allowed us to develop a local funding model that incentivised positive move on to suitable and sustainable accommodation, avoiding unnecessarily lengthy stays in what should be interim accommodation. Unfortunately, the government decided not to change the existing funding model, so this opportunity was not realised.

Despite these challenges, we have sought to develop local responses to encourage positive move on. Through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, we appointed a Service Improvement Lead in our Commissioning team to help us move towards outcomes focused commissioning. This programme involved three key areas: increasing access to accommodation to prevent or relieve homelessness, reducing the number of evictions through an improved and collaborative approach, and increasing move on from supported accommodation to suitable and sustainable accommodation. As part of this work, we reviewed our Prevention of Evictions from Supported Accommodation Protocol and our Move On from Supported Accommodation Protocol (see appendix 2). To help us manage demand we have also commissioned a number of 'emergency beds', so we can quickly provide interim accommodation when a resident becomes homeless.

In the longer term, we seek to move towards a housing-led approach to making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring. As we do this, we need to continue to work with accommodation providers in the city to improve our responses for residents in congregate crisis and supported accommodation. As we do so, we need to ensure that interim accommodation is available when needed and that we humanely support residents to move into suitable and sustainable accommodation at the earliest opportunity.

5.3.4 – Supporting residents who are multiply excluded

As highlighted in section 4.7, we have relatively low levels of rough sleeping. However, we view every person sleeping rough as an absolute failure, as all Newcastle residents should have the right to suitable and sustainable accommodation.

The need for specialist support and accommodation

Section 3.4.3 outlines the specialist support and accommodation we provide for those residents who are multiply excluded. In commissioning this specialist provision, we recognise that our broader homelessness accommodation and support provision does not

⁷⁵ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/funding-for-supported-housing-two-consultations

adequately meet the needs of these residents. Our short-term relief accommodation is not set up to deal with the intensity of support required by these individuals. Despite this specialist provision, many of these residents continue to be trapped in a cycle of moving between short-term relief accommodation and rough sleeping.

Watts et al. echoed these challenges, recommending that NCC and voluntary sector partners and accommodation providers should review formal and informal criteria influencing access to support and accommodation, including via the commissioned street outreach team. The authors made particular reference to the challenges associated with people who have a local connection to another area who are rough sleeping in Newcastle. A key issue highlighted by our frontline practitioners and identified as a consistent theme in our quarterly homelessness reviews is the proportion of people who are rough sleeping in the city but who have no local connection to Newcastle. We aim to reconnect these residents with the local authorities that they are from and where they would be able to make an application for full homelessness duty.

Improving our Housing First provision

Watts et al. also recommended that NCC and voluntary sector crisis and supported accommodation providers should move towards a rapid rehousing approach for single homeless households, including via the expansion of and improvements to the fidelity of Housing First provision in the city for those with complex needs.

Transitioning to a rapid rehousing approach and expanding Housing First provision in the city will take time and require significant resource. In the short-term, the Housing First services included in our new commissioned homelessness prevention and relief hubs and the Housing First pilot undertaken by YHN provide opportunities to develop effective Housing First services, which represent positive examples of this type of provision. If we are to develop Housing First services that have high fidelity and provide a realistic foundation for recovery from the complex needs most multiply excluded adults face, then we need to consider the role of mental health and drug and alcohol treatment services. The Housing First pilot being undertaken by YHN includes a dual diagnosis specialist. It will be important to capture the learning from this pilot to provide an example of how housing and homelessness services, mental health and drug and alcohol treatment services can improve joint working processes with this group.

Improving the coordination of support for residents who are multiply excluded

However, these Housing First services only represent a relatively small part of our provision for residents who are multiply excluded. There is a much wider range of services in the city that support these residents. Frontline practitioners in our statutory homelessness services and professionals who attended our Homelessness Prevention Forum meeting in December 2019 identified that although we have a number of specialist services for residents who are multiply excluded, we should improve joint working between these services. They specifically highlighted that services were often working in isolation from one another and there was no single point of coordination case management and recording. In 2019, we appointed a new Rough Sleeping Coordinator to help improve the coordination of support for these residents.

5.3.5 – Preventing homelessness for residents who are leaving asylum accommodation

Watts et al. (2019) recommended that the Home Office should work with asylum accommodation and support service providers to address barriers inhibiting NCC's capacity to prevent homelessness among those leaving asylum accommodation, ensuring that notice of discharge from such institutions is given at least 56 days in advance and that sufficient information is provided to enable an effective response. This recommendation indicates that our challenges in this area are primarily related to structural challenges related to national government policy.

Section 2.1.4 highlighted that the numbers of people seeking asylum who have been dispersed to Newcastle has increased in recent years. It also outlined the process through which we receive notification that a resident has been granted refugee status.

The levels of homelessness experienced by newly recognised refugees is of considerable concern to us. The Home Office policy is that those in receipt of asylum support cease to be entitled to accommodation and financial support 28 days after notification of the granting of refugee status. This represents a rapid change in circumstances for people who may not have been in the UK for very long, are unfamiliar with the systems, may have limited English language ability and who have not had access to employment and savings or a wider social network.

We believe this 28-day 'move on' period to transition from asylum accommodation and support is insufficient. It is also at odds with the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which places duties on local authorities to intervene earlier (56 days) to prevent and relieve homelessness.

Our Refugee Move On team provide transitional support into settled tenancies and onto mainstream support. This support has been strengthened by the addition of two LAASLOs. However, these additional staffing posts are temporary and the timescales are still too tight. As a result, many of these residents are forced to make a homelessness application and move into temporary accommodation. Frontline practitioners in our statutory homelessness services noted that these challenges are amplified for larger families. This is because we have a relative lack of larger properties that are suitable for families. In the absence of a change in government policy we seek to develop local responses to help these residents to access suitable and sustainable accommodation in a safe, inclusive and welcoming city. With YHN, we have identified a small number of larger properties that can be used to house larger families who have recently been granted refugee status.

5.3.6 – Supporting residents who are experiencing domestic abuse

Table 2 in section 4.3.2 showed that violent relationship breakdown was the third most prominent cause of homelessness for households owed the full statutory homelessness duty between 2013/14 and 2017/18. This remained relatively static as a proportion of overall acceptances, with absolute numbers increasing over the five years. However, section 4.3.3 highlighted that placements in domestic abuse refuges to fulfil statutory temporary accommodation duty fell significantly from 20 households in 2013/14 to only two households in 2017/18.

Watts et al. (2019) recommended that Newcastle City Council should explore ways to better identify households at risk of homelessness including those who are living with a partner but at risk of homelessness linked to violent or non-violent relationship breakdown.

Preventing homelessness for residents who are experiencing domestic abuse brings unique challenges. Anyone who is experiencing domestic abuse cannot be expected to reasonably reside in their home. As a result, they should be understood as already being homeless. However, we still want to avoid the need for these residents to have to move into temporary accommodation if possible. To do this, we need to further strengthen our partnerships with other statutory and voluntary sector partners such as the police and domestic abuse charities, to define our role in a proportionate partnership that identifies and support households who are at risk of violence or abuse in their home.

Where these households do need to move into temporary accommodation, we want this to be good quality, safe, and staffed by professionals who can offer specialist advice and support. For this reason, our primary aim is to accommodate these individuals in specialist domestic abuse refuges. Where this is not possible, we aim to accommodate households in our purpose built, temporary accommodation, Cherry Tree View. The reduction in placements in domestic abuse refuges identified in section 4.3.3 was reflected and partly explained through the perspectives of frontline practitioners in our statutory homelessness services in a number of participatory focus groups. These practitioners consistently identified that there was very limited availability in domestic abuse refuges across the region. Where there was availability, it did not often fit with the specific household size and circumstances of the household.

As well as limited availability, these practitioners also highlighted that there were issues around information sharing, with the Newcastle Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS) using a separate database for recording accommodation and support placements to all other homelessness accommodation services, who use the Newcastle Gateway. Practitioners highlighted that this can create a gap in knowledge and make coordinating support for households more challenging.

Appendix 1 – References

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Appendix 2 – Policies and protocols

Sustaining Tenancies Guidance (*previously known as the Prevention from Eviction protocol; introduced 2007, reviewed 2009 and 2012*)

This aims to prevent evictions from YHN and housing association tenancies. This approach is based on the early identification of the risk of homelessness, e.g. because the person is vulnerable, they are moving to independence from supported accommodation or they are at risk due to debt. This involves targeting advice and support to those at risk of homelessness as a routine response to risk triggers, e.g. rent arrears.

Supported Housing Move on Protocol (incorporates Pathways to Independence) (*introduced April 2012*)

This aims to identify barriers to moves to independence from supported accommodation and promote appropriate use of resettlement support services. This protocol was developed to improve links between supported and general needs housing. Prior to the

development of the protocol, supported housing providers said that around 20% of their residents were ready but could not move on due to the lack of availability of accommodation and YHN had identified people being put forward for a tenancy who were obviously not ready. The aim of this protocol is to create agreement about residents' readiness for independence and of the support required. This allows us to target support and prevents setting people up to fail. Key partners are NCC's Active Inclusion Service and Commissioning, YHN's Support and Progression team and supported housing providers.

Preventing Evictions from Supported Housing Protocol *(introduced 2013)*

This aims to ensure that there is a consistent and consensual approach to preventing people losing their hostel accommodation through eviction. One of the aims of the protocol is that all evictions from supported housing are 'endorsed' by the council as action taken as the last resort, and the information gained as to reasons for evictions is used to help inform the commissioning of services and the impact of unmet needs, which are predominantly related to mental health and drug and alcohol addictions.

Hospital Discharge Protocol *(introduced 2007, reviewed 2009 and 2013)*

This aims to prevent homelessness on discharge from hospital. Key partners are NCC's Active Inclusion Service and Commissioning, YHN, Tyne and Wear Homes, Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust.

Drug Management Protocol *(introduced 2007, reviewed 2009)*

This was predominantly a response to the Wintercomfort court ruling in 2000 when the managers of a day centre were convicted for allowing their premises to be used for the supply of drugs. This judgement created a concern that people using drug would be evicted from supported housing by providers not wanting to fall foul of the legislation. The protocol aims to provide agreement on the safe and legal management of drug use in supported accommodation and give confidence to those providing accommodation to people using drugs that they are acting within the law. Key partners are Northumbria Police, Safe Newcastle, supported housing providers, drug treatment services and NCC Commissioning. Evictions for drug use alone have not been a major issue in Newcastle and this, combined with reduced capacity, has meant this protocol has not been regularly reviewed. However, Safe Newcastle are leading a review of this protocol to respond to the drug-related issues that impact upon people living in supported accommodation, e.g. debt, violence and drug-related deaths in hostels.

Prohibitions Order Protocol *(introduced 2007, reviewed 2012)*

This is aimed at reducing homelessness as the result of a Prohibition Order, which result in the emergency closure of a house in multiple occupation (HMO). We have had one closure (in September 2007) and work closely with our Public Safety and Regulation Division and review risks at our monthly Private Rented Sector meeting. Key partners are NCC's Active Inclusion Service, Public Protection and Neighbourhoods, Private Rented Service and Legal Services, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, and Newcastle and Northumbria Universities.

Clean Homes Protocol *(introduced 2007)*

This is aimed at preventing homelessness from accommodation designated as “filthy and verminous” by the Public Protection and Neighbourhoods team. This protocol, like the Prohibitions Order Protocol above, is rarely enforced and the use of it has reduced, as the targeting of floating support has improved. Key partners are NCC’s Active Inclusion Service, Public Protection and Neighbourhoods, Private Rented Service, Adult Social Care, YHN and Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust.

These protocols have contributed to joint planning, improved responses to crisis and joint commissioning of services and initiatives. We report on the protocols and the measures we use to monitor to them on a quarterly basis, through the quarterly homelessness review briefings.