

Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer: Workforce development – overview of our routine approach and accompanying resources

1. Introduction and background

The [Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals) seeks to make the best use of the limited face-to-face specialist advice and support services in Newcastle by helping other non-specialist services to prevent and respond to the risk of homelessness and financial exclusion. This means moving from signposting to proportionate responses in which all partners can play a role. To help us to do this, in 2015 we developed ‘spectrums of advice’ for housing and homelessness, benefits, and money management (covering debt and budgeting advice). These ‘spectrums of advice’ describe three broad tiers of information and advice for each of these areas and act as a tool to help us to better understand where services and organisations fit into our provision in Newcastle and what support they need to do this. They are available on the Newcastle City Council website at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals

Our aim is to adapt the practice of services delivered and commissioned by the council which work with vulnerable residents who may be at risk of homelessness, to help staff working in those services 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 and financial exclusion, 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 and volunteers have with residents who might be at risk.

We believe that doing this should contribute to achieving our aim of making it everyone’s business to prevent homelessness and financial exclusion, as well as helping our collective understanding of the role, and possible role, that each person plays in supporting the people who they work with, and the consequences of not making the most of this. To help with this, Newcastle City Council’s Active Inclusion Service has delivered a coordinated programme of training on housing and homelessness, benefits, preventing benefit sanctions, debt and budgeting since 2015.

As part of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, we have maintained, reviewed, updated and added to this programme of e-learning modules and quarterly face-to-face training sessions. This briefing note describes this workforce development programme in more detail than is in our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer overview report, which is available online at:

www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals

2. Our workforce development programme

Our workforce development programme extends beyond supporting multi-agency staff and volunteers to identify and know how to respond to the risk of homelessness. It supports our wider Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach to supporting residents to have the foundations for a stable **life** – somewhere to live, an income, financial inclusion and employment opportunities.

It includes the following two elements, **e-learning modules** and **face-to-face training sessions**. These two elements are supported by a range of support and resources, such

as consultancy phone lines and ‘trigger point conversation’ information sheets, which are available online at:

www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals and www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals

2.1 E-learning modules

To support our awareness raising function, we have produced e-learning modules which are suitable as standalone training for multi-agency staff and volunteers who carry out roles where they provide information rather than advice to residents and where they need to have an awareness rather than a more in-depth understanding. These modules are also used as pre-learning for our face-to-face training sessions, which are described in section 2.2.

Our e-learning modules are available to Newcastle City Council staff and Councillors and to staff and volunteers who don’t work for the council. We have produced the following modules using the [Learning Pool](#) online learning system:

- **Housing and Homelessness in Newcastle:** This is aimed at frontline staff and volunteers who come into contact with people who have housing problems but who don’t provide housing advice or support. It takes about 30 to 45 minutes to complete
- **Introduction to Benefits – stage 1:** This is aimed at frontline staff and volunteers who do not provide active benefits advice but who can give basic information and signpost to benefit offices and advice services. It takes about 15 minutes to complete
- **Introduction to Benefits – stage 2:** This is for people who have completed the ‘stage 1’ module and gives more information about who can claim what benefit, the benefit rules, key messages and useful contacts. It takes about 50 minutes to complete
- **Introduction to Universal Credit:** This is for people who have completed the two Introduction to Benefits modules. It gives an overview of Universal Credit, who can claim Universal Credit, how to claim it, the rules, key messages, useful contacts and where to get support. It takes about 45 minutes to complete
- **Debt Awareness:** This is aimed at frontline staff and volunteers who come into contact with people who have money problems but who don’t provide budgeting or debt advice. It takes about 30 to 45 minutes to complete

More information, including face-to-face session training dates and e-learning access information, is available on the [Newcastle City Council website](#).

2.2 Face-to-face training sessions

Our face-to-face training sessions are delivered both routinely on a quarterly basis and targeted to specific groups of staff or volunteers in response to demand or as part of a targeted approach. The following sessions are aimed at frontline staff and volunteers who provide general advice and support to residents proactively and in response to issues raised. They provide resources which support longer term workforce development.

Our routine training sessions are:

- **Introduction to Housing and Homelessness in Newcastle:** 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. This session also covers practical information about the role of the council’s Housing Advice Centre, the policies and procedures that

the council and partners in Newcastle follow to help prevent homelessness, and where to get further information and advice

- **Introduction to Benefits:** A basic overview of the benefits system, its structure, basic rules, who can claim what, claims, payments and challenging decisions, some problem areas and how to avoid problems in the first place. This session also covers practical information about the benefit administrators and where to get further information and advice
- **Preventing Benefit Sanctions:** This session is delivered jointly between the council and the Department for Work and Pensions and focuses on supporting residents to avoid benefit sanctions to reduce the number of sanctions applied in Newcastle
- **Introduction to Budgeting:** This session is aimed at frontline staff and volunteers who provide face-to-face support to residents and who could provide budgeting information and advice as part of their role. The session gives the skills to help residents to stay out of debt and manage their money, by showing how to complete an accurate budget plan, identify how income can be increased and costs reduced, manage a bank account and bill payments, and support with other aspects of financial inclusion

3. Our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer and next steps

Workforce development was an important part of the foundation for our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, and throughout our programme has continued to be a fundamental part of our approach to both responding to the risk of homelessness and preventing the risk of homelessness.

During the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funding period, between 1 January 2017 and 31 March 2019, we delivered the above programme of training to 1,432 multi-agency staff and volunteers. This included targeting workforce development to specific groups of staff, including Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches, drug and alcohol treatment providers, and services working with children, young people and families.

Due to significant organisational transitions and other priorities, largely due to austerity and demand and budget-related pressures, 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 are, therefore, continuing 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.

We are willing to share the learning from the workforce development aspect of our approach to prevent the risk of homelessness and financial exclusion with other areas, in the same way as we are sharing the wider learning from our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme. To help with this, we have published a suite of resources online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals

Contact officer

Claire Horton, Service Improvement Lead – Active Inclusion, Newcastle City Council
Phone 0191 211 6049 Email claire.horton@newcastle.gov.uk

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