

# Newcastle's Homelessness

**Review Summary  
2008**

# Newcastle's Homelessness Review Summary 2008

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# Newcastle's Homelessness Review Summary 2008

## 1. Introduction – why we need a review

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to develop a strategy to reduce homelessness every five years, based on a thorough review of the homelessness situation in the area. The aim is to ensure that the Council responds to changing circumstances.

Over 1,000 people, including service users, have been consulted and all available data analysed to establish:

- The scale and nature of need for all groups
- The services that provide advice, accommodation, and support
- What needs to be done to address any gap between these

Recommendations and findings are included in the action points at the end of the relevant chapters. The full review can be found at [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf)

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this review. We have tried hard to reflect everyone's views and to capture the truth from the data. However we accept that we may have missed things or made mistakes and would welcome your comments. Please contact Neil Munslow at [neil.munslow@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:neil.munslow@newcastle.gov.uk) if you would like to suggest any changes. This Review is a strategic tool that helps us to improve services our approach will be to build on this but also be open to change based on regular dialogue and analysis.

Website: [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf)

If this information is needed in another format or language; please call: Homeless Prevention Project on 0191 277 1731 / 33 or email: [hpp@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:hpp@newcastle.gov.uk)

## The local context

Newcastle's draft Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) recognises that sustainable housing is a pre-requisite of sustainable communities and a necessary requirement for other therapeutic and supportive interventions to work. This is evidenced by inclusion of the prevention of homelessness as a local indicator in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) in

addition to the two indicators which cover people moving on to and sustaining independence. This means developing a holistic approach to the needs of people at risk of homelessness by both addressing their problems but also by creating opportunities for change by aligning accommodation, employment, care, support and health provision.

## The housing market in Newcastle

Newcastle's housing market has changed considerably since 2003 when there was an oversupply of housing to rent, the tables below show the reduction in affordable housing and the relatively low level of replacement stock.

### Numbers of accommodation units in the City by tenure

Year	2001	2007	2010 Estimate	Year	2001	2007	2010 Estimate
Owner Occupiers	63,256	68,548	71,940	Housing Association	6,559	6,493	6,698
Council	34,464	29,508	28,343	Private rented	15,721	17,776	17,890

### New house completions

Year	Private		Socially rented		Shared ownership		Total	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
2004/5	824	95	34	4	8	1	866	100
2005/6	899	93	33	3	34	4	966	100
2006/7	703	87	85	11	18	2	806	100
2007/8E	753	89	62	7	30	4	845	100

Repossessions have also increased from 217 in 1997 to 730 in 2007.

The most recent evidence underpinning the city's Housing Strategy outlines the scale of the housing challenge. The following figures illustrate the change in the local housing market:

- It is estimated that as many as 15,000 new homes will need to be built
- Total available council lettings reduced by 65%, from 6,700 in 2001/02 to 2,349 in 2006/07
- The total council stock has reduced by 4,805 since 2001/02, with a further reduction of 550 predicted over 2007/8 (250 demolitions & 300 Right to Buys)
- Newcastle has the third largest student population of the Core Cities and has seen an increase in the student population of 3,000 in the last 3 years. The Universities' and College's growth plans imply a need for 6,000 more student homes. This competition has reduced access to private rented accommodation for other groups.

## **Deprivation in Newcastle**

The 2008 draft Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) highlights the progress made in addressing deprivation. In particular that Newcastle is now ranked 37<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority area by the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (2007). This is a significant improvement from 20<sup>th</sup> most deprived area in 2004. The SCS also recognises that currently, more than a third of Newcastle's people live in an area that is amongst the 10% most deprived in Britain:

- 25,950 families were receiving Child Tax Credit and/or Working Tax Credit in Newcastle in 2005/06 - 89% of all families
- 15,310 children live in out-of-work families - approximately 30% of all children, compared with 20% in England
- 32,250 households in the City are dependent on benefits
- Nationally mortgage approvals have fallen to a 64,000 a record low since records began
- Repossession for arrears are estimated to reach between 45,000 and 54,000 in 2008

The reduction of deprivation has not kept pace with the regeneration initiatives. Newcastle now has a shortage of accommodation, and this impacts on those with the lowest incomes and the most socially excluded. The reduction in housing supply by almost 5,000 dwellings has meant that Newcastle has had to become more effective in managing demand.

## **Who is affected by the risk of homelessness?**

This Review covers the needs of around 6,000 people who require supported housing or who are at risk of homelessness. This population ranges from chronically excluded people who sleep rough to families on low incomes at risk of eviction or mortgage default. For convenience we have separated the groups affected as follows:

- Chronically excluded rough sleepers – this affects a small number of people – up to 10 people on any one night and around 100 per year
- People living in supported accommodation – at any one time 750 people live in supported accommodation beds and 860 living in general needs accommodation with floating support this covers around 3,000 people per year
- People living in general needs rented and owner occupied accommodation who are at risk of losing their accommodation. There are a range of estimates of the impact of the economic downturn and at present it is too early to precise as to the effect upon homeowners in Newcastle. However given that Newcastle has relatively high

accommodation costs and low wages the impact is likely to be considerable. At present around 3,000 households a year receive advice aimed at preventing homelessness.

The people whom the Council has homelessness responsibilities split into 2 groups:

**a. Statutory priority need clients: 1977 Housing Act (now 1996 Housing Act)**

Broadly these are people in acute housing need or in crisis where the households contain:

- dependent children
- young and elderly
- acutely ill
- people fleeing violence, harassment or an emergency

The Council has a duty to secure accommodation for these households.

**b. Homelessness prevention and market stability – 2002 Homelessness Act**

The 2002 Act widened the duty to prevent homelessness through a strategic approach.

This split complicates all councils' response to homelessness and the generally limited resources available invariably have to focus on meeting statutory duties first, which can be to the detriment of those in the most acute need. There also needs to be recognition of the limitations of the homelessness services alone in countering the causes of homelessness, much of which is affected by wider housing market and social deprivation factors. We know that we must work in partnership to provide complementary accommodation and support if we are to develop lasting solutions. We have been most successful where we have provided a matrix of options that marry housing, employment, support, care and health provision.

## Cross-cutting needs

The figures below from 2006-7 are based on the 2,000 households discharged from supported accommodation, so they do not represent the whole population, but they do illustrate the cross-cutting implications of homelessness:

<p><b>Families</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>297</b> people with experience of domestic violence were accommodated</li> <li>▪ <b>378</b> households with dependent children lived in homeless accommodation</li> <li>▪ <b>46%</b> of children in the Council's emergency accommodation were involved with Social Services (in 2005)</li> <li>▪ <b>67</b> households including a pregnant woman were accommodated</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adults with other problems</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>440</b> people with drug abuse problems were accommodated (21% of the total)</li> <li>▪ <b>471</b> people with alcohol problems were accommodated (22% of the total)</li> <li>▪ <b>591</b> adult offenders were accommodated (29% of the total)</li> <li>▪ <b>274</b> people who had slept rough in the past were accommodated</li> </ul>
<p><b>Young people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>342</b> 16-17 year olds lived in temporary or supported accommodation</li> <li>▪ <b>181</b> young people at risk (aged 16-25) were accommodated</li> <li>▪ <b>58</b> people with a history of care were accommodated</li> <li>▪ <b>80</b> teenage parents were accommodated</li> </ul>	<p><b>Vulnerable adults</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>72</b> people with learning disabilities were accommodated</li> <li>▪ <b>292</b> people with mental health problems were accommodated</li> <li>▪ <b>57</b> people with physical disabilities were accommodated</li> <li>▪ At least <b>30%</b> of those accommodated were involved with a statutory agency</li> </ul>

It is a testament to services in the City that the proportion of the city's population who experience severe housing problems is not huge. However, the cost of homelessness in financial and human terms is considerable.

## **2. What has changed since the 2003 Homelessness Review and Strategy?**

The most significant change is the adoption of the partnership approach with an emphasis on the prevention of homelessness. This has seen us move from advocacy which focuses on referrals to seeking to address what is needed to sustain the person in the community (see [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf) for the full progress report on the 2003 Action Plan).

Three major changes occurred that have helped to create this change:

- The Homelessness Act 2002 and the requirement for Councils to act strategically to prevent homelessness
- The Supporting People (SP) programme replaced the Housing Benefit-based funding regime for supported housing. SP contracts with accommodation and support providers are based on strategic planning, and have been critical in helping to achieve the aims of the 2003 Strategy.
- The creation of Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), the Council's Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and the Strategic Housing Service (SHS), and subsequent restructuring of the Homeless Service. This has allowed the SHS to take a city-wide strategic lead, and led to YHN becoming a national exemplar for their provision of support to vulnerable people, as seen in their winning the contracts for the running of Stepping Stones, Inline and the Family Intervention Project (FIP). The strong performance of YHN has provided a benchmark for other social landlords in the city and facilitated the development of nationally acclaimed prevention protocols.

We have learnt a lot since the production of our first Homelessness Strategy in 2003. There have been many positive outcomes, and this was recognised last year when we were given the title of Regional Homelessness Champions for 2007/8.

### **What has been achieved? The most significant outcomes are:**

- No B&B used since December 2006. In 2006/7, 1232 days were used, with an average spend of £50,000 pa between 2002 and 2006
- Increase in prevention - homeless acceptances down 38% from 939 in 2004/5, to 584 in 2006/7
- Number of homeless 16-17 year olds down 65% from 209 in 2003/4 to 75 in 2006/7
- BVPI 213 prevention cases – increased from 405 in 2005/6, to 1758 in 2007/8
- Low levels of rough sleeping – 2008 formal count found 2 people
- Housing Association nominations – on target in 2007/8 for the first time
- Increased bed spaces in temporary accommodation - 689 in 2004, to 750 in 2008

- Increased floating support - 529 units of support in 2004, to 860 in 2008
- Increased number of people moving to settled accommodation - 284 in 2005/6, increased to 340 in 2007/8
- Improved facilities e.g. YHN's Stepping Stones hostel, Crisis Skylight Centre, BBHA new hostel, Cyrenians' self build hostel
- No shared rooms in any hostels by end of 2008
- Over £4m of capital funds attracted since 2003 for temporary / supported housing and other building projects

### **What has not been achieved?**

- Despite good progress on maintaining low levels of rough sleeping we have not developed lasting solutions to chronic exclusion, to meet the needs of people who are not able to take up or sustain a stay in the accommodation currently on offer
- Reducing the rate of eviction from supported housing – this is still a significant issue
- Not yet significantly increased the number of people who move -on from supported housing to sustainable independent accommodation
- Still to develop alternative options where the Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation
- Still need to secure mainstream services for children of homeless families
- Need to improve the quality of all buildings, and particularly the Council's own homelessness provision
- Other issues still to be addressed:
  - embedding strategic leadership for the sector
  - improved governance
  - transparent standards for all sectors
  - service standards for the council's homelessness provision
  - clear and transparent targets
  - transparent monitoring

## Case studies

The case studies below provide some illustrations of the impact of the last 5 years' work:

**Mr and Mrs Smith** bought their council house in 2004 for £45,000. They became homeless in 2008 following the repossession of their home after they had amassed debts of £160,000. They now face moving to a less popular area and the children moving schools. They borrowed significant amounts against the value of their home which they could not afford to repay. Understandably the family were in disarray and their main focus has been on their accommodation however there are likely to be other needs particularly for the children who have been affected. They did not receive early advice or warnings about borrowing.

**Barry** lived in temporary accommodation for a number of years, due to the nature of his work: mostly live-in hotel jobs, and outdoor education courses. Barry and his partner ran a successful outdoor education business for a number of years but when the relationship broke up, so did the business partnership. Barry lost his job, his home, and his car. After spending some time rough sleeping, Barry was offered a hostel place in Newcastle. Having lost everything that was important to him, Barry's confidence and self-esteem were very low. He found out about Skylight through a notice on the hostel notice board. He initially engaged in an art class. Since then, Barry has tried a number of sessions in the centre including; IT, yoga, salsa and contemporary dance, car and bike maintenance. Barry's main aim was to start up a business again, and Skylight offered the facilities and support to do this. In the meantime, he felt he needed to find some paid employment, and applied for help through the Transitional Spaces Project (TSP), which provided job coaching, and practical and financial help with moving out of a hostel into private accommodation. He found work as a Support Worker for adults with learning disabilities. He moved into independent accommodation, supported through TSP and Skylight, and has now moved again, joined a sailing club, and applied for a Business Start-up Grant to get his business going again. He now provides support to others at Skylight.

**Dave** was homeless for many years, moving from the street to a homeless hostel and back because of his drug and alcohol problem. After several failed attempts he decided he had to change, and took up the offer of a rehab placement. Coming back to the city 6 months later, clean and not drinking heavily, Dave became a service user representative for drug and alcohol users. Now, 3 years later, works as a support worker for homeless and socially excluded people who need help to get into the services that helped him to transform his life.

**Samantha** was being threatened with eviction for rent arrears on her YHN tenancy. She is deaf and did not want to respond to housing staff about the arrears. An Advice and Support Worker contacted her and she agreed to talk over the problem. A benefit check led to her being advised to apply for Disability Living Allowance. She agreed to be represented by a solicitor at court, and a suspended possession order was made. Having increased her income, she has been able to keep up with the payment plan agreed with the housing office, and the threat of eviction has receded.

**Jayne** has four children, one a 20 year old with a baby, and three teenagers, one with very poor health and one struggling with drug problems. She was living in a privately rented flat. She complained to the landlord who had refused to do any repairs and switched off the gas, but to no avail. An advice agency brought in a surveyor to do a full assessment of the flat, and the report listed numerous serious faults, mainly to do with the electrics, damp, and dilapidated fittings. Jayne stopped paying the rent and was being taken to court. Jayne moved to another flat, disappointed that she could not get help with her problems.

**Terry** slept rough for months after leaving prison. He went to the day centres in the town, and staff from the ACE team tried to get him to accept some help. He is an illegal drug user on top of his methadone prescription and was worried about having to stay in a large place with lots of other people, as he has previously been involved in violence in large hostels. So he wouldn't accept the many offers of a bed in a hostel, even though his drug use and mental health was getting worse. However, after 5 months support by the ACE team Terry moved into a smaller hostel and is still a resident.

**Carol** had mental health problems and had attempted suicide while she was staying in temporary accommodation. It was a particularly poor environment for her. She had tried to get a move into her own home through Your Choice Homes but without success. With the support of the Pathways Advice and Support Worker she has moved into her own tenancy. She has also rebuilt links with her family, and is coping well in her own tenancy.

### 3. The current picture of homelessness in Newcastle

#### What we know about the scale of homelessness – the broad picture

The legislative split between priority and non-priority homeless people skews the data on homelessness. This split can confuse the analysis as there is an overlap between the 2 systems. The Housing Toolkit and the Gateway (see Governance section) will facilitate stronger data to identify the effectiveness of preventative interventions and housing options.

#### Statutory indicators – demand for support to meet homelessness and housing need

The introduction of the prevention agenda in Newcastle has resulted in a dramatic reduction in both applications as homeless and statutory duty acceptances. The homelessness service was restructured in September 2004. However this success must not be viewed in isolation and is not an indication of a fall in demand for assistance. When all requests for assistance are taken into account, demand for help from potentially homeless people has actually risen:

	2003-4	2004-5	2005-6	2006-7	2007-8
<b>Advice enquiries</b>	N/A	72	1511	812	836
<b>Homeless applications</b>	2424	2595	984	829	746
<b>Duty cases</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1708
<b>Total demand</b>	<b>2424</b>	<b>2667</b>	<b>2495</b>	<b>1641</b>	<b>3290</b>
<b>Homeless acceptances</b>	1038	906	610	584	484

Duty cases were not recorded separately until partway through 2006-7

#### Statutory and non-statutory demand and use of homeless accommodation

Newcastle Homeless Liaison Project (NHLP) collects data which relates to activity within temporary and supported accommodation for homeless people, and referrals from agencies for clients seeking accommodation. This shows that the number of people admitted to temporary accommodation in the city fell, despite there being an additional 60 beds.

#### Temporary / supported accommodation use

	2003-4	2004-5	2005-6	2006-7	2007-8
<b>Admits</b>	2418	2056	2083	2114	2085
<b>Discharges</b>	2089	2006	1996	2120	2132
<b>Referrals</b>	3313	3872	4872	4894	3750

#### Who is using the accommodation and where are they from?

NHLP data shows that the proportion coming from outside Newcastle fell from 40% to 23% for all supported housing, and from 54% to 29% for direct access (DA) accommodation. This was in line with the aims of the 2003 Strategy.

No. and % of beds going to non-Newcastle residents	Supported housing		Direct access	
	Number	%	Number	%
2003	786	40%	454	54%
2004	713	35%	360	45%
2005	688	35%	356	47%
2006	655	31%	314	40%
2007	482	23%	213	29%

The next table shows a corresponding increase in emergency accommodation which is taken up by households referred by HAC, again inline with the 2003 strategy:

Emergency beds offered to HAC	2006 average	Jan – Mar 2007	Apr – June 2007	July – Sept 2007	Oct – Dec 2007
HAC 1 <sup>st</sup> option	66%	86%	82%	84%	85%
HAC admits	41%	60%	62%	69%	73%

### Reasons for Homelessness

In Newcastle, the causes of homelessness for all enquirers have been recorded since 2003-4, and not just for those who are accepted as being owed a statutory duty. An analysis of the main causes of homelessness shows a fairly consistent picture. However it is important not to concentrate solely on the main causes, and to recognise that trends in relation to the other causes of homelessness need to be explored. For example, the numbers of acceptances for people losing their homes because of either rent arrears from the private sector or mortgage arrears have always been very low, but are nonetheless important to note. To provide effective housing options we also need to better understand the secondary reasons for homelessness e.g. why does someone get into debt or is asked to leave home.

Below is a table of the main reasons for homelessness from all types of contact at HAC.

Top 5 reasons for homelessness - all contacts									
2003-04	No/%	2004-05	No/%	2005-06	No/%	*2006-07	No/%	2007-08	No/%
Left parents & friends	1238 (46.8)	Parents & friends	1018 (39.4)	Parents & friends	1020 (42.3)	Parents & friends	592 (45.0)	Parents & friends	1066 (34.9)
Violence	236 (8.9)	Loss of private rented	281 (10.9)	Loss of private rented	253 (10.5)	Loss of private rented	213 (16.2)	Loss of private rented	225 (7.4)
Loss of private rented accom <sup>7</sup>	192 (7.3)	Violence	244 (9.4)	Violence	162 (6.7)	Violence	121 (0.1)	Violence	209 (6.8)
Non violent relationship break-down	141 (5.3)	Non VRB	165 (6.4)	Non VRB	128 (5.3)	Non VRB	59 (4.5)	Non VRB	195 (6.4)
Rent arrears	129 (4.9)	NASS	105 (4.1)	Harassment	114 (4.7)	Mortgage arrears	48 (3.6)	Mortgage arrears	48 (1.6)

\*As above duty figures for 2006-07 were not recorded.

## Prevention

The table below shows the considerable increase in prevention cases since 2005. However these need to continue to develop.

<b>BVPI 213 Preventions</b>	<b>2005-6</b>	<b>2006-7</b>	<b>2007-8</b>
	405	642	1758

It is expected that as affordable available property becomes scarcer and the “credit crunch” takes effect prevention work will become even more essential. Debt is not currently specifically recorded but this needs to be addressed as national and local anecdotal evidence suggest it is increasingly important.

## Access to settled accommodation

The table below shows an increase in people progressing to settled housing. This increase is attributable to the introduction of the Pathways, and of the Pathways Advice and Support Workers (ASWs). The rise in private rented accommodation is linked to the Private Rented Project and the introduction of the Rent Deposit Scheme and the Private Rented ASW.

<b>Move on from homeless accommodation</b>	<b>2005-6</b>	<b>2006-7</b>	<b>2007-8</b>
<b>Move on to a council tenancy (YHN)</b>	207	207	232
<b>Move on to Housing Assoc tenancy</b>	30	30	25
<b>Move on to private rented tenancy</b>	47	65	83
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>340</b>

YHN houses proportionally twice as many homeless households as Housing Associations (HAs), and are pro-active in doing this. The major HAs have signed up to the Pathways and Prevention of Eviction and Repeat Homelessness Protocol, and have agreed to match YHN’s performance on rehousing homeless households. The table below shows the improvement in HA nominations performance, but this will not meet the expected future demands. Due to the limited availability of public housing we need to increase the number from the 51 people who secured private rented accommodation through the rent deposit scheme between Jan 2007 and April 2008.

### % of council nominations to housing associations

	Places for People	Nomad E5	Home	Riverside NE	Cheviot
<b>Dec 2006</b>	2 %	8%	19%	26%	32%
<b>Dec 2007</b>	23%	64%	45%	81%	52%

### Performance in homelessness work

The table below shows the Council's performance in relation to all the BVPIs for homelessness. The one BVPI with no significant positive trend is the number of homeless households requiring temporary accommodation, which leads to concerns about how the Council is going to achieve the Government target of a 50% reduction in this figure by 2010.

BVPIS	2005-6	2006-7	2007-8
<b>BV183a Average length of stay in B&amp;B</b>	0.6wks	1.6wks	0wks
<b>BV183b Average length of stay in hostels</b>	10.2wks	9.4wks	5.1 wks
<b>BV 202 Average number of rough sleepers</b>	0 to 10	5 to 10	10 to 15
<b>BV 203 change in the no. of families in accomm</b>	35 (+3%)	34.5 (-1%)	33.3 (-4%)
<b>BV 213 Preventing homelessness cases</b>	405 (3.43)	642 5.3%)	1758 (15%)
<b>BV 214 Repeat homelessness cases</b>	31 (5%)	28 (5%)	13 (3%)

\*During 2006-7, the criteria for this BVPI changed to exclude council temporary accommodation

The Council's successful record in meeting the Government's targets was recognised by the award of Regional Homelessness Champions for 2007/8

#### **4. The scale of homelessness in Newcastle –client group summaries**

These summaries are drawn from an analysis of the data showing the last 3 years' homeless applications and advice cases for each group, and NHLP data for referrals into and discharges from temporary and supported housing in the city. As well as the views of service users, the Housing Strategy Review Groups, a number of strategic groups, and two large events held to discuss the Homelessness Review.

- **Children and Families**

Families with children make up the majority (79% in 2006-7) of the households for whom the Council has a statutory homeless duty. Most of their accommodation needs are met by the Council. As a result of the success of prevention activities, the number of families accepted as homeless shows a substantial decrease from 486 households in 2003-04 to 379 in 2007-08. However, there is concern over the proportions of families becoming homeless from:

- The private rented sector
- Owner occupation - mortgage problems show an increase in recent years. In 2003/4 this accounted for an average of 1% of cases in 2006/7 it has risen to an average of almost 4%
- BME groups - around 30% of the families with 3 or more children come from BME communities.

Families with significant support needs tend to be those headed by teenage parents, or parents fleeing domestic violence, but there are also significant numbers of families with drug or alcohol-related needs, or mental health problems. Support is needed during and after a stay in temporary accommodation and in virtually all cases homelessness is a symptom of a range of problems rather than a causal factor.

#### **Children and Families action points:**

- Improve the quality of temporary accommodation particularly the council's own provision
- Evaluate the need for family centre and dispersed accommodation
- Increase supply of family-sized accommodation, especially 4/5 bedroomed properties
- Build on the success of YHN's Family Intervention Project and Children's Services Changing Trax and Parenting programmes and the links into the emerging Think Families agenda to improve the outcomes for families
- Secure mainstream funding for improved services for homeless children

- Improve play facilities at HAC, and safety for children within the flats at Hill Court
- Improve the use of the Common Assessment Framework to support homelessness prevention in the city
- Develop positive interventions for families who are deemed intentionally homeless
- Further develop service user involvement and provide training for people involved in service user participation
- Ensuring that there is sufficient provision support for families moving into their own home

- **Families experiencing domestic violence**

The key issues raised in relation to this group focused on the quality of accommodation, the need to develop more prevention options, help needed to move on to settled housing and to sustain tenancies, and the needs of women with other problems such as drugs and alcohol, a group which currently cannot easily be accommodated in refuges or elsewhere.

**Families experiencing domestic violence action points:**

- Develop options for women fleeing domestic violence whose needs (including drug and alcohol problems) are too high for existing refuge provision

- **Young people, young offenders, care leavers and teenage parents**

Homelessness amongst young people is a key issue for Newcastle, for under-18s and those aged up to 25. Young people aged 16 and 17 who experience homelessness or other severe housing problems are quite likely to have a range of other problems, including offending, experience of violence or other abuse, problems relating to teenage pregnancy, drug use, a history of care. HAC has been working with the Youth Offending Team, Leaving Care Team and Inline to try to ensure that the housing needs of young people are met in a planned way avoiding homelessness. This has been effective as seen in the following:

- 50% reduction in care leavers requiring temporary accommodation between 2004-5 and 2006-7
- No young person was remanded into custody in 2007-8 because of a lack of accommodation
- The number of young offenders without satisfactory accommodation has fallen from 8% to less than 2% of the YOT caseload
- The number of under-18s making homeless applications has fallen by 278% whilst the number seeking advice and help has increased

- Homelessness amongst teenage parents aged under 18 has reduced, but there has been an increase in homelessness amongst parents who are aged between 18 and 25.
- No young people under 18 have been placed in B&B by the homeless service since December 2006

However some young people may still be placed in B&B by Children's Services; this remains an issue to be addressed within the city.

### **Young people, young offenders, care leavers and teenage parents' action points**

- Develop emergency and longer term supported housing options for young people with complex needs, challenging behaviour, and drug or alcohol problems
- Develop supported housing options for young mothers and for teenage couples with children
- Build on the Youth Voice educational and peer review accreditation programmes
- Review working arrangements between Strategic Housing, YHN, and Children's Services, and use of the Common Assessment Framework and Integrated Youth Strategy
- Develop a protocol to meet young people's care needs where these cannot be met through supported housing provision
- Review assessments of support needs for young people moving into independence

#### **• Single homeless people and rough sleepers**

Single homeless people make up 98% (4,500+ people) of the referrals to the NHLP into temporary accommodation which go through NHLP. Two people were found on our official rough sleepers count on 29/4/08. On average 6-10 people are discussed at the weekly case management meetings.

It is also recognised that unsupported vulnerable people coming from outside the city need assistance to either return to accommodation in their home area, or to find suitable housing within the city which does not reduce availability for people who are from Newcastle.

A high proportion of those presenting as rough sleeping have an offending background (42% last year), alcohol problems (39%), and/or drug problems (29%). We also know that people who have been rough sleepers are hard to engage.

## Single homeless people and rough sleepers' action points

- Reduce numbers leaving supported housing with no address to go to (619 in 2006)
- Maintain the increased numbers moving to settled accommodation (284 in 2005 increased to 340 in 2007)
- Reduce the number of evictions from supported housing (312 in 2006)
- Maintain low level of rough sleeping through multi-agency case management
- Develop co-ordinated and consistent response to rough sleeping by all agencies particularly drug, alcohol, mental health services and Safe Newcastle partners
- Increase support for adults facing chronic exclusion including those in HMOs
- Ensure that there are routes into appropriate accommodation for couples, and men and women with complex needs
- Work in partnership to bring services together to help rough sleepers sustain the accommodation they are offered, and access other services to address health, offending, access to children, and other problems

### • **Drug and alcohol users**

Drug and alcohol users are over-represented amongst homeless people in Newcastle, as elsewhere. The snapshot survey carried out for the Drugs, Alcohol and Housing Strategy in 2006 found 566 drug and alcohol users needing help to resolve a housing problem. However, a third of all those approaching Newcastle agencies for help do not come originally from Newcastle.

Homeless drug or alcohol users are not all single, and many have additional needs, primarily offending histories, mental health problems, or experience of violence. A proportion (around a fifth) has slept rough. Small numbers have children (around 8% of the total each year, about 35 households, in relation to drugs, and around 25 households in relation to alcohol).

Drug users represent about a third (and increasing, over the 3 years) of the people evicted from supported housing. Recent work with rough sleepers has identified 6-10 chronically excluded people with long term alcohol problems who sleep rough and use hostels intermittently and there is little in terms of proactive services to engage this group.

## Drug and alcohol users' action points

- Develop proactive services to address mental health, drug and alcohol problems
- Develop accommodation provision for people wanting to stay clean/dry
- Develop accommodation provision for people with a dual diagnosis
- Continue with joint commissioning with Supporting People and the Drugs Support Unit

### • Offenders

The absolute number of offenders seeking help through NHLP has steadily grown, whilst the percentage of referrals from offenders compared to the total has remained relatively constant, as has the number of offenders leaving supported housing in the city. In 2006-7, just under 1/3 of the offenders staying in the city originally came from outside Newcastle. High numbers of those with an offending background also present with a drug (40%), alcohol (46%), or mental health problem (15%), or have slept rough (19%). Those with an offending background make up over half of those evicted from homeless accommodation.

## Offenders' action points

- Work with GONE to implement the re-launched HARP Protocol
- Identify better routes into settled housing for offenders
- Improve co-ordination with probation, prisons and support providers to increase the number of offenders maintaining independence
- Reviewing the way that offenders access advice which can help to protect existing tenancies during a short stay in prison

### • BME households

Newcastle's population is diversifying. Between 1991 and 2001 Newcastle's BME community grew by nearly 60% to 6.9%. Newcastle attracts over 3,750 international students each year and is home to over 5,000 asylum seekers. Following European Union expansion Newcastle is benefiting from thousands of economic migrant workers choosing to live in the city.

Requests for help for homeless and potentially homeless households come largely from families with dependent children. BME households account for around 20% of homeless applications from families with children, and around a quarter of those with 3 or more children, and a slightly higher proportion in relation to acceptances. In recent years, demand has been rising for families moving from accommodation for asylum seekers, and for larger families.

Increasing need is also seen in relation to households not eligible for assistance, including those who are sleeping rough as a result of a lack of funds.

### **BME households' action points**

- increase our engagement with and understanding of the BME communities housing needs
- Achieve a year-on-year reduction in homelessness amongst BME households
- Maintain low level of homelessness of refugees including people from the Home Office Legacy programme
- Better understand the issues faced by migrants when employment ends and use this information to inform our work on homelessness prevention
- Ensure that advice on housing options takes account of the specific issues and concerns of minority ethnic people

### **• People with mental health problems**

Homeless people with mental health problems represent a small but constant group. In 2007/8 32 (7%) of households accepted as in priority need at HAC had mental health as a primary or secondary reason and 299 (14%) of NHLP recorded discharges from supported accommodation in 2006 were recorded as having a mental health problem.

There are tensions over definitions of mental health problems and the subsequent responses e.g. it could be said that it is normal for a person to be depressed when homeless and that they are not mentally ill. There are 3 CPNs and an approved social worker seconded into housing services that provide assessments and support. These services are being reviewed to establish whether they are correctly configured and sufficient to meet needs.

We know that we need to improve our understanding of these problems and to considering commissioning effective outcomes that are not necessarily based on assessment and medicalised support. We can learn from services such as Trading Places that promote mental well being through employment and activities.

### **People with mental health problems' action points**

- Develop a better understanding of the relationship between mental health and accommodation needs and develop housing and support in response
- Complete the Mental Health Trust's review of seconded mental health services
- Review whether services can provide support at a lower level over a longer period of time
- Continue to focus on preventing homelessness for people leaving hospital
- Provide better liaison and joint training to help to implement protocols and policies and to develop more early intervention work to sustain tenancies

#### **• People with learning disabilities**

Again there are tensions over definitions. Learning disabilities are not recorded in the Government's homelessness records and the NHLP returns show that in 2006 73 people, 3% of discharges were recorded as having a learning disability. However, only a very small proportion of these will be accepted as being in need by Adult Services.

### **People with learning disabilities' action points**

- Investigate the provision of multi-disciplinary services for those people who are the most chaotic and fall within the remit of a number of services
- Strengthen links between the Learning Disability and Homelessness sectors to improve shared evidence and outcomes for people with learning disabilities in housing need
- Develop better information materials for service users and agencies

#### **• People with physical disabilities**

Very few homeless applicants (under 10 a year) are accepted as homeless on account of a physical health or disability, and small numbers of those seeking help through NHLP have a physical disability around 60 a year are accommodated. Significantly over a third of those approaching NHLP for help have an alcohol problem as well as a physical disability.

There are no specialist housing facilities for people in this group. Most of our supported accommodation does not meet the Disability Discrimination Act standards and this remains the outstanding issue for the Homelessness Strategy.

### **People with physical disabilities' action points**

- Seek funding to make all temporary accommodation DDA compliant and that more units are made available to wheelchair users and others with limited mobility

- **Gypsies and travellers**

The Government is keen to encourage innovative solutions for addressing the shortage of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. The Council has commissioned a sub-regional response to the needs of gypsies and travellers to assess requirements across local authority boundaries. The research is due to be completed September 2008.

### **Gypsies and travellers action points**

- Respond to changes in legislation and usage, and identify any housing issues emerging from research.

- **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)**

It is not easy to identify the need for services or incidence of homelessness amongst LGBT people, as sexual orientation is not often identified. One service provider, Outpost, works with young gay people and over half of its referrals come from people from outside the city.

### **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)action points**

- Develop processes to evaluate sexual orientation when allocating and developing housing
- Ensure where appropriate sexual orientation is covered in support planning and training
- Tenancy and licence agreements should prohibit homophobic behaviour
- Review LGBT couples accommodation options

- **Sex workers**

Many women who are involved in the sex industry are working in order to sustain an addiction or a chaotic lifestyle, or are trapped in a violent or abusive relationship. Their lifestyle can make it difficult for them to engage with services. Recent action research on sex work by the GAP (Girls Are Proud) group has identified some of the key issues as: experience of high levels of violence, Class A drug use and lack of engagement with health services. The research also found that it was likely that some women had become involved in sex work to avoid sleeping rough, and noted the emerging of failed asylum seekers resorting to sex work. The research found that 41% were staying in a hostel or B&B, and 21% considered themselves to have no address.

### **Sex workers' action points**

- Improve access to provision for women working in the sex industry with complex problems
- Improve information about the needs of BME and asylum seeker sex workers

### **• HIV/AIDS/Advanced/Late Stage**

There are around 20 referrals to NHLP and 10 admissions into supported housing each year. Social Services works with a rather large number of people – around 600 – and issues identified for this group are the unsuitability of hostel accommodation for some people, and the difficulties faced by failed asylum seekers with this condition.

### **HIV/AIDS/Advanced/Late Stage action points**

- Improve routes into settled accommodation

### **• Ex-service personnel**

Very few ex-services personnel become homeless and seek help in Newcastle, and the number has reduced over the last 3 years from around 11 to around 4 a year. Newcastle will need to respond to a possible change in the law which will give people leaving the forces the right to have the place where they have been stationed as creating a local connection.

### **Ex-service personnel action points**

- Consider the research to be published by York University on preventing homelessness amongst ex-services personnel

### **• Older people**

Relatively few people aged 60 and above contact either HAC or NHLP for help to resolve housing problems. HAC sees around 15 people aged over 60 each year and NHLP is approached by around 50 a year. Small numbers have needs relating to offending, physical violence, or mental or physical health problems, around 20% had problems relating to alcohol.

### **Older people action points**

- Carry out a survey of needs of people aged over 60 in the supported sector
- Maintain increase in moves to sheltered accommodation

### **• Generic action points applying to all client groups**

There are common themes to the improvements identified for the individual groups as much of what happens is governed by centralised systems e.g. allocations, referral etc. The points

below reflect this and our aspiration to have common processes that make it easier for clients and agencies to secure and sustain accommodation.

- Reduce the rate of evictions from all types of housing
- Improve the quality of temporary accommodation, including private HMOs
- Increase the rate of successful move-ons from supported housing into independence
- Develop a plan for helping unsupported vulnerable people coming from outside the city
- Evaluate the need for pre-tenancy training
- Build on existing work to help homeless people to access employability skills
- Further development of meaningful activities for all service users
- Maintain preventative initiatives e.g. sanctuary scheme, Family Intervention project etc
- Create opportunities to increase general needs/intermediate move on to provide accommodation and support designed to meet the needs of vulnerable people
- Improve access to housing advice to increase early interventions
- Improve the understanding of the eligibility criteria for council housing so all agencies supporting people ensure their clients can cope with a tenancy
- Work with private landlords to promote access to and the issuing of longer tenancies
- Review risk assessment and support assessment processes for supported housing, to help them to access housing to meet their needs, and reduce evictions

## **5. Homelessness services in Newcastle: Assessment, Advice and Prevention Services**

Newcastle has a good range of homelessness services both in terms of the quantity and quality of the provision. In terms of the homelessness services themselves, the improvements which have been noted throughout this review are based on the hard work of all our partners. We are not complacent, however, and this section describes current provision and notes suggested improvements.

### **Council homelessness and homelessness prevention services**

The main homelessness services provided by the City Council are based at the Housing Advice Centre (HAC). Services provided there to respond to enquiries from people who are homeless, may become homeless, or have other housing problems are set out below:

**Homelessness Prevention Officers (HPOs):** a team of 8 HPOs responds to all enquiries including out of hours and from people in prison, hospital, care, or in the forces. The initial aim is to give advice to resolve a problem if possible, or making an appointment or a referral to another service if needed. The Prevention options on offer are described later. A homelessness application is taken where it is clear that homelessness cannot be prevented or where the applicant wishes to make a homeless application. For people not in priority need, help is given to identify suitable emergency or other supported housing, and to take steps towards accessing settled accommodation.

In 2006-7, HPOs saw a total of **1641** households, gave housing advice to **812** households, and accepted **584** households accepted as homeless. Homelessness was prevented in **252** cases. In 2007-8, 1511 households were, and homelessness has been prevented for **500+** households.

**Tenancy Relations Service (TRS):** In 2007, TRS saw 580 tenants and 111 owner occupiers and tenants threatened with repossession. The two Tenancy Relations Officers offer:

- advice
- help to mediate or negotiate with landlords on rents and repairs
- court representation in possession proceedings
- action to prevent illegal evictions

The TRS is also part of a court duty representation system which is coordinated by the Newcastle Law Centre. **1102** households were represented by the Newcastle Scheme in the 2007/8. This is an increase of **300** on the previous year. During the last six months, the TRS has successfully represented people in **22** mortgage repossession cases.

**Newcastle Homelessness Liaison Project (NHLP):** Is a clearing house for accommodation vacancies available to agencies dealing with homeless people in Newcastle. In 2006-7, NHLP received **4892** referrals, and noted **2119** people leaving temporary accommodation in Newcastle (70.5% from Newcastle). NHLP data is collated into regular reports about trends in homelessness within the city. NHLP supports the Newcastle Homelessness Forum, which meets quarterly and provides a website with regularly updated information at [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf)

NHLP also facilitates a monthly nomination meeting, which looks at individual cases for example of people moving out of hospital, prison, Young Offender Institutes, or emergency accommodation). The aim is to enable a planned approach to securing accommodation, so reducing the occurrence of crisis homelessness.

**Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Project (NHPP):** Started as a short-term Neighbourhood Renewal Fund project funded between 2005-8 which aims to prevent homelessness by developing partnerships, policies, protocols and practices, which promote joint working and long term change. The list of initiatives developed by NHPP can be found below. In 2008 the project became funded through the Strategic Housing Services budget.

**Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Network:** NHPP established the Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Network in 2006 and currently has 34 signed-up members and a total of 82 organisations involved. The Network develops, promotes and consults on prevention initiatives (see Prevention Section for details). Further work is needed to involve more staff from social housing providers, and from non-housing bodies such as education, health, and youth work, so that more action can be taken to intervene at a much earlier stage.

## **Voluntary sector housing advice**

The following agencies provide housing advice, some as specialists and others providing general advice which covers housing:

### Specialist housing advice agencies

- Shelter North East Housing Aid Centre

### General advice agencies which cover housing advice

- Citizens' Advice Bureaux
- Newcastle Law Centre
- University of Northumbria Student Law Office
- Gateshead Community Legal Advice Centre
- Solicitors (3 registered with CLS for housing)

A large number of other agencies that work with vulnerable people carry out some level of housing advice as part of other work. The Homelessness Prevention Network has shown the potential for increasing the effectiveness of this advice by developing a city wide approach as seen in the Pathways and Prevention from Eviction protocols.

## **Preventing homelessness in Newcastle**

### **Current activities**

There is a significant amount of homelessness prevention work being carried out in Newcastle. This is a summary of action currently being led by the Strategic Housing Service, and by other agencies. The successes in preventing homelessness are attributable to the wide range of actions described below. There has been no one simple solution rather it is the cumulative affect of these actions.

### Strategic Housing Service (SHS)

The table below lists the client-centred prevention options provided or under consideration by the SHS, shown as a checklist against prevention options recommended by CLG:

CLG recommended prevention options	Available	Considered
Home visits in all cases	All 16/17s	Yes
Sanctuary type schemes.	Yes	
Early warning systems with housing providers	Yes	
Leaving prison	Yes	
Mediation carried out by staff	Yes	Strengthen
Private sector coordinator resource	Yes	Strengthen
Formal external mediation	No	Yes
Other landlord incentives	Yes	
Frontline homeless prevention fund	Yes	
Leaving hospital	Yes	
Rent deposit scheme	No	No
Prevention of homelessness via housing allocations schemes.	Yes	
Use of Discretionary Housing Payments homelessness service	No	Strengthen
Formal referrals to agencies e.g. CAB, financial advice.	Yes	
Rent bond scheme	Yes	
Close working links with Housing Benefit	Yes	
Leaving armed forces	No	No
Active referrals to floating support	Yes	
Home visits in some cases	Yes	
Use of Discretionary Housing Payments via Housing Benefit	Yes	
Protocols for people leaving institutions	Yes	

The next table shows the initiatives developed with our partners to prevent homelessness

- Prevention from Eviction and Repeat Homelessness Protocol (good practice - Shelter)
- Pathways to Independence (good practice - Homeless Link)
- Allocations policy changes and guidance on eligibility
- Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Project
- Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Network
- Rough Sleepers' initiative
- Homelessness Prevention Fund
- Nominations process for accessing Housing Associations
- Hospital Discharge and Homelessness Prevention Protocol (good practice – Shelter)
- Young Offenders' Housing and Resettlement Protocol (good practice – CLG Young Homelessness website)
- Temporary Accommodation Drug Management Protocol

- Drugs, Alcohol and Housing Strategy and Action Plan
- Rent Deposit Scheme
- Debt Rehabilitation scheme
- Common Referral Form for supported housing
- Clean Homes Protocol
- Sanctuary scheme
- Young persons meditation
- Peer Education – in all secondary schools and youth clubs
- Transitional Spaces scheme - £300,000 CLG incentives for people to secure employment and private rented accommodation
- Sanctuary scheme – funded by the Community Safety Partnership
- Adults facing Chronic Exclusion pilot - Cabinet Office pilot
- Family Intervention Project - Home Office pilot
- Training on the above for over 1,000 staff

### **Housing Options**

Newcastle aims to adopt a co-ordinated and comprehensive housing options approach to all tenures that will add the following to the above:

- To improve the co-ordination of services that are currently available but which might offer more customer-oriented services if they were better aligned. Within this remit particular focus will be given to:
  - Intermediate housing
  - Housing and employment opportunities
  - The use of private renting in meeting housing need
  - Pathways for vulnerable people
  - Financial advice involving money advice, debt, welfare advice, mortgage advice, accessing loans
  - Performance management (outcome monitoring and clear review mechanisms)

### **What more needs to be done - preventing homelessness**

The Strategic Housing Service has identified a number of areas in which homelessness prevention work could be improved. Our main emphasis is on reducing demand through early interventions and creating opportunities for positive change. In addition to the prevention

initiatives listed above we have begun publicising the services offered. We are also working to increase housing options in the private sector and to develop move on opportunities for vulnerable people. In 2006 Housing Quality Network mapped housing advice services and its key conclusions are included in the actions below:

### **Action points for assessment, advice and prevention options**

- Develop prevention options in the most effective locations to meet the changing causes of homelessness and changing housing market need including:
  - Develop early mediation initiatives
  - Develop use of the Common Assessment Framework to prevent homelessness
  - Improve access to debt advice, both for owner occupiers and for vulnerable tenants and evaluate the Debt Rehabilitation Fund
  - Build on links with Housing Benefit to include Discretionary Housing Payments
  - Improve the quality and extent of publicity of homelessness and housing options services
  - Build on the Prevention from Eviction and Repeat Homelessness Protocol to ensure that all agencies in Newcastle are co-ordinated to ensure that people receive early advice and support necessary to maintain independence
- Develop stronger performance management of the effectiveness of preventative initiatives
- Provide sector-wide training related to standards and targets
- Target services designed to help refugees with a pathway into settled housing
- Develop a corporate approach to debt management and ensure there are sufficient debt advice services available
- Provide pre-tenancy training for a range of service users, to include building the skills to help homeless people to move into employment
- Identify solutions to housing problems for migrant workers not entitled to seek public sector help, when their employment comes to an end
- Promote better standards of management in private rented sector, through information, training, and enforcement
- Provide incentives to landlords to provide good quality affordable accommodation, and build better links with landlords, and bring empty properties back into use
- Improve facilities at HAC

## **6. Homelessness services in Newcastle: temporary accommodation services**

The Council's 56 units of temporary accommodation sits within a wider resource of supported housing (see the diagram below) with over 750 beds designated for homeless people in Newcastle. These are provided by 12 agencies in a range of provision from large 50 bed hostels to small shared houses and self contained flats. All are predominantly funded by Supporting People and Housing Benefits. See [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf) for the service directory.

Our aim is to co-ordinate the sector to achieve the best outcomes for people at risk of homelessness. The Governance and New Challenges sections describe the means by which we facilitate this. Our success in stopping the use of B&B and reducing rough sleeping is strongly linked to effective co-ordination. The Council's accommodation sits within a much wider resource of supported housing (see diagram below), and we to make sure that people access the most appropriate accommodation to meet their needs, enabling them to move through a pathway to sustainable independent living.

Newcastle already has the lowest level of Temporary Accommodation (56 units) of all the core cities and the Council continues to strive to meet the CLG's target to reduce the amount by 50% in 2010. To put this in perspective, the CLG target, which is based on a snapshot of use on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004, allows Wansbeck to have 13 times as much accommodation per head of population.

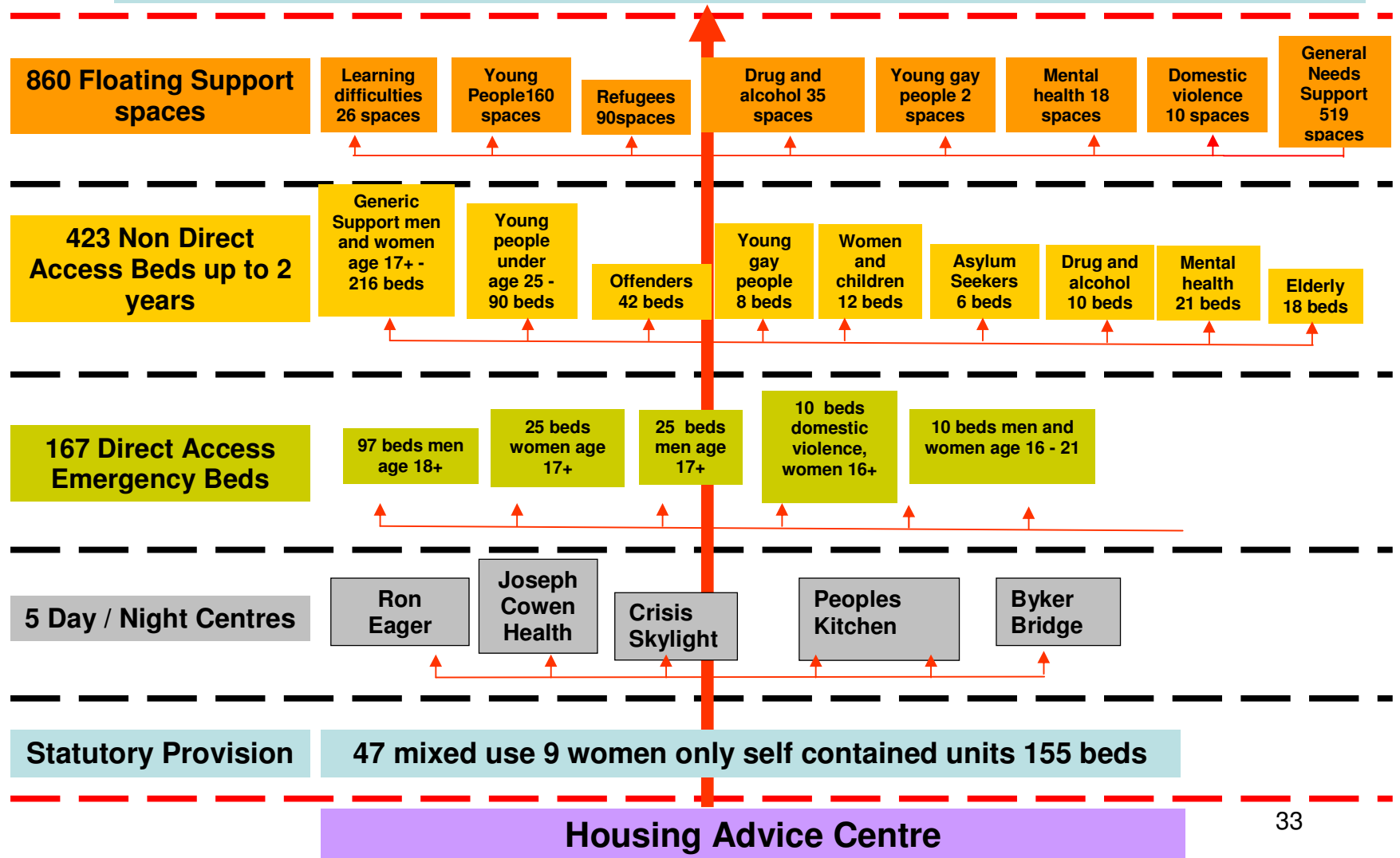
The Council has a vision for developing its temporary accommodation provision to meet a wider range of needs beyond homelessness and to meet the temporary accommodation needs of all of the Council, which includes Children's and Adult Services. The aim being that accommodation is provided as part of a range of services that address the problems that lead to homelessness.

The CLG's Places of Change programme has led to an aspiration to drive up standards in terms of both physical provision, and facilities for helping people to move on, to build independence, to gain employment, and to reduce social exclusion overall. The Strategic Housing Service is leading the sector in developing a holistic approach to meeting the

complex needs of people at risk of homelessness. This means both addressing problems and creating opportunities for change by aligning accommodation, employment, care, support and health provision.

# PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT 2008

## Independent Living



### **Council accommodation: Hill Court and New Bridge Street (NBS)**

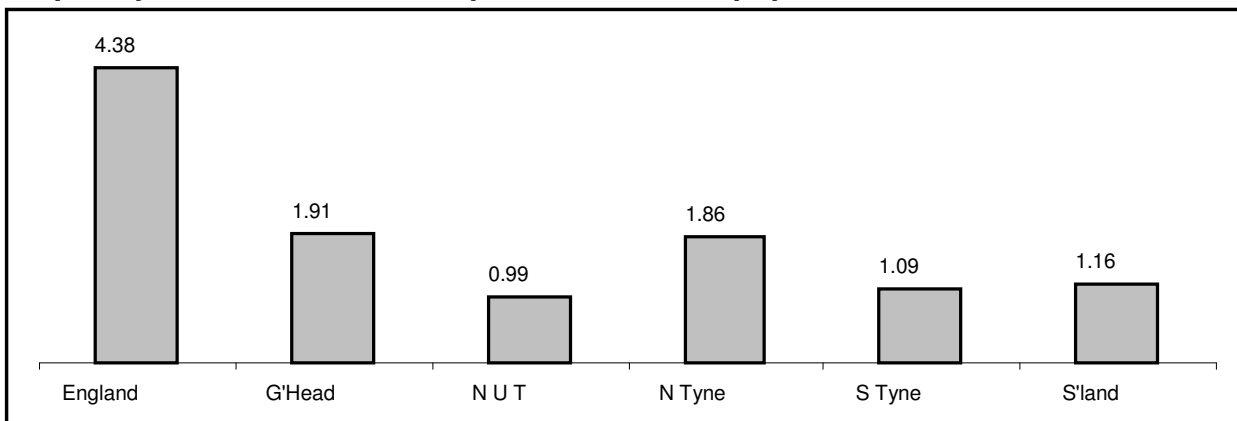
Neither Hill Court or NBS were purpose-built and the accommodation has been adapted from what was 1950s general needs flats and a private house respectively. In both cases it is recognised that the services provided are good, the buildings do not meet modern standards.

At Hill Court there are 47 self contained flats (133 beds) in three adjacent five storey blocks. The size of the accommodation ranges from bedsits to 3 bedroom flats. On site there is a crèche, after school club, laundry facilities and a fenced-in play area. There is a multi-agency staff team, which offers a range of support to all service users and their families including outreach support when they move on. The team includes housing support workers, a health visitor, social worker (mental health), community psychiatric nurse, and children-centred workers. The team works very closely with a range of partners including social care, Connexions, Probation and schools. There is also a weekly GP surgery, and all service users who are not registered with a GP are encouraged to join the local practice.

At NBS there are 9 bedsits (30 beds) which can accommodate 9 households. The rooms can be used by single women, or women with children aged up to 12 for boys and 16 for girls. All residents share communal areas including kitchen/dining facilities and washing/bathing facilities. The building is DDA accessible, and one bedsit can accommodate a woman or child who uses a wheelchair. A number of recreational activities for women and children take place, including trips out, swimming, bowling, visiting galleries. A support group for current and past residents meets on a weekly basis. A breakfast club is held every day. The multi-agency staff team from Hill Court regularly visit the hostel and provide support to all service users

The table below shows Newcastle's relatively low use of temporary accommodation, which is the lowest of the core cities and in the region. This demonstrates the effectiveness of Newcastle's prevention initiatives. However this low level of use will make it difficult to make further reductions needed to meet the Government's target of reducing temporary accommodation use by 50% based on a snapshot of use at the 31/12/2004. The chart below compares Newcastle's temporary accommodation use to Tyne and Wear and the rest of England.

## Temporary accommodation use per 1,000 head of population 2007



Until 2007 over 90% of applicants the Council owed a statutory duty to were accommodated in its own temporary accommodation. The table below shows the decline in use in 2007/8 which illustrates the increase in access to the voluntary sector and the success of prevention initiatives particularly via YHN reducing the number of tenants presenting as homeless.

<b>Statutory temporary accommodation 56 units</b>	<b>2005-6</b>	<b>2006-7</b>	<b>2007-8</b>
Total number of placements	501	500	378
Number of singles/couples placements in TA under 18	74	106	75
Number of singles/couples placements in TA over 18	125	176	108
Number of families placed TA	195	211	182
Average stay in days	52	47	43
Move on to supported accommodation	40	51	84

### **Voluntary sector direct access supported accommodation**

There are 5 direct access hostels in Newcastle, providing a total of 149 beds. Direct access hostels provide food and shelter for single homeless people who do not have anywhere else to stay. Direct access refers to hostels that can be accessed immediately, in practice this rarely happens due to limited vacancies and it is also creates difficulties for equal opportunities and strategic planning. The Gateway will help us to provide fairer access to accommodation. See [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf) for a directory of provision in Newcastle.

### **Voluntary sector non direct access supported accommodation**

12 organisations currently provide 524 temporary supported accommodation beds designed to be for homeless people, most of it for single people.

In addition, the YWCA has two large buildings (not funded through Supporting People) which accommodate 176 men and women. YWCA does not aim to provide a homeless service, but will accommodate homeless people if they fit their criteria.

### **Move-on outcomes from supported accommodation**

During the last 5 years, it has become clear that there are 4 key issues for the sector:

- **The high rates of eviction from temporary accommodation:** the most common last address for homeless people is a homeless hostel (307 people evicted in 2007). It is positive that in 2007, the figure has been reducing, from 34% at the beginning of the year to 21% by the end of year.
- **Low rates of positive move-ons:** relatively high numbers of people who leave temporary housing go on to no known address (618 in 2006 37% of all discharges).
- **Exclusions:** we know that a small number of people are barred from all accommodation.
- **Long stay residents:** the table below shows an NHLP snapshot of long term residency in supported housing. SHS and the SP team have worked with providers to reduce this and of note are the 8 long term Salvation Army residents moved to sheltered accommodation. We also have to consider if accommodation is correctly designated as homeless.

### **Snapshot of residency in non-direct access accommodation**

	<b>2-5 years residency</b>	<b>5+ years residency</b>	<b>Total over 2 years residency</b>
<b>Mar-08</b>	56 (13%)	58 (14%)	114(27%)

Homeless Link carried out a study of evictions with providers (4 direct access, 3 non-direct access) in 2007-08, to review evictions over a 6 month period, investigate recurring themes and case studies of 'typical' eviction situations. The study attempted to identify underlying causes and possible solutions. The most common reasons for eviction, according to providers were: rent arrears (42%) and unacceptable behaviour (33%). In around half of all cases evictions were made without senior management sign-off. Where a system of senior management veto had been introduced eviction rates decreased. Providers who routinely issued 4 or 2 week notices to clients tended to evict more regularly than providers with a standard intervention procedure (e.g. Acceptable Behaviour Contracts). Where intervention was based on a dialogue and 'tenancy recovery', it was found to be more successful.

Rent arrears are a problem for all providers, but especially in direct access provision which works with the most excluded and chaotic clients. Homeless Link suggest a possible solution of a complete veto of evictions for rent arrears. This can leave the provider vulnerable financially, and needs to be coupled with a comprehensive strategy for key working that facilitates positive but firm approaches to rent collection. Structuring collection at times of payments of benefits or meaningful activity sessions has proved successful.

Behaviour issues appear to result from two main factors: lack of information about client need, leading providers to accept referrals they are ill-equipped to support; and lack of capacity of key working to facilitate engagement in activities or services. Evictions for behaviour often are linked to substance/alcohol issues or violence. Approaches differ across providers, with varied thresholds of acceptability. One solution is client 'swaps', with two providers successfully exchanging clients to better suited accommodation without the need for eviction.

Providers want to develop a system that facilitates them in accepting and supporting the clients best suited to their provision. The Gateway, described in the Governance section will do much to achieve this. More work needs to be done on to help staff and providers to develop ways of engaging techniques with people who exhibit dangerous or disturbing behaviour, and other models of intervention, including client exchange, need to be explored. Other avenues yet to be explored include very positive outcomes demonstrated by a provider in the North West, where evictions fell dramatically following detailed discussions with service users about the approach taken to poor behaviour. In addition, peer research with service users about the causes of evictions and exclusions in the sector in Newcastle needs to be followed up, to complement work done with providers and their staff.

#### **Accommodation action points for 2008 Homelessness Strategy**

- Build on the systemic pathways and YHN's good record of providing efficient move on
- Improve the council's temporary accommodation
- Develop proposals for future provision to meet all the council's temporary accommodation needs, particularly Children's and Adults' Services, recognising the need to reduce the council's use of temporary accommodation by the CLG's target of 50%
- Develop standards for accommodation and services and benchmark accommodation against the Decent Homes standard, DDA and CLG's Places for Change criteria to include:

- no shared bedrooms, and less need to share bathrooms
- designed to ensure all residents feel safe
- facilities for health provision
- provision for meaningful activities including developing independence skills pre-tenancy training, and help to gain employability skills
- Develop better accommodation options for residents: who do not want to stop drinking, those who are not able to share with others e.g. dispersed flats, women, couples
- Reduce the time people spend in homeless accommodation
- Consider re-designation of accommodation for residents needing to stay for 2-5 years
- Improve service user involvement and feedback
- Reduce the number of evictions and exclusions
- Identify barriers to move-on for people and increase positive move ons
- Improve inreach work for drug, alcohol and mental health services
- Ensure staff respond to service users requests to treat all residents respectfully
- Ensure that access to supported housing is prioritised for those who have the most urgent needs as agreed between key commissioners
- Co-ordinate bids for funding for new developments to meet the priorities agreed across the council (see Capital and Revenue Alignment Register in Governance section)
- Develop a protocol with Adult and Children's Services to meet the needs of the people accommodated with care needs beyond the support services provided
- Maintain YHN's strong performance and support Housing Associations to match this

### **Floating support**

The amount of floating support has increased by over 300 places since 2003, to 860 spaces. This is a testament to the value for money savings created by the SP team who have achieved this despite a £2m budget reduction. The services are provided by a 12 organisations working with formerly homeless people.

Low level support is provided by YHN Advice and Support Workers in three teams: the Pathways team works with people in emergency and other supported accommodation schemes; the Outreach team works with Your Homes Newcastle tenants to prevent homelessness; and the Refugee Move-on team works with refugees given permission to stay.

The majority of services are medium to high level support and resettlement and provide up to two years of floating support to help to sustain tenancies for the following groups:

- Young people
- Offenders
- Substance misusers
- People with mental health problems and/or learning disabilities
- Women at risk of domestic violence
- Single homeless

### **Floating support action points for Homelessness Strategy**

- Explore options to strengthen partnerships to improve support to meet the needs of people with mental health problems, teenage parents, and drug/alcohol users
- Build on the Pathways to ensure that support planning and pre-tenancy preparation is coordinated to create successful transitions to independence
- Develop proposal to limit damage caused when people do not engage with support

## 7. Homelessness services in Newcastle: Day and night services

There are currently two day centres for homeless or excluded people in the city, a centre providing meals, social activities and signposting to other services, and a learning centre.

### Day services

There are currently 4 centres for homeless or excluded people in the city:

- **Joseph Cowen Healthcare Centre (Byker Bridge Housing Association):** Provides advice, access to a GP, Community Psychiatric Nurse, District Nurse, Needle Exchange, and laundry and bathing facilities.
- **Ron Eager House (Tyneside Cyrenians and Trading Places):** Provides housing advice, employment advice, drug treatment, and health care, as well as food and drink, bathing and laundry facilities. Trading Places, a joint venture with the Newcastle User and Carer Forum, offers support and advice, hot food and drink, and activities on Fridays and Sundays, through a service run by volunteers
- **People's Kitchen:** Provides food, clothing, learning resources, and information are provided at the Alison Centre, which is open 5 evenings a week and one afternoon. The People's Kitchen also provides hot food at several places in the town on an evening.
- **Crisis Skylight:** This learning centre provides learning activities on a wide range of subjects (practical, artistic, physical activity, IT, and developing skills), seven days a week, for homeless people and others. There is also a café, open 5 days a week. Members can get involved in volunteering activities, preparing for employment, or gaining qualifications, and get help to resolve problems which hamper their move on to independence.

For 9 months Ron Eager House opened at weekends as a night centre; the intention was for this to create the opportunity for services to engage with chronically excluded people. Whilst this increased our understanding and engagement with excluded people the management of it has been criticised for being counter productive. The joint case management of excluded people has proved to be far more effective at reducing rough sleeping.

### Outreach services

Outreach work with homeless people is currently done by four organisations:

- **HAC:** carries out weekly surgeries at Ron Eager House and visits people in hospital
- **ACE (Adults facing Chronic Exclusion):** this Cabinet Office pilot managed by Tyneside Cyrenians works with chronically excluded people
- **Joseph Cowen Healthcare Centre:** carries out weekly visits to places in the city centre and East End where people are known to sleep rough
- **GAP - Girls Are Proud:** managed by the Cyrenians, GAP project works with sex workers

### **Action points for outreach and day services**

- Improve the co-ordination between these services and housing and support provision
- Improve the understanding of the value of these services
- Explore opportunities for mainstream funding for these services

## **8. Governance arrangements - strategic links and working with other agencies**

### **Introduction**

Both the profile of homelessness in Newcastle, and the strategic linkages have improved since 2003. In particular there is now an established link to the political governance system. There are also stronger links to other corporate strategic initiatives in the Council. However, homelessness is not currently viewed as a “weathervane” issue for the Council. Most of the achievements described here are attributable to the close working partnerships particularly with Supporting People, YHN and the voluntary sector providers.

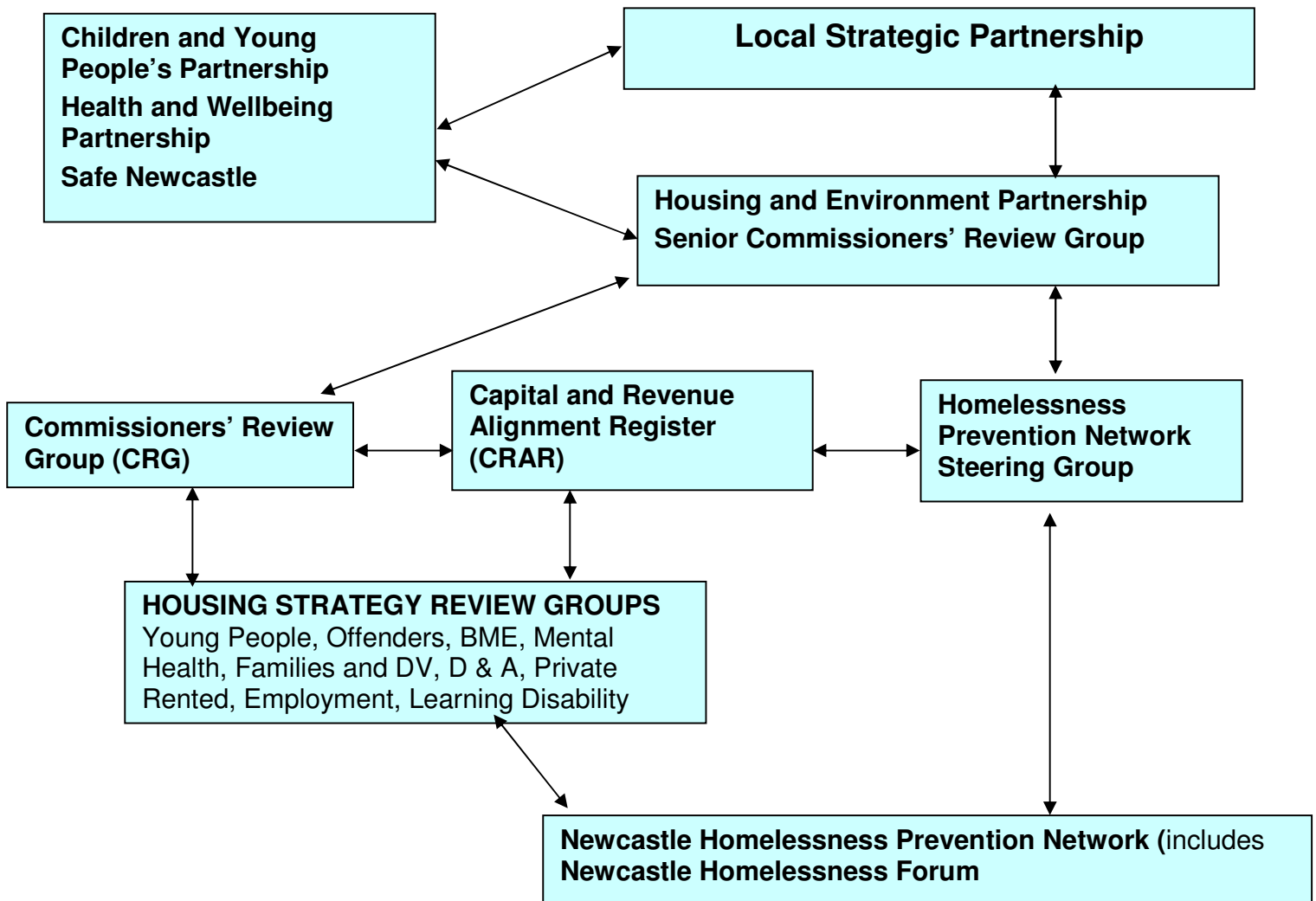
Good governance is essential for effective partnership working to meet complex cross cutting needs. Much of the success of the last two years is attributable to the stronger governance arrangements described below. Our aim is to ensure that there are effective links between front line practice to meet individual needs and to relate this to policy, strategy and commissioning. It is important that these arrangements are tight and that good and poor performance is monitored and acted upon.

However, homelessness is not currently viewed as a “weathervane” issue for the Council. Community and Local Government (CLG) recommend that homelessness is seen as a key indicator of how well a council manages its housing market and supports vulnerable citizens, the logic being that without somewhere to live all other interventions to reduce vulnerability such as child protection, mental health, addictions, will not be successful. At present it is not always clear whether homelessness is an outcome of a lack of accommodation, or as a result of a person’s vulnerability. We know that in practice it is a complex dynamic of accommodation and support. The emergent governance arrangements described below are beginning to create a framework to better address this dichotomy.

### **Corporate governance**

The diagram below shows the emerging corporate governance framework within which homelessness sits. This framework has been developed in response to the restructuring of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the development of the “Housing Toolkit”, Housing Strategy Review Groups (HSRGs) and the Homelessness Prevention Network (HPN) (see [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf) for more detail).

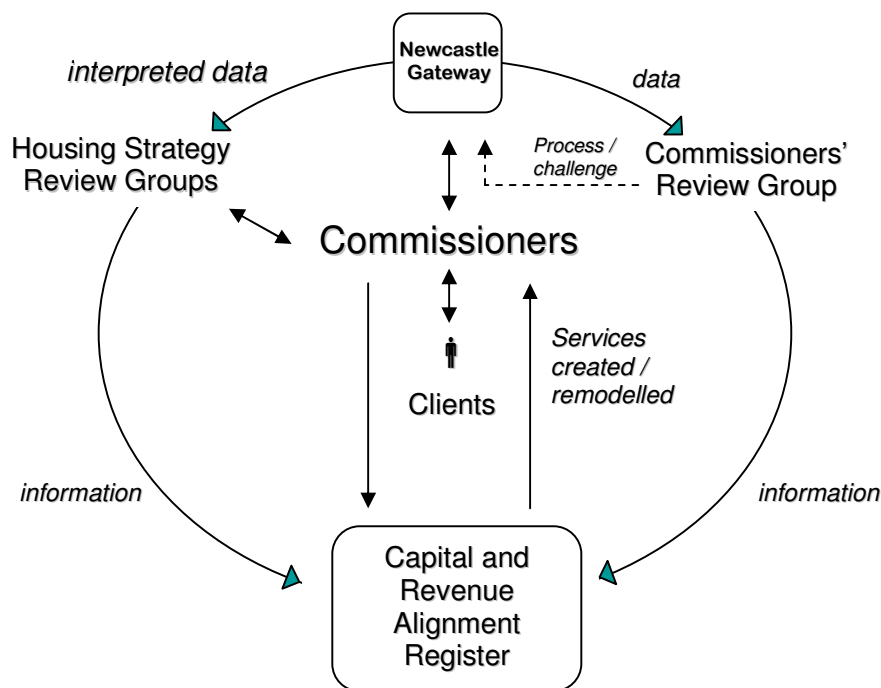
The aim is to use the same strategic language and processes where there is a cross-cutting link, and to use the same strategic statements in the Supporting People, Safe Newcastle and Homelessness Strategies.



## The Housing Toolkit

This has been established in partnership with the Supporting People Commissioning Body (SPCB) to ensure that the services it commissions meet the needs of its partners. We have developed a partnership working framework – known as the Housing Toolkit – to facilitate partnership working. The Toolkit incorporates– the Newcastle Gateway and the Capital and Revenue Alignment Register (CRAR) and brings together commissioners’ and the voluntary sector to ensure that these processes are running effectively. See [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf) for a more detailed description.

The toolkit will help us to build on the success we have had in making the best use of existing resources in order to meet changing priorities and opportunities that arise



The diagram above illustrates the information flows between these processes and structures; the various elements are further described in below.

## Who are the Housing Toolkit commissioners?

The commissioners represent the following organisations or parts of organisations:

- Newcastle City Council Adult Services Directorate: learning disability; physical disability; older people; mental health.
- Strategic Housing Service
- North of Tyne PCT: Public Health

- National Probation Service for Northumbria
- Children and Young Persons' Partnership – YOT, Children's Services
- Safe Newcastle: Domestic Violence; Drugs Support Unit

A list of the designated officers who act as commissioners for the purposes of the Housing Toolkit is held on the Supporting People website at [www.newcastle.gov.uk/supportingpeople](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/supportingpeople)

### **Newcastle Gateway**

The Gateway will be a single prioritised register of individuals requiring supported housing. To join the register, individuals must be sponsored by a commissioner; priority within the register will be determined by a single set of agreed criteria.

### **Capital and Revenue Alignment Register (CRAR)**

The CRAR is a list of real service developments where revenue has been identified and which require capital funding. It will help commissioners and the wider supported housing community to make best use of opportunities to access capital funding by facilitating an ongoing dialogue about our shared priorities. Projects may be initiated by anyone with an interest in supported housing, but must be logged on the site by a designated commissioner who agrees that the service is a priority. The register itself is held in the resource area of the SP website at [www.newcastle.gov.uk/supportingpeople](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/supportingpeople) along with a more detailed explanation of CRAR processes.

### **Commissioners' Review Group (CRG)**

The CRG is a group of representatives of the commissioners who will oversee the Gateway and receive management information from the Gateway and other sources in order to assess the effectiveness of services used by SP client groups, including but not limited to services commissioned directly by Supporting People.

### **Housing Strategy Review Groups**

A number of provider and stakeholder reference groups have been designated as Housing Strategy Review Groups; a full list of the groups and planned meeting dates is available in the resources area of the [www.newcastle.gov.uk/supportingpeople](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/supportingpeople). These groups are the primary forums to which officers involved in developing the City's Housing and Supporting People strategies will refer to gain a service user, voluntary and community sector perspective on proposed and existing provision. The groups cover the following:

- Private rented sector liaison
- Drugs, alcohol and housing
- Mental health
- Young People
- BME
- Offenders
- Children & Families and domestic violence
- Learning Disability
- Employability (Drugs, homelessness and employability Group)
- Rough sleepers

Partnership work with all these agencies, and others in the voluntary and community sector are an essential part of today's homelessness activity. For partnership work to be effective, all partners need to share common objectives, have a common language, be committed to making change, and be prepared to scrutinise the outcomes of their work together and separately. The last few years have shown that essential elements of joint work also include a strong evidence base, demonstrable and measurable outcomes, and a sense of having made a difference by working together. At the first annual review of its work, Prevention Network members agreed that it had made a difference, and highlighted a number of other agencies which need to be round the table to discuss homelessness, especially if we are to intervene earlier before crises occur. Strengthening the Prevention Network is emerging as a key priority. This method of working is still in development as the City moves to a "One Council" culture, but it has already proved effective in aligning accommodation and support to the needs of commissioners.

### **Political governance**

A key improvement since 2003 is that homelessness is now reported at a political level, in line with CLG guidance. Homelessness performance is reported to the Neighbourhoods and Communities Executive Portfolio Group and the complementary Scrutiny Panel. The support of the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities has benefited the sector.

Elected members receive copies of the Homelessness Prevention Network newsletter, and several members have attended Network and other events. It is hoped that political support for addressing homelessness can be further strengthened over the coming year, and that a champion at Local Strategic Partnership level can be identified.

### **Links to other corporate strategies**

The strategic links within the Council have improved considerably since 2003, and there are now strong links to other strategic initiatives. This has contributed to joint planning, an improved response to crises, and more joint commissioning of services and initiatives, and has produced tangible results. For example, through the Children and Young People's Partnership access has been secured for Youth Voice to provide their peer education programme on the risks of homelessness in all secondary schools and youth work venues in the City. We have also seen the benefit of linking the City's support for capital allocations of Housing Associations (HAs) to their management performance. This has helped to get the main HAs in the City to be on target, for the first time, to meet their nominations targets.

### **Key strategic links:**

#### **Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement (LAA)**

The links to homelessness are seen in the inclusion of the prevention of homelessness as a local indicator in addition to the two indicators (141, 142) which cover people moving on to and sustaining independence.

#### **The Supporting People Strategy**

Homelessness services are the second largest group of services funded by Supporting People. The Strategic Housing Service works closely with Supporting People to ensure that homelessness services are aligned to strategic priorities and effectively target identified needs. This will be done through the Housing Toolkit described above:

Supporting People officers also participate in a range of groups including the Housing Strategy Review Groups, the Prevention Network Steering Group / Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, and the Prevention Network.

#### **The Newcastle Children and Young People's Plan**

The Plan recognises that the provision of good quality housing and the prevention of homelessness are important in achieving improved outcomes for children and young people. The Strategic Housing Service (SHS) is represented on the Children and Young People's Partnership Executive which meets to monitor the outcomes of the plan. Newcastle is adopting the "Think Families" approach which seeks to ensure that all provision has regard to the needs of families.

SHS is represented on the following partnerships which contribute to the delivery of the plan:

- Youth Offending Team Board
- Teenage Pregnancy Board
- Integrated Youth Strategy
- Homeless Children's Strategy Group
- Parenting Support Strategy
- Family Intervention Project

### **Social Inclusion Strategy**

Homelessness is recognised as one of the most profound symptoms of chronic social exclusion and homeless adults facing chronic exclusion are one of the priority target groups. It is important to ensure that the prevention of homelessness is included in the following tools and techniques proposed in the strategy:

- Social Inclusion Network
- The Social Inclusion Toolkit
- Social Inclusion Issues Groups
- Social Inclusion Seminars
- A Partnership Fund for Social inclusion and Community Cohesion

### **Community Safety Strategy**

The prevention of homelessness is recognised across many of the priority areas in this strategy. Newcastle is a Respect Action Area and SHS is represented on the Respect Co-ordination Group, which ensures compliance with the Respect agenda. SHS contributes to this agenda through the:

- Respect Housing Management Standard working group
- Family Intervention Project Steering Group

The importance of homelessness prevention as part of the responses for reducing the harm caused by violence, and helping to reduce drug and alcohol misuse, is well recognised in Newcastle. SHS is represented on the following groups:

- Domestic Violence Steering Group
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements Strategy Group
- Drugs – Adult Commissioning Group
- Alcohol Strategy Steering Group

### **Domestic Violence Strategy**

The strategy stresses the importance of prevention. This has proven effective as seen in the 102 episodes of homelessness prevented by the Sanctuary scheme in 2007, the increase in outreach services and improved partnership working.

## **Employability Action Plan**

To help achieve homelessness prevention targets, the action plan should reflect that:

- Aftercare is likely to be needed for a significantly longer period of time than may be the case with other groups to ensure retention in employment.
- Soft outcomes, such as increased self-esteem and confidence, are as important as hard outcomes.
- There is a need to include numeracy, literacy and basic skills as pre-requisites of work.

## **Engagement with other agencies**

Other agencies outside the Council are engaged with the homelessness agenda in a variety of ways. Representatives from the voluntary sector (supported housing, advice, education and learning, counselling, and others), Registered Social Landlords and private landlords, employment link agencies, and other statutory agencies such as health, Police, Probation, YOT, and Safe Newcastle participate in the following which consider homelessness issues:

- Newcastle Homelessness Forum
- Homelessness Prevention Network
- Housing Associations/Housing Corporation Liaison group
- Housing Strategy Review Groups:

## **Sub-regional groups**

The Tyne & Wear Homelessness Officers' Group meets quarterly and covers:

- Benchmarking, information and recording systems
- Highlighting good practice: operationally, strategically and in response to changing legislation and housing market demands
- Information sharing
- Needs mapping
- Developing joint policy
- Responses to changing legislation/guidance

## **Influencing the Housing Strategy**

The Homelessness Strategy is one of the sub-strategies, which will develop the work of the Council and its partners within the overarching Housing Strategy. A key objective will be to

ensure that the supply of affordable housing increases and that we make best use of all sectors of the housing market for vulnerable people.

## **Conclusion**

The current transition to the LAA framework removes the mandatory requirement for councils to report on homelessness performance and therefore creates a level of uncertainty. This could create a perverse situation whereby the focus is on the poorly performing and crisis areas, and not on prevention. As demonstrated in the performance section of this review, homeless services in Newcastle have performed well. Much of this is due to the multi-agency responses facilitated through better governance arrangements and the high level of corporate and political priority, which has been facilitated by the national performance indicators and the strong evidence base of the homeless sector. There is a need to consolidate the governance arrangements and to enforce the links to the formal partnerships.

## **Strategic and governance action points for 2008 Homelessness**

- Implement the Housing Toolkit: Gateway scheme, Capital and Revenue Alignment Register, Housing Strategy Review Groups, Commissioners' Review Group
- Strengthen governance arrangements and embed the joint commissioning arrangements
- Maintaining a strong evidence base to demonstrate the value of homelessness prevention
- Further development of Homelessness Prevention Network to:
  - embed the protocols, policies, and procedures already developed
  - involving more agencies to promote earlier intervention align training sessions on existing protocols to standards and performance
  - monitor and report on progress on all existing protocols
- Ensure regeneration initiatives are relevant to the needs of vulnerable people
- Ensure that performance is measured as part of the LAA and Portfolio monitoring

## 9. The challenges for the future

The table below shows the pressures on the housing market which may have an impact on homelessness. The Council and its partners need to be alert to these pressures to avoid being taken by surprise by any changes which would affect our ability to prevent homelessness. It is important, therefore, that homelessness and market failure is raised on the agenda of relevant groups and bodies including the Environment and Housing Partnership, Bridging Newcastle Gateshead, and the City Development Company.

### Possible pressures

- Entry level house prices have nearly doubled since 2003, significantly faster than incomes. House prices continue to increase: current levelling off may only be temporary, as has been the case in the past. In the last two years there were 3,500 fewer homes at £90,000 or less in the last two years.
- Unemployment increases as public sector investment in the region decreases. This has been a major driver of economic growth and the message from the Government is that this will now cease e.g. 1200 staff to go from DWP by 2011
- Lending practice will tighten in response to the credit squeeze, possibly reducing the multipliers used when calculating mortgage offers. This will further restrict access to home ownership e.g. house auctions at 3 year low, slowdown marked in North East and London
- Macro-economic influences on the region will impact disproportionately upon Newcastle, as a function of its role as regional capital, e.g. if homelessness becomes an issue for the sub region, many of these households will be attracted to the concentration of support and social housing in the city
- 50,000+ households in Newcastle fall into sub-prime market and will be adversely affected if the credit crunch happens as predicted
- The increasing numbers of migrant households, with a preference for private renting may take up opportunities in the lower end of the market
- Reduced resources: Newcastle has had the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest settlement from central government and faces significant budget reductions. This has resulted in a £89,000 pa cut to the Homelessness Grant aid, which limits the ability to respond to changes

## **10. Proposed actions to meet the challenges identified**

Our success in reducing homelessness in the context of reduced housing supply has been based on the better management of demand as described in the prevention initiatives described in this review. This is based on reconciling the accommodation and support needs of vulnerable people so they are not set up to fail and can sustain their accommodation. The effectiveness of the provision of good quality support is seen in Inline's work with young tenants, which has a 90%+ success rate in sustaining people.

The Homelessness Strategy creates a framework to extend this approach to all areas of community-based support to increase the contribution to the prevention of homelessness. This will include partnerships and new initiatives like the Family Intervention Project and the Peer Education Programme. It also means ensuring that all agencies work to meet the LAA targets on prevention and sustaining people in independence, which requires the maintenance of co-ordinating and monitoring systems. To achieve this we need to embed the prevention initiatives that have worked well to end B&B use in 2007 and to reduce the time that people are homeless or need temporary accommodation.

### **a) Improve governance to improve the use of resources**

#### **• Introduce the Housing Toolkit**

See the Governance section for a description of this key initiative which consolidates the partnership initiatives between SHS and Supporting People. This will align accommodation, support, statutory commissioning and capital development to maximise the value of existing resources.

#### **• Changes to funding – removal of the Supporting People ring fence**

The strengthening of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) in 2008 will set the Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) priorities. This will coincide with the removal of the Supporting People funding ring fence. Supporting People funds 60-80% of supported housing, and there is a risk that the needs of homeless people will be prioritised below that of statutory duties, for example to older people.

## **b) Initiatives to prevent homelessness and reduce demand**

### **• Consolidate and broaden the prevention initiatives**

The prevention initiatives introduced in 2005 through the Homelessness Prevention Project, particularly the Pathways and Prevention from Eviction Protocols need to be embedded. We are in the process of extending this to Housing Associations and Children's Services. The work with Children's Services creates opportunities to reduce the adverse affects of insecure accommodation on families.

### **• Develop a corporate approach to debt rehabilitation**

We need to ensure that debt advice is well publicised, that all agencies are aware of the indicators of debt and specialist services are able to intervene at an early stage. The Debt Rehabilitation Fund scheme has since April 2007 helped to prevent homelessness amongst 60+ households who have been helped to go bankrupt. In addition to large debts, other problems have been eased e.g. mental and physical ill health, relationship breakdown, domestic violence. We need to support the continuation of this approach and balance this against the council's debt collection responsibilities.

### **• Enhance support planning via a programme of pre-tenancy training**

Supported housing agencies all carry out support planning we need to build on this to ensure people are be fully prepared for independence.

### **• Consolidate employment and meaningful activities**

There are 17 employment related schemes provided by supported housing providers in the city to help their residents to break the cycle of homelessness. The majority of these schemes are dependent on short term funding. The long term value of this work in breaking the cycle of exclusion needs to be assessed and where appropriate mainstreamed.

### **• Review of offender accommodation processes**

We need to work with GONE to implement the re-launch of HARP. We also need to work towards a more coordinated process for MAPPA (multi-agency working with high risk offenders) cases as Newcastle takes twice as many people as the rest of Tyne & Wear.

### **• Meeting acute and multiple needs**

We need to tackle the extreme cases of the small number of people who periodically sleep rough whilst excluded from our supported accommodation. We know that Newcastle as the regional capital attracts people and we need to encourage a regional approach to addressing these problems. For all of these people the main issue is keeping rather than getting accommodation.

- **Learning from the Adults facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) project**

The Tyneside Cyrenians have secured £296,000 from the Cabinet Office to run the ACE pilot, looking at how best to engage chronically socially excluded. The ACE provides an opportunity to identify the causes of chronic exclusion and this will feed into the City's Social Inclusion Strategy with the aim of breaking the cycle of exclusion through joint action. We need to build on the early stages of the project to work with people in unsatisfactory Houses in Multiple Occupation which we know are occupied by people at the worst end of social exclusion. We also need to build on the work of ACE and the GAP project to aim to address the needs of sex workers, and people with substance misuse problems who have been barred from all accommodation and cannot access social housing.

- **Improving risk assessments for people in need of supported housing**

The Gateway will help us to learn more about risk assessments built on information passed on by referrers, to enable us to decide on the most appropriate type of accommodation for the person. For people moving to independence from supported housing, it is important that social housing providers and other landlords receive appropriate information about support needs and risks, to help them to decide how best to help the applicant

- **Changes to overcrowding legislation**

We will need to respond to the Government's intention to raise and clarify the profile of overcrowding. The latest consultation describes the potential social impact on overcrowded households and defines the importance the CLG are placing on increasing the supply of larger homes. It seems likely that the duty to accommodate more people who live in overcrowded accommodation will come before the larger accommodation is built. The situation is further complicated by not knowing the exact number of households affected.

- c) Increase the supply and quality of accommodation**

As noted an additional 60 supported housing and 330 floating support spaces have been created since 2003. In addition to the mainstream regeneration and plans to build more affordable houses as detailed in the 2007 Housing Strategy, the Council is developing the following initiatives to increase the amount of housing supply accessible to vulnerable people:

- **Improve accommodation standards**

We need to develop standards for accommodation and services and benchmark accommodation against the Decent Homes standard, DDA and CLG's Places of Change criteria to include improved facilities within the council's temporary accommodation.

- **Access to the private rented sector: Build on the Rent Deposit Scheme**

We need to get more landlords to engage with this NRF funded scheme which has created 51 tenancies between Jan 2007 and Apr 2008

- **Bring empty properties into use**

There are an estimated 2,000 empty properties in Newcastle our aim is to work with supported housing providers and the Housing Corporation to create employment opportunities for homeless people to refurbish and then live in the properties with the possibility of entering into shared ownership

- **Housing Associations**

In 2007 the Council established a joint protocol with the Housing Corporation. This has increased nominations by 50 % and Housing Associations (HA) have committed themselves to matching YHN in accommodating homeless people. HAs have also signed up to the Preventing Evictions and Repeat Homelessness Protocol and Pathways to Independence.

- **Pathways to Independence**

A significant advance is the change in the housing allocations procedures to create the Pathways. This gives additional housing priority to vulnerable homeless people who have demonstrated that they have addressed the reasons for their social exclusion. The challenge is to ensure everyone reaches their optimum level of independence

- **Addressing ineligibility for social housing**

A remaining key challenge is that a number of people, particularly those who have offending or substance misuse backgrounds may be ineligible for council housing because of concerns about their suitability due to their previous unacceptable behaviour. Our challenge is to ensure that no one is unfairly excluded from housing and we have developed processes to do this, we know that we have to do more to make sure everyone understands and uses these. However in doing this we also need to meet the greater challenge of ensuring that we don't set people up to fail and reach an explicit consensus between the applicant, support provider and landlord to ensure that the person is being fairly treated and that they will be able to maintain their tenancy. We need to build on our Pathways and Prevention from Eviction protocols to ensure that all support services work effectively together to prepare people for independence and for landlords to work with the support provider to maintain these people in independence.

**We are also considering the development of the following initiatives:**

- **Private Sector Leasing (PSL) and landlords incentives scheme (LIS)**

In response to the Home Office's asylum seekers Legacy Programme we are developing a PSL. This will involve YHN managing private rented properties that are leased from their owners by the Council. Most London authorities use PSL and LIS to meet the needs of vulnerable people in crisis.

- **Independent accommodation provided by sympathetic landlords**

We are looking for ways for the working with supported housing providers in the City to provide move-on accommodation for people who are ready to leave supported housing but who, whilst not needing formal support, need a sympathetic landlord who can respond quickly to any changes in circumstances. This will provide dedicated move-on accommodation from supported housing.

- **Meeting the CLG's target to halve the use of temporary accommodation for statutory homeless households**

A major challenge is to meet the CLG's target to halve the use of statutory temporary accommodation, which will leave Newcastle with 26 units of accommodation. This will be difficult for Newcastle but may be achieved by creating a demarcation between crisis homelessness accommodation and accommodation that is linked to programmes for change e.g. the Family Intervention Project.

## **Conclusion**

The three core issues which influence the options for a successful prevention agenda are:

- **To reduce demand by addressing the reasons for the loss of accommodation**
- **To continue to improve the efficiency of existing accommodation**
- **To increase the supply of accommodation options available for prevention.**

Looking at the main reasons for homelessness it is important that we maintain and build on the successes of our prevention initiatives. This will mean developing the Homelessness Prevention Network and the "one council" approach. It will require holistic services responsive to people's need by both addressing their problems but also by creating opportunities for change by aligning housing, employment, care, support and health provision.

It is likely that mortgage arrears and debt along with the need to make more use of private sector accommodation will continue to increase. This means we will need to reinforce our debt advice and better coordinate our approach to the private rented sector.

Our success in reducing homelessness in the context of reduced housing supply has been based on the better management of demand via the prevention initiatives described earlier. The effectiveness of the provision of good quality support is seen in Inline's work with young tenants, which has a 90%+ success rate in sustaining people. The Housing Toolkit seeks to consolidate and build on the success of our coordination of existing resources. It is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that existing provision is our greatest asset.

With regard to the availability of accommodation we need to maintain our efficient partnership with YHN. Although we have achieved success with the increase in supported housing and Housing Associations this is unlikely to meet the expected future demand. Again the main option at present would appear to be increasing options within the private rented sector. The rent deposit scheme has widened access however work needs to be continued to improve security and increase options in the face of competition from the student market.

We also need to respond to the challenge in the Hill's report to provide housing that truly meets the needs of the community and as identified in the Sustainable Communities Strategy there are areas of acute deprivation in Newcastle. Many of the people in these areas are on the cusp of homelessness and we need to recognise this and consider developing mixed, supportive communities and learn from programmes like the Urban Village model

Lastly, the options available for prevention have been increasing for the past three years and continue to offer more realistic and practical assistance for households in housing difficulties. However these need to continue to develop and become more responsive and timely if we are to meet the challenges of a tighter housing market and ongoing deprivation.

## **Appendix One**

See [www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/nhf) for the directory of services and further information including a full report on progress on the 2003 Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

## **Appendix Two**

### **Consultees: contributors to the Homelessness Review**

#### **Housing Strategy Review Groups:**

- Private rented sector liaison
- Drugs, alcohol and housing
- Mental health
- Young People
- Black and Minority Ethnic housing
- Offenders
- Children and Families, and domestic violence
- Learning Disability
- Drugs, homelessness and employability group

#### **Strategic and other groups\*:**

Teenage Pregnancy Support Task Group  
Learning Disability Housing Strategy Group  
Newcastle Homelessness Forum  
Homelessness Prevention Network

#### **Service users and groups:**

Youth Homelessness Forum  
Newcastle User and Carer Forum (drugs issues)  
Hill Court residents  
HAC exit survey  
Crisis Skylight  
Joseph Cowen Health Centre

\* Other groups whose views were sought were: Newcastle Housing Partnership, Supporting People Core Strategy Development Group, Neighbourhood and Community Portfolio Group, Older Person's Strategy, Domestic Violence Strategy Board, Local Safeguarding Children Board, Hidden Harm group, Youth Offending Team Board, Mental Health Housing Strategy group, Safe Newcastle Partnership, Adult Treatment Commissioning Board, BME Housing Strategy group, Private Landlords Forum.