

# Housing Position Statement

The Road to Recovery  
Post Covid-19



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## Introduction

This housing position paper sets out our key priorities ahead of a new housing vision we will deliver in 2021, which will cover the period up to 2030. We already have existing housing priorities which were set out in the 2018 Housing Statement:

- Delivering new homes to create greater choice
- Making best use of the City's existing housing stock
- Sustainable economy and communities
- Providing advice, support and information to vulnerable people

This paper updates on achievements we have delivered against and sets out research and development undertaken in the last two years.

One of the aims of this document is to highlight the impacts of Covid-19 across the housing sector and on our residents. The Council has already put in place measures to mitigate against these impacts. This paper documents new requirements and statutory duties placed on the Council by Government, as well as the business as usual activity, such as managing to full effect the Housing Revenue Account and the Council's housing related assets.

Investing in the City's housing takes a collaborative approach. This paper describes work we have carried out with our partners, our managing agent. Your Homes Newcastle, as well as Adult's and Children's Care Services. It highlights how we are aligning resources and service provision, so we can deliver the best offer of accommodation for our residents and how we provide access to the best housing that meets the needs of the City's residents.

It also outlines our broad housing delivery ambition for the City, and how we will work with funding partners and developers to build and invest in the City.

## Background – Our Ambition for Housing

The following documents are part of the key drivers which influence this statement and set out the context for our priorities.

### Labour Party Manifesto

The Newcastle Labour Party manifesto (April 2019) set out an ambition for '*More and Better Homes*'. Within the manifesto there is an express belief that everyone should have the right to a decent home. In doing this we will:

- Support a range of community initiatives to develop new homes, including co-operative housing models, self-build schemes and university pilot schemes to demonstrate new housebuilding technology.

- Further develop new schemes offering supported housing across the City, preventing them from being sold under right to buy and providing quality accommodation for residents who may have been placed outside the City, in institutional settings away from their family and support networks to meet their needs.
- Support initiatives such as 'Street Zero' to move towards a 'Housing First' approach, and to provide outreach support for rough sleepers in the City.
- Develop and prepare to implement a Selective Licensing scheme that is appropriate for the City.
- Continue to assess the feasibility of establishing an organisation to manage private sector rented housing.
- Find new ways to give private sector tenants a voice in decision-making, bringing renters together to support one another and campaign for better conditions.
- Deliver homes at the current pace via acquiring land, demolishing buildings and reviewing the assets in the City.
- As a City of Sanctuary, we will continue to support Syrian and Afghani families, individuals and unaccompanied children to settle and integrate into our communities.
- Work with health partners to tackle fuel poverty and the people who live in cold homes.

### Shaping our Future Together

Presented to Cabinet in December- 19 was the medium-term financial plan for 2020/21-22. In this were several commitments related to housing and the allocation of 'provisional' resources to range of emerging issues, transformation and key priorities, including:

- Continued demand pressures in children's social care
- Reshaping the property portfolio to create long-term sustainability
- Supporting Local Services to address long-standing pressures on neighbourhoods
- Investing in capacity to deliver our net zero climate change commitments
- Investing in capacity to preserve jobs and growth
- Supporting a Child Friendly City, where children are protected from exploitation, violence and abuse, have a good start in life, and have access to quality participatory and inclusive education and social services.

### Housing Statement 2017-19

In January 2017, Cabinet approved the Housing Statement 2017 -19 as the overarching strategic housing plan for the City. The Housing Statement presented our new build ambitions and other housing priorities. A further refresh of the Housing Statement was approved by Cabinet in July 2018, along with a refresh of the Private Sector Housing Plan.

These two documents, along with the Specialist Housing Delivery Plan and the evidence base, now need to be updated and presented in a new long-term vision with which to communicate the city's overall housing vision, priorities and ambitions over the next decade – 2020 to 2030.

## Achievements

### New Build Housing:

Analysis of delivery so far against our annual new build targets for housing shows that we delivered nearly 5,000 new homes over the last 5 years, with the last three years presenting record highs. Over 1,000 homes have been built per year, this includes over 1,000 new affordable homes over the last 3 years.

*Over 5,000 new homes have been built in the City over the past 5 years.*

*This is the highest level of new housing development seen in the City for the past 30 years.* This level of new build is a result of the Council directly contributing to half of the new homes delivered. We take an active role in housing delivery across all tenures, using Council land, prudential borrowing, and capital assets and receipts to draw in investment to gap fund and to meet housing need. Notable examples include:

- *We have invested over £10m from the Housing Revenue Account to remodel our sheltered housing schemes across the City*, creating 174 modern, accessible homes and attractive shared spaces. We have also built 119 award winning homes for older people at Tree Top Village, as well as a range of additional specialist accommodation.
- *265 new homes have been delivered to date through our Housing Delivery Framework.* In this model we use Council land and grant, supplemented by Homes England funding, commission development partners and Registered Providers to finance and build properties for affordable rent, shared ownership and specialist homes; such as Extra Care apartments and homes for people with learning disabilities and/or autism.
- In our Annuity Lease Back Model, *we have used our land assets plus £8.9m grant funding secured through Homes England to build 148 new accessible and affordable homes* in phase 1, with a further 199 properties in the pipeline for phase 2. This has attracted in the region of £40m of external finance.

### Bringing empty homes back into use:

To ensure we make the best use of the homes we already have in the city, the Council provides grants to make private sector empty properties habitable. Since November 2017, *the Fairer Housing Unit has worked with private sector homeowners and landlords to facilitate nearly 2,000 empty homes to be brought back into use.*

### Providing adaptations:

*For the 2019/20 year, £2.4m was received from central government for our Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) work to support independence for private sector tenants and residents.* This is an uplift from £0.8m in the previous year. This funding provides around 450 adaptations annually, such as stair-lifts, walk in showers, ramps and extensions. With the average Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) costing less than £7,000 as a one-off, the benefits to residents as well as the cost savings to health and social care are potentially very high, particularly where it reduces falls – and typically reduces the need for supported housing by approximately 3 years.

Additionally, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) committed £1.3m to undertake minor adaptations to support Council tenants with independent living. To help improve the customer journey and speed up waiting times YHN staff have been trained as trusted assessors to ensure council tenants waiting times are reduced for minor adaptations.

## Service Improvement Reviews

During 2019 the Fairer Housing Unit (FHU) and Your Homes Newcastle, (YHN) our managing agent, have undertaken several service reviews and market research projects with the aim to better understand the needs and demand of the City's housing markets and needs groups. Service reviews and research included:

- The HRA Asset Review to better understand the demands and marketability of council housing across neighbourhoods;
- An Insights study looking at people's perceptions of council housing and how this is viewed by people looking for suitable affordable accommodation;
- Looking at the way extra care and specialist housing is marketed and allocated – with this drawing out recommendations to streamline the process and to improve the customer journey;
- An assessment of the housing needs of the LGBTQ communities in the City. Findings indicate the need to undertake further work to create a culture of inclusivity through focused staff training and resident awareness and expectation. Again findings will be used to inform the shaping of the Customer Journey;
- A Disability Housing Review to review of service delivery across Care & Repair Newcastle, YHN, and Adults and Older People's Services, with proposals to improve the customer experience via reducing process, speed up delivery of individual customer outcomes including advice, digital solutions; adaptations from first point of contact, through assessment, and receipt of service;
- Shaping the Housing Plus Offer to develop a modern and comprehensive Older Person's offer for customers living in YHN managed housing, and that NCC assets are well managed and that they meet the needs of an ageing population; and
- Review of crisis support & homelessness provision to scope out the long-term future for crisis accommodation in the City in line with the revised commissioning procurement.

In doing this, we are better informed in the way we need to change and tailor the way we deliver services and to market our assets. We have several actions set out in our priorities, which these reviews have influenced, including making the customer journey better and easier, and understanding how we can better market our existing housing offer and provide care and support provision.

## Challenges and Opportunities in the year ahead

As well as the challenges thrown at the City Council and its partners due to Covid-19, we already had several challenges coming from changes to government policy and decisions on how to protect and make the best use of our assets.

### Challenges due to Covid-19

As well as a devastating public health crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic has simultaneously caused an economic and social shock to the City. This has led to rising cost pressures on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), an increase in demand on services, as well as a short-term fall in the delivery of new housing provision and options. Some of the impacts we have seen on services have been:

- Private Rented Sector Advice and Assistance: People seeking advice on evictions from the private rented sector or relating to their finances has increased substantially since the start of the pandemic in mid-March and was anticipated to increase further with the ending of the eviction protocol on the 21<sup>st</sup> September. From March to the end of July an *increase of 19,000 (+45%) residents in the City visited the website of the Private Rented Team (PRS Team) in the Fairer Housing Unit to access advice. Alongside providing advice to private sector tenants, the PRS Team engaged with private sector landlords to assess the impact of the crisis on their business plans. A survey in May of private landlords provided an insight into the impact of Covid-19 on the Private Rented Sector beyond the clients who have sought help and advice from us. These are landlords who are either part of the Accreditation Scheme, have a property subject to licence or work directly with PRS. The landlord survey suggested that, although most landlords had experienced a significant impact on their business, only 10% planned or considered to end tenancies, with over 40% stating that they have negotiated with their tenants on a case by case basis. This demonstrates a level of professionalism and pragmatism within the market. However, we should not reduce efforts to communicate with tenants and will maintain to offer support and advice to both landlords and tenants. The PRS Team have continued to distribute the message to landlords that eviction needs only be a final option and there are many resources available to both themselves and their tenants, with a focus on early intervention and negotiation to prevent the loss of homes during this time.*

*An increase of 19,000 (+45%) residents in the City seeking advice from the Private Rented Team in the Fairer Housing Unit (March to July)*

Concerns have been raised around the impact of the lifting of the possession orders ban on 21<sup>st</sup> September, and what this will mean for residents and services providing housing advice and support. Similarly, Money and Pensions Services (An arm's-length body sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions that engages with HM Treasury on policy matters relating to financial capability and debt advice) have estimated that there is likely to be a rise in demand for advice and assistance of 60% over the next 18 months peaking at the end of 2021.



- Rent Arrears: The furlough scheme and an increase in unemployment and Universal Credit (UC) claimants has led to a decrease in rent collection within the HRA. We estimate an overall reduction in collection rate of 5% due to several customers on lower income during the pandemic. We are predicting approximately 4,000 new UC claims to be made in 20-21. We aim to reach mutual agreements with tenants to recover arrears over an agreed period. To do this YHN are assisting all those impacted by Covid-19 and falling into arrears to understand their circumstances, offer and engage with tenants to take up support from employment advice to financial assistance. We are currently reviewing our policies and procedures to make sure that no one is evicted into homelessness and that all relevant support has been offered before we take action.
- Re-housing the most vulnerable: Needing to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable members of our communities and the requirement to house all homeless people into suitable self-contained accommodation, led Newcastle to suspend the Allocations Policy to ensure housing that became available was used for this purpose. The suspension of general needs housing allocations during the coronavirus lockdown led to the establishment of an Emergency Housing Panel to ensure that people in emergency need could secure housing. *Between 30 March and 19 June 2020 the Panel facilitated 189 households, at risk of homelessness to move to independent tenancies.* The housing panels have worked well to better align social care and housing services. This has given us the opportunity to review how our allocations panels operate and how they can maintain this approach to rapidly match vulnerable people with social care needs or additional support needs, with available and appropriate housing options. The better alignment of housing and support services will also help us show the value to all landlords in the City of how we can work together to maximise the value of our collective investment to provide suitable and sustainable homes.
- Housing Delivery (new build): The lockdown in March also meant construction of new housing coming to a stop. After a 3 months stoppage government granted permission in mid-June for developers to be allowed to go back on site, with added safety measures. The ceasing of building for nearly 3 months is likely to impact on the output of new homes, both affordable and for sale, for the coming year – though no council funded or commissioned sites have stalled significantly or ceased development. We are confident, however, that over a period of time the output of new homes on private sites will be back on target as sites are progressing well to revised timescales.

*Newcastle received best practice recognition from government in the way it moved quickly to house the most vulnerable during the pandemic*

We are also working with our North of Tyne colleagues to develop a pipeline of sites to help accelerate the delivery of new housing in the City, including market for sale, affordable and specialist housing for older people.

- Disabled Facilities Grants (Adaptations): The number of Disabled Facilities Grants (adaptations) undertaken has reduced significantly due to clients shielding and other social distancing restrictions. Business as usual, taken from the average across 2019/20, would usually see 54 referrals received into the FHU for



adaptations and 52 cases closed each month – with the total number of cases completed over 2019/20 being in excess of 400. Conversely, in the first three months of this financial year (April 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup>) only 48 referrals were received – with 47 completed. Though completions were down due to the restrictions, the service did however maintain contact with clients on the waiting list via undertaking administrative checks and financial assessments so that adaptations could be fitted as quickly possibly once it is safe to do so.

## Changes to Government Policy

- New requirements of the Housing Regulator came into force in April 2020 for consumer standards. This includes home standards, focusing on repairs and stock condition, tenant engagement and involvement and neighbourhood management. Although most of these functions are delivered by YHN, the regulator is very clear the responsibility for ensuring standards are met rests with the Local Authority. Delivering compliance with the consumer standards depends on good governance, and on an organisation's culture. Should we fail to meet these standards will result in a regulatory notice made public and is likely to have significant consequences for the authority in the way of an improvement notice made, with further non-compliance resulting in services being taken over by the regulator.
- Increased compliance and focus on building and fire safety: In July 2020 the government published its draft Building Safety Bill. This was described by the Housing Secretary as the “biggest improvement to building safety in nearly 40 years”. The bill contains wide-ranging changes to facilitate more stringent requirements on the built environment sector around building safety standards and the introduction of a new Building Safety Regulator. This brings with it new rules and compliance measures we must adhere to as owners of multi-story residential buildings, including:
  - provide clearer accountability for, and stronger duties on, those responsible for the safety of high-rise buildings throughout design, construction and occupation
  - give residents a stronger voice in the management system, ensuring their concerns are not ignored and they fully understand how they can contribute to maintaining safety in their buildings
  - strengthen enforcement and sanctions to deter non-compliance with the new regime in order to hold the right people to account

## Cost pressures on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA):

Government policy and inflation will cause cost pressures on the HRA over the coming and subsequent years:

- Investment required into high rises due to the [Building Safety Bill](#), (see above)
- Climate change - *To meet the City Council's pledge to make Newcastle carbon neutral by 2030 will have a significant call on the HRA.* For example, it is

estimated £500m is required to make HRA stock (Council housing) EPC rating C compliant across all stock.

- Inflationary pressures on the Repairs & Maintenance programme.
- Added investment needed to maintain decency standards.
- Still dealing with a four-year 1% rent cut which impacts on long-term business & investment plans.
- Forecasted increase of 5% in rent arrears due to the impact of Covid-19 on tenant's employment status and increase in Universal Credit claimants.
- Restructuring HRA assets. To evaluate the HRA assets and to ensure we gain maximum value in the long-term, a wide scoping high-level review of the HRA assets has been carried out. This will enable the Council to identify investment requirements that will enable HRA stock to continue to meet the needs and aspirations of residents across the City. Financial scenario testing was carried out over the early part of 2020 to ensure that the HRA thirty-year business model remain viable. The asset plan will identify alternative opportunities available for investment in Council stock, that will not only maximise the financial benefit to the HRA, but will help the Council provide the housing needed. It is expected that the final asset plan will be submitted for approval in Spring 2021.
- Identify new delivery methods. Much of the land the Council owns and has set aside for housing has now been developed. To keep our new build ambitions going, we must explore different avenues for acquiring brownfield land to help maintain a healthy pipeline of housing sites. Alternatively, the City Council could choose to become a housing provider and partner with developers to deliver affordable housing on non-Council land using the Housing Revenue Account and other grant funding, like other registered housing providers. Several opportunities currently exist in the city for the Council to do this, namely: Newburn Riverside (owned by Homes England), the General Hospital site, or developments in and around the city centre.

## Opportunities

The year ahead will also present opportunities in the shape of new funding available for us to bid against, and to take forward our new build programme, as well as how to better align services to improve the customer journey.

*The Government has released new funding opportunities to help deliver new housing.*

- The government's Brownfield Housing Fund awarded to the North of Tyne has provided an opportunity to accelerate housing delivery in the City. In bidding against this fund, the FHU will be working with our North of Tyne colleagues to develop a pipeline of sites to help accelerate the delivery of new housing, including market for sale, affordable and specialist housing for older people. Bids to the fund will be expected to be in place by late October 2020.
- A commitment by government to create a single £10bn Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) that would be used to provide schools, roads and GP surgeries to support new developments, as well as the renewal of the Affordable homes

programme will provide a welcome boost to the resources needed to bring forward housing and neighbourhood development.

- In March-20 the government announced a £12bn 5-year Affordable Homes Programme starting in 2021/22. This gives Newcastle a further opportunity to bid for funding to progress our ambitious housing delivery programme. Newcastle, as a trusted partner of Homes England, fared well in the last Affordable Homes Programme, receiving £11.84m, which was the largest award to a single authority in the North. We will be drafting up the Newcastle bid for the next round of the Affordable Homes Programme in due course.
- In June it was announced that a £2bn of government funding for energy efficiency improvements in the private sector – with £500m to be administered by local authorities, and a further £50m for social housing decarbonisation pilot would be made available. Newcastle is, at time of writing, waiting on the announcement of funding from the first round of the £500m to be administered by local authorities – with a second round of funding to be released in March 2021. Delivery of energy efficiency measures to homes across the City will support local contractors to retain and expand their teams and will reduce household energy costs, increasing disposable incomes.
- We will continue to make better use of empty homes and commercial buildings. In keeping with the changes to Permitted Development Rights announced by government in July, we will explore the feasibility with partnering registered providers and developers for the re-use of commercial premises and land for the delivery of housing.
- In July the government has announced the Next Steps Accommodation Programme, a £266m fund to stop homeless people going back on the street. The fund is made up of two parts:
  - to ensure interim accommodation and support continues for those who need it and can be used to help people move into the private rented sector, extend or secure alternative interim accommodation or where possible help people to reconnect with friends or family.
  - to provide additional supported homes this year for those currently housed in emergency accommodation.

The overall objectives of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme are to reduce rough sleeping and to seek to ensure rough sleepers brought into emergency accommodation in response to Covid-19, do not return to sleeping rough. As Covid-19 remains a risk, it is also essential that people, particularly those who are at increased risk of severe illness, are kept safe. Focus will be on the successful resettlement and recovery of those who have a long and/or repeat history of rough sleeping. In line with this we will develop an HRA capital programme to bring our voids and empty homes in the City back into use, to reduce use of temporary accommodation, bidding into MHCLG for capital and revenue funding. If Newcastle is successful in its bid, funding from the programme will cover property costs and support new tenancies for vulnerable people who were provided with emergency accommodation during the pandemic.

## Evidence Guiding our Priorities: An Overview

### Population change: A growing population for a City of choice:

Population change has a major impact on future demand in the wider housing market. This is reflected in the need for affordable housing and the requirements for future stock by type, size and tenure. An important feature in measuring future housing requirements is to forecast what is likely to happen to population changes over the next decade so that provision can be planned.

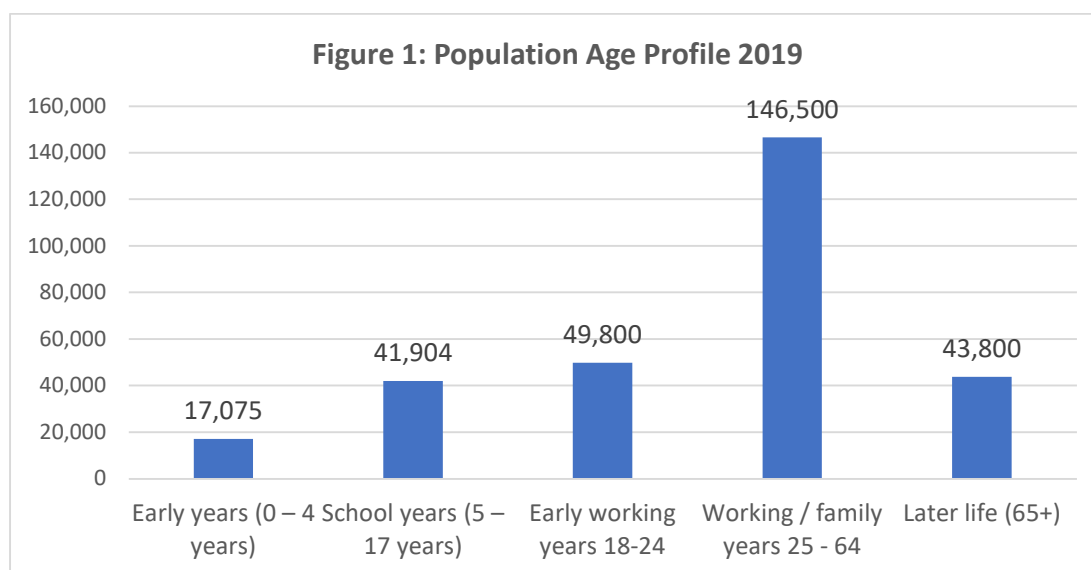
*By 2030 the population of Newcastle is predicted to increase by 12,400*

Recent population growth in the City has relied heavily upon a sizeable increase in net inward migration, particularly international migrants and students (with a significant overlap between the two).

Table 1: Population projections 2019 – 2030:

Life stages	Number of people		% change from 2030	
	2019	2030	Change No.	% Change
Early years (0 – 4 years)	17,075	16,892	-183	-1.0
School years (5 – 17 years)	41,904	44,361	+2457	+5.8
Early working years 18-24	49,800	54,400	+4,600	+9.2
Working / family years 25 - 64	146,500	142,200	-4,300	-2.9
Later life (65+)	43,800	53,200	+9,400	+21.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>298,900</b>	<b>311,300</b>	<b>+12,400</b>	<b>+4.1</b>

Source: Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information System (PANSI)



## Older People and Future Housing with Support Needs:

Data shows Newcastle's population is projected to reach 311,300 by 2030 - an increase of 12,400 on 2019 figures. The most significant feature in the population projections is the projected growth of older people aged 65+. Against 2019 figures it is projected the numbers in this age group will rise 21.5% by 2030. The increase in older households will have implications for support services, extra care housing, adaptations and other age-related care requirements.

*The number of those aged 65+ is forecasted to increase by 9,400*

Conversely, the working age range 25 to 64 is projected to decrease over the period 2019 to 2030 by 4,300 persons, or 2.9% of the population.

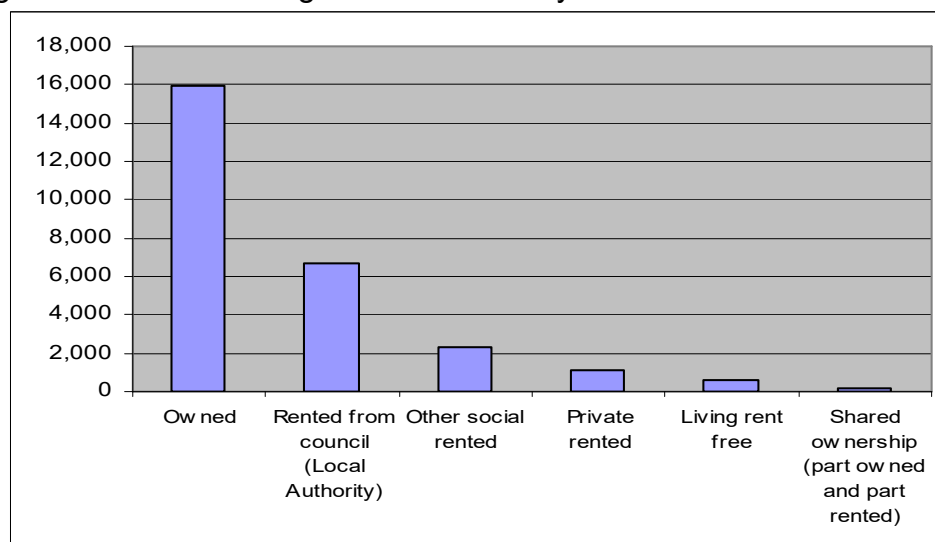
Projections also suggest there will be an increasing demand for care and support services due to an increase in the number of people aged 65 and over with disabilities, dementia and limiting long-term illness by 2030. Table 2 provides a summary of these projections.

**Table 2: Predicted increase in people aged 65 and over with a disability / illness 2019 to 2030**

Type	2019	2030	+ or -
People aged 65 and over with a limiting long-term illness,	11,545	14,130	+2,585
People aged 65 and over unable to manage at least one mobility activity on their own	8,047	9,841	+1,794
Number of people predicted to have dementia	3,128	3,833	+705
Number of people predicted to have a limiting long-term illness	12,619	15,456	+2,837
Total population aged 65 and over predicted numbers of hospital admissions due to falls (per annum)	1,416	1,716	+300
Total population aged 65 and over living in a care home with or without nursing	1,756	2,155	+1,756
Total population aged 65-74 predicted to live alone	5,849	6,845	+996
Total population aged 75 and over predicted to live alone	8,186	10,372	+2,186
Source: Projecting Older People Population Information System (POPPI)			

Data also shows that of the 129,780<sup>1</sup> households in Newcastle, over 15,000 are one-person households aged 65 and over (11.6%) and a further 7,000+ (5.6%) are one-family households where all occupants are aged 65 and over. Many of these households are homeowners, and a significant proportion rent from the Council.

Figure 2: Households aged 65 and over by tenure



*Those aged 65+ are more likely to own their own home than rent*

There is a mismatch between the tenure make-up of older persons households and the provision of specialist housing, as most retirement housing is to rent from the Council or a Registered Provider (RP) with very few leasehold options. This suggests that making more leasehold options would help to rebalance the housing market.

Projections also suggest there will be an increasing demand for care and support services, as there is predicted to be an increase in the number of people aged 65 and over with disabilities, dementia and limiting long-term illness by 2030. To create a full continuum and a total pathway offer, research findings highlighted the need for housing with support rather than just supported housing.

To cater for projected growth in the housing and care needs associated with this group, we will carry out some market testing to assess views on housing with care and support. This market testing will also review potential locations for this type of housing, with a site in the Outer West as well as the old general hospital site considered in the testing, for siting mixed tenure housing for older people with a range of care and support needs.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Live Tables on Dwelling Stock. Gov.UK. 2018

## Housing needs

Accounting for homelessness, overcrowding and suppressed household formation, our Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), completed in 2017, shows a need for 1,102 new homes per annum (up to 2030). This requirement is made up of:

- 706 open market homes for sale
- 96 affordable homes, or 35% of all new homes delivered

*Newcastle needs over 1,000 new homes per annum to cater for current and future need*

Due to viability<sup>2</sup>, our joint Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan with Gateshead (Local Plan) sets a target in Newcastle of 150 new affordable homes per annum, or 15% on sites of 15 or more (up to 2030).

## Health & Housing

Good quality housing is essential to perform the basic functions of keeping people safe, warm and dry. Poor housing conditions exacerbate some of the most common health conditions and increase the risk of severe ill health or disability by up to 25% during childhood and early adulthood<sup>3</sup>.

The Public Health Outcomes Framework sets out several indicators to measure variants such items as: fuel poverty; childhood household injuries; falls and frailty; appropriate homes for people with additional needs; and homelessness. Broader public health priorities relevant to housing include poverty, families living in poverty, violent crime / domestic violence, dementia and isolation in specific groups / communities.

## Specialist housing needs

The Council has a strong commitment to ensure all residents have access to affordable housing, especially those who experience a long-term disability or who are vulnerable. Research has proven that maintaining independence within a community setting has long lasting impact on mental and physical wellbeing. In many cases a move to institutional care can deskill the individual, remove access to personal income and is more expensive in social care terms than moving to specialist accommodation.

Population projections show an increase in the prevalence of people requiring specialist and /or supported housing over the period 2019 to 2030. This increase is related to people living longer and therefore becoming more infirm or succumbing to age related conditions, such as dementia. There is also a predicted to be a slight rise in people living with a learning disability and / or autism (mild and severe). Similarly, a range of new specialist accommodation is needed to replace outmoded provision, or to create efficiencies and savings via better alignment of housing and support services.

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<sup>2</sup> **Viability** assessment is a process of assessing whether a **site** is financially **viable**, by looking at whether the value generated by a development is more than the cost of developing it. This includes looking at the key elements of gross development value, costs, land value, landowner premium, and developer profit.

<sup>3</sup> Shelter 2009



<b>Type (aged 18 to 64)</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2030</b>
People aged 18-64 predicted to have a learning disability, by age (baseline estimate)	4868	4899
People aged 18-64 predicted to have a severe learning disability, and hence likely to be in receipt of services	306	315
Total population aged 18-64 predicted to be dependent on drugs	8,614	8,851

### **larger accessible properties**

The largest growing group requiring re-housing due to a disability is ‘family sized households with a disabled child or disabled family member’. Larger properties in existing stock are already at a premium and configurations are often not ideal or require adaptation or costly extensions.

A review carried out in 2019 into shaping the housing plus offer found that people living in supported or sheltered housing don’t want to be labelled as living in ‘sheltered’ or in a ‘scheme’, and that they want to live in a long-term home that can change with their needs.

To meet identified need we will therefore seek to include a small number of accessible and adaptable larger properties each year in our new build programme. To achieve this the Council’s recently adopted Development Allocations Plan (DAP) now requires new developments to provide 25% of all new homes to be accessible and adaptable to cater for specialist needs groups, including older people.

### **Building a place-based and housing-led approach to ending homelessness**

The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRAct) which came into force on the 3 April 2018, created new statutory duties for local housing authorities, in addition to duties under the [Housing Act 1996, Part VII](#) and the [Homelessness Act 2002](#). The key measures in the Act are:

- an extension of the period ‘threatened with homelessness’ from 28 to 56 days.
- a new duty to prevent homelessness for all eligible applicants threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need.
- a new duty to relieve homelessness for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need.
- a new ‘duty to refer’ - public services will need to notify a local authority if they encounter someone, they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The Heriot-Watt University research ‘[Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?](#)’ showed that poverty is the main cause of homelessness. [The Homeless Monitor:](#)

England 2019 showed that 71% of local authorities reported an increase in homelessness in the last year.

Newcastle's responses to homelessness are based on trying to proactively support all residents to sustain their homes and prevent the risk of homelessness. This is mainly through Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) who manage the Council's 26,000 council homes. To compliment the use of council housing to alleviate homelessness, we also commission from registered providers and homelessness charities rooms to relieve homelessness and provide support.

Newcastle spends around £3.2m a year on commissioned services for residents who face homelessness, this includes: a daily outreach service for people sleeping rough, 729 rooms mainly in hostels or shared houses, 228 floating support spaces, and YHN provide an additional 590 floating support spaces. The Council's funding attracts around an additional £3m in housing benefit.

After ten years of austerity, welfare reforms, and localism, we know that if we are going to end homelessness, then we must focus on what's best for Newcastle and maximise our collective resources across the City.

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

Our partnership with Crisis will provide more capacity to translate our work on preventing and relieving homelessness through a housing-led and place-based approach.

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

Through reviewing our crisis accommodation, we have identified that we need to use our own stock more in the journey out of homelessness. It is recognised more could be done within the HRA and YHN services to provide support and a real opportunity out of crisis and supported accommodation.

Funding is being made available via Homes England and the MHCLG, and together with existing providers, we are keen to capitalise on re-investing in outdated stock. We will undertake scenario planning as well as responding to requests from our current providers

to ensure the transition to new crisis beds provision with fewer beds overall is managed successfully.

### **Domestic Abuse.**

The Domestic Abuse Bill (2019) places a legal duty on local authorities from April 2021 to do the following:

- provide support for victims of domestic abuse, including safe accommodation/ refuge provision;
- develop and publish strategies detailing the range of support available for victims in our area;
- set up a Local Partnership Board to oversee and advise on the local commissioning of domestic violence and abuse services; and
- produce a local Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and Strategy.

Newcastle currently has a good range of commissioned support for victims/survivors of domestic abuse, with a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategic group in place. We therefore believe we are in a good position to meet the emerging statutory duties.

The Newcastle Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (NIDAS) is an integrated offer comprising of a women's only (and children) refuge with 14 self-contained flats, an outreach service (for males and females), IDVA and ISVA service, and support for children and young people (either living in the refuge or where family are receiving outreach). However, the current contract is due for renewal end of May 2021.

To procure a new service provider we will build an engagement and consultation framework for the re-procurement pictured against the strategic context highlighted above. This will be conducted in usual practice as a review of the contracted service and opportunities for revision through a detailed proposal contained within an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA). This will be prior to competitive tender taking with the contract awarded via November Cabinet to allow for a sufficient mobilisation period prior to commencement of new contract from June 2021.

### **Looked after Children (LAC)**

Newcastle City Council's role as the Corporate Parent for all of Newcastle's children in care means that the Council has a legal and moral duty to provide the kind of support that any good parent would provide for their own children. That means enhancing their quality of life and opportunities, as well as simply keeping them safe.

Newcastle is working to become a UNICEF Child Friendly<sup>4</sup> City and is building on the established high quality and passionate CIC Council to ensure the views and

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<sup>4</sup> A child-friendly City (CFC) is a City, town, community or any system of local governance committed to improving the lives of children within their jurisdiction by realizing their rights as articulated in the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

experiences of Children in care are fully represented and influence the decisions that the Council takes about placements for children in care.

To aid our corporate parenting duties, and to ensure we meet our child friendly City pledge to keep children feeling safe and secure, the HRA is called upon to provide suitable and safe accommodation for both care leavers and those in care:

- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) financially contributes to supporting care leavers via the supported accommodation project;
- Council has used its own asset to provide family style accommodation in safe neighbours staffed by NCC specialist teams for short- and longer-term placements of children in care.

Demand for placements for looked after children continues to rise across Newcastle in line with the national picture, and the City Council continues to explore placement options that provide the right level of care for each individual child.

As part of this approach, the Council is looking at increasing the number of foster carers and developing residential care settings that can provide both a home with therapeutic support for children and young people. This includes the potential to develop existing assets, utilise social housing or ensure developments of small children's homes are included in development schemes. In most cases these homes will be small with vibrant settings for just two or three children or young people at a time.

As part of the wider review of supported accommodation and outreach support being undertaken, we will ensure that all services give due regard to the aims and outcomes of children in care/care leavers. In doing this, the FHU will continue to work with Children's Social Care on the development of programme as set out in the emerging Children in Care Strategy.

## Climate Change

We know that the future success of our City depends on our ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and we take seriously our responsibility to protect our planet for generations to come. CO2 emissions generated in the City are split into three key areas, with approximately an even split between the three areas of:

- transport;
- domestic residential; and
- industrial/commercial sectors.

*Residential properties account for 32% of the City's CO2 emissions*

The domestic residential sector makes up 32% of Newcastle carbon emissions in 2015, which is 448,000t CO2 per year. Emissions from domestic sector have fallen by 34% from 2005 to 2015, with a 42% decrease in emissions from electricity consumption and 29% from gas. A large portion of the reduction is related to the decarbonisation of the electricity grid, namely the move from coal to gas fired generation.

Retrofitting hard to heat homes will be necessary to deliver on net zero, and in the social sector there is a readily available delivery mechanism. Improving the North's homes even at a steady rate could create 20,000 jobs at pace, providing a direct and positive impact on local supply chains. It will put money back in people's pockets through energy bill savings and reduce pressure on the NHS. Newcastle has made significant progress in targeting of energy efficiency measures across the City and overall, the average energy efficiency of homes is above the national average.

There was some positive news from the government's Summer financial statement – with £2bn allocated to Green Home Grants in the private sector; and a £50m net zero pilot for the social housing sector. Newcastle has already bid to the first round of Green Homes Grants to assist with our decarbonisation and energy efficiency programme in the owner occupier sector – with a second round of funding expected in the Spring 2021.

## Housing Solutions – Our Priorities

### Priority 1: Delivering new homes to create greater choice

Accounting for homelessness, overcrowding and suppressed household formation, our Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), completed in 2017, shows a need for 1,102 new homes per annum in the City (up to 2030).

Within the Council's adopted Core Strategy & Urban Core Plan (CSUCP) there are targets in Newcastle to build 19,000 (gross), 17,000 (net) new homes over the period 2010 to 2030 – with at least 15% (150 per annum) being affordable. The breakdown of targets within 5year tranches in the CSUCP are as follows:

Table 2: Five yearly new build targets		
	5-year Target (net)	Annual target (net)
2010-15	1400	280
2015-20	4800	960
2020-25	5400	1,080
2025-30	5400	1,080
<b>Totals</b>	<b>17,000</b>	-

*Analysis of delivery so far against our annual new build targets for housing shows that we delivered nearly 5,000 homes over the last 5 years, with the last three years presenting record highs - with over 1,000 homes being built per annum, including approx. 1,000 new affordable homes over the 3-year period.*

Prioritising building on brownfield sites is a key objective of the planning system and, as a result, the amount of development on brownfield sites is an important indicator which is monitored as part of the work to assess housing land supply. In doing this we have recently adopted a Brownfield Land Register (Dec 2018). This will help to ensure that the government's target that 90% of suitable brownfield sites have planning permission for housing by 2020 is being met. It also aims to encourage increased housebuilding and reuse of previously developed sites (brownfield).

The Council's recently adopted Development Allocations Plan (DAP) now requires new developments to provide 25% of all new homes to be accessible and adaptable to cater for specialist needs groups, including older people.

### Council Interventions

Using Council interventions in the new build programme, such as grants or using our land, the current long-term programme (Oct 2019 to Jan 2022) shows a further 3,690 new homes will be delivered. Of these it is estimated 1,254 will be affordable homes, including a variety of differently delivery models including: community led and cooperative housing, and the Annuity Leaseback Model which will deliver a total of 346 new affordable rented and specialist homes.

However, much of the land the Council owns and has set aside for housing has now been developed. Over the course of the next year the Council will be working to extend the review into housing assets by approaching other housing providers to promote changes to assets to modernise their offer, support demolition of outmoded or redundant stock and build new where appropriate to help maintain a healthy pipeline of new housing beyond 2022.

## Working with the North of Tyne Combined Authority and Homes England

Newcastle has been successful in bidding for and receiving government funding for our ambitious house building programme. Homes England sees Newcastle as a trusted partner in delivering the new homes needed, with Newcastle receiving the largest share in the North East of the last round of the Shared Ownership & Affordable Homes (SOAHP) funding totalling £11.84m (2016-21).

We will continue to strengthen this partnership with Homes England as well as that with the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA). In doing this we will develop a robust delivery plan for new housing. Using an element of the £24m awarded to the NTCA in July from the government's £400m Brownfield Housing Fund, the Fairer Housing Unit will be working up a list of brown field housing sites that will benefit from additional funding to put forward to the NTCA Cabinet for review.

### Strategic Sites:

We will, working with Homes England and other partners, explore progressing several strategic sites in the City requiring regeneration, and to assist with our new build ambitions. These sites are:

- Forth Yards: The development of the Forth Yards site would provide much needed housing to retain and attract the working population, as well as to improve the vista of the City from the South. The development of Forth Yards would allow for the creation of a new neighbourhood with excellent connectivity between the City and the Central Station for work and leisure.

Although the City is a popular destination for employment, data shows that we lose potential residents to neighbouring authorities each year, notably those ages 25-44.

An Economic Impact Assessment demonstrates that the site has the potential capacity to deliver over 3,500 residential units with consequent benefits in terms of private sector development and construction investment, job creation and the wider economic benefits of attracting new residents and increasing footfall. Development of Forth Yards would meet this housing need, enabling the creation of a new neighbourhood with excellent connectivity in the City and retain economically active households.

It is proposed that a bid is made to the government's forthcoming investment fund for the necessary funding needed for the infrastructure works to make the site viable for development. Infrastructure works required include acquiring adjacent sites to open access, removing the branch rail line and viaduct.

- Walker Riverside: Walker has benefitted from significant investment in recent years, including a new primary school, supermarket, the award-winning Tree Tops older persons village, specialist housing and new build homes for sale and affordable rent. A further 134 homes for affordable rent will be completed by March 2022.



The next phase of activity will be focused on the Pottery Bank South area, where we aspire for a vibrant mixed community, well connected to local facilities and the City Centre. There is potential for around 250 new homes here, which would be predominantly for market sale, with some affordable sale and specialist properties.

We will be working closely with Homes England and our partners on a programme for this area in 2020/21.

Other potential large-scale sites for new housing include:

- Newburn Riverside: A site in the ownership of Homes England who is seeking a development partner for up to 1250 new homes.
- General Hospital: Master planning still underway but this has potential for mixed tenure development for older people and for private rent.
- Scotswood phases 4 and 5 which could potentially deliver 1200 new homes.
- Walkergate Hospital which could deliver potentially 40 Homes.

### **Community Led Housing**

The Fairer Housing Unit will draft a statement that sets out Newcastle City Council's approach to meeting its duties with regards Self-build and community-led housing. This statement will outline the legislation that sets out our duties, what we are required to do, how we are seeking to meet these duties and our approach to increasing the number of community-led housing and self-build schemes in Newcastle.

This statement will be developed with the aim to:

- Contribute towards delivering a range and choice of new homes in the City, with potential for delivering affordable housing and meeting housing needs;
- Enable communities to take forward their own small-scale housing schemes;
- Recognise the self-build and community-led housing community and put in place mechanisms to support the housing aspirations of those on the Custom and Self-build register; and
- Raise awareness of self-build and community-led housing and encourage its delivery through putting a range of support structures in place to enable schemes to progress from the earliest opportunity.
- Provide funding support for groups to take forward their ideas.

### **Better use of HRA assets**

Over 2019 a two-pronged approach was undertaken to identify the future strategy and sustainability of Council housing stock in the City. A quantitative study was undertaken in the shape of an HRA Asset Review looking at the efficiency and cost effectiveness of HRA assets across several neighbourhoods. Alongside this a qualitative Housing Insights study was undertaken with current council house tenants and potential tenants seeking their views and perceptions of Council housing:

The HRA asset review has identified a small number of underperforming properties. These properties are in diverse neighbourhoods across the City and comprise a mix of

small estates, low rise flats, high rise flats and sheltered schemes. The review also identified estates that have low net present values (NPV's), generally under £20,000 per unit - the City Average is £32,000.

Scenario planning is now being undertaken within the overall HRA financial model to ensure that recommendations for these estates and properties are viable. The recommendations reported to Cabinet in November 2019 is that we will now move to the next stage of the review, to consider if sustainability could be improved through a range of measures, such as re-modelling, changing lettings policy, and /or changing tenure.

For some properties these measures may be insufficient to address decline, with a more radical solution required, such as demolition, replacement or disposal. These options will be cumulatively tested within the 30-year HRA model to consider how affordable a long-term programme might be.

The housing insights study which ran along alongside the HRA asset review sort the view of customers and potential customers of Council housing. This highlighted that people want an improved degree of choice in the area local to them rather than having to migrate across the City. People also wrongly assume they would not be entitled to a Council house as it was only for those who were in need, therefore they did not register an interest via Tyne and Wear Homes.

The stigma of living in a Council house was highlighted as an issue by individuals as a factor for not applying. On a positive note, the affordability and security of tenure was a plus, with the view that Council housing is a tenure of last resort and stigmatised still weighing heavily as a negative.

To counter the negative perceptions and highlight the positives Council housing has to offer, it is proposed a commercial marketing plan and campaign is developed to promote Council housing in the City. To do this we will designate resources from the 2021 revenue budget (HRA) to implement a marketing plan to attract more people to apply for Council housing, namely working families and those currently residing in the private rented sector.

Over 1,860 HRA properties are currently designated based on the tenant being over a certain age, e.g. aged 55+. This has led to some age designated mid-rise and high-rise blocks becoming unsustainable due to not enough people of the designated age wishing to take up a tenancy, and also due to them not being full adaptable for older people or those with mobility issues.

We also have a more modern offer for older people in our sheltered or extra care accommodation. Age designation is now not a modern way of defining housing, and we need to move to a more inclusive definition of how we let and allocate properties for general needs and those who have additional needs. We therefore propose to review how we designate properties, and some of the services we provide in designated properties, such as Ostara or support services. This will provide tenants with more choice in the accommodation we are able to offer. It will also allow us to make better use of the housing stock and to better serve the needs of our communities.

## Priority 2: Sustainable Economy and Communities

The Council has a strong commitment to ensure all residents have access to housing that suits their needs, especially those in later life, those experiencing a long-term disability or who are vulnerable. Research has proven that maintaining independence within a community setting has a long-lasting impact on mental and physical wellbeing.

Our specialist housing delivery programme was first presented to Cabinet in November 2017, and was based around the delivery of new homes for several cohorts:

- Age (65+, dementia, mobility, adaptable)
- Mental health
- Learning disability / autism
- Physical disability
- Looked after children

Within the Specialist Housing Delivery Plan there was an overall target to deliver 925 specialist and supported homes over the lifetime of the document (2017-2021). To achieve this, the Council works in partnership with a host of agencies and organisations, including: Your Homes Newcastle, registered providers, house builders and Homes England.

The remainder of the Specialist Housing Delivery Plan shows that over the period January 2020 to Dec 2021, the Council plans to facilitate the build of 500 new properties to cater for those with a specialist need. This will comprise of:

- Bungalows (sheltered & non-sheltered)
- Core & cluster apartments
- Assisted living apartments
- Tyneside apartments
- Enhanced concierge plus apartments, and
- Shared living apartments (learning disability / and or autism)

### Older People

Scoping and evidence gathering demonstrates a growth of the various groups requiring specialist and supported housing. For example, the growth in the older population (aged 65+) is predicted to increase 9,400 by 2030, with a 22% increase in people living with dementia. Though not all newly arising need will require specialist accommodation, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in demand over the current provision, and that we should be scoping what this demand will be as part of our new build programme and the asset management strategy.

We will explore further the products and services available to older people in both social housing and the private sector housing markets. We will develop further interventions which deliver living longer and with better health in homes and develop links to communities and existing flexible support services.

## Adaptable and Accessible Housing

The largest growing group requiring re-housing due to a disability is 'family sized households with a disabled child or disabled family member'. Larger properties in existing stock are already at a premium and configurations are often not ideal or require adaptation or costly extensions. We will therefore seek to include a small number of accessible larger properties each year in our new build programme, to meet identified need.

We will retain a healthy pipeline of new provision to cater for those with a specialist housing need. The Fairer Housing Unit working with Adult Services, will take the lead in planning for the future needs of these groups. It is requested that work is approved to assess potential sources of funding and land to facilitate new build provision, as well as looking at existing assets, with a view to carrying viability and feasibility assessments for re-modelling and re-provision – so that the Council readies itself for the predicted increase in residents who will require specialist and supported housing in the near to medium term.

To assist with this requirement the Council's recently adopted Development Allocations Plan (DAP) now requires new developments to provide 25% of all new homes to be accessible and adaptable to cater for specialist needs groups, including older people.

We will also work with private sector landlords to encourage the take up of Disabled Facilities Grant and work with property owners to make sure adapted stock continues to be offered and made available to those that need it.

## Looked after Children (LAC)

Despite the work to reduce the numbers of children and young people coming into care, demand for looked after placements continues to increase. It continues to exceed our in-house capacity, both in foster care and in residential placements, and we do not expect that demand to reduce. This has translated into unprecedented financial pressure in the context of increasing demand for services, compounded by a significant increase in complexity. This is a trend seen nationally as well as locally.

Given the likely increases in demand over time and the rising levels of complexity and need, particularly among young adolescents who come into care, we know that we need to develop a residential and fostering offer that will enable us to better assess need, through the provision of additional therapeutic support. We will never be able to accommodate all children in house, but we will work to develop the independent market and to expand our in-house provision where that is appropriate.

Children's Social Care, the Fairer Housing Unit, YHN and other Social Housing providers in Newcastle are working together to identify social housing that could be used to provide accommodation for looked after children. We will continue to use our own assets to provide family style accommodation in safe neighbours staffed by NCC specialist teams for short and longer term placements of children in care, and as part of the wider review of supported accommodation and outreach support, we will ensure that all services give due regard to the aims and outcomes of children in care/care leavers as set out in an updated Children In Care Strategy.

### **Crisis Accommodation (homelessness)**

Providing good quality accommodation is an essential foundation to either prevent or relieve a resident's homelessness. We will work with Adult Social Care and Integrated Services and YHN to develop our Housing First provision within the HRA - so that we can meet the needs of the Homelessness Strategy. Housing First aims to overcome homelessness by offering immediate and independent accommodation in the community. In doing so, the model seeks to provide a foundation for person-centred support that enables recovery from the 'multiple and complex' needs that these residents often have. As part of our partnership to end homelessness, Crisis have committed to fund a high-class Housing First service in the City. This will improve our ability to offer suitable and sustainable accommodation and personalised and holistic support to residents with multiple and interrelated needs. To fully realise the potential of Housing First, we will need to develop proportionate partnerships with health, social care and criminal justice based around the needs and circumstances of everyone.

We will also work with providers to explore opportunities to gain capital funding to improve the quality of our commissioned homelessness accommodation.

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

### **Rough Sleeping Initiative Funding**

The overall objectives of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme are to reduce rough sleeping and to seek to ensure rough sleepers brought into emergency accommodation in response to Covid-19, do not return to sleeping rough. As Covid-19 remains a risk, it is also essential that people, particularly those who are at increased risk of severe illness, are kept safe. In keeping with this the City Council working with partners will focus on the successful resettlement and recovery of those who have a long and/or repeat history of rough sleeping. The Fairer Housing Unit will develop an HRA capital programme to bring our voids and empty homes in the City back into use to reduce the use of temporary accommodation, bidding into MHCLG for capital and revenue funding for improvements and support services.

### **Allocation of properties for those most in need**

Working with Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Integrated Services and Your Homes Newcastle, The Fairer Housing Unit will take out of the allocation process a number of properties currently within the Housing Revenue Account. These are properties that are directly let to Social Care services and to individuals and families, to support the Council in its corporate parenting duties, and provide statutory temporary accommodation to those in highest need. Decisions on each case will be agreed through an Exceptions Panel managed by the FHU.

### **Priority 3: Making best use of the City's existing housing stock**

It is important that we make the best use of the housing stock we already have if it is to be used to the best of its ability to meet the varying degree of housing need and aspiration that exists, as well as to ensure that housing contributes to creation of neighbourhood that people are proud of and want to live in.

#### **Bringing private sector empty homes back into use.**

It is estimated there are around 3,800 vacant non-Council properties in Newcastle - this equates to around 4% of private sector housing stock. The empty homes programme operated by the Fairer Housing Unit provides advice with grants up to £2,000 for properties empty for 2 years, with £10,000 of grant for properties empty for 10 years or more to private owners and landlords to renovate their empty properties.

In 2019/20 the Empty Homes Team within the Fairer Housing Unit helped to bring back into use 719 private residential empty homes, of which almost one quarter had been empty for over two years.

Looking at the number of homes brought back into use in isolation, shows the empty homes programme to be successful. However, it is felt that some, if not most, homeowners receiving empty homes grant may have in fact used their own resources to carry out the necessary improvements to their properties. Similarly, since April 2019 the rules around Council tax levied on empty homes has changed. Since this date the Council Tax premium for properties that have been empty over 2 years increased from 50% to 100% - with those empty over 10 years the premium can be 300%. This change was brought in to act as an incentive for those with the means to bring properties back into use.

With this in mind, the Fairer Housing Unit will explore aligning empty homes activities with other strategic priorities, especially with the proposals of assisting individuals and families with supporting the Council in its corporate parental duties, the proposals to change from large scale crisis accommodation to smaller bespoke therapeutic provision, and to fulfil the need for specialist type housing. To do this we will work with commissioners across the Council to align housing policy and delivery with new models of accommodation and care, and will develop an HRA capital programme to bring voids and empty council homes back into use to reduce use of temporary accommodation.

The Fairer Housing Unit will also review how to can bring back non-residential empty homes back into use which could arise as part of the impact of the covid-19 pandemic.

#### **Private Rented Sector Property Licensing Schemes.**

In 2018 the City Council consulted on introducing new Selective and Additional licensing schemes that would cover approximately 68% (18,000) of private rented properties in the City. Taking account of comments made during consultation we designated a city-wide

Additional Licensing Scheme and 5 new Selective Licensing Areas. Licensing was introduced to improve housing condition, reduce anti-social behaviour, and to ensure properties in the city are being managed effectively.

The new scheme, introduced on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020, cover areas which will see the greatest benefit from the introduction of licensing. Areas of the City that do not meet the criteria for selective licensing will be offered proactive and reactive enforcement and support services.

To ensure the new licensing scheme can be delivered effectively, new staff have been appointed in both the Private Rented Service within the Fairer Housing Unit as well as the Public Protection and Neighbourhoods Team. The Private Rented Service provide a comprehensive offer of support to both landlords and tenants. The Public Protection and Neighbourhoods team have introduced a new system of patch-based working which will ensure each licensing area has a dedicated officer who can work with landlords, tenants and partner agencies. The proactive intelligence-based enforcement approach has also been introduced ensuring a consistent approach in line with the Private Sector Housing Enforcement policy.

In the City there is already two existing Selective Licensing schemes initially designated on the grounds that they were suffering from low demand. They cover approximately 871 properties, or 2.8% of the City-wide stock. The Fairer Housing Unit will work with Regulatory Services to assess the impact of the schemes against original objectives and prepare recommendations for letting the schemes lapse or to renew them.

### Tackling Climate Change

In April 2019, the City declared a climate emergency and have committed to reduce the City's carbon footprint to zero by 2030, 20 years ahead of the government's 2050 target.

To achieve net zero carbon within the housing sector will require further improvements to most properties in the City. This will require continuing to reduce energy demand and converting homes over to low carbon technology to heat properties. This will be achieved by establishing a range of solutions and financial models that can deliver improvements in the thermal performance, better controls on lighting and heating systems, increase energy efficiency of appliances and conversion of heating and power systems to low carbon technology.

As a city we know that this is a challenging target which will require action from everyone far beyond our role as a Council, which is directly responsible for just 5% of emissions. It is for this reason a citizens' assembly is being established in the city on climate change, and that it is important as a city we work with the North of Tyne Combined Authority, establish a net zero task force of City partners in addition to promoting the recently published and approved 'Net Zero Newcastle - 2030 Action Plan' which was approved at Cabinet on 14 September 2020.



### Potential housing decarbonisation options for Newcastle:

- **Energy saving** – Interventions include improving thermal performance of the building, better controls on lighting and heating systems and behaviour change, such as reducing thermostat temperatures.
- **Energy efficiency** – Interventions include increasing the efficiency of boilers, domestic appliances and lighting (i.e. lights which produce the same amount of light, but use less power)
- **Moving to low emission energy sources / low carbon energy generation** – Interventions include ground source heat pumps, air source heat pumps, gas hybrid boilers, biomass boilers / solar thermal, solar photovoltaic, wind and storage.

The Council will be trialling new approaches to achieve mass roll out of decarbonisation measures such as Energy as a Service model. If we trial passive energy efficiency measures and renewal energy installations we can then prove concept both financially and technically for wider roll out.

Government has set out that all newbuild post 2025 will need to include new heat installations(no gas boilers) – we will be ensuring our post 2022 new housing delivery takes this into account.

A key element of our strategy will be to support residents – owners, landlords, private tenants and social housing tenants to take up the offers from government such as the Green Home Grant.

## **Priority 4: Providing advice, support and information to vulnerable people:**

The Council understands it is a very difficult time for many residents in the city. Since the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic crisis we have reviewed our work practices to ensure we protect our vulnerable residents, support our economy and keep our city moving. As a city we are continuing to do this and are reviewing this situation on a regular basis.

We recognise that a proportion of our tenants will have seen a recent change in their income due to loss of their job, being furloughed, self-isolating or a reduction in hours. The Council has already put in place a number of support services for residents, alongside our managing agent Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) and other partners in the city to reduce the impact of these changes in finance and prevent arrears.

The Fairer Housing Unit and YHN are committed to providing advice and support to residents of all tenures, by providing a wide range of interventions, these include:

### **Rapid Rehousing Pathways and No Evictions into Homelessness**

The Council, as landlord and YHN, as our managing agent, responded to the government's guidance to freeze evictions as soon as it was issued, in line with the court service suspension of ongoing possession action for those tenants already in the system or where action was about to commence. YHN continues to proactively contact residents to check on their welfare. Any tenant who has flagged they need assistance with financial matters is offered appropriate advice and support based on their case. Where tenants have failed to make their regular rent payments YHN has made early contact to offer similar help.

Evictions are unfortunately still a part of the customer journey and we identified that, although we have a low number of evictions from our Council housing stock, it is still sometime the option of last resort. During the Covid-19 Pandemic we were able to quickly stop all evictions.

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

### Support to residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness:

The City Council have put in place additional measures to ensure that people at risk of homelessness are supported and offered appropriate accommodation. The Active Inclusion Unit within Adult Social Care have identified and spoken to all rough sleepers in the City and offered individual support to find appropriate accommodation. The street triage team meet regularly to review and make contact with anyone sleeping rough on the streets of Newcastle. In addition, Adult Social Care have worked to ensure all residents housed in temporary or hostel accommodation who are ready to move on to their own accommodation are supported in doing this, improving their housing situation and freeing up bed spaces for emergencies.

As part of our 'Everyone in' campaign which was launched at the start of the Covid-19 crisis our rough sleeper team have also reached out and supported people who were found to be rough sleeping but who had no recourse to public funds. This work was carried out even though it was outside of our statutory obligations as a Council as it was considered a matter of public safety and the correct form of action to ensure that no person, regardless of their status, was left street homeless at this unprecedented time. At this time there has been a decrease in rough sleeping of around 90% due to these measures, which have been funded from a mix of government support and the Councils own resources.

Provision of crisis and temporary accommodation Newcastle Council commission and fund over 700 bed spaces across the city working with specialist providers. This accommodation is a mix of high-quality new build schemes, self-contained cluster properties and more traditional hostel accommodation. It includes provision for families, singles, women and children fleeing Domestic and Sexual Violence, and more bespoke services for tenants with particular challenges such as addictions or complex needs.

The City Council provided extra funding for supported accommodation which provided to pay for additional staff to ensure that all hostels and emergency accommodation could be adequately staffed during this time to ensure that social distancing and shielding could be observed by all accommodation users.

A partnership within the City Council set up an Emergency Allocations Panel that met daily and over the period of three months to consider all priority cases. As a result over 40 people were moved on from supported accommodation into general social housing, so ensuring there was a pipeline of available crisis accommodation for rough sleepers and others in need of emergency accommodation. Learning from this model was used in bidding into MHCLG and the design Council for funding to support embedding these processes and enabling fast track move on and resettlement in the future.

The Councils public health team continue to provide guidance on public safety issues during this period. Early on briefings, newsletters and emails were shared with homelessness providers. Liaison with the CCGs identified those who required shielding and bespoke arrangements were put in place at their accommodation to ensure this

could be maintained, for example ensuring they had their own bathroom and kitchen facilities. Those tenants with food and medication needs were supplied with deliveries. Tenants in both outreach and crisis accommodation also had food and other items delivered through the City Lifeline volunteering service which was put in place by the Council to ensure those most vulnerable received essential items.

### **Private Rented Sector interventions**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Newcastle Private Rented Service has continued to provide much needed support to private renters. This support includes those who because of Covid-19 have accrued arrears in their rent. In March the Government introduced a three-month moratorium on all evictions in the Private Rented Sector which was extended to 21<sup>st</sup> September 2020, meaning that whilst notice can still be served evictions cannot take place.

During the Pandemic restrictions, the Private Rented Service has continued to provide services by phone and email whilst working from home. We have seen an uplift in contacts from around 1000 this quarter to 1500. The predominant reason for contact from tenants is about financial worries.

We are very conscious of the risk that tenants face as the restrictions on evictions lift and the Private Rented Service are now supporting tenants to negotiate with their landlords, access benefits or seek alternative suitable accommodation. If the case is particularly complex, the Council have excellent relationships with specialist advocate and can refer tenants to services such as Shelter.

The Council's website has regularly been updated including information about where to access new and additional benefits, how landlords should manage repairs and maintenance while social distancing, how to get help if you are a victim of domestic violence or abuse; and understanding the new rules around possession and eviction.

The Council's Private Rented Service aim to launch a Tenant Rights awareness raising and engagement campaign to provide information to those tenants who do not normally come to the attention of the Local Authority or other support agencies but may be at risk due to lack of information about their rights. That campaign will be launched in autumn this year.

### **Disability Housing Grants (Care & Repair).**

The Disabled Facilities Grants Team (DFG) within the Fairer Housing Unit commissioned 'Foundations' in 2019 to undertake a review of how people access information and services that help them to live independently in their own home. The review looked at:

- Services offered across all tenures
- Identifying areas for improvement & providing recommendations for service improvement
- Recommendations for meeting the needs of vulnerable people and improving the customer experience

From this it was identified efficiencies could be made across the services offered by the Council's DFG team and YHN. Recommendations also stated a need to develop a single over-arching disability housing policy across all tenures with a single point of contact with aligned budgets. That we implement a trusted occupational therapist approach, put the customer first, speeding up the process by removing multiple assessments by different agencies / Council departments, and that access to information is improved for those seeking options to help them live independently in a home of their choice.

Partners are working to introduce operational changes in the service delivery, and the DFG Team working with YHN and Adult Social Care are reviewing the relevant policies which overarch the delivery of these services.

### **Allocations and lettings of specialist accommodation**

The Housing Quality Network (HQN) were commissioned to review the allocations via panel process for those seeking supported and sheltered accommodation. They commented upon the good practice the Council has encompassed within its programme and our approach as being forward thinking. However, a few recommendations were suggested to improve further the customer

- provide a slimmed down allocations decision making process that puts the customer first with an integrated care and housing approach.
- a consideration of the sustainability of specialist supported housing schemes by balancing the range of needs being catered for so that schemes do not become overwhelmed with high end needs clients.
- Targeted marketing of schemes to widen the customer base.
- Regular reviews of schemes and the customer experience to ensure lessons learnt maintain scheme desirability and viability – mitigating against void rent loss.

The review highlighted gaps within specialist provision and the divide between general needs and specialist accommodation. It also highlighted the need for housing with support rather than just supported housing in order to create a full continuum and a total pathway offer.

At the same time, YHN undertook a review of their services which it offers to residents and the customer journey. This echoed the finding of other reviews, as recommendations included:

- build a rounded housing offer with an easy access housing options service for older people seeking accommodation.
- facilitate a joined-up approach to awareness raising of housing officers, R&M staff and others who may encounter those who may be struggling and in need of additional support.
- develop a housing pathway into extra care and enhance the role of supported housing advisers.
- extend support and advice to those living in general needs.

Following the reviews outlined above, a number of task and finish groups have been established to consider findings which highlighted the quick wins that could be achieved within the specialist sector, such as:

- streamlining of the processes, staff training and understanding, better information sharing, and cross departmental working;
- concentrate on improving access routes for new customers, working to ensure that housing options and aligned support is an integral part of support services, so even existing customers or those in receipt of support services are supported to evaluate and understand their housing options based on their current and future needs;
- consider and recommend generic and specific marketing information and campaigns to help raise awareness and understanding.

Using customer intelligence, the fairer Housing Unit and YHN will identify any further areas within the customer journey that requires improvements and suggest solutions to improve as well as looking at any gaps or missed opportunities where needs are not being met. This information will be used to provide a series of recommendations and actions to deliver, to improve, or to enhance the customer journey.

### **Responding to regulation and tenant engagement and customer feedback**

To ensure the Council meet with the requirements of the new consumer standards post April 2020, a set of indicators will be gathered and reported on a quarterly basis and benchmarked against the industry standard of a similar sized organisation. These quarterly reports will feed into 'a yearly assurance statement' made publicly available to allow tenants to scrutinise and to hold the City Council as their landlord to account.

Delivering compliance with the consumer standards depends on good governance, and on an organisation's culture. Should the City Council fail to meet this will result in a regulatory notice made public and is likely to have significant consequences for the authority in the way of an improvement notice made, with further non-compliance resulting in services being taken over by the Housing Regulator.

To mitigate against failings, the Fairer Housing Unit working with YHN will carry out an audit of the governance arrangements and an action plan setting out key priorities for the next 12 months. This will aim to identify if we need to improve compliance and demonstrate that we have effective arrangements in place to mitigate the risk of regulatory intervention.

Our Tenant and Leaseholder involvement and engagement model provides a range of opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to influence policies and services, and to challenge and scrutinise the Council and YHN. At the heart of our approach are three formal groups: Newcastle Independent Tenant Voice (NITV) Panel; Scrutiny Involvement for Tenants (SIFT) Panel, as well as YHN's Customer Service Committee (CSC).

A new long-term plan for tenant engagement will be produced by spring next year.

## **Regional Lettings Policy, Tyne and Wear Homes**

Following an independent review of the Tyne and Wear Homes Choice Based Lettings Scheme, the partnership agreed to investigate the possibility of one common allocation policy. This will look at the banding system across the region to align how we prioritise housing need. It may also suggest that we look at aligning our allocations policies sub regionally, where they match and review our local lettings approaches to allow for greater flexibility in local lettings. The partnership will also use its own resources to update IT systems and the customer website, so simplifying the customer journey.

In response to this the Policy and Commissioning Team of the Fairer Housing Unit will review the lettings and allocations policy and local lettings plans to reflect regional and local priorities. A report will be brought to Cabinet following on from the review of the aged designated stock, review of marketing and lettings, as well as the outcome of the regional discussion on a one common allocation policy.

## **Next Steps**

The Fairer Housing Unit will consult and engage the whole housing market, providers, customers and development partners and staff on the priorities within this housing position statement. We will use this consultation and feedback to inform the development of our new 10-year housing vision and feedback to Cabinet in 2021.