

Homelessness prevention in Newcastle: Examining the role of the 'local state' in the context of austerity and welfare reforms

Executive Summary

**Beth Watts, Glen Bramley, Janice Blenkinsopp
and Jill McIntyre**

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Executive Summary

This report examines how Newcastle's 'local state' (the city council and relevant partners) are preventing homelessness in the context of local government funding cuts and welfare reforms, and how these approaches might be improved. The mixed methods study has quantitatively compared Newcastle with other core cities using key administrative and survey-based data sources, and employed qualitative interviews and focus groups with expert local stakeholders, frontline workers, and residents with experience of homelessness or homelessness risk.

Key findings

- Newcastle has experienced a triple burden since 2010, facing amongst the most severe cuts in local authority budgets, among the worst impacted by welfare cuts, and one of the first areas to experience Universal Credit and its attended implementation and design challenges.
- In common with other core cities, Newcastle faces a more challenging context than the rest of England in relation to levels of poverty, destitution, and severe and multiple disadvantage. Low pay and working hours seem to be a serious and perhaps worsening problem in Newcastle.
- Newcastle's approach to homelessness prevention has four core characteristics: it is weighted towards *early prevention* and the mitigation of early signs of homelessness risk—before the government's 56 day target; it is *partnership-driven* reflecting the view that homelessness prevention is – and in a context of austerity must be – 'everyone's business'; it is *proactive* at the policy and practice level; and it is *data and evidence-informed*, with a strong focus on continuous learning and service improvement.
- Newcastle has low levels of homelessness compared to other core cities, and its surrounding Housing Market Area, on almost all measures. In particular, the city records very low levels of homelessness acceptances, households in temporary accommodation, and levels of street homelessness, and no use of unsuitable temporary accommodation like Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless households.
- The most likely combined explanations for these low levels of homelessness are Newcastle's housing market context – a relatively large stock of council housing more conducive to homelessness prevention, higher social lettings rates and lower private rent levels – and the city's very strong emphasis on and network of services for homelessness prevention.
- Arrears forbearance and support to council tenants; benefit advice, income maximisation and budgeting support; Discretionary Housing Payments; Alternative Payment Arrangements; facilitating access to the internet for people on Universal Credit; and the city's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer were identified as particularly crucial to effective prevention. What is striking about this list is the domination of interventions seeking to mitigate the negative impacts of Central Government policies.
- There is scope to improve preventative interventions targeting single people, young people, those with complex needs, some groups of migrants and private tenants. Particular opportunities for improvement were identified in relation to mental health support, the scope and depth of current partnership arrangements between relevant agencies, employment support, access to social housing, and the quality of and access to homelessness services, particular for those with complex needs.
- Strengthening homelessness prevention in Newcastle in these ways requires a combination of action from national and local actors, including Central Government and relevant departments, Newcastle City Council and voluntary sector organisations.

Context

The current context in which Newcastle is seeking to prevent homelessness is extremely challenging. The city has been subject to among the very highest cuts to local government funding among the core cities, second only to Manchester and London, and reflecting a general pattern of the most deprived areas facing the greatest cuts to their budgets. In managing these cuts, spending on homelessness has been maintained, partly by attracting short term Government funding, which has contributed to a small increase since 2010. Supporting People budgets have been cut substantially in Newcastle, though notably less than in a number of the other cities, and similarly, mental health services have been somewhat protected relative to other 'high cuts' core cities. Cuts in Newcastle have overwhelmingly been concentrated in the 'other services' grouping, with the biggest component here being cuts to 'central services'. Cuts to library budgets are also part of this reduction in 'other services' spending, something seen to be relevant to homelessness prevention by stakeholders given the digitisation associated with Universal Credit.

Newcastle has also been among the worst impacted by cuts to household incomes linked to welfare cuts and reforms, which amount to over £2,000 per household since 2010. Specific reforms highlighted by local stakeholders as having a deleterious impact on households' income and thus increasing their risk of homelessness included the bedroom tax, the benefit cap, and the freeze on working age benefits including Local Housing Allowance. Benefit deductions addressing priority or public sector debts (including to cover previous tax credit overpayments, advance loans, court fines, or debts to 'third parties') were highlighted as an additional factor precipitating crisis. An acute locus of concern regarding welfare reforms in Newcastle was the introduction and roll out of Universal Credit, something navigated in Newcastle ahead of the timetable in most other areas.

In common with other core cities, Newcastle has high levels of destitution, and severe and multiple disadvantage. It is unusual in having adjacent areas which are as deprived, or worse, than the core city itself, something which may lead to higher levels of inward movement into Newcastle than in cities with better off peripheries, as households seek to make use of the opportunities (for services, employment etc.) perceived to be or in fact offered by the urban area. Low earnings at the bottom of the labour market are a more serious – and perhaps worsening problem – in Newcastle compared to other core cities. Newcastle's housing market context is more conducive to homelessness prevention, characterised by amongst the lowest private rents of the core cities and social lettings rates double those seen in most of the northern core cities and around three times the English average.

Newcastle's approach to homelessness prevention

Newcastle City Council have had a strong focus on homelessness prevention since the early 2000s catalysed by Central Government agendas in that decade, but extending through the 2010s despite the Government's 'light touch' approach for most of this latter period. During this time, a spectrum of approaches to homelessness prevention have been developed which extend far beyond the city's statutory duties under both pre- and post- Homelessness Reduction Act law. The city's approach to homelessness prevention has four core characteristics. First, it is weighted towards early or 'upstream' prevention seeking to identify early signs of homelessness risk and secure Newcastle residents the makings of a stable life – somewhere to live, an income, financial inclusion and employment opportunities – and thus reducing the likelihood of homelessness. Second, it is partnership-driven reflecting the view that homelessness prevention is – and in a context of long-term and deep austerity must be – 'everyone's business'. Third, it is proactive. At the policy level

the approach is proactive in seeking to maximise opportunities for contact with at-risk homeless households by engaging all relevant partners, and equipping those partners to provide substantive prevention interventions where possible, and effectively refer on to appropriate services. At the practice level it is proactive in being creative in how to identify, contact, engage, and maintain relationships with households at risk. Fourth, the approach to homelessness prevention is data and evidence informed, with a strong focus on collecting, reporting, sharing, and continuous learning from relevant statistics and information relevant to policy and practice.

Newcastle has taken advantage of various Central Government funding opportunities, including crucially, the through the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme and developed a wide range of governance structures, partnerships, referral routes and interventions locally, in spite of the challenges of cuts to local government funding. Examples include the Active Inclusion Newcastle Unit and wider approach; the maintenance of a large welfare rights services within the city council and arms-length management organisation Your Homes Newcastle; protocols related to eviction from the social rented sector and seeking to prevent homelessness among those leaving institutions; and most recently the Street Zero partnership which aims to end street homelessness in the city by 2022.

Homelessness in Newcastle: scale, trends and profile

The scale of homelessness is susceptible to analysis via a range of data sources, and across almost all of these measures, Newcastle has low levels of homelessness. The city records very low absolute levels and rates of statutory homeless acceptances and households in temporary accommodation, low levels of street homelessness, and has made no use at all of unsuitable temporary accommodation like Bed and Breakfasts for homeless households since 2006. Using methods more heavily reliant on household surveys to estimate overall 'core homelessness' and thus escaping some of the limitations of administrative data sources, Newcastle also appears to have very low levels of homelessness compared to elsewhere – the lowest of all the core cities in 2017.

Despite having a very low rate of acceptances under homelessness legislation, Newcastle has statutory homeless application and decision levels in the middle/top of the core cities pack. This appears to be because a higher proportion of households applying as homeless are found to be 'not homeless' or not in 'priority need', a pattern that likely reflects that the city's ambitious prevention services bring more households into the ambit of the statutory system than elsewhere, but also perhaps variations in the interpretation of the priority need test in different areas. It must be borne in mind that those not owed the full statutory duty in Newcastle benefit from a wide array of non-statutory services and now enjoy greater statutory entitlements (to prevention and relief) under the Homelessness Reduction Act. According to household survey data, and in common with other core cities, a significant number of households in Newcastle appear to experience hidden forms of homelessness like sofa surfing and staying with friends/family.

Trends in both statutory homelessness and rough sleeping in Newcastle are broadly stable, in stark contrast to those seen in London and the South of England. This reflects a broader regional story linked primarily to housing market context, but aided by Newcastle's preventative focus. It is too early to decipher clear trends in homelessness subsequent to the Homelessness Reduction Act coming into force in April 2018. Data from Newcastle from the last year prior to the Homelessness Reduction Act shows an uptick in homeless acceptances, in stark contrast to other core cities who have seen a decline. Though caution should be taken in interpreting a one-year change, this wider

decline has been linked to local authorities 'gearing up' for the Homelessness Reduction Act, and it may be that there was less scope to make short term gains in this manner in Newcastle given the pre-existing heavy emphasis on prevention.

In common with the rest of the country, the key triggers of statutory homelessness in Newcastle are the ending of private tenancies, along with violent relationship breakdown and family exclusions. The balance of triggers affecting the wider groups owed prevention and relief duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act are slightly different, with non-violent relationship breakdown and eviction from supported housing seemingly more important, alongside the ending of private tenancies and family exclusions. There are early indications that leaving student accommodation and returning from abroad are driving some homelessness. More households applying to the council as homeless have been staying with friends and family than come from the private or social rented sector, underlining the importance of finding modes of intervention targeting these more hidden groups.

Data on the profile of those experiencing homelessness and homelessness risk in Newcastle show that as in the rest of the country, Black and Minority Ethnic households are over-represented among those accepted as statutorily homeless, albeit that the absolute numbers are low. This likely reflects more general drivers of homelessness (i.e. poverty) disproportionately impacting this group, and combining with the challenges of recent migration for some households, as well as the fact that Newcastle is a main Home Office dispersal area. There are a subgroup of homeless individuals in the city who appear to be 'stuck in the system', experiencing various forms of core homelessness over a long-time period and cycling between rough sleeping and supported accommodation. Though small in terms of absolute numbers, this group is the most visible of the homeless population and associated with highest costs to the public purse, in addition to the human impacts of this form of severe and enduring disadvantage.

Work to forecast levels of homelessness across England in the future as highlighted the fundamental role of poverty reduction in preventing homelessness, as well as making links between homelessness risk and unemployment, crime rates, and institutional discharge. Some of these 'levers' are subject to local manipulation and indeed, are being directly targeted to seek to prevent homelessness early and proactively in Newcastle. Many of the primary influences on these levers lie with Central Government, however, who has for the last decade or so taken a 'light touch' approach to steering local authority efforts on homelessness, combined with reforms to the welfare system and local government finance that are widely acknowledged to be pushing homelessness risk in the wrong direction.

Evaluating homelessness in Newcastle: service user perspectives

Interviews with 18 residents with experience of homelessness or homelessness risk in Newcastle highlighted a range of considerations relevant to prevention work in the city. Participants' housing and financial circumstances underline in sometimes shocking personal detail the very low income people are surviving on and the impact of this on their quality of life and security. Experiences of destitution – going without food and heating, in particular – were common, as was going without basic furniture, struggling to pay for travel around the city, and generally having to subsist on an extraordinarily low residual income, especially once deductions from benefits were taken into account. These circumstances were often what brought individuals into contact with services, but in many cases persisted after supportive interventions had been made, albeit that these had

ameliorated some aspects of the situation. This demonstrates the limits – linked to a nationally driven programme of welfare cuts – of the tools currently available at the local level to more adequately address the needs of some households.

Accessing social – and in particular council – housing and temporary/supported accommodation were a protective factor for households residing in these types of accommodation in various ways. Social housing gave people a sense of security even if they were still in financial difficulty, and a place to call and make home. Temporary and supported accommodation provided people with a safe place to stay while securing or working towards a longer-term housing solution, although it was clear that households often felt ‘in limbo’ in such accommodation and concerned about whether their longer-term housing outcome would suit them, both financially and in terms of its location near friends and family. For the young people in supported accommodation we spoke to, some clearly found this environment valuable, while others felt hindered from moving on with their lives by conditions of ‘tenancy readiness’. Some of the people we spoke to had histories of rough sleeping and staying in the city’s hostels. This crisis accommodation seemed to form part of this chaotic period of their lives rather than a clear route out of it, with normal housing offering better prospects, but the need for ongoing support incredibly important for those with vulnerabilities and support needs.

The experiences of those we spoke to point to some areas where local responses could be improved. Some had reached crisis point (e.g. the threat of eviction from social housing) apparently without a supportive intervention having been put in place. Others had not been effectively supported or referred to appropriate services when they initially sought help. Still others found particular services bureaucratic and not tailored to their needs, with employment support and expectations around work search highlighted here as problematic, and made harder in the context of people managing in situations of severe poverty. Struggles accessing and problems within the city’s hostel system were also highlighted by several participants, so too the vital importance of in-tenancy support for vulnerable households when in settled housing. Examples of failures in joint working, for instance between domestic abuse services and social landlord teams, were also present, as were instances of poor advice and missed opportunities for early intervention.

Prevention services in the city had made a significant difference to many of those we spoke to. The biggest differences to participants’ objective circumstances were seen when tangible financial help and advice was available to help resolve existing issues and make someone’s financial circumstances more sustainable going forward. Discretionary Housing Payments and advice on/help applying for appropriate benefits had made very substantial differences to the circumstances of some of those we spoke to. Receiving holistic and personalised support and clearly communicated advice from named, friendly and approachable individuals had a significant and positive impact on the subjective wellbeing of those we spoke to, as well as positive practical impacts. Good relationships with particular staff underpinned the most positive comments we heard. In several cases, positive impacts were achieved following contact made with households by services, rather than the other way around, suggesting that the proactive early intervention approach pursued in the city is paying dividends in terms of accessing some households at risk before crisis, or before they have realised they are in crisis. In the context of the often severe poverty facing households we spoke to, practical subsistence help accessing food or paying for heating had helped many, as had other forms of support helping them access basic furniture. This underlines the value of the Crisis Support and Supporting Independence Schemes.

Evaluating homelessness prevention in Newcastle: key informant and frontline worker perspectives

There is a cross-sector consensus that Newcastle is a high performing authority in relation to homelessness prevention, something supported by our quantitative analysis of the scale of and trends in homelessness. Leadership was identified as the primary enabler of this approach. While national leadership in the early 2000s was recognised as an antecedent of current practice, in the past decade local leadership in managing the challenges associated with national government policies was highlighted as the key driver. Consistent political leadership from elected members was seen as essential in ensuring that homelessness and related budgets could in some cases be protected, relatively speaking, in the face of large-scale funding cuts. Administrative leadership from an ambitious, experienced and knowledgeable team of officers was identified as enabling an innovative and problem-solving approach. Other enablers of the current approach include the historic presence of strong third sector organisations in the city, a partnership-driven approach, and the internal structure of the local authority, which sees welfare rights and homelessness/housing teams working to the same corporate objectives.

A number of specific services and interventions were seen to be particularly important and effective in preventing homelessness, including forbearance and support from Your Homes Newcastle (who manages Newcastle's council housing stock) in relation to rent arrears; advice on benefit entitlements and income maximisation, especially unpicking errors in relation to Universal Credit claims; budgeting support; Discretionary Housing Payments; and Alternative Payment Arrangements; 'easements' to Universal Credit/Jobseekers' Allowance-related work search requirements for those experiencing a domestic emergency; and facilitating access to IT equipment and the internet for people to manage their Universal Credit claim effectively online. What is striking about this list is the domination of interventions seeking to mitigate the negative impacts on poverty and homelessness of Central Government policies. Newcastle's work as a Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer authority is perceived to have been extremely positive. The multidisciplinary team has modelled new ways of working proactively and intensively with at-risk households and the partnership between the Jobcentre, local authority, Your Homes Newcastle and Crisis is widely seen to have radically increased opportunities for supportive interventions to target homelessness risk upstream and pre-crisis.

Room for improvement in the responses to some specific sub-groups of the homeless population were identified. Particular concern was voiced about single people and single men, reflecting that they face access to lower levels of benefit entitlements, fewer kinds of support services than are available to families, and often also lack informal support networks. Young people were also a locus of concern given their even lower entitlements to welfare support at a time when they are navigating the transition to adulthood. Some of Newcastle's supported accommodation provision for young people was seen to be too large scale and crisis-oriented and thus falling short of enabling young people to move on into mainstream housing and to address their wider needs. A number of specific migrant groups were also highlighted as facing a series of barriers to effective homelessness prevention, in particular those transitioning from asylum seeker services, European migrants seeking to claim Universal Credit, and those without recourse to public funds. Challenges were also highlighted identifying private tenants at risk of homelessness before crisis point. The group of most concern, however, were those with complex needs. The city's supported and hostel accommodation was not seen to meet the needs of this group (and indeed to sometimes

exacerbate them), with calls made for better access to mainstream housing, the protection of housing support budgets, and the scaling up and improvement of Housing First provision.

Efforts to develop homelessness prevention in Newcastle are impacted by a series of challenges, limitations and barriers. Welfare reforms combined with cuts to local government budgets have created an environment in which often the best local responses can possibly achieve for households is to 'keep the wolf from the door' and meet basic subsistence needs, with a life free from financial hardship simply out of reach for some households. Where resources from Central Government were available to enable responses to homelessness, the structure of these was often far from ideal, with funding pots being cash- and time-limited, subject to fixed cohort restrictions, and focused on crisis responses rather than prevention. Even the Homelessness Reduction Act, the preventative 'spirit' of which was welcomed, was seen to not go far enough in facilitating upstream and cross-sector, cross-departmental prevention. Concerns around data protection and information sharing were also highlighted as a barrier to maximising opportunities for effective prevention.

A number of opportunities for improvements in Newcastle's homelessness prevention landscape were identified by those working in the sector. The availability of and access to mental health support was identified as a major issue interacting with homelessness risk in the city, with a particular focus on the need to improve support available to those with mental health problems that do not meet clinical thresholds. Despite the city's strong focus on homelessness prevention being 'everyone's business', considerable scope was identified for improving partnership working and structures, particularly involving health services, but also addiction, probation and offender management, education, and children's and social services, and local businesses. Protocols for leaving some institutions (asylum seeker accommodation and prisons) are not seen by local stakeholders to be working as effectively as they could due to issues on the originating institution side. Buy-in from the voluntary and community sector appears to be uneven, with some tension evident around the role local actors felt the local authority should play in driving partnership approaches. While those within the local authority see a clear moral case – and electoral mandate – for strong leadership, some voluntary sector colleagues call for an 'enabling approach' that sees third sector organisations as more equal partners.

Gaps were also identified in the employment support arena in light of the ever more essential role of employment as a possible route out of poverty given the retracting welfare safety-net. In addition, a series of weaknesses were highlighted in relation to exclusions from housing and homelessness services. The role of affordability and other background checks in excluding vulnerable and low income households from social housing was seen to be particularly unhelpful from a homelessness prevention perspective. Help to those sleeping rough was also seen to be weakened by the deployment of various exclusionary practices including sometimes rigorous use of local connection rules and reconnection offers, restrictions on the support available to those with a history of violence in supported accommodation, and to those sleeping rough with a dog. Eviction from and abandonment of supported and crisis accommodation was identified as another important exclusionary mechanism undermining homelessness prevention efforts in Newcastle.

Conclusions and recommendations

A series of recommendations arise from our analysis, and these target a combination of local and national actors, including Newcastle City Council itself, Central Government departments, but also other local actors across the voluntary sector and public sector. This spread of recommendations

acknowledges the wide variety of organisations with a role to play in identifying homelessness risk early and mitigating it. In particular, they reflect the foundational role of Central Government in setting the national policy and funding framework in which population level risk of homelessness and local government's capacity to respond to it is shaped.

The current context is particularly pernicious in his regard, with local authority efforts to prevent homelessness directly limited by national policies that increase homelessness risk and restrict local authorities' capacity to respond effectively to it. Welfare reform measures that have made households poorer, and local government budget cuts that have made councils poorer are the key culprits here, but numerous other, smaller and more specific examples of government policy inhibiting more effective homelessness prevention have been given throughout this report.

Newcastle City Council, like other local authorities, is fighting homelessness with one hand tied behind its back, making the positive story about trends in and levels of homelessness in the city particularly impressive, and emphasising that even in this extremely challenging context a significant and sustained difference can be made by locally-driven approaches, especially within a more enabling housing market context. Nevertheless, while Newcastle has demonstrated impressive capacity to protect residents from homelessness, in many cases local services are unable to provide residents with the foundations of a stable life in the way the city council wishes to. While there is then scope for locally driven improvements to homelessness prevention work in Newcastle, the 'local state' will continue to be constrained to a substantial degree until these national-level barriers are removed.

Recommendations for national actors

1. Central Government should review the scale, distribution, and impacts of local authority budget cuts, including on homelessness, homelessness prevention, and housing support services, and recognise the challenges associated with multiple short-term, rigidly structured, and narrowly focused funding pots in compensating for this. Central Government should ensure that local authorities have sufficient and sustainable funds to prevent and alleviate homelessness effectively;
2. Central Government should urgently review the impact of post-2010 welfare reforms on homelessness and homelessness risk, including the benefit cap, bedroom tax, freeze to working age benefits, Local Housing Allowance caps, and Universal Credit, and improve primary prevention measures at the national level by ensuring that social security entitlements cover households' realistic housing costs and enable them to escape poverty and destitution;
3. The Home Office should work with Asylum Accommodation and Support Service providers and the Ministry of Justice with Community Rehabilitation Companies to address barriers inhibiting Newcastle City Council's capacity to prevent homelessness among those leaving asylum accommodation and prison, ensuring that notice of discharge from such institutions is given at least 56 days in advance and that sufficient information is provided to enable an effective response;
4. The Department of Health should work with local health professionals to ensure they play a greater role in homelessness prevention, including enabling General Practitioners and other relevant health professionals to identify early signs of homelessness risk among patients and give timely and affordable support to households applying for benefits on the basis of health

needs. The Department of Health should also recognise the potential role of mental health problems in increasing homelessness risk, and support the provision of services working with people with mental health problems (including those falling below clinical intervention thresholds) to reduce homelessness risk;

5. The Department of Education should consider its role in helping to minimise homelessness risk among those leaving education institution;
6. The Department for Work and Pensions should strengthen the employment support offer to improve access to paid work, increase the income those entering work at the bottom end of labour market receive, and help to ensure the sustainability of work. This could involve interventions seeking to increase the demand for paid work opportunities (via childcare provision and other support to un/under-employed households) and the supply of employment opportunities (via work with employers);
7. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should review the effectiveness of the Duty to Refer and consider strengthening the scope and nature of obligations on other public agencies to play a role in the early identification of homelessness risk, and the resolution of homelessness. A wider range of relevant health professionals should be included in the Duty to Refer, including General Practitioners;
8. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should consider how to support and encourage local authorities in providing early interventions that seek to prevent homelessness prior to households being at risk within 56 days, alongside their duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act;
9. Central Government and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should recognise the valuable potential protective role of social – and specifically council – housing in preventing homelessness and providing households with a secure and affordable home. The supply and management of social housing should be supported accordingly;
10. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should conduct a review of social housing allocations, with a focus on access to housing for low income households and those at risk or with previous experience of homelessness;
11. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should review the role of the ending of private rented tenancies in precipitating homelessness and seek to strengthen tenant rights to minimise homelessness risk for those residing in private rented accommodation;
12. Central Government should ensure that local authorities have the guidance and expertise they need to share information between and within all relevant public and voluntary sector organisations to facilitate the identification of early signs of homelessness risk, and maximise effective homelessness prevention, in line with the requirements of data protection regulations.

Recommendations for local actors

1. Newcastle City Council should maintain its strong emphasis on early homelessness prevention. Support available to those at more immediate risk and already experiencing homelessness –

including episodically and chronically homeless individuals with complex needs – should be strengthened and improved, including via routes identified in the recommendations below;

2. Voluntary sector partners and accommodation providers and Newcastle City Council should improve the quality of congregate crisis and supported accommodation provision to minimise issues of abandonment, eviction and exclusion from these services and maximise positive move-on, with a particular focus on episodically and chronically homeless individuals with complex needs, and including young people's supported accommodation.
3. Newcastle City Council and voluntary sector partners and accommodation providers should review formal and informal criteria influencing access to support and accommodation, including via the city's street outreach team, in particular those relating to local connection rules and reconnection offers, histories of violence in crisis/supported accommodation, and dog ownership, and consider how these practices interact with local efforts to ensure the sustainable prevention and relief of homelessness, and in particular the aim of ending rough sleeping in Newcastle by 2022;
4. Newcastle City Council and voluntary sector crisis and supported accommodation providers should move towards a rapid rehousing approach for single homeless households, including via the expansion of and improvements to the fidelity of Housing First provision in the city for those with complex needs, and more generally by ensuring access to mainstream accommodation with adequate floating support for those residing in temporary, supported or crisis accommodation;
5. Local health professionals (see below), probation/offender management partners, social housing anti-social behaviour teams (in particular relation to joined up working in response to domestic violence and abuse), addiction services, voluntary sector welfare rights and homelessness organisations, and other local partners working with residents at potential risk of homelessness should participate actively in the partnership approach to homelessness prevention currently pursued in Newcastle. Newcastle City Council should (continue to) facilitate and encourage the involvement of these partners;
6. Local health partners should play a greater role in homelessness prevention, with a particular focus on the role of General Practitioners and other relevant health professionals identifying early signs of homelessness risk among patients and giving timely and affordable support to households applying for benefits on the basis of health needs. Local health partners should also recognise the potential role of mental health problems in increasing homelessness risk, and the value of supporting households with mental health problems (including those falling below clinical intervention thresholds) in reducing homelessness risk. Local health partners should provide expertise/advice to non-health services (including social landlords and housing/welfare advice services) where household's health and mental health problems are contributing to homelessness risk;
7. Newcastle City Council should strengthen information sharing and joint working between local authority departments. This study would indicate a particular focus on Children's Services and Council Tax support;

8. Newcastle City Council should consider – based on emerging evidence from H-CLIC statistics – developing new relationships and protocols with higher education institutions to improve the prospects of students leaving such accommodation with nowhere safe to live;
9. Newcastle City Council explore whether it can strengthen the employment support offer to improve residents’ access to paid work, increase the income those entering work at the bottom end of labour market receive, and help to ensure the sustainability of that work. This could involve interventions seeking to increase the demand for paid work opportunities (via childcare provision and other support to un/under-employed residents) and the supply of employment opportunities (via work with employers);
10. Newcastle City Council should review social housing allocation practices across the city’s providers (Your Homes Newcastle and housing associations), with a view to ensuring the city’s high social lettings rates are being leveraged to achieve positive outcomes for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, with particular attention to social landlord practices excluding households due to affordability concerns, previous rent arrears, offending histories, or for other reasons;
11. Newcastle City Council should protect the provision of face-to-face support for vulnerable residents who struggle to use online or phone-based provision and facilitate positive relationships between households at risk of homelessness and named, approachable frontline workers. Newcastle City Council should also seek to safeguard and strengthen access to IT facilities for those without such access, and support those without the relevant skills to use it;
12. Newcastle City Council should develop mechanisms and protocols to enhance the prevention of homelessness caused by the ending of private rented tenancies, including by building relationships with private landlords, and consider the role of incentives-based approaches to encouraging landlords to help support services identify tenants at risk of homelessness;
13. Newcastle City Council should explore ways to better identify households at risk of homelessness in more ‘hidden’ situations, including among those living in private tenancies, sofa surfing/staying with friends and family, and or living with a partner but at risk of homelessness linked to violent or non-violent relationship breakdown.

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The Institute of Social Policy, Housing and Equalities Research (I-SPHERE) at Heriot-Watt University is a leading UK research centre in the fields of housing, poverty and social policy with a strong international reputation. I-SPHERE staff specialise in research on homelessness, destitution, complex needs and other forms of severe disadvantage.