Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer: 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2019 – part of the government's Homelessness Prevention Programme

This report provides an overview of Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer. It is supported by a suite of documents which provide both more detail on the work funded by the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer and resources for other areas to use or learn from. These are available on the Newcastle City Council website at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals

1.   Background to Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer

Newcastle's relatively good record on preventing homelessness is based on long-term committed political leadership, council housing, investment in accommodation, advice and support services, and an infrastructure to facilitate consensus and partnership working.

Newcastle City Council established the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach in 2013, as part of improving our responses to the government's welfare reforms and the associated increased risk of homelessness and in the context of austerity (an estimated £327 million reduction in the council's budget by 2022). The combination of these factors meant responding to greater need with less resources through our partnership approach which seeks to support residents to have the foundations for a stable **life**:

- somewhere to **l**ive
- an **i**ncome
- **f**inancial inclusion
- **e**mployment opportunities

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

Following our selection as an 'early adopter', other areas were invited to bid into the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer fund. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) stated that they wanted to establish a network of ambitious Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer areas who "*want to go further and faster with reform and develop new approaches to preventing homelessness*" and that these areas would:

- carry out prevention activity earlier and with a wider group of people – not just those who are owed the statutory duty
- lead across partnerships and services to prevent and reduce homelessness
- collaborate with other services and / or use data to identify at-risk households and target interventions well before residents are threatened with the loss of their home
- help MHCLG to overhaul how data is collected and analysed to build their evidence base on 'what works' to prevent homelessness, testing the effects of these approaches in different areas to inform a sustainable approach to homelessness prevention
- work with other areas to share best practice and commit to sharing learning with central government

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

2.   Newcastle's approach to being an 'early adopter' Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer

The Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funding and profile has given us the opportunity to build on and strengthen our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach to supporting residents to have the foundations for a stable life. It has contributed to strengthening Newcastle's citywide approach to identifying and responding to the risk of homelessness at the earliest stage and to improving our understanding of the causes of homelessness and the effectiveness of our responses.

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

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

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

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

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

We have aimed to prevent homelessness in Newcastle by improving our collective sharing, reviewing, analysing, understanding and responding. We do this by providing partnership working arrangements, jointly planning, providing consistent communications and workforce development, and simplifying processes, wherever possible. This has been especially important given that the government's welfare reforms and the increased conditionality that now comes with welfare benefits mean that residents have limited options to prevent homelessness. If they are not entitled to benefits they need to get employment to maximise their income, and to reduce their expenditure they need to

budget or move to cheaper housing. Our context means that employment and cheaper housing might not be readily available to fit the circumstances of those that need them.

Because of the relationship between these areas we had been developing coordinated approaches to aligning housing, welfare benefits, debt and employment information, advice and support since 2013. We had done well in improving the alignment and coordination of these for vulnerable residents. Our approach through the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme has been to take that work to the next level, to make the best use of all public service resources to prevent homelessness by working towards more integrated responses to support residents to have the foundations for a stable life.

In Newcastle, we use the following three broad categories to describe how we target advice and support to residents to prevent and respond to homelessness:

- **Primary prevention: residents at risk of homelessness**
  This is when we provide 'upstream' responses to residents who are at general risk of homelessness at some point in the future, but not within the 56 days that are specified in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Much of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer work fits into this category because of our aim to make the prevention of homelessness everyone's business. We are working towards creating a culture where we seek, wherever possible, to upstream the prevention of homelessness

- **Secondary prevention: residents threatened with homelessness**
  This is when we respond to residents who approach the council because they are likely to be homeless in the next 56 days and we have duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Some of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer work fits into this category, as part of adapting our responses to meet new statutory duties and strengthening our responses to meet local aspirations

- **Crisis: residents who are homeless**
  This is when we respond to residents who are sleeping on the streets. As well as Newcastle having an Entrenched Rough Sleeping Social Impact Bond (another part of the government's Homelessness Prevention Programme), we have a local initiative called Street Zero to maximise the value of our collective investment with the aim of ending rough sleeping in Newcastle by 2022

We believe that our approach is one that takes account of the national policy context but that pursues our local ambitions and what is right for people living in Newcastle, despite challenging circumstances in doing so. Our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funding has given us another opportunity to enhance this, and to question and refine our approach as we learn and understand more.

3.   What Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme has included and why

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

- **Responding as consistently and effectively as we can to residents who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness**

- **Working towards more integrated responses for residents**
- **Moving towards outcomes focused commissioning**
- **Improving our collective understanding**

These themes and projects are summarised below and are described in more detail in a suite of resources available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals

3.1 Responding as consistently and effectively as we can to residents who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness

Newcastle is a proactive city that understands that for many residents the risk of homelessness relates to their individual circumstances and life chances. It's a place where we are aiming for it to be everyone's business to identify residents who may be at risk due to individual vulnerability, life course events or transitions, and then to target proportionate and measurable solutions to mitigate those risks. To help us to do this, as part of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme we have:

- developed *'Our Inclusion Plan'* to meet our local aspirations as well as new statutory requirements;
- developed a *'pathways' resource for multi-agency staff* to clarify our responses to homelessness in Newcastle; and
- delivered a **workforce development programme** to multi-agency staff and volunteers

These areas of work are outlined below and expanded on in the resources available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals

3.1.1 'Our Inclusion Plan'

Working with Uscreates (now FutureGov) and Neil Morland and Co, we designed and implemented 'Our Inclusion Plan' as the assessment and planning framework for our statutory housing advice, assessment and temporary accommodation services to use to support the residents they are working with to have the foundations for a stable life. This was at the same time as ensuring compliance with the legislative requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to assess and jointly plan around the housing and support needs of residents at risk of homelessness. This has involved:

- Designing an assessment and planning framework in conjunction with residents, frontline practitioners, managers, Crisis and Shelter using service design principles
- Incorporating MHCLG's Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC) monitoring into the prototypes, as part of workforce development to familiarise practitioners with the new monitoring requirements in advance of them being introduced
- Testing prototype documents with residents being assessed in the statutory housing advice and assessment service in advance of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 being introduced, taking feedback from residents and practitioners and incorporating changes into revised prototypes before agreeing a final version for translation onto our Newcastle Gateway case management system
- Carrying out routine reviews of the 'Our Inclusion Plan' document and supporting IT, using practitioner insights and case records to identify improvements to the way we are responding to residents and refining our processes accordingly

Using service design principles has helped residents and frontline practitioners to be part of the transition process to the most significant change to homelessness legislation in England since 1977, as well as developing an assessment and planning framework that meets and exceeds the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. We have built on this process to extend the use of 'Our Inclusion Plan' to our statutory temporary accommodation service and hope to extend its use further to help with the continuity of support planning with other accommodation providers in the city.

3.1.2 'Pathways' resource for multi-agency staff

We have identified, clarified and refined the pathways for residents who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness, consolidating our responses to homelessness (and the threat of homelessness) into a format which is clear and understandable to frontline staff. This is part of our effort to develop a consistent thread from the identification of need, to assessment, to response (our pathways), to monitoring, to reviewing and then policy development and resource allocation. This has involved:

- Spending time in frontline services and using ethnographic approaches to understand the task, helping to develop a deeper understanding of the pathways of response, how they interconnect and the extent to which they were standardised across different services and practitioners
- Categorising the causes of homelessness and stages of our responses into a framework in which the individual pathways are organised
- Reviewing these pathways with practitioners and managers to check the accuracy and allow us to identify problems and gaps in our provision or evidence around particular pathways, so that we can develop solutions (including informing commissioning)
- Developing a navigable prototype document and testing and refining this with a range of multi-agency staff

The prototype 'pathways' resource has received extremely positive feedback and is ready for circulation to multi-agency staff and more widespread use in services to test its usability when working with residents. We are building communications and a quarterly review cycle into this next stage of the resource's use and are also considering how the model could be used to meet other needs, such as supporting 'in-depth case reviews' (which are described in section 3.4.2) and visualising how other systems work in related areas.

3.1.3 Workforce development programme

Our aim is to adapt the practice of services delivered and commissioned by the council which work with vulnerable residents who may be at risk of homelessness, to help staff working in those services to identify and prevent the risk of homelessness and financial exclusion as part of their everyday practice. For example, by incorporating prompts and questions into their conversations and the support plans they make with residents. By raising awareness of the risk of homelessness, providing training on how to identify and respond to it, and embedding this learning into routine practice, we believe that we will make the most of the contacts that multi-agency staff have with residents who might be at risk of homelessness. This should contribute to achieving our aim of making it everyone's business to prevent homelessness. It also helps our collective understanding of the role, and possible role, that each person plays in supporting the people who they work with, and the consequences of not making the most of this. This has involved:

- Maintaining a routine [quarterly programme of online and face-to-face training](#), which is reviewed and updated to meet new demands (covering housing and homelessness, benefits, preventing benefit sanctions, debt and budgeting)
- Delivering the above to 1,432 multi-agency staff and volunteers between 1 January 2017 and 31 March 2019
- Targeting this programme to specific groups of staff, including Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches, drug and alcohol treatment providers, and services working with children, young people and families

Despite the large numbers of multi-agency staff and volunteers trained over the course of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, we have had more limited success with the targeting aspect of our workforce development than we hoped we would have. This is partly due to not having dedicated capacity for this area of work, but also due to having limited control or influence on different services and organisations. Coupled with significant organisational transitions and other priorities, largely due to austerity and demand and budget-related pressures, this has meant that some services have felt unable to prioritise workforce development. However, we still believe that it's the right thing to do to maximise the contacts that services have with residents by raising awareness and knowledge of how to identify and respond to issues that increase the risk of homelessness or financial exclusion. We are continuing with both the delivery of our routine quarterly training programme and the targeting of workforce development to specific groups beyond the end of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme.

3.2   Working towards more integrated responses for residents

Newcastle is a transformational city that aims to break down the barriers between public services to enable residents to get better, more proactive, integrated advice and support that seeks to solve problems rather than just to pass problems on to another service or place. To help us to do this, to maximise the contacts that residents have with publicly funded services and to provide more integrated responses to residents, as part of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme we have developed:

- a ***Homelessness Prevention Pilot with Jobcentre Plus*** to pilot identifying and responding to the risk of homelessness related to benefit administration and unemployment, and to reduce the impact that unstable housing can have on residents' search for work; and
- a ***multidisciplinary team*** to trial delivering integrated casework on housing, financial and employment issues for residents facing certain issues or changes in circumstances, or where existing services aren't designed to meet the intensity of support required, and to systematically capture the learning from doing so

These areas of work are outlined below and expanded on in the resources available online at [www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals](#)

3.2.1   *Homelessness Prevention Pilot with Jobcentre Plus*

This is a partnership between Newcastle City Council, Jobcentre Plus, Your Homes Newcastle (YHN – the arms' length management organisation which manages council housing in Newcastle) and the national homelessness charity Crisis. The pilot started in June 2017 and has involved:

- Training 134 Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches in how to identify and respond to residents who have unstable housing or are at risk of homelessness
- Giving Work Coaches ways to refer residents who have unstable housing or are at risk of homelessness to specialist advice and support, clarifying which is the most appropriate service to respond
- Helping Work Coaches and staff from the above organisations to jointly determine the best way to respond to those residents, with housing and homelessness services working to resolve residents' housing issues and updating Jobcentre Plus. Jobcentre Plus can then put in place easements to residents' work-related conditionality and adapt Claimant Commitments, if relevant

By 31 March 2019 this approach had identified 729 residents in unstable housing or at risk of homelessness, referring them to specialist advice and support (353 to Newcastle City Council's Housing Advice Centre, 325 to Crisis and 51 to YHN). It is included in the government's Rough Sleeping Strategy (August 2018) with a commitment from the government to "*share as best practice the innovative partnership work between Newcastle Jobcentre Plus and Newcastle Local Authority, an early adopter of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer Programme across the whole Jobcentre Plus network*".

The Homelessness Prevention Pilot is continuing beyond the end of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, rather than reverting to the minimum threshold for Jobcentre Plus to identify residents at risk of homelessness which is set out in the 'duty to refer' in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. We are aiming to strengthen the partnership to make further improvements to identifying and responding to the risk of homelessness related to benefit administration and unemployment and to reducing the impact that unstable housing can have on residents' search for work.

3.2.2 Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer multidisciplinary team

To extend the above approach towards more integrated working for residents who require a more intensive approach, we have developed a multidisciplinary team which includes the following specialist caseworkers aligned to the foundations for a stable life:

- Somewhere to live – secondment of an Income Recovery Officer from YHN
- An income – outposting of a Welfare Rights Officer from Newcastle City Council
- Financial inclusion – outposting of a Debt Advisor from Newcastle City Council
- Employment opportunities – loan of a Work Coach from Jobcentre Plus

The multidisciplinary team started working together in October 2017 with three main aims:

- To deliver integrated casework on housing, financial and employment issues for residents facing certain issues or changes in circumstances, or where existing services aren't designed to meet the intensity of support required
- To provide infrastructure support to help services and organisations to adapt to meet the challenges of a reduced welfare state and to strengthen our local system
- To capture the learning from their ways of working and to contribute to evidence on the issues that residents are experiencing and the challenges they face to inform local and national policy and practice

Our hopes for the multidisciplinary team were that:

- Bringing together the specialisms that support the foundations for a stable life to work in an integrated way would provide a more joined-up approach to working with residents
- Collectively agreeing values and ways of working would build trust, which in turn would create a stronger foundation and credibility – with each other, as well as with others
- Prioritising practical solutions around human needs would help to build trust with residents
- Having more flexibility would allow a shift in focus from managing time and resources to focusing on what is best for residents
- Having an underlying focus on purpose and considering how things feel would result in a more meaningful, humanised experience – for practitioners as well as for residents – helping us to understand whether people respond differently when we respond to them differently (combining being cool-headed and warm-hearted)
- Through questioning and reflection, we could reach insights that had a wider reach than the individual case – working our way together through the vague, unknown and uncertainty to a more defined understanding
- Having a balance between empathy and interrogation (questioning systematically) could be possible – to test that being understanding and giving factual information and advice don't have to be mutually exclusive; they just need to be balanced appropriately and in context

We believe that we have sufficient information to identify who is at risk of homelessness and enable us to proactively target preventative advice and support, so the multidisciplinary team use a case-finding approach rather than taking referrals. In their 18 months of operating to 31 March 2019, the multidisciplinary team used a range of data sources to identify residents potentially at risk using seven different groups of criteria (or 'routes' as we refer to them). These range from simple datasets, such as residents living in a certain tenure affected by a certain welfare reform in a certain area of the city, to algorithms comprised of a much greater range of data to enable us to test predictive analytics as part of the multidisciplinary team's work.

By 31 March 2019 the multidisciplinary team had proactively identified and approached 296 households using this case-finding model, establishing contact with over 60% and providing holistic support to 40% of those households. The 'headline findings' from the summative review of the multidisciplinary team (which is available online) show that:

- a majority of the residents the multidisciplinary team identified were living in precarious, complicated and burdensome circumstances that had been worsened by welfare reform policies since 2010. The team also found some successes and failings with the local system in the way residents with integrated challenges are supported. Most importantly, what they found in most cases were residents exercising incredible resilience, grace and humility given the frustration many of them felt. Many of these residents were trying to get on with their lives but were also incredibly glad of some support to help them feel more stable
- the multidisciplinary team have most been able to achieve integrated outcomes across more than one of their disciplines (housing, welfare benefits, budgeting and debt, and employment) with the more complex cases. These have also lasted the longest time
- even within an extremely challenging context, the multidisciplinary team have achieved some very positive outcomes for residents, stabilising the situation for many. Nevertheless, the extent to which a single team can overcome challenges of a structural nature on an individual level is inevitably limited

- the multidisciplinary team have made an important and sometimes vital impact on the lives of many of the households they have supported. Working in an integrated way with specialists from complementary disciplines has been central to this, as has the adoption of an inductive approach informed by an action research methodology. This approach has enabled sufficient flexibility to adapt according to improved understanding of the circumstances of the households supported. The importance of the positive impact made is amplified when considering that they have proactively identified many households who had previously been labelled as particularly complex or difficult to engage

The findings broadly suggest that the multidisciplinary team have reduced the risk of homelessness for those households they have been able to work with (this is indicative rather than definitive). However, it has a bittersweet tone because although it shows that the team's work has been effective in reducing the risk of homelessness, the findings also show that for those households who the team were unable to engage with the risk of their homelessness has persisted and even worsened.

In summary, the multidisciplinary team has tested a new approach that combines research and practice with the aims of providing holistic, multidisciplinary support to households facing integrated challenges and informing local and national policy and practice. The learning captured from their initial pilot indicates that this approach has been successful in meeting these aims, but also emphasises the limitations in the capacity and scope of a single service in bringing about sustainable change in the face of such a challenging structural context. We have secured continuation funding and the team will be extended for 18 months, until 30 September 2020, with the addition of a staff member from Early Help.

3.3   Moving towards outcomes focused commissioning

Newcastle is a supportive city where we aim for living independently to be the norm and living in homeless hostels the exception for those who need additional support before they can do so; a place where we support those people to move to sustained independence at the earliest opportunity. We commission a range of supported accommodation and floating support services that operate in a 'crisis response' model that reacts to unpredictable demand. These services include gender specific accommodation, short-term and longer term support, and specialist provision for young people aged 16 to 24 years and for people with mental health problems. Our aim is for people's experience of homelessness to be rare, brief and non-recurring, and for prevention to be at the core of the advice and support we provide to people threatened with homelessness. However, when we are unable to prevent homelessness, we know that we need appropriate, humane and person-centred responses to support people to move to sustained independence at the earliest opportunity.

Our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer has given us an opportunity to further develop our responses, being clear that our collective decisions need to be evidence-based and aligned to our statutory duties, and to better understand the causes of homelessness and the effectiveness of our responses. Moving towards outcomes focused commissioning means creating a system that promotes preventative responses, enables real-time learning, is adaptive and reflective, and leads to an outcome focused approach to commissioning and to service providers' delivery models. Moving towards this has involved working with our local provider market to identify opportunities to achieve this, with a focus on the following key outcomes:

- **Increasing access to accommodation to prevent or relieve homelessness** – this has involved working more closely with our service providers to create ways of working that focus on daily conversations to identify opportunities to increase capacity, including improving turnaround on void bed spaces; increasing throughput as people move on to greater independence; moving people to alternative accommodation in the city when there is conflict with other residents; introducing additional funding through a spot purchase arrangement so that accommodation providers can increase staffing resources or offer personalised interventions that will secure accommodation; and increasing the number of 'emergency beds' that providers are incentivised to keep void for direct placement purposes

- **Reducing the number of evictions through an improved and collaborative approach** – this has involved reviewing the Prevention of Evictions from Supported Accommodation Protocol in conjunction with accommodation providers to identify opportunities for early notification of risk of eviction, and mitigating actions to prevent, including the provider sourcing alternative accommodation across commissioned accommodation provision in Newcastle, and the resident being clear on an escalation process from warnings to eviction taking place. Building on this collaborative approach, commissioned accommodation providers now also provide both the evicted resident and the council's Housing Advice Centre with written evidence of the reason for the eviction, any potential remedial action and the resident's right to appeal the eviction. This enables the Housing Advice Centre to respond appropriately to the accommodation needs of the individual within a legislative and a local policy context

- **Increasing move-on from supported accommodation to suitable and sustainable accommodation** – this has involved reviewing the Move-On from Supported Accommodation Protocol, with an initial focus on the 'move-on panel'. This has increased participation in the panel and led to prioritisation of residents in both short-term (crisis) and longer term (supported) accommodation who, through their support planning process, have been assessed as demonstrating a readiness to move on ("green") but have barriers that may be preventing a successful move to independent living. The panel, which includes YHN, now agrees clear actions to address the barriers, for the resident themselves and for the accommodation provider to enable move-on to take place as soon as possible. This leads to an increased throughput and freeing up of crisis and supported accommodation for future use

Beyond the end of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, building on the closer working with our commissioned accommodation services and with the Housing Advice Centre, Commissioning has been able to identify and co-design specific functions and requirements that have been reflected in the system models and service specifications for the new 'Homelessness Prevention and Relief Responses' contracts that will be in place from 1 October 2019. These contracts have a stronger preventative focus and greater emphasis on partnership working to support our statutory duties and policy aims, including:

- improving our evidence base by increasing data quality – this will be achieved through a "data payments" Payment by Results element in the new contracting arrangements;
- developing accommodation models that can respond flexibly to unpredictable demand, including scaling up of a Housing First provision – this will be a longer term programme of work with cross-council partners and accommodation providers in the city to transform our accommodation, moving from larger single site hostels to smaller environments that are more dispersed and community-based; and

- creating more opportunities for collaboration through a 'distributed leadership' approach with commissioned accommodation providers, looking at joint solutions to improve our responses.

3.4   Improving our collective understanding

Newcastle is a strategic city that builds its responses on understanding the interaction between the individual, systemic and structural causes of homelessness, residents' life courses and the effectiveness of our support to enhance their life chances. Improving our understanding has been at the centre of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, to acknowledge that our understanding both informs and is informed by the rest of our work in this area. To help us to do this, we:

- commissioned ***Heriot-Watt University research*** to examine the role of the 'local state' in the context of austerity and the welfare reforms;
- are ***improving our information collection and our analysis and use of information***
- are ***strengthening our insights from frontline practitioners***; and
- are ***strengthening our insights from residents***

These areas of work are outlined below and expanded on in the resources available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals

3.4.1 Heriot-Watt University research

To help us to better understand the role of the local state in preventing homelessness in the context of localism, austerity and the welfare reforms, the [Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Equalities Research](#) (I-SPHERE) at Heriot-Watt University carried out research during 2018-19, resulting in the report *Homelessness prevention in Newcastle: Examining the role of the 'local state' in the context of austerity and welfare reforms*[1].

This research involved documentary analysis, key informant interviews, focus groups with frontline practitioners and partner organisations, quantitative data analysis and in-depth interviews with residents at risk of homelessness. Watts et al. (2019) state:

"*The analysis renders clear the very challenging context in which households are seeking to avoid homelessness and local services seeking to prevent it. Newcastle can be described as seeking to prevent homelessness in the context of a triple whammy of high local government budget cuts, high welfare reform impacts and the early implementation of Universal Credit. Moreover, 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 deprivation. Low pay and working hours seem to be a serious and perhaps worsening problem in Newcastle*"

In considering the scale, trends and profile of homelessness in Newcastle, Watts et al. (2019) state:

"*Newcastle has low levels of homelessness compared to other core cities and (unusually) compared to its surround Housing Market Area. In particular, Newcastle*

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[1] Watts, B., Bramley, G., Blenkinsopp, J., McIntyre, J. (2019) *Homelessness prevention in Newcastle: Examining the role of the 'local state' in the context of austerity and welfare reform*. I-SPHERE / Heriot-Watt University

records very low levels of homelessness acceptances, households in temporary accommodation (TA) and levels of street homelessness, and no use of unsuitable TA like Bed and Breakfast accommodation. This is in spite of the challenging context for homelessness prevention described in chapter 3, with Newcastle among the cities worst effected by local government budget cuts and welfare reform, and having (in common with some other core cities) higher levels of severe and multiple disadvantage and destitution than other cities".

In their conclusion, Watts et al. (2019) state that:

"*Newcastle City Council has thus developed a rich set of approaches to homelessness prevention that seek to identify households at risk, reduce the chances of homelessness occurring, and where it does, minimise its duration. This network of layered approaches extend far beyond the city's statutory duties under both pre- and post- Homelessness Reduction Act law, and can be characterised as: (1) weighted towards upstream 'primary' prevention seeking to secure Newcastle residents the makings of a stable life (having a home, an income, being financially included and employed) and thus reduce the likelihood of homelessness, with interventions targeting those displaying early signs of homelessness risk (2) partnership driven reflecting the view that homelessness prevention is – and in a context of long-term and deep austerity must be – 'everyone's business', (3) proactive, both at the policy level in seeking to maximise opportunities for contact with at-risk homeless households by engaging all relevant partners and equipping them to provide substantive prevention interventions where possible and effectively referring to appropriate services, and at the practice level in being creative in how to identify, contact, engage and maintain relationships with households at risk and (4) data and evidence driven, with a strong focus on collecting, reporting, sharing, and continuous learning from relevant statistics and information relevant to homelessness prevention*".

We are using this research and the accompanying recommendations to inform the development of our next phase of consolidating our approach to improve homelessness prevention and how we respond to homelessness crisis in Newcastle.

3.4.2 Improving our information collection and our analysis and use of information

As the underpinning function of our work on improving our understanding, we wanted to strengthen our existing collection and use of information, both internally and with partners, to improve our understanding of what information is available (and potentially available), what the uses for this information are, and the impact and effectiveness of our responses. We believe that systematically analysing information helps us to identify who is at risk of homelessness, what our responses are and whether those responses work. In turn, this strengthens our processes for using information for local decision-making, such as commissioning and changes to policy and practice, as well as contributing to improving the national evidence base for homelessness prevention. This has involved:

- Adapting our homelessness assessment process and Newcastle Gateway case management system to be compliant with MHCLG's H-CLIC monitoring requirements, as a minimum, and supporting practitioners to be able to comply with those changes. We have also ensured that we can still record homelessness preventions for residents who are at risk of homelessness earlier than 56 days, even if the government no longer require that information to be reported to them

- Contributing our experiences to inform MHCLG, our software provider and other areas
- Maintaining and refining our quarterly homelessness reviews to inform our collective understanding and joint planning
- Considering what information we want further analysis of (and why), whether we have that information available or whether it needs to be considered as an area of development, and what we are going to do with that analysis once it's been done
- Developing a model for carrying out 'in-depth case reviews' to enable the above and to inform service development and system improvement. We started this in our multidisciplinary team; firstly, for residents who were near eviction in our Sustaining Tenancies process and, secondly, for residents who are at risk of homelessness and are involved (or have been involved) with Children's Social Care and / or Early Help
- Testing predictive analytics to maximise the use of the information we have available with the purpose of identifying potential homelessness that we can prevent. Our multidisciplinary team have done this using Policy in Practice's LIFT dashboard, alongside our other datasets and their experiences. As described in section 3.2.2, they have used various criteria to identify different circumstances of residents who may be at risk of homelessness before approaching the households identified, as part of their case-finding model to proactively target preventative advice and support

We plan to build on this work by:

- Using an 'in-depth case review' approach to support our understanding of repeat homelessness and our responses to those residents
- Developing our exception reporting process to move from the reporting of isolated cases to aggregating and analysing the information, for example to inform our understanding of both missed homelessness prevention opportunities and the use of temporary accommodation for reasons other than homelessness

3.4.3 Strengthening our insights from frontline practitioners

As described in section 3.2.2, we have incorporated capturing learning into the core of our multidisciplinary team operating model. The reflections of that team are a key part of the evidence that we are using to better understand residents' lives and how our policies, processes, services and systems respond to those intricacies.

We have also worked with Newcastle University's Creative Writing department to run a series of workshops with frontline practitioners (called 'Retelling Stories') in January and February 2019 to critically assess how we gather, listen, understand and re-tell the stories of residents who present as homeless or at risk of homelessness. This builds on the development of 'Our Inclusion Plan' as part of our aim to develop an even more empathetic process of assessing and planning for residents' needs. This has involved:

- Developing composite case studies drawn from residents who have had repeated contact with our homelessness system, for use within the workshops
- Collectively understanding and highlighting the issues that are leading to those residents consistently ending up in crisis
- Considering the purpose and uses of information

Newcastle University have evaluated this short programme of workshops. Findings suggest that these sessions allowed participants the opportunity to reflect on their work and validated already good practice, but also highlighted that frontline practitioners had

differential abilities to utilise the techniques in their day-to-day work. Participants also suggested a number of ways in which the sessions could be improved. We are considering the learning and potential uses for incorporating techniques like this in other areas of our work to strengthen our insights from frontline practitioners.

3.4.4 Strengthening our insights from residents

We have been working with [Groundswell](#) since January 2019 to review our structure for supporting residents who have experience of homelessness to inform the design of our homelessness prevention system. We want to move beyond a service user representation model to embedding meaningful participation routinely across our review processes. To do this, it is important to ensure that the views of residents with experience of homelessness are embedded into our decision making processes, rather than undertaking 'one-off' consultation exercises.

To determine the best ways to embed resident participation in our partnership approach we have worked with Groundswell to implement the first stage of the 'Newcastle Voices' project. This has involved:

- Mapping existing service user involvement and participation activities across Newcastle to identify how well they gather, include and respond to views of people with experience of homelessness
- Identifying good practice participatory approaches that already exist in Newcastle and around the UK to inform this project
- Using peer research to consult over 100 people with experience of homelessness or being at risk of homelessness on their experience of participation and how they would like to be involved in the future
- Producing a report, recommendations and toolkit for participation of people with experience of homelessness

The next steps of the project are to:

- Co-produce a model for participation of people with experience of homelessness
- Conduct a pilot to embed the recommendations in our homelessness review structure

We see this as a first step in improving resident involvement and strengthening our insights from residents. We have committed funding for this beyond the end of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer period and will be working to embed the model of participation in our homelessness review structures.

4.   The outcomes of Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer

4.1   Newcastle's headline homelessness numbers

In addition to the information included above for our different projects, including the findings from Watts et al. (2019), our headline numbers below show that we have maintained relatively high levels of homelessness prevention, low numbers of people found sleeping rough, and no use of bed and breakfast to meet statutory homelessness duties during the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funded period. This is in the context of austerity, which is reducing the council's budget by an estimated £327 million by 2022, and the government's welfare reforms, which are [reducing income arising from](#)

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- **Homelessness prevention** – 4,233 in 2018-19 (4,876 in 2017-18; 4,164 in 2016-17)
- **People found sleeping rough** – average of 6 per night in 2018-19 (6 in 2017-18; 5 in 2016-17)
- **Use of bed and breakfast accommodation to meet homelessness duties** – 0 in 2018-19 (0 in 2017-18; 0 in 2016-17 – not used since 2006)

We can't say that our approach to homelessness prevention – both pre-dating and during the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funding period – has directly resulted in the homelessness-related numbers that we report for Newcastle. However, Watts et al. (2019) state that:

"*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, and low levels of street homelessness. 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*".

Watts et al. (2019) summarise our context for seeking to prevent homelessness as:

"*Newcastle then 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. All of these factors, separately and together, are seen to escalate the risks of homelessness faced by residents, and to constrain the ability of the local authority to prevent and respond to homelessness*"

"*The headline story in Newcastle then is of a city facing an extremely challenging context, but managing to maintain extremely low and stable levels of homelessness on almost all measures.*"

In addition to what we have managed to maintain, despite our challenging context, we have also learnt a great deal and improved our collective understanding of residents' lives, how we respond, the effectiveness of those responses and what our future priorities should be. We have tested different ways of working, supported frontline practitioners and managers, and informed local and national policy and practice, all of which are contributing to the prevention of homelessness and, ultimately, benefiting local residents.

4.2   Independent research on Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer

Watts et al. (2019) refer to Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer in positive terms, with references including:

"*A strong message from key informants concerned the gains made via work funded by the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer. Participants were clear that the major contribution here had been enabling prevention work to happen further upstream, rather than when households were nearing crisis.*"

"*Key informants described how in various ways this partnership work via the Trailblazer had precipitated a 'culture shift' in services.*"

"*… the set of interventions and reforms pursued via Trailblazer funding were seen in overwhelmingly positive terms by the key informants involved*"

There are also positive references to Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer in the *Evaluation of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers*[2], which focused on the first year of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme and featured Newcastle as one of six case study areas, including:

"*The principle benefits of this approach in Newcastle were creating a strong evidence base on the local causes of homelessness and the effectiveness of different preventative approaches. It also played a subsidiary role in building trust and engagement with local providers, with an interviewee commenting that "evidence helps create consensus and provide transparency".*"

4.3   Meeting MHCLG's original aims for Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers

We have met the following aims of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme that were identified by MHCLG when they sought applications from other areas (see section 1):

- **Carry out prevention activity earlier and with a wider group of people, not just those who are owed the statutory duty** – As described in section 3.2.2, the multidisciplinary team we have developed has used a range of data sources to identify residents potentially at risk of homelessness using seven different groups of criteria. By 31 March 2019 they had proactively identified and approached 296 households using this case-finding model. The findings from the multidisciplinary team's summative review broadly suggest that the team have reduced the risk of homelessness for those households they have been able to work with. For completeness, we have cross-referenced whether any of those households have been owed a statutory duty. Only four of the 296 households had been, as follows:

  - only one was during the multidisciplinary team's time of working with them and was a household who was owed a statutory duty when they had to leave their home due to harassment in their local community
  - two households were owed a prevention duty – one who was identified using predictive analytics and who opted out of receiving advice and support from the team, and one who was being supported by the Housing Advice Centre prior to the team contacting them
  - one household was owed a relief duty before the team contacted them, as part of the Sustaining Tenancies process

- **Lead across partnerships and services to prevent and reduce homelessness** – Watts et al. (2019) summarise key informant and frontline worker perspectives as follows:

"*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*

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[2] ICF Consulting Services Limited with Bryson Purdon Social Research (2018) *Evaluation of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers*. ICF.

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".

- **Collaborate with other services and / or use data to identify at-risk households and target interventions well before residents are threatened with the loss of their home** – As described in section 3.2.2 and above, our multidisciplinary team has used a range of data sources to identify residents potentially at risk of homelessness, including testing predictive analytics. In addition to using data, one of the team's primary aims is to provide infrastructure support to help services and organisations to adapt to meet the challenges of a reduced welfare state and to strengthen our local system. In doing this, they have collaborated with a range of services to target advice and support before the threat of homelessness. This includes Adult and Children's Social Care and is described further in the multidisciplinary team's summative review. In addition, by 31 March 2019 the Homelessness Prevention Pilot with Jobcentre Plus – our partnership between Newcastle City Council, Jobcentre Plus, YHN and Crisis described in section 3.2.1 – had identified 729 residents in unstable housing or at risk of homelessness, referring them to specialist advice and support

- **Help MHCLG to overhaul how data is collected and analysed to build their evidence base on 'what works' to prevent homelessness, testing the effects of these approaches in different areas to inform a sustainable approach to homelessness prevention** – In the first year of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme we spent time helping MHCLG to understand the issues connected with their requests for cost data and household data, providing supporting information including rationales, definitions and methodologies for the data requested. This was part of our aim to provide clear and meaningful information that isn't subject to misinterpretation and to support MHCLG's understanding of what is possible to extract from local systems and to contribute to guidance that supports consistent reporting across authorities. This was in advance of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the introduction of H-CLIC in the second year of the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, which we have also contributed learning to MHCLG on, as well as informing our software providers and other areas (as described in section 3.4.2)

- **Work with other areas to share best practice and commit to sharing learning with central government** – As described below, our approach to being an 'early adopter' Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer has been to openly and generously share our development process, approach, learning and resources with a range of local, national and European organisations. The list in section 4.4 shows how we have worked with others to share best practice, including sharing our learning with central government. We have also published a suite of resources for others to use online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals

4.4   Sharing Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer learning

As stated above, our approach to being an 'early adopter' Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer has been to openly and generously share our development process, approach, learning and resources with a range of local, national and European organisations, supporting others and helping to shape their thinking. This has included the following:

- **Local government, arm's length management organisations, jobcentres and universities**, including within Tyne and Wear, London Boroughs and other local and combined authority areas, individually and through structures such as:

  - the local authority **Homelessness Analytics Group**
  - the **Local Government Association** (LGA), including presenting in the 'Innovation Zone' of their Annual Conference 2018
  - the **Local Area Research and Intelligence Association**
  - the **Tyne and Wear Jobcentre Plus Ambassadors Network**
  - a **FEANTSA and City of Westminster co-hosted European Peer Review** targeted towards cities interested in learning more about integrating housing and employment services

- **Central government and Parliamentary bodies**, including:

  - **Cabinet Office** – presenting some of our work with residents with multiple public sector debts to the Fairness Group
  - **Department for Work and Pensions** – presenting our Homelessness Prevention Pilot with Jobcentre Plus to Neil Couling, Change Director General and Senior Responsible Owner Universal Credit; Caroline Dinenage MP, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance; and Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary
  - **HM Treasury** – presenting the multidisciplinary team's work to Andrew Wood, Deputy Director of the Strategy, Planning and Projects team, and members of the Housing, Planning and Cities team, Welfare Spending and Reform team, and Local Government Reform team, who wanted to understand the impact of government policies on communities
  - **House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee** – providing written and oral evidence for the follow-up inquiry into the benefit cap and written and oral evidence for the inquiry into the welfare safety net, and responding to written requests for information on Universal Credit, such as support with housing costs
  - **House of Lords** – presenting at an event on preventing vulnerability hosted by Lord Bird MBE
  - **National Audit Office** – Newcastle was one of five case study areas for their *Rolling out Universal Credit* report (June 2018) and one of two local authority case studies for their *Tackling problem debt* report (September 2018)
  - **Scottish Government** – presenting our work to inform the implementation of the Fairer Scotland Duty

- **National and regional organisations**, including:

  - **Alma Economics** – informing their research for MHCLG on the causes of homelessness
  - **Centre for Responsible Credit** – Newcastle was one of ten case study areas to inform their LGA funded research *Reshaping financial support: How councils can help to support low-income households in financial difficulty* (February 2019)
  - **Chartered Institute of Housing** – informing the development of course materials for distance learning students on homelessness prevention, focused on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and presenting on Universal Credit with YHN at their 'Tackling homelessness and meeting housing need' conference
  - **Cooperative Innovation Network** – as a case study for homelessness prevention
  - **New Local Government Network** – as a case study in an innovation briefing due to be published on service design and prototyping

- *Northern Housing Awards 2019* – the multidisciplinary team were shortlisted in the 'Best initiative for tackling homelessness' category
- *Northern Housing Consortium* – presenting on our Homelessness Prevention Pilot with Jobcentre Plus at their 'Northern Voices: Delivering Universal Credit and tackling homelessness' conference
- *Westminster Insight* – presenting on how we have used Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funding to support frontline practitioners to adapt to the new legislative framework for the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 at their 'Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – One Year On' conference
- *WPI Economics* – sharing the tailored Claimant Commitment work that has been developed as part of the Homelessness Prevention Pilot with Jobcentre Plus

- **European and international organisations**, including:

  - *FEANTSA* (the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) – hosting a two-day visit from them and presenting at their annual policy conference in Porto
  - *United Nations* – hosting a visit from Professor Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, following a submission made in conjunction with the Institute for Health and Society at Newcastle University
  - *URBACT* (European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development) – presenting at their Policy Lab in Paris

In addition to the above, as part of the conclusion of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, we are sharing this learning at an event in Newcastle on 20 June 2019 and are publishing resources which provide more details on the projects outlined in section 3 (online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals). We are not simply stating that everywhere should or could follow the approach that we have taken, given that different areas can have very different contexts. However, we believe that we have at least some learning that every area will find relevant and replicable and have, therefore, separated our learning into a suite of resources to facilitate a more refined approach to sharing rather than publishing one long report on our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme.

5. The next steps for homelessness prevention in Newcastle

We are maintaining our long-term aim to develop a whole city systemic approach to proactively identifying and responding to the risk of homelessness by working with partners in the voluntary, business, faith and public sector to maximise the value of our collective investment to better resolve our common aim to end homelessness. We believe that there are opportunities to build on our preventative model to improve crisis responses, that we have done this through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme, and that we have valuable learning to share with MHCLG and with other areas. Despite our challenges, we want to continue to:

- **support residents to have a stable life** – somewhere to **l**ive, an **i**ncome, **f**inancial inclusion and **e**mployment opportunities
- **prevent homelessness at an earlier stage** (than the 56 days prescribed in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017), with the earliest identification of a life in crisis or a crisis in life
- **identify and respond to the "*underlying issues*"** that the Prime Minster referred to in the launch of the Homelessness Prevention Programme in October 2016

Through our focus on improving our collective understanding we have concluded that alongside providing consistent, effective and flexible frontline responses to residents who need help, we need to build in and embed the capacity and ability to question, consider, analyse, make sense of, define, redefine, categorise, conclude, develop responses and continually refine our approach. If we don't do that and don't improve our understanding of the situation and what the options for responding are, we risk our responses being more limited, especially given the dynamic context we are working in described in section 2 . Improving our collective understanding also means that we stand more chance of being able to do the right thing for people the first time we identify that they need our help.

We have secured additional internal funding (known as 'Life Chances') to extend some elements of our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme. Using this funding, and to support us to do the above, we are consolidating our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach and progressing the following areas of work, as outlined in our most recent [bi-annual report to Cabinet on our responses to the government's welfare reforms](#):

- **Developing and maintaining proportionate partnership arrangements**
- **Supporting residents with a consistent partnership approach to identifying and responding to the obstacles they face to having suitable and sustainable accommodation**
- **Building on the learning from multidisciplinary team responses**
- **Reviewing the council's debt collection processes**

We believe that there are opportunities to strengthen local systems and make homelessness prevention 'everyone's business' by better using information, improving our understanding, maximising existing contacts that residents have with services, supporting multi-agency workforce development, and providing consistent and up-to-date information. However, there are challenges in doing this and it requires the continuation and support of visible leadership to maintain and further develop our citywide culture.

We would like to more conclusively evidence the value of homelessness prevention and partnership working in this area and aspire to improve both our local and the national understanding of cost benefit analysis for homelessness. Given the impact of structural issues, such as national policies and the housing and employment market, on the risk of homelessness, we also commit to continuing to use our learning to contribute to bridging the gap between local experience and national policy-making.

Watts et al. (2019) describe Newcastle as "*at the forefront of innovations in the homelessness prevention arena, not least through the Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, via which it has developed a range of ways to identify and support those showing early signs of homelessness risk*". We are hopeful that we can build on this, extending our approach further and continuing to improve our partnership approach to preventing homelessness in Newcastle and improving the lives of local residents.

Author and contact for more details:

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

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