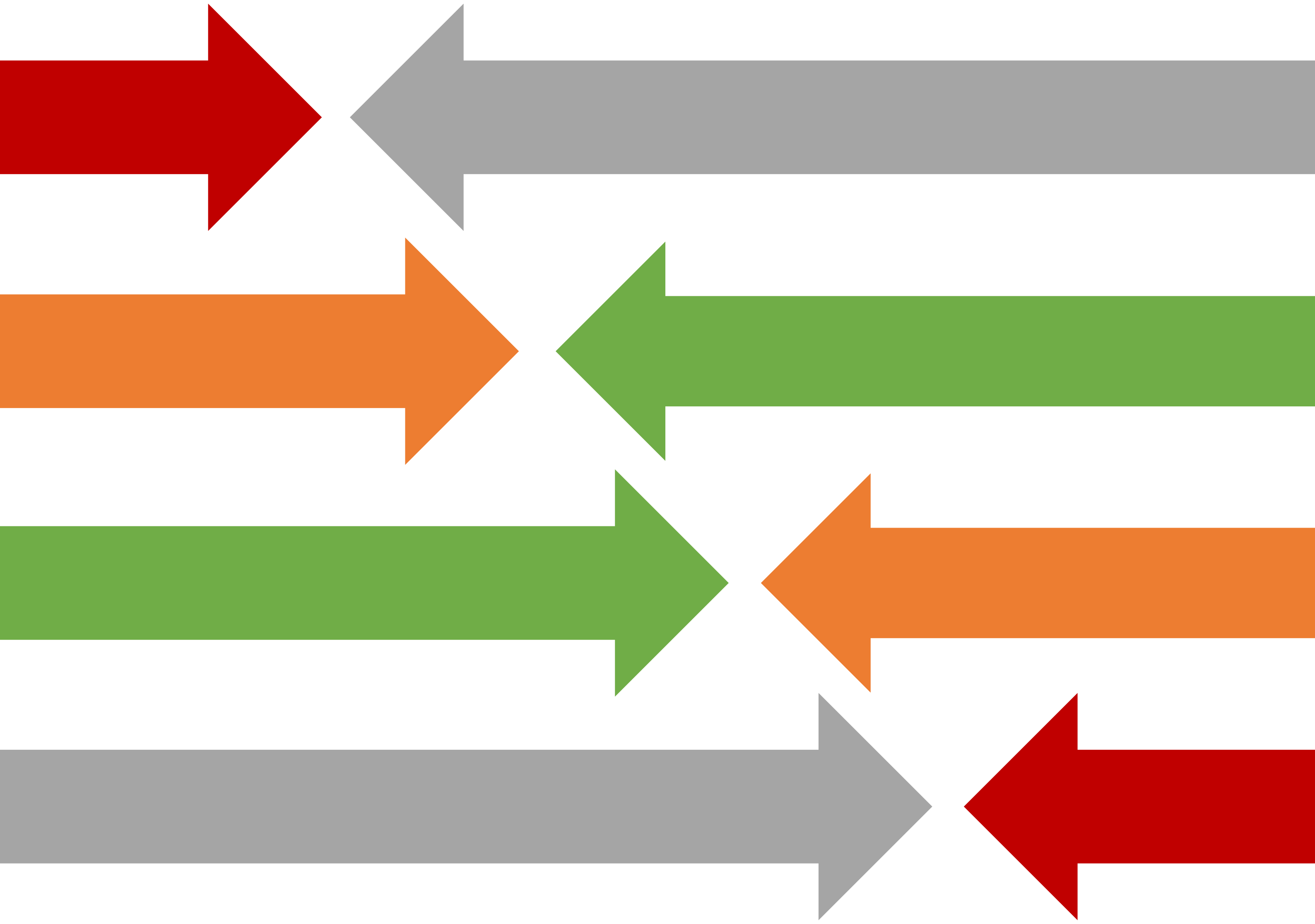
Newcastle City Council

Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer

Pathways: clarifying our responses to homelessness in Newcastle

The process of developing the pathways resource



Dr Chris Parker, Active Inclusion Service, Newcastle City Council

1. Introduction

1.1 – Background and purpose

This project is part of Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, and complements our work to support practitioners to transition to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. At a wider level, it is also 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. To this point, some of our responses have developed organically, and are not routinely available to practitioners or residents in a transparent form. Clarifying our responses should allow us to prevent homelessness in a more consistent manner. In the context of 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 importance of responding to homelessness consistently and effectively is even greater.

In this project, the term 'pathways' refers to how we respond to those residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Essentially, how do we identify someone threatened with homelessness or actually homeless? what steps do we take to respond? and who carries out these steps? The pathways project seeks to identify, clarify, and refine the pathways for residents in Newcastle who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. In its broadest form, the task is to consolidate our responses to homelessness (and the threat of homelessness) into a form which is clear and understandable to practitioners. The objectives of the first stage of the project are to:

- consolidate our responses to homelessness (and the threat of homelessness) into pathways which align to the key causes of homelessness in Newcastle
- map the ordering of responses within each pathway and clarify the roles and responsibilities of different services within each pathway of response to identify gaps in continuity for residents
- collate useful information on each pathway into an accessible and navigable resource for practitioners, with residents in mind
- gather feedback from practitioners on both the resource and the actual pathways of response

The perceived benefits of the project are to:

- have our responses written down in a more transparent format, allowing a point of reference for staff
- support new practitioners and others to understand the range of approaches we use to respond to homelessness
- collate key information on each pathway of response, making them more accessible for practitioners
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of different services in specific pathways. In the process, contributing to our effort to 'make preventing and responding to homelessness everyone's business'
- develop a clearer link between our policies and the realities of our practice
- identify gaps in our pathways of response either in terms of the continuity of support, or in our evidence of 'what works'

What the project will not do:

- replace the expertise or experience of practitioners. Each resident's issues are individual and complex and this project will not provide set responses for every eventuality
- allow residents to navigate themselves through our pathways
- inherently improve any of our responses, at least in the first instance. It is hoped that areas which require development will emanate from the project, but further work will be required to improve these

1.2 - Structure of this report

The main focus of this report is to explain the process of development for the pathways resource. Section 2 begins by drawing on relevant literature to highlight the methods used in the project and their suggested benefits, which complement the aims of this project.

Section 3 focuses on the process of development itself. Section 3.1 outlines the process of familiarisation, essential to understanding the task and approaching it in a structured way. Section 3.2 then details the development of the framework for the pathways resource. Section 3.3 focuses on the mapping of individual pathways before section 3.4 highlights the process for reviewing these pathways. Section 3.5 outlines the creation of the prototype pathways resource. Section 3.6 then presents how we tested the pathways resource and outlines practitioners' positive feedback on its structure, usability and relevance (see section 3.6).

Finally, section 4 outlines some key conclusions from the project before section 5 outlines the next steps for further development.

2. Literature on mapping a system

The pathways project is funded through Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer, a public service transformation programme that focuses on the prevention of homelessness at an earlier stage.

Public service transformation inherently involves a process of system change. In their study of change in organisations and collaborations, Lowe and Plimmer (2019)[1] identified a number of common steps in the process of change that are followed iteratively:

- starting with a purpose
- understanding the system
- co-designing
- experimentation
- reflection
- re-design
- putting learning at the heart of governance, embedding and influencing

In different ways and to different extents, many of these steps are represented in each of the projects we have developed through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer. However, it is not within the scope of this report to cover the details of each.

Within the pathways project, aspects of 'co-design', as well as 'experimentation, reflection and re-design' are represented in the methodology used to develop the resource. However, the most relevant step to the pathways project is 'understanding the system'. Lowe and Plimmer note that an essential component in understanding the system is 'making the system visible'. Abercrombie et al. (2015)[2] note that explaining systems in a simple and clear way is inherently difficult. However, the failure to do so can be infuriating for the uninitiated and can risk creating cynicism about the effectiveness of approaches. In turn, Lowe and Plimmer discuss the concept of 'path dependence' in complexity theory to argue that complex systems are unpredictable, but not totally random. They produce patterns that must be understood to understand the results they produce. Although this project could never fully represent the complexity of a whole system, it does seek to make these patterns more visible to aide understanding and mitigate cynicism about the usefulness of our approach.

The pathways project seeks to do so by identifying, clarifying and refining the pathways for residents in Newcastle who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. In seeking to achieve clarity, these pathways are organised by the primary causes of

[1] Lowe and Plimmer (2019) *Exploring the new world: practical insights for funding, commissioning and managing in complexity*. Collaborate.

[2] Abercrombie, R., Harries, E., Wharton, R. (2015) *Systems Change: a guide to what it is and how to do it.* Lankelly Chase/ NPC

homelessness in Newcastle and our key stages of response (see section 3.2). The result is a visual representation of the system of homelessness prevention and relief in Newcastle.

As highlighted in section 3.1, many of our pathways of response have developed organically over time, as have the interconnections between them. They have been developed during particular commissioning cycles or in response to growing demand identified during our review processes, emergent opportunities to build stronger partnership arrangements or changes in national government policy. At each point, the individual pathway of response that had been developed may have been explained but these pathways are often subject to change, evolving in response to changing circumstances. As a result, it is important to note that we do not propose that our system of homelessness prevention and relief has been deductively planned out in advance. Nevertheless, in mapping the pathways out it has become possible to identify that they are not entirely disparate; instead they interconnect as part of a more complex whole.

To this point there has been no single resource that has structured these pathways, showing how they fit into what can be defined as a wider system of homelessness prevention and relief.

2.1 - Bounding the system

Before mapping the individual pathways of response and their interconnections, it was first important to determine the boundaries of the system, and therefore the project. Abercrombie et al. (2015) note that understanding the boundaries of a system is not a straightforward task. However, they also highlight that many theorists see establishing boundaries is a critical first step for effective systems change. They go on to note that deciding on a boundary is always a matter of judgement based on who and what are involved in the cause and the response. Section 3.2 outlines how we sought to both define and bound Newcastle's homelessness prevention and relief system in the process of 'developing the framework' for the mapping of individual pathways. Section 3.1 outlines the process of familiarisation that informed the development of the mapping framework.

2.2 - Process mapping to 'make visible'

Once the framework had been developed, it was possible to begin mapping the individual pathways of response. To do this, we employed techniques commonly referred to as 'process mapping'. Klotz et al. (2008:1) describe process mapping as displaying *"activities and procedures … in a graphical way as pictorial images [to] convey considerable information".*

In their article on the use of mapping in behavioural health delivery, Johnson and Debono (2016:1)[3] describe process mapping as *"a simple, yet powerful tool that can form the basis of quality improvement work".* Damelio (2016)[4] highlights a number of different types of process mapping including relationship mapping, cross functional process mapping, and flowcharts.

In this project, we primarily used flowcharts to visualise the pathways that constitute our current system of homelessness prevention and relief. *Ibid.* describes a flowchart as "*a graphic representation of the sequence of work activities used to create … a single output"* (p.8). He goes on to note that flowcharts represent the most "granular" view of the work done in a process. As highlighted in the 'background' section to this report, this project was concerned with looking in detail at how do we identify someone threatened with homelessness or actually homeless? what steps do we take to respond? and who carries out the different stages of the response? As a result, it was important to

[3] Johnson J.K., Debono D. (2016) *Process Mapping to Improve Quality in Behavioural Health Service Delivery.* In: O'Donohue W., Maragakis A. (eds) Quality Improvement in Behavioral Health. Springer.

[4] Damelio, R. (2016). *The basics of process mapping*. Productivity Press.

look at our pathways in detail in order to accurately answer these questions.

Process mapping is generally considered as a tool that can be used an intermediary to service and system improvement. In other words, by mapping out what is happening, we can identify how to improve it or what we may be missing.

Antonacci et al. (2018)[5] highlighted eight key benefits related to process mapping related to quality improvement projects in healthcare. They identified that process mapping contributed to gathering a shared understanding of the reality; helped identify improvement opportunities; engaged stakeholders in the project; defined the project's objectives; supported with the monitoring of the project's progress; assisted in developing learning; and increased empathy. They also highlighted that a key benefit was the simplicity of the method itself. Of Antonacci et al.'s key benefits, two are particularly relevant for this project: 'increasing transparency' and 'developing a shared understanding'. The simplicity of process mapping as a method and the detail allowed by flowcharts is central to both of these benefits.

The notion of transparency has been highlighted earlier in this section, in relation to 'making the system visible'. Klotz et al. (2008)[6] found evidence to support the idea that visual approaches, and process mapping in particular, significantly increase transparency. However, simply improving transparency is not necessarily sufficient for improving understanding of the system. This is particularly true when a system involves a wide range of actors, working within a range of different organisations, at different levels, and with different motivations and roles.

Making the system more visible, involves making the system visible to a wide range of actors. In turn, improving understanding of the system means developing a shared understanding of what the system is.

2.3 - Developing a shared understanding

Fiore and Schooler (2004:134)[7] also argue that process mapping can act as a problem solving tool because it leads to the construction of a "shared mental model of the problem". More specifically they provide a framework for collective thinking about a system. Section 3.2 of this report outlines how we developed a framework to encourage a shared understanding of our system of homelessness prevention and relief and section 3.6 outlines the perspectives of different actors about the extent to which they understood and agreed with this structure.

Mapping the system can encourage stakeholders to consider all elements, rather than those that apply specifically to their work. Doing so can then help to identify problems within processes. Orasanu (1994:256)[8] reminds us that "before a decision can be made, we must first recognize that a problem exists, determine its nature, and determine the desired outcome". Section 3.4 of this report outlines how we reviewed each of our pathways of prevention and relief, including how we developed a log of practical challenges associated to individual pathways. In this way, the process of creating and reviewing process maps, and therefore 'making the system more visible' (Lowe and Plimmer, 2019) may act as an intermediary to improvement.

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[5] Antonacci. E., Reed. J., Lennox, L., Barlow, K. (2018) *The use of process mapping in healthcare quality improvement projects*. Health Services Management Research (1 – 11

[6] Klotz, L., Horman, M., Bi, H. H., & Bechtel, J. (2008). The impact of process mapping on transparency. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *57*(8), 623-636.

[7] Fiore, S. M., & Schooler, J. W. (2004). Process mapping and shared cognition: Teamwork and the development of shared problem models. *Team cognition: Understanding the factors that drive process and performance*, 133-152.

[8] Orasanu, J. (1994). *Shared problem models and flight crew performance*. In Johnston, N., McDonald, N., & Fuller, R. (Eds.), Aviation *psychology in practice* (pp.255-285). Brookfield, VT: Ashgate.

2.4 - The process of process mapping

Antonacci et al. (2018) note that successful process mapping exercises generally involve gathering evidence from multiple stakeholders to inform their development. In terms of the process maps themselves, the authors argue for simple and appropriate visual representation when creating process maps to aide transparency and understanding.

Damelio (2016) highlights five methods that can be used to develop process maps, all of which were employed in the development of the pathways resource:

- *self-generate* - developing your own maps without input from other stakeholders (see section 3.3 for detail on how we 'self generated' some maps)
- *one to one interviews* – process maps can be created as a participative tool within interviews or as a product of interviews (see section 3.1 for how we incorporated one to one interviews in the process of familiarisation)
- *group facilitation* – facilitated sessions with stakeholders that have as their purpose the creation and review of process maps (see section 3.4 for how we used group facilitation to review our maps)
- *content (resource) review* – using content analysis of relevant documents to inform the development of process maps (see sections 3.1 and 3.3 for how we used content analysis of documents to map our pathways)
- *observation* – observing the relevant process in practice to inform the creation of a process map (see section 3.1 for detail on how we used observation in our process of familiarisation)

The remainder of this document explains how we designed, developed, and tested the pathways resource with a range of different actors using each of these methods. The evidence from our testing of the resource suggests that we have been able to develop a resource that creates simple and appropriate visual representations of our pathways of response. In turn, providing a basis for a shared understanding of our system of homelessness prevention or relief. Before this, page 6 provides an overview of the process of developing the Pathways resource.

3. The development of the Pathways resource

The Pathways resource was developed over six stages between November 2017 and April 2019. An overview of each of the six stages is available in figure 1 (below). More detail on each stage of the development can be found in the corresponding sections.

Figure 1: An overview of the development of the Pathways document

1 Familiarisation and scoping

First, we spent time looking at our statutory homelessness data to understand the key causes of homelessness in the city. We also spent time observing and interviewing practitioners in our frontline services to understand more about our key pathways of response (see section 3.1)

November 2017 – January 2018

2 Developing a framework

We then developed a framework by grouping the key causes of homelessness in Newcastle and categorising our different stages of preventing and relieving homelessness (see section 3.2)

January 2018 – February 2018

3 Mapping the pathways

Each of our individual pathways were then mapped according to the cause of homelessness they primarily related to. Each pathway can contain a number of steps and a range of services (see section 3.3)

February 2018 – July 2018

4 Reviewing the pathways

We ran a series of review workshops with senior staff and managers that were structured around different groups of causes. In each, participants corrected, questioned and added to individual pathways of response (see section 3.4)

March 2018 – August 2018

5 Making the prototype document

Once all of the pathways had been mapped, reviewed and amended accordingly, they were consolidated into a single prototype resource that could be navigated by the user. The structure of the document was modelled on the original framework (see section 3.5)

August 2018 – October 2018

6 Testing the prototype document

We then ran five interactive sessions to test the prototype resource. The first three sessions were with more senior practitioners and managers. The final two sessions were with frontline practitioners from across our homelessness system (see section 3.6)

January 2019 – March 2019

3.1 - Familiarisation and scoping

This project was informed by a desire to clarify our key responses to homelessness. In doing so we hoped to make them more visible in order to encourage more consistency in how we support residents who have become homeless, threatened with homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness.

This was a relatively broad brief, particularly since our responses are also broad, related to a range of different causes of homelessness and developed over time. It was important to resist the tendency to jump in and create something quickly, rather than creating something useful. Therefore, it was decided that an essential first step in understanding the task itself and considering how it would be best approached would be to go through a process of familiarisation and scoping.

The process of familiarisation and scoping took place between November 2017 and January 2018. There were two parts to this process; identifying the key causes of and key responses to homelessness in Newcastle.

Identifying the responses involved working with the practitioners who were actually delivering these responses. An ethnographic approach was taken incorporating both observation and one to one interviews in two key frontline services; our Housing Advice Centre (which acts as Newcastle City Council's point for residents to present under homelessness legislation) and Cherry Tree View (Newcastle City Council's statutory temporary accommodation). Observations and one to one interviews were conducted informally, with interviews taking place at opportune times during practitioners' day to day work. A template had been developed in advance of these interviews based on a list of different uncategorised responses and designed to capture knowledge, extent of use and opinions of effectiveness on each. However, it quickly became apparent that this structured template was ineffective and a much more unstructured approach was required, allowing the practitioners to lead the discussion. In turn, practitioners began asking about the project itself. In the following discussions, a number of them suggested the use of flowcharts to map out each response. Conducting these interviews alongside observation also led to a discussion about how they would use a resource like this. It was apparent that staff would have relatively little time and any resource would need to be simple and clear, easily navigable and in a format that was accessible.

Section 2.4 of this report highlighted that observation and one to one interviews are both methods for developing process maps. In this project, it was these methods that led to the incorporation of process maps in the first place. They then also allowed deeper understanding of the requirements of the resource. However, they did not provide as much clarity on how to structure a resource to make it simple, clear, easily navigable and accessible.

Identifying the causes of homelessness involved a different approach. There are numerous causes of homelessness. These causes are rarely experienced in complete isolation from each other and should not be understood as a single event. For example, the primary cause of a resident's homeless may be an eviction from a rented property. Yet, prior to this there are likely to be underlying causes that have contributed to this eviction, such as an escalation of rent arrears. Going back further, these rent arrears may have been catalysed by a reduction in hours of employment or a reduction in receipt of benefits. It was important to capture not only our response to the primary cause, but also how we seek to prevent homelessness by responding to these underlying causes. Doing so in a clear and understandable way required the development of a framework for individual pathways to sit within. The first step in thinking about how to do this was to use

Newcastle's quarterly homelessness review data and reports to identify the key causes of homelessness in Newcastle. At the time, the statutory monitoring framework primarily focused on the primary cause of an individual's homelessness, with little information about underlying causes[9]. Therefore, the key primary causes were used as the basis of one part of the framework.

However, Newcastle's approach was also informed by a three-tiered approach of prevention at primary and secondary levels, and relief of homelessness at what is termed the 'crisis' level, if prevention activities are not successful[10]. This informed the basis of a three-tiered structure, working back from the primary causes to explore pathways of response that sought to prevent them from occurring.

The following section (3.2) outlines how we developed a framework based on the primary causes of homelessness, and the stages of response at primary, secondary and crisis levels.

3.2 - Developing a framework

As Abercrombie et al. (2015) remind us, before mapping a system, it is important to set boundaries. In this project, we did this by developing a framework that the individual pathways could sit within. This framework seeks to summarise and clarify our system for preventing and relieving homelessness. In reality, our homelessness prevention system cannot be fairly represented by a single resource. It oversimplifies the intricacies and complexities of the system, as well as the dynamic policy context it operates within.

Currently, we describe our 'homelessness prevention system' as a flexible framework that brings partners together to better identify and respond to the risk of homelessness. However, we also recognise that we have more to do in order to create a truly coherent system. Aspiring to coherence helps us to understand the challenges that partners face and the context we work in. In turn, an awareness of our limitations and contradictory pressures, helps us to overcome them.

In this context, a clear and logical framework[11] was crucial to supporting practitioners to develop a shared understanding of our system of homelessness prevention and relief (see section 2.3), rather than seeing themselves as individual services working in isolation. On a practical level, we also needed a clear framework to ensure that the pathways could be navigated and therefore usable. Without a framework the resource risked becoming a disparate collection of flowcharts, which were only a summary of the disconnected policy documents they sought to provide more clarity on.

The framework for the pathways resource is broadly categorised in two ways. Firstly, by segmenting our homelessness prevention system into four interconnected stages of response:

- '**at risk' of homelessness**: for those residents who may be at risk of homelessness in the future, but are not immediately threatened in the next two months
- **'threatened' with homelessness**: for those residents who are threatened within the statutory definition of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 that generally defines someone 'threatened' as being 56 days from becoming homeless

[9] The statutory monitoring framework has changed with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 in April 2018
[10] See Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick (2008) for an overview of similar structure of prevention approaches and Fitzpatrick et al. (2011); Harding et al. (2013) for overviews and evaluations of Newcastle's preventative approach

[11] Section 3.6 presents findings that suggest frontline practitioners found the structure of the document understandable and logical.

- **‘homeless’**: for those residents who are ‘literally’ homeless (they do not have any accommodation they can reasonably occupy)
- **‘suitable and sustainable’ accommodation**: this should be the solution for residents at the other three stages. If a resident is ‘at risk’ or ‘threatened’, our pathways should focus on helping them to make that accommodation ‘suitable and sustainable’ or to move them to accommodation that is. If they are already homeless, we should focus on moving them into accommodation that is ‘suitable and sustainable’ as soon as possible

This segmentation was informed by the ‘primary’, ‘secondary’ and ‘crisis’ categories outlined in section 3.1 but amended to reflect the circumstances of residents rather than the type of activity undertaken to respond.

The second way that the resource is categorised is by grouping the primary causes of homelessness. In the ‘pathways’ resource, the primary causes have been grouped into five categories:

- **Arrears in rented, leased and owned accommodation:** this group incorporates pathways for the most common causes of homelessness, which are related to financial problems leading to housing cost arrears
- **Leaving an institution:** this group incorporates pathways for those leaving situations where their welfare has been the responsibility of national or local government. The primary causes within this group are leaving a prison, leaving a hospital (mental health or physical health), leaving the care of the local authority, and leaving asylum accommodation
- **Abuse, harassment or violence:** this group incorporates the pathways of response for residents who are threatened with homelessness or literally homeless as a result of domestic abuse, threats or actual violence or harassment
- **Relationship problems:** this group incorporates pathways around relationship problems and breakdown with family, partners, or friends that has led to a risk, threat of homelessness or a resident actually becoming homeless. This group will not include pathways where there is evidence or claim of abuse, harassment or violence
- **Benefits and budgeting issues:** this group was added at a later point and only includes pathways in the ‘at risk’ stage. It relates to financial challenges caused by changes to the benefits system and how we have sought to support residents to manage these challenges

A visual representation of this framework is included in Appendix 1. The following sections show how this framework supported both the structure of the mapping and review of individual pathways. Section 3.4 highlights how the review sessions were organised around themes dictated by this framework. Section 3.5 highlights how this framework provided the structure for a single resource (the pathways resource) that shows how individual pathways represent a wider system of homelessness prevention and relief. First, section 3.3 explains how individual pathways were mapped according to a timetable dictated by the framework.

3.3 - Mapping the pathways

Once the framework had set the general boundaries and structure of the system, it was possible to start mapping the individual pathways. Mapping took place between February and July 2018 and according to a timetable structured around the groupings of causes and stages of response. The aim was to create initial prototype versions of each pathway that could be reviewed during an overlapping series of workshops taking place between March and August 2018 (see section 3.4). The prototypes were likely to be subject to considerable change, so familiar and low cost methods were used to create each map. Initially, pathways were mapped out using pencil and paper. Only when we were happy that the structure and content of the pathway was clear did we transfer these into electronic versions using Microsoft Word.

The process of familiarisation and scoping (section 3.1) had highlighted flowcharts as a potentially useful way of developing simple, clear, and easily navigable pathways that practitioners had asked for. Section 2.2 highlighted that flowcharts are one type of the wider method of process mapping and identified the need for simple and appropriate visual representation when creating process maps to aide transparency and understanding.

As a result, it was important to avoid overcomplicating the flowcharts with information, either in terms of the amount of steps or the written descriptions of each individual step. The broader navigability of the whole resource is discussed in section 3.5. At this stage, the primary concern was to ensure navigability between individual steps. Many pathways involved various steps and options depending on the actions of residents and practitioners. Mapping these out in a clear and logical way involved segmenting wider pathways into individual stages. These stages were first informed by our key stages of response (‘at risk’, ‘threatened’, ‘homeless’) but within each of these key stages, sub stages were also created by identifying points of transition within pathways. These points of transition were usually where a resident’s risk or threat had escalated.

Achieving clarity and simplicity also involved describing each individual step using clear and straightforward language that strikes the right balance between being factual and being understandable. The approach that was taken was to use consistent terminology to describe common steps, as well as colour coding to allow users to more quickly and identify positive and negative points of transition.

Although the process of familiarisation and scoping had provided useful information on the format and characteristics of the flowcharts, it had provided much less information on actual steps, activities, and responsibilities within each pathway of response. This information was sourced from a number of sources, using two of the methods outlined in section 2.4; *content (document) review* and *one to one interviews*. For some pathways, a local policy or procedure was available that could act as the primary source of information on which to base the mapping. However, for some pathways, there was no written policy, procedure or guidance. In these cases, one to one interviews were arranged with key informants (usually service managers or experienced practitioners) who were most likely to be familiar with the pathway. The pathway was mapped out on paper with the key informant before being transferred to an electronic format. In some cases, parts of or even whole pathways were also ‘self-generated’ by one of the two officers responsible for mapping.

Developing process maps of pathways that are clear and simple, appropriately segmented, accurate and understandable was a considerable challenge. Various drafts were created on paper before pathways were mapped out electronically and even then, there was an awareness that these were unlikely to be sufficiently clear, accurate or understandable. However, there was also an awareness that it was important to create something that could be reviewed, amended and improved during review workshops, as discussed further in the next section.3.4 - reviewing the pathways.

Between March and August 2018, a series of participatory workshops were organised with a range of senior staff and experienced practitioners, with the purpose of reviewing the initial prototype maps of each pathway. Damielo (2016) highlighted *group facilitation* as a method for developing and reviewing process maps (see section 2.4). In this project, facilitated workshops were found to be a useful method for reviewing and providing direction for further development of the prototype maps. They also helped to develop a shared ownership and understanding of what each pathway of response consisted of, among those who were most familiar with them. There was general agreement amongst participants that clarifying responses was important in improving transparency of our responses to practitioners, which should lead to greater consistency in our responses (see sections 2.2 and 2.3).

The timetable for this series of sessions was structured in the same way as the timetable for mapping. Each workshop focused on a different stage of response and a different group of causes (e.g. those ‘threatened’ with homelessness due to leaving an institution). Essentially, relevant pathways were mapped then reviewed in the corresponding workshop.

Each workshop was designed to be participatory, involving participants in reviewing rather than just seeking their opinions. Printed A3 versions of each prototype map were used as a focal point for the sessions. Participants were asked to work through the pathways, correcting, questioning and adding to them to develop them further. The sessions involved one facilitator, who guided the discussion and one note taker, who captured points that emerged. Participants were also encouraged to write directly onto the printed versions of the prototype maps to either correct, add, amend the content or to suggest a different way of formatting or displaying the information.

The notes that emanated from these sessions were transcribed and used as the raw data, informing the amendments that followed. These transcribed notes were written into a log of amendments that was structured by the framework (see section 3.2). More general comments on the approach taken to map out these pathways were recorded separately.

Throughout the discussions that took place, many points that were made focused on the effectiveness of the pathway of response itself (or individual steps and services within the pathway). Although this was not the specific purpose of the review workshops, it was still important not to miss this opportunity to capture practical and operational challenges related to each pathway. Alongside the log of amendments, a log of challenges associated to the actual pathways of response was developed to ensure these perspectives were not lost. In this way, the project may also act as an intermediary to improvement (see section 2.2).

Once all of the pathways had been mapped and reviewed, and all amendments had been logged, the process of amending each prototype map began. Amendments were systematically worked through and changes and additions were made directly to the maps. Once all amendments were completed, they could be consolidated into a single prototype resource. The next section provides more detail on how this resource was made.

3.5 - Making the prototype resource

Once all of the pathways had been mapped, reviewed and amended accordingly, they were consolidated into a single prototype resource that could be navigated by the user. This process took place between August and October 2018.

The structure of the resource was modelled on the original framework. The person using the resource is first asked to identify whether the resident is ‘at risk of’, ‘threatened with’, or literally ‘homeless’, ‘multiply excluded homeless’ or whether they are seeking ‘suitable and sustainable accommodation’. Within each of these stages of response the user is asked to select the ‘primary cause’ of the resident’s risk, threat or homelessness, or the tenure of ‘suitable and sustainable’ accommodation they would like to source. The relevant pathway of response is then displayed.

As with each of the initial prototype maps (see section 3.3), the prototype resource was created using Microsoft Word. This allowed the prototype resource to be created without the additional cost, time, and resource involved in finding and purchasing a different form of software or consultancy. The familiarity of the software allowed greater flexibility to ‘play around’ with the structure of the resource.

Navigation within the resource was achieved by creating internal links between different sections, allowing users to ‘click’ their way through the resource. Internal links were created for each possible transition at the end of a section of the pathway (e.g. whether the resident has been engaged in support or not). Internal links back to the start of each section and back to the start of the resource were also added to each page to allow the user to leave a pathway once they had sourced the information they required. External links were added separately to each individual pathway to provide supporting information from trusted sources (e.g. Newcastle City Council’s website, Gov.uk, or Shelter) while trying to keep the flowchart as simple and clear as possible.

Once all pathways had been added to a single Word document and linked together appropriately, the resource was finalised by converting it into a PDF. This retained the links and formatting of the original Word document but prevented the document from being accidentally edited by users. The finalised version of the document was then proofed by three separate officers to limit any grammatical errors and to ensure all links worked correctly. The process of proofing also involved ‘sense checking’ to ensure that descriptions were clear and the ‘flow’ within and between pathways seemed logical.

Section 3.4 highlighted how collectively reviewing the individual pathways with key informants helped to make the pathways more transparent and encouraged more of a shared understanding. However, it was not until the prototype document was created that the system of homelessness prevention and relief began to become more visible (Lowe and Plimmer, 2019). To this point, the pathways had been mapped according to causes but were a collection of disparate responses. Collating them according to the broad framework enabled more clarity on how they interconnected.

It is important to reiterate here that we do not propose that our system of homelessness prevention and relief has been deductively planned out in advance. Nevertheless, in mapping them out it has become possible to identify that they are not entirely disparate; instead they interconnect as part of a more complex whole.

Once the prototype document had been created, it was possible to begin testing and refining the document as a whole.

3.6 - Testing and refining the prototype document

Between January and March 2019, we ran five interactive sessions in an IT suite to test the prototype document. The first three sessions involved 23 more senior practitioners and managers. These sessions were organised according to the stages of response that formed part of the document’s framework. The first primarily focused on pathways for those ‘at risk’ and ‘threatened’, the second on pathways for those ‘threatened’ to ‘homeless’, and the third pathways for those who are ‘homeless’ to ‘suitable and sustainable accommodation’. Each of these sessions involved practitioners with greater experience in these areas. The final two sessions involved 19 frontline practitioners from a range of services and organisations in our system of homelessness prevention and relief and reviewed the document as a whole.

In each session, participants were introduced to the project and the development of the document. However, they were not given any information about how to use or navigate the prototype document. Participants were then given ten minutes to ‘play around’ with a version of the document that had been pre-loaded onto a computer. After ten minutes, participants were asked to fill out a survey to give their initial feedback, while continuing to use the document. After another 30 minutes, the facilitator led a discussion around participants' initial feedback. In addition to capturing participants' feedback on the potential uses, organisation, look and feel, and navigability of the resource, participants were also asked to test the use of the resource in relation to scenarios they may face in their day to day work. Each participant was given a brief scenario that described a resident or household that was at risk of, threatened with, or literally homeless due to a specific cause. They were asked to use the resource to follow what they understood the correct pathway. Each participant was given an A3 print out of the entire pathway to provide detailed feedback such as specific additions, comments, or broken links. The facilitator and a note taker also captured broader feedback from participants. Specific feedback was then transcribed as comments onto a single PDF document to identify the exact location of suggested amendments. These were used to make final amendments to the resource before it was released for general use.

Participants were able to change and amend their initial survey responses. Following this task, a final summative discussion was led by the facilitator, in which participants were again asked to consider the document as whole. Across all sessions, participant's feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Each of the following sections cover participant's perspectives on different aspects of the document before the final section highlights feedback that suggests the importance of the project in helping to 'make the system visible'.

***Potential uses** for the resource*

Participants were asked for their opinions on the potential ways the resource could be used. They were able to select as many options as they wished. Their responses indicated that the resource may have a number of different uses but would primarily serve as a resource for existing frontline staff or as part of an induction for new staff.

"It'll be great for someone coming in to the job"

"Great tool; especially for frontline staff"

Significantly less participants felt that the document could be used as a resource for residents. However, for the seven participants who selected 'other', the most common use noted was using the resource during support planning with residents.

"I think service users may feel there's almost too much information - but when the right pathway is identified a print out and discussion is useful"

"Would be a great tool to use when doing [support plans], educational and informative to see and talk about"

*How the resource is **organised***

To capture feedback on the framework that informed the structure of the resource, participants were asked about how the resource was organised. As shown in figures 2 and 3, participants generally agreed with and understood how the resource was organised.

Figure 2: do you agree with how the resource was organised?

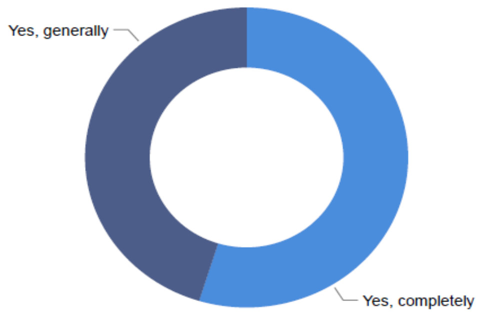

Figure 3: can you rate how easy it is to understand how the resource is organised? 1=makes no sense at all, 10=completely clear and understandable

Participants noted the familiarity of the framework that structured the resource:

"I think these are recognised stages for people in the sector, but I am not sure someone outside this would understand them"

"It feels very familiar"

Participants also highlighted the importance of structuring the information in a visual way to aide users' understanding, not only through the use of flowcharts but also through colour coding to reflect different stages, and the use of icons for each group of causes:

"I feel that it's been organised in a very user friendly way. You can find exactly what you need straight away."

"The colours help to differentiate between the sections, which is necessary because there's so much information"

"I liked that every potential scenario is listed as a tab below the main tab and also has an icon/picture"

The **look and feel** of the resource

Participants were also asked to provide feedback on the 'look and feel' of the resource. As shown in figure 4 (below), participants generally rated the resource as achieving a high degree of clarity and smoothness in its use.

Figure 4: Can you rate the look and feel of the resource? 1=ugly and clunky, 10=clear and smooth

Participants noted the value of flowcharts in displaying the information:

"It looks like a succession of flow charts, which is useful once used to looking at it in that way. Have to go through sections to get where you want to be but is clearly labelled. Bounce through once familiar with it."

"Good flow charts - easy to navigate"

Participants were also asked about the level of detail contained in the resource. They generally thought the level of detail was 'just right', with some feeling that a little more detail would be useful, although this varied according to the intended use of the resource.

In a broad sense, some participants highlighted that the level of information and range of pathways was intimidating:

"Little bit scary, in a nice way"

As noted in the previous section, the colour coding and use of icons was noted by participants as a useful way of making the structure of the resource visible:

"The use of images and colour to break it up the amount of info is very helpful - Its handy having the option to go back to the start of both the document and the section - Just looking at it, it comes across as user friendly and the layout not as daunting and serious as guidance on homelessness can often appear."

Navigating the resource

In this way, participants' feedback suggested that the structure of the resource and the way it was displayed was important in increasing the transparency of what the pathways of response are and how they are interconnected.

Displaying the interconnections within and between pathways of response was essential to making the resource usable and encouraging a shared understanding of what these responses were (see section 3.5 for more detail on how these connections were created). Participants were asked how 'usable' the resource was. As displayed in figure 6, participants rated the resource as being simple to use.

Figure 6: Please rate how usable the resource was: 1=very confusing, 10=very simple

Participants also rate the resource as easy to use, as displayed in figure 7.

Figure 7: Could you rate how easy or difficult it was to find what you wanted in the resource? 1=very difficult, 10=really easy

When asked for the reasons for their response, participants generally noted the ability to 'click' easily through the pathways:

"Easy for staff to use"

"It flowed quite well from the first click"

"You're never more than three or four clicks away from the information you want, which is good"

"I could find it straightaway; that's what I liked"

Participants did consistently note one issue with the navigability of the resource. Although the document had 'back to start of section' buttons, it did not have a 'back button' with internal logic that knew where the user had previously been:

"Consistent layout and design, would benefit from back buttons in some places"

However, some highlighted that with more use, this becomes less of an issue:

"I don't think the lack of a back button is as big an issue as you're never more than three or four clicks away"

General feedback on the value of the resource

Across different testing sessions, participants highlighted the value and usefulness of the resource, focusing largely on how it draws together previously disparate sources of information into a single place:

"The information currently isn't all in one place – that's the difference"

Across the responses of frontline practitioners, there was a clear desire for clarification of the pathways of response in Newcastle. In each session, a consensus emerged that suggested a lack of consistent guidance and supported the idea that many pathways have developed organically (see section 1.1), as displayed in the following quotes:

"It currently works on personalities and isn't written down, e.g. supported accommodation providers"

"I've been a support worker for years and there isn't much guidance. You learn the options for move-on from other colleagues"

"When can we have it? I want it now!"

Some participants also noted that by providing greater clarity and drawing together the pathways of response, the resource should help develop more consistency and encourage a shared understanding of our pathways and how they fit into a wider system of homelessness prevention and relief:

"Very clear – will help not to set people up to fail if you know the criteria for services"

"Brilliant system"

"Will help with consistency"

4. Conclusions and next steps

This report has covered the development of the pathways resource, through the first stage of the wider project, which culminated in the development and testing of the pathways. The key aim of the project was to clarify and refine the pathways for residents in Newcastle who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. As this project was part of a public service transformation programme, section 2 briefly explored system change literature to highlight some key steps in the process of positive change. Developing an understanding of the system was identified as a key step in successful processes of system change. In turn, a key component of understanding the system was ‘making the system visible’. Process mapping was highlighted as a useful method that had the potential to improve the transparency of processes, in turn acting as an intermediary to development, and encouraging a shared understanding among stakeholders.

Section 3 of the report outlined how process mapping was used in the development of the pathways resource, beginning with an overview of the process. Section 3.1 covered how Newcastle’s homelessness quarterly review data was supplemented with observations of frontline practice to develop familiarise the task. Section 3.2 showed how the framework was developed for the pathways resource, emphasising the importance of this in creating a structure for the resource and ‘bounding’ the homelessness system. Section 3.3 described how the pathways were mapped using flowcharts beforehand, section 3.4 detailed how participatory workshops were used to review individual pathways. Section 3.5 then described the low cost approach to making the pathways resource itself, using familiar software rather than expensive alternatives. Section 3.6 presented findings from interactive testing sessions with a mixture of managers and frontline practitioners. The process of testing revealed very positive feedback from participants around the potential uses of the resource, as well as its structure, usability, look and feel and navigability. More importantly, participants in testing sessions highlighted the value of the resource in promoting transparency and consistency in our responses to homelessness.

Overall, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the first stage of the project has met its aim of creating a resource that clarifies and refines the pathways for residents in Newcastle who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. In turn, the project has started a process of ‘making the system more visible’ to those who work within it and promoting a shared understanding of the interconnected nature of the pathways of prevention and relief.

4.1 - Next steps

Only very minor amendments, with no significant changes to the structure, navigation or content of the pathways resource were suggested by participants in the sessions. As such, the resource should be ready to launch in June 2019, as part of the ‘suite’ of resources developed through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer funding. It will be made available on Newcastle City Council’s website within the ‘information for professionals’ page of the homelessness section.

As services and pathways are subject to change, it is essential to keep the resource up to date. A quarterly review process has been developed for the resource in which users will be asked for their feedback on the resource. The second stage of the pathways project will consider the next stage of the resource’s use including how the model could be used to meet other needs, such as supporting ‘in-depth case reviews’ and visualising how other systems work. These in-depth reviews will follow a methodology outlined as part of the suite of reports and resources produced through Newcastle’s Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer and focus on exploring the effectiveness of particular pathways by applying measurements to each individual step.

Appendix 1 – Overview map