

Newcastle's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025

Executive Summary



1. Introduction

This strategy is intended to provide a starting point for our work to end homelessness in Newcastle...

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires local authorities to carry out a homelessness review and formulate a homelessness strategy every five years.

On 20 June 2019, Newcastle City Council entered into a partnership with Crisis to end homelessness in the city altogether.

We will begin by undertaking a comprehensive review of homelessness in the city in 2020¹.

That review will inform the development of a strategy to end homelessness in the city over ten years.

We will work in partnership and encourage participation from everyone who can help us to end homelessness

This strategy is based on:

- Newcastle's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review 2019
- Our quarterly homelessness prevention reviews and forums
- Heriot Watt's study of homelessness prevention in Newcastle
- Research conducted as part our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme

2. Our core aim: Ending Homelessness in Newcastle

We will work in partnership to end homelessness in Newcastle over the next ten years...

Last year we entered into partnership with Crisis to end homelessness in the city. This will provide additional capacity to further our aspirations **to unite the city** to make responding to homelessness everyone's business. In turn, enabling us to better **align our resources** to do more of what's right by **making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring** in Newcastle.

We define 'ending homelessness' as:

- No one **sleeping rough**
- No one forced to live in **transient or dangerous accommodation**, such as tents, squats and non-residential buildings
- No one living in **emergency accommodation**, such as shelters and hostels, without a plan for rapid rehousing into affordable, suitable and sustainable homes
- No one homeless due to **leaving a state institution**, such as prison or the care system
- Everyone who is **immediately threatened with homelessness** gets the help that prevents it from happening
- Everyone known to be **at greater risk of homelessness** due to affordability or vulnerabilities is proactively targeted with advice and support to reduce the possibility that they become threatened with homelessness at an earlier opportunity than 56 days

3. Our progress since our last strategy

Our previous strategy focused on increasing prevention and humanely responding to crisis we fail to prevent...

National policy changes have compounded existing challenges associated to poverty and disadvantage:

poverty + localism + austerity + the welfare reforms = less resources, more demand, and more confusion

We have sought to help residents and organisations transition to these existing and new challenges.



At the same time, we have had to respond to these changes and the introduction of the **Homelessness Reduction Act 2017¹**.

We have built our partnership approach on a strong foundation of accommodation and support...

Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme

Additional funding to respond to rough sleeping

Street Zero partnership

Additional funding from MHCLG allowed us to build on the AIN partnership approach, creating successful examples of how we can better integrate our services and make better use of evidence

Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach

This partnership approach helped to improve the consistency and coordination of information, advice, support and accommodation available to residents facing interconnected challenges

Homelessness accommodation and support services

26,000 units of council housing stock

Close working relationships with YHN

Retaining homelessness accommodation and support services and work with Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), created the platform for developing the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach

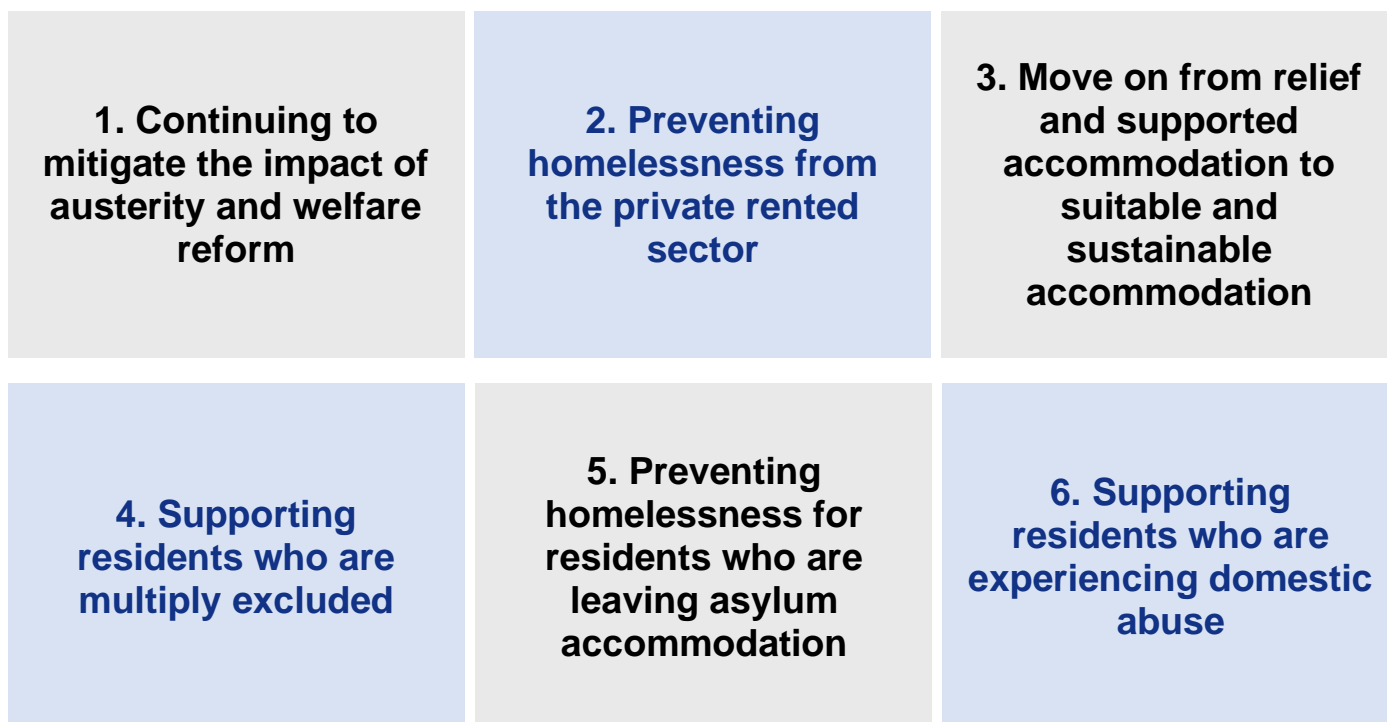
This approach has helped us to have a relatively good record of preventing and relieving homelessness...

Heriot-Watt University's recent study of homelessness prevention in Newcastle in the context of welfare reform and austerity (Watts et al., 2019) found that:

"The headline story in Newcastle is of a city facing an extremely challenging context, but managing to maintain extremely low and stable levels of homelessness"

4. Our key challenges and obstacles

Although we are encouraged by this relative success, we still see it as an absolute failure that anyone sleeps rough in Newcastle. We also know that there are a number of key areas in which we can improve our responses...



We expect to continue to face these structural and systemic obstacles...



An uncertain economic and policy context – longstanding issues of poverty have been exacerbated by austerity and the welfare reforms causing increased hardship and confusion for residents and services. The economic and social impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is likely to place more residents at risk of homelessness.



Conflicting funding mechanisms – over recent years, central government funding has been short-term in nature, focused on delivering pilot programmes for specific groups. Sustainable funding sources are required to develop good quality services and, more importantly, link those services together into a system of response.



Fragmented service responses – we have made some good progress in developing proportionate partnerships across the public and voluntary sector. However, there is far more work to do to break down silos between different disciplines and sectors, to better focus our resources on individuals who need us to work collaboratively to support them.



The localism agenda – more responsibility has been shifted to local authorities at a time of reduced funding and increasing demand. These changes mean there are less incentives from central government for local authorities to focus on early prevention or retain council housing to provide suitable and sustainable homes to residents who can't afford local market rents.

5. Our key priorities

We have five key priorities as we move towards our aim of ending homelessness in the city...

1

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

After ten years of austerity, welfare reforms, and localism we know that if we are going to end homelessness then we have to focus on what's best for Newcastle and maximise our collective resources in the city. Our partnership with Crisis will provide more capacity to translate our work on preventing and relieving to ending homelessness through a housing-led and place-based approach.

2

Ensuring all residents have access to suitable and sustainable homes

To end homelessness through a housing-led approach, we need to ensure that residents have suitable and sustainable homes to end rather than just relieve their homelessness. This means establishing local definitions of suitable and sustainable homes, improving our understanding of the needs and circumstances of each household, and improving our rapid rehousing pathways.

3

Developing proportionate partnerships based around residents' needs

If we are going to ensure all residents have access to suitable and sustainable homes, then we will need to provide more than just housing-related support. To provide the support residents need to access and maintain suitable and sustainable homes, we need to develop proportionate partnerships based around understanding and then responding to their different needs.

4

Reviewing our debt collection processes to help us move from collection to connection

One key area in which we can work better together to maximise the value of our collective investment and respond to residents' needs is around debt. Our Cabinet agreed to a review of corporate debt in the context of the whole cost to the Council, including lost income, collection, forbearance, discretionary payments, advice, support and recovery action.

5

Consolidating our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach

Our approach is based on continuous learning and iterative service improvement. Over the next five years, we want to strengthen our partnership approach and shift its focus from preventing homelessness to ending it. Achieving our other priorities will need dedicated infrastructure support to develop our partnerships, pathways of response, workforce development and review processes. This support helps us to maximise the value of our local investment and to attract new funding.

6. Our approach

Our approach to meeting our priorities and ending homelessness in Newcastle will be based around...



Working in partnership

We can't end homelessness alone, which is why we have sought to make homelessness everyone's business through our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach. We will continue to work in partnership to move towards our core aim of ending homelessness in Newcastle. We will work with partners to develop proportionate partnership arrangements based on the scale of the risk of homelessness residents face and the opportunities to work together to reduce those risks.



Improving our understanding

Improving our collective understanding will continue to be central to our approach. Our partnership with Crisis will begin with a comprehensive evidence review of homelessness in Newcastle. This will provide us with evidence to inform the development of a strategy for ending homelessness, but it won't give us prescriptive solutions. We will need to use a flexible approach to test new approaches, iterating and learning over the ten years to end homelessness.



Having good quality accommodation and support environments

We aim to transition to a housing-led approach where independent accommodation dispersed in the community is the response for the majority of residents. However, we will still need good quality temporary accommodation to allow us to quickly accommodate households who are literally homeless.



Providing personalised and holistic support

Providing good quality accommodation is an essential foundation to prevent or relieve a resident's homelessness. However, to ensure that this accommodation is sustainable we need to provide personalised responses based around the underlying causes of homelessness for each resident. As the exact nature of these underlying causes will differ, we need to provide personalised support.

7. Our initial steps

Ending homelessness in Newcastle will be a journey that will take time and will require us to adapt our approach based on what we learn. There are some initial steps we will take in moving from our strong record of preventing and relieving homelessness, to ending it altogether...

1. Building on what we have learned from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Our preventative and partnership driven approach has meant that we were able to adapt quickly to the challenges presented by the pandemic with:

- **Rapid rehousing pathways facilitated by learning from the Emergency Housing Panel** through partnership working between the Fairer Housing Unit, YHN, Housing Advice Centre and commissioned homelessness accommodation providers
- **Developing individual solutions for people who are sleeping rough** by building on the heroic commitment of the city's specialist homelessness services' essential workers, who ensured that all of our services remained operational throughout lockdown and by strengthening the partnership working between our Rough Sleeping Coordinator, Changing Lives' Multiple Exclusion Team, Housing Advice Centre and the Police
- **Identifying opportunities to better target support** through the newly established Citylife Line and by working with our commissioned homelessness accommodation providers to identify and support people at greater risk of coronavirus

2. Conducting a review of evictions

The Council and YHN will work together to further reduce evictions and develop an approach to have no evictions into homelessness, through improved collaboration, to act as an exemplar for all landlords. This will ensure potential evictions are reviewed by a multi-agency panel. **Extending the example of the Emergency Housing Panel to strengthen collaborative multi-agency panel responses to key personal trigger points** through an updated Sustaining Tenancies Guidance to better align financial support, advice and care for those at risk of eviction.

3. Developing a review and strategy to end homelessness

In 2020, **we will undertake a comprehensive review of homelessness in Newcastle** through our partnership with Crisis to end homelessness. The review is intended to help us to better understand the scale and nature of homelessness in Newcastle, the effectiveness of our responses, what drives organisational and professional behaviour, and what needs to be done differently to end homelessness. We will then use this understanding **develop a strategy to end homelessness in the city**.

To accelerate our work to end homelessness, we will continue our work with the **Ministry of Housing and Local Government** to enhance our responses to end rough sleeping. **Crisis will also develop a Housing First service** for those residents who struggle most to move into suitable and sustainable homes through our current homelessness system.