

Active Inclusion Newcastle – briefing note 2020-21

Background and context

Active Inclusion Newcastle is a partnership approach developed as part of the Newcastle City Council 2013-16 budget setting process. It responds to the:

- **growth in demand** for financial inclusion and homelessness prevention information, advice and support when resources and certainty are reducing
- **transition residents and organisations need to make to a reduced welfare state**
- **scale of poverty and disadvantage** many Newcastle residents face
- need to **change our culture**, to promote preventative and partnership responses

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach is guided by our local politicians' values of fairness, inclusion and social justice and contributes to Newcastle City Council's priorities of employment, education and skills, and housing. We do this by providing a framework to improve the coordination and consistency of information, advice and support, helping partners to increase residents' financial inclusion and to prevent homelessness. This is in the context of the government's welfare reforms, which will affect over 40,000 Newcastle residents and will [reduce income arising from working age benefits in Newcastle by an estimated £120 million annually by 2024-25](#). This is at the same time as [the council will have had to save £327 million due to government cuts and increasing cost pressures by 2022](#).

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach is supported by Newcastle City Council's Active Inclusion Service which provides governance arrangements, policy support and sector leadership to build trust, encourage collaborative working and support compromise. This infrastructure helps to maximise our resources to support residents to maintain the foundations for a stable **life**:

- somewhere to live
- an income
- financial inclusion
- employment opportunities

Many residents face interconnected challenges that cannot be effectively responded to by single service silos. Since 2013 we have made good progress in promoting the means and benefits of service coordination. Our next step is improving service integration, which is difficult when the legislative, financial, information-sharing and support planning frameworks don't yet match our aspirations. We are applying the principles of public service transformation to our partnerships to change culture, behaviours and expectations; making understanding the context we're working in, cooperation and prevention the norm, and crisis the exception. We were supported by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop [Newcastle's Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme](#) to enhance our infrastructure support to those at risk due to their social, financial, health and migration / asylum circumstances. We are helping residents and services to transition to the changing context and aspire for this to be:

- **Practical** – providing partnership approaches to the reduced and changed welfare state
- **Preventative** – making it everyone's business to predict and prevent crisis
- **Problem solving** – considering how people, policies and processes can adapt and support

To do this, the following objectives underpin the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach:

- **Understand the local impact** – based on our context and the life courses, pathways and risk triggers that affect Newcastle residents
- **Segment need** – to provide proportionate, personally relevant and cost-effective responses

- **Align budget processes to support the most vulnerable to prevent crisis** – during 2019-20 Active Inclusion Newcastle partners advised 30,601 people on welfare benefits, debt and housing
- **Develop citywide consensus and partnership responses** – 134 services and organisations participate in our [Financial Inclusion Group](#) and [Homelessness Prevention Forum](#). Routinely monitoring and reviewing with partners helps us to understand and show how we use our limited resources to make a positive difference to improve residents' lives and to identify opportunities for improvement and innovation
- **Provide infrastructure support** – information, training and workforce development to help partners who are not specialists in financial inclusion and homelessness prevention to identify risk and act to prevent crisis, rather than just to refer to crisis services
- **Provide [partnerships](#) and [protocols](#)** – agreed ways of working that give consistent governance and practice to increase financial inclusion and prevent homelessness
- **Provide universal information to prevent residents becoming more vulnerable** – examples of this information are available online [here](#)
- **Adapt core council directly delivered and commissioned specialist support, care and therapeutic services for residents who are known to be vulnerable** – to enable them to identify and prevent the risk of financial exclusion and homelessness
- **Target support to shield the most vulnerable and to prevent crisis** – from our specialist financial inclusion, homelessness prevention and employment advice and support services. This is supported by the Newcastle Gateway web-based system which helps to match 23,921 residents with 72 services by 478 staff users
- **Catch residents who are 'not known' to be at risk through open access information and advice services** – learning how we can identify risk and prevent crisis earlier
- **Systematic exception reporting** – to support collective reviews of why we haven't prevented financial exclusion or homelessness, e.g. because of performance, policy, provision or commissioning issues, and problem solving to avoid repeat cases
- **Consider the balance of individual, systemic and structural causes of exclusion**

We aim to create a strong system which supports strong services. This includes the following:

Primary prevention activities – 'adapting' core services for vulnerable residents

We provide support to multi-agency staff and volunteers who work with disadvantaged residents but who are not specialists in housing, welfare benefits, debt or employment. This includes providing resources to help identifying, talking to and responding to residents about these issues to become routine. The following information shows the support provided in 2019-20 for staff and volunteers who are not specialists in financial inclusion and homelessness prevention:

- **Communications and information** – 3,721 people receive our information updates
- **Website** – 69,199 visitors to our webpages for [welfare rights](#), [debt](#) and [homelessness](#)
- **Trigger point conversations** – [information](#) to support councillors, multi-agency staff and volunteers to talk to residents about money, housing and employment issues
- **Spectrum of advice** – 860 people participated in online and face-to-face training
- **Welfare rights and debt consultancy advice** – for 517 staff and volunteers
- **Partnerships and governance** – 134 services and organisations participated in the work of our Financial Inclusion Group and Homelessness Prevention Forum
- **Quarterly forums and published reviews** – led by the Council's Portfolio Holders to create consensus about the impact of the cuts and the effectiveness of our responses for [financial inclusion](#) and [homelessness prevention](#)

Secondary prevention activities – ‘targeting’ specialist advice and support

At the core of our partnership are our specialist information, advice and accommodation services. In 2019-20 these services provided advice to 30,601 people and allocated accommodation and support for 1,016 households, supporting other services when they need more specialist help. The following data for 2019-20 demonstrates their scale and value:

- **Homelessness and housing** – 3,745 cases of homelessness prevented, no bed and breakfast accommodation used since 2006 and evictions from Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) reduced by 72% since 2008 to 50 cases out of approximately 27,000 tenancies
- **Welfare rights** – 23,198 residents supported to secure £28,991,470 of annualised benefit gains. The benefit gains of the council’s advisers have increased from £429k each in 2009-10 to just over £1 million each
- **Debt** – 3,853 residents given advice to provide relief from debt
- **Supporting Independence Scheme** – 620 households awarded resettlement support
- **Employment support** – 329 vulnerable residents supported into employment
- **Affordable credit** – 10,590 Moneywise Credit Union members

We monitor and review the use of these services to identify how we can improve our primary prevention activities and to inform commissioning.

Crisis activities – ‘catching’ residents whose crisis we fail to prevent

These services support residents facing homelessness and destitution when crises haven’t been prevented. This is demonstrated by the following data for 2019-20:

- **Emergency accommodation** – 216 households accommodated to meet statutory duties and to mitigate crisis
- **Crisis Support Scheme** – 1,425 households provided with emergency food, gas, electricity, clothing or travel support
- **People sleeping rough** – outreach support for 312 people who were found sleeping rough

We use exception reporting and feedback loops to learn from crises to better target our primary and secondary prevention activities so that we change practice and improve systems.

Examples of the positive difference the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach has made

Reducing evictions from council housing – in 2007 we developed [sustaining tenancies guidance](#) with Your Homes Newcastle who manage Newcastle’s council homes. This was to reduce evictions by intervening with advice and support when tenants are at risk of eviction rather than relying on a more expensive and less effective legal based threats process. This approach has been the main factor in reducing evictions from council housing by 71%. The level of evictions is now low enough for us to know the names of those at risk. We review every case to consider the causes and the opportunities to improve our systems to prevent further evictions.

Aligning Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) with advice and support – in 2011-12 Newcastle City Council received £94,326 in DHP funding; the allocation for 2019-20 was £932,043. DHP is provided as short-term funding to help tenants to change their circumstances to be able to pay their rent, either by maximising their benefit entitlement, budgeting, working to increase their income or moving to more affordable accommodation. Following a pilot in 2015-16 to strengthen the alignment of the DHP process with the provision of advice and support to prevent homelessness, advice and support providers are

notified when a DHP decision has been made, so that they can support the resident to meet the conditions. We have built on the DHP award process by providing personalised recommendations based on intensive working with certain residents through our Active Inclusion multidisciplinary team.

Providing preventative outreach to households at risk of homelessness – in 2019-20 our specialist Housing Support Officers from Cherry Tree View (the council's statutory emergency homelessness accommodation service) provided outreach support to 345 households identified at risk of requiring emergency accommodation, preventing them from having to move into emergency accommodation.

Identifying the risk of homelessness in partnership with Jobcentre Plus – in March 2017 the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness asked Newcastle to be the first city to pilot preventing the risks of homelessness related to benefit administration and unemployment and reducing the impact that unstable housing can have on residents' capacity to find work. We have trained 134 staff in Newcastle jobcentres to identify the risks of homelessness. From 5 June 2017 to 31 March 2020 those Work Coaches have identified 839 residents at risk of homelessness, referring them to specialist advice and considering easements to reduce their work-related conditionality whilst their housing situation stabilises. This is included as best practice in the Government's [Rough Sleeping Strategy](#).

Governance arrangements

At the core of our [Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership arrangements](#) are:

- our quarterly [Financial Inclusion Group](#) seminars chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council, and
- our quarterly [Homelessness Prevention Forum](#) meetings chaired by the Cabinet member for Housing

We produce quarterly briefing notes for [financial inclusion](#) and [homelessness prevention](#) which collate the data available from partners, helping us to collectively review the challenges we face and the difference we have made, and agree future priorities.

We know that partnership working doesn't just happen; it takes political commitment, energy and discipline to create citywide consensus, meaning and purpose that builds trust with residents and partners by improving their experience of our collective resources. We have shown that through cooperation we can maintain the outcomes described earlier despite having to cut £2.2 million from our secondary prevention services since 2013. Our data demonstrates the value that a strong system brings in facilitating strong services to work in partnership to meet the challenges of increased demand in the context of reduced resources. Whilst many of the causes of poverty are outside of our control, working together through our Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership is making a positive difference to residents and consolidating this will enable us to continue to do so in increasingly difficult times.

More information:

- [Newcastle's Homelessness Strategy](#)
- [Welfare benefit advice services](#)
- [Debt and money advice services](#)
- [Housing advice services](#)
- [Information for professionals: financial inclusion](#)
- [Information for professionals: homelessness prevention](#)

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