

# Active Inclusion Newcastle

## Newcastle's Financial Inclusion Briefing: Q3 2014-15

The Council and its partners are committed to tackling inequality and promoting financial inclusion is an important part of this work. Our approach to financial inclusion is based on working in partnership through our Financial Inclusion Group to provide information, advice and support to residents when they face difficulties, and promoting early intervention to prevent problems reaching crisis point. Whilst many of the causes of poverty are out of our control, by working together we can make a difference to residents in the context of us having fewer financial resources.

To support this cooperative way of working we need to share priorities, challenges and create a common language. To help to do this we produce a quarterly briefing note to highlight trends and to review how we are responding to the following five objectives in our Financial Inclusion Action Plan:

- 1. Maximise income and respond to welfare reform**
- 2. Support residents to manage their money and promote access to independent debt and budgeting advice**
- 3. Help residents to train, gain and remain in employment**
- 4. Promote affordable credit options**
- 5. Reduce fuel poverty, increase financial resilience and promote access to bank accounts**

Our quarterly reviews facilitate collective agreement about the issues residents face, the difference we are making to people who face financial exclusion. We recognise that there are limitations in some of the data collected as organisations invariably count their interventions differently. However, there is sufficient agreement for us to produce these briefings to demonstrate the work of our Financial Inclusion Group. Our main aim is to make a positive difference and reduce inequality by prioritising financial inclusion, not to produce a piece of academic research, but we welcome partners to point out any errors or opportunities for improvement.

### Headlines:

- Since 2010 Newcastle Advice Compact organisations' advice has helped residents to secure **£114,834,555** in unclaimed benefit entitlement.
- Universal Credit will be introduced in Newcastle on 27 April 2015 for single residents making a new claim for Jobseeker's Allowance. You can find out more at our information sessions on 26 and 27 March 2015, from 12 noon to 1.30pm in the Council Chamber, Newcastle Civic Centre. To book a place, please email [activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk) stating which session you would like to attend and the service or organisation you represent.
- UK Asset Resolutions (UKAR) has nominated the Newcastle Advice Compact for an Institute of Money Advisors award in the Best Partnership category.
- On 5 February 2015 78 people attended a seminar to consider the findings of Newcastle University's research into the impact of the "bedroom tax" on the health and wellbeing of Walker residents. The research has been published in the [Journal of Public Health](#).
- Our next Financial Inclusion Group seminar will be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2015 and, for the first time, will consider a geographical based approach to financial exclusion. Further information about the seminar can be found in section 6 of this document.

# 1: Maximise income and respond to welfare reform – including benefit take-up and digital inclusion

**Table 1.1 Annualised benefit gains and clients seen by Newcastle Advice Compact**

	2013-14	2014-15 Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Benefit gains</b>	£21,902,716	£4,454,938	£5,853,807	£6,610,236	
<b>Clients seen</b>	16,017	3,344	5,324	5,056	

## Trends:

Table 1.1 shows that between quarter 2 (Q2) and quarter 3 (Q3) of 2014-15 benefit gains increased by 11%. However, the number of clients seen decreased by 5%. The increase in benefit gains is due to targeting advice and an increase in the number of positive Personal Independence Payment (PIP) decisions coming through. Since 2010 Newcastle Advice Compact organisations advice has helped residents to secure **£114,834,555** in additional income. This is not only important in helping to maximise income for residents, but it also provides an important boost to the local economy.

Universal Credit will be introduced in Newcastle on 27 April 2015 for single residents making a new claim for Jobseeker’s Allowance. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) estimate this will affect up to 4,035 claims over the year, 807 of these will have housing costs. The DWP also estimate that 605 people will require support to make and manage their claim online, including 201 people likely to need budgeting support. Our preparations for Universal Credit build on our partnership approach to increasing financial inclusion. In the course of the development of this work, and to improve our understanding about what Universal Credit will mean for individuals and organisations, we have developed a Newcastle Universal Credit Support Partnership triage trial. This work is described in further detail below.

On 5 February 2015 Newcastle City Council, Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) and Newcastle University hosted a seminar to present the findings of research into the impact of the “bedroom tax” on the health and wellbeing of Walker residents. Qualitative research undertaken by Newcastle University found that this loss of income has a detrimental impact on physical and mental health. Furthermore, residents reported difficulties in meeting basic needs, such as affording food (with many turning to food banks), living in cold homes, restricting fuel for cooking and heating and problems in budgeting. Others also reported an increase in personal debt and a reliance on unsustainable high interest credit to help meet their income shortfall. In many cases options to mitigate the impact of the “bedroom tax” are limited (downsize, secure paid employment or take in a lodger) and present additional barriers.

January’s Financial Inclusion Group seminar focused on older people and financial inclusion. A key message presented at this seminar, based on findings from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Age UK, was that pensioner poverty can be avoided if older people are supported to claim their full benefit entitlement. This is because older people have generally received a greater level of protection under the welfare reforms. The seminar endorsed Newcastle’s targeted approach to maximising benefits and the success of our Pension Credit and Attendance Allowance work that raised £9,414,687 in unclaimed benefits between April 2012 and September 2014 for residents aged 65 and over. We are working with the Quality of Life Partnership to find new ways to engage with older people in order to further promote benefit take-up.

## What we are doing:

- In preparation for the staggered roll out of Universal Credit in Newcastle we have developed a Newcastle Universal Credit Support Partnership triage trial with Jobcentre Plus and local partners. At

the core of the trial is the development of a common triage process to assess and support residents to prepare for Universal Credit and to meet the wider demands of the welfare reforms. Staff from Cherry Tree View (the Council's statutory emergency accommodation), the Community Family Intervention Project (FIP) (part of the Newcastle Families' Programme) and YHN started using this triage process in February 2015 with the residents that they work with.

- The Council is also working on joint communications with the DWP and YHN for the introduction of the first tranche of Universal Credit in Newcastle on 27 April 2015. There will be general information sessions on 26 and 27 March 2015 that are open to staff and volunteers from the Council, YHN, health organisations and the voluntary and community sector. Information sessions are free to attend, but places must be pre-booked in advance. To book a place email: [activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk). Our communications about Universal Credit build on our approach to communications about previous welfare reform issues; placing it in the context of residents' financial inclusion, rather than as a benefit change in isolation.
- Newcastle Welfare Rights Service is continuing with targeted take-up work for children with disabilities. Children's Services have identified families who may be missing out on benefits. Since this project started in April 2013 and up to 31 Dec 2014, **1,015** families have been supported to claim **£3,327,281** in previously unclaimed benefits.
- To help staff to support their service users to maintain an appropriate income, avoid benefit problems and know where to turn for further support and advice, we have developed an online 'Introduction to Benefits' training module. This module has been developed as part of our work to develop a 'Spectrum of Advice in Newcastle' and is currently being rolled out to staff who support residents who are vulnerable to issues relating to income, such as supported housing providers. Access to this training module can be arranged by emailing: [activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk)
- We are holding Introduction to Benefits training sessions for staff who support residents who may be benefit dependent or are susceptible to the impact of welfare reforms, and those who may be missing out on much needed income. The latest session was on the 24 February delivered to 16 staff from the FIP team. The next session will be held on 7 May 2015 for key staff at Changing Lives. We are also beginning to provide open sessions to staff, the first open session will be held on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2015. Further information will be circulated to partners in due course.
- We are continuing to roll out our Active Inclusion Newcastle "Offer" of support to organisations across the city.
- In 2014 91 people attended the 'Preventing benefit sanctions' workshops which the Council delivered in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. 34 people attended March's workshop.

#### What next:

- Following on from January's Financial Inclusion Group seminar, the Newcastle Advice Compact is investigating new ways to identify older residents who may be entitled to Pension Credit.

## Digital inclusion

**Table 1.2 Free or low cost internet access points and organisations offering IT training in Newcastle**

	2013-14	2014-15 Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Free / low cost internet access points</b>	655	648	662	678	
<b>Organisations / venues offering IT training</b>	85	85	69	63	

**Trends:**

Table 1.2 shows a 2% increase in the number of free or low cost internet access points between Q2 and Q3– we believe this does not reflect an increase in provision, but rather that our initial figures were an underestimation of the number of points available. Better communication with providers, as a result of the development of the interactive map showing computer and IT support in Newcastle , means we are confident that all open access points are included in our figures. The number of organisations and venues offering IT training has reduced by 9% during the same period. This reduction in training is result of funding ending, leading to the closure of some organisations.

The interactive map showing computer and IT support in Newcastle can be accessed [here](#).

**What we are doing:**

- In preparation for the staggered roll out of Universal Credit the Newcastle Universal Credit Support Partnership triage trial includes questions relating to digital inclusion. This will help us to assess the digital capacity of residents in the city, as well as raising awareness with staff and residents about the computer and internet access, training and support that is available in the city.
- We have submitted a joint funding application with Gateshead Council to develop two Digital Champion Training Hubs – one will be based at Newcastle City Library and the other at Gateshead’s Central Library.
- Representatives from the Digital Team are taking part in the Be Online Campaign from 23 February to 8 March 2015. The Be Online campaign aims to inspire as many people as possible to discover what the internet can do for them. This year the themes are ‘Stay Healthy’, ‘Find Work’ and ‘Live Life’.

**What next:**

- Work is underway to develop Newcastle’s ‘Digital by Choice’ approach. Our vision is to have excellent digital services which are so easy to use that people choose to use them.

## **2: Support residents to manage their money – including promoting access to independent debt and budgeting advice to prevent money worries and debt from reaching crisis point and homelessness prevention**

**Table 2.1 Debt advice and homelessness prevention through debt advice by Newcastle Advice Compact**

	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15 Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
Debts written off	£4,193,358	£1,030,592	£1,184,572	£661,853	
Clients seen	3,647	875	918	941	
Homelessness prevention	559	122	121	179	

**Trends:**

Table 2.1 shows that between Q2 and Q3 the number of clients seen has remained consistent. Homelessness prevention has increased by 48%; this is a result of improved recording. Debts written off have decreased by 44% this quarter. As a measure, debts written off can vary as it reflects both clients' individual circumstances and the value of their debt.

Insolvency Service statistics for 2014, released on 23 February 2015, show that there were 99,196 individual insolvencies in the UK during 2014, a 1.8% decrease compared to 2013 and the lowest annual total since 2005. However, on 15 January 2015 the Government announced plans to enable easier access to debt relief for financially vulnerable people. The changes will mean the maximum amount of debt which can be covered by a Debt Relief Order (DRO) will increase from £15,000 to £20,000. Additionally, the DRO asset limit will be raised from £300 to £1,000. As a result more people experiencing financial problems will be eligible to apply for a DRO. A DRO is the cheapest insolvency option and is available for £90. These changes will come into effect on 1 October 2015.

Debt advisers are reporting an increase in residents who are in work but are unable to cover their essential needs, such as food and clothing, and to pay priority bills. There is a worry that with the introduction of Universal Credit in Newcastle more residents may find it difficult to budget and that rent payments owed to social landlords may further increase.

**What we are doing:**

- A budgeting support programme has been developed to assist the delivery of the triage trial to help prepare for the implementation of Universal Credit. The programme includes budgeting training for staff, and resource materials which can be used as part of individual budgeting support sessions. Staff training and resource materials cover the following areas: budgeting issues potentially created by Universal Credit, the benefits of budgeting, priority bills (what needs to be paid first and why), ways to increase income and to reduce spending, saving, borrowing, access to bank accounts, payment methods and personal budgeting sheets.
- We are working with the Council's 16 Plus Team to improve financial inclusion support for care leavers. This will include work to try and prevent young people from falling victim to payday loan scams. We have offered individual financial capability sessions to care leavers affected by payday loan broker scams. We have also offered debt and budgeting training sessions for staff from the 16 Plus Team.
- UKAR have nominated the Newcastle Advice Compact for an Institute of Money Advisors award in the Best Partnership category.

**What next:**

- We will be providing personal budgeting support for the first tranche of residents affected by the introduction of Universal Credit. The budgeting support programme developed for the triage trial will inform this and will help to provide valuable learning about the budgeting challenges created by welfare reform, the additional demands likely to be experienced by advice and support providers, and how residents respond to budgeting support.
- To better support non-specialist advice services to respond to financial exclusion and the risk of homelessness our Spectrum of Advice is being extended to cover: money management (budgeting and debt), housing and homelessness, and wider financial inclusion services. The initial work to map the different services available in Newcastle will be complete by 30 April 2015.

- To support non-specialist advisors working with people needing budgeting support we have developed an online debt awareness training module. This will be available by 31 March 2015. Access to this training module can be arranged by emailing: [activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk)
- Representatives from the Newcastle Advice Compact are working together to develop a joint funding bid to Comic Relief's Healthier Finances programme. This fund aims to support residents in severe financial hardship by increasing financial literacy, reducing debt, maximising income and increasing access to affordable credit.
- Newcastle Advice Compact is working with Northumbrian Water to raise awareness of their new water affordability schemes. As part of this work we will undertake a leaflet drop to households with high levels of water debt to promote both these schemes and local trusted debt advice.
- We are exploring options to extend the principles of the Walker Welfare Reform Pilot to people who are reaching the end of their Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) award and are at risk of homelessness due to the "bedroom tax".

### 3: Help residents to train, gain and remain in employment by developing holistic packages of support

**Table 3.1 Clients registered and supported into employment by Newcastle Futures**

	2013-14	2014-15 Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Clients registered	1,534	320	307	259	
People supported into employment	680	154	150	129	

#### Trends:

Table 3.1 shows that between Q2 and Q3 there has been a 15% drop in the number of clients who have registered with Newcastle Futures for employment support. The number of people supported into employment has also dropped by 14%. This dip is expected; Newcastle Futures have identified that Q3 returns have been lower for the last few years.

The Office for National Statistics [Statistical Bulletin: Regional Labour Market \(February 2015\)](#) shows that the employment rate for people aged 16 to 64 years for Q3 2014-15 was 70% in the North East. The dataset also shows that:

- The North East has experienced a drop in work force jobs (7,000);
- The North East has the highest unemployment rate in the country with an unemployment rate of 8% compared to a national average of 5%;
- The North East had the highest headline Claimant Count Rate at 4%. The rate for the UK as a whole was 2%. The Claimant Count Rate measures the number of people who are claiming unemployment benefits but are actively seeking work.

Information released by the National Apprenticeship Service shows that the number of vacancies posted on its website by employers across the North East increased by 45% during August to October 2014, compared to the same period in 2013. During this period vacancies increased from 1,760 to 2,550. In Newcastle the number of vacancies advertised increased by 28%, going from 230 to 250. The support available to boost youth employment has increased due to the introduction of Generation North East (formally known as the Youth Contract). As part of this initiative five local authorities in the region have secured £4.5 million to support 2,300 young people into employment. Further information about Generation North East can be found below.

Conversely, Newcastle's unemployment rate for people aged 50 to 64 continues to remain high. At 2% this is higher than UK as a whole (1%). Older people and unemployment is an issue identified by both Newcastle Futures and Newcastle's Age Friendly City. This is an important area for consideration to ensure that older people do not become severely disadvantaged due to changes in the labour market and the growing numbers of services and job access points becoming reliant on digital services.

**What we are doing:**

- Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead, Northumberland and Durham Councils have secured £4.5 million Youth Contract funding to support 2,300 young people into employment. This fund will be known as 'Generation North East' across the region and aims to offer a simplified, responsive and coordinated service which ensures support for businesses and young people.
- The region has successfully secured £1,995,206 via the Government's Fair Chance Fund to support young homeless people with significant support needs to turn their lives around and access employment opportunities. The fund will cover seven local authority areas – Newcastle, Northumberland, South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Gateshead, Durham and Sunderland – and will be administered by Home Group.
- In September 2014 a small fund was established to support care leavers to sustain employment and apprenticeship opportunities. Currently six people are in receipt of this support.
- Newcastle Futures are continuing to work with young people in the city to help secure apprenticeship opportunities. During Q2 four young people were supported to complete eight weeks paid work experience training at McAlpine.
- Recent investment in construction projects across the city has led to increased apprenticeship opportunities in this area. Newcastle Futures are continuing to work with employers to develop pathways into employment for young people.
- Newcastle Futures and Newcastle City Council developed work experience opportunities for eight young people. Six have gone on to secure paid work experience within Newcastle Council's Highways Team.

**What next:**

- Following on from a successful application to the Department for Communities and Local Government's Help for Single Homeless Fund a partnership made up of Newcastle, Gateshead and Northumberland local authorities, Job-Centre Plus, Changing Lives and Oasis Aquila have been awarded £198,818 over two years. This fund will help to help increase the numbers of single homeless people entering employment who live in supported accommodation. Four specialist employment workers will support people living in supported accommodation to help manage their claimant commitments, avoid sanctions and work towards employment. It is anticipated that the project will commence in May 2015.
- YHN is working with the 16 Plus Team to explore apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers at their Palatine Beds factory.
- Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Newcastle are being offered a cash incentive to encourage firms to provide paid work experience for young people. Funding can be used to offset 50% of the national minimum wage.
- We will provide a wider picture of the employment support available in the city.

**4: Promote the expansion of affordable credit options as an alternative to expensive high interest credit, such as payday loans or loan sharks**

**Table 4.1 Moneywise Credit Union membership and loans granted**

	2013-14	2014-15 Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
--	---------	------------	----	----	----

No. members	6,736	6,918	7,117	7,267	
Loans granted	2,433	542	480	784	
Own Your Own	N/A	67 approved applications from 431 received	34 approved application from 163 received	12 approved applications from 119 received	

### Trends:

Table 4.1 shows that Moneywise Credit Union's membership continues to grow. Between Q2 and Q3 membership increased by 2%, continuing the upward trend. Historically, October to December (Q3) marks Moneywise Credit Union's busiest period for loan applications. The numbers of loans approved during this quarter have increased by 38% compared to Q2; however this figure is down by 5% on the same period last year.

'Own Your Own' is a scheme developed by Moneywise Credit Union and YHN. It provides low cost loans for household items, helping to deter tenants from accessing high interest credit options. During Q3 the loan approval rate dropped to 10%, this is down from Q2's rate of 21%. The main reasons for refusal continue to relate to rent arrears or poor credit history.

There have been no convictions for loan shark activity during Q3; however the Illegal Money Lending Team have received intelligence suggesting that loan sharks are operating in Newbiggin Hall, Westerhope and Byker wards. Officers are currently following up on these leads. At a national level there has been a noted increase in the number of loan shark victims turning to petty crime in order to fund loan shark debt. Based on this trend we will look to work with Northumbria Community Rehabilitation Company, which is responsible for much of the probation services within communities, to offer support in order to increase loan shark awareness amongst staff.

Promoting access to affordable credit and the benefits of regular saving is a priority for Newcastle's Financial Inclusion Group. An important part of this work has involved the development of school based credit union collection points. In January 2015 we were pleased to note that the Archbishop of Canterbury's Task Group on Responsible Credit and Savings announced they would be trialling a project to establish savings clubs in primary schools. The savings clubs, which will be administered by credit unions, aim to encourage children to save small amounts of money on a regular basis, helping to instil the importance of saving from a young age. The pilot will be trialled at six schools in Lewisham, Bromley, Bradford and Nottingham during 2015.

Newcastle's first school based credit union collection point opened at Atkinson Road Primary School during the summer of 2013. Pupils were involved in the designing of savings books and were trained about the importance of saving and good money management. Two years on 296 adults and children are saving on a regular basis at this venue. Based on the success of Atkinson Road Primary School's collection point we have continued to develop this approach. Further collection points have been established at West Newcastle Academy Primary School, Thomas Walling Primary Academy, Sacred Heart Primary School, St. Bedes Primary School, St. John Primary School and Central Walker Church of England Primary School.

### What we are doing:

- There are 716 adult and children savers at our school based credit union collection points detailed above. Between Q2 and Q3 the number of people saving at school based collection points has increased by 37%.

- Moneywise Credit Union is undertaking a large scale marketing campaign with posters being installed at 21 Metro stations across the region.
- Newcastle Furniture Service is designing a range of furniture packs specifically for care leavers. This initiative aims to make greater use of the procurement power held by Newcastle Furniture Service so that care leavers can access household goods at more competitive prices and are less likely to opt for high interest credit options, such as Brighthouse.
- In January the Illegal Money Lending Team held a month of action to highlight the links between debt and depression. As part of this work Stop Loan Shark refresher training was delivered to seven staff from Newcastle Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB).

**What next:**

- Riverside Community Health Project and Moneywise Credit Union will continue to develop the network of school based credit union collection points in Newcastle.
- Moneywise Credit Union is developing a low cost ‘jam jar’ account to support residents affected by Universal Credit. This type of account will assist residents to budget their monthly income and help make sure that priority bills are paid on time.
- Following April’s Financial Inclusion Group seminar we will promote Moneywise Credit Union and the benefits of membership with older people and older people’s organisations in Newcastle.
- YHN will be undertaking a leaflet drop to 300 households in areas of suspected loan shark activity.
- Representatives from the Illegal Money Lending Team will be holding a month of action to raise awareness of the dangers of loan sharks. The area and month for this initiative will be agreed with partners.
- In response to intelligence provided by the Illegal Money Lending Team identifying a growing number of loan shark victims turning to petty crime in order to fund their debt, we will increase loan shark awareness with Northumbria Community Rehabilitation Company.
- In February 2015 the All Party Parliamentary Group on Debt and Personal Finance argued that high interest stores such as Brighthouse encouraged consumers to take out expensive warranties and insurance when purchasing household items, such as sofas. The Financial Conduct Authority has been urged by the Parliamentary Group to investigate such practices. We will monitor this situation and provide an update on important developments.

**5: Reduce fuel poverty, increase financial resilience and promote access to bank accounts**

**Table 5.1 Referrals received by Energy Services**

	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15 Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
YHN referrals	239	50	49	65	
Non YHN referrals	117	22	16	25	
<b>Total referrals</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>90</b>	

**Trends:**

Table 5.1 shows a 28% increase in the total number of referrals received by Energy Services between Q2 and Q3; YHN referrals have increased by 33% and non-YHN referrals have increased by 81%. Although there has been an increase in the number of referrals received this quarter, the reasons for requests remain the same as previous quarters and continue to relate to:

- Fuel debt ;
- Self disconnection;
- Reducing energy bills, and;

- Replacement gas boilers.

Newcastle CAB's Fuel Debt Advisor started in post in October 2014 and has supported 130 residents seeking advice on fuel debt matters. The main requests for assistance mirror trends identified by Energy Services, however CAB are also receiving requests for advice relating to energy bills, particularly help to understand how charges have been calculated.

Part of the eligibility criterion for Universal Credit requires residents to have access to a bank or building society account or Post Office Card Account; otherwise they will not be transferred to the new benefit. Nationally it has been estimated that almost two million adults don't have access to a bank account, however we do not have this information at a local level. Our triage trial includes information about basic bank accounts and details of banks who offer such accounts.

#### **What we are doing:**

- Newcastle City Council's third collective energy switching scheme auction (known as the Big Community Switch) closed on 2 February 2015. This has resulted in a potential average energy bill saving of £230 per household.
- Warm Up North are delivering free or discounted boilers for low income households who are owner occupiers or private renters. For more information, visit [Warm Up North's website](#)
- Warm Up North are also delivering free or subsidised cavity wall and loft insulation. For more information, visit [Warm Up North's website](#)
- Newcastle Warm Zone helped eligible clients who had recently claimed Savings Credit to apply for the £140 Warm Home Discount.
- Newcastle CAB has submitted funding applications to The ScottishPower Energy People Trust and Northern Grid for a fuel debt advisor.
- Shelter has appointed a Fuel Debt Advisor.

#### **What next:**

- A fourth collective energy switching scheme will be held in May 2015.
- In January 2015 the Government published their consultation response to the Warm Home Discount extension to 2015-16, in which Government have committed to retain the £140 payment for eligible residents, helping them to meet energy costs. 2015-16's scheme will open in summer 2015 and we will work with partners to promote take-up with residents.
- In January 2015 the Government announced plans to establish new basic bank accounts that will end bank charges if a standing order or direct debit fails. In some instances, charges for each missed item have been as much as £35. Accounts will be available to residents who do not have a bank account or who are frozen out of their account due to previous money problems. Nine banks have agreed to offer basic bank accounts, they are: Barclays, the Cooperative Bank, HSBC, Lloyds Banking Group (including Halifax and Bank of Scotland), National Australia Banking Group (including Clydesdale and Yorkshire brands), Nationwide, RBS Group, Santander and TSB. These accounts will be available by December 2015. We will monitor developments in this area and ensure that partners are aware of progress and the potential implications for residents.

## **6. Next steps and how to get involved**

The issues raised in the draft version of this briefing were discussed at the Newcastle Advice Compact meeting on 18 February 2015. Feedback and comments have been incorporated into this document which will be presented to councillors and the Financial Inclusion Group. Information will also be published on Newcastle City Council's website. Our next quarterly Financial Inclusion Group seminar will be held on 23 April 2015 (2.45 to 5pm at Riverside Community Health Project, Carnegie Building, Benwell, NE4 8XS). Seminars are free to attend and provide an opportunity to find out more about

specific issues and agree what collective action we can take. To find out more about seminars, or anything else concerning financial inclusion in Newcastle, please contact Clare Fish by emailing: [financial.inclusion@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:financial.inclusion@newcastle.gov.uk) To find out more about the work we are doing to promote financial inclusion visit: [www.newcastle.gov.uk/managingyourmoney](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/managingyourmoney)

**Contact officer:** Clare Fish: telephone: 0191 277 7529 email: [clare.fish@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:clare.fish@newcastle.gov.uk)