

Active Inclusion Newcastle

Newcastle's Financial Inclusion Briefing: 2019-20 Q2

Promoting financial inclusion is an important part of Newcastle City Council and its partners' commitment to tackling inequality. 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 the best use of the resources available to make the greatest difference for residents.

To support this cooperative approach, we aim to share systems, and priorities to help meet the challenges created by the welfare reforms (£122m cut in Newcastle by 2024) and austerity measures (£283m cut by 2020). To help facilitate this we produce a quarterly briefing note to create a common language, to highlight trends and to review our responses to the following six objectives in our Financial Inclusion Action Plan:

- 1. Maximise income and respond to the welfare reforms**
- 2. Support residents to manage their money, increase financial resilience, reduce harmful debt and prevent homelessness**
- 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 account**
- 6. Tackle food poverty**

Our quarterly review process helps to create collective agreement about the issues residents face and the difference we are making to those who experience financial exclusion. We recognise that there are limitations in some of the data collected, as organisations invariably count their interventions differently. However, there is enough agreement for us to produce these briefing notes to demonstrate the work of the 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 pure academic research. However, we welcome partners to point out any errors or opportunities for improvement.

Headlines:

- The Supported Employment Service will be moving its FoodWorks training provision to Westgate College from January 2020. The service will also take over all catering provision for the site
- We have mapped the provision of free, emergency and low-cost food in Newcastle. This is available at www.informationnow.org.uk. In Q2 2019-20, the foodbank and free emergency food pages were visited 403 times and were in the top 10 most printed pages of 2019
- The multidisciplinary team began the second phase of their work on 9 September 2019, having secured funding to continue their work until September 2020 via the Life Chances Fund. This second phase incorporates an Early Help Specialist, seconded from Newcastle City Council
- Five Lamps have been chosen to be part of the Fair4All Finance pilot programme and the dormant bank account fund. The project has been designed to support the financial wellbeing of the most vulnerable in society
- Moneywise Credit Union have launched several new products including Own Comforts, Prom Loans, Family Loans and the Rent Account. For more information visit www.moneywise.org.uk
- The next Financial Inclusion Group seminar will be held on Thursday 27 February 2020 and will focus on Newcastle City Council's corporate debt approach. For more information email financial.inclusion@newcastle.gov.uk

1: Maximise income and respond to the welfare reforms (including digital inclusion)

Table 1.1: Annualised benefit gains and clients advised by the Newcastle Advice Compact

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (18-19)	Q4 (19-20)	2019-20
Benefit gains	£31,171,014	£7,349,373	£8,027,428			£15,376,801
Clients advised	21,670	5,900	6,063			11,963

Trends:

Advisers continue to experience more time consuming and complex cases due to the welfare reforms. Table 1.1 shows that the number of clients supported, and benefit gains achieved by partners has remained consistent this quarter.

Universal Credit (UC) is replacing six 'legacy benefits'. Of the total households on UC and 'legacy benefits' in Newcastle, 48% were on UC; in other words, the roll out of UC is 48% complete across the city. This compares to national roll-out of 32% and North East roll-out of 35%. 30% of those in receipt of UC in Newcastle are in some form of employment. By August 2019, YHN tenants on UC owed a total of £3.51 million and the YHN rent arrears attributed solely to UC were £1.29 million. In March 2019, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) [Economic and fiscal outlook – March 2019](#) stated that the migration of UC process will be completed by June 2024. Failure of residents who are in receipt of certain means tested benefits to comply with work related activity may have their benefit cut, known as a sanction. UC accounts for 91% of all sanctions. From 27 November 2019, the maximum UC sanction period has been reduced from 3 years to 26 weeks.

At the time of writing, the latest government budgetary plans were announced in the [Spending Round 2019](#), published on 4 September 2019, includes £23 million for the DWP to fund a range of measures for support for vulnerable claimants and people with complex needs migrating to UC ('managed migration'). This funding includes additional outreach activities to support those who are homeless and increasing the number of Armed Forces champions to support veterans when entering the labour market.

What we are doing:

- As part of making financial inclusion everyone's business the [spectrum of advice for benefits](#) continues to help services better understand what level of benefit support services provide, whilst providing support for those organisations in the form of training, information and advice. During this quarter:
 - 132 people completed the 'Introduction to Benefits' tiers 1 and 2, the 'Universal Credit' e-learning module and free quarterly face to face training on 'Introduction to Benefits', an increase of 140% on last quarter due to providing special Introduction to Benefits sessions for the reconfigured YHN Support and Progression staff. The e-learning modules we have produced have been used with permission by Lambeth Council. Further information can be found on our [information for professionals and volunteers webpage](#)
 - 3,136 people received our bi-monthly Benefit Bulletin, which provides benefit news, targeted information and 'tips' to help navigate the benefits system and avoid problems. For more information or to signup email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk
 - The Active Inclusion Service writes a quarterly article on welfare reforms for the national Institute of Money Advisers' Quarterly Account magazine, which is distributed to 1,930 money advisers across the country

- The Welfare Rights Service answered 104 consultancy advice calls from professionals
- There were 7,860 unique visits to the City Council's welfare rights and money webpages – www.newcastle.gov.uk/welfare/rights. Three Universal Credit pages were the most visited, including the table explaining the circumstances when a Universal Credit claim needs to be made and when it does not.
- Support for UC claims in Newcastle is provided by the government-funded Citizens Advice Newcastle (CAN) 'Help to Claim' scheme (for more information phone 0800 144 8444 or email HTC@newcastlecab.org.uk) and by council staff in the East End and the West End Community Hubs
- In Q2 2019-20 the Welfare Rights Service advised:
 - 108 residents with learning disabilities to claim benefits worth £449,271 a year
 - 760 residents with physical difficulties to claim benefits worth £1,907,618 a year
 - 395 residents with mental health problems to claim benefits worth £1,013,283 a year
 - 207 carers to claim benefits worth £517,569 a year
 - 356 families with a disabled child to claim benefits worth £957,165 a year
- The Active Inclusion Service provides targeted benefit information and advice for health staff and GPs via GPTeamNet. Information has received 949 views
- The Welfare Rights Service have commenced a monthly advice session at the Marie Curie hospice (3 hours per month)

What next:

- Building on its close working relationship with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) the Welfare Rights Service will meet JCP Disability Employment Advisers and visit the City Jobcentre
- Newcastle Welfare Rights are considering ways to work closer with the Health Service
- As a positive step towards a more integrated service and as an example of proportionate partnerships the Welfare Rights Service are developing electronic referrals to related essential services such as the Energy Service and Carers Newcastle
- In addition to the request to provide the Introduction to Benefits training session for Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) Support and Progression staff, Active Inclusion also responded to a request to develop a new course on 'challenging benefit decisions'. So far this has been provided for 79 Support and Progression staff.

Case study: Supporting residents in need

Context



Family (two adults and two children, Mum pregnant with third child) attended the Fenham drop in session for advice. Mum could speak limited English and could not read



Dad was recently sanctioned for mental health issues following an episode of psychosis that led to violent outbursts

Other than Child Benefit, Dad was in receipt of all benefits to his bank account. He refused access to the account, meaning the family had a very limited income. Mum did not have any essential items for her unborn baby and needed support with benefits to provide for her two children

Work done and outcomes

The family were only in receipt of Child Benefit payment £34.40 per week (£1,788.80 per annum). The Welfare Rights Officer:

- Successfully applied for UC for Mum and children, worth £12,175.66 per annum
- Applied for Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA) for UC to ensure that rent was paid directly to the landlord, reducing the family's risk of homelessness
- Secured £100 through Greggs charity to purchase essential goods for the unborn baby, and secured additional items through Social Services
- Successfully applied for Council Tax Reduction, worth £1,073.33 per annum
- Following the baby's birth, informed the relevant organisations about the change in circumstance and helped Mum to claim Child Benefit for her new baby, worth £501.20 per annum
- Applied for Pop cards for her older children to help reduce travel costs

This increased Mum's annual income of £12,676.86, substantially reduced the family's risk of homelessness and enabled Mum to prepare safely for her newborn and provide for her older children during the period of family breakdown.

Digital inclusion

Table 1.2: Initiatives to promote digital inclusion

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19-20)	Q4 (19-20)	2019-20
Digital skills courses	98 sessions 456 attended	28 sessions 121 attended	16 sessions 87 attended			44 sessions 208 attended
People's Network take-up	28%	25%	24%			25%
One to one digital sessions	Not available	10	8			18
Hours volunteered	1,598	423.5	291			714.5

Table 1.3: Citizens Advice Newcastle Help to Claim service

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19-20)	Q4 (19-20)	2019-20
Number of people supported	N/A	250	Pending			250

Trends:

Table 1.2 summarises activities to support residents to get online provided by Newcastle City Council and YHN. Between Q1 and Q2 of 2019-20 uptake of digital skills courses decreased by 21%. Hours volunteered have also decreased this quarter. For more information about the help available to get online contact Lisa Dawson by email lisa.dawson@yhn.org.uk or phone 0191 277 1251.

Table 1.3 shows the number of people supported by CAN's Help to Claim service. The Help to Claim service provides support to people during the early stages of a UC claim, from application to first payment. Please note that this service is not Newcastle specific. Data for Q2 2019-20 has not been provided.

What we are doing:

- Free Wi-Fi is available in 69 public buildings and city centre streets increasing opportunities for people to get online. For more information visit <http://www.godigitalnewcastle.co.uk/wifi>
- During Q2 2019-20 we held 4 Techy Tea Parties for customers with a tablet, iPhone or smartphone that they want to learn more about. Techy Tea Parties take place on the second and last Thursdays of the month at City Library. In Q2, 27 residents attended. For more information, or to book a place, visit [Newcastle Libraries' event webpage](#)
- During Q2 2019-20 we held 20 sessions (10 courses) of the Learn My Way, Online Basics sessions. In Q2, 50 people attended. For more information, or to book a place, visit [Newcastle Libraries' event webpage](#)
- Specialist Get Online Champion Training sessions for staff from local community and charity organisations continue to run monthly at the City Library. During Q2 2019-20, 2 courses were delivered, and 10 people attended. For more information contact Lisa Dawson lisa.dawson@newcastle.gov.uk
- From April 2019, YHN and Newcastle Futures have been working in partnership to deliver a programme funded by ESF money. Referrals onto the Online Basics course should increase via this new programme

- Referral routes have been established with Moving On Tyne and Wear (MOTW), and Reed in Partnership who deliver the Work and Health Programme for the DWP
- 2 new digital volunteers have been recruited and are in training
- Learn My Way - Introduction to Office was launched during Get Online Week (October 2019). The course is now timetabled to run as part of our main provision. For more information, or to book a place, visit [Newcastle Libraries' event webpage](#)

What next:

- HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) have contacted Newcastle City Council's Digital Inclusion team to discuss tailored Get Online Champion training for staff in customer facing positions. Planning will take place soon
- YHN Employability customers, Fenham Rehab Centre users and Fenham residents will be taking part in digital inclusion activities scheduled for next year. Working in partnership with Northumbria University, the Social Cohesion and Wellbeing through Digital Literacy project will be launched in January 2020

2: Support residents to manage their money, increase financial resilience, reduce harmful debt and prevent homelessness

Table 2.1: Debt and budgeting advice provision by Newcastle Advice Compact and its impact on Newcastle residents including homelessness prevention through debt advice

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19-20)	Q4 (19-20)	2019-20
Debts written off	£1,963,639*	£489,868	£439,055			£928,923
Clients advised	4,916*	1,074*	1,046			2,120
Homelessness prevention	726*	35**	30**			65

* Figure does not include all partners ** Figure only includes Money Matters returns

Trends:

Table 2.1 shows that between Q1 2019-20 and Q2 2019-20 the number of clients advised decreased by 2%, a smaller than expected decrease for the summer months.

Money Matters Debt Advisers continue to monitor sustainability of their clients' budgets. During Q2 2019-20, out of 142 households for whom budgets were completed:

- **48% had sustainable budgets**
- **37% were able to meet their living costs because of the additional financial support** provided by a Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to help pay their rent
- **15% had unsustainable budgets** where they had insufficient income to meet their basic living costs and there was no additional financial support available

What we are doing:

We continue to take a coordinated citywide approach to supporting Newcastle residents affected by money problems and debt. Examples include:

- Supporting households on Housing Benefit affected by the lower benefit cap – at 30 September 2019, Revenues and Benefits information showed that there were 200 households in Newcastle who were affected by the benefit cap. The Active Inclusion Service co-ordinates support for households in private and social rented tenancies and prioritises according to the risk of homelessness: 'high risk' households include families that are losing £60 per week or more in Housing Benefit and/or households that are vulnerable due to their prior or current involvement with prevention services. 'High risk' households are referred to Money Matters for support. Between 1 June 2016 and 30 September 2019, Money Matters offered advice and support to 258 affected households. Information on some of the outcomes and outputs of this support and on the barriers that the families need to overcome to improve their finances and achieve financial stability is highlighted below:
 - 40 households are no longer affected by the benefit cap
 - 82 households received debt advice and 48 received budgeting advice; 49 were awarded DHPs which amounted to £75,571 in extra income; 38 were prevented from becoming homeless and 18 were referred to Newcastle Futures for employment support
 - 196 barriers to a stable life were recorded against 61 benefit cap households, including 35 households in housing that is no longer affordable, 26 without access to childcare, 15 with no confidence of securing employment and 19 with an addiction which reduces their ability to pay priority bills

- The multidisciplinary team began the second phase of their work on 9 September 2019, having secured funding to continue their work until September 2020 through the Life Chances Fund. This second phase incorporates an Early Help Specialist, seconded from Newcastle City Council. The multidisciplinary team were originally established through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funded [Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer](#). They began approaching residents using a 'case finding' approach on 12 November 2017. The initial pilot ran until the end of March 2019. The [final summative report](#) that draws together learning from the team's work over their initial pilot period and is available online as part of [a suite of reports and resources produced through our Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer programme](#). The first periodic review of the team's second phase of work will be completed in February 2020
- Supporting residents who are claiming UC – YHN and Money Matters provide Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) to residents who need help managing their money as a result of claiming UC. 217 referrals were made during Q2 2019-20
- We provide training to partners as part of our [spectrum of advice for money management \(budgeting and debt\)](#). As part of this approach:
 - The 'Debt Awareness' e-learning module was completed by 49 people in Q2 and provides basic debt information and details of organisations residents can be signposted to for advice
 - Quarterly face to face 'Introduction to Budgeting' training was completed by 13 people in Q2. Details of the Active Inclusion Newcastle training programme is available online at <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals>
 - 471 subscribers received our quarterly debt bulletins, providing the latest debt news and targeted information. To view and sign up for debt bulletins visit <https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals> or email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk
- Money Matters supported 5 vulnerable residents to obtain a Debt Relief Order (DRO) during Q2 2019-20 through its discretionary DRO fund

What next:

- Newcastle is one of the three local authorities chosen to pilot a new approach to problem debt – the Civil Service "Re-imagine Debt" initiative – which involves government departments identifying vulnerable people early and providing joined-up support to people who struggle with debt. 20 households have now been selected and are receiving support from Money Matters. Feedback was provided to the national Reimagining Debt Steering Group in March 2019 and the pilot is going to be progressed from within the Cabinet Office and will start to be extended to other local authority areas. To that end, Money Matters advisors met with Policy in Practice in August to share their experiences as part of work that they are doing with the Cabinet Office
- In March 2017 Money Advice Service (MAS) released the [Standard Financial Statement \(SFS\)](#), a single format for financial statements, allowing debt advisors and creditors to work together to achieve the best outcomes for people struggling with their finances. We are consulting with MAS about Newcastle City Council's Corporate Debt Strategy to help us create more consistency between Newcastle City Council's collection departments and debt advisers, and a smoother transition through the debt collection process for residents who owe money to Newcastle City Council.
- As part of our work to support residents with debts and to roll out the SFS, we are working with Advice Compact partners to develop a consistent approach to budgeting support and debt advice for residents whose income is insufficient to meet their basic needs, and/or to afford to make debt repayments. This was the topic of the Financial Inclusion Group Seminar in October 2018. Following on from this, we are working with staff to review the Council's approach to corporate debt to move from collection towards connection on the context of resident's reduced incomes and increased debts. A new Senior Active Inclusion Officer joined the Active Inclusion Unit on 1 July 2019 to carry out this review of corporate debt within the Council and YHN

- Money Matters advisers were interviewed as part of research by Heriot-Watt University on the 'Role of the local state' to consider how we prevent homelessness in the context of localism, austerity & welfare reforms. [The final report](#) was published on 19 June 2019 as part of our suite of reports and resources produced through our [Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer](#)

Case study: debt write-off

Context



Single female referred to Money Matters by a Neurological Advocate at the Advocacy Centre North due to having multiple debts that she was struggling to manage. She is bedbound and lives in a residential care home. At the time of initial appointment, she was receiving Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). She had recently suffered a stroke but was able to give Money Matters permission to deal with matters via her sister. She owed £156 Council Tax arrears, £3,860 utility arrears and £5,240 in non-priority debts



Client was a home owner and her sister was staying in the property. Client no longer legally owned the property having been scammed out of ownership by a fraudster who was serving a prison sentence at the time of initial appointment. Whilst the client was not the named owner at the Land Registry, she still had access to the property and the matter was being dealt with by a Solicitor. As a result of moving into a residential care home the client received an overpayment of PIP care element of £3,125 as her care costs had been covered by NHS Continuing Healthcare

Work done and outcomes:

Money Matters visited the client at the care home with her sister and Advocacy Centre North worker in order to take instructions and advise. Due to client's medical condition it was agreed that in the first instance attempts would be made to obtain write-off / debt reduction as far as possible. The debt advisor:

- Successfully applied to Newcastle City Council's Council Tax Hardship Scheme, leading to £156 being paid to the client's account, leaving a zero balance
- Successfully applied to the client's utility trust via Charis Grants which repaid in full £3,477 gas arrears and £383 electricity arrears
- Requested a write-off with medical evidence from the DWP in respect of the overpayment of PIP. This was ultimately unsuccessful with the DWP declining to waive their right to recover as they did not consider that their decision to recover at £11.10 per week was causing any 'significant exceptional financial hardship'
- Requested write-offs for the client's remaining non-priority creditors, all of who acquiesced, leading to further write-off of £2,115

The woman is now much better able to manage her finances and can concentrate on receiving support for her health issues.

3: Help residents to train, gain and remain in employment

Table 3.1: Number of people supported into employment, self-employment, volunteering or apprenticeships

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19-20)	Q4(19-20)	2019-20
People supported into employment, training volunteering or apprenticeships	630	80*	88			168

*Excludes Crisis Skylight data

Trends:

Table 3.1 shows that between Q1 and Q2 of 2019-20 the number of residents supported into employment remained consistent. However, figures have fluctuated as not all partners have consistently reported their figures via the Newcastle Employment Support Compact. This makes comparison with previous periods difficult.

Employment advisors from the Supported Employment Service, Newcastle Futures, YHN and Crisis Skylight Newcastle continue to work with residents experiencing significant barriers to employment which must be overcome before work can be considered. Typically, barriers relate to confidence, debt, concerns about being “worse off” and fears about rent affordability.

What we are doing:

- The Skills Hub hosted a ‘Newcastle Employability Day’ on 19 November 2019 in partnership with Smart Works. Details of upcoming events offered by the Skills Hub are available [here](#)
- 10 tenants who were employed by YHN prior to Q2 progressed into permanent employment this quarter. Tenants were employed through a combination of Your Homes Your Jobs and apprenticeship programmes. For more information contact the Employment Team by email employabilityteam@yhn.org.uk
- YHN are a delivery partner for the European Social Fund (ESF) and National Lottery Funded ‘Wise Steps’ programme, which supports people with multiple barriers to employment find work. The team have developed a delivery programme which involves supporting tenants who have identified IT and digital skills as a barrier to employment. Delivery of the ESF programme started this quarter, providing tenants with a range of employability provision to support them into work or training opportunities. This quarter the team have supported 40 tenants to develop employability skills

What next:

- January 2020’s Cabinet Report will focus on employment support provision
- The Supported Employment Service will be moving its FoodWorks training provision to Westgate College from January 2020. The service will also take over all catering provision for the site
- We will be promoting cooperative growth – supporting the 40,000 households affected by welfare reforms to participate in the city’s economic development; sharing solutions and developing a coordinated, targeted response for residents who need additional support to gain and sustain employment

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

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19-20)	Q4 (19-20)	2019-20
No. of members	9,782	9,893	10,168			10,168
Loans granted	2,422	626	570			1,196
Loan value	£2,272,211	£551,135	£568,151			£1,119,286

Table 4.2: Five Lamps loans granted and loan value (Newcastle residents)

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19-20)	Q4(19-20)	2019-20
Loans granted	410	93	109			202
Loan value	£304,179	£71,190	£82,495			£153,685

Trends:

Table 4.1 shows that between Q1 and Q2 of 2019-20 Moneywise Credit Union's membership increased by 3%, however loans granted decreased by 9%. During the same period the number of loans granted by Five Lamps increased by 17%.

What we are doing:

- The Illegal Money Lending Team have developed a series of short cartoons to warn children and young people about the dangers of loan sharks. The cartoons are available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37wgTGyZ7J0>
- Five Lamps have been awarded 'best newcomer' at the Credit Strategy Awards (voted for by customers). Although Five Lamps have been delivering personal loans since 2008, they have only been delivering loans as the Conduit brand since July 2018
- Five Lamps have secured £5million of investment to help vulnerable households across the UK break out of the cycle of high cost debt. This investment represents the largest ever single investment in a UK community lender. Further information is available [here](#)
- Five Lamps is working in partnership with ASDA to promote affordable credit options to customers. Further information is available at www.money.asda.com/personal-loans/
- Moneywise Credit Union have launched two new products – a family loan and rent account. Further information is available at www.moneywise.org.uk
- Moneywise Credit Union have launched 'Own Comforts' an affordable alternative to rent to own. Applicants do not need to be members to apply for an 'Own Comfort' loan. Further information is available at www.moneywise.org.uk/owncomforts

What next:

- Five Lamps have been chosen to be part of the Fair4All Finance pilot programme and the dormant bank account fund. The project has been designed to support the financial wellbeing of the most vulnerable in society. Updates will be shared in future briefings

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

Table 5.1: Energy Services new referrals, cases closed and financial outputs

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19-20)	Q4 (19-20)	2019-20
New YHN referrals	351	101	92			193
New non YHN enquiries	170	53	31			84
Energy debts written off	£111,625	£13,296	£15,880			£29,176
Total cases closed	343	94	51			145
Average financial gains	£325.44	£141.45	£311.38			£201.21

Table 5.2: CAN Northern Powergrid Fuel Debt Project's new clients seen and fuel debt issues dealt with

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19-20)	Q4 (19-20)	2019-20
New clients	1,081	301	281			582
Issues addressed	978	519	406			925

Trends:

Newcastle City Council's Energy Services provide specialist energy saving and fuel debt advice to Newcastle residents and fuel debt casework. Table 5.1 shows that between Q1 and Q2 2019-20 referrals to Energy Services decreased by 19%, this is an expected seasonal trend. The main reasons for referral continue to relate to fuel debt, high energy bills and not enough money to top up meters.

CAN's Northern Powergrid Fuel Debt Project started in October 2014. It provides a daily drop-in face-to-face specialist advice service for residents experiencing problems with energy bills and fuel debt, such as advice on reducing energy costs by switching tariffs, payment methods or suppliers, and saving money through energy efficiency, or help with current supply problems, including debts and disputed bills. Table 5.2 above shows that between Q1 and Q2 of 2019-20, the number of new clients seen decreased by 7% and the issues addressed decreased by 22%. This quarter the project also helped residents to deal with £199,376.74 of fuel related issues, including fuel debt, reimbursements, hardship payments and tariff checks.

What we are doing

- Newcastle City Council's Crisis Support Scheme provided 157 fuel top-up vouchers at a value of £4,980 during Q2 of 2019-20 to residents experiencing crisis or disaster
- YHN have received funding to deliver Smart Meter advice to residents aged 65 years and older. The aim of the project is to educate residents and dispel myths around smart meters. Since the project started the team has provided almost 2,000 residents advice on smart meters, switching energy suppliers, energy efficiency, benefit and budgeting advice
- CAN have a hardship fund to support vulnerable clients (based on Ofgem's definition of vulnerability) experiencing hardship, for example benefit delays, with a one-off short-term emergency payment via the Northern Powergrid Fuel Debt Project. For more information contact the team by e-mail powergrid@newcastlecab.org.uk or phone 0370 145 1450
- Newcastle City Council is running an energy price comparison and switching scheme. For more information visit www.newcastle.gov.uk/energyswitch

- Newcastle City Council have delivered 92 first time gas central heating systems for residents with funding secured from National Grids Warm Homes Fund. The scheme has now closed

What next:

- An energy company options appraisal has been carried out with other North East local authorities and the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO). The project team are reviewing fuel poverty across the region

6. Tackle food poverty

Table 6.1: Number of food parcels issued by the Crisis Support Scheme to residents experiencing crisis or disaster

	2018-19	Q1 (19-20)	Q2 (19-20)	Q3 (19 -20)	Q4 (19-20)	2019-20
Number of parcels issued	706	102	103			205

Tackling food poverty was added to our aims following January 2019's Financial Inclusion Group seminar. As this is a relatively new area, we will be working with partners to understand food insecurity levels in Newcastle, the reasons why people use foodbanks and opportunities to prevent crisis at the earliest opportunity.

Table 6.1 shows the number of food parcels issued by the Crisis Support Scheme to residents experiencing crisis or disaster. Between Q1 and Q2 of 2019-20, the number of parcels issued remained consistent. The value of parcels issued this quarter was £8,847.97.

What we are doing:

- We have worked with Food Nation to establish the Food Poverty Network Group in response to the Newcastle Good Food Plan, and to improve coordination and awareness of support for people experiencing food insecurity. For more information contact Clare Fish by email clare.fish@newcastle.gov.uk
- We have mapped the emergency food, discounted food and free hot food provision available across the city. Information is available via the [Information Now](#) website. Between 1 July and 30 September 2019, there were 403 visits to the 'foodbanks and free food in Newcastle' page
- Food Power Newcastle have set up a [Facebook page](#) detailing emergency food, free food or discounted food in Byker
- Food Newcastle have received the Sustainable Food Cities for the bronze award. The awards recognise work to tackle key food issues, including food poverty

What next:

- We will be working with Newcastle West End Foodbank to provide support to residents experiencing food insecurity
- The Food Poverty Network Group is considering opportunities to measure population and service levels of food insecurity in Newcastle. Work will also seek to understand the reasons why people use foodbanks and identify earlier opportunities for intervention. For more information contact Clare Fish by email clare.fish@newcastle.gov.uk

Active Inclusion Newcastle

The Financial Inclusion Group is part of the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach that responds to the growth in demand for information, advice and support to promote social and financial inclusion and to prevent the risk of homelessness with reduced resources. The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership coordinates responses to the welfare reforms, austerity and destitution by creating the conditions for stability:

- An income
- Somewhere to live
- Financial inclusion – life without excessive debt
- Training and employment opportunities

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership provides and supports partners to deliver the following:

Primary prevention activities – to support making the prevention of homelessness and destitution ‘everyone’s business’:

- Information for professionals, volunteers and the public – financial inclusion examples are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Consultancy advice for professionals and volunteers – contact details are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Briefing sessions for professionals and volunteers – to request a briefing, email activeinclusion@newcastle.gov.uk
- Spectrums of advice – details are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Training for professionals and volunteers – details of e-learning modules and face to face training sessions are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Protocols and policies – details are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/homelessnesspreventionforprofessionals
- Partnerships and governance – details are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals
- Copies of previous quarterly reviews are available online at www.newcastle.gov.uk/benefits-and-council-tax/welfare-rights-and-money-advice/information-professionals-and-volunteers/financial-inclusion-group

Secondary prevention activities – specialist advice and accommodation services that community based primary services can turn to when they need help

Crisis activities – services that support people facing destitution when community and preventative support fails to prevent crisis

Next steps and how to get involved

The issues raised in this briefing were discussed at the Newcastle Advice Compact meeting on 20 November 2019. Feedback has been incorporated into this document which will be presented to councillors and the Financial Inclusion Group at our next seminar on 27 February 2020.

For more information on financial inclusion:

visit www.newcastle.gov.uk/financialinclusionforprofessionals or contact Clare Fish by phone 0191 277 7529, or e-mail clare.fish@newcastle.gov.uk