

# Active Inclusion Newcastle – briefing note 2023-24

## Background and context

Active Inclusion Newcastle is a partnership approach developed as part of Newcastle City Council's 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
- **transitions that residents and organisations need to make in 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 tackling poverty and the cost-of-living crisis. 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 affect over 40,000 Newcastle residents and will reduce income arising from working age benefits in Newcastle by an estimated £105 million annually by 2027-28. This is at the same time as [the Council having to save £370 million due to government cuts and increasing cost pressures by 2024](#), and in the context of a cost of living crisis pushing up the price of essentials at a time when residents are still recovering from the economic impact of the pandemic which has compounded the issues residents face by reducing median incomes by 4.5%, changing rules around benefits and housing, and bringing people into the benefits system (residents on Universal Credit increased by 11,248 from March 2020 to March 2023).

The Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership approach is supported by the 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 us 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 services. Since 2013 we have made good progress in promoting the means and benefits of service coordination. We now want to improve 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, and our commitment to prevention won the [World Habitat Gold Award](#) in 2020. 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 2022-23 we and partners advised 32,608 people on welfare benefits, debt and housing
- **Develop citywide consensus and partnership responses** – 142 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** – including web information visited 84,557 times. Other 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 26,461 residents with 65 services by 644 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
- **Carry out 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 2022-23 for staff and volunteers who are not specialists in financial inclusion and homelessness prevention:

- **Communications and information** – 3,631 people receive our information updates
- **Website** – 84,557 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** – 803 people participated in online training
- **Welfare rights and debt consultancy advice** – for 605 staff and volunteers
- **Partnerships and governance** – 142 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 2022-23 these services provided advice to 32,608 people and allocated accommodation and support for 986 households, supporting other services when they need more specialist help. The following data for 2022-23 demonstrates their scale and value:

- **Homelessness and housing** – 4,315 cases of homelessness prevented, no use of bed and breakfast accommodation to meet our statutory homelessness duties since 2006, and 1 eviction into homelessness from Your Homes Newcastle (YHN)'s 25,790 tenancies. Our challenge is to maintain these low figures post-pandemic
- **Welfare rights** – 22,569 residents supported to secure £22,805,610 of annualised benefit gains
- **Debt** – 4,039 residents given advice to provide relief from debt
- **Supporting Independence Scheme** – 479 households awarded resettlement support and an additional 164 awards of targeted support for households leaving homeless accommodation or the asylum system
- **Employment support** – 405 vulnerable residents supported into employment
- **Affordable credit** – 7,154 Moneywise Credit Union members
- **Support for refugees and asylum seekers** – 375 households given advice and support

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 2022-23:

- **Emergency accommodation** – 524 households placed into our temporary accommodation to meet statutory duties and to mitigate crisis
- **Crisis Support Scheme** – 1,050 households provided with emergency food, gas, electricity, clothing or travel support
- **People sleeping rough** – outreach support for 278 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 our partnership approach has made**

**Helping residents prepare for the move the Universal Credit** – where we are working with and providing practical support to advice partners and YHN to support the remaining 11,332 households in Newcastle who are yet to move to Universal Credit to ensure they are on the right benefit now, to be ready for Universal Credit and help with the cost of living crisis.

**Helping older residents to maximise their income** – 770,000 pension credit age people are missing out on £1.4 billion a year Pension Credit. We encouraged older residents to claim this benefit through various communication channels and by directly writing to 775 people who we believe may be entitled; 211 of these are now in receipt of pension credit.

**Cost of Living Crisis** – our coordinated response brought together a range of measures to support people with the rising cost of living. The response sought to ensure effective communication with professionals and members of the public, target resources to achieve maximum impact and extend the reach of our touch, trigger and transition points. Over 100 professionals attended the Active Inclusion responding to the Cost of Living Crisis training. We established multi-agency referral pathways through the Advice Compact that supported over 2,600 households to receive payments of £200.

**Partnership for People and Place** – Research as part of this project confirmed a relationship between areas of the city suffering with the highest levels of deprivation, and the prevalence of

safeguarding adults concerns. By working in close partnership with the West End Foodbank, officers from Active Inclusion and the Safeguarding Adults Unit have put in place a training programme and clear referral routes which allow the Pathways Team at the West End Foodbank to connect people who use the foodbank with a range of services, including Money Matters, Welfare Rights and Adult Social Care. The project has led to a heightened understanding of the relationship between poverty and safeguarding adults.

The project has been independently evaluated by Northumbria University, the evaluation provides an even greater understanding of the impact of the project and what further opportunities there to find pathways out of food insecurity for people who have been pushed into poverty.

**Support for migration, refugee and asylum** – We coordinate a strategic approach to the integration of people migrating, with refugee status and seeking asylum. We manage the Government's Refugee Resettlement Programmes and provide case management support to residents whose circumstances change due to their immigration status (leaving the asylum process, refugee family reunification, or experiencing homelessness / destitution due to no recourse to public funds). Our Local Authority Asylum Liaison Officers supported 375 households in 2022-23).

We also develop, coordinate and promote Newcastle as a [City of Sanctuary](#). We are publishing a Council of Sanctuary Strategy in June 2023 and are hoping to be awarded as a Council of Sanctuary under the updated City of Sanctuary appraisal process for Local Authorities. There is ongoing work with a range of organisations and institutions in the city to promote [Sanctuary Awards](#) and support them to apply. We currently have 13 awarded Schools of Sanctuary and over 50 in the schools network (out of 120 in Newcastle), and the City Library, Newcastle University and West End Foodbank are all awarded places of Sanctuary.

In addition, the Homes for Ukraine team have provided support services to refugees accessing the DLUHC coordinated visa offer for Ukrainians fleeing the conflict. Transition Officers have facilitated the integration of refugees into homes and communities, fostered effective relationships with charitable and voluntary sector organisations and promoted collaborative access to services and amenities. The Homes for Ukraine scheme have supported the integration and independence of 346 individuals throughout 2022, with 50 of those individuals progressing to either private rented tenancies or social housing.

**No evictions into homelessness** – In [July 2020](#) Newcastle City Council's Cabinet agreed that the Council and YHN collaborate to lead the city's housing sector to develop an approach of having no evictions into homelessness.

To implement the policy aim, we established the Sustaining Tenancies at Risk (STaR) panel. This multiagency panel brings together Newcastle City Council (Housing Advice Centre, Money Matters, Multi-disciplinary team, Children's Social Care and Early Help) and YHN (Income Collection, Financial Inclusion and Support & Progression Service). It aims to identify and support YHN tenants, who are at risk of losing their tenancy and put into practice the policy aim of no evictions into homelessness.

215 YHN households were supported through this process in 2022-23. There has been only one eviction from YHN into homelessness since the STaR process began compared to the 50 evictions in 2019-2020.

## **Governance arrangements**

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

- our quarterly [Financial Inclusion Group](#) seminars chaired by the [Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy](#), and
- our quarterly [Homelessness Prevention Forum](#) meetings chaired by the [Cabinet Member for Housing and Regulatory Services](#)

We produce quarterly briefings for [financial inclusion](#) and [homelessness prevention](#) which collate data available from partners, helping us to collectively review the challenges we face, the difference we have made, and agree future priorities. However, 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 these outcomes despite having to make cuts to our services as a result of austerity. Our data demonstrates the value that a strong system brings in facilitating 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 and Rough Sleeping 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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