

[Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council](#)

[Homelessness Strategy 2016](#)

## Foreword

Welcome to Newcastle under Lyme's fourth Homelessness Strategy, which sets out our priorities and future actions for preventing and tackling homelessness over the next five years.

The priorities of this strategy have been developed from the findings of the Homelessness review and in consultation with our partners. Our homelessness review has highlighted many key findings but it is very clear that a focus on prevention remains the key to tackling homelessness.

The Council is committed to preventing homelessness and we recognise that we can't achieve this on our own. Partnership working is fundamental to this strategy both to prevent homelessness and offer sustainable housing options. Our stakeholders have the specialist knowledge and expertise to provide assistance to our residents when faced with homelessness issues. In short, effective solutions to homelessness require a joined up multi agency approach and our partners are key contributors to the successful delivery of our priorities.

This strategy is supported by an action plan which will set out how Newcastle and its partners will address homelessness issues specific to Newcastle under Lyme. We will review our plan annually to ensure that this strategy remains responsive to the emerging needs of our Borough.

## Introduction

We published our last homelessness strategy in 2010 and this strategy will build upon the achievements we made in our last strategy. Under the Homelessness Act 2002, we have a statutory duty to review and refresh our Homelessness Strategy every five years. In 2015 we commenced a thorough review of homelessness in our borough.

In addition to the requirement to review and refresh our Homelessness Strategy, we also have a statutory duty to provide advice and assistance to those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness under Part V11 1996 Housing Act. Our homelessness and housing advice service is carried out by Midland Heart on our behalf under a legal contract, whilst the strategic function is retained with the Council.

This is our fourth homelessness strategy, it aligns closely with our Housing Strategy and represents our corporate commitment to provide a high quality homelessness service, which prevents homelessness and allows us to fulfil our statutory responsibility to secure accommodation where there is a legal duty to do so. This strategy will assist in ensuring that this commitment is Council wide and includes working with all our partners to deliver our long term goal of keeping homelessness levels in Newcastle under Lyme as low as possible.

DRAFT

## Our vision

Our overall vision for our strategy remains the same;

'To ensure that homeless levels in the borough remain as low as possible through prevention and to provide in partnership effective and quality services to those affected by homelessness'.

From this vision stems our three key priority areas;

- Prevention
- Supporting households into sustainable housing solutions
- Working in partnership to address the causes of homelessness in Newcastle

Our strategic priorities for the next five years are based upon the findings of our Homelessness review, consultation responses and consideration for the Government's Gold Standard.

The Gold Standard is a benchmark for local authorities to work towards (from 'Making Every Contact Count, A Joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness' August 2012). 'Making Every Contact Count' clearly states that 'there is no place for homelessness in the 21st century'.

The 10 challenges in the Gold Standard are:

1. To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
2. To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
3. To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice
4. To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative
5. To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support
6. To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord
7. To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
8. To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness, reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs
9. To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
10. To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

Our Homelessness Review recognised the need for us to consider whether we are prepared to contribute both financially and strategically in order to achieve the Gold standard.

Consideration has been given to whether we should participate in the Gold Standard process and to date we have made the commitment to consider the elements of these challenges with particular focus being given to the ones we feel will make the most difference to our borough. We will use the Gold Standard process as an internal review exercise to identify any areas where our current service provision could benefit from improvement. To show this commitment we have identified and made reference to the relevant challenges when discussing our strategic priorities within this Strategy.

We are pleased to report that our previous Homelessness Strategies have developed efficient and effective services that not only meet the needs of those affected by homeless but also align with the working practices at our Council.

### **Homelessness Review**

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires us to carry out a homelessness review of our area and formulate and publish a strategy based upon its findings every five years.

During 2015 the Council's Housing strategy team have undertaken a comprehensive review of the current homelessness situation in Newcastle under Lyme. The review has identified the causes of homelessness, the needs of those faced with or experiencing homelessness and the services currently available to meet those needs. It has taken into consideration the views of our stakeholders and service users, which has enabled us to identify any issues and gaps in the current provision. Finally, it informs the reader of current Government policy.

The information from the Review, plus Government guidance has enabled us to develop this Strategy. It sets out the direction we want to take over the next five years in order to prevent and address homelessness. In doing so, it sets the key strategic priorities which will inform the allocation of resources by the Council and its partners. Delivery of these priorities is set out in the next section. We recommend that it is read alongside our strategy.

Copies of the Review can be found at [www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk](http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk) or by contacting the Housing Strategy Team direct on 01782 742456.

### **Consultation**

To test our findings of our homelessness review, we consulted with our partners. The purpose was to share our evidence and seek further information from our partners which may strengthen our review. Partners were given a full 12 week consultation period on the review findings.

We have involved our partners throughout the whole development of our strategy.

We have produced this draft homelessness strategy based upon the findings of our homelessness review, statistical information and consultation. This draft strategy has been considered by the Council's Economic Development and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee. *To complete once strategy has been to Scrutiny.*

## Context and purpose

Definition of homelessness for the purpose of this strategy:

The statutory definition of homelessness was unaltered by the Homelessness Act 2002 and remains as that defined by the Homelessness Act 1996 s.175,

‘A person is homeless if he or she has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere which is available for his or her occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy. A person will also be homeless where he or she has accommodation but cannot secure entry to it, or where he or she has accommodation that is a moveable structure (such as a caravan or a house boat) and there is no place where it can be placed in order to provide accommodation. A person who has accommodation is to be treated as homeless where it would not be reasonable for him or her to continue to occupy it’

Also a person is considered to be threatened with homelessness if he or she is likely to become homeless within 28 days.

If a local authority has reason to believe that a person is homeless or threatened with homelessness, it is required to make enquiries and decide whether it owes the applicant a duty to find accommodation for them. In each case an assessment will take place to determine whether the applicant is actually homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless. If an applicant meets these criteria the authority has an immediate duty to provide temporary accommodation for them and anyone who normally resides with them.

Local authorities owe a lesser duty to applicants who are not in priority need or who are intentionally homeless. Local authorities may have a duty to provide them with advice and assistance in finding new accommodation. Information and advice about homelessness and housing options can be provided by the local authority and also external agencies. However it is essential that the advice and assistance provided is up to date, robust and will help with the aim of preventing homelessness.

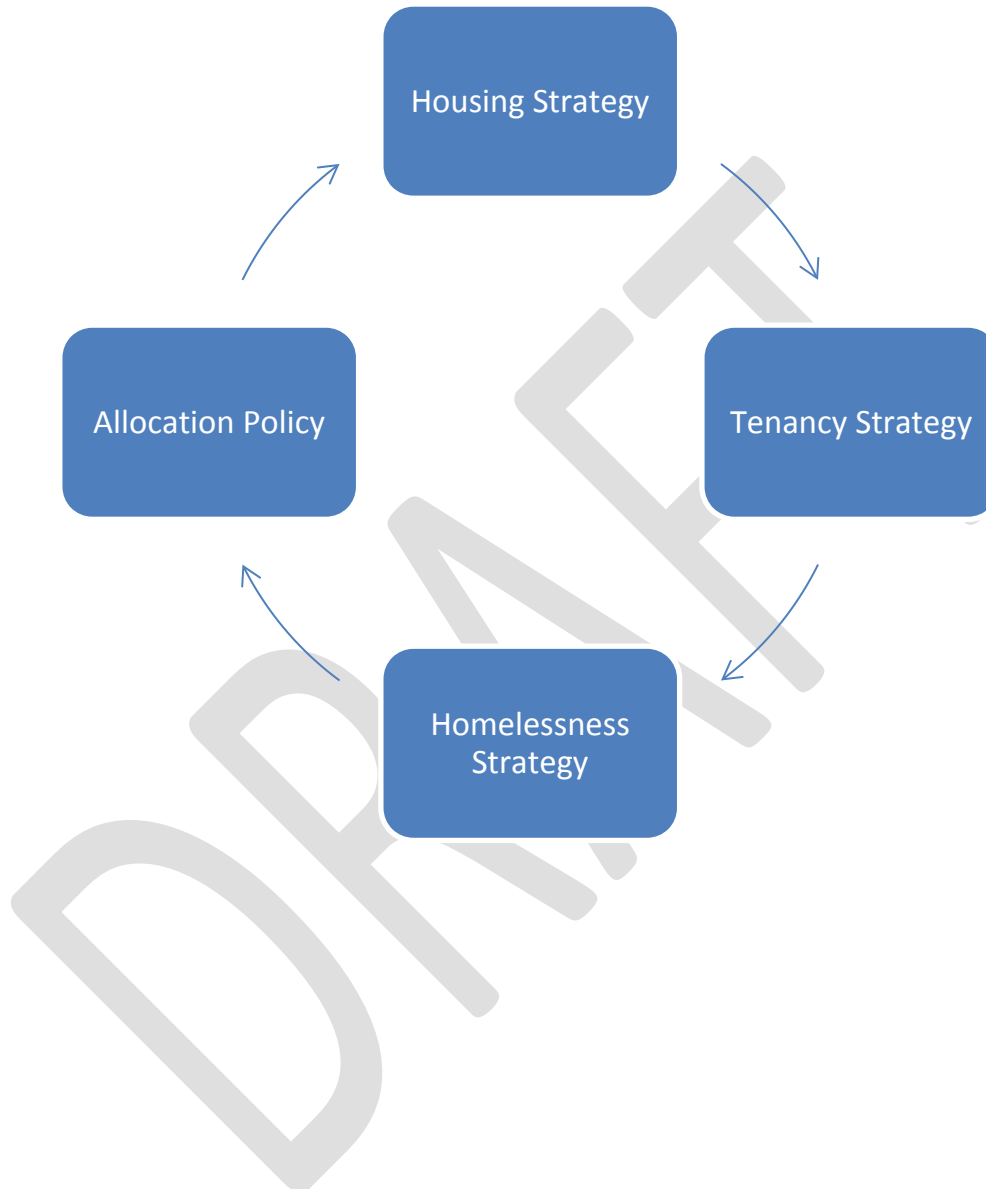
Where an applicant is threatened with homelessness and meets the above criteria, local authorities have a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure that the accommodation remains available for their occupation.

The test local authorities should now apply is whether a homeless applicant is more vulnerable than ‘an ordinary person if made homeless’ rather than an ‘ordinary actual homeless person’.

## Coverage

This strategy covers the borough of Newcastle under Lyme. Some of our services are delivered across local authority boundaries and even on a sub-regional basis. This is due to the various partnership projects we are involved in where we recognise the benefits and efficiencies of working together and the funding opportunities that have been made available to us.

This strategy has also been developed to ensure that appropriate links have been made to other relevant strategies and action plans, especially our Housing Strategy which is the overarching document for our service.



## **Priority 1**

### **To Prevent Homelessness**

Achieving this priority contributes to our corporate aim of creating a borough of opportunity.

#### **1.1 Early Interventions**

Homelessness prevention is at the heart of this strategy. Early intervention to prevent homelessness is our starting point; it's cost effective and provides positive outcomes for our residents. Our main priority will always be to prevent homelessness wherever possible, ideally through the provision of robust housing advice early on which enables a household to remain in its current accommodation or where this is not possible supporting the transition into alternative accommodation. This approach is firmly embedded within our Newcastle Housing Advice service and over the period of our last strategy the service has successfully delivered 2725 preventions.

Our Newcastle Housing Advice Service (NHA) has a range of prevention options available to residents. We want to ensure that the interventions we offer are effective in preventing homelessness, which in turn will reduce the demands on our frontline staff and also assist in reducing the need for us to use temporary accommodation.

We recognise for early intervention, there is the need to ensure that there is a wide range of easily accessible information available to enable those who can self-help to access our resources and follow advice and guidance to remedy their personal situations. As our service continues to get busier we want to enable customers who are able to self-serve, can do so by offering comprehensive online advice and self-help tools, which in turn will reduce demands on the team. This will also enable the team to focus their time and expertise on our more complex and vulnerable customers.

For customers who are more complex and vulnerable, we recognise there is the need to identify any underlying issues and risks they may have as early as possible and ensure that relevant services are able to intervene to prevent homelessness. We will only achieve this where agencies all work together and refer customers to the correct services. This means encouraging our partners to work with us by fully embracing the prevention ethos in the delivery of their services. We understand that just like us, there is an uncertainty for our partners in relation to what demands are going to be placed upon them in the future and therefore it is important to ensure that all our services run efficiently and customers are swiftly referred to organisations already providing assistance rather than other agencies trying to fix issues on their own and taking on unnecessary responsibilities.

#### **1.2 Continuous Service Improvement**

We are committed to providing excellent fit for purpose homelessness and housing advice services to our customers. Our commissioning processes ensure that agencies who deliver services on our behalf have experience and can demonstrate a wealth of knowledge and expertise.



Our NHA service is no exception, we have a professional team who possess an in depth knowledge with many years of experience in housing advice and homelessness issues. There are processes in place to ensure that this knowledge is retained and developed further. Staff have regular refresher training to ensure that the service is able to respond to developments in homelessness and housing law.

Since the last re-tender our service has been re-shaped and within the new contract is the requirement to continually improve and develop provision for an efficient, effective service which is compliant with legislation

We will do this by regularly reviewing the prevention options we offer, by measuring the usage and effectiveness of each scheme. Funding for the schemes will be prioritised according to the methods that are most effective and have a positive impact on the main causes of homelessness in Newcastle. We will continue to monitor our service through our regular performance monitoring, customer feedback, quality assurance and quality checks. We will continue to utilise the resources that are made available to us by the National Homelessness Advice Service, in particular the free training that is made available to all housing options teams.

We will use the gold standard toolkit as a review exercise to assist us in achieving continuous improvement to our service. A mock diagnostic peer review commenced in September 2015. Feedback from this will inform future actions and developments in service improvement and will dictate the pace of our involvement in the official gold standard process.

### 1.3 Annual Review of Homelessness Strategy

The Gold Standard process considers it best practice for Local Authorities to review their homelessness strategies on an annual basis. We remain in an extremely financially challenging time and this strategy has the role to ensure that resources ploughed into homelessness services are used to their full potential. We must be realistic about the fact that there is the potential for further cuts to services across our authority. This means that during the life of this Strategy, if budgets dictate we may need to look at what is currently being delivered, prioritise and if required reshape and restructure that provision in accordance with the demands of the changing market. With this in mind, our Strategy will in effect be constantly under review and its purposefulness and effectiveness considered annually in line with Gold Standard best practice. We will produce an updated action plan, which will be approved annually by our Portfolio holder.

### 1.4 Commission Services to Prevent Homelessness

Our Newcastle Housing Advice service is supported by a number of complementary homelessness services which are commissioned by the Council. These services offer practical assistance to specific groups in order to prevent homelessness. We will continue to strategically commission specific services with our partners in order to deliver effective proactive services that will prevent homelessness and ensure that repeat homelessness is minimised.

As we plan to review the position of this Strategy on an annual basis, the findings will inform our future commissioning processes and enable us to respond to emerging local issues. Our

commissioning processes ensure that services are compliant to equality and diversity issues and accessible to all our residents.

### 1.5 Manage Service Expectations

Due to the increase in demand for our service and the reduction of properties available through our housing register, we need to continue to manage the expectations of our customers. We must ensure that whilst fulfilling our legal obligations to homelessness households and those at risk of homelessness, our customers understand that the advice our service provides is based upon the best housing options available to them as individuals and that there are many influencing factors that can be specific to their own personal circumstances that can be instrumental in that choice.

There is an ongoing requirement to educate people about the realities of homelessness and perceptions on accessing social housing.

### 1.6 Corporate Commitment

The Council is committed to preventing homelessness; within the Council there are a wide range of overarching strategies that have impact upon the homeless or those at risk of homelessness. Our homelessness review recognises that although there are a number of overarching strategies, few mention homelessness in any great detail.

This strategy aims to ensure that all our Council departments are signed up to the prevention ethos. We will do this by providing awareness / update sessions to staff, elected members and partners in relation to local responses to homelessness and the importance of preventing homelessness. We will continue to ensure that housing is represented at corporate working groups within the Council.

### 1.7 Housing Pathways

The Gold Standard process identifies the need for local authorities and their partners to develop housing pathways that include accommodation and support for key client groups. We acknowledge that for some of our most vulnerable customers a more bespoke pathway approach would benefit their journey from institutional and supported accommodation into more settled and sustainable long term accommodation. We have identified that at present the key client groups that would benefit most from a housing pathways approach are vulnerable adults with complex needs and young people.

#### 1.7.1 Vulnerable Adults

Our NHA service has seen an increase in the number of vulnerable adults with complex needs seeking assistance. It is our aim to work with relevant agencies to develop a multi-agency pathway approach which will form the basis of a process that best meets the individuals housing and support needs, whilst developing their abilities to achieve the most appropriate level of sustainable independent living that makes the best use of the support and services that are available.

Our key partner's for this work include Staffordshire County Council Adult's Services, housing providers, probation, police, health and the third sector.

## 1. 7.2 Young People

Young people who experience homelessness issues are an extremely vulnerable group. Services for young people need to be effective with focus on early prevention.

The 2009 Southwark judgement clarified the legal position surrounding Section 20 of the Children's Act 2989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 in relation to a Child in Need. It also placed an obligation on local authorities to strengthen their joint working procedures for care leavers and homeless young people.

A joint protocol has been established between all the Staffordshire housing authorities and Staffordshire County Council, at the time of writing the protocol is going through its final stages of adoption at County. The protocol will provide a more co-ordinated approach to enable homelessness to be prevented and support to be made available.

We recognise for the protocol to be successful we need to continue to develop and strengthen our partnerships between agencies working with young people in Newcastle. We also need to develop further housing options both temporary and long term with young people specifically in mind. The current accommodation options for young people are extremely limited and there is no longer any young person specific accommodation within our area.

Our key partner's for this work include Staffordshire County Council Children's Services, housing providers, probation, police, health and the third sector.

## 1.8 Preventing Repossessions

Much work has been done both nationally and locally on preventing repossessions over the last five years. We want to ensure that we have measures in place to prevent repossessions wherever possible. We have been actively involved in the Government's mortgage rescue scheme and 12 households were rescued in our borough when the scheme was in operation.

National guidance and standards for mortgage lenders has been introduced, including Conduct of Business rules and a requirement to notify local authorities of impending possessions through the nationally agreed Mortgage Repossession Pre-Action Protocol. We can confirm that we are notified of households in the Borough with impending possessions and in response we contact the households to offer advice and assistance. The type of advice ranges from assistance from NHA, debt and welfare advice from our debt advice service, which includes representation at court to referrals to other local agencies who may be able to offer support.

In addition to this, there is a Court Desk service that operates at the Stoke on Trent combined court, this service gives last minute legal advice to households who are facing hearings but have not previously sought advice.

We also received a 'one off' DCLG grant to help prevent repossessions by creating a scheme which would offer interest free loans where it may prevent repossessions. We developed a scheme in partnership with the Staffordshire Credit Union and as the homeless review has highlighted, despite the promotion of the availability of these loans there has

been a very low take up. We are currently considering a more appropriate use to prevent homelessness for the remainder of this funding.

Our homelessness review findings demonstrated mortgage repossessions have fallen and is on a downward trend within our Borough; however this is in contrast to the number of legal actions sought by landlords, where we have seen an increase in numbers. We will continue to monitor trends in our area and where possible will work closely with registered providers to proactively prevent evictions from social tenancies.

#### Relevant Gold Standard Challenges for Priority 1:

Challenge 1 – To adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services

Challenge 2 - To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs

Challenge 3 - To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice

Challenge 5 - To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support

Challenge 7 - To actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions

Challenge 8 - To have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually to be responsive to emerging needs

#### Priority 1 - Summary of issues:

- Early Intervention is the starting point of this strategy
- We are committed to continuous service improvement
- Our Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed annually
- We recognise the need for services that provide assistance in preventing homelessness and will utilise the findings of the annual review of this strategy to inform future commissioning to ensure we respond to local emerging needs
- There is corporate commitment to prevent homelessness
- The key client groups that would benefit most from a housing pathways approach of Young people and vulnerable adults with complex needs
- Mortgage possessions have been decreasing whilst legal action by landlords have been on the increase

## Priority 2

### Support Households into sustainable housing solutions

Achieving this contributes to our corporate aim of creating a clean, safe and sustainable borough.

#### 2.1 No Second Night Out (NSNO)

We are committed to the principles of the NSNO initiative for rough sleepers. NSNO seeks to ensure that no rough sleepers end up sleeping out for a second night.

Our homelessness review has shown that although we have a relatively low number of rough sleepers in Newcastle, there has been an upward trend over the last few years, which is consistent with national figures. DCLG data has shown that since 2010 there has been an increase in rough sleeping nationally year on year. We have always ensured that there is service provision in our borough to address rough sleeping and plan to develop our current approach further by implementing more widely the philosophy of 'NSNO'. Working with our partners we will ensure that we have a clear understanding for the needs of rough sleepers and offer a proactive approach to assessing their needs and helping them off the streets. We need to ensure that all the organisations who deliver services to rough sleepers focus on ending rough sleeping not sustaining a rough sleeping lifestyle.

We will review the access to emergency beds and ensure that support and resources are available to re-connect individuals who sleep rough and have no local connection to our borough.

#### 2.2 Short Term Temporary Accommodation

We have a duty to secure short term temporary accommodation for unintentionally homeless households in priority need under Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act (as amended). The circumstances when we will usually place households in temporary accommodation are:

- pending the completion of inquiries into their homeless application
- when an application is accepted until suitable secure accommodation becomes available
- under severe weather provisions

The range of temporary accommodation options available to us are: Bed and breakfast accommodation, temporary accommodation units, hostel accommodation in other local authority areas (although places are limited), private rented stock and refuges for women fleeing domestic violence.

We try to limit the use of all types of temporary accommodation in the borough for alternative more long term sustainable options. Historically we have been extremely successful in our low usage by managing our requirements through our temporary accommodation unit and occasional use of Bed and Breakfasts. However, during the past couple of years we have seen an increase in the need for and use of temporary accommodation; in particular we have seen an increase in the need for interim accommodation whilst a homelessness investigation is carried out.

Unfortunately, the increase in demand has occurred at a time when the range of accommodation options available to us has become more restricted. Funding restrictions, local connection criteria, competing demand for bed spaces by other statutory agencies and scheme closures have led to a reduction in the choice of appropriate temporary accommodation options available to us. This has meant that we have become more reliant than ever upon Bed and Breakfast accommodation which is seen as the most unsuitable choice of temporary accommodation.

In performing our duties to homeless households under Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act, we are obliged to have regard to the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities. The Guidance states:

*'that housing authorities should avoid using B&B accommodation wherever possible. Where B&B accommodation has been used in an emergency situation, applicants should be moved to more suitable accommodation as soon as possible. The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003 provides that B&B accommodation is not suitable for families with Children and households that include a pregnant woman unless there is no alternative accommodation and then only for a maximum of six weeks'. CLG, Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, July 2006, para 7.6*

To exacerbate our problems further, we have also been faced with the challenge that many of the bed and breakfast providers we have used in the past are no longer willing to accommodate our customers or accept our business, deeming them too high risk.

This increase in numbers and limited accommodation options available to us is a cause for concern and we are looking for innovative solutions. We are in the final stages of completion for a second temporary accommodation unit to be added to our range of options. The model duplicates our initial temporary accommodation unit and shall be a valuable addition particularly where it is necessary to assist larger households who would require for multiple rooms to be booked in a bed and breakfast. We anticipate that by the time this homelessness strategy is adopted by our Cabinet that our second unit will be in full operation.

We will conduct a review of our current temporary accommodation options and explore more innovative approaches to develop a range of temporary accommodation options that meets our needs. We acknowledge that Universal Credit will have an impact upon the funding arrangements for short term temporary accommodation and this will need to be factored in to the development of future delivery models.

We understand that there will always be circumstances when we will need to use temporary accommodation, where we can, we will look at ways to reduce our usage and hope that many of the actions within this strategy, particularly those focused around early intervention and long term accommodations will assist us in that goal. Finally when we have had to use temporary accommodation we will continue our focus of moving people out of temporary accommodation and into more sustainable long term accommodation as quickly as possible.

### 2.3 Long Term Affordable and Sustainable Accommodation

During the period of our last homelessness strategy we experienced a slowdown in the housing market, this impacted significantly upon our ability to provide additional affordable



housing in Newcastle. Developers stated they could not make the affordable housing elements of schemes add up, there have been limited funding opportunities for Registered Providers (RP's) to develop and many more people have faced problems in securing mortgages.

The need for affordable and sustainable housing in Newcastle goes above and beyond homelessness, improving access to permanent accommodation is a much broader priority and meeting the need for more permanent affordable housing is fully addressed in our Housing Strategy. We recognise that the provision of affordable housing can reduce the length of time homeless households have to wait for re-housing and in certain circumstances can help people address their housing needs at an earlier stage without having to make a homelessness application. Therefore this strategy will focus upon what improvements we can make on the long term housing options for households who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### 2.3.1 Long Term - A Suitable Private Rented Sector Offer

Our objective is to provide affordable sustainable accommodation as quickly as possible for homeless households, as this will remove the need to provide temporary accommodation. It is clear that we are no longer able to meet this objective by relying solely on the social rented accommodation in our borough. The pressures on waiting lists for social rented housing mean it's really important that we also make the best use of the alternative stock available, especially in the private rented sector.

The private rented sector has an important role to play especially for households who cannot access social housing or afford to buy. Our homelessness review has identified the need for further work to be delivered in order to better access the private rented sector for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

#### 2.3.1.1 Discharge of Homelessness Duty into the Private Rented Sector

The Localism Act 2011 has enabled all local authorities (since 9 November 2012) to discharge their duty towards homeless households in priority need by using privately rented housing irrespective of whether the household is in agreement with this.

Our Tenancy Strategy states that we can use this option, but only if it is a suitable and sustainable option for the household. To date, we have only used this power once.

We recognise that we have the opportunity to make better use of the power to discharge into the private rented sector than we currently do. By using this power, we will be able to accommodate households into suitable affordable sustainable accommodation, whilst negating the need for them to wait for long periods on the various housing registers available in our borough. We will still maintain our policy to consider the circumstances of each individual household as to whether it is appropriate when deciding to use this power.

We will need to ensure that we have access to a good supply of private rented stock, the properties meet the correct standards of repair and that tenancies are granted for at least 12 months with the expectation that the landlord would enable the tenants to stay for longer.

We are aware that affordability is likely to be a major factor when offering any property in the private rented sector, in particular the impact of Universal Credit and other Welfare reforms may have on our customers. When considering whether to discharge our homelessness duties in the private rented sector, if it was not affordable we simply would not place a household in a situation where the tenancy is likely to fail.

#### 2.3.1.2. Promoting Access

We shall continue to explore innovative ways to secure access to affordable and good quality accommodation in the private rented sector for our customers. We plan to review the current incentives that are offered to private landlords and develop a suitable private rented sector offer in the Borough.

We will continue to maintain the good working relationship we have with our housing benefit department. Discretionary Housing payments regularly assist in preventing homelessness and we believe that there is scope for it to be even more targeted.

We also recognise that Estate and Letting agents also play a key role in the provision and access of private rented stock. We need to explore ways of engaging with estate and letting agents similar to what we already do with private landlords.

Our housing services have been very successful in working with a range of partners to encourage empty property owners to bring their empty properties back into use. We will continue to work closely with owners to advise and assist them into bringing their properties back into use and if necessary will use the enforcement powers we have available to us. We would like to further develop this work and investigate opportunities where our homeless households can access these properties.

#### 2.3.1.3. Quality of Stock

Our Housing Services Team will continue to work within the private rented sector to ensure that the condition of the stock is of good condition. The service will continue to take a proactive approach in the provision of advisory services, sign posting and providing advice on grants and loan facilities that may be available to improve property condition. They will continue to support and promote the North Staffordshire Landlord Accreditation Scheme and facilitate training to help landlords understand best practice and legal requirements. We hope these actions will continue to drive up the standard of the private sector stock in our borough.

#### 2.3.1.4. Supporting Landlords

The right landlord for our customers is someone who is accredited, understands their letting responsibilities and works with us to keep the rents low in return for the range of services / incentives we are able to offer.

We provide support to landlords through a variety of ways including our website, NHA, regular newsletters, forums and officer advice and assistance. We will continue to ensure that this information is readily available to landlords to facilitate understanding of the responsibilities involved in rented properties. We recognise that by supporting the landlords who operate in our borough, not only creates better relationships to access the private



rented sector but also to enable tenants to remain in the private rented sector once they have a tenancy.

#### 2.3.1.5. Supporting Tenants

The ideal tenant is someone who cares for and keeps the property tidy, doesn't cause anti-social behaviour or a nuisance to neighbours and pays the rent.

We recognise that an effective way of preparing customers for independent living and giving them a greater chance of sustaining their tenancy successfully is to provide pre-tenancy training. A number of our partner agencies provide types of this training and have reported upon its successes in making customers 'tenancy ready'.

In order to ensure that our customers can afford the rental requirements of a private sector property, we will continue to ensure that our customers are offered a full range of advice and assistance to maximise their income. Our debt advice service will provide customers with income and expenditure assessments to effectively manage their budgets.

Our housing service will support tenants if property standards are not acceptable and how these issues can be addressed.

#### 2.3.2 Long Term – Social Housing

We have already acknowledged that we are no longer able to meet our objective of providing affordable sustainable accommodation as quickly as possible for homeless households solely through social housing stock alone. The turnover of register provider's (social landlords) stock has slowed, which means we have fewer opportunities for re-housing homeless households in this type of tenure. Therefore it is important for us to ensure that effective use is made of the housing stock that is available.

Since our last Homelessness Strategy our Homelessness, Housing Advice and Housing Register Service has been re-tendered and our Housing Allocations policy revised. The implementation of our new policy will ensure the best use of our nomination rights to Social Housing Stock. We will continue to work with our register provider partners to ensure that the nominations through the Homes Direct Housing register are working and we gain appropriate access to Social Housing Stock.

We will continue to work with registered providers to increase the supply of social housing. Opportunities for this are through section 106 agreements with private developers or through registered providers undertaking their own independent housing developments. The Housing strategy will continue to monitor and feed into this area of our activity.

#### Relevant Gold Standard Challenges for Priority 2:

Challenge 2 - To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs

Challenge 3 - To offer a Housing Options prevention service to all clients including written advice

Challenge 4 - To adopt a No Second Night Out model or an effective local alternative

Challenge 6 - To develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both client and landlord

Challenge 9 - To not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation

Challenge 10 - To not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and for no longer than 6 weeks

Priority 2 - Summary of Issues:

- We are committed to the principles of NSNO
- Whilst reducing the current usage of temporary accommodation there is still the requirement for appropriate accessible provision in our Borough
- We need to develop of suitable private rented sector offer for the Borough
- Social housing stock plays a vital role in accommodating our homelessness households however it can no longer be the single solution

### **Priority 3**

#### **Work in partnership to address homelessness in Newcastle**

Achieving this contributes to our corporate aim of a co-operative council delivering high value community driven services.

#### **3.1 Partnership Working**

This priority is about having a strong focus on working with a wide range of partners to enable us to address homelessness issues in Newcastle. Our Homelessness services are commissioned by the Council in partnership with a number of organisations who deliver services on our behalf. In addition to the services we commission there are a wide range of organisations who provide services which assist in tackling homelessness, these include support providers, housing providers, the advice sector, the voluntary sector, charities, churches and other faith groups. Other statutory agencies such as probation, health and social care providers and education also have a pivotal role. We believe that through the work of our previous homelessness strategies we have built and developed a wide range of successful partnerships, in this strategy we will continue to strengthen those relationships with particular focus being given to mitigating the impacts of Welfare Reforms and improving the health and wellbeing of our customers.

##### **3.1.1 Mitigating the impact of Welfare Reform - through partnership working**

The impact of welfare reform is something we cannot address in isolation. The reforms have reduced the income levels of many households, placed restrictions upon the type of housing a household can apply for and resulted in additional rental costs for those who are seen as under occupying tenancies.

We anticipate that the roll out of Universal Credit will also bring about further changes. Universal Credit which is administered by the Department of Works and Pensions, provides a single monthly payment to one member of the household, this is paid in arrears and includes any contribution there may be towards the rent.

Potential implications for our customers include debt, rent arrears, an increased demand for smaller properties and housing transfers, budgeting and money management issues as households move onto Universal Credit and a higher risk of those in financial difficulties of becoming homeless. In order to limit the risk of homelessness arising from the changes brought about by welfare reforms, we will need to manage the impacts and work closely with our partner agencies.

To date we have been proactive in addressing the impacts of the reforms and have trained staff so they are able to prepare, support and advise households affected by the changes. We signpost and refer customers to appropriate services, provide financial and money advice about benefits, budgeting and debt management.

We will continue to work with our partners to monitor trends and deliver services which will prevent affected households from becoming homeless as a result of welfare reforms.

We need to build partnerships that enable our customers to access opportunities to employment, education and training and support to raise and meet aspirations.

### 3.1.2 Improving the health and wellbeing of our customers

We believe that by jointly working with all our partners, we can improve the health and wellbeing of our customers. Housing has always had a significant role in helping to improve people's health, be it through the homelessness prevention work we deliver to the provision of grants and adaptations that enable people to stay in their own homes. These services have always been part of our role, however, historically there has been little co-ordination between the delivery of housing and health services. Local clinical commissioning groups are now responsible for the commissioning of healthcare services and local health and wellbeing boards are now responsible for determining their commissioning priorities.

We need to respond to the changes in the delivery of health services and develop new partnerships to meet these needs. It's essential that homelessness is recognised on the district Health and Wellbeing partnership board. We will continue to build our relationship with Public Health.

The links between health and homelessness are recognised but there remain health inequalities for those that are homeless or insecurely housed. Our team at NHA are increasing seeing more people with complex needs.

Mental health, drug and alcohol services are vital, as are basic primary health care requirements such as being able to see a GP, health visitor or a dentist, and access routine health screening services. We need to ensure we understand the new arrangements, identify our local needs, and be able to feed these into the new strategic arrangements.

### 3.2 Housing Pathways – through partnership working

Supporting people funding has been mainstreamed and the ring fenced removed, as a result services in our borough have experienced partial and complete cuts in funding. We have further work to ensure that the needs of our customers who used to benefit from the services provided under the supporting people framework are able to access alternative and adequate service provision to meet their needs.

Our work around developing sustainable housing pathways is an important element which also contributes to priority 1 – to prevent homelessness. We will continue to work on the development of protocols with statutory and voluntary providers which will enhance access opportunities.

### 3.3 Newcastle under Lyme Homelessness Forum

In addition to partnership working for front line delivery our homelessness forum plays a key role in the delivery of this strategy. The forum meets on a quarterly basis and has been the vehicle for key partners to come together not only to monitor our homelessness strategy's action plan but also to identify local issues. We know that sharing good practice and information is so beneficial to the development of our homelessness service provision and we will continue to use the forum to ensure this is done as effectively as possible.

The forum has an open membership to any organisation that considers it to be a stakeholder in the prevention of homelessness in our borough. We will continue to review and improve the performance of this group and the communication processes that we use to support the group.

#### 3.4 Shropshire, Staffordshire and Telford & Wrekin Homelessness Prevention Partnership

We are an active partner of the Shropshire, Staffordshire and Telford and Wrekin Homelessness Prevention Partnership (SSHPP). The partnership was formed in response to a single one off funding allocation from the DCLG. The allocation was to enable Councils to work collaboratively to develop and share solutions that will help to reduce rough sleeping and single homelessness. Shropshire County Council is the accountable and commissioning body for the partnership. The partnership has supported the funding of our extremely successful shared accommodation pilot for under 35 year olds.

We aim to continue to play an active role in this partnership, through this group we will continue to work to highlight any gaps in current homelessness service provision, share best practice and wherever possible secure for future funding to prevent homelessness.

#### Relevant Gold Standard Challenges to Priority 3:

Challenge 2 - To actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs

Challenge 5 - To have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that include appropriate accommodation and support

#### Priority 3 - Summary of issues:

- Partnership working is fundamental to this strategy both to prevent homelessness and offer sustainable housing options
- Poor financial situations can place households at risk of homelessness
- Housing has always had a significant role to play in improving people's health and wellbeing
- Our Homelessness Forum plays a key role in the delivery of our homelessness strategy

## Resources

Financial resources for tackling homelessness are extremely limited and we anticipate that further cuts will have to be made.

Revenue funding is used to meet the ongoing cost of homelessness services and capital funding is used to meet the initial cost of a new service (including accommodation).

### **The Council's General Fund**

Each local authority funds the majority of their revenue expenditure on homelessness and related activities through their General Fund. This includes the costs of providing a housing options and advice service, grant funding to third sector organisations that provide services to homeless people, the cost of providing emergency accommodation to homeless households and support to facilitate the Homelessness Forum.

### **Newcastle Housing Advice (NHA)**

The Council discharges its statutory homelessness duty by contracting Midland Heart to deliver the Newcastle Housing Advice Service. The service delivers the Housing Register, the Housing Options Service (which includes the delivery of the prevention schemes) and the Homelessness functions on behalf of the Council.

### **Funding for Third Sector Organisations**

At present a number of our complementary homelessness services are funded via the Newcastle Partnership Commissioning Process and the Council's Voluntary Grants Panel. Over the duration of this Strategy, the decision to continue funding these services will lie with how they strategically align to the priorities of both the Council and this Strategy and how successful service delivery is. For both processes, applications for the provision of services are invited in accordance with the Council's procurement regulations and processes.

### **Emergency / Temporary Accommodation**

As part of our temporary accommodation provision, we commission Midland Heart to deliver and manage one unit of accommodation to use in times of emergency for homelessness households, as an alternative to placing them in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The approximate delivery costs (excluding set up costs) per annum for the unit are approximately £7,500.

The unit has enabled us to avoid placing homeless families in bed and breakfast accommodation. However, when the unit is full and there have been no hostel spaces available bed and breakfast accommodation has still had to be used. In response we have recently commissioned a second unit of temporary accommodation to be added to our provision.

### **Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Homelessness Grant**

The DCLG have provided funding to each local authority based on the level of identified need for homelessness prevention initiatives in each area. The funding is rolled into the

Business Rate Retention Scheme (BRRS). The amount is no longer ring fenced to homelessness, although the DCLG do expect Local Authorities to use the funding to prevent homelessness in their areas. For Newcastle, the funding has enabled us to develop and operate the prevention schemes available to individuals. The current allocation is guaranteed till the end of the financial year 2015/2016. At present we have not been given any indication as to whether there will be any further funding after 2015 /2016.

We have received £124374.08 from the DCLG to deliver homelessness prevention services during 2015.

Clearly this has major implications for the Council as at present this funding allocation enables us to deliver the wide range of prevention schemes on offer in the borough. It also reiterates the importance to have robust monitoring systems in place that enable us to evidence our work and highlight the value for money and cost savings it delivers.

### **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)**

DHPs are not part of the normal Housing Benefit / Local Housing Allowance or Council Tax schemes. They are a discretionary payment made in certain circumstances to those people whose Housing Benefit or Council Tax payments do not meet their housing needs. They are funded by Central Government on a yearly basis and the funding is limited. Nevertheless they are a valuable asset towards the prevention of homelessness in certain cases.

We have received a government contribution of £159,189 for discretionary housing payments in 2015.

## **Implementing and monitoring our Strategy**

In order to meet our commitment to deliver our priorities within this strategy a delivery plan has been developed.

The Homelessness forum will be the group responsible for the delivery and monitoring of this plan. The plan shall be regularly monitored and reviewed annual to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and meets any emerging needs and policy / legislative changes.

The adoption of this Homelessness strategy also demonstrates the corporate commitment of the Council to prevent homelessness in the borough.

## Publication

A copy of this strategy is available at [www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk](http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk)

If you would like more information in relation to this strategy, please contact housing services on 01782 742456.

DRAFT



**Newcastle under Lyme  
Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2016 - 2021**

| Priority<br>1 | To Prevent Homelessness  |  |  |                                  |                  |   |            |
|---------------|--|--|--|----------------------------------|------------------|---|------------|
| Number        | Action   | Output   | Impact   | Resources                        | Lead(s)          | Planned Activity  | When       |
|               | <b>Achieving this will contribute to all of the Council's Corporate priorities – Priority 1 A clean, safe and sustainable borough, Priority 2 A borough of opportunity, Priority 3 A Healthy Active Community, Priority 4 Becoming a co-operative council, delivering high quality community driven services</b> |  |  |                                  |                  |   |            |
| 1.1           | Ensure that corporately staff and elected members have sufficient information and knowledge of homelessness  | Improves knowledge and expertise of staff and members<br><br>Works towards Gold Standard | Enables informed decisions regarding the allocation of future resources<br><br>Promotes shared responsibility for homelessness | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy | Provision of awareness / briefing sessions.<br><br>Briefing notes and Corporate reports.<br><br>Housing Strategy staff representation at working groups | Ongoing    |
| 1.2           | Review Homelessness Strategy annually  | Up to date and fit for purpose homelessness strategy<br><br>Works towards Gold Standard  | Responsive to emerging needs   | Within current housing resources | Housing strategy | Annual review of strategy plus major review every five years  | May 2017   |
| 1.3           | Complete internal mock diagnostic peer review of service   | Identification of areas of good practices and weakness in current service provision      | Continuous Improvement of service delivery   | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy | Internal peer review<br><br>Report findings corporately which will dictate future involvement and   | April 2016 |

|     |  |  |  |                                  |  |  |   |
|-----|--|--|--|----------------------------------|--|--|---|
|     |  | Works towards Gold Standard  |  |                                  |  | timing in the Gold Standard process  |   |
| 1.4 | Enhance the range of self-help options available to customers seeking housing advice | Improved range of self-help services available to customers<br><br>Frees up NHA staff resources for more complex cases | Customers able to tailor realistic and appropriate advice efficiently<br><br>Empowering customers to help themselves | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy<br><br>NHA<br><br>Midland Heart | Map current provision<br><br>Enhance online accessibility  | Ongoing   |
| 1.5 | Explore new and alternative approaches to enhance early homelessness preventions     | Reduce number of homeless acceptances<br><br>Improved homelessness prevention toolkit of options available             | Staff will have more prevention tools available to tailor assistance to each case                                    | With current housing resources   | Housing Strategy                                 | Map current provision, consider best practice and the feasibility of implementing in the Borough | Annually  |
| 1.6 | Continue to deliver debt advice for homeless or potentially homeless households      | Homelessness prevented through timely debt advice and assistance   | Better money management for homeowners and tenants   | Within current resources         | Housing Strategy<br><br>Aspire Housing           | Raise awareness of service<br><br>Monitor service provision                                      | Ongoing quarterly monitoring of current service provision.<br><br>Evaluation of service provision<br><br>Re-commissioning |

|                   |   |  |   |                                  |  |   |  |
|-------------------|---|--|---|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
|                   |   |  |   |                                  |  |   | of service   |
| 1.7               | Monitor the customer satisfaction within the homelessness service   | Continuous service improvement<br><br>Management of service expectations           | Better understanding of customers for us<br><br>Better understanding for customers in relation to realities and perceptions of what our service can offer | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy<br><br>NHA<br><br>Midland Heart                           | Align with continuous improvement work of the NHA contract  | Ongoing via NHA quarterly contract monitoring meetings                                   |
| 1.8               | Ensure appropriate advice and assistance is in place for homeowners threatened with eviction                                    | Homelessness due to repossessions is prevented                                     | Up to date information in relation to repossession activity in area   | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy<br><br>NHA  | Review the range of options currently available   | Ongoing via NHA quarterly contract monitoring meetings                                   |
| <b>Priority 2</b> | <b>Support Households into sustainable housing solutions</b>  |  |   |                                  |  |   |  |
|                   | <b>Achieving this aim will contribute to the Council's Corporate Priority by creating a clean, safe and sustainable borough</b> |  |   |                                  |  |   |  |
| 2.1               | Continue to develop the NSNO principles for the Borough   | Reduction in the number of rough sleepers having to sleep rough for a second night | Improved access to emergency accommodation  | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy<br><br>Stoke High Risk Commissioning Team<br><br>Brighter | Review current service provision in line with NSNO Gold Standard Model, develop action plan to enhance current service provision via rough sleeper's outreach service | August 2016 (1 <sup>st</sup> annual review of current rough sleeper's outreach contract) |

|     |  |  |  |                                  | Futures  |   |  |
|-----|--|--|--|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 2.2 | Delivery of appropriate temporary accommodation                                    | <p>Increase of temporary accommodation options available to NHA staff when accommodating under homelessness duties</p> <p>No families are placed in B&amp;B (unless in an emergency) for more than 6 weeks</p> <p>No 16 &amp; 17 year olds are placed in B&amp;B</p> | Appropriate temporary accommodation to meet the needs of borough residents | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy                                   | <p>Conduct a review of the temporary accommodation provision in the borough</p> <p>Identify future needs</p>                    | Ongoing through the duration of the strategy |
| 2.3 | Continue to develop the Private rented sector offer available to borough residents | Increase the number of sustainable move on into the private rented sector  | Sustainability of long term tenancies                                      | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy<br>Private Sector Housing Service | Promoting access to PRS<br>Housing Services continue to take a proactive approach<br>Supporting landlords<br>Supporting tenants | Ongoing through the duration of the strategy |
| 2.4 | Develop a Private rented discharge policy  | Increase number of suitable 'discharge of duty' into the   | Reduction in the requirement to use temporary accommodation                | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy                                   | <p>Develop draft policy</p> <p>Gain corporate approval for policy</p>   | August 2016                                  |

|                   |  |                                      |   |                                  |   |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
|                   |  | private rented sector                | Homeless household re-housed in Sustainable accommodation |                                  |   |  |  |
| 2.5               | Monitor the impact of the allocations policy   | Allocations policy working           | Responsive to emerging needs and policy impacts           | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy<br>NHA                                 | Regular reviews of waiting list and letting statistics | Ongoing through the duration of the strategy |
| 2.6               | Monitor Nominations that take place in the Borough   | Nomination agreements and target met | Policy objectives are met                                 | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy<br><br>Lettings Forum Members          | Quarterly review of nominations                        | Ongoing via Quarterly letting forum          |
| <b>Priority 3</b> | <b>Work in Partnership to Address homelessness in Newcastle</b>  |                                      |   |                                  |   |  |  |
|                   | <b>Achieving this will contribute to all of the Council's Corporate priorities – Priority 1 A clean, safe and sustainable borough, Priority 2 A borough of opportunity, Priority 3 A Healthy Active Community, Priority 4 Becoming a co-operative council, delivering high quality community driven services</b> |                                      |   |                                  |   |  |  |
| 3.1               | Continue to identify key partners to work with in relation to the homelessness prevention agenda and causes of homelessness  | Homelessness is prevented            | Clear effective and inclusive partnership working         | Within existing resources        | Housing Strategy<br><br>Homelessness Forum stakeholders |  | Ongoing through duration of strategy         |
| 3.2               | Continue to work with partners to ensure that customers affected by  | Homelessness is prevented            | Clear effective and inclusive partnership working         | With existing resources          | Housing Strategy<br>Housing Benefits Newcastle          |  | Ongoing through the duration of the strategy |

|     |   |  |  |   |   |   |  |
|-----|---|--|--|---|---|---|--|
|     | welfare reforms are supported to prevent homelessness   |  |  |   | Partnership Registered Providers  |   |  |
| 3.3 | Develop working relations with Public health and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to explore the links between poor health and housing and ways to tackle these jointly | Impact of homelessness and health considered in health and wellbeing agenda and public health outcomes<br><br>Prevents homelessness<br><br>Increases awareness of housing and homelessness issues amongst health professionals | Health and wellbeing of customers improved<br><br>Improves partnership working | Within current housing resources  | Housing Strategy<br>Public Health CCG<br>Stoke and Staffordshire Moorlands Local Authorities          | Housing reps from Newcastle Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke to meet Bi monthly with reps from Public Health and CCG<br><br>Ensure housing representation at relevant working groups | Ongoing through the duration of the strategy |
| 3.4 | Work with partners to ensure that there is appropriate accommodation options available for young people, especially 16 & 17 year olds   | Prevents homelessness for young people<br>Suitable accommodation options are available for young people<br>No 16 & 17 year olds are  | Contributes to Gold standard challenge<br><br>Improved partnership working     | Consideration for will need to be given regarding investment of new housing schemes | Housing Strategy<br><br>Children's Services (County Council)<br><br>Key Service Provider Stakeholders | Monitor the number of YP presenting at NHA<br>Explore alternative accommodation options<br>Work with partner agencies to deliver  | Ongoing through the duration of the strategy |

|     |  |   |   |                                  |  |   |  |
|-----|--|---|---|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
|     |  | placed in B&B   |   |                                  | Shropshire, Staffordshire and Telford and Wrekin Homelessness Prevention Partnership |   |  |
| 3.5 | Work with commissioning partners to provide support to homeless households or those at risk of homeless, to receive appropriate support, especially those with complex needs | Provision of appropriate support services to meet the needs of homeless households or those at risk of homeless | Fill gaps in provision<br><br>Future needs identified | Within existing resources        | Housing Strategy<br><br>Partner agencies   | Continue to monitor delivery of current service provision and align with future needs | Ongoing through the duration of the strategy |
| 3.6 | Review current membership of Homelessness Forum  | Appropriate representation at forum   | Focus on prevention at a strategic level              | Within current housing resources | Housing Strategy   | Conduct review<br><br>Amend / update membership                                       | January 2017                                 |