



'Everyone Belongs' -
Active Inclusion
Newcastle: Preventing
Homelessness in Times
of Crisis

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Summary

This is the report of the peer review of Newcastle's active inclusion approach to preventing and tackling homelessness, undertaken by the EUROCITIES working group on homelessness on the 23-24 June 2014. The review was carried out in the framework of the European Active Inclusion strategy, with its three pillars used as an analytic framework:

- Inclusive labour markets.
- Adequate income support.
- Access to quality services.

The peer review demonstrated that cities have different levels of influence over the three pillars:

1. Inclusive labour markets

In Newcastle, much work is undertaken to prepare homeless and other excluded people for employment, but there is frustration at the limited success of this approach because there are few jobs available in a labour market that is not inclusive. Cities need to explore further how to create an inclusive labour market locally.

2. Adequate income support

In the UK local authorities have few competences in welfare benefits, which limit their ability to tackle financial exclusion. The central government has recently been applying ever tighter restrictions on claiming benefits, often creating additional burden on the city authorities and local services to ensure that people who are excluded from the labour market have sufficient money to meet housing and other essential living needs.

3. Access to quality services

The provision of good quality services appears to be the pillar of active inclusion, which there is the most control over at a local level. The peer review uncovered a number of choices made by the city council and other agencies as the key factors behind providing quality services;

- high level political support for good quality services,
- focusing on prevention,
- building services based on findings and evidence from research and practice,
- a holistic approach,
- effective co-operation between agencies, and
- a framework within which service users can be consulted about the provision of services.

Three historical elements of the central government policy in the UK have been found to play a particularly supportive role in Newcastle's ability to create good quality services; the legal framework for tackling homelessness, the provision of free health care services, and resources that have been devoted to preventing and tackling homelessness by previous national governments. In addition a low demand in the housing market was found to play a strong role in enabling Housing First or housing-led provision of services and facilitating public acceptance of the provision of accommodation to homeless people.

Introduction

These are the key findings of the peer review that took place in Newcastle upon Tyne on 23-24 June 2014 on services to prevent and tackle homelessness. The review comprised of in-house discussions and presentations, study visits and meetings with service users (see annexe for detailed list).

The report discusses the relationship between the three pillars of active inclusion and homelessness, suggesting that inclusive labour markets (section 1), access to an adequate income (section 2) and good quality services (section 3) are all essential in preventing homelessness or, if this is not possible, tackling it effectively. It suggests that the three pillars are clearly inter-linked but the provision of good quality services is the one that cities have most control over. It then presents a number of key factors (sections 3.1-3.9) that contribute to the high quality of services to prevent and tackle homelessness in Newcastle.

The three pillars of active inclusion and the role of cities

The peer review provided an opportunity to reflect on the European Union's three pillars of active inclusion - inclusive labour markets, access to an adequate income and good quality services - in the context of the work undertaken in Newcastle to prevent and tackle homelessness. A strategy to promote active inclusion in any city would ideally involve comprehensive and integrated measures to tackle all three of the pillars. However, in practice, local authorities and other bodies are likely to have more control over some of the pillars than others. In addition, the ability of cities to develop a distinct approach is influenced by the extent of their powers: in countries such as the UK and the Czech Republic, cities are more dependent on central government than in (for example) the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands.

1. Inclusive labour markets

Unemployment is a major difficulty for Newcastle. Figures for the number of unemployed people continue to rise in the North East of England, although they are falling in other regions.

This is not a problem exclusive to Newcastle: Ljubljana, for example, has an unemployment rate of 13%. In Gijon the labour market is problematic even for those with high levels of qualifications; the most common reason for homelessness among local people is that they have lost their jobs.

Some of the employment services in Newcastle have been seeking to improve access to employment, sometimes for all those who are unemployed and sometimes specifically for homeless people. In Newcastle, housing providers are trying to help young people into work through measures such as creating apprenticeships and an organisation called Newcastle Futures supported 1,000 people into work last year. This is an important

prevention measure in a city where homelessness is not brought about by a crude housing shortage but where low income is almost always a contributing factor.

The Crisis Skylight is a project with the priority to improve employment prospects for people who are homeless or who are in poor quality or insecure housing. It offers tailored employment programmes and accredited learning opportunities in literacy, numeracy, IT and English for non native speakers. It also offers alongside activities that seek to address a broader range of needs through mental health support and creative workshops in areas such art, music, drama and dance. In addition, the Crisis Skylight Cafe is a social enterprise where homeless and formerly homeless people are trained and gain work experience in areas such as food hygiene and customer service.

In other cities, there are similar projects to improve the skills and work readiness of homeless people. In Gijon there are training workshops for homeless people and in Tallinn the city operates a number of measures that seek to prevent social exclusion and homelessness. These are focused particularly on employment, e.g. providing training and encouraging good work habits. People who attend training courses have their transport costs paid. Those people who do not work are required to get involved in activities such as making gift-sets for charities. Early intervention measures aim to improve the motivation of people who are homeless through counselling and building independent living skills.

A major problem faced by service providers in all cities is that they have more influence over the supply side of employment - where, for example, they can seek to improve the skills and work readiness of service users - and have less control over the demand for labour. This was a difficulty noted in Newcastle and other cities, where high unemployment presents a major barrier to homeless people and others in finding work. Concern was expressed during the peer review at the usefulness of training people for employment when there are so few suitable job opportunities for them. A further concern is that, due to the economic crisis, budgets for reintegration are increasingly available only for those service users who are most likely to find employment, leaving behind the most excluded people (including many homeless people) who are in need of basic qualifications or employment skills. Despite these difficulties, Newcastle and other cities are examining whether they can do more to address structural causes of unemployment and how they can contribute to creating an inclusive labour market locally. This is an area which warrants further investigation and exchange of good practice among the cities.

2. Access to an adequate income

In the UK, central government sets the level of welfare benefits, and the rules for receiving them, with cities having little influence beyond deciding who receives some limited discretionary payments. In other countries responsibility for welfare benefits resides at the local level - some cities, for instance in the Netherlands, have more

decision-making power in this area and some cities also set additional discretionary benefits.

The recent UK national government's welfare reform programme is a major challenge to financial inclusion, with benefits being made more conditional and many households who are judged to be under-occupying social rented housing being made subject to the 'bedroom tax'¹. This means that they face large reductions in housing benefit (the benefit to help low income people pay their rent). Short term loan companies are spending large amounts of money on advertising to persuade people to take loans at very high levels of interest. People whose benefits have been cut are particularly at risk of responding and ending up in debt.

The link between people's accommodation and their financial situation has been acknowledged in Newcastle, where housing and welfare rights are key elements in the Active Inclusion Newcastle (AIN) strategy. Newcastle's Financial Inclusion Action Plan includes objectives such as maximising income and responding to welfare reform, supporting residents to manage their debt, promoting the expansion of affordable credit options and increasing skills in money management.

Measures such as providing early advice to as many people as possible have reduced by more than half the number of evictions from Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) - the organisation that manages the council's property on its behalf. There is concern over evictions in the supported housing sector, which can be carried out more easily than eviction from housing with standard tenancy agreements. The priority given by Newcastle to preventing evictions is a characteristic shared with Ljubljana.

Access to income support measures is important to prevent homelessness in many cities, as people usually have to pay something towards emergency accommodation. However, difficulties are presented by conditionality of welfare benefits, which is often attached to residency. Nevertheless in some cities, for example in Barcelona, crisis and emergency accommodation is free of charge.

In Gijon, people from outside the city are only entitled to basic services and must be registered for at least one year to have access to benefits. In Ljubljana, municipal financial assistance is only available to people who are on low income or are receiving state social assistance and have permanent residency.

Despite successes such as reducing the number of evictions, other indicators related to poverty demonstrate the limited control that agencies in Newcastle have over the financial position of residents. For example, 500 people are without access to an adequate income in Newcastle at any one time, mostly as a result of having been sanctioned for failing to meet the new, stricter conditionality to welfare assistance

¹ The 'Bedroom Tax' refers to changes introduced to housing benefit by the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which came into effect on 1 April 2013. These changes include an 'under-occupancy penalty' which reduces the amount of benefit paid to claimants if they are deemed to have too much living space in the property they are renting. Although the Act does not introduce any new direct taxes, the penalty for rooms classified as "spare bedrooms" has been characterised as the 'Bedroom Tax'.

introduced by the central government. Churches and food banks have stepped in to meet basic needs in these circumstances.

3. Good quality services

The provision of good quality services appears to be the pillar of active inclusion that city authorities have most control over, albeit within financial constraints linked to levels of central government funding. This section will identify some common concerns that were highlighted by the peer review team. Then it will discuss factors that appeared to contribute to the high quality of service provision in Newcastle.

Some of the common concerns with regard to the provision of services to homeless people were:

- There is widespread uncertainty as to how to respond to those who are destitute and have no entitlement to services due to a lack of citizenship, e.g. migrants from other parts of Europe.
- There was acknowledgement of the importance of gaining the support of the public to ensure that homeless people are not forgotten about and that there is not local resistance to the re-housing of homeless people. Awareness tends to be highest when there is an emergency such as very bad weather. However, it is important to raise awareness in the correct manner, in order to avoid reinforcing stereotypes.
- It can be particularly important to provide support services and reassurance when a service user moves from temporary to permanent accommodation, particularly if they have made friends there.
- Service users may fear isolation when moving into permanent accommodation from a shared living arrangement.
- If temporary accommodation is of good quality, service users may be unwilling to move onto accommodation that is permanent but of a lower standard.
- It may be difficult to provide support services to people who become demotivated because they feel ready to move on but do not have the opportunity to.

In Newcastle, some services are provided directly by the local authority while in other cases it provides strategic leadership to other agencies through measures such as collecting information about local needs, developing a citywide consensus over policy intervention for homelessness and monitoring and reviewing services with stakeholders. The services being provided by Newcastle were acknowledged by the peer review team as being of high quality, with the temporary accommodation at Cherry Tree View being particularly highly praised. The physical quality of the accommodation was of a high standard, with each household living in a self-contained, spacious flat with own kitchen and bathroom. For larger families, flats with more rooms are offered.

Much of the discussions at the peer review focused on the benefits of providing high-quality emergency accommodation. The criticism that providing high quality emergency accommodation may demotivate people to move out into an independent situation has been dismissed by the evidence. The team in Newcastle has compared the experience of providing the services at Cherry Tree View to the low quality accommodation the city had

previously. It was reported that the good physical environment led to better rapport between the staff and service users allowing for better recognition of needs and providing better tailor-made support. A good physical environment also improved the behaviour of the service users - they were more likely to respect the accommodation's policies on visitor and substance use and fewer police calls had to be made to respond to serious situations. The service users were also more stable in terms of mental well-being in this type of accommodation, which limited the trauma associated with becoming homeless and provided respite that allowed people to focus on the future.

Another very positive feature was the range of services and activities that were available to support service users, such as children's play facilities (also including sessions on parenting skills) and mental health support. This provides holistic support to an individual or families.

A number of factors were identified as contributing to Newcastle's ability to provide this high standard of services, arising from historical central government policy (sections 3.1-3.3), the nature of the housing market in Newcastle (section 3.4) and the action of the local authority and other agencies working in the city (sections 3.5-3.9).

3.1 Favourable legislative framework

Homelessness legislation in the UK supports the provision of effective services through the partial right to housing² and the right of all to receive advice. Moreover, the 2002 Homelessness Act requires local authorities to work together with other agencies to devise and implement a strategy to tackle homelessness in their area. There is no similar statutory framework in other countries; the legacy of several decades of legislation in the UK appears to be a positive one.

3.2 Free health care that is not insurance based

The provision of free health care, with no requirement to take out insurance, is an advantage that Newcastle had over cities in other parts of Europe, where specific arrangements need to be made to ensure that homeless people have access to routine health care.

For example, in Slovenia, although all citizens are entitled to health insurance, people without permanent residence may be unable to arrange this and are therefore not entitled to use public health services. The Ljubljana Health Centre provides health care and counselling for those who are not insured, with licensed doctors working voluntarily. In Tallinn, the city also provides health care for those not covered by health insurance and pays for tests for tuberculosis every year, while in Gijon work is being undertaken to create special houses where homeless people with chronic health problems can receive medical support.

² Partial right to housing means that local authorities have a responsibility to secure accommodation for homeless households but only if they are not intentionally homeless, have a local connection and are in a priority need group: households with dependent children or a pregnant woman, people who are vulnerable in some way e.g. because of mental illness or physical disability; people aged 16 or 17; people aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care; people who are vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces; people who are vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence.

In contrast, while there are specific facilities for people with addictions, homeless UK citizens can walk into a hospital and receive health care or can register with a general medical practice / health centre. This does not eliminate all health care difficulties for homeless people: for example, there are recurring complaints among professionals in the homelessness field about the problems of accessing mental health care. For example, four people, who were resident at Cherry Tree View at the time of the peer review, had their referrals to specialist mental health units rejected; it is difficult to challenge such decisions.

3.3 Adequate levels of resources

A number of new services have been developed in Newcastle, and a number of existing services improved, as a result of funding from central government before 2010 (although smaller in absolute terms than some other cities in the UK). One example of such service is the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) programme, presented at the peer review, which is run by the NGO Changing Lives. It provides assertive outreach³ to people with a history of rough sleeping by staff who have themselves experienced social exclusion in various forms.

Cherry Tree View provides a further example of the value of having high levels of resources devoted to tackling homelessness. It was one of a number of forms of temporary accommodation redeveloped or refurbished under the previous government’s Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP) between 2005 and 2010. Newcastle received 13% of the money that was available nationally under the HCIP, enabling the city to end the practice of sharing rooms in supported accommodation run by NGOs. Moreover, Cherry Tree View is able to operate with 20% under-occupancy to ensure that there are always temporary flats available for people in an emergency or crisis situation. Services funded initially by central government have now become the responsibility of the city administration. Since 2010 Newcastle faces a huge challenge in maintaining the quality of these services as the city has had its funding for supporting homeless people cut by 40%. Newcastle city council has taken a strategic decision to continue funding the ACE programme at the previous level. This decision however has limited the resources for other services, meaning that agencies have been commissioned to provide similar levels of service with less funding.

Despite the huge challenges presented by cuts to central government funding, past policies and funding have left Newcastle relatively well placed, compared to other European cities, to continue providing quality services. For example, Newcastle has accommodation for homeless families, while in other cities; homeless accommodation is for women and children only, with men having to stay separately, in shelters or sleep rough. Cherry Tree View is in an almost unique position in being able to operate with 20% under-occupancy; in the Netherlands, for example, there is a requirement for 90-95% occupation, which limits the ability to respond in an emergency or crisis.

of life, often including work, social relationships, residential independence, money management, and physical health and wellness.

3.4 Low housing market demand

In Newcastle there is a relatively low demand for housing can make it easier to provide good quality services to prevent and tackle homelessness. In Newcastle, there is a relatively low proportion of owner occupied housing by UK standards (about half of the housing in the city), a high proportion of rentals by households receiving housing benefit (approximately one quarter) and a high proportion of privately rented housing (one quarter). Half of this private rented housing is occupied by students. However, demand for housing of all kinds is low when compared to many other UK cities.

One example of an initiative which was possible as a result of low demand for housing is the Housing First approach targeted at homeless people with the most complex needs. It involves moving homeless people directly into self-contained stable accommodation, providing an alternative to the more traditional 'staircase' model of a series of moves where the individual becomes gradually more independent. Such a step could be problematic in cities, where non-homeless people have difficulty in obtaining housing.

This initiative has similarities with schemes operating in many North American and European cities and is operated by the NGO Changing Lives. Funding, originally provided by central government, now comes from the local authority.

3.5 High level political support

A high level of political support can also be a decisive factor in the provision of good quality services. This is reflected in decisions to fund services which are not required by law. Local politicians were fully supportive of improvements to increase the supply and quality of temporary accommodation to ensure that unsuitable options such as bed and breakfast hotels are no longer used.

3.6 A strategic, preventative approach, based on research evidence

Data collection is at the heart of the council's approach because it demonstrates the impact of the services that the council provides or funds. It is the key to developing consensus and a common approach that makes the best use of resources. A quarterly review involves asking service users to assess services.

A central point for single homeless people to apply for accommodation and support was set up (The Gateway). In addition to providing a single-point of access to services, this is an important source of information because it collects aggregate data from hundreds of agencies (for example, probation services) on referrals, allocations and on people who have moved to other accommodation.

The success of preventative work is demonstrated by the large reduction in the number of people who approach the local authority because they have become homeless. When people do become homeless it is often because they are evicted by private landlords. In the UK private tenancy agreements are protected only for 6 months and so landlords can easily evict people without stating a reason, just with a correctly served notice. Many families who become homeless have a social worker working with them. Social workers

have been encouraged to seek out and provide advice to households at the point when they are at risk of homelessness (early intervention).

Consistent feedback loops are built into the planning and designing of the services in Newcastle. When a person becomes homeless, their route to homelessness is thoroughly analysed, including the contact (or lack of thereof) with various city agencies. Based on this the weakest points in the system are identified and then improved.

3.7 A holistic, individual approach

The close working relationship between the housing and welfare rights service in Newcastle demonstrates the importance attached to a holistic approach in preventing and tackling homelessness. An additional success factor is the case centred approach, in which careful consideration is given to the services that could most effectively support each homeless person towards inclusion.

The information leaflet of the Temporary Accommodation Service (TAS) at Cherry Tree View reinforces this point. The leaflet indicates the range of services that are provided to service users, in addition to assistance to find suitable permanent accommodation and states:

“Many people who use the service have very upsetting experiences, and need a lot of support. We have a multi-agency team who can provide support to everyone. The team is made up of Housing and Support Officers, Housing Support Assistants, a Mental Health Social Worker, Specialist Health Visitor and dedicated worker for children.”

An example of the holistic approach is the consideration that is given to the overall improvement of the circumstance of people accommodated at Cherry Tree View, through providing services which are not directly related to housing. For instance, the organisation called Children North East provides services to families on site, from childcare to improving parenting skills, and as a result children school attendance.

3.8 A history of integrated approaches

Linked to the holistic approach is the recent history of effective joint working between agencies in Newcastle, which has been partly the result of the introduction of the Supporting People Programme and partly a determined, council-led effort to improve communication. The Gateway provides an example of effective joint working, as large numbers of agencies provide information on applications for supported housing. The information entered is matched against the accommodation available and an offer is usually made through a support worker. However, there is a concern that such examples of effective co-ordination are threatened by the government cutting funding from anything that is not considered a ‘front line’ or crisis services.

Other cities are also improving their coordination. For example, Gijon city council’s social services municipal foundation (FMSS) is leading a network to optimise and organise services provided by different organisations. The aims are to improve the quality of interventions and promote the integration of services. This is being achieved through an agreement signed by all the organisations to work towards creating a common database and common procedures and rules.

3.9 Service user involvement

It is important to work effectively with service users even if it can be difficult to work systematically with groups of homeless people to carry out structured consultation processes. In Newcastle - while a decision has been taken not to create a specific service user group for homeless people - there have for seven years been consultations with Newcastle User Carer Forum: a forum for people who have accessed drug, alcohol, homelessness and/or criminal justice services and their carers. The inclusive nature of the forum is demonstrated by service users not needing to be 'clean' in order to be involved in it.

The forum is there so that service users and carers can express their views and become involved in strategic planning groups. Consultation has taken place over specific issues but there are moves to try to develop a regular quarterly consultation.

Conclusion

A major challenge for Newcastle is to continue to provide high quality services to prevent and tackle homelessness in the face of further funding cuts that are expected over the next few years. However, providing high levels of funding for homelessness services (at least until recently) is not the only means by which central and local government have had an impact on the three pillars of active inclusion in the city. In the case of an adequate income, central government has reduced the amounts of money available to those who are not working and made this money increasingly conditional on the actions of the individual. This increases the challenge for the cities to tackle financial exclusion, which is related to adequate income support one of the three pillars of the European Active Inclusion strategy.

Regarding the second pillar of active inclusion, inclusive labour market, the problem is low availability of jobs. This is due to current national policy focusing more on supply side measures and less on investments that lead to job creation and can lay the ground work for creating inclusive labour market. However, for the second pillar of active inclusion, inclusive labour market, the problem is low availability of jobs. This is also due to current national policy focusing more on supply side measures and too little on investments to create inclusive labour market. However, there is still scope for city administrations to support inclusive labour markets at local level and this can be explored further.

On providing quality services, three factors that have facilitated the provision of good quality services in Newcastle are: the favourable legislative framework for homeless people in the UK, the free health service where there is no requirement for insurance, and the low housing demand (there is less potential for homeless people to be seen to be competing with other households for accommodation).

Other positive factors that are more in control by the local authority are;

- the high level of political support and political will to invest in high-quality services,

- the strategic and preventive method based on research evidence, and
- the holistic approach, and the efforts that have been made to encourage multi-agency working and the commitment to service user involvement.

It is likely that, if these factors can be reproduced in other contexts, the outcome will be more effective services and a more inclusive environment for homeless people.



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For more information see:

<http://ec.europa.eu/progress>

The information contained in this event does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

Annexe: List of Sources

This report was drawn from the following sources:

- The self-assessment document prepared by Newcastle City Council in preparation for the peer review.
- A presentation to the peer review team by Councillor Joyce McCarthy, deputy leader of Newcastle City Council.
- A presentation by Neil Munslow, service manager: Active Inclusion in Newcastle
- Presentations about the response to homelessness and social exclusion in three other European cities: Gijon, Ljubljana and Tallinn.
- Tours of the local authority's temporary accommodation at Cherry Tree View and the Skylight facility run by the NGO Crisis
- Talks on recovery and service user involvement by Andy Hackett, service user involvement officer for Changing Lives and Matthew Bower, project worker with the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) team.
- Discussion among members of the peer review team led by Dick Reinking, chair of the working group on homelessness.