

# Looked After Children Commissioning Strategy

## 2010 – 2013

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## 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this commissioning strategy is to understand and plan for the current and future needs of our Looked After Children and Care Leavers to help them achieve good outcomes. The strategy covers the period 2010-13 and its development has utilised the commissioning principles and processes in the **Gateshead Children's Trust Commissioning Strategy (draft 2010-11)**, approved by the Children's Trust Board in May 2010.

Nationally there are approximately 60,000 Looked After Children and Young People in England, relying on the state for part or all of their upbringing, and although there have been some improvements there remains a significant gap between the outcomes for children who live in care and those who do not. **Care Matters Time to Deliver for Children in Care (DCSF 2008)** is the Government's ambitious agenda to improve services for children in care, on the edge of care, and leaving care or custody. It is clear that working together for looked after children is vital if we are to improve their life chances, and to that end, this strategy links with a number of partner strategies and service plans where there are cross cutting issues, shared targets and objectives.

The strategy provides a framework across the five **Every Child Matters** outcomes a national initiative for partners to plan and commission high quality services targeted to meet need. It reflects national priorities and those in the **Gateshead Children and Young People's Plan (2010/11)**, and supports the long-term commitment in Gateshead to focus on prevention and early intervention together with more integrated and holistic services delivered by multi-agency teams around the family.

The **Gateshead Joint Strategic Needs Assessment** along with an analysis of performance and activity data has supported the assessment of the needs of children and young people. The **Gateshead Corporate Parenting Partnership Plan 'Looking After Us' 2009** feeds into the analysis as have the views of children and young people and practitioners. The priorities are detailed in the **Looked After Children Commissioning Action Plan 2010-11 Appendix 3** of this strategy.

The Corporate Parenting Partnership will be the body that monitors commissioning for looked after children. Commissioning activity contained within the action plan will be subject to annual review by the Partnership to ensure it responds to changes at a national and a local level. The Corporate Parenting Partnership will report its progress on improving outcomes to the Children's Trust Commissioning Executive through the board's governance structure.

## 2.0 Vision

Gateshead Children and Young People's Plan provides an overarching vision for all children and young people in Gateshead:

'All children and young people are empowered and supported to develop their full potential and have the life skills and opportunities to play an active part in society'.

'Looking After Us' sets out Gateshead's commitment to looked after children and young people in response to Care Matters. It sets out the vision at the heart of corporate parenting, where all partners take responsibility to promote and protect looked after children and young people, and ask themselves:

'If this were my child, would it be good enough for them?  
If I were that child, would it have been good enough for me?  
How could I make it even better?'

The key to improving outcomes for every looked after child and young person in Gateshead is seen to be through a whole-system commitment to corporate parenting raising the profile of looked after children within the council and with all partners including health, housing, leisure services, schools and colleges.

## 3.0 Definition of Commissioning

Commissioning is about enhancing the quality of life for children, young people, families and carers in Gateshead. The Children's Trust Planning and Commissioning Framework follows the **9 steps DCSF Commissioning Model** that employs **4 key activities: assess, plan, do and review**. Commissioning activity can take place on multi-levels: for instance at lead practitioner, or child and family level, team or service level or strategically across a Borough wide area.

Commissioners and planners of services for Looked After Children are supported to work more effectively through utilising the trust's commissioning framework. It encourages creative opportunities to meet need outside of traditional patterns of service delivery and partners are encouraged to collaborate and consider pooling resources in order to commission new ways of delivering services.

## 4.0 Strategic Commissioning Intentions

In order to achieve good outcomes for Looked After Children and control costs it is essential that a long term strategic approach to planning and commissioning services is maintained.

Joint commissioning of specialist placements and services must consider the needs of the whole child and their family, and address health, education and social care needs in order to improve and to avoid escalating costs.

An effective strategy for Looked After Children must include preventative and support services to avoid children becoming looked after unnecessarily and to reunite them safely to their families wherever possible.

By developing a range of appropriate and high quality placements with readily accessible multi-agency supports Looked After Children will be able to stay close to their local communities where that is practicable, in stable placements that demonstrate positive outcomes for all.

Building in-house placement capacity will reduce reliance on expensive out of borough placements except for the small number of children and young people with the most complex needs where we will work collaboratively with stakeholders to commission the most cost effective and high quality solutions.

Involving children and young people, families, carers and professionals in the design, delivery and monitoring of all services is vital so we know that we are getting it right and importantly the care experience of Looked After Children is improved as a result.

Supporting Looked After Children to make a successful transition into adulthood through the provision of good quality education, training and employment, suitable accommodation and support is an essential part of an effective strategy.

## **5.0 Commissioning Principles and Standards**

Principles that underpin how we work with and support children, young people and families are located in the Children and Young People's Plan 2010/11.

There are 10 principles at the heart of our corporate parenting considerations and responsibilities that must be taken into account when planning, and commissioning services for Looked After Children. They can be found in the Corporate Parenting Partnership Plan 'Looking After Us'.

In addition, the European Convention on the Rights of the Child, incorporated into UK law in 1991, which ensures 'Every child and young person is entitled to

a private and family life and has the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives', underpins the strategy.

## 6.0 National Context and Messages from Research

Since 1997 there has been a major legislative programme aimed at improving services for vulnerable children and families and with a particular emphasis on Looked After Children. The Every Child Matters and Care Matters programmes have set high expectations for local authorities to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and Young People by ensuring placement choice, stability, excellent education and dedicated health services. At the same time there is pressure to control costs and a national shortage of foster carers and qualified social care staff. Planning and commissioning with trust partners and a range of stakeholders including recipients of services is promoted as a means to deliver improved outcomes and cost effectiveness.

Messages from research indicates that despite high ambitions and a shared commitment for change outcomes for children and young people in care have not sufficiently improved and there remains a significant gap between the quality of their lives and those of all children. Research published in **Quality Matters in Children's Services (Every Child Matters 2009)** reported on the outcome of interventions for children in care and in need from the Quality Protects Programme launched in 1998. In relation to commissioning there is some evidence that joint commissioning is taking place but it is too early to say what impact it is having on improving outcomes for Looked After Children. Studies also show that children, young people and their families are becoming increasingly involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of services but there is little evidence of what service users felt about this involvement or gained from it.

## 7.0 Local Context

Currently, around 45,600 young people aged between 0 and 19 live in Gateshead. This means that around one quarter of the whole population of Gateshead (just over 190,000) is a young person, which is similar to the rest of the country.

After a downward trend in the 1990's there has been an upturn in the birth rate since 2000 and the revised projection from **Office of National Statistics**, data is for a 15% increase (from 2,251 to 2,648) in births in Gateshead between 2006 and 2015.

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation tell us that residents living in 16 out of 22 wards in Gateshead are in the top 25% most deprived wards in England. Key priorities

are set out in the **Gateshead Local Area Agreement** across five Neighbourhood Management Areas: West, Inner West, Central, South, and East with eighty-five individual neighbourhoods contained within these five areas.

The **Gateshead Vitality Index** ranks the 85 neighbourhoods of Gateshead according to six domains: crime, education, health, housing, income, and unemployment, it shows the combinations of problems to be concentrated in the Central and East areas, but with patches in the South of the borough.

Data that outlines the distribution of the **0-19 year's population registered with GP practices** by Gateshead Neighbourhood Management Area indicates that the Central Area contains by far the biggest proportion of children and young people. Therefore, more than half of Gateshead's population of children and young people live in areas generally marked by a combination of economic deprivation and other related problems.

Other facts about children and young people's lives in Gateshead can be found in the Children and Young People's Plan

### **Local strategies and plans**

Looked After Children are identified as a key priority in the council's corporate plan **Gateshead Vision 2030** and the Children and Young People's Plan (2009/10). A number of cross-government programmes that aim to reduce social exclusion, inequalities in health, education, housing and crime set out essential actions to deliver improved outcomes for Looked After Children. Where there are shared targets or cross cutting priorities, it important to make a clear link with partner plans to the effectiveness of this strategy.

Local Authorities and National Health Service organisations serving children, young people and families are expected to take steps to unify or coordinate services. The **Gateshead Looked After Children Health Team Report (2009-10)** sets out their response to collaborative working and tells us they are reviewing and developing services in response to the recent guidance, **Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children (DCSF & DH 2009)**.

**A First Class Education in Gateshead (2009)** sets out the aims of the Virtual School Head; to work together to reduce the educational attainment gap between Looked After Children and their peers as a means of improving outcomes. Recommendations from the SEN review, **An Inclusive Future: High Quality Education for all Children with Special Education Needs in Gateshead (2008)**, aims to improve special educational needs provision. It recognises and makes provision for Looked After Children, in mainstream and

special schools as well as for those who need to be educated in Pupil Referral Units or out of borough placements.

The **Gateshead Council Homelessness Strategy (2008-13)** sets out the council's commitment to meeting homeless need including in part for 16 and 17 year olds to reflect the **Southwark Judgement, R(G) v Southwark LB 2009** and other regulations and guidance that identify young people leaving care as having a 'Priority Need' for accommodation and services. The **Gateshead Joint Housing Protocol (2009)** is under review to reflect the judgement. The protocol ensures the effective discharge of responsibilities between Children and Housing Services and the Gateshead Housing Company and sets out joint responsibilities to meet the accommodation needs of vulnerable young people and to support them become responsible, successful tenants reducing the risk of homelessness.

## **8.0 Needs Analysis**

A needs analysis is a way of estimating types of need and prevalence across a given population. This assists with planning and commissioning services, which are targeted to meet identified need. The needs analysis can help:

- Estimate the current and future needs of a population
- Indicate the geographical distribution of need
- Identify the gap between met and unmet need.

The following section provides an overview of the looked after population in Gateshead and a summary of our performance. An in-depth profile for Looked After Children compared to regional comparators and the national average can be found at Appendix 1. A full needs analysis of all children's needs living in Gateshead can be found in the Children and Young People's Plan and in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

### **Overall profile and numbers**

In 2009-10 a number of vulnerable children and their families receiving specialist services in Gateshead from social care and youth offending services were as follows:

- 139 children and young people were on the child protection register
- 301 children and young people were looked after by the local authority
- There were 1,400 children in need\*
- 558 young people were charged, warned or reprimanded because of their offending and of these 11 were looked after.

As at the end of March 2010, 301 children were looked after by Gateshead. This equates to a rate of 77.2 per 10,000 populations. Comparator authorities in the North East are Sunderland, with 67.9 per 10,000 and South Tyneside with 95.5 per 10,000 populations. In 2008-09, the regional average was 69 per 10,000 and the England average was 46 per 10,000 populations.

Although Gateshead numbers are higher than regional and national averages they compare reasonably well with our comparator authorities and proportionally are third lowest across the North East region.

Analysis shows looked after numbers have risen to their highest in over 5 years. Despite a recent decrease, they are rising again and in July 2010 stood at 308. The overall trend shows a gradual rise characterised by a series of rapid upward and downward spikes. Coordinated efforts to address rapid rises into care have led to numbers dropping but it has proved difficult to sustain these reductions.

Sunderland has been the only authority in the North East to see a decrease in their LAC population from 2009 to 2010. Gateshead has seen an increase overall of 3% and Newcastle has seen the most significant rise with an increase of 13% from 2009 to 2010.

Children looked after by Gateshead are primarily in the older 10-15 age group which is broadly comparable to other authorities in the North East and nationally. A predominantly older cohort of looked After Children indicates that family support work in the early years may be preventing children from entering the care system. However, this is a complex picture and recently we have seen increases in looked after children aged under 1 year, 1 to 4 years and 16 years and over.

Very young children that do become looked after are more likely to leave the care system through adoption or other permanence routes. Children over the age of 5 who become looked after on a Care Order are likely to remain in the care system longer term. Children who become looked after when they are older are most likely to have had a number of unsuccessful preventative interventions and are unlikely to return home quickly. They are likely to present with complex and significant difficulties that require long term expensive specialist services.

### **Externally commissioned placements**

As at 31 March 2010, 30 children and young people were in externally commissioned placements; 26 were accommodated in foster care, residential school or children's homes, and 4 were in secure provision. This compares to a

total of 20 as at 31 March 2009 of which 19 were looked after in externally commissioned placements plus 1 in secure provision. The table below shows placement by type and numbers including those with Special Education Need Statements.

<b>Externally commissioned placements as at 31 March 2009 + 31 March 2010</b>				
<b>Placement Type</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Number with SEN Statement</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Number with SEN Statement</b>
<b>Fostering</b>	5	1	10	3
<b>Residential Home</b>	8	3	10	3
<b>Residential School</b>	6	6	6	4
<b>Secure Unit Sentenced/remanded</b>	1	1	1	1
<b>Secure Unit Welfare orders</b>	0	0	3	2
<b>Total</b>	20	11	30	13

During 2009-10, the numbers of children placed in residential placements has begun to increase. This is partly due to the closure of a four bedded in-house residential unit and a delay in developing alternative arrangements to accommodate these young people. It also reflects the increase of young people coming into care with very challenging behaviors and our use of secure provision has increased for welfare reasons.

We have also seen a 100% increase in the use of out of borough foster placements although numbers remain low and this equates to 5 more children and young people placed across the year. Data analysis shows this reflects meeting the needs of 2 Asylum Seeking young people and 7 young people on Care Orders who require long term provision.

## **9.0 Current Pattern of Service Provision**

A range of services contributes to improving outcomes for Looked After Children and the delivery of the strategy. The majority of provision is delivered in-house or through public and voluntary sector partners. Key providers are involved in setting performance frameworks and shaping services through existing planning and governance arrangements such as the Corporate Parenting Partnership and Children's Trust Board.

Wider forums and meetings share information with all partners about service developments and future demand. Partners have opportunities to feed their views and service user views into planning processes and contribute to good practice development.

Services and spend, where this is known, for Looked After Children including for externally commissioned placements has been mapped and this can be found in Section 13 'Use of Resources and Value for Money' and in Appendix 2.

## **10.0 Commissioning Priorities**

It is difficult to predict demand, plan services based on existing data collection and shared performance management frameworks as their focus is limited, and we are currently looking at how this can be improved and look at outcomes. However, we do know looked after numbers are increasing and this puts extreme pressure on placement resources and other services provided by partners. Despite investment in foster carer and adopter recruitment, it is difficult to increase the number of carers to keep up with demand and offer placement choice. The situation is exacerbated by the volatile nature of placement demand and the increasingly complex needs of individuals who require these resources.

There is a need to plan strategically with independent sector placement providers where it is not cost effective for us to provide specialist provision. Notwithstanding this, our experience over recent years indicates that strengthening our in-house fostering and adoption services is the correct direction of travel both for the interests of Looked After Children and in terms of best value.

### **i) Supporting children & young people on the edge of care**

Whilst continuing to ensure robust safeguarding arrangements we will align our number of children looked after with the regional average. We aim to work with partners to embed family and parenting support to prevent family breakdown and a priority is to target support to children on the edge of care in order to prevent their needs escalating which may result in their entry to the care system.

For those who do come into care we will provide intensive support to facilitate rehabilitation back to their families where it is in their best interests and safe to do so. Partner agencies are increasingly using the CAF assessment process and team around the family support plans to maximise the use of community-based support services for those with additional needs. In addition, Lead Practitioners

across Adults and Children's Services can lever in additional resources through Personalised Budgets to commission individually tailored support services.

Specialist and targeted family support services are working together in new ways to support families in crisis in their communities. The Family Intervention Project provide specialist interventions and practitioners work intensively with children, young people, their families, adult services, schools and local communities to improve behaviours and parenting and support children to achieve better outcomes.

We are extending the reach of existing interventions such as Family Group Conferences to target families where there is domestic abuse and other safeguarding concerns. They also provide a service to support a safe return home in line with care planning arrangements for children or young people who are in care.

A Youth Crime Family Intervention Project targets families with children at risk of offending and anti social behaviour and a Hidden Harm Service works intensively with families where there is substance misuse and the risk of family breakdown. The impact of these interventions will be subject to analysis across a range of indicators and learning will inform Looked After Children Services in an effort to understand the most effective ways to target services to improve outcomes for children and young people.

## **ii) Improved placement stability and care planning**

Partners will work together to develop our integrated service offer for Looked After Children and ensure we make commissioning decisions about where to invest scarcer resources where they can achieve the greatest gains. Our preventative approach means that the children who become looked after tend to be those with the most complex needs and challenging behaviour. A key priority for us is to make improving life chances for looked after children a priority to all and to work intensively with our partner agencies to achieve that. We know the basis of improving outcomes is to ensure a stable placement so that continuity of relationships, community links, education and health provision provides the right conditions for maximising potential.

The multi-agency Placement Stability Working Group is developing a range of initiatives to improve placement outcomes and care planning. Wherever it is practicable, and in line with individual care plans, we will provide placements with Gateshead foster carers as close to the child's home community as we can. The group focus their activity on areas where there are shortfalls in performance and ensure good outcomes for Looked After Children remain a high priority.

Our foster care and adoption recruitment strategies aim to recruit more carers to provide a range of placement options which will improve the placement matching process and enhance placement stability. We aim to extend the number of solo and emergency placements and to enhance the training and support for more carers, including wrap around supports for the most challenging children and young people who otherwise would have gone into residential provision. There is a need to review foster care, residential care and secure placements provided to young offenders who are remanded into care, some of whom are already looked after. The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is pump priming a regional approach to Intensive Fostering for this group and Gateshead are part of this initiative.

We will promote our permanency offer to ensure timely achievement of permanent placements and secure placement stability through adoptions, special guardianship and residence orders. Reviews of care plans, the use of appropriate legal orders and reunification planning can assist with a throughput of children out of the care system. We have already seen an increase in the number of children placed with kinship carers on a different legal basis such as residence orders.

We recognize that for some young people family placements are not always the best option and they do not need a permanent family placement. We provide a small number of residential services in Borough. We know there is always likely to be the need for specialist residential placements for a small number of children with complex needs and challenging behaviors and those with disabilities if we are to provide stability for them. We will continue to be involved in regional commissioning initiatives to develop good quality, cost effective procurement of low volume placements.

We will ensure children are able to communicate their views about services and their individual care plans. For children with disabilities a participation worker and a team of Person Centred Planners can provide information and advice to children, young people and their families in transition or who receive personal budgets to ensure appropriate decisions are made in support plans and seamless links are made to adult service provision.

Placement demand is increasing for Asylum Seeking children and young people and refugees and numbers of looked after children from BME communities are increasing year on year. We will extend and review the contract we hold on behalf of regional partners with the Sahara Project that assists us with the recruitment of Black and Minority Ethnic foster carers and adopters and offers a range of supports to children and carers that enhance placement stability.

### iii) Reducing reliance on out of Borough placements

Expenditure on Looked After Children is inflated by the increasing demand and an increase in the use of externally commissioned placements due to a lack of capacity in Borough. A joint commissioning group including education, health, and social care commissioners have strategic responsibility to build capacity and develop local provision so that there is a reduction in placements outside the Borough.

There are several key initiatives to allow reinvestment in local solutions. These include planned development of specialist provision with independent sector partners to meet complex needs in cost effective ways. We wish to reinvest in targeted support services for children with disabilities, such as autism, we know this can prevent some young people coming into care. **The Fostering & Adoption Marketing & Recruitment Plans 2010-13** set out actions, targets and levels of financial investment to build local capacity in particular for adolescents and chaotic young people who may well end up in out of borough placements.

We are looking at restructuring our current spend to further develop supported housing options for Care Leavers and homeless 16/17 year olds to ensure foster care and residential provision is available for those with more appropriately identified needs.

Proposals in the recent CAMHS and SEN Reviews recognized the need to develop community initiatives and school based supports to help meet the needs of this group, some of whom have learning disabilities and challenging behaviors, within the Borough. Overall the aim is to reduce the stress for families and others who look after these young people in community settings and in the home and to support young people take more control of their behaviors and optimize their capacity to function more positively.

For those with complex health and social care needs the launch of the **Children's Continuing Health Care Framework (DH 2009)** will support the development of clear criteria and transparent processes to assess those with complex health needs and determine appropriate care provision and funding contributions. This will facilitate joint commissioning of specialist provision for those in transition into adulthood.

**Aiming High for Disabled Children Programme (DCSF 2008)** has improved our offer of flexible short breaks. Personalized budgets have been used to commission flexible, targeted supports. This has proved helpful when families and carers are in crisis, and has contributed to a reduction in potential requests for children to be accommodated and to placement stability.

A pilot project supported through the **North East Region Improvement Efficiency Partnership** has commissioned providers to develop new services to meet the needs of children and young people on the Autistic Spectrum with associated challenging behaviours within their home communities. Learning from this project will be rolled out across the region in 2010 and will inform future commissioning.

#### **iv) Improved education outcomes**

In Gateshead, our ambition as a corporate parent is to ensure that all Looked After Children have access to appropriate high quality educational opportunities that help them to achieve the highest standards he or she possibly can. This includes supporting their aspirations to achieve in further and higher education.

A First Class Education (2009) sets out a strategic plan for raising the achievement of Looked After Children in Gateshead in order to reduce the educational attainment gap between Looked After Children and their peers. Although the overall attainment levels of Looked After Children has improved it does not reflect the high overall improvement rate that all children in Gateshead schools have achieved.

Looked After Children have high levels of special educational needs in comparison to the general population and a series of recommendations from a recent SEN Review aims to improve outcomes for children, including those who are Looked After, with special educational needs and for those who need to be educated outside mainstream provision including in out of borough placements.

The role of the Virtual School Head is key to developing several priority areas to improve the experience of school for children in care with schools, foster carers and social workers including:

- priority admission arrangements
- personalised learning plans delivered through personal tutors
- personal education allowances available for those at risk of not reaching expected standards
- extended 14-19 provision including work placement experience
- role of designated teacher placed on a statutory footing
- stronger guidance on using exclusion only as a last resort
- Training and support for foster carers to enable appropriate support in the school and home

#### **v) Improved health and wellbeing**

All Looked After Children in Gateshead have access to good quality health care assessments, up to date health plans and a range of appropriate health services to ensure their health and wellbeing needs are met. These are individual to their age and stage of development and include sexual health, substance misuse and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

The Looked After Children health team provides a high-level performing service with health assessments, reviews, immunisations and dental checks meeting or exceeding targets. A significant number of out of area health assessments are undertaken which along with the sharp rise in looked after numbers has placed significant pressure on the team across the range of service provision.

The Teenage Pregnancy Service works closely with the health team and partners delivering services for children and young people as set out in **Gateshead Teenage Pregnancy Service Plan 2010-13 (draft)**. Looked After Children are a key priority and are one of the target groups identified as 'at risk'. Sexual health and pregnancy protocols are in place with a programme of training to support their implementation. Another key priority is the development of a range supports for teenage parents in partnership with housing, education, employment and training providers.

Recommendations within the new statutory guidance to promote the health and wellbeing of Looked After Children will guide the developments in health provision for Looked After Children in Gateshead.

As part of a health lifestyle, we will ensure Looked After Children have access to a range of sports and leisure opportunities outside of their school day and during holiday periods. This supports the development of an individual's core skills, social skills and the overall benefits can include improved educational achievement and self-esteem.

#### **vi) Improved transition to adulthood and independence**

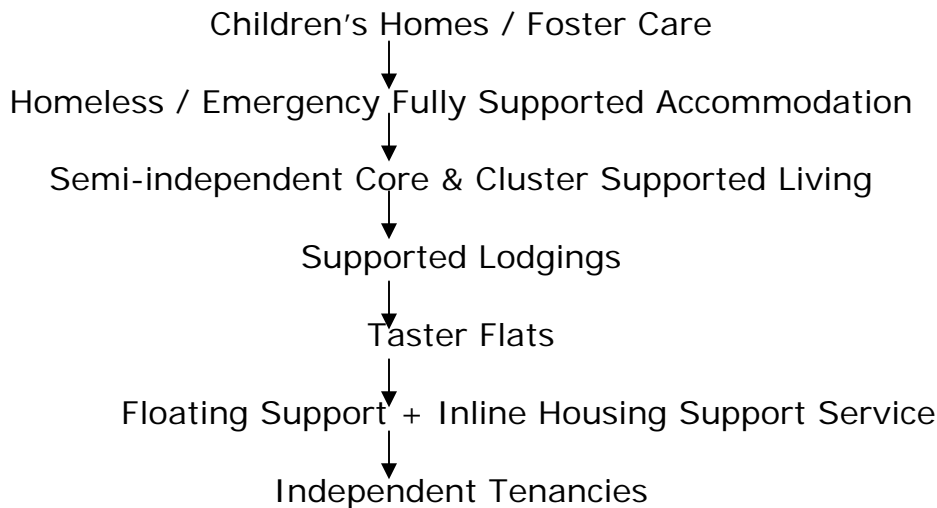
In Gateshead all young people leaving care will be properly prepared for independence and receive the support and encouragement they need. Care leavers will be well equipped emotionally, practically and financially to move on into adulthood. A Personal Adviser will support them up to the age of 25 if they are in education. They will have access to a range of supported accommodation options suitable to their stage of maturity 'readiness' not on age criteria alone. Young people will be supported to stay on with their foster carers as supported lodgings placements when appropriate.

Leaving care services will further develop our integrated offer of a range of practical supports and preparation for independent living to young people who

live in a variety of settings. Multi-agency advice and guidance sessions and the provision of independent living facilities, drop in sessions and courses are available at our Young Peoples Service to help young people develop skills and confidence in a safe environment.

Young offenders will benefit from the range of supported and semi- supported accommodation options other vulnerable young people in Gateshead receive depending upon their individual levels of need. They will also benefit from the emergency hostel provision once it is completed.

We will continue to expand our range of supported accommodation options through commissioning arrangements with a range of providers. We will further develop the Care Leavers Pathway to meet individual levels of need as follows:



We will take into account the recent guidance following the Southwark Judgement in May 2009 regarding homeless 16 and 17 year olds when developing our provision .The ruling means that homeless 16 and 17 year olds may be treated as being looked after and require suitable support and accommodation. An increased number of 18-21 year olds will therefore become entitled to leaving care support.

An Accommodation Strategy developed with Housing Services has mapped supply and demand and a variety of types of accommodation is potentially available to meet different types of need: supported, semi supported and independent living. There is a need to further develop a range of housing options for care leavers and it is planned to increase the number of taster flats as they have proved useful for some young people in developing independent living skills.

Recent consultation with care and housing staff and young people led to a proposal to commission a 24/7 supported independent accommodation

provision for 18 – 21 year olds in partnership with housing services to offer a 'stepping stone' from residential or foster care to fully independent living. There are capital monies available to support the development of this project.

Gateshead Housing Services have developed Inline - a Young Peoples Support Service that provides tenancy and homeless support that prioritises care leavers and young offenders. It will be necessary to keep Inline under review to ensure it prioritises care leavers and young offenders in the reconfigured accommodation developments.

A range of supported, independent living options is required for those young people with disabilities who will require support into adulthood and beyond. This has been a particular challenge in Gateshead especially given the limited number of affordable properties and the need to identify capital monies to fund expensive adaptations. We now have a dedicated Housing Development Officer post who will work with young people, their families and housing providers to develop individual housing and support options.

#### **vii) Increased participation of children and young people**

We are reconfiguring the Children's Rights Service to improve the range of services Looked After Children and young people receive throughout and beyond their time in care. A Participation Hub will support the development of a variety of approaches to encourage and support the participation of young people, parents and carers. A peer advocacy project is being developed with support from One Voice to complement the traditional advocacy services we commission from the independent sector.

### **11.0 Equality and Diversity**

Gateshead Council's corporate document Vision 2030 sets out its commitment to eradicating inequality and fosters an attitude of 'zero tolerance' towards prejudice in all its forms across the whole community; where different people from different backgrounds can live together, not just side by side. All policies and strategies must carry out an equalities impact assessment to determine if there will be any adverse impact on people's lives across the range of equality dimensions.

This strategy has been subject to an equalities impact assessment and it will be reviewed annually to determine if any steps are required to address negative outcomes for Gateshead's Looked After Children.

Within the authority we have a duty to promote and celebrate diversity and to ensure services and staff are responsive to individual needs and differences;

provide equality of opportunity and ensure all children are valued equally and can develop their abilities to their fullest potential. Service specifications and agreements with statutory, independent and the voluntary sector partners highlights and monitors their contribution to meeting equalities standards.

## 12.0 The Provider Market and Workforce Planning

Increasingly we are opening specialist services up to competition in education, health and social care. By encouraging other providers to enter the market, new and innovative ways to meet the needs of children in our care can be developed. We will share information about our future commissioning intentions with providers and potential changes to regulations and standards of service delivery to assist in developing a sufficient, skilled and available workforce and when appropriate ask them to help us develop our thinking around new service requirements. We will work with providers to determine how we can develop incentives to improve outcomes whilst at the same time achieve efficiency savings.

At a strategic level, trust partners are responsible for delivering a **Children's Workforce Development Policy** across Gateshead that includes setting standards of competence across the childcare sector including voluntary and independent providers. The policy takes into account **Children's Workforce Development Council** standards and promotes these to practitioners and providers of services through access to safeguarding training and to **Gateshead Integrated Working Training Directory** so they are helped to be able to spot children at risk or with additional needs.

Currently local authority departments act as providers and commissioners of services and deliver the majority of specialist services for children in care. Several independent and voluntary sector partners deliver a number of early intervention and targeted prevention services commissioned by Children's Trust partners. Health services locally are in the process of reconfiguring their operations into a commissioner and provider split in order to support the delivery of a **World Class Commissioning (DH 2007)** model.

In order to support a mixed model of service provision trust partners are keen that all partners move toward the procurement of services through an arms length commissioning arrangement that is open and transparent. Key to this is understanding the unit costs of in-house provision in order to establish a level playing field between internal and external providers and the development of service level specifications that are flexible, targeted at those who need them, can be evaluated against clear and demonstrable outcome measures, and deliver continuous improvement and value for money. We will work closely with partners to support this development and with Corporate Procurement to utilise

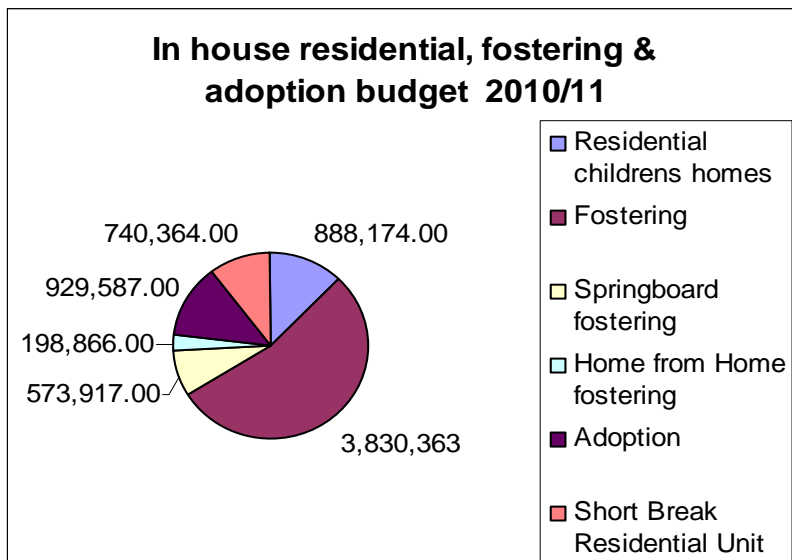
appropriate procurement mechanisms to commission provision that delivers best value.

### 13.0 Use of Resources and Value for Money

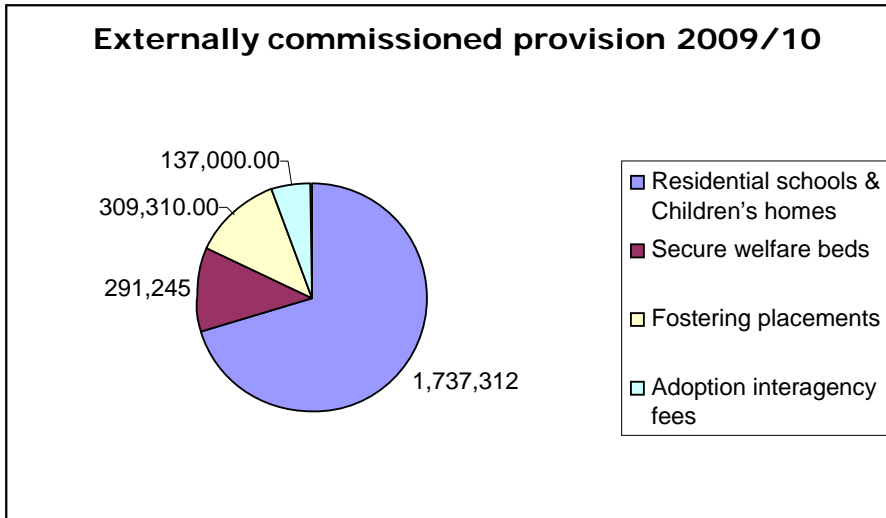
#### Financial context

It is not currently possible to reliably identify the cost of providing some public sector services for Looked After Children including social work, education and health services. This is largely due to difficulties in disaggregating costs where they form only part of a broader range of services that are delivered to various user groups. In order to support more effective commissioning the trust is moving towards joint performance management frameworks in instances where partners have shared responsibility to improve outcomes for a particular service user group or service and this will help us understand costs in more detail.

Notwithstanding limitations, the budget spend for in-house residential, fostering and adoption services for 2010-11 can be found in the chart below. Costs include staffing but exclude overheads such as building running costs.



The breakdown of spend for externally commissioned provision includes foster placements, residential independent schools and children's homes, secure provision for welfare reasons and adoption interagency placement fees. All provider costs include staffing and overheads.



### Access to services

Access to services is based on an assessment of need. Parents are expected to contribute to the cost of accommodating their child subject to a means test of their personal financial circumstances. A number of adoptive and foster carers receive a special financial allowance to help meet the needs of the child until they reach adulthood; these are subject to an annual means test.

### Value for money

In order to secure quality and value for money externally commissioned services are procured in line with best value principles, our organisational procurement standards, European Union guidance and the Third Sector Compact.

Given partners are increasingly subject to constraints on public expenditure it is important that an accountable framework is used to make transparent spending decisions and secure maximum value for money. A cost benefit analysis should be carried out before any commissioning decisions are taken. This could be aided by utilising budgetary analysis models, there have been models piloted in Children's and CAMHS Services that assist with organising information about current and new services that could be provided and allows comparison of the alternative uses of resources.

### Pooling budgets

The Children's Trust commissioning framework encourages the consideration of the best budgetary framework for managing and commissioning services effectively including whether to align budgets with partners or whether a single

agency budget can deliver across a locality or the borough. Partners have flexibilities in law to pool or align their budgets. When partners do so arrangements are underpinned by robust agreements with rigorously monitored contract service specifications evaluated against clear objectives.

### **National and regional commissioning drivers**

There are nine Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs), linked to Directors of Children's Services, working towards achieving the priorities of national government. Public sector services must focus on reducing spend through efficiencies that include collaborative working and an approach that moves resources from expensive acute services into personalised community services that can prevent needs escalating. The RIEP's provide efficiency leadership and support to councils and local partners and ensure resources are available to support change at a regional level.

The North East RIEP has produced a **Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategy and Delivery Plan**, detailing how it will fulfil this remit. Its focus is on supporting, facilitating and challenging local authorities and their partners to deliver on their ambitions. Its range of on-going work streams includes commissioning to reduce the number of expensive out of borough placements, personalisation, and prevention, together with workforce development. Gateshead Council will make use of this to refine its own approaches.

### **14.0 Quality Assurance and Improving Outcomes**

All partners must work toward improving outcomes across the Every Child Matters outcomes. Many of our objectives can only be achieved for Looked After Children through joint working across a number of agencies, for example, improving educational attainment where the role of the foster care is as important as the schools. We are prioritising the need to improve our approach to managing data and performance to support our planning and commissioning arrangements.

It is anticipated that further development of the JSNA and Outcome Based Accountability models, which are being tested out in a small number of services across the trust, will support the development of an outcome based planning and commissioning framework for Looked After Children.

Quality assurance mechanisms are being strengthened across safeguarding and care planning and placement services as part of a continuous improvement cycle that involves children, young people, their families and carers to help shape and develop services that deliver high quality provision. The **Local Safeguarding Children's Board** plans to analyse data about vulnerable

children and families in Gateshead to understand underlying trends, including for children who become looked after, and what that tells us about their needs to inform our future planning.

Looked After Children should expect the same high standards of care whatever setting they are placed in and all placements and services are subject to performance management and inspection. We work proactively with partners who are commissioners or providers of services to ensure robust safeguarding and quality standards are achieved and take action collectively where there are shortfalls. We have quality accreditation processes in Gateshead for all providers of externally commissioned services and we are working collaboratively with regional partners to develop a shared quality assurance framework for independent fostering and residential provision.

## Appendix 1

### Profile of Looked After Children

Needs analysis is a way of estimating the extent and nature of a population so that appropriate support is planned accordingly. The needs analysis can help:

- Estimate the current and future needs of a population
- Indicate the geographical distribution of need
- Identify the gap between met and unmet need.

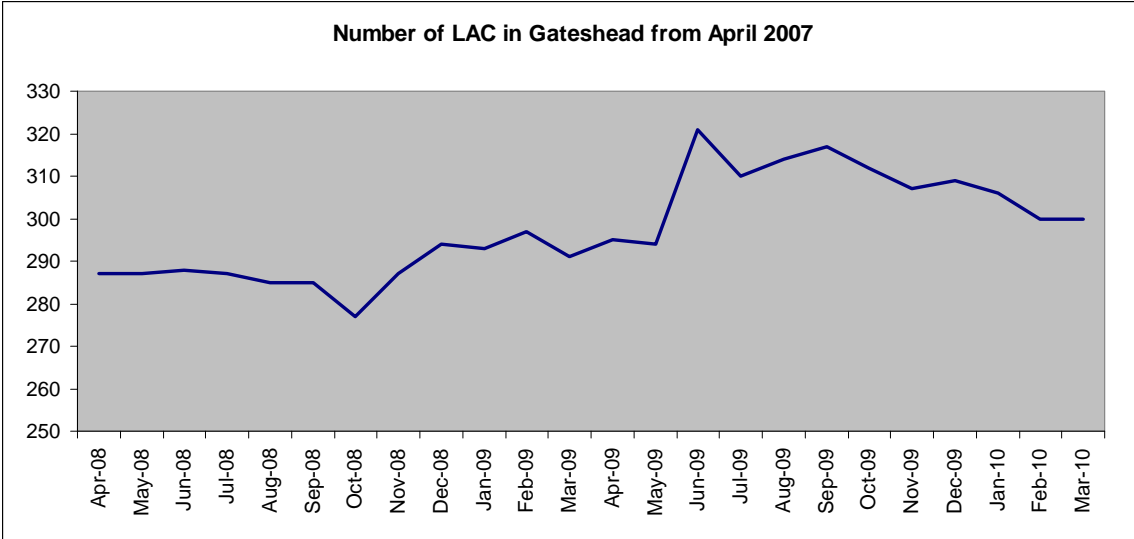
### Overall profile and numbers

In 2009-10 a number of vulnerable children and their families were receiving specialist services in Gateshead from specialist social care and youth offending services as follows:

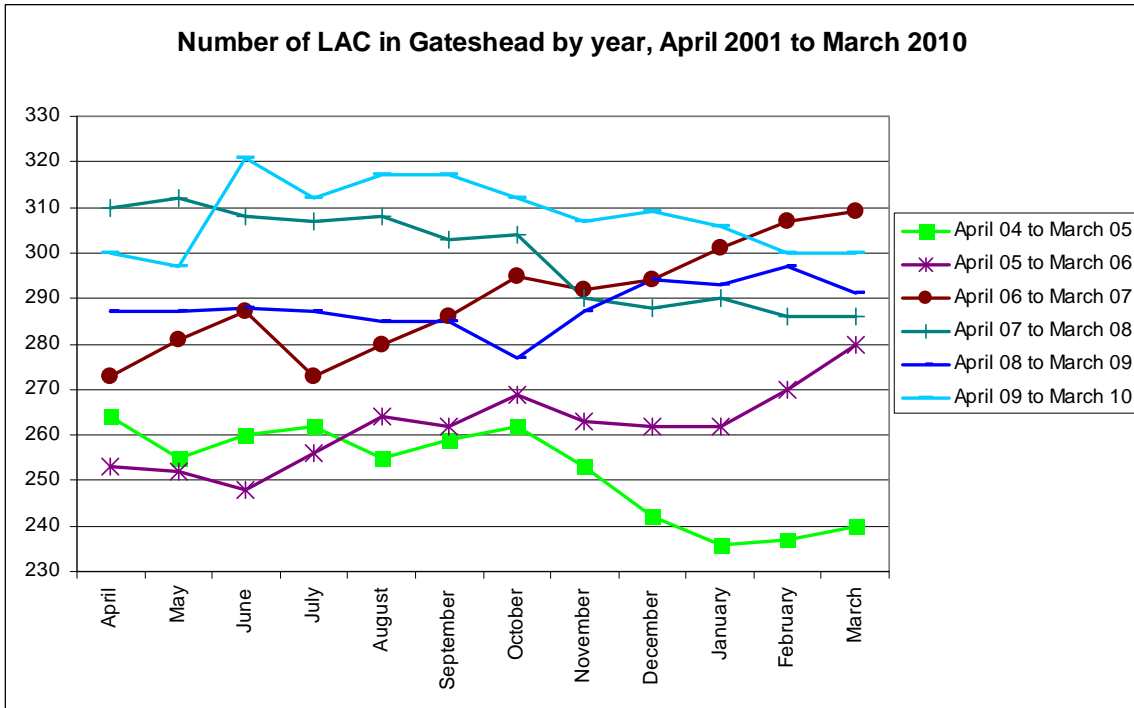
- 139 children and young people were on the child protection register
- 301 children and young people were looked after by the local authority
- There were 1,400 children in need (guidance from CIN census advises us to include all children who were referred during the year even if there was no further action – figure is provisional)
- 558 young people were charged, warned or reprimanded because of their offending, 11 of those were looked after children.

As at the end of March 2010 there were, 301 children looked after by Gateshead. This equates to a rate of 77.2 per 10,000 of the under 18 population. Gateshead's statistical comparator authorities in the North East are Sunderland who had 67.9 per 10,000 and South Tyneside with 95.5 per 10,000 populations in 2009-10. Figures for 2008-09 shows that the North East average was 69 per 10,000 and the England average was 46 per 10,000 populations (figures for 2009-10 will be available later this year). Nationally, there were 60,900 looked after children as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009, an increase of 2 per cent compared to the 2008 figure of 59,500.

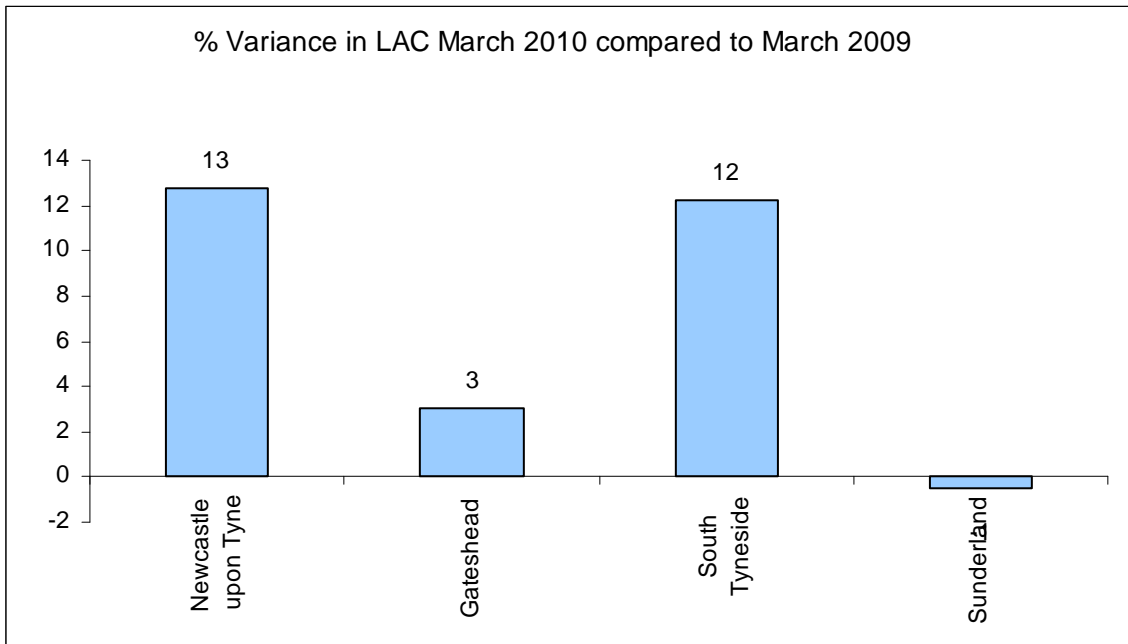
The table below shows that our looked after numbers have increased to the highest they have been in over 5 years, a peak of 321 in June 2009. There has been a steady decline since December 2009 and we are reporting 301 LAC at the end of March 2010 however, numbers are increasing again and stand at 308 in July 2010.



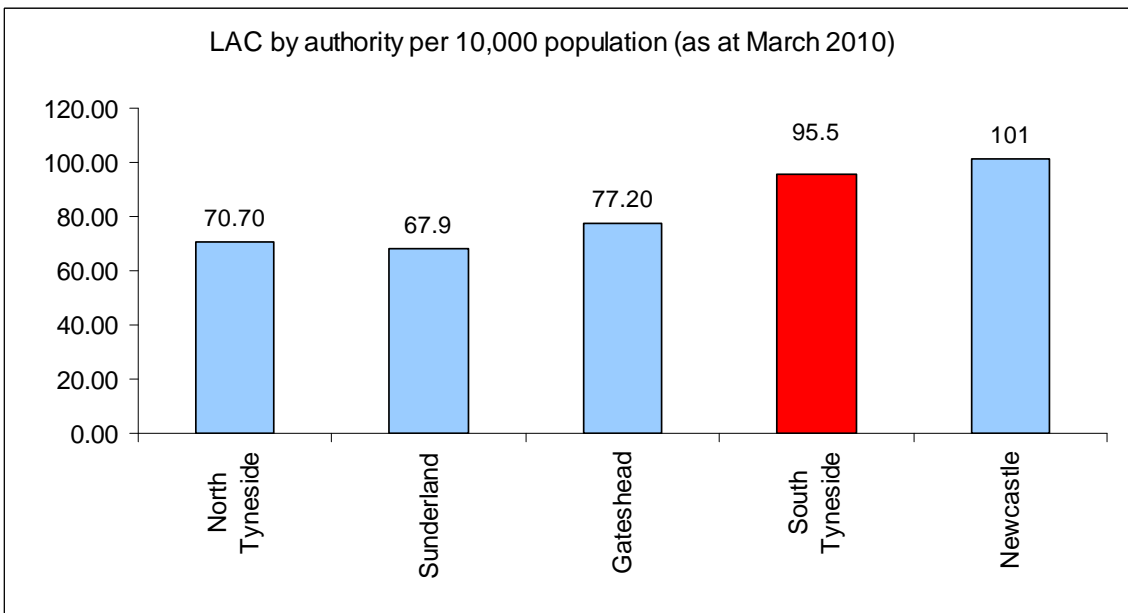
The graph below shows looked after trends on a yearly basis over a longer time period.



Regionally, Sunderland has been the only authority to see a slight decrease in their LAC population from March 2009 to March 2010. Newcastle has seen the most significant rise with an increase of 13%.

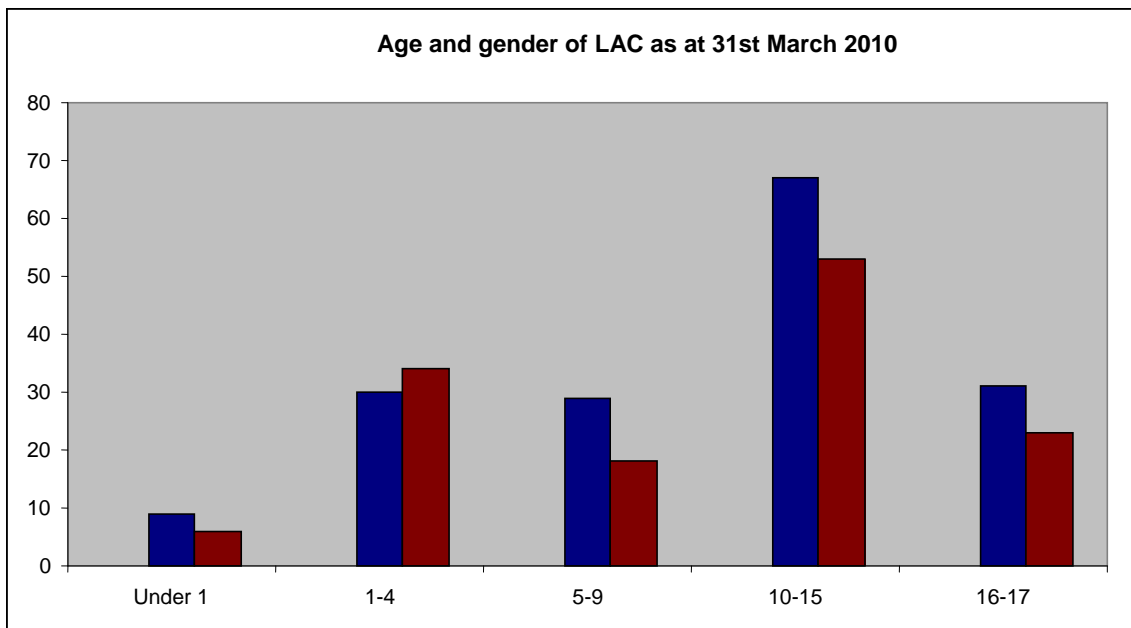


Of the regional data available at this time, we can see that the proportion of LAC per 10,000 of the Gateshead population is the third lowest, at 77.2 per 10,000.



## Age and gender profile

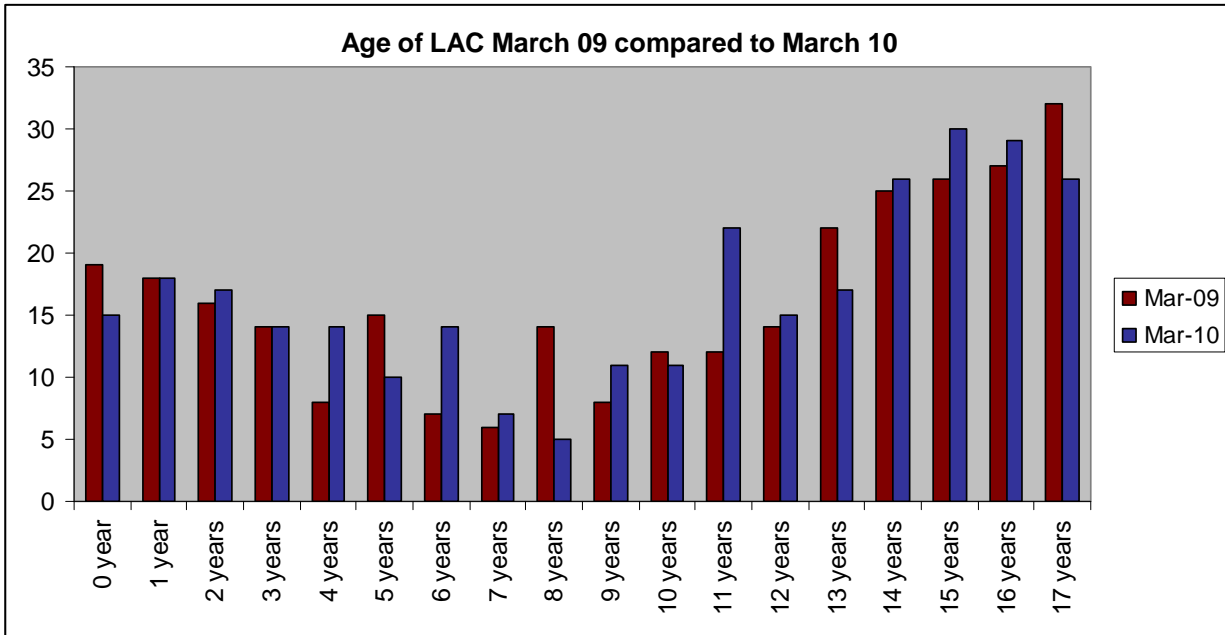
Children looked after by Gateshead are primarily in the older 10-15 age group. The table below shows the looked after population age range and gender as at the 31 March 2010. It is broadly comparable to other authorities nationally and in the region. A predominantly older cohort of Looked After Children indicates that family support work in the early years may be preventing children from entering the care system.



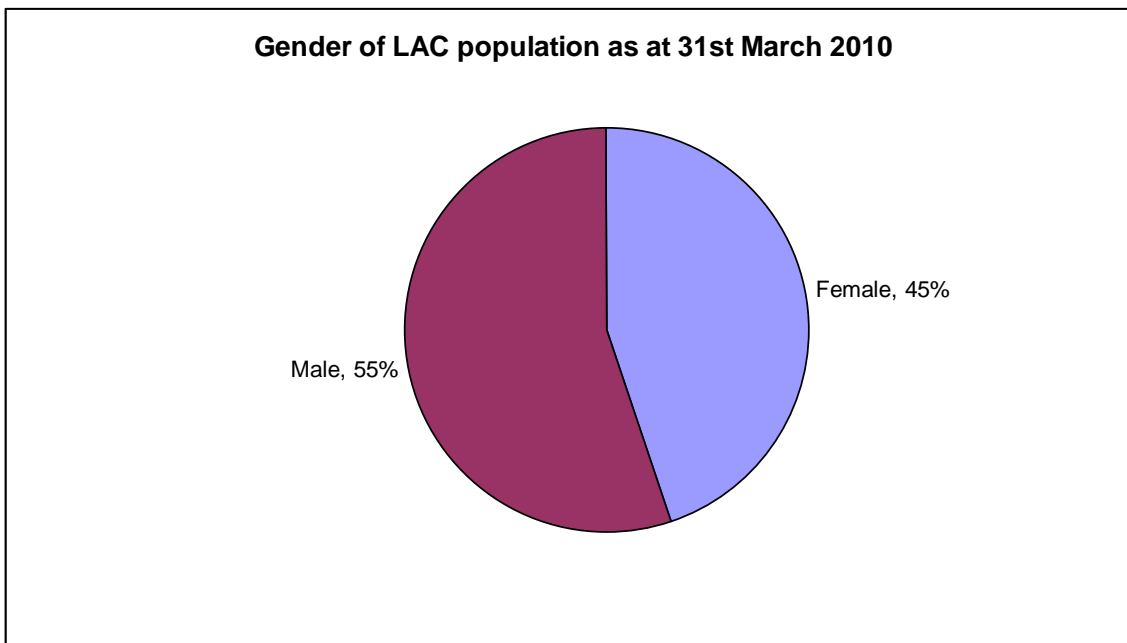
However, analysis shows that compared to 2008-09s we have seen increases in Looked After Children aged under 1 year, 1 to 4 years as well as for those 16 years and over, whereas previously we had proportionally lower rates for these age ranges. It is likely there are a complexity of factors affecting the increase in numbers and the changed age profile: the effect of high profile child deaths; increased professional involvement with younger age children and families through Sure Start and Children's Centre Programmes; and the development of integrated working and use of CAF assessments.

Very young children that do become looked after are more likely to leave the care system through adoption or other permanence routes. Children over the age of 5 who become looked after on a Care Order are likely to remain in the care system longer term. It also means that most children who do become looked after when they are older have already had a number of preventative interventions that have not had success and these young people are therefore

more unlikely to return home quickly and are likely to present with more complex and significant difficulties.



In Gateshead, more males than females are looked after and this position is reflected regionally and nationally. The graph below shows the gender split of looked after children as at 31 March 2010 in Gateshead.



## Numbers of children entering and leaving care

Between April 2009 and March 2010 there were 150 children who became looked after and 142 children ceased to be looked after in comparison to 2008-09 when 97 became looked after and 101 ceased to be looked after. Although the looked after children cohort is a constantly changing population, the trend during the previous 12 months (Apr 09 - Mar 10) indicates that there has been a significant increase in the number of children becoming looked after and those who ceased to be looked after during this time.

## Geographic profile of children in care

It is not currently possible to give an accurate breakdown of the wards or areas that children in Gateshead become looked after from, as Care First does not collect this data. Information Management Services will develop this for future reporting.

A report prepared for Children's Services in 2007 provides a snapshot of the five Neighbourhood Management Areas (Inner West referrals counted with West) from which children were referred to Social Care Services which covers Looked After Children, Children in Need, and Child Protection cases.

<b>Snapshot of referrals to Children's Social Work Services 2007</b>					
<b>Area</b>	<b>Central</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>total</b>
<b>CIN</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>1172</b>
<b>CP</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>LAC</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>243</b>
<b>total</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>1531</b>

## Ethnicity

The majority of children looked after in Gateshead are white. At 31 March 2010 the percentage of children looked after who were from minority ethnic groups ('meg') was 7.9% in total.

The ethnic composition of Gateshead looked after children population as at 31 March 2010 is in table below.

<b>Ethnic origin of Looked After Children at 31 March 2010</b>	
<b>White</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Black or Black British</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Other ethnic groups</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>301</b>

It is difficult to determine the ratio of the proportion of looked after children from minority ethnic groups to the proportion of all ethnic minority children in the local population because of the way census data is collected. Notwithstanding this experimental census data for 0-15 year olds from BME communities can be found in the table below.

<b>Gateshead estimates resident population by ethnic group and sex mid 2007</b>	
<i>Figures in thousands</i>	<b>Ages 0-15</b>
<b>All groups</b>	<b>34.1</b>
<b>White</b>	<b>32.4</b>
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>.6</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>.6</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>.2</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>.3</b>

Census 2007 mid 2007 experimental population estimates

Given the limitations with relying on census data we can broaden our understanding of the needs of these communities by utilising local information. For instance, Gateshead Council Asylum-Seeking and Moving On Team informed us that in October 2007 there were 66 children from asylum-seeking families in council accommodation, with some others housed in the private sector in Bensham and Saltwell wards. There were at least 32 children of refugee families in the borough, although this is an estimate; once granted the legal status of refugees the family may have no further contact with Council services.

Anecdotal evidence is that the families tend to favour town centre accommodation to be near their communities, and the 2001 Census identified Central area as containing the highest percentage of people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, 3.5% compared to the Gateshead average of 1.6%. In addition, their financial circumstances dictate living in the cheapest or harder to let accommodation.

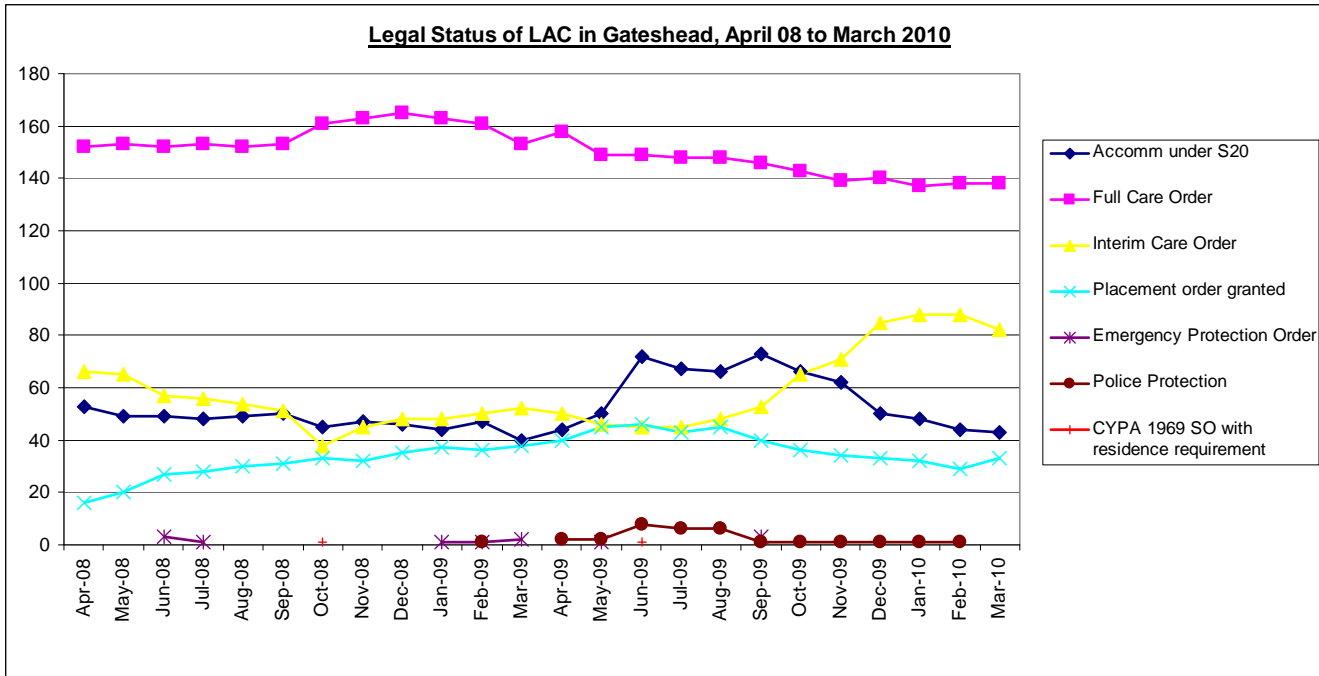
There is a large Orthodox Jewish community living predominantly in the Bensham area of Gateshead with approximately 1,000 children and young people under 16 years. An independent needs assessment has been commissioned at a community level, supported by council funding; its aim is to understand more fully, what the whole population's needs are. It is hoped emerging data will assist children's services with planning for this particular group

It can be difficult to plan services for Looked After Children to meet different types of religious and cultural needs given numbers are comparatively low and demographic information is limited. However, notwithstanding data limitations we know that numbers of looked after children from BME communities are increasing year on year and that there is a demand for a range of placements including short term, permanent and emergency provision that can meet the needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and refugee children.

## **Legal status**

As at 31 March 2009 Gateshead has a comparatively low proportion of LAC subject to voluntary agreements under S.20 of the Children Act 1989 in comparison to those on Care Orders. Nationally at the end of March 2009, for the proportions of looked after children by legal status, 30% were looked after under Section 20 (ie at parental request) and 65% were looked after under a full or interim care order.

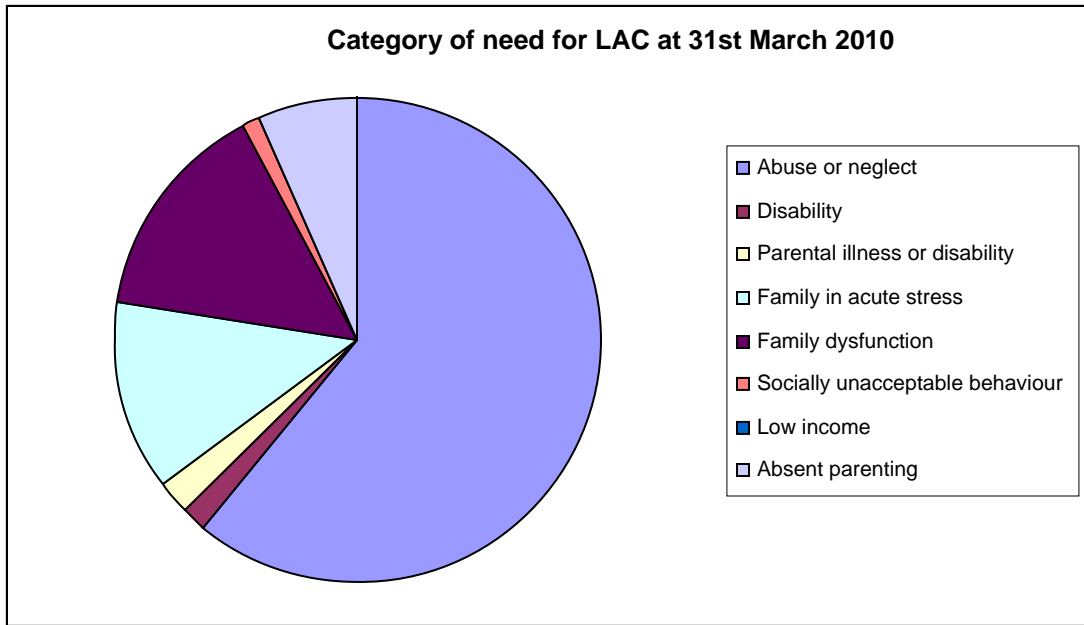
However, during 09/10 there was a sharp rise (10%) in the number of children subject to voluntary agreements under S20, which reflects an increase in those subject to police protection. The age profile shows that in the over 11 age group, the proportion looked after under S20 is higher than for those with court orders, indicating that these young people may have entered the care system because of family breakdown rather than because of significant harm.



### Category of need

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009, the majority of Looked After Children in Gateshead, 183 (65%) were accommodated due to abuse or neglect. This compares to the position of 59% and 62% regionally and nationally. The table below shows the position in Gateshead as at 31 March 2010.

<b>Category of need for Looked After Children at 31 March 2010</b>	
<b>Abuse or neglect</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Disability</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Parental illness or disability</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Family in acute stress</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Family dysfunction</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Socially unacceptable behaviour</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Low income</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Absent parenting</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>301</b>

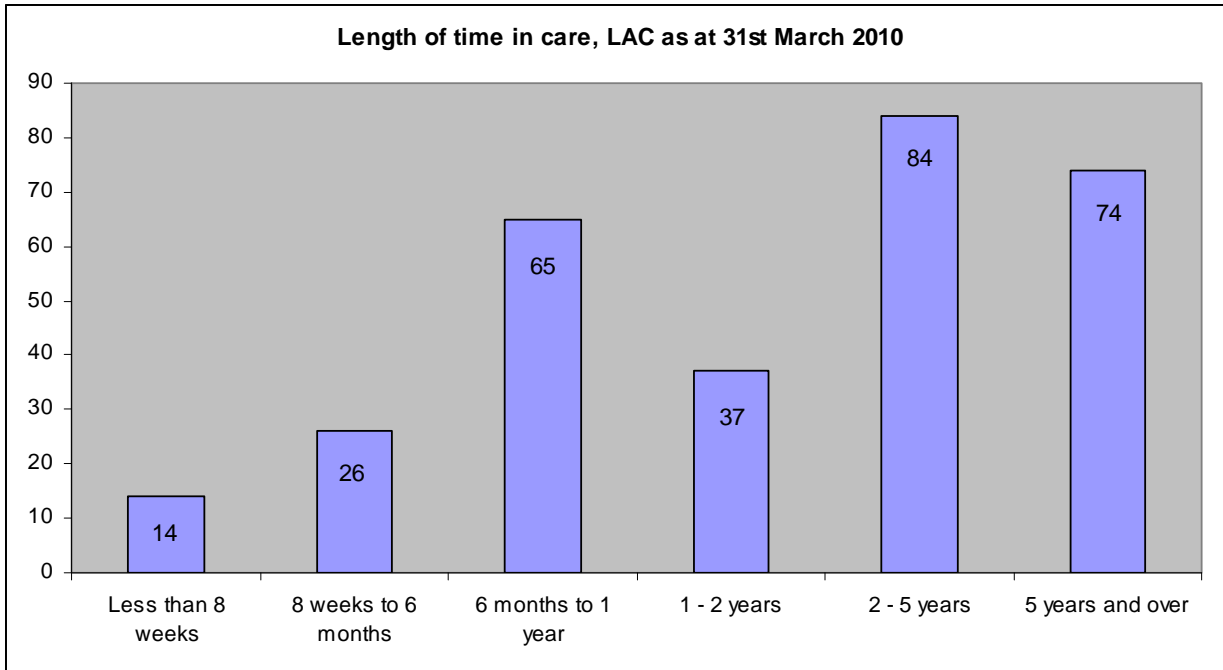


### Duration of care episodes

In March 2010 47% of total looked after population have been looked after for less than two years, 28% have been looked after for between two and five years and 25% have been looked after for over five years

The overall trend shows that 65% of LAC have been looked after longer than 12 months. 77% of those have been LAC longer than 36 months and the number appears to be increasing. A possible explanation of this is suggested above in the legal status section.

It is difficult to make a comparison with neighbouring authorities due to the different ways in which length of time in care is measured.



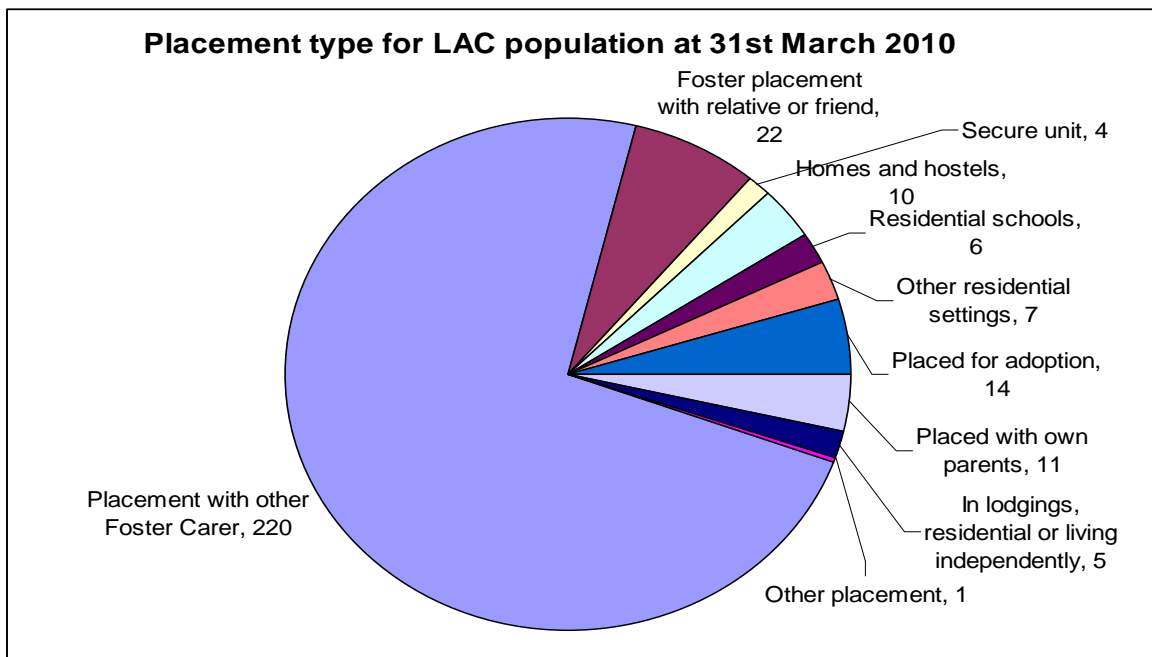
## Looked After Children with Special Educational Needs

The school census 2008 shows that 3.1% of the total school population in Gateshead had a statement of Special Educational Needs. Of the Looked After Children who had been looked after for at least 12 months as at the end of September 2009 33% had a statement of educational needs.

## Types of placement

Gateshead has 81% of children in foster care placements. 100% of children under 10 are in foster care or placed for adoption and more of our children are placed in foster care than in other similar authorities.

8% of children looked after were placed in residential care which is 24 out of a total of 301. This is consistent with the position in England as a whole where the proportion of looked after children in residential care is 11%. The table below shows the position for all children and young people looked after as at 31 March 2010.



## Externally commissioned placements

As at 31 March 2010 a total of 30 children and young people were placed in out of borough placements which comprised; 10 in foster care, 16 in residential provision and 4 in secure settings. Of the 16 residential placements 10 were in children's homes and of these 1 young person was joint funded with education; the remaining 6 were placed in independent schools/learning centres of which 3 were on the ASD Spectrum and were tri-partite funded between social care, education and health. Of the 4 placed in secure only 1 was subject to a criminal justice order the other 3 were placed by Gateshead for welfare reasons and were social care funded.

During 2009-10, the numbers of children placed in residential placements has increased by 33%. This is partly due to the closure of a four bedded in-house residential unit and a delay in developing alternative arrangements to accommodate these young people. It also reflects the increase of young people coming into care with very challenging behaviors and our increased use of secure provision.

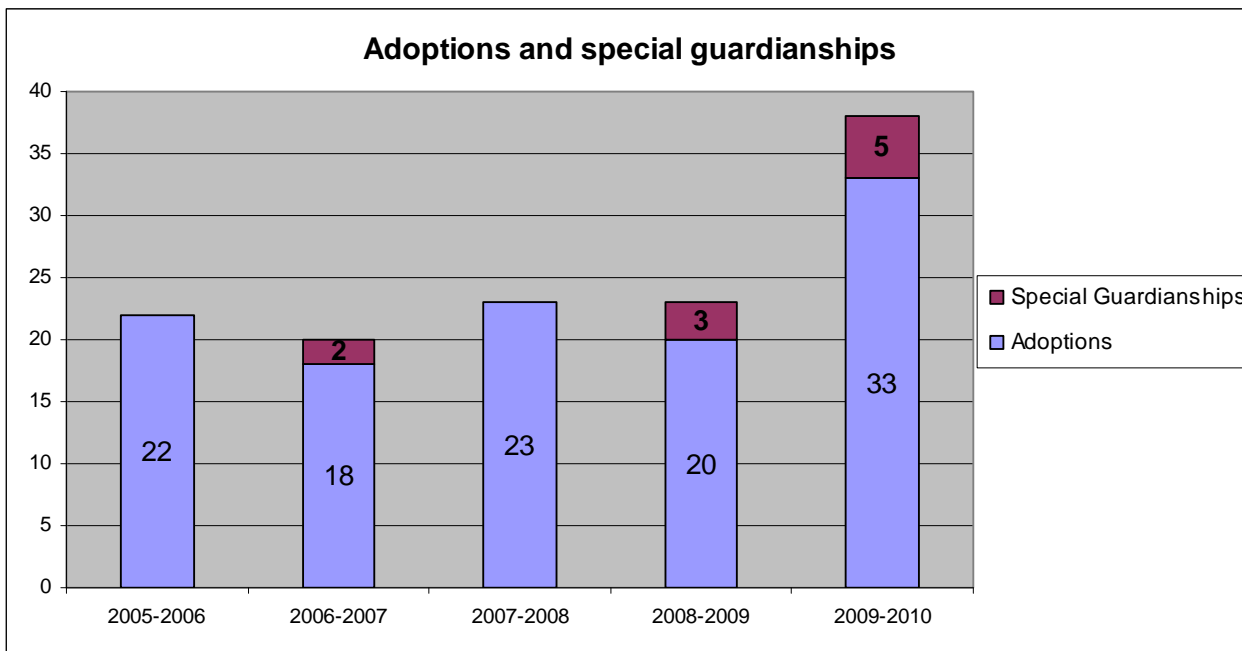
We have also seen a 100% increase in the use of out of borough foster placements although numbers remain low and this equates to 5 more children and young people placed across the year. Data analysis shows this reflects meeting the needs of 2 Asylum Seeking young people and 7 young people on Care Orders who require long term provision.

## Placement stability and permanence

10.3% of Gateshead children looked after at 31 March 2010 had 3 or more placement moves, compared to 12% for our North East neighbours and 11% for England in March 2009. The long term stability of children under 16 looked after for more than 2.5 years who had been in the same placement for 2 years is 70.5%. In March 2009, the comparable figures for our North East neighbours were 65.2% and for England was 67%.

Analysis shows that a significant number of those with 3 or more placement moves are in the older age range, on 31st March 2010 17% were aged 15 years or older and 40% were those aged 11-17. Other characteristics are that they are often new admissions 28% aged 15 and over or are older adolescents moving on to independence. These young people often have a range of other problems such as being involved in care proceedings, or in offending or substance misuse.

The numbers of children moving out of the looked after system through Adoption or Special Guardianship have been increasing and the graph below shows the trend.



## Health of Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Overall the health of looked after children and care leavers is good. The number of looked after children (who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months) who have had their teeth checked by a dentist and an annual health assessment was 93% at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 and has risen by 2.5% from 2008/09 which was higher than for statistical neighbours and the England average.

In March 2010, 99.48% had a health assessment. 86.08% had a dental check and 95.36% of children's immunisations were up to date. 124 Looked After Children aged 4-16 had a Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire completed to assess their emotional wellbeing, scoring 13.3. In 2008/09 the regional average was 13.94 and the national average was 13.71. A score of 0-13 is classed as 'normal' and 14-16 is considered borderline.

## Looked After Children educational achievements

The overall attainment levels of Looked After Children has improved but does not reflect the high overall improvement rate attained at GCSE or SATs that all children in Gateshead schools have achieved. Looked After Children have high levels of special educational needs in comparison to the general population. Nationally 28% of Looked After Children have statements for special educational needs (SEN).

Within Gateshead, of those looked after continuously for 12 months or more, on September 30<sup>th</sup> 2009, figures indicate 33% of children and young people had a SEN. Targets to meet National Indicators showed that: Looked After Children achieving five A-C GCSEs (or equivalent including English and maths) was 39% of the 16.5% target. However, those continuously in care for 12 months who achieved five A-C GCSEs reached 15% not far short of the 16.5% target.

New into care Looked After Children receive early support and educational progress is tracked which has alleviated some of the difficulties children may have faced. Since January 2008 every LAC including care leavers has had the opportunity to access private tutoring through the VSH pilot. Over 100 Looked After Children have been referred and received tuition. A national study **Making Good Progress (DCSF 2009)** has identified that Looked After Children progress more rapidly than other children when provided with 1:1 tuition.

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions about performance trends, but what we do know is that improving the educational experience of Looked After Children and maximizing their attainment requires persistent support and attention across a range of initiatives and settings.

The % of young people leaving care aged 16 or over with at least one GCSE at grade A\* - G or a GNVQ in 2009 – 10 was 69.05% which places us between regional neighbours, Sunderland 68.9% and South Tyneside 75.9% and is better than the England average for 2008-09 which was 57.3%. Care leavers who obtained five+ GCSEs at grade A\* - C in 2009-10 was 14.29% lower than Sunderland at 31.1% but slightly higher than South Tyneside at 13.8%.

## **Transition into adulthood**

During the year ended 31 March 2010 Gateshead had 50 (35%) young people aged 16+ cease to be looked after. At 31st Mar 2010, the Leaving Care Service offered services to 68 young people who are still looked after.

Analysis of the education, employment and training needs of care leavers' data shows that for the year 2009/10 16 (79%) of Care Leavers were in Education, Employment and Training this compares well to South Tyneside 53% but not to Sunderland at 82%. Targets aside, it is generally accepted that this group of young people are particularly vulnerable especially in the current economic downturn and they require sustained efforts across a range of initiatives to support their chances of achieving economic wellbeing and associated life chances.

Settled and supportive accommodation arrangements enable care leavers to be more likely to take up opportunities for education, training or employment. Analysis of the accommodation needs of Care Leavers as at the end of March 2010 shows 21 (100%) of care leavers aged 19 were living in suitable accommodation. Despite our considerable achievement we know that many young people find themselves without sufficient choice of accommodation and support when and where they need it. With this in mind a detailed needs assessment in relation to the accommodation and support needs of all young people is to be undertaken as part of the new Sufficiency Duty and the Southwark Judgment Guidance.

## **Looked After Children and offending**

During the period ending 31 March 2010, 11 young people who were looked after for longer than 12 months were given a final warning / reprimand or convicted of an offence committed while being looked after. The percentage of Looked After Children offending was in 09/10 was 8.1% similar to last year, 12/145 in 08/09 8.3%. We have a range of intensive family based interventions offered to families and their children where there are known offending behaviors, anti social behaviors or other risk factors that may lead to family

breakdown to reduce the need to become looked after or involved with the Criminal Justice System.

## **Views of children and young people**

All children and young people who are looked after receive a service from Children's Rights throughout and beyond their time in care. There are active peer groups that meet regularly that give young people a say in decision making as well as opportunities to socialise and have fun: One Voice – Youth Network and Gateshead's Children in Care Council recently launched its charter 'Standards in Care' which reflects our corporate Care Pledge. The views of children and young people are regularly sought to assist with the development of services and young people take part in service planning and team development events when appropriate. Young people are supported to sit on staff interview panels.

Several members of One Voice sit on Gateshead's Youth Assembly and get involved in wider issues. One Voice holds four events annually when senior council officers meet with the chair to discuss issues for looked after children and officers are invited to One Voice meetings. The children and young people are in the process of setting up a 'Peer Mentoring' scheme with support from the Children's Rights worker and One Voice.

Young people in care have shadowed senior officers and had work placements within the council and twice a year all Looked After children met with elected members from Overview and Scrutiny to feedback how they find life in care in Gateshead. Recently as part of Care Matters 4 members of One Voice attended a Ministerial Stock Take residential event in London to give feedback to members of Parliament and answer a survey to give a national picture of life in care. The young people are looking to use the same survey here in Gateshead with all Looked After children and young people. This will feed their views into the Looked After Children Services Plan and other related plans including this strategy.

## **Views of other Stakeholders**

As part of the development of this strategy, the views of a range of professionals involved in providing services for children and young people have been sought and included. In addition, there has been recent reviews of family support and children with disability services and a reshaping of specialist social work services that asked practitioners and providers of services for their views on 'what works' and 'where are the gaps?'. That information has been included in this documents development.

## Appendix 2

### Current Pattern of Service Provision

#### Fostering services

Gateshead's has 167 fostering households at present caring for a total of 236 children and young people. Currently the fostering service is comprised of mainstream foster carers, two fee paid specialist schemes and a short break scheme for children with disabilities. Kinship carers offer an important placement choice for Looked After Children and the fostering service provide support and training to all family and friend carers.

The fee paid schemes are; professional contract carers who largely provide long-term placements for children and young people with higher levels of need, and Springboard foster carers who are part of a wrap around service for those with the most challenging needs in partnership with therapists and education and family support workers who are attached to the scheme.

The service is currently undergoing a restructure following an independent review. An implementation plan provides detail of the new service that is separated into short term and long term/permanent fostering with a specific focus on emergency, teenage, and complex needs in both strands; the timeline for completion is September 2010. The overall aim is to move to a position where an increased number of young people have positive placements in foster care with improved support and training offered to foster carers and by addressing the difficult behaviour of young people, to mirror the approach of the Springboard scheme.

The review identified a range of actions in order to further develop an integrated service to meet the needs of Looked After Children. Key strategic priorities in the reshaped team and management structure will be to deliver:

- a reduction in externally commissioned placements
- improved local capacity, placement choice and stability with robust levels of safeguarding
- timely achievement of permanent placements
- active service user participation and partner involvement

At an operational level, key priorities will deliver:

- increase in targeted foster carer recruitment and diversity of resources
- implementation of an accommodation plan for Looked After Children
- improved permanence planning processes and long term / permanent provision
- continuous improvement of safeguarding practice

- improved service user participation and delivery of Care Pledge

A Fostering Services Marketing Plan 2009-11 sets out key actions to increase placement choice and capacity. Recruitment is essential too in order to maintain the present levels of mainstream carers as current carers retire or leave the service. A new post is specifically coordinating recruitment activity to support this. In 2010-11 an increase of 30 new foster families are needed to improve the quality and range of foster care placements:

- permanence
- long term and complex needs
- teenage placements and complex needs
- sibling groups and children with disabilities
- emergency

### **Adoption and permanence services**

Gateshead's adoption service has achieved high levels of placement and adoption supports in 2009-10. This achievement has been assisted by a significant financial investment over a number of years recognising the need to increase the number of children placed for permanence who are unable to live with their birth families and the requirements of new legislation.

The **Adoption and Children Act (2002)** and the implementation of the new adoption support regulations and Special Guardianship Orders has placed significant demands on Gateshead's adoption service. Post adoption services are provided both in house and through an independently commissioned service, this gives service users' choice. There has been significant investment to cover these increased responsibilities including an increase of staff in the adoption team and the integrated Looked After Children's teams to ensure children with permanence plans are progressed in a timely manner.

The shift towards permanency planning for a greater proportion of Looked After Children has meant that the team have absorbed a significant increase in family-finding work for children under the age of 8 years and sibling groups. The adoption team have been successful in recruiting in-house adopters for even the most hard to place children and only uses inter agency placements for specific needs usually ethnicity or complex disability. The role of the Recruitment Officer is vital to this task and the 'Parents for Children' project that recruits and supports carers for hard to place children is beginning to have some successes. The Adoption Service Marketing Plan 2009-11 contains key activities to develop placement choice and capacity that will assist with enhanced matching and placement stability.

## **Residential services**

Gateshead Council has restructured its residential services, one of its in-house children's homes was closed in 2009 and finances invested in the development of in-house fostering services. The planned reduction reflects the emphasis placed on caring for children and young people within family placements as far as possible. Of the two remaining children's homes, one has five long-term beds and one has four long-term beds plus one emergency bed. The young people are assisted to move on into independence and outcomes are consistently positive for individuals in both homes.

In addition, Grove House provides short breaks for children with disabilities including those with complex health and learning disabilities with challenging behaviours. The service, provided to over 60 families per year, contributes positively to individual children and young people's health and wellbeing and promotes family stability.

## **Integrated Looked After Children and care planning teams**

Currently there are two integrated social work teams delivering services to children in care and leaving care and they are co-located with the Looked After Children's health team. REALAC education services, Connexions and Housing work together with the integrated team from a Young Peoples Centre that provides group work facilities, a drop-in service, and life skills course as well as specialist health and therapeutic services. There is a new Accommodation Support worker in one social work team to increase supported placement options for the 14 plus age range.

The social work therapists provide an improved offer to Looked After Children focusing on placement stability, training and support to foster carers, children and young people. Social work therapists and the Psychologist are key members of the Placement Stability Working Group.

The increasing number of young people in the older age group remaining Looked After has significant implications for the leaving care budget. The resources within the staff team will be stretched as the number of young people who will reach 18 is predicted to increase significantly by nearly double in 2010-11. This does not take into account those young people who may choose to leave care before they reach 18.

## **Children with Disabilities services**

Currently the Children with Disabilities social work team have responsibility for a small number of Looked After Children at the high end of the autistic

spectrum with associated challenging behaviours or physical disability who have become looked after in residential school settings. Education and health services usually cannot meet their need in borough and a lack of intensive community supports means families cannot manage the stress of their living at home. They are all likely to need accommodation and support to live independently beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and Adult Social Care Services start longer term planning alongside Children's Services generally around their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## **Education services**

The Raising Educational Achievement of Looked After Children team (REALAC) provide a main plank in achieving improved education outcomes in Gateshead as does the Virtual Head who manages the service. The team support Social Workers with the completion of Personal Education Plans and act as a bridge between school and home. With the support of the PEP coordinator, the completion rate of PEPs has risen considerably to 96.6% as of April 2009. A named Educational Psychologist for Looked After Children liaises with all school Psychologists to ensure their needs are highlighted in school planning and liaises with Pupil and Parent Services on provision for Looked After Children and to develop and deliver training and advice for team members.

REALAC deliver the Teenagers To Work scheme that provides work placement and Skills for Life workshops for those aged 14 to 18 years who are not in employment or training. Recently the service has become involved with a national initiative 'From Care2Work' to improve outcomes for young people making the transition from care and education into the workplace or further training. The aim is to develop a national register of employers who sign up to make a clear commitment to improve employment opportunities for this disadvantaged group and to create a 'Quality Mark' for employers involved in the initiative.

## **Health services**

In Gateshead, the Looked After Children's health team is co-located with the integrated social work service in the Young Peoples Resource Centre and in other outreach services. It is a virtual team made up of a Designated Doctor, Designated Nurse, Consultant Psychologist, and works closely with a Drug and Alcohol Targeted Prevention worker and a Sexual Health Promotion worker.

The various posts that make up the virtual team are commissioned and funded through different health agencies such as the PCT and funding streams like the CAMHS grant which can make forward planning a particular challenge. There is benefit for services to young people since the teams co-located as the

designated nurse and others have been able to respond in a timely and direct way to the young person or their professional advisor in the Resource Centre setting.

The health team provides a high-level performing service with health assessments, reviews, immunisations and dental checks meeting or exceeding targets. A significant number of out of area health assessments are undertaken which along with the sharp rise in looked after numbers has placed significant pressure on the team across the range of service provision compounded by gaps when posts have not been filled or there are delays in recruitment.

The team continues to prioritise the provision of training, consultation and support to practitioners, foster carers, adopters, panels, residential care homes, and directly to children and young people themselves. The work of the team makes a positive contribution to placement stability and the health and emotional wellbeing of the LAC population. A recent key development is the use of a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire screening tool following the introduction of a National Indicator NI58 –the Emotional and Behavioural Health of Children in Care.

## **Housing services**

Gateshead Council's Homeless Strategy 2008-13 sets out the council's commitment to meeting homeless need. National Regulations and Guidance identifies young people leaving care as having a 'Priority Need' for accommodation and services. The Gateshead Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers aims to ensure the effective discharge of responsibilities between Children and Families Services, Housing Services and the Gateshead Housing Company by jointly addressing the diverse accommodation needs of young people leaving care, supporting them to become responsible and successful tenants and thereby avoiding the need them to become homeless.

As a response to the new Sufficiency Duty and the Southwark Judgement a needs assessment carried out jointly with Children's Services will refresh strategies and protocols and assist with developing options for appropriate supported accommodation and placement provision.

A Practitioner Group meet regularly to discuss every Care Leaver or Young Offender needing to be housed to assess the most appropriate accommodation pathway and level of support required.

A Homeless Prevention Officer post has been created to work with 16 and 17 year olds many of whom are Young Offenders, Teenage Parents and / or

Looked After Children. Initially the post is for 12 months and if assessed as improving outcomes then Housing Services will look to extend the post.

Accommodation options for vulnerable young people have increased as has the support required to help young people maintain tenancies. There are 2 'Taster Flats' and a new Floating Support Service where 2 young persons support workers provide pre-tenancy and tenancy support. The housing workers link closely with leaving care workers and use the Young Peoples Service to provide drop-in advice and information sessions.

Housing Services have developed a new build supported housing scheme for 16-25 year olds with medium level needs in partnership with South Tyneside. However, there is a need for more direct access / emergency accommodation with high levels of support for young people aged between 16 and 19. This age group need a range of options that include more supported lodgings, taster flats and small cluster arrangements for young people with high levels of need with move on provision to enable young people to take on their own tenancies with floating support. There is also a gap in provision for pregnant care leavers and young families. The Young Persons Housing Working Group have an action plan to address identified gaps and an analysis of need is currently being carried out with Children's Services to recommend potential options for development that will maximise use of limited resources.

### **Independent foster care provision**

As part of the investment of in-house foster care services, we aim to reduce reliance on independent provision except where there is specialist need.

Gateshead, Newcastle and Northumberland Councils currently have an Approved Foster Care Provider List with all Independent Foster Care Agencies across the region signed up to a Gateshead contract. There will be a joint re-tendering exercise to renew contracts, which will utilise an improved performance outcomes framework developed nationally, and this will be in place from 2011. This will effectively manage costs for individual placements, reduce contract management costs, and enhance continuous performance improvement and provider/commissioner relationships.

### **Independent residential care provision**

We also aim to reduce reliance on residential education, secure placements and children's homes placements except where there is evidence of specialist need

Currently provision is arranged through national framework contracts that give us flexibility to spot purchase to meet low levels of need. Before awarding

contracts service providers undergo an accreditation process in terms of quality, cost and effectiveness. Contract specifications are jointly performance managed by Children's Services staff and the Commissioning Team to ensure identified outcomes are met.

These placements are high cost and quality of service delivery is variable. It proves difficult to manage costs and quality due to distance of placements from Gateshead, types of need and structuring of provider costs. Regional opportunities to improve procurement, passport accreditation, and jointly monitor providers and manage costs are being explored where this would bring clear benefits.

### **Minority Ethnic Groups support services**

Currently the annual cost of providing the Sahara Project delivered by IKL Associates is £94,000 per annum split between 11 local authority partners.

Gateshead Council is lead authority for this innovative project that aims to assist local authorities with the recruitment and support of Minority Ethnic foster carers and adopters. Across the region, 11 out of 12 authorities have signed up to a Partnership Agreement to manage the work of the project. An important element of the project is the consultancy and training on Black Perspectives offered to workers, carers, foster carer and adoption panels. Supports offered directly to carers and children enhance placement stability and cultural and religious identities. The project increasingly offers support to children and young people in placement who are Asylum Seekers and refugees.

Local authorities regionally have pooled financial resources and Gateshead holds the contract with the provider, IKL Associates Ltd, on the partner's behalf. Future aims are to review the project and widen its remit to cover all ethnic minority groups in the local population and to explore extending the annual contract to a 3 yearly funding commitment.

### **Adoption support service**

Currently £28, 000 per annum is spent on an independent service. There is a contract in place that is renewable annually.

Adoption services are provided in house and through a Service Level Agreement with After Adoption an independent voluntary organisation, this gives service users independence and choice. The impact of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 has been a significant factor in the increased demand for post adoption support.

## **Independent advocacy and Independent Visitor services**

Currently approximately £15, 000 per annum is spent on an Independent Visitor block contract that is renewable annually and approximately £30,000 on a range of advocacy services.

Action for Children provides spot purchased advocacy services when Looked After Children have a problem that cannot be dealt with by support from Children's Rights workers or their Social Worker. They are sign-posted to participation workers who can provide support to a young person. In some instances, it is more appropriate to make a referral to the Independent Visitor Service also provided by Action for Children.

We are also improving our advocacy offer by commissioning a telephone / IT based advocacy helpline from an independent sector provider for children in need or who are looked after in Gateshead.

Children with disabilities and their families who are receiving services from the council are able to access specialist advocacy services from Your Voice Counts or Barnardos both organisations are commissioned by Children's Services.

Gateshead Your Voice is an advocacy and rights based group led by looked after young people for those who are looked after with support from the council's in-house Childrens Rights Service and the voluntary sector. They are currently developing a peer advocacy scheme with funding from Children's Services.