

# **Sufficiency Strategy for Cared for Children**



**be the difference.**



# Foreword

I am delighted to share with you our local Sufficiency Strategy 2026-2030.

The Local Authority is committed to ensuring that all children in Gateshead thrive and that those most vulnerable receive the support they need to flourish. We are ambitious for the children in our care and want the very best for them. We want to ensure that children's life chances are enhanced and that we reduce inequalities by ensuring that they have access to opportunities to help them succeed.

Meeting the needs of children in care and those who are care experienced is the responsibility of the whole council and its multi-agency partners. We remain committed to working with our partners across health, education, police and the voluntary and community sector to develop services which are ambitious for our children, and which are designed with young people based on their feedback.

This strategy lays out our approach to the way in which we will work to ensure that we have the right services and support in place locally for our children so that they achieve the very best outcomes when they are in our care and as they move into adulthood.

Our ambition is to be the very best corporate parent we can be to our children and for children who are in our care to live in loving, safe homes; close to their families and friends and to support them to remain within their schools and colleges. We are committed to children growing up with a strong sense of Belonging and we know that these are the pillars of stability which provide so many of our children with the building blocks that support them in their lives. As a result of this ambition our strategy has the following aims:

- Support children to live locally and maintain connections with family, friends and schools
- Improve placement stability and prevent placement breakdown
- Support sibling groups to remain living together
- Meet diverse needs
- Reduce reliance on external providers
- Ensure value for money

Where we can, we aim to provide the best support to enable children to remain living within their families and extended families. We are committed to seeking out and finding those in a child's network and working with them to support children.

We know the importance of sibling relationships to so many of our children and are committed to supporting these important connections through the provisions in this strategy.

We want children to experience loving relationships in care and are committed to ensuring a wide range of choice of options locally to meet the wide range of our children's needs. We are committed to ensuring that we have the right number, variety, and quality of foster care, residential care and supported accommodation provision to meet our children's needs.

Our young ambassadors and our children in care council are central to the way in which we will measure the success of this strategy and action plan as the success of our approach will be in the feedback from the children who need our support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Fergusson'.

Helen Fergusson

Director of Children's Services and Lifelong Learning

# Introduction

The purpose of this Sufficiency Strategy is to set out the current position and future intentions in Gateshead to ensure the local authority can provide sufficient, appropriate and high-quality placements and support for all cared-for children. The Sufficiency Strategy supports our statutory duties under the Children Act 1989 and aligns with our corporate parenting principles. It also echoes the vision and priorities set out in our Corporate Plan and Children and Young People's Partnership Strategy.

## Strategic aims

Our strategic aims are to:

- support children to live locally and maintain connections with family, friends and schools
- improve placement stability and prevent placement breakdown
- support sibling groups to remain living together
- meet diverse needs
- reduce reliance on external providers,
- and ensure value for money

## Context and rationale

Under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, the Council has a duty to provide accommodation for any child in need within Gateshead as a result of:

- (a) there being no person with parental responsibility for the child
- (b) the child having been lost or abandoned; or
- (c) the person who has been caring for the child being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing the child with suitable accommodation or care.

Children or young people who are provided with accommodation by the Council are referred to as "children who are cared for". The child or young person can be cared for on a voluntary basis where there is consent from the parents (Section 20). Where parents do not agree to the care arrangement, but the Local Authority still believes it is in the child's best interests to be cared for outside of their

parent(s) care, the Authority may apply to the court for a legal order so that the child can become cared for.

The council has a duty, as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within the local authority area.

The 2010 guidance on the sufficiency duty states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet the duty.

The sufficiency duty must take account of the requirement, under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989, that the overriding consideration for placing a child is that the living arrangement must be the most appropriate available to meet the child's needs. Next, preference must be given to a living arrangement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a living arrangement must be found, as far as is reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:

- is near the child's home
- is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.
- enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling
- where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and does not disrupt his/her education or training

Gateshead Council's Children's Social Care Service continues to face significant and sustained pressure due to rising demand, increasing complexity of need, and long-standing financial challenges. Demand is driven by children with complex needs, including mental health issues, disabilities, and risk of exploitation or neglect. While the number of children entering care is beginning to decline, it remains high, with a continued reliance on high-cost residential placements due to limited foster and secure care capacity.

The cost of care is escalating, compounded by a national shortage of suitable placements and workforce challenges linked to the residential workforce. Gateshead continues to experience higher than average rates across key children's social care indicators, including Children in Need (CIN) and Children in Care (CiC). These elevated figures have several implications for the local authority:

**Placement sufficiency:** There is a shortage of local foster and residential placements, particularly for older children and those with complex needs.

**Workforce challenges:** High complexity impacting social worker capacity; Recruitment and retention of experienced social workers remain difficult, contributing to service strain.

**Financial pressures:** High-cost placements and increasing demand are placing significant strain on the council’s budget and demand for placements, staffing, legal services, and support packages.

**System-wide support:** Changes underway in the NHS are leading to resource challenges that risk impacting on effective partnership working.

## Strategic objectives

In the context of the challenges being faced, our strategic objectives in relation to cared for children are:

Objective	Outcome
<p>Increase opportunities for children and young people to be cared for in or as close to Gateshead as possible</p>	<p>Increased proportion of cared-for children and young people placed within Gateshead within 20 miles of home.</p> <p>Children succeed when they remain connected to their home, communities, schools and support networks. Familiarity promotes stability, continuity of education, and access to health and social care services. It also strengthens relationships with families and friends and in addition supports emotional wellbeing.</p> <p>Reducing out of area placements helps minimise disruption and ensures better oversight and quality assurance from an operational and commissioning perspective.</p>
<p>Improve placement matching and stability</p>	<p>Improved placement stability and reduced disruption to education and health services.</p>
<p>Strengthen commissioning and market engagement</p>	<p>Strong, transparent and collaborative relationships with providers, clear identification of local needs, and effective commissioning arrangements to ensure high</p>

	quality and cost-effective provision that focuses on child-centered outcomes.
Enhance wraparound support (education, health, emotional wellbeing)	Wraparound services covering education, health, emotional wellbeing and social inclusion are essential to ensure stability and reduce the risk of placement breakdown.
Promote permanency and reduce time in care	Prioritising timely permanency through kinship care, long-term fostering or adoption means children and young people grow up in stable environments and reduces reliance on care placements.

To support us to achieve these objectives, seven key priorities have been identified, which are:

- 1) Reduce the overall numbers of children in care and the length of time they remain in care
- 2) Reduce the number of children in external residential care and bespoke arrangements
- 3) Improve placement stability and reduce the risk of placement breakdown
- 4) Support for children to exit care, where safe to do so
- 5) Strengthen and increase in-house fostering provision
- 6) Ensure children and young people with ongoing health needs are identified early and proactive engagement with NHS colleagues continues.
- 7) Strengthen post 16 provision through:
  - commissioning further supported housing for 16/17 year olds
  - developing a holistic young person's housing pathway
  - strengthening joint working protocols between Children's Services and Housing

## Sufficiency challenges

There are gaps in local, specialist therapeutic placements, especially for older children and those with complex emotional or behavioural needs. There is a need to strengthen local residential provision, trauma-informed delivery and mental health wraparound support, reducing dependence on isolated placements out of area.

The authority depends heavily on external providers, with only limited in-house residential homes. This restricts supply and drives up costs in respect of out-of-area activity. However, there are plans in place to incrementally develop new in-

borough homes and engage nearby registered providers to participate in commissioning dialogue, but this is an area of development. Current demand versus local supply, influences use of placements outside Gateshead, risking disruption and variability and stability for children and young people

Gateshead have a fostering recruitment strategy which identifies specialist, mainstream and connected carers as areas for development.

Current fostering capacity does not fully support children with mental health, SEND, or trauma-related needs, increasing pressure on residential or agency placements.

While trauma-informed models like “Trusting Hands” and CAMHS exist, there are gaps in community provision for children and young people with mild to moderate emotional needs. There is a need for wrap around therapeutic support, and a more integrated joint commissioning approach is necessary to providing therapeutic support within foster and residential placements. This in turn will reduce waiting times in the system if a more joined up approach to a graduated response to address need is achieved, especially for those children and young people with trauma, abuse, or self-harm issues.

There is a gap in respect of registered provision for complex needs: Complex behaviour, SEND, and autism-specialist residential care is underrepresented in local commissioning frameworks.

Lack of secure/semi-supported placements: There is a shortfall in semi-independent or secure placements for older teenagers or those requiring greater safeguarding support.

Addressing these gaps requires clear commissioning strategies to:

- Grow local residential care (in-house and provider partnerships)
- Expand specialist fostering services
- Enhance tiered mental health support
- Introduce secure/semi-independent living options
- Strengthen market insight and data-driven forecasting

## Summary of local commissioning gaps

Area	Key gaps in delivery
<b>Residential</b>	Limited in-house homes, high reliance on external and out-of-area placements
<b>Fostering</b>	Insufficient specialist and connected person placements
<b>Mental Health</b>	Under-provision for mild/moderate needs; therapeutic support gaps

<b>SEND</b>	Few specialist homes; absence of supported or secure placements
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# Sufficiency assessment

## Fostering

Fostering is the most used form of care with 59% of our children living in fostering households, with 46% of these children living in in-house provision. 14% of our children are living in kinship arrangements and 13% in independent provision, as at September 2025. The most recent North East average for foster care placements is 69% and the England and Statistical Neighbour average is 67%. Gateshead benchmarks favourably at 73% (note this is the total of Kinship, IFA and In House Fostering).

The number of children living in in-house foster care has continued to increase with an ongoing reduction in the use of independent fostering provision. However, we continue to experience challenges in relation to foster carer sufficiency due to foster carers retiring, taking a break, and beds being blocked due to the increasing complexity of needs of children. We have experienced a reduction in foster carer recruitment, and this is a trend that is being experienced nationally and by Independent Foster Agencies.

The age profile of children living in foster care broadly reflects the age profile of cared for children overall. Half of all children living in in house foster care are aged 10-15; 75% of all children living in independent fostering provision are aged 10-17.

Age Group	Total cared for %	Total foster care %	In house foster care %	IFA %
0-1	6	6	7	3
2-4	7	5	4	5
5-9	18	22	24	17
10-15	44	48	50	44
16-17	25	19	15	31

Based on our numbers of children in care, we need more foster carers so children can be cared for in a family setting. The foster carers required moving forward are not limited one particular cohort of children or the meeting of one particular area of need. We require foster carers that can offer solo placements, carers that can offer homes to large siblings groups in addition to carers who can support our teenage young people. We have a large teenage cohort of young people and alongside the need to for foster carers to support these young

people, they will also require additional skills around support teenage young people.

In Gateshead we offer Fostering Clusters which support children to be in a shared care arrangement, this can sometimes avoid our children and young people going into residential care. Therefore, foster carers who could support a shared care arrangement are also needed.

We also have Mockingbird Constellations which offer increased peer support to our foster carers in addition to the increased offer of sleepovers with the Hub carers. This support allows the foster carers to build an extended support network around themselves and the children and young people they care for.

We do have a need for respite carers who can offer respite to foster carers in addition to families who have children with complex needs and require some additional support in the form of respite care.

We have developed an offer of Community Foster Carers, who work directly with our foster carers and support placement stability. Additionally, they will work into the community to support edge of care work and can support children and families rather than those children coming into care.

When our young people turn 18 our Foster Carers offer Staying Put where the young people can continue to live in the foster home up until they are 21 years old. Whilst this offers excellent support to our young people, there is an effect on foster care sufficiency whilst young people extend their time within the home. There were 21 children in Staying Put arrangements as at January 2026, 14 of which were in-house Fostering and 7 were independent Foster Carers.

## Supported lodgings

When looking at our cohort of young people leaving care, it was noted that we have a gap in our provision for our young people post 16 years that may not have the offer of a Staying Put arrangement or where they cannot manage a supported accommodation provision or independent living. We are developing a Supported Lodgings service to support this gap in resource. Ofsted registration is pending and recruitment campaigns are underway.

## Kinship care (family, friends and connected foster care)

Children who are cared for can be placed into the care of a family member or friend, provided a viability assessment concludes that this would be safe, viable and in the child's best interests (the assessment determines whether the living

arrangements are suitable for the child and are defined in the Fostering Regulations). In these circumstances the family or friend can be temporarily approved under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations as a kinship foster carer for a 16-week period and in exceptional circumstances, this may be extended for a further 8 weeks. During this period, the family/friend/connected person(s) providing kinship foster care will be paid a Fostering Allowance for the child identical to that received by qualified foster carers.

At the end of October 2025, there were 78 children in kinship arrangements. The age profile of these children again, broadly reflects the age profile of all children in our care. The largest proportion in Kinship arrangements are children aged 10 to 15 (42%), followed by children aged 5 to 9 years old (24%). 14% of children are aged 2 to 4 and 10% aged 16 to 17 years old. 9% of children are under 2.

The Council also recognises that to provide safe and effective care, kinship carers may need additional specialist support. If care arrangements are in danger of breaking down or the child has additional needs, examples of advice and support include mediation and counselling services helping children maintain family time with parents, other relatives or important adults, therapeutic support; Child and Young People's Services support as required.

A family group conference is an approach to planning and decision-making which builds on the strengths, skills and experience of the wider family as well as professionals. Gateshead Council uses family group conferences to help find solutions to difficulties a family might face in bringing up and caring for children. Examples of when a conference or family network meeting could be used include issues with family relationships, family time, children's behavioural difficulties and school attendance.

Gateshead Council is committed to ensuring that no child should become 'cared for' because of inadequate housing. Housing services provided by the Council and its partners can make an important contribution to promoting kinship care arrangements by assisting carers to secure suitable housing. Housing Authorities and registered social landlords are engaged to ensure that their policies recognise the importance of the role performed by kinship carers and that whenever possible, kinship carers living in social housing are given appropriate priority to move to more suitable accommodation if this will prevent the need for a child to become cared for. Gateshead Council's lettings policy incorporates measures to ensure that preventative actions can be taken to avoid the need for a child to become "cared for".

Gateshead Council recognises the importance of continuity of education for children and young people. Advice and guidance on educational matters for children cared for by family and friends is provided, by directing carers to the most appropriate helplines or services. Young people aged 16 -19 in kinship

placements may be entitled to the Government funded bursary scheme. Priority schools' admissions are available for those children who were in Local Authority care but who are now placed with their family under a Child Arrangements Order, Special Guardianship Order or Adoption Order


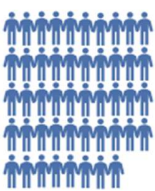
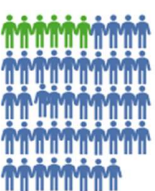







Kinship carers may sometimes feel isolated when they take on this role, particularly when they are dealing with the complex needs of vulnerable children for which they had not planned. Getting together with others in a similar position can often be an invaluable source of support in itself. Support groups are a valuable way of helping carers to access information about services which will help them to care for the children, as well as ensuring that they are treated with understanding and respect and receive emotional support. Therefore, Gateshead Council will continue to work with its partner agencies and the voluntary and faith sectors to find ways to encourage peer support and access to support groups. There are currently support groups for our kinship carers that are delivered across the borough.

## Children's homes

Based on our number of children in care, the demand for children's home provision and the complexity of children entering care, we continue to invest in the development of new smaller children's homes so children can live closer to home.

At January 2026, there are 48 independent children's homes beds in Gateshead, across 15 homes. Of these, only 13% are used by Gateshead Council for Gateshead children. The remaining beds are used by regional local authorities. None are used by local authorities outside of the North-East region. This often makes it difficult to identify local children's home provision for our children and young people.

The diagram below shows the distribution of provision in Gateshead, utilization of provision by Gateshead Council and additional provision in development as at January 2026:

EXTERNAL MARKET	15 Homes 	48 Placements 	6 Gateshead Placements 	2 in Development 	9 Additional Beds 
	4 Homes 	17 Placements 	38 Placements in External Market 	2 in Development 	7 Additional Beds 

As of December 2025, Gateshead was supporting 47 children and young people in residential provision, representing 9.4% of all children in our care. This remains below the national average of 12% of children in care living in residential children’s homes. Of those in residential provision locally, 7% were placed in external homes, while 2.4% were living in Gateshead’s in-house residential homes.

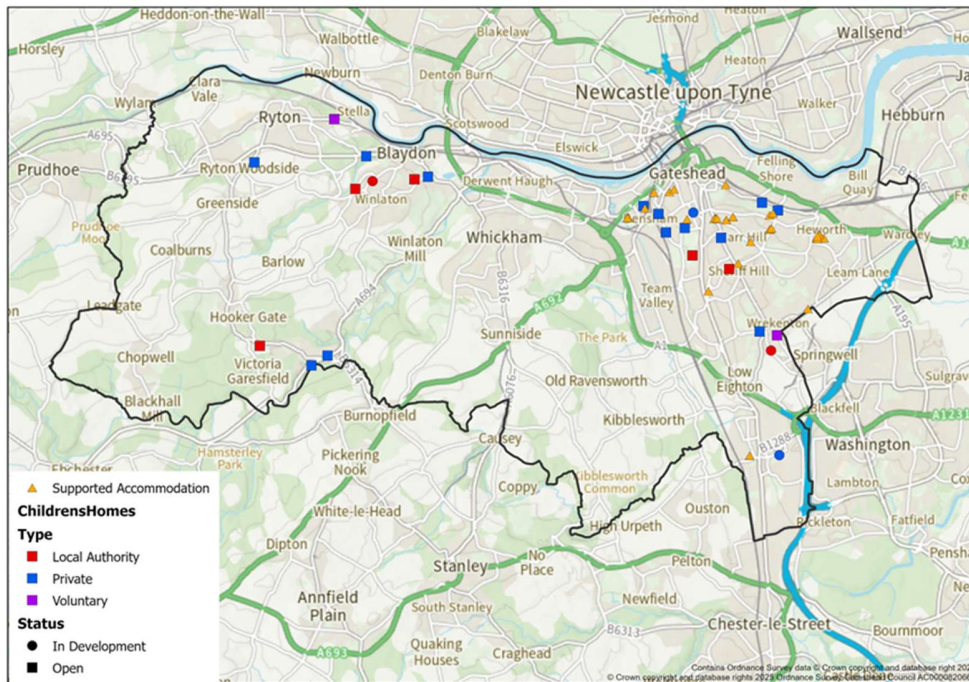
Despite maintaining a lower rate of residential use than the national picture, demand continues to exceed our internal capacity. Of our children in residential care 35 children (74%) are placed in external residential homes, compared with 12 children (26%) living in Gateshead Council’s own homes. This level of external reliance presents ongoing challenges around placement availability, cost, stability, and proximity to local support networks.

The needs profile of children living in residential care is significant. Eighty-nine percent (42) of the current cohort have an identified Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND). The most prevalent needs are Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs (20%), followed by Cognition and Learning needs (13%). Residential homes also support young people who are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and those who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), further highlighting the complexity of the cohort.

Age demographics also reflect shifting patterns of need. Among children living in residential homes, 55% are aged 10–15, while 43% are aged 16–17. Notably, 75% of 16–17-year-olds in residential care live in Gateshead Council’s own homes. This indicates relative strengths in meeting the needs of older young people through internal provision, while younger adolescents continue to drive demand for external placements.

These patterns collectively underline the importance of expanding and diversifying Gateshead's in-borough residential offer. Increasing local provision will improve placement choice, reduce reliance on out of borough homes, support better local outcomes, and enhance stability for children with increasingly complex needs

The map below shows current provision of children's homes across Gateshead:



We encourage all providers to contact us prior to developing new homes in Gateshead to ensure that proposals are in line with our local needs and gaps in provision and due diligence is considered. We influence and shape homes that are being developed and offer challenge at the planning application stage when homes are not in line with our needs. We ask providers operating in Gateshead to work in a Gateshead First Approach, which results in more of our children and young people living closer to home. This oversight will support Ofsted's commitment to prioritise applications where there is a clearly identified local need and/or current placement options are insufficient.

As children and young people's needs become more complex, we increasingly require children's homes that care for a smaller number of children (1-2 children). Providers proposing to develop anything outside of this should discuss their proposals with us. It is important that we have the right type of homes, that are ethical and offer transparency, in the right locations that can provide stable, trauma informed care, by a skilled, knowledgeable and experienced care team at a sustainable cost.

## Staying close

We know that as young people move on from a children's home, being able to still live close to places and people they know can help young people feel good and make sure they are supported with everyday life. With Staying Close, those young people who would like to live independently have the opportunity to try this out for up to 6 weeks in a flat that is set up for our young people.

We will agree with our young people what sort of things we will support them with and how many hours of support they will get. Help around how to live independently includes support to:

- manage your own property
- look after yourself
- stay in education or training
- manage money, like sticking to a budget and paying bills
- stay safe where you live

We need our young people to be doing or have already done an Independent Living Skills Program at their children's home. This will help the young people learn some of the basic skills they need when they leave the children's home, such as cooking or sticking to a budget. We will help the young people build on these skills when they move.

As set out in the Children's Wellbeing and School Bill, the program is designed to support eligible "former relevant children" up to the age of 25, where their welfare requires it, with:

- finding and keeping suitable accommodation,
- accessing services relating to:
  - health and wellbeing,
  - relationships,
  - education and training,
  - employment; and
  - participating in society.

A dedicated Staying Close Co-Ordinator works with the young people and supports around all areas of Staying Close.

We also offer monthly "Life Nights" Sessions for Care Leavers - an informal, social way for care leavers to build independence, confidence and essential life skills aligned with the four Preparing for Adulthood areas:

- Accommodation & Living Skills
- Education/Training/Employment
- Health & Wellbeing
- Relationships/Community.

Further on, young people are supported to live on their own for 12 months via an Introductory Tenancy Service, which provides up to 30 tenancies with support for 18-25 year olds and is a key service for moving young people onto independent living. This service is currently undergoing a review and this will inform future sufficiency needs to ensure young people have enough housing options help them move on to living independently.

## Young persons supported accommodation pathway

Supported accommodation for young people represents 5% of all children in care provision. As we support our young people to develop independence skills and prepare them for leaving care, we require local providers to continue to develop Ofsted registered supported accommodation provision that can grow based on our fluctuating needs. We encourage all providers to contact us prior to developing new supported accommodation provision in Gateshead to ensure that proposals are in line with our local needs and gaps in provision and due diligence is considered. It is important that we have the right type of provision, that is ethical and offers transparency, in the right locations that can provide stable, tailored support, by skilled, knowledgeable and experienced support staff, at a sustainable cost. This oversight will support Ofsted's commitment to prioritise applications where there is a clearly identified local need and/or current placement options are insufficient.

In 2024, the Council refreshed its commissioning plan for supported accommodation for 16-21 year olds, to meet levels of need and demand through the following provision (76 units in total):

- Emergency Accommodation 16-21yrs (20 units)
- Complex Needs Supported Accommodation 16-21yrs (8 Units)
- Medium Needs Supported Accommodation 16-17 years (5 Units)
- Medium Needs Supported Accommodation 18-21yrs (13 Units)
- Dispersed Supported Housing 16-17yrs (9 Units)
- Dispersed Accommodation 18-21yrs (21 Units)

All contracts were awarded, with the exception of the dispersed supported accommodation for 16-17 year olds, which is an outstanding need that remains a priority for the Council.

Further single homelessness provision is due to become available early in 2026 and will provide an additional 10 units into the pathway for 18-25 year olds, which in turn will deliver more move on options for 16-17 year olds and take the total units within the commissioned pathway up to 86.

An overview of how this provision fits with our wider housing options available to young people can be found in Appendix 3, My Housing Journey. This shows the full range of provision and support available until a young person can live independently in their own home.

## Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

We support our UASC young people that either present to the local authority or via the NTS scheme. Currently our UASC young people that are assessed to need support from a foster care will be offered foster care, either in-house or via an IFA. Those older UASC are able to be supported in shared properties with floating support. Those UASC that are post 18 yrs also sit on the young person's supported accommodation pathway, where supported accommodation is made available.

Sufficiency for the overall supported accommodation pathway will remain under review on a quarterly and annual basis to inform any further need and demand and commissioning activity.

## Secure accommodation

Secure care accommodation is a type of residential care that restricts the freedom of children and young people under the age of 18 years. It is for the small number of children and young people who may be a significant risk to themselves or others in the community, and where it has been determined by a court that their needs and risks can only be managed in a controlled setting. Secure care aims to provide intensive support and boundaries to help young people move forward positively in their lives while keeping them and/or other people safe.

There are individually managed secure children's homes throughout England and Wales encompassing a range of services within a secure environment that support the individual needs of the children in their care. They provide placements for boys and girls aged between 10 and 17 and provide full residential care, educational facilities and healthcare provision. In addition there are Local Authority run secure children's homes in the region. It is a small number of children or young people that we accommodate within these settings in any one year, therefore it would be a single referral to the secure portal where the referral would be shared to those settings who could best meet the needs of the particular child or young person.

# Care workforce

It is a strategic priority to increase the number of in-house foster carers in Gateshead. Currently we have:

- 69 long term carers
- 50 short term carers
- 13 respite carers
- 4 home from home carers
- 5 Community Foster Carers

We have residential staff (RCCO) who offer care and support to our children and young people. RCCO's are all either qualified or working towards their level 4 and Registered Managers holding level 5 qualifications.

With the introduction of Supported Lodgings, our hosts will go through a training offer that is equivalent to that of a foster carer. Our recruitment identifies those hosts that have transferable skills from other sectors of the workforce.

# Support services

## Advocacy

Advocacy is a statutory requirement under the Children Act 1989. It ensures that the voices of children and young people are heard in decisions that affect their lives. Independent Advocacy empowers children to express their wishes and feelings, challenge decisions and access their rights, promoting transparency and accountability in care.

Gateshead Council commissions independent advocacy service for children in care, care leavers and those subject to child protection processes. Awareness and uptake of services need to be strengthened to ensure all eligible children and young people know how to access support.

In terms of increasing awareness, we will deliver targeted communication campaigns and training for social workers, carers and young people to promote advocacy services.

## Transition support for our care experienced young people

Within the Care Experienced team, we have Personal Advisors who work with our young people to assess and support the accommodation needs of the young people. We work in partnership with our housing teams and jointly facilitate an accommodation pathway.

For young people who have been living in our residential homes we support via the Staying Close project. This project offers support on a 1-1 basis to prepare young people for independence and supports the transition from residential to their new accommodation, working with accommodation partners.

We publish up-to-date information about the services we offer for care leavers and other services which may assist care leavers in or preparing for adulthood and independent living. The local offer covers health and well-being; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation; participation in society.

Our care leavers should be aware of and understand the local offer, which is ambitious, clear and accessible. It takes account of the corporate parenting principles and sets out how we as the local authority deliver on young people's statutory entitlements and what further discretionary support the local authority offers.

The local authority consults care leavers effectively on the local offer and monitors how effective the local offer is at providing good experiences for young people and helping them to make progress. We review and update the offer regularly to ensure that it continues to meet young people's needs.

Children's services should work closely with other local authority departments and local partners to develop a multi-agency offer for care leavers that supports their overall well-being. The Corporate Parenting Board take ownership of the offer and monitors its effectiveness.

## Trauma-informed support

Trauma-informed support is offered to practitioners in Gateshead by Trusting Hands, a multidisciplinary team working into Gateshead Childrens Services.

The core offer is a graduated approach consisting of:

- Connected conversation: advice, guidance and reflection is offered to a Children's Services practitioner, facilitated by a Trusting Hands clinician.

- For young people with multi-agency involvement, support is facilitated by two clinicians to provide support around mentalisation. The purpose of the consultation is to develop a trauma-informed understanding of the young person's presentation, provide guidance on their care pathway, and support the system working around the child and family.
- Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) Clinic: advice and guidance is offered to multiagency practitioners by an Advanced Speech and Language Therapist.
- Understanding the Story ("Formulation"): For children and young people with multiple and complex needs, and/or significant multiagency involvement. Understanding the Story sessions are facilitated by two Trusting Hands clinicians and support the system to develop a shared understanding of the young person's risks, needs, and vulnerabilities, in the context of their life experiences.
- Intervention: Where indicated, Trusting Hands clinicians will offer indirect support to the system around the young person. This is agreed in line with the identified needs, and may include: providing resources, offering a trauma-informed lens within care or risk planning meetings, providing advice or consultation to professionals or carers, or specific SLCN advice and support

## Virtual school

Gateshead Virtual School is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of Gateshead Children in our Care (CIOC). Education is central to all decision making regarding the welfare of our children and will feature in all care planning together with social care colleagues. Social workers, VSH, IROs, school admission officers, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) team will work together to ensure that, except in an emergency, appropriate education provision for a child is arranged at the same time as a care placement.

## In-house training

Where an external provider is caring for one of our children or young people and that child or young person has complex needs that we are supporting the care team with via the delivery of training, this training offer will also be extended to the key workers from an external provider.

## Community foster carers

Gateshead has a key resource – Community Foster Carers who are skills foster carers that support families on the edge of care and our in-house foster carers with peer support and placement stability. Where appropriate this offer is extended to our external providers to support stability for our children and young people.

# Our approach to market engagement and commissioning

Gateshead Council adopts a practical and collaborative approach to market engagement and commissioning to ensure placement sufficiency for children and young people. Our strategy is built on strong partnerships with providers, a clear understanding of local needs and a commitment to commissioning high-quality, cost-effective care.

We maintain regular individual and collective dialogue with providers through:

- Provider Forums and Partnership Meetings – fostering transparency and collaboration
- Regional Care Cooperative Engagement (RCC) aligning commissioning priorities across the North- East
- Feedback mechanisms – ensuring provider input informs service development and quality improvement

These activities enable us to share sufficiency data, discuss emerging needs and co-design solutions to enhance placement stability.

Our commissioning principles are:

- Child-centered outcomes – prioritising stability, safety and wellbeing
- Effective quality assurance – robust monitoring of Ofsted ratings, safeguarding compliance and contract management
- Value for money - balancing cost efficiency with quality of care
- Innovation and flexibility – encouraging providers to develop bespoke solutions for children and young people with complex needs

We utilise regional frameworks and dynamic purchasing systems to secure placements efficiently while maintaining high standards.

Quality of provision is monitored through:

- Regular contract reviews and performance audits for internal and external placements
- Safeguarding checks and compliance with statutory requirements
- Continuous improvement plans informed by provider feedback, Ofsted and Regulation 44 inspections

## Current market position

While in-house Fostering remains our preferred option, demand for residential and specialist placements continues to rise, particularly for children and young people with high level emotional and behavioural needs. Geographic analysis shows a significant proportion of placements outside Gateshead, highlighting the need to expand local provision.

To address the needs of our children and young people, we will adopt a whole-system, needs-led approach that ensures every child receives the right support, in the right place, at the right time. This means developing provision that is established in early identification, high-quality assessment, strong multi-agency collaboration, and a clear pathway of support that prioritises safety, stability, wellbeing, and opportunity.

## Gateshead's commitment to providers

We have developed a set of commitments to support partnership working with our providers, demonstrating our parenting commitment by working effectively together as a team around our children:

- Provide high quality assessments and care plans
- Ensure we provide timely paperwork
- Ask you if we are getting this right, listen and work together to resolve
- Bring in specialist expertise and support where children have specific needs
- Work together to ensure timely access to health services
- Work together to hold risk and support during a crisis
- Do what it takes to ensure stability
- Work together to ensure quality improves and support improvement plans resulting from changes to an Ofsted judgement
- Celebrate your successes in achieving high quality outcomes for our children and promote best practice

# Financial sufficiency

## Latest financial position (November 2025)

Significant budget pressures remain within external residential placements, internal children’s homes and Agency Fostering. However, the Children Social Care Financial Recovery Plan remains on track and ahead of schedule, which has reduced the overall overspend from the start of the financial year by over £1m. As the placement mix changes to focus on the best and most affordable care packages, expenditure will vary either up or down across the types of provision used. All placement budgets will be assessed and adjusted at the end of the financial year, which should reduce the amount of budget volatility in 2026/27 which should also be improved by MTFs growth and further interventions delivered through the Children’s Social Care Financial Recovery Plan. The table below sets out the forecast expenditure for 2025/26 for each placement type, showing the budget and budget variance.

Forecast cost (£m)	Nov-25	Unit Cost per week (£)	Budget	Over / (under) spend
External Residential	15.373	6,681	12.933	2.440
GMBC Homes	5.020	5,422	3.725	1.295
Agency Fostering	3.627	1,301	2.615	1.012
Supported Accommodation	0.731	2,393	0.000	0.731
Secure	0.623	0	0.000	0.623
Remand	0.339	0	0.000	0.339
In House Fostering	6.382	614	6.102	0.280
Kinship Care	0.959	277	0.916	0.042
Hospital	0.000	0	0.000	0.000
Placement with parents	0.000	0	0.000	0.000
Placed for Adoption	0.313	524	0.373	-0.060
Grand Total	33.366	1,974	26.664	6.702

## Cost drivers

The most fundamental cost driver is the number of children entering and exiting care. The complexity of need and associated cost of care packages is another key driver as whilst our activity is improving, children entering care are doing so with more complex needs which is reflected in the cost of provision.

The impact of inflation, cost of living, National Insurance and associated pay awards are all also contributing to costs.

Sufficiency in terms of placement supply within Gateshead and the associated costs of out of borough placements which are usually more expensive are also a contributory factor.

## Value for money

As part of placement searches, cost breakdowns are requested by providers to ensure, as far as possible, value for money is being achieved. This supports informed discussions with providers prior to the placement commencing and supports a greater understanding of provider costs in different parts of the market.

With the NE12 regional commissioning arrangements (Northeast 12 Local Authorities) now dissolved, Gateshead is currently left without an active procurement framework, creating a significant challenge from a commissioning perspective. This creates a pressing need to establish or adopt an alternative model to ensure continuity, compliance, and effective delivery of residential services.

In addition, the absence of a structured procurement framework presents a significant financial risk, as it minimises our ability to secure consistent pricing, manage economies of scale, and implement value for money placements. A structured approach provides essential financial controls and a transparent basis for budget planning and performance monitoring.

In the absence of a framework, a local cost of care model has been developed, designed to provide a consistent evidence-based method for evaluating provider uplift requests. The model ensures that financial decisions are transparent and details workforce expenditure, service delivery requirements and inflationary pressures. By applying a structured approach, the model strengthens financial governance, details fair and sustainable provider fees and enhances Gateshead's ability to demonstrate value for money

There is clear scope to explore the development of a new residential framework that can provide structured procurement, financial assurance, and a consistent approach to commissioning moving forward.

## Newton complex care diagnostic – Spring 2025

Newton's work aimed to better understand the needs, costs, and placement patterns of children and young people with complex care needs, both regionally and within Gateshead. The diagnostic explored opportunities for improved

collaboration, sufficiency, outcomes, and financial sustainability. It also examined the wider children in our care cohort to identify cost pressures and areas for improved outcomes.

Key Findings about Needs, Costs & Placement Patterns:

- Trauma and mental health needs are the most common drivers of high-cost placements.
- 1 in 3 children and young people were not in their ideal placement to best meet their needs.
- Placement instability is a major issue: most children and young people in high-cost care had multiple previous placement moves (fostering – residential - bespoke).
- Strong links exist between placement breakdowns and escalating costs.
- Providers often lack complete information at referral stage, impacting confidence, matching, and price.
- Price negotiation is inconsistent across placements and often not grounded in clear need-based costing.

The diagnostic reinforces the need to:

- Strengthen consistent, high-quality assessments and referrals
- Improve stability in fostering and residential placements
- Address placement breakdowns earlier through targeted support
- Improve commissioning practice, market understanding, and negotiation capacity
- Build stronger partnerships with providers, grounded in transparency and co-production
- Review the prevalence and necessity of solo placements
- Develop fostering capacity for children and young people with complex behaviours
- Understand long-term trajectories and adulthood transitions for children and young people in high-cost care

## **Action plan delivery, monitoring and evaluation**

The Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan has been developed to ensure we remain focused on achieving our objectives by tracking the delivery of the priorities. It can be found at Appendix 1. Progress against the Action Plan will be reported to Sufficiency Board and Corporate Parenting Board on a quarterly basis.

We will review this Sufficiency Strategy and our Action Plan on an annual basis to ensure we reflect achievements and continue to set realistic and meaningful priorities and targets. We will also use the annual review to reflect on feedback from children and young people, and ensure their views are incorporated into the refresh of the Action Plan.

## References

[About Gateshead - Gateshead Council](#)

[Joint Strategic Needs Assessment - Gateshead JSNA](#)

[Corporate Plan 2025-30 - Gateshead Council](#)

[Children and Young People's Partnership Strategy for Gateshead \(2025-2030\) - Gateshead Council](#)

[Gateshead SEND Strategy 2023-26 - Gateshead Council](#)

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Sufficiency Action Plan

Appendix 2 – Data and Intelligence

Appendix 3 – My Housing Journey

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Sufficiency action plan

Priority	Action	Initiative	Lead	Timescales	Outcome
Reduce the overall numbers of children in care and the length of time they remain in care	Reduce 0-2yr olds entering care.	Develop pre-birth offer across the service to support reduction of 0-2yr olds entering care and remaining safely with birth families and family networks.	Head of Function Children in our Care & Resources	Feb 2026	Reduction of 0-2yr olds entering care and remaining safely with birth families and family networks.
	Implement robust decision making manels for entry into care – Complete (Process in place as part of Business as Usual)		Heads of Function, Children’s Social Care	Ongoing	Children will only come into care where it is appropriate and all other supports have been exhausted
	Implement the Reunification strategy	Roll out relational practice throughout the service	Head of Function Children in our Care & Resources	Update & review June 2026	Increase the number of Children & Young people who will return to parents or extended family

		Transfer the family rather than the child			
Reduce the number of children in external residential care and bespoke arrangements	Continue to encourage and support Kinship Care	Promote the improved local offer for Kinship Carers	Practice Lead Children in Care Resources	Update in April 2026	An increase in the number of children staying with extended family
	Increase in-house children's home provision	Acquisition and works for a Children's Home (Fell View)	Head of Function – Children in our Care and Resources	Sept 2026	Additional 3 beds in Gateshead
	Undertake a capacity and demand analysis, predict and plan for future needs and identify optimum utilisation of internal and external provision	Capacity and needs analysis across the internal and external market	Head of Function Children in our Care & Resources & Lead Commissioner	Update June 2026	Support sufficiency and reduce the number of external and unregulated placements
	Influence the market to ensure proposals for new provision are in line with our sufficiency requirements.	Improved market engagement and commissioning relationships	Lead Commissioner	Ongoing	Greater access to local placements and reduce cost pressures
Improve placement stability and reduce the risk of placement breakdown	Increase the use of Gateshead beds for Gateshead children	Work with the local and regional market to support the development of	Head of Function – Children in Care and Resources/ Lead Commissioner	Ongoing	Increased proportion of Gateshead children in Gateshead placements

		meaningful sufficiency for Gateshead Children			
	Review commissioning intentions	Continuously review our commissioning intentions to ensure planned activity contributes to sufficiency priorities	Strategic Commissioning Manager	Ongoing	Strategic commissioning activity makes a demonstrable difference to sufficiency
	Review quality assurance and contract management mechanisms	Develop and implement a strengthened Quality Assurance Framework for all external and internal provision, including	Lead Commissioner/ Commissioning Officer / Contract Management Officers	Framework design: Apr–Jun 2026  Implementation: Jul–Dec 2026 Jan 2026	Strengthened oversight with providers and compliance around provision
	Increase awareness of advocacy services	Deliver targeted communication campaigns and training for social workers, carers and young people	Principal Social Worker	March 2026 and quarterly reminder thereafter	Increased awareness and understanding of advocacy provision. Evidence of increased utilization of advocacy

	Address gaps in specialist therapeutic provision to strengthen and stabilize local specialist placements for children and young people with complex / emotional behavioral needs	Commission new therapeutic residential provision and expand trauma informed delivery	Strategic Commissioning Manager	Initial scoping 2026 and a phased development 27/28	Reduce out of area placements and improve local stability
	Improve support for children with mental health, SEND and Trauma needs	Develop integrated graduated therapeutic wrap around support across all placement activity	Strategic Commissioning Manger / Head of Function / ICB	2027	Faster access to therapeutic support
	Address gaps in complex-needs provision and commission specialist SEND and autism-specific residential provision	Identify gaps and work with providers to establish suitable local specialist homes	Strategic Commissioning Manager / Head of Function / ICB	Needs analysis 2026	More local options for children with complex needs
Support for children to exit care, where safe to do so	Implement the Reunification Strategy	Increased offer of support around family to support a safe return of the child	Head of Function Children in our Care & Resources	BAU to be reviewed June 2026	Increase the number of Children & Young people will return to parents or extended family

Strengthen and increase in-house fostering provision	Increase number of foster carers	Marketing & Comms Strategy	Practice Lead Children in Care Resources	April 2026 review	A greater and more stable number of in-house foster carers
	Increase utilisation of our current foster carers	Review strategy and payments	Practice Lead Children in Care Resources	August 2026	An increase in the number of placements available at any one time
Ensure children and young people with ongoing health needs are identified early and proactive engagement with NHS colleagues continues	Identification via various panels – external residential, high needs, DCT as well as in care team meetings, supervision and at the front door	Completion of correct plans and processes for s117, CCC and DSR	Team managers, Practice Leads, DSCO and Heads of Function	Review June 2026	Ensure we are identifying children early and making appropriate applications
Strengthen post-16 provision	Commission and mobilise Young Persons Dispersed Accommodation for 16–17-year-olds	Commissioning Review	Strategic Housing Manager	Sept 2026	Sufficient bedspaces to meet levels of demand for 16–17-year-olds  Increase Ofsted registered provision
	Undertake commissioning review of UASC	Commissioning Review	Strategic Commissioning Manager/Strategic Housing Manager	June 2026	UASC needs are being met appropriately

	Introductory Tenancy Service Review	Following a completed review of this Council service we will develop a new service specification and align within our 16-21yrs pathway	Strategic Housing Manager	Jan 2026	Sufficient move on options for young people to move on and live independently
	Develop and implement a new Young Persons Supported Housing Pathway	Commissioning Review – currently underway	Strategic Housing Manager	Sept 2026	A clear pathway for young people to move into supported accommodation that meets their needs before moving on to live independently in their own home.
	Single Homelessness Accommodation Provision Young Persons Scheme – Develop Partnership Agreement and mobilise scheme	Development of a Partnership Agreement between the Council and Tyne Housing	Strategic Housing Manager	October 2026	Agreed expectations/ requirements between the Council and Tyne Housing to ensure provision best meets the needs of Gateshead young people
	Develop Internal 16+ Registered Offer	Explore Internally Providing 16-17yrs Dispersed Provision.	Strategic Housing Manager/ Head of Function – Children in Care & Resources	March 2026	Additional units available to young people.

					Increased Ofsted registered provision
		Implement a Supported Lodgings Service internally	Head of Function Children in our Care & Resources	June 2026	Increases the offer post 16 – offer options to our young people
	Strengthen data/performance reporting for 16-21yr olds	System Development Plan	Strategic Housing Manager	March 2027	Improved system that provides performance information to inform contract monitoring and commissioning. Improved Data sharing between Housing and Childrens Services.
	Strengthen approach for council housing managed by Children's Services	Review roles and responsibilities for some of our internal young person's provision i.e. staying close	Strategic Housing Manager	March 2027	Strengthened approach to Housing Management within these properties

## Appendix 2 – Data and intelligence

### Gateshead's children and young people

#### Children's Services in Gateshead - the current situation

Total number of young people under 18 in Gateshead  
**40414**  
2024 ONS MYE 0-17



**191** Children on a child protection plan

**6.5%**   
from ethnic minority communities



**485** children in care

**27.6% Local Children** aged U16 in relative low income families (Child Poverty)



Children in low income families: local area statistics - 2023/24 FY

**4219** School age children overall with SEN support  
24/25 Accademic Year



**8349** Children on Free School Meals  
24/25 Accademic Year



**2016** Children with an EHCP (Active EHCP as at September 2025)



**10** First time entrants to YJS



(Period April to December 2024)

**774** Children in receipt of early help



**1370** Children in need



**423** Care experienced young people



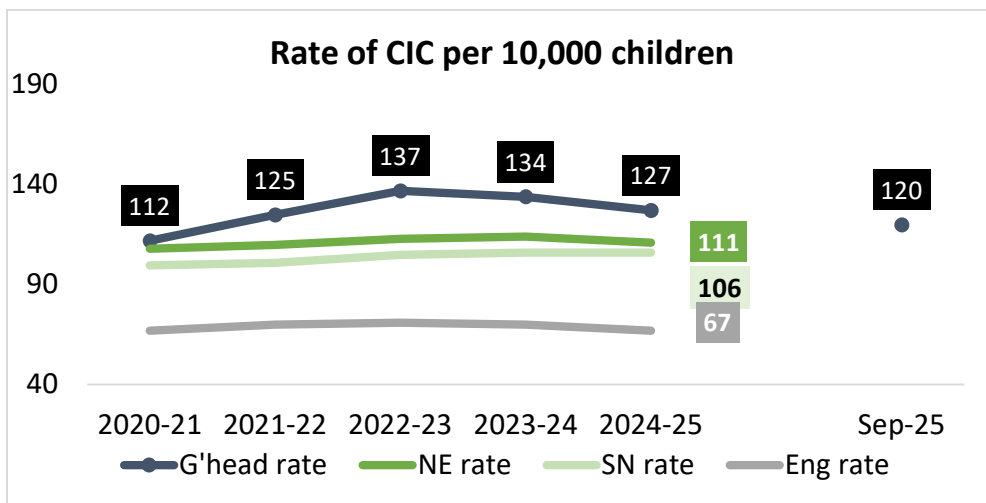
**223** Children with a disability



## Gateshead's cared for children

### Children in our care

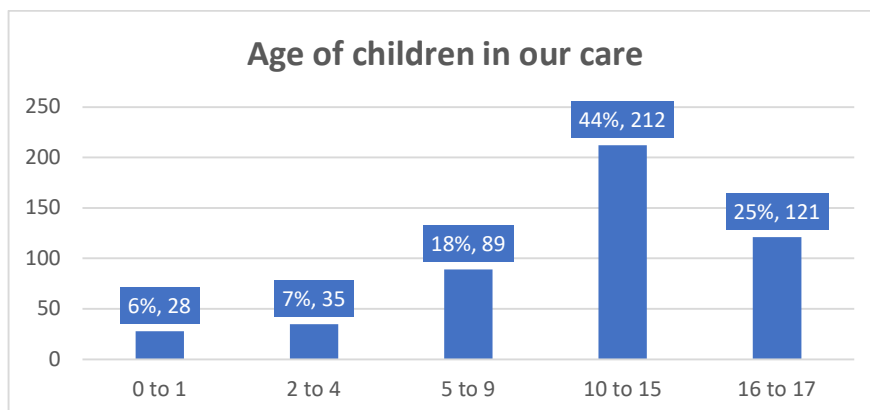
At the end of September 2025 there were 485 children in our care, a rate of 120 per 10,000 population. Gateshead's rate is higher than the Regional (111), Statistical Neighbours (106) and National (67) averages when compared to the latest data available from 2024/25.



21 (4.3%) of children in our care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

### Age of children in our care

Of the 485 children in our care, 44% are aged 10 to 15, 25% aged 16 to 17, 18% aged 5 to 9, 7% aged 2 to 4 and 6% under 2.



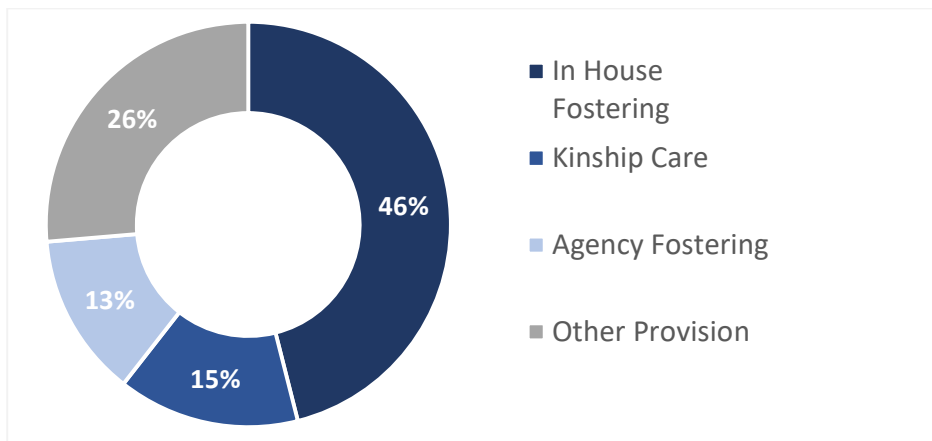
### Placement stability

Children’s placement stability is strong in comparison to our benchmarks, and at September 2025, 10.3% of children experienced 3 or more placement moves in the previous 12 months, compared to 11% regionally and 10% nationally.

For longer term stability of placements, 71% of children have been in the same placement for at least 2 years, compared to 68% regionally and nationally.

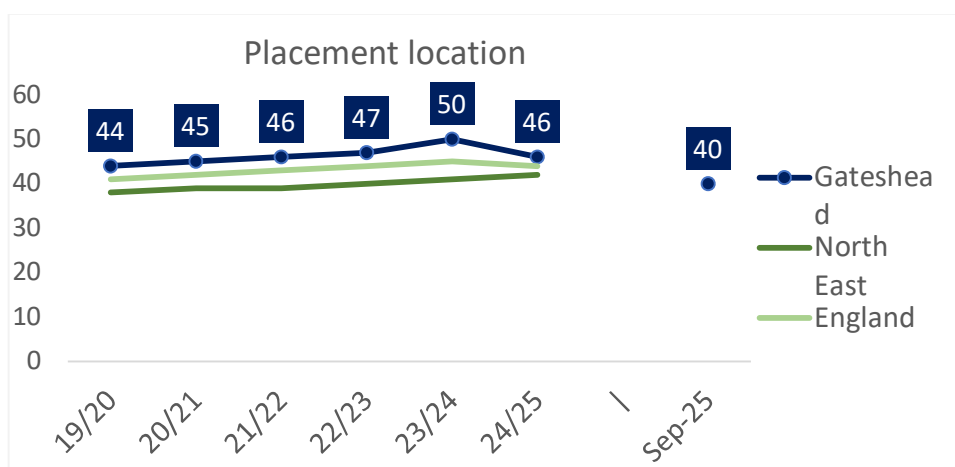
### Placement type

46% (222) of children in care are placed with our own Foster Carers, and 14% (70) are living in Kinship Care arrangements, with a further 13% placed with Agency Foster Carers.



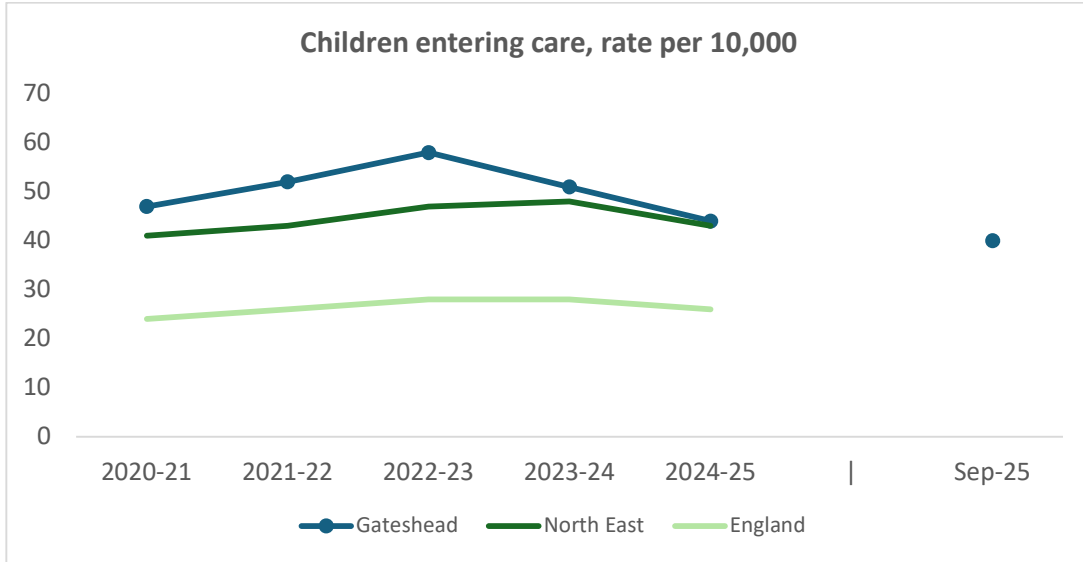
### Placement location

Of the 485 children in our care, 60% are living in Gateshead and 40% are living outside of Gateshead, with 12% living 20 miles or more from their home.

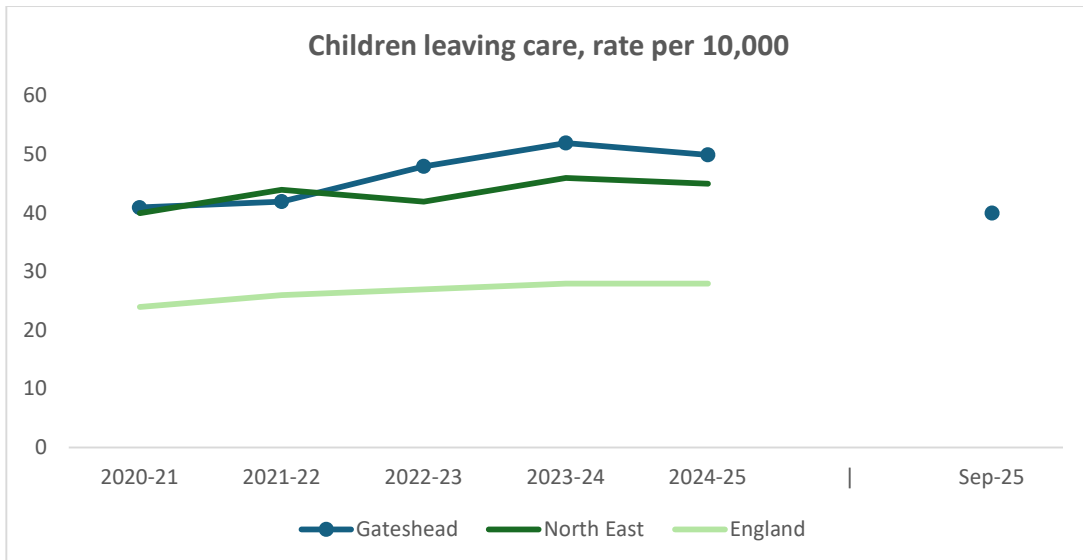


### Entries and exits from care

For children entering our care we have seen a decreasing trend, with 53.1 children entering our care per 10k population in 2022/23, 52.4 in 2023/24 and 45.5 in 2024/25.

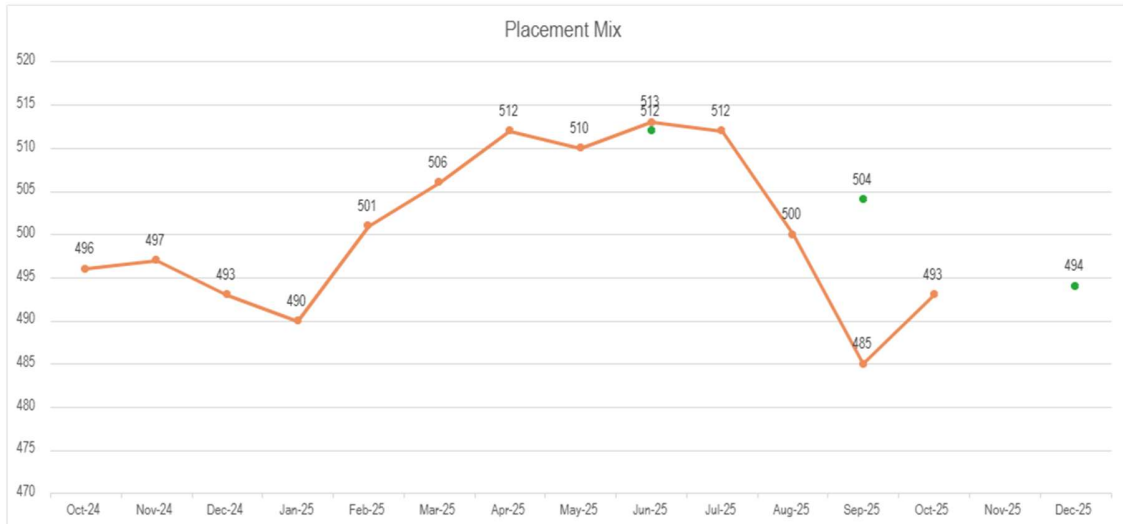


For children exiting our care, we have seen an increasing trend, with 48.8 children per 10k population in 2022/23, 52.1 in 2023/24 and a slight decrease to 50.8 in 2024/25.



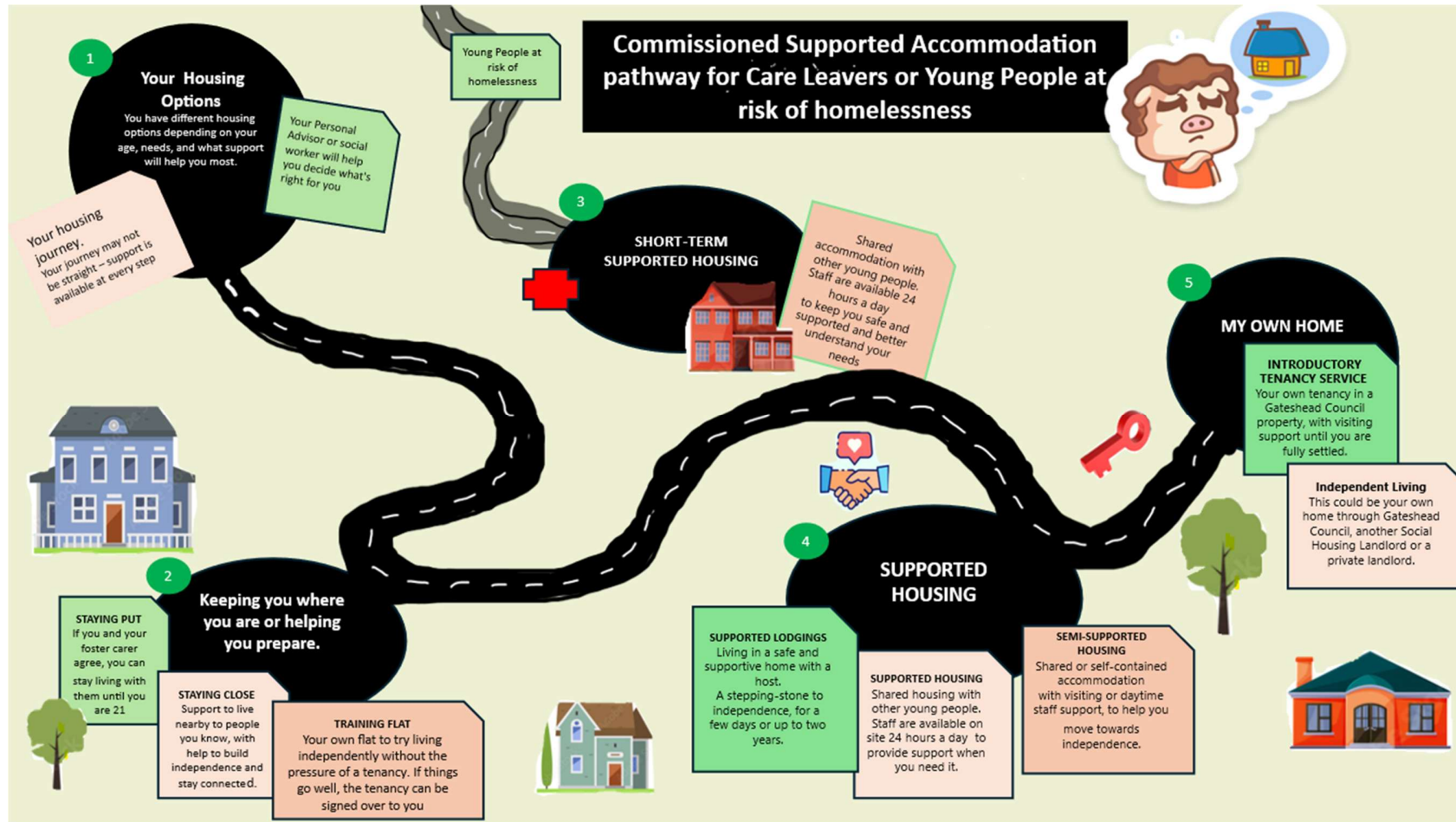
## Placement mix

- Actual
- Projected



	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25
Agency Fostering	80	84	82	84	81	79	76	73	67	64	63	66
Bespoke	7	7	7	6	6	5	5	5	6	9	8	6
External Residential	46	48	50	50	49	50	55	47	47	41	40	35
GMBC Homes	12	12	12	12	12	12	11	10	10	11	10	11
In House Fostering	218	213	215	222	224	226	225	227	238	231	222	223
Supported Accommodation	19	19	17	13	9	10	9	17	16	20	18	23
Kinship Care	73	74	69	72	78	77	71	84	78	71	70	78
Hospitals	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Mother and Baby Unit	0	0	2	1	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Placed for Adoption	11	10	9	9	9	11	12	13	15	16	15	13
Placement with parents	27	22	22	27	32	37	42	35	33	35	37	36
Secure	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Remand	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>513</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>493</b>
Child Arrangement Order	28	24	28	25	25	25	24	23	24	21	21	19
Special Guardianship Order	380	341	374	368	372	371	377	379	383	380	382	373

# Appendix 3 – My housing journey



**be the difference.**

