

NORTH EAST CHILD POVERTY ACTION PLAN

Tackling child poverty,
creating real opportunity.



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For more information about this work and how you can support it, please contact childpovertyreduction@northeast-ca.gov.uk



Visual notes taken during our action plan engagement

FOREWORD

It's no secret that the North East can be the best place in the world to grow up, to live and raise a family.

Yet this isn't the case for far too many babies, children and young people across our region, whose life chances and outcomes are being limited by financial hardship and all the obstacles this creates.

That's why I've made tackling child poverty my number one priority as Mayor – including by setting up our first-of-its-kind child poverty reduction unit, and kick-starting the development of this action plan – because it is simply not possible to achieve our mission of making the North East the home of real opportunity unless we do more to address this issue, together. Doing so is also central to ensuring our region can play its fullest part in contributing to the country's economic growth, both now and longer-term.

THIS FIVE-YEAR CHILD POVERTY ACTION PLAN SETS OUT A VISION OF THE NORTH EAST BEING A PLACE WHERE EVERY BABY, CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON IS SUPPORTED TO THRIVE AND ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL - REGARDLESS OF THEIR BACKGROUND, OR WHERE THEY LIVE.

It has been developed in partnership with a broad range of cross-sector organisations, parents, carers and young people across our region – and we are incredibly grateful to all those who have shared their ideas, expertise, insights and valuable time to support this work.

The action plan is squarely focussed on what people have told us matters to communities throughout our region – from Berwick to Bishop Auckland, Hexham to Horden and the cities, towns and villages in between – and will build on and add value to the tireless work I know is already taking place every single day to support families and children across the North East.

ALL OF THE ACTIVITY OUR PLAN SETS OUT ADDRESSES THREE KEY PRIORITIES, AND WILL BE DELIVERED WITH PARTNERS BASED ON LOCAL STRENGTHS AND NEEDS.

Firstly, doing what we can together to support children and families here and now – including by helping more families to maximise their incomes. We have to reduce immediate levels of hardship in the North East, if parents, carers and young people are to be able to focus on their next steps and plan for the future.

We will also break down the barriers to opportunity that poverty can bring – including by collectively investing more in giving babies, children and young people the best start in life. There is absolutely no shortage of aspiration in our region, but we need to create more pathways to support young people and their families to achieve their goals.

And we will work to tackle longer-term, structural challenges for our region, to create the infrastructure of opportunity and help make work pay for more families – whether that's building a better transport network, providing more support with childcare costs, or transforming skills, employment and careers support for parents, carers and young people.

But we know we cannot achieve this vision – and address these priorities – alone, and this plan therefore also acts as a call to action to join us in what will be a collective, regional endeavour.

I am confident that we will step up to this challenge together, so that we can end the days where our children and region are held back by poverty.

Kim McGuinness
North East Mayor



Mayor McGuinness at Newbiggin-by-the-Sea child poverty roundtable for local organisations

'Child poverty is not only damaging the development and future prospects of tens of thousands of children across our region, it is holding the whole of the North East back.

'Devolution presents us with a significant opportunity to prioritise tackling this issue together – and it is so important that this has been grasped by Mayor McGuinness, with an action plan that not only recognises the importance of collectively investing more in babies, children and young people, but sets out why this matters to the whole of our region.

'We are so pleased to have been able to help shape this work, alongside a broad coalition of organisations right across the region – and we look forward to continuing to work with the Mayor and North East Combined Authority as the action plan is implemented.'



Beth Farhat
Chair, North East Child Poverty Commission

'Tackling child poverty is absolutely crucial if we are to break down barriers to opportunity and improve the life chances of every child across every part of our country.

'This task cannot be achieved by national Government alone, and I am proud to see the North East leading the way on addressing this issue at a regional level – driven forward by Mayor Kim McGuinness and her determination to both invest in children and families, and to bring together cross-sector partners in what has to be a collective endeavour.

'Doing this in a way that aligns and will add value to our work at a national level puts the North East Combined Authority area in a great position, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with Kim and regional partners on this issue.'



Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Co-Chair, Ministerial Child Poverty Taskforce and Secretary of State for Education

OUR PLAN ON A PAGE

OUR VISION

The North East is a place where every baby, child and young person is supported to thrive and achieve their potential - regardless of their background or where they live.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

SUPPORTING FAMILIES HERE AND NOW

- doing what we can together to help families maximise their incomes.

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITY THAT POVERTY CAN BRING

- collectively investing more in giving babies, children and young people the best start in life.

TACKLING LONGER-TERM, STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

- including those which will help to make work pay, and create the infrastructure of opportunity, for more families.

WHAT WE WILL DO:



Make childcare more affordable and accessible, through the **Mayor's childcare grant** and a **regional plan for childcare and early education**.



Create a new **North East health in pregnancy grant** and further roll out **baby boxes** to support new families.



Widen **opportunities for older young people** by expanding youth provision and access to year-round low and no-cost activities.



Get more money into families' pockets - supporting all to receive their entitlements through expanded advice and take-up campaigns.



Create a new **North East Fundamentals Fund**, to help ensure no child in the region goes without essentials.



Create more and better jobs that make work pay - through our **Local Growth Plan, SHINE scheme for employers and New Deal for North East Workers**.



Deliver a **joined-up, affordable, reliable and accessible transport network** that breaks down barriers to opportunity.



Drive down the cost of education including **free after school clubs** and work to ensure **equity and fairness in education** across the region through our **Excellence in Education** Programme.



Accelerate work to **create more affordable, warm and decent homes for families**.



Work to ensure more families have **access to affordable, healthy food in their communities**.



Support local community organisations through the **Mayor's Opportunity Fund** and **Flexible Social Finance Fund**.



Work to ensure all families can access the skills, equipment, data and support needed to be **digitally included**.



Expand **prevention-focused, joined-up support for families** through our work on public service reform.



Open up access to **our region's cultural and sporting opportunities**, and careers.

INTRODUCTION

Our work as a Mayoral Combined Authority is guided by five missions – the first of which is to **make the North East the home of real opportunity**, by investing in the foundations of our economy and removing the barriers that prevent people succeeding.

The evidence is clear that these barriers include high rates of babies, children and young people growing up in poverty across all parts of our region – and that this is not just threatening good childhoods and limiting the potential of individual children and families; it is holding the whole of our region back.

This five-year (2025-30) child poverty action plan is therefore not only fundamental to delivering on our first mission – it is essential to ensuring our region is able to play its full part in contributing to the UK’s economic growth.

We know that national policy and spending decisions will make the biggest difference to bringing down child poverty rates both in the North East and across the country. Advocating for national policy changes and investment that will make a difference to our region, alongside pressing for further devolved powers to bolster our future Integrated Single Settlement and role as a Mayoral Strategic Authority, will therefore be an important part of our work on this issue.

We also look forward to this action plan being able to align and add value to the forthcoming national child poverty strategy – and we are willing and ready as a region to test any new approaches or interventions the Government may want to pilot before scaling up.

However, this ambitious, evidence-informed plan sets out our determination to use the collective levers and resources we have available here in the North East to prevent and reduce child poverty. This represents a significant investment, from the very earliest stages, in our single most important asset as a region: our people.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Following extensive engagement with a broad range of cross-sector organisations, parents, carers, and young people across the region, all of the activity our plan sets out is focussed on **three strategic priorities**:

- **Supporting children and families here and now** – including by doing what we can together to help families maximise their incomes
- **Breaking down the barriers to opportunity that poverty can bring** – including by collectively investing more in giving babies, children and young people the best start in life
- **Tackling longer-term, structural challenges** – including those which will help to make work pay, and create the infrastructure of opportunity, for more families

Some of this work will be directly commissioned and funded by the North East Combined Authority through our first-of-its-kind child poverty reduction unit – and delivered locally in collaboration with a wide range of cross-sector partners, building on and enhancing existing activity. It will mean testing, learning, innovating and evaluating – and refining and adapting our interventions as they are implemented, with the action plan being refreshed each year of its lifetime.

Other activity involves ensuring child poverty reduction runs as a golden thread through every decision we take and investment we make across a range of policy areas, and leveraging different funding streams to maximise their impact.

Of course, tackling child poverty is everybody’s business and all of this work will involve organisations across the region stepping up and playing their part. We will therefore use our convening role to influence the activity and investment of other organisations and networks across the North East.



Mayor McGuinness with pupils and staff following a child poverty roundtable for local organisations at Our Lady of the Rosary Primary school, Peterlee

OUR VISION

We know that the North East can be the best place in the world to grow up, live and raise a family – but this isn’t the case for far too many people in our region.

Our vision is for the North East to be a place where every baby, child and young person is supported to thrive and achieve their potential – regardless of their background, or where they live.

This plan is our call to action for the region and a prospectus for change. We are determined to deliver it together, and it therefore sets out numerous opportunities for organisations across all sectors to join us in what will be a collective endeavour.

We will actively pursue commitments from other organisations and individuals within and beyond the region – including (but not limited to) philanthropists, funders, business, inward investors and our anchor institutions – on how they too will help to fund and enable this work.

WAYS OF WORKING

Our ways of working as an organisation will reflect the change we want to see – and will work in collaboration with others to deliver – across our region.

As a proudly accredited **Living Wage employer** and a **Mayoral Strategic Authority with an Integrated Financial Settlement** from 2026, we will ensure that the **socio-economic duty – alongside our commitment to reducing child poverty as part of our mission to make the North East the real home of opportunity** – shapes every investment decision we take, the design of our projects and programmes, and our processes such as procurement and recruitment.

We recognise our role as a commissioner within the region and the importance of **developing a strategic approach** with – and **longer-term funding and stability** for – the organisations who will help us to deliver this action plan, including those within the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

And, whilst this is a plan that will benefit the whole of our region, we will take an **intersectional, whole-family approach** to how we implement it with our partners across the North East – recognising that some localities face greater barriers to opportunity than others, and some families are more likely to experience, or be at risk of, poverty and financial hardship.

These include single parent families (the large majority of which are headed by women); those with children aged under 5; families where someone in the household (adult or child) has a disability; ‘larger’ families (with three or more children); families from minoritised ethnic groups (including those with no recourse to public funds); and families living in a rented home.

We also know that there are other groups of young people in our region who are more likely to experience barriers to opportunity, including young care leavers, young carers, and babies, children and young people living in kinship families.

Importantly, this plan has been developed in partnership with a broad range of cross-sector organisations and services across the region, parents, carers and young people – and **we commit to continuing to work closely with organisations, parents, carers and young people**, to shape the implementation and evolution of this plan throughout the next five years.

As part of this commitment, we will work with the North East’s youth sector, local authorities, schools, colleges and young people to **establish a North East Youth Combined Authority** – embedding youth voice into our work, including the future development and delivery of this action plan, and to inform our wider engagement with young people across the region. And, as part of our plans to establish a **citizen engagement strategy** – building on existing participation work and good practice across the North East – we will ensure that parents and carers continue to inform the delivery of this plan as it is implemented and evolves.



Child poverty summit hosted by Mayor McGuinness in Sunderland

MEASURING PROGRESS

Whilst we know that national policy and spending decisions will make the biggest difference in reducing child poverty rates both in the North East and across the country, **we will monitor progress against a number of measures to ensure we are heading in the right direction together.**

We will need to see a meaningful improvement in these measures across all parts of our combined authority area, if we are **to achieve our overarching vision of making the North East a place where every baby, child and young person is supported to thrive and achieve their potential – regardless of their background, or where they live** (whilst fully recognising the extent to which even local authority-level figures can mask the picture for families at a neighbourhood level). We will also track our progress on these measures against the UK average.

- **Children living in relative poverty, after housing costs** – our headline measure
- **Children living in relative poverty, before housing costs** – to understand how housing costs are driving child poverty in different parts of our region
- **Children living in deep poverty and in very deep poverty, after housing costs**
- **Children living within ‘income deprived’ families on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)** – due to be updated in late 2025
- **Children living in food insecure households**
- **Children living in ‘workless’ and ‘long-term workless’ households**
- **‘Economic inactivity’ rates (working age people, aged 16-64)** – recognising that these figures can include students, parents with disabled children, people with health conditions and disabilities, and people with unpaid caring responsibilities
- **Young people (aged 16-24) not in education, employment or training**

At present, several of these measures are published for England at a regional (not combined authority) level, and **we will therefore press national Government and its agencies to address this data gap**, which currently makes it harder to provide a baseline for, and measure progress on, our work. We also know that there are concerns around the robustness of some of these datasets – including as a result of the way in which data is collected or recorded (or not) – and we will push too for this nationally-published information to be as reliable and comparable across regions as possible.

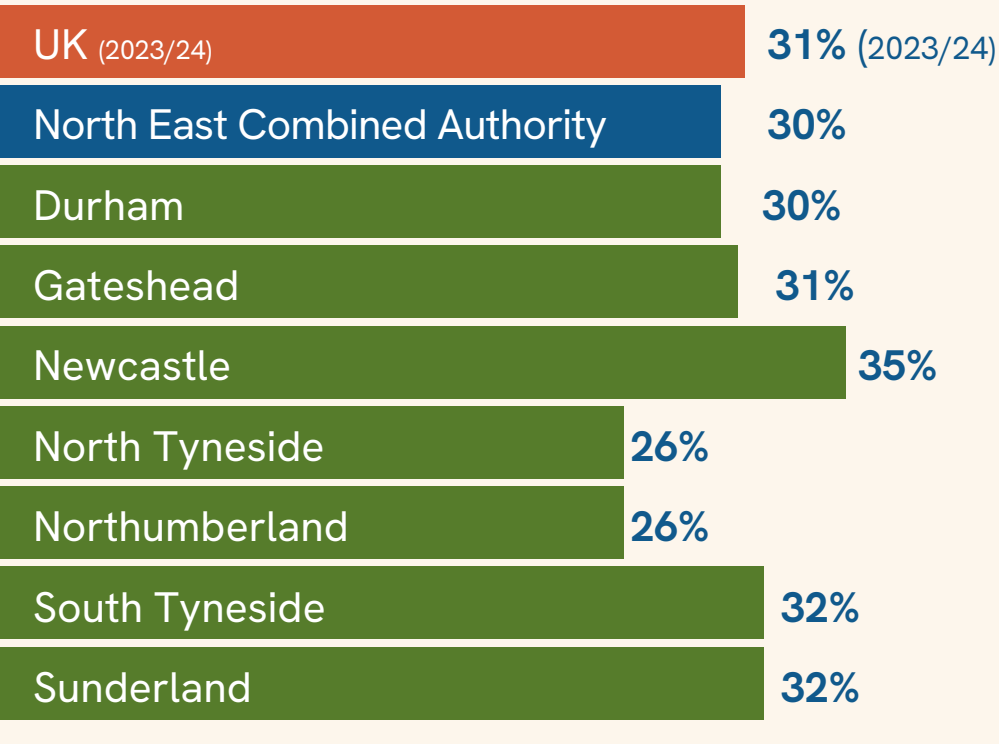
Given there can be a significant time-lag on several of these measures, **we will additionally work with national, regional and local partners to explore how we can make use of more real-time information** to understand and respond to what is happening now for North East families. This includes making better use of administrative data, and considering how the data that currently sits within a broad range of organisations across the North East – including those within the voluntary and community sector – can be shared.

And most importantly – as well measuring the number of people our action plan and investment reaches (recognising that this may look quite different in different parts of our region) – **we will focus on what families, children and young people tell us about the tangible difference our interventions have made to their living standards, opportunities, and plans for the future**, through our ongoing evaluation of this work.



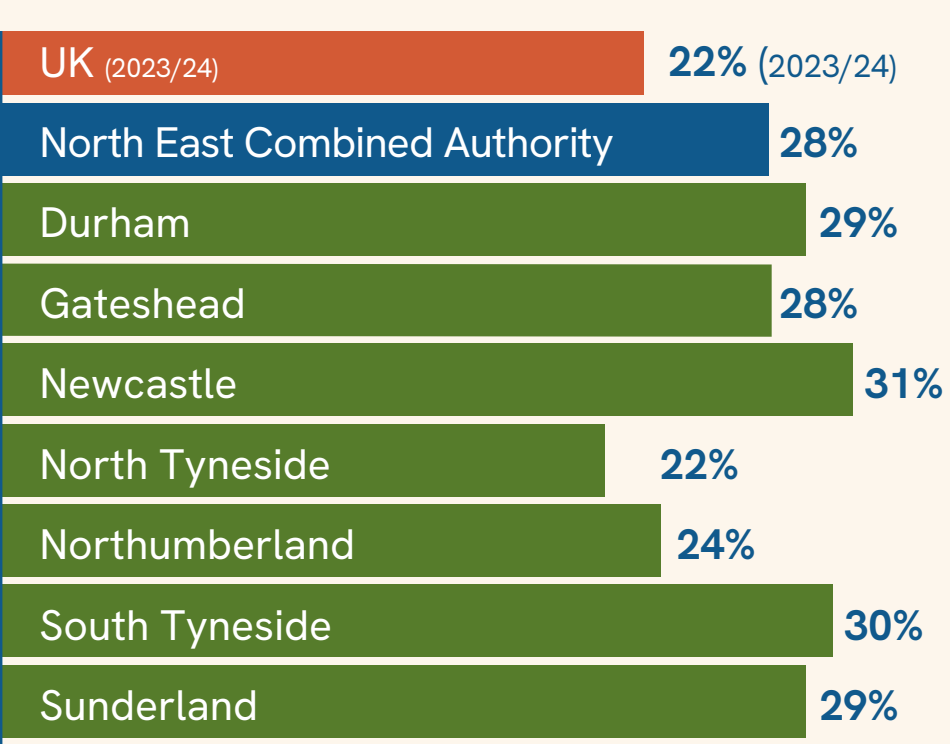
Visual notes taken during our action plan engagement

Children living in relative poverty, after housing costs



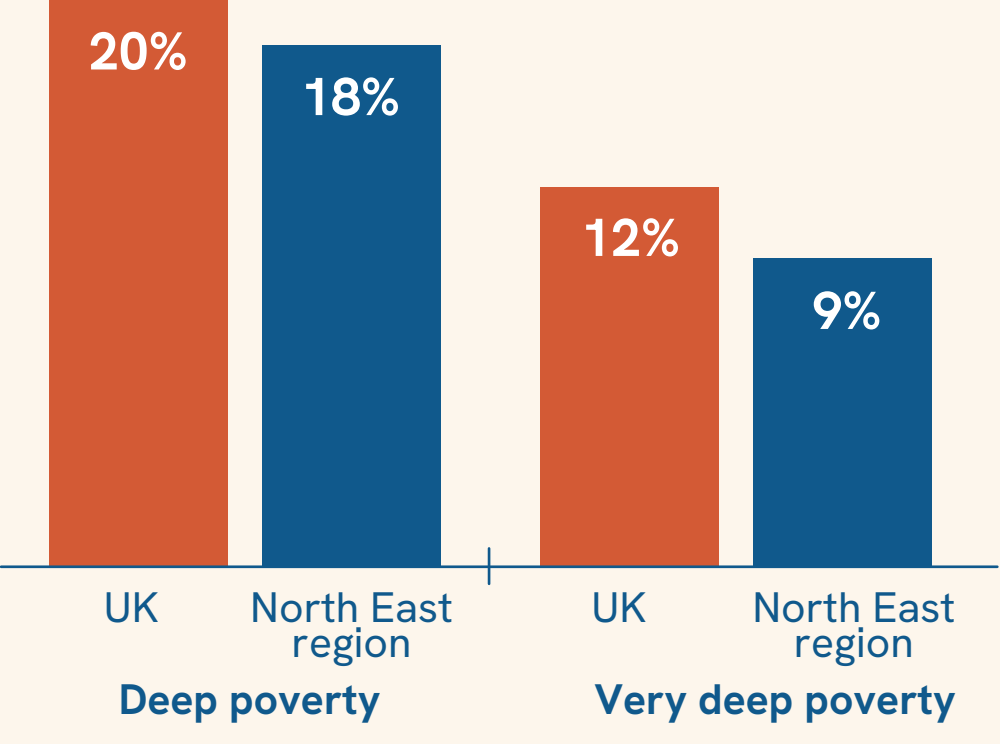
Source: HBAI 1995-2024 (DWP, 2025) and Local Child Poverty Statistics (End Child Poverty, 2025)

Children living in relative poverty, before housing costs



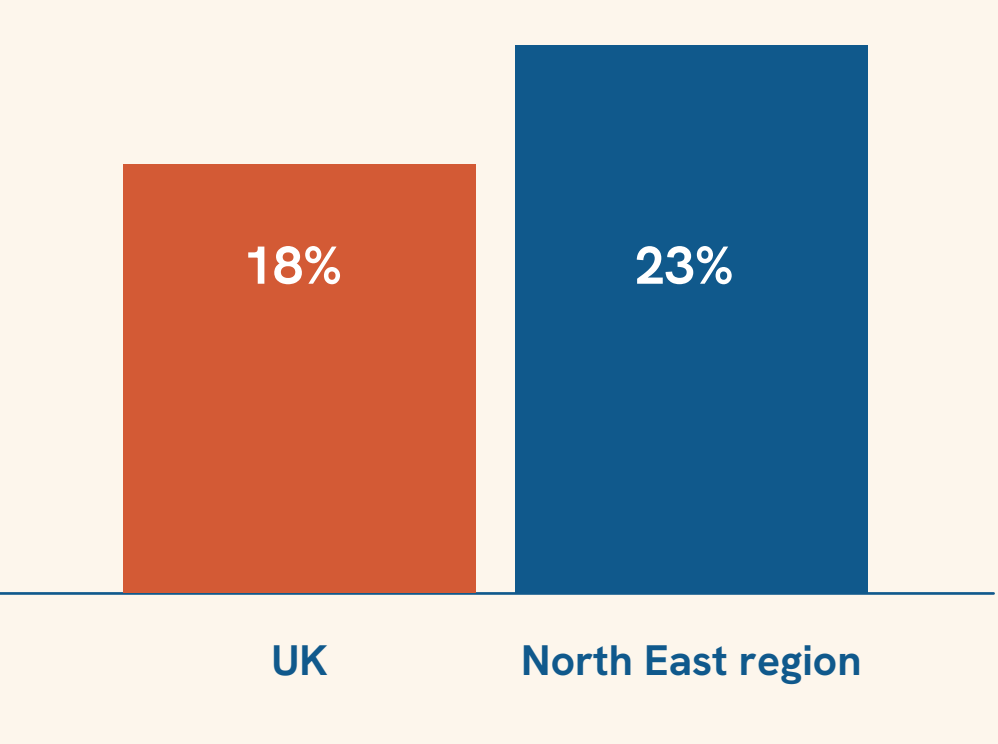
Source: CILIF 2014-2024 (DWP, 2025)

Children living in deep poverty and in very deep poverty, after housing costs (2021-24)



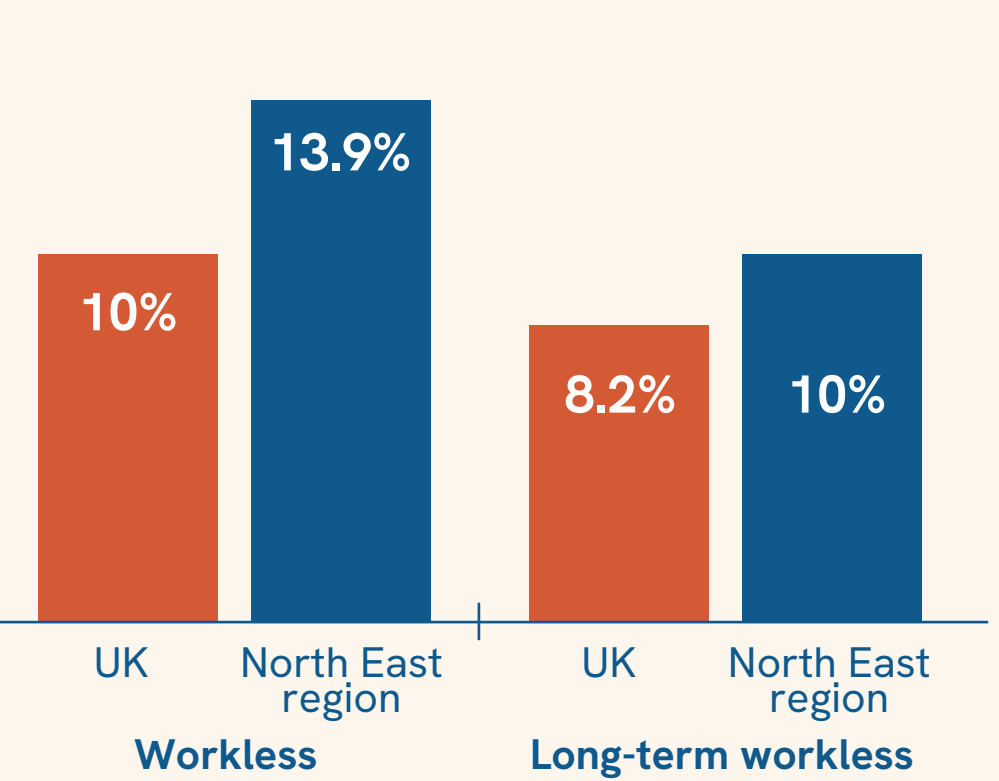
HBAI analysis undertaken by Joseph Rowntree Foundation for North East CA

Children living in food insecure households (2023/24)



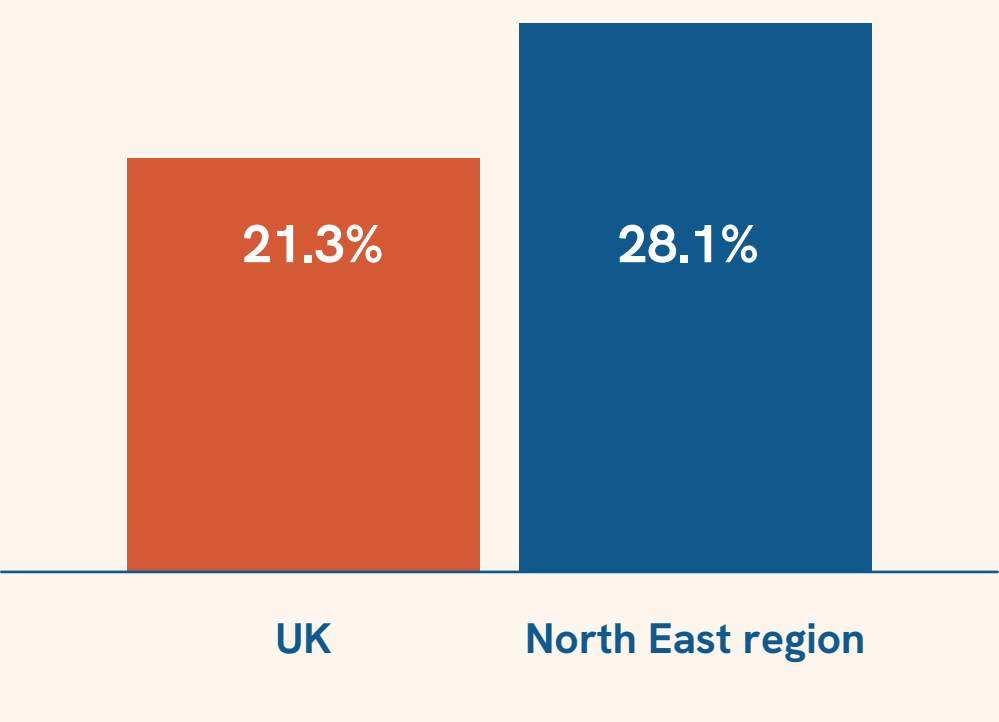
Source: HBAI 1995-2024 (DWP, 2025)

Children living in 'workless' and 'long-term workless' households (2023)



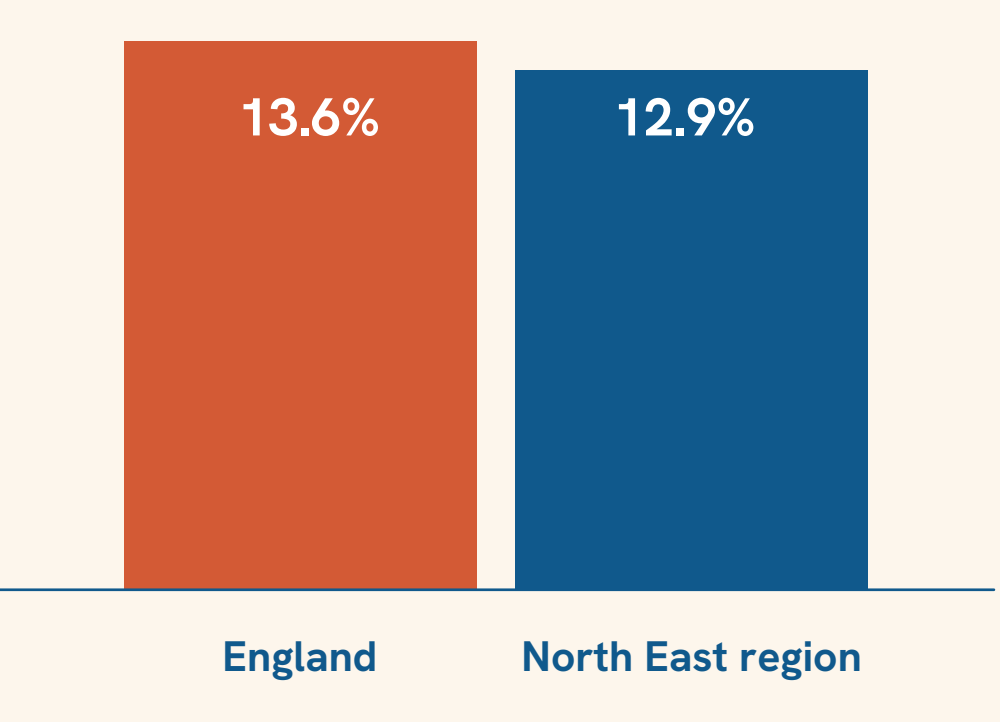
Children living in long-term workless households 2023 (ONS, 2024)

Economic inactivity rates, working age people, aged 16-64 (February to April 2025)



Source: Labour market in the regions of the UK, June 2025 (ONS, 2025)

Young people (16-24) not in education, employment or training (Q4 2024)



Source: NEET age 16 to 24 (DfE Explore Education Statistics, 2025)

We will need to see a meaningful improvement in these measures across all parts of our combined authority area, if we are to achieve our overarching vision of making the North East a place where every baby, child and young person is supported to thrive and achieve their potential – regardless of their background, or where they live. At present, several of these measures are published for England at a regional (not combined authority) level, and we will therefore press national Government and its agencies to address this data gap, which currently makes it harder to provide a baseline for, and measure progress on, our work.

WHAT WE WILL DO

Now and next: These are the activities that will have a phased approach, with early delivery priorities followed by what we will achieve over the course of this plan.



CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS

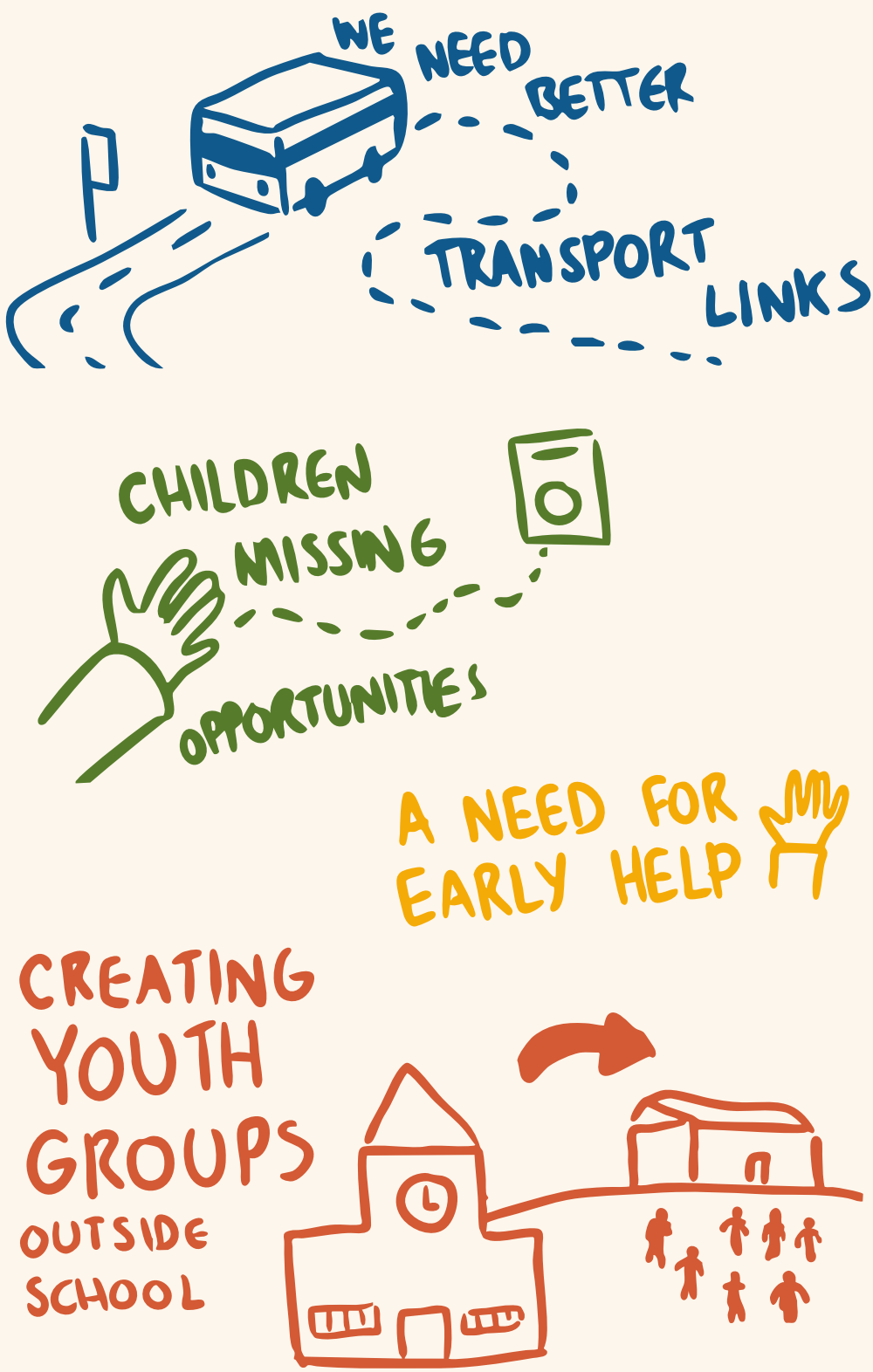
Now (early delivery priorities)

Working with local authority partners, childcare settings and employment support providers, we are piloting the **Mayor's childcare grant**, to offer simplified support which reduces barriers to work, education and training for parents and carers, and supports children and families in a way that adds value to the existing childcare funding landscape. This initial pilot will have two strands: a local trial in County Durham prioritising single parent families with under-5s; and a region-wide trial supported by the Department for Work and Pensions-funded Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme, for families with multiple barriers to work.

Next (and by 2030)

Building on the learning from our initial pilot, we will work with local authority partners, childcare settings and employment support providers, to expand the **Mayor's childcare grant** to more parents and carers across the region, to support them to more easily access paid employment and training opportunities.

We will additionally work with early years settings, local authority partners, after-school and holiday club providers, training bodies, trade unions and others to develop a **regional childcare strategy** - a plan that builds on nationally-funded support and recognises the role of affordable, accessible, high quality and inclusive childcare/early education in giving every child the best start in life; as a critical piece of economic infrastructure, particularly for women; and the importance of growing and upskilling our early years workforce.



Visual notes taken during our action plan engagement

TESTING NEW APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Now (early delivery priorities)

We will fund and work closely with cross-sector partners – including public health and our region’s universities – to deliver and evaluate **three local test and learn pilots**, with a view to wider implementation as quickly as possible, and to securing the additional funding necessary for the expansion of this work (subject to any changes to national policy).



Local pilot 1 – Working with partners, we will trial a **North East Health in Pregnancy grant** to support all expectant mothers in the area on low incomes/in receipt of Universal Credit with additional costs in their third trimester of pregnancy.

Local pilot 2 – We will fund expanded provision of **baby boxes** to all first-time families in the area in receipt of Universal Credit or assessed as benefiting from this support, delivered through health and community partners.

Local pilot 3 – Working with young people, the youth sector, schools, colleges, existing community-based providers, employers and other stakeholders, we will **expand specialist youth provision and access to year-round, low and no-cost activities for older young people** – including support which opens up pathways to future employment such as pre-apprenticeship training.

Innovation activity – In addition to our three local pilots, we will utilise new investment and capacity secured through external funding to test, learn and innovate, growing initiatives that make a difference and learning from ones that don’t.

Next (and by 2030)

We will work with cross-sector partners to **secure the additional funding required to expand our three local test and learn pilots across the region** – building on the learning from these trials, and subject to any changes to national policy. We will additionally seek to scale up our externally-funded innovation activity.

We will also work with local, regional and national partners to **identify opportunities, and secure investment, for future local and regional pilots to take place in the North East**, with a view to wider implementation.



Visual notes taken during our action plan engagement



Child poverty summit hosted by Mayor McGuinness in Sunderland

TRANSPORT

Now (early delivery priorities)

We have extended the **£1 single fare for young people aged 21 and under on the bus, Metro and Ferry** (and the £3 daily cap on these modes, plus Northern Rail services between Blaydon and Sunderland) – as well as introducing a **£2.50 cap on adult single bus fares**, supporting parents and carers.

We will continue to support the year-round **Kids Go Free offer** on the Metro and Ferry, and the expansion of this offer to buses during the school holidays (where parents/carers with a valid ticket can take up to three children aged 11 and under for free).

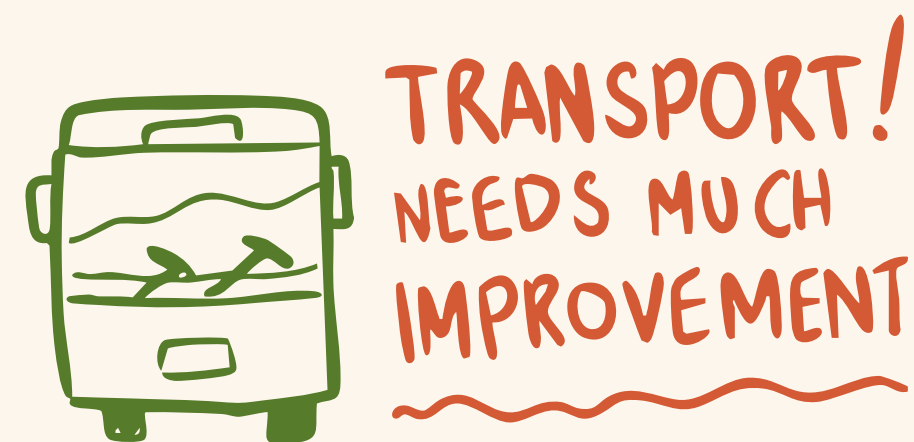
We will continue to enable **free travel for all young care leavers (aged 18-25)** on the bus, Metro and Ferry.

Working with partners including local authorities, Nexus and transport operators, our **Local Transport Plan** (LTP) will start to **create a green, integrated transport network that works for all and breaks down barriers to opportunity**, by better linking children, young people and parents/carers to employment, education and training, healthcare provision, leisure activities and other essential services. The LTP will be underpinned by initial investment of over £200 million, supporting the development of **a transport network that is more reliable, joined-up, easier to use and safer for women and girls** – including through better walking and cycling routes.

Next (and by 2030)

In the immediate term:

- We will work to retain the **£1 single fare for young people aged 21 and under on the bus, Metro and Ferry** (and the £3 daily cap on these modes, plus Northern Rail services between Blaydon and Sunderland) until at least 2028 – as well as retaining a **cap on adult bus fares to support parents and carers**.
- We will continue to support the year-round **Kids Go Free offer** on the Metro and Ferry, and the expansion of this offer to buses during the school holidays.
- We will continue to enable **free travel for all young care leavers (aged 18-25)** on the bus, Metro and Ferry.
- We will secure funding to **enable free travel on the bus, Metro and Ferry for all young carers** (aged up to 25).



Visual notes taken during our action plan engagement

Working with partners including local authorities, Nexus and transport operators, we will continue to deliver our **Local Transport Plan** (LTP) – including by 2032 (and as soon as possible, subject to funding and new powers):

- **Bringing buses back under public control**, with an improved and more integrated network.
- **Connecting Washington to the Metro**, to expand opportunities for local residents and businesses.
- Enabling **free travel for all young people aged 18 and under across the network**, and continued **reduced fares for those aged 19-21**.
- Delivering a **fully-integrated public transport network**, including a simplified, seamless ticketing system.
- **Introducing more affordable fares for other groups**, for example people getting back into work or training.
- **Transforming the daily experience of Tyne and Wear Metro users** by bringing new trains into service across the network and using recently-secured funding to invest in a new signalling system to improve reliability for passengers.
- The development and delivery of a **School Streets** programme across the region, to provide safer, cleaner environments outside school buildings.
- Supporting the development of **schemes to widen access to Active Travel equipment**, for example cycle grants or loans, to enable those not in full-time employment to take up work or training opportunities.



These are the activities and interventions that will take place throughout the course of this plan.



A GROWING AND VIBRANT ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR ALL

Working closely with business, public and voluntary and community sector partners across the region, we will deliver the ten-year **North East Local Growth Plan**. This plan sets out how – building on our sectoral strengths, unique assets and opportunities – we will create tens of thousands more good jobs to contribute to higher levels of employment and productivity, rising take-home pay, increased residual household incomes and improved living standards right across our region, including for families with children.

Our Local Growth Plan commits to **invest in the foundations of our economy and remove the barriers that prevent people from succeeding** – recognising that inclusive, sustainable growth and the prosperity of our region are dependent on a much broader and balanced set of priorities – including investment in skills, improving access to employment, reducing the digital divide, improving housing, creating a better transport system and unlocking wider economic opportunities. Crucially, **the Local Growth Plan emphasises that**, if babies, children and young people growing up in the North East today are to be able to access our region’s economic opportunities and benefit from future growth, **we must tackle high rates of childhood poverty and hardship** – and it will **commit to closing our region’s gender pay gap and to supporting the growth and development of our foundational economy**, a disproportionately high employer of women.

Our **new accreditation scheme recognising and celebrating responsible employment in the North East – SHINE** – sets out how employers across all sectors can contribute to this action plan through the pay, conditions and support they offer to their staff, including parents and carers; and through the opportunities and contributions they offer their wider community – such as work experience placements for young people, apprenticeships or supporting school and college careers programmes. We will make engagement with the SHINE scheme, and this wider action plan, an expectation of the organisations we do business with.

We will work with businesses and employers, trade unions, civil society and the Living Wage Foundation, to **make the North East a Good Work region**, progress on which will be overseen by the SHINE Steering Group. As part of this, we will work with the Living Wage Foundation to promote the real Living Wage and the benefits of accreditation.

And we will **continue funded support for employers, to help more organisations across all sectors** to better understand the financial circumstances of their employees – providing bespoke, supported action plans to implement meaningful change.

We will work with cross-sector regional and national partners to deliver our **New Deal for North East Workers** – so that people of all ages, and from all backgrounds and communities, are supported to develop their skills (including through volunteering opportunities), to find good quality, fairly paid jobs, to make progress in a job with good prospects, and to

lead healthy, fulfilling working lives. Through the devolved Adults Skills Fund, Free Courses for Jobs and Skills Bootcamps, we will **invest over £100 million per year in workforce skills**, to ensure more people can access secure, well-paid jobs across our region and employers can grow and thrive. We will also provide **a highly visible and locally accessible ‘front door’ to high quality universal skills, employment and careers support** for every North East resident who needs it, including those already in employment.

This **all-age career support** will start early, through the expansion of our **North East Ambition** programme to support all primary, middle, secondary and special schools (including alternative provision) and FE colleges to provide the best possible careers guidance and facilitate meaningful employer/workplace experiences for their students. This will help to ensure children and young people are aware of the wide range of employment opportunities available in our region and the pathways to accessing them, including through technical/vocational education and apprenticeships.

We will also work with employers, education providers and young people to launch **an ambitious regional work experience programme**, providing high quality opportunities for every young person in the North East to experience the world of work while they are in education. And we will broker partnerships between businesses, the youth sector and others to **ensure social value investments create lasting opportunities for young people** across our region.

Recognising the significant impact that high rates of economic inactivity have on our region's economy and living standards, including for families with children, we will decisively tackle this issue by **providing person-centred support for residents excluded from work** (with a particular focus on people with health conditions and disabilities, young people and carers), to overcome the barriers preventing them from securing and sustaining paid employment.

This will include working closely with cross-sector employers and our voluntary and community sector partners to deliver and learn from the three-year Department for Work and Pensions-funded **£50 million Connect to Work** programme providing intensive, wraparound support to people with health conditions and other complex barriers to sustaining employment; and the one-year DWP-funded **£10 million Economic inactivity Trailblazer** which will develop a localised approach to tackling this issue. Both of these programmes will work in tandem with the one-year DHSC-funded **£19.5 million Health and Work Accelerator** pilot, being delivered by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), to provide personalised support through health settings for residents who are in work but at risk of becoming economically inactive as a result of certain health conditions. The North East Combined Authority and North East and North Cumbria ICB jointly commit to ensuring all three programmes will prioritise reaching families with children, and young people.

And we will support **a new DWP pilot that is taking place across six Jobcentres in the North East** in partnership with Citizens Advice and other voluntary and community sector advice organisations, to test and learn from a more tailored and flexible approach to the way in which people, including parents/carers, are supported by and engage with their Work Coaches – with a view to encouraging this approach to be rolled out further across the region to benefit more parents and carers.



ACTION TO MAXIMISE INCOMES

We will build on our existing region-wide activity to tackle child poverty, including by:

- Funding and working with cross-sector partners to deliver **income maximisation, benefits and debt advice** across our region, making this available within a wider range of trusted community spaces – such as early years settings – to help families receive their entitlement, including those who are in work. We will additionally fund **online information sessions for anyone in contact with families across our region as part of their everyday work**, about the type of help that is available and how to encourage parents, carers and young people to access it.



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- Working with voluntary, community sector and local authority partners **to establish a new North East Fundamentals Fund**, to support the expansion of proven, local schemes helping to ensure that no child goes without essentials, including initiatives supporting our region's youngest children.
- Convening local authority and voluntary and community sector partners to **improve the consistency of locally-delivered support across the region** – such as free school meal auto-enrolment schemes; support with school uniform costs, the availability of pre-loved provision and reducing the cost of the school day; the delivery of local crisis support to families; approaches to supporting families with debt; and **local and regional data-driven take-up campaigns**.
- Working with The Share Foundation, schools, colleges, the youth sector and other partners to **encourage young people, including care leavers, across the region (born between September 2002 and January 2011) to locate and access their unclaimed or lost Child Trust Fund**, if they have already turned 18 or are about to do so. This commitment will apply to the Junior ISA scheme for young people in care and the other life skills opportunities provided by The Share Foundation.

CULTURE, TOURISM AND SPORT

Working with a wide range of cross-sector partners, we will ensure that **the plans we have to build on the region's culture, creative, heritage, tourism and sporting offer will be genuinely inclusive for children, young people and families** – removing barriers to participation; opening up opportunities to improve physical health and mental wellbeing; strengthening social capital and community cohesion; and creating new employment and skills opportunities in these important sectors and as part of our wider foundational economy.

These plans include the development and delivery of a **regional events programme**; catalysing investment to sustain a vibrant and healthy cultural sector that increases opportunity and positive impact for the region's children, young people and families; working to establish the North East as the **first UK Region of Sport**; and delivering a **comprehensive, ten-year programme of investment** to maximise our opportunities from leisure and business tourism. We will monitor the reach of our investment and the impact of this work through a new **North East Cultural Observatory** - measuring children and young people's access to culture and sport across the region as part of this work.

We will also work with cross-sector partners to ensure the thriving North East creative sector we will help to grow – including by investing in and supporting our music, writing and screen industries – has **a pipeline of diverse talent, with clear pathways from education to employment for young people**, alongside retraining opportunities for adults.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

We will work with Good Things Foundation, local authority partners, business, voluntary and community sector organisations and national Government to define a **Minimum Digital Living Standard for our region**, and support the delivery of interventions to ensure that children, young people and families can access the skills, equipment, data and support needed to be digitally included – focussing on our communities most at risk of being disadvantaged by the digital divide. Our wider work to maximise family incomes and reduce essential costs will include **take-up campaigns for broadband social tariffs**.



EDUCATION AND ENRICHMENT

Building on regional good practice, including initiatives developed by our voluntary and community sector, we will fund **activity that reduces the costs of education for families and young people** through more schools, and a wider group of educational institutions – such as early years settings, colleges and universities. We will additionally facilitate the first regional pilot of the Donate to Educate digital platform.

We will fund and expand our work with schools and other learning partners to deliver a **Home of Opportunity programme of free after-school clubs, enrichment activities and family learning** across the region.

Our new £5 million **Excellence in Education programme**, currently funded to 2028, will work with schools, local authority partners, Multi Academy Trusts, teaching unions, Teaching School Hubs, Research Schools, education charities and national Government to deliver projects and interventions to support children's educational and future outcomes, focussed on three regional priorities:

- Inclusion (school attendance, children and young people's social, emotional mental health and wellbeing, and transitions into school/between phases);
- Realising Potential (support for literacy, oracy and maths skills, and promoting cultural capital and personal development); and
- Teacher Wellbeing, Development and Retention (a package of support to build the skills, resilience and leadership of our teachers, complementing existing provision).

We will **build on Inspire, our small grants programme for education** open to schools and colleges, widening it to any organisation in the region working with children and young people and in partnership with a school/college, for projects that expand opportunities and/or remove any barriers to children and young people thriving. We will also enable and encourage individuals and other organisations, within and outside the region, to provide additional investment for the fund.

And, working with education partners and the region's transport providers, we will also fund and evaluate **a rural pilot, breaking down travel cost barriers to children and young people accessing enrichment, including cultural and sporting opportunities**, with a view to expanding this work within the wider region.



HOUSING

Recognising the key role housing costs can play in driving up child poverty, we will work to **create a better functioning housing market** across our region to support an increase in residual household incomes and improved housing standards for families with children. This will include working with local authorities, the North East Housing Partnership, other housing providers and Homes England to create investment models that **unlock, and accelerate construction of, substantially more green, high-quality social and affordable homes**, over the course of the Local Growth Plan.

Given the high proportion of children living in socially-rented homes in our region, we will additionally work with the **North East Housing Partnership** to support their delivery of a new, collective commitment made to contribute to this action plan: to ensure that **all of their customers' children have a bed**; to work with schools and charities to ensure **all of their customers' children have a school uniform**; to partner with organisations across the region **to provide sports activities for young people**; and **to support the career aspirations of young people** with targeted careers engagement and by role modelling housing in schools. We will also work with social housing providers to explore how they can go further on this commitment, for example, on rents; as major employers within the region; and on the provision of flooring in all properties.

In partnership with our constituent local authorities, we will continue to **provide free retrofit advice through the North East Warm Homes one stop shop service**. Available to all residents and private landlords across the region, expert advisors provide ongoing support for families to access funding and finance to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. And, in preparation for devolved retrofitting funding being included in future Integrated Single Settlements, we will launch a **cross-sector North East Warm Homes Taskforce** to support the development of an **ambitious plan for the delivery of retrofit activity across the region to make our existing housing stock – including in the private rented sector – warmer and cheaper to heat**. This work will begin with a three-year pilot to develop innovative solutions to improve outcomes for working-age women with children in the private rented sector, accelerating retrofit activity to address fuel poverty in the worst housing and tackle wider inequalities.

We will additionally work with local authority partners and wider stakeholders to develop a **Homelessness Prevention Blueprint** which maps current provision, identifies gaps in services, and explores regional collaboration opportunities and our role in reducing homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation, including for families with children – and we will push for **more devolved powers and funding to take on rogue landlords**, to help ensure all families in our region are able to live in an energy efficient, safe, well-maintained, inclusive and decent home.

JOINING UP SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Our emerging work on **public service reform** identifies significant opportunities for more effective cross-system, joined-up working to support prevention, including through a focus on the Best Start in Life agenda.

We are in early discussions with central Government and regional partners, such as health, about how this work can be taken forward – with partners looking at how their services and resources could be better designed and aligned to improve outcomes, particularly for children in low income families, as well as to reduce pressure on crisis services. As part of this work, we are exploring opportunities to adopt prevention-focussed test and learn approaches to integrating local services, alongside closer working with initiatives such as Changing Futures Northumbria, to help bring more joined-up, person-centred support to a wider range of families while continuing to build the case for long-term investment in prevention.

The type of work that could be included within this prevention-focussed test and learn approach includes **exploring options for the expansion of Sure Start-style services within the region**, through building on national investment to further extend the reach and effectiveness of Best Start Family Hubs, and working with partners to improve community-based mental health provision.



Visual notes taken during our action plan engagement

SUPPORTING OUR
COMMUNITY ASSETS

Through the £1 million **Mayor’s Opportunity Fund** – currently due to run until late 2027 – we are providing support to our region’s grassroots groups, charities, and community organisations, including towards their core running costs. These include organisations working with children, young people and families experiencing financial hardship. We will expand the Fund and enable and encourage individuals and organisations, within and outside the region, to provide additional investment for this.

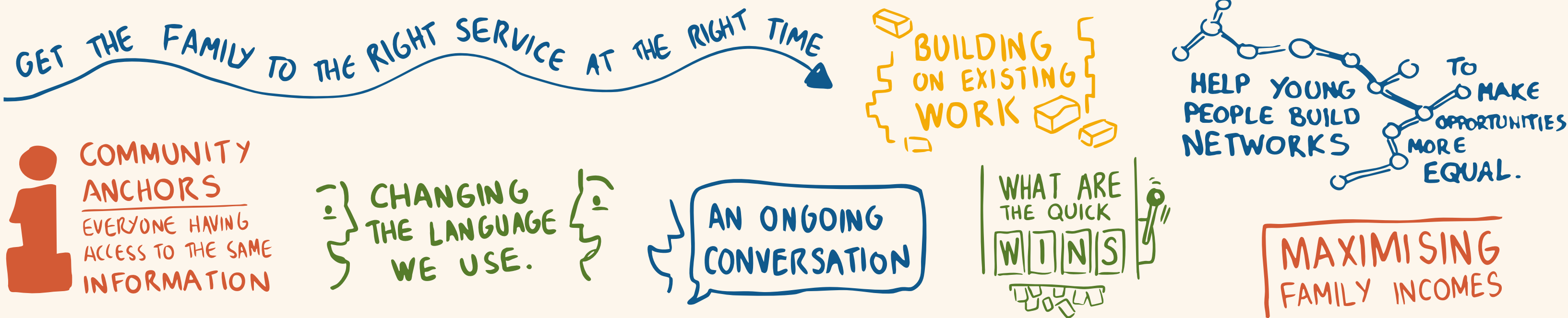
Through phase 1 of our **Flexible Social Finance Fund**, we are investing over £1 million in Socially Trading Organisations (STOs) across the region. Delivered by Big Issue Invest, the fund provides tailored, flexible loans to help STOs achieve their social purpose ambitions, whether managing community-owned assets; delivering essential family services; addressing food insecurity at a grassroots level; or creating more local employment opportunities.

Subject to demand and take-up for this support, we will expand the Flexible Social Finance Fund so that it can benefit even more Socially Trading Organisations to improve self-sustainability, grow impacts and support local families across the region – and will work with partners to secure additional investment for the North East.



TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY

We will work with existing local food partnerships, local authority and health partners, voluntary and community organisations, business and universities to **address high rates of food insecurity** for families and children in our region by undertaking a strategic review of our wider food system: to identify further measures to open up access to affordable, healthy food in communities; to ensure we are using every lever available to us to **help end the need for emergency food parcels for families**; and in a way that **supports our region’s food producers and local economies** – and to understand how we can **better measure food insecurity at a local level**. As part of this work, we will **ban the advertising of junk food across our public transport network**, starting with the Metro.



Visual notes taken during our action plan engagement

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AB Connexions
Academy 360, Sunderland
Aclet Close Nursery School, Bishop Auckland
Action for Children
Active Families North East
Active Travel England
Advice in County Durham
Alive Church, Gateshead
Anchor
Anxious Minds
Arriva
Arts Council England
Ashington Children’s Community
Association of Directors of Children’s Services North East
Association of Directors of Public Health North East
AtkinsRealis
Balmoral Learning Trust
BBC Children in Need
Beamish Museum
Bede’s Helping Hands
Believe Housing
Bernicia Homes
Berwick Community Trust
Big Local Jarrow

Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust
Bishop’s Primary School, Ashington
Blyth Resource and Initiative Centre (BRIC)
Building Self Belief CIO
Busy Bees
Cedarwood Trust
Centre for Life
Centre for Young Lives
Changing Lives
Cheviot Centre, Wooler
Child Poverty Action Group
Children North East
Choices4Growth, Berwick
Church Action on Poverty
Citizens Advice County Durham
Citizens Advice Gateshead
Citizens Advice Newcastle
Citizens Advice North Tyneside
Citizens Advice Northumberland
Citizens Advice South Tyneside
Citizens Advice Sunderland
Clinks
Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Communities Together Durham
Community @ NE66 youth group, Alnwick

Community Action Northumberland
Community Foundation North East
Community Money Advice County Durham
Community of African Women
Connect Northumberland
Connected Voice
Costain
County Durham Foodbank
CREST - Compact for Racial Equality South Tyneside
Crisis
Deckham Family Hub
Department for Education
Department for Work and Pensions
Durham Children in Care Council
Durham Christian Partnership
Durham Community Action
Durham County Council
Durham Wildlife Trust
Durham Youth Council
Eagles Community Foundation
East Durham Trust
Education Development Trust
ELCAP - Easington Lane Community Access Point
Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities group, Durham

Escape Intervention Services
Esh Group
Everyone Active
Everyturn Mental Health
Family Gateway
Farne Primary and Cheviot Primary, Newbiggin Hall
Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) North East
Feeding Families
FinPact
Fiscus
Foundation of Light
Foundation of Light Youth Voice group
Galafield Family Hub, Newbiggin Hall
Gateshead Central Library
Gateshead College
Gateshead Council
Gateshead Foodbank
Gateshead Football Club Foundation
Gateshead Youth Council
Gentoo
Glenroyd House, Consett
GLL
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Grace Darling CofE Primary School, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea

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Health Equity North
Her Circle
Holding Hands
Home Group
Hope Vineyard Sunderland
Hope4All young mentees, Pennywell
Horden Community Welfare Football Club
Horsley Hill Family Hub
Hospitality and Hope
Housing Employment Network North East (HENNE)
I.M.P.A.C.T. Northeast CIC
Impact Family Services
Insights North East
Inspire South Tyneside
Investing in Children
Invigor8 North East CIC
IPPR North
Jarrow School
Jewish Community Council of Gateshead
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Karbon Homes
Key Community

Kind Currency
Leading Link
Livin
Living Wage Foundation
Love, Amelia
Magic Breakfast
Marriott Communications
Marsden Primary School, Whitburn
Money and Pensions Service
More Than Grandparents
Mortal Fools
My School Health
National Education Union (NEU)
National Trust
NBHD Group
NEFirst Credit Union
NE Youth
New College Durham
New Writing North
Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre
Newcastle Carers
Newcastle Carers Young Carers group
Newcastle City Council
Newcastle College
Newcastle Foodbank

Newcastle Helix
Newcastle Rugby Foundation
Newcastle United Foundation
Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne Methodist District
Nexus
Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK
No. 28 Community House, Hexham
North East and North Cumbria ICB
North East and North Cumbria Child Health and Wellbeing Network
North East Business and Innovation Centre
North East Chamber of Commerce
North East Child Poverty Commission
North East Child Poverty Trust
North East Culture Partnership
North East Futures UTC
North East Housing Partnership
North East Institute of Technology
North East Law Centre
North East Museums
North East Youth Alliance
North Tyneside Council
North Tyneside Youth Council
Northern Health Science Alliance (NHSA)

Northern Housing Consortium
Northern Learning Trust
Northern Rights
Northern TUC
Northumberland County Council
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Northumbria University
Northumbrian Water
Office of the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner
One Million Women and Girls
Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School, Peterlee
PACT House Stanley
Peace of Mind North East
Phonetic Digital
Pioneering Care Centre, Newton Aycliffe
Point North
Port of Tyne
Pride Action North
Prudhoe Youth Project
Queen Elizabeth High School, Hexham
Rainbow Family Hub, Washington
RedSTART
Represent Women
Resolve Poverty

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Rise North East
Riverside Community Health Project
Rosie’s Corner, West Northumberland
Schools North East
Scouts
Seven Stories
ShARP - Shiny Advice and Resource Project
Shildon Alive
Show Racism the Red Card
Signal
Silx Youth Project, Blyth
Simonside Youth Project, South Shields
Smart Works Newcastle
Society Matters CIC
Sotech
Southmoor Academy, Sunderland
South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust
South Tyneside Council
Sow, Grow and Cook – Bill Quay Allotment
Space 4, Houghton-le-Spring
St Gregory’s Catholic Primary School, South Shields
Stagecoach North East
Stanhope Primary School, South Shields
Stanley Town Council
Stop Loan Sharks – the Illegal Money Lending Team

Stormbreak CIO
StreetGames
Success4All CIO
Sunderland All Together Consortium
Sunderland City Council
Sunderland College
Sunderland Community Action Group
Sunderland Culture
Sunderland Foodbank
Sunderland Mind
Sunderland Parent and Carer Forum
Sunderland University
Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance
SURT: Stopping Unsafe Relationships Together, South Tyneside
Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust
The Angelou Centre
The Bay Foodbank
The Bread and Butter Thing
The Bunker
The Children’s Foundation
The Children’s Society
The Comfrey Project
The Cornforth Partnership
The Cultural Spring

The Food Foundation
The Glendale Gateway Trust
The Greggs Foundation
The Key
The King’s Trust
The Meadows
The Millin Charity
The National Lottery Community Fund
The Nicole and Jessica Rich Foundation
The Salvation Army
The Share Foundation
The Wave Project
The Wise Group
Three Sixty Degrees
Thriving Together Northumberland
Timestep Dance Academy, Northumberland
Together for Children
Training in Care
Transform North East
Tyne and Wear Citizens
Tyne Coast College
Tyneside Cinema
Tyneside Training Services
UNISON
UTC South Durham

Voluntary Organisations’ Network North East (VONNE)
Wallsend Boys Club
Wallsend Children’s Community
Wallsend Children’s Community Parent Community Champions
Wavehill
Waythrough
Weardale Baby and Toddler Group
Weights & Cakes CIC
West End Children’s Community
West Moor Youth Project, North Tyneside
West Northumberland Foodbank
We Make Culture
Winning With Numbers
WL Distillery
Wooler Drop-In Centre for young people
Woolpak – Wooler Parents and Kids
WWIN - Wearside Women in Need
YMCA North Tyneside
YMCA Teesdale
Youth Focus: North East
Young Asian Voices