

Placement Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children in Care in Gateshead 2018 – 2021

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1. Introduction

This strategy sets out how Gateshead Council will ensure that there is sufficient accommodation of all types for children in our care.

This sufficiency strategy will ensure that Gateshead Council:

- Supports and maintains a range of services that meet the needs of children in care and those who, without support, might be accommodated
- Works with partners to ensure that only the children and young people that need to come into care are accommodated
- Communicates with partners and supports the market to deliver appropriate placements in the local area
- Has the mechanisms in place for the commissioning of appropriate placements and additional support outside of the local area where the child's needs require this

This strategy should be read in conjunction with the following Children's Services and corporate documents:

- Vision 2030
- Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives Gateshead's Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2018 – 2023
- Gateshead Council Fostering recruitment strategy 2018-2021
- Annual Fostering Services plan

The development and delivery of highly effective support for children who are looked after by the Local authority is a key priority for Gateshead. This strategy also draws upon our JSNA and sets out how we will achieve this in partnership with children and young people, local communities and partners.

The Council seeks to continuously improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers in order to improve their life chances and opportunities. These outcomes are closely linked to placement stability and ensuring that children have placement choice and are matched and placed with the right carers.

This approach is in keeping with the Council's Thrive agenda. We want Gateshead to be a place where everyone thrives. If we are to achieve this a **radical rethink is needed about the way we work as a Council**, the way we spend the money, the way we work with partner organisations, businesses and how we work with our local people and communities.

Within Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives we pledge to:

- Put people and families at the heart of everything we do
- Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance
- Support our communities to support themselves and each other
- Invest in our economy to provide sustainable opportunities for employment, innovation and growth across the borough
- Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead

This strategy covers:-

Children in Care

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is legally defined as 'in care' by a local authority if he or she:

- is provided with accommodation for a continuous period for more than 24 hours under S.20 (voluntary agreement with parent or with the young person if he/she is over 16 years old)
- is subject to a care order (made by the Family Court); or
- is subject to a Police Protection Order, Emergency Protection Order or Remand
- is subject to a placement order (pre-adoption)
- Within this document we will refer to young people who meet these criteria as 'children in care' (CiC).
- A young person ceases to be in care when he or she turns 18 years old, an adoption order is granted or their parents resume parental responsibility. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 extends the local authorities responsibilities to care leavers up to the age of 21, or 25 if they are in full-time education. We also support those carer leavers who are not in full time education through for example "staying put in fostering".

This strategy will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis in consultation with key stakeholders.

2. Vision

Gateshead's Vision 2030 promotes:

Local people realising their full potential, enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe, prosperous and sustainable Gateshead.

This strategy focuses on the application of this vision to children and young people who need to be looked after and aims to realise the vision of looked after children being:

Empowered and supported to develop to their full potential, being safe, healthy, happy and being provided with the life skills and opportunities to play active parts in society.

This strategy also recognises that looked after children and care leavers are amongst the most vulnerable children and young people within our community and, as such, require additional support to help them achieve their best possible outcomes. The Council has a clear role as a Corporate Parent and seeks to make the aspirations and attainment of our looked after children and care leavers their highest priority.

In Gateshead we are committed to supporting children to remain within their family, wherever possible. We do so by working with and supporting families to bring about change so that parents and carers are able to provide good parenting, firm boundaries and emotional support to ensure children are protected from significant harm.

We strive to ensure that there is a continuum of services to address the various and complex needs of children and families so that these families are supported to care for their own children and prevent unnecessary entry into care or repeat admissions. This includes the services below and we continue to explore further innovative ideas:

- Intensive Family Support (including Gateshead Think Family approach)
- Family Group Conferencing
- Developing Early Help and Edge of Care Services

The aim of any intervention is to achieve stability, improve parenting and family functioning in a way that keeps each child safe and allows that child to develop.

Where this is not possible we seek to provide high quality substitute care within family settings as near as possible to the child's home to maintain links with birth parents and their communities.

We are proud of our children and young people in Gateshead. We want the same for the children and young people in our care as any good parent would want for their child. We want our children to be healthy and happy in childhood. We want them to feel valued for who they are and to feel loved. We want them to enjoy learning and to have a good experience of education to help them fulfil their aspirations for the future.

Our aim is for children in our care to grow up to be emotionally balanced individuals who will experience positive relationships, be responsible citizens and achieve their full potential. We will achieve this by working with and listening to children and their families to find the best care arrangements that can meet their specific and individual needs.

The following will help drive and deliver our vision:

- We work collaboratively with families and our partners to support and enable children and young people to be cared for within their own families, wherever possible.

- All children and families benefit from integrated and co-ordinated services enabling full participation in universal and mainstream services in their local communities.
- A suite of Early Help services are used to support children on Child Protection Plans and their families, and prevent entry into care. This includes Early Help Team and Family Support services, Think Family Service, Family Group Conferencing, Parenting Programmes, Drugs and Alcohol support and other locally based, targeted services.
- Direct social work interventions are used with families, to support those with parental responsibility to meet the needs of their children safely.
- Through robust assessment, planning and case review, we ensure that we only look after those children and young people for whom being in care is the only way of ensuring their safety, protection and development.
- We continue to work with those with parental responsibility to help a child in care return home safely wherever this is possible.
- Where children cannot be cared for by their birth parents we provide placements in family settings, as close to the child's home area as possible that meet each child's individual needs.
- Where children cannot return home, we aim to secure legal and emotional permanence, preferably through adoption, Special Guardianship, Family Arrangement Orders, or where this is not possible, Long Term Foster Care.
- As we aim to place the vast majority of children within a family setting, we always maximise the use of internal fostering resources first before using local external fostering resources. We avoid using residential care except when it is the best way of providing support to meet a child's complex therapeutic and educational needs.
- Children in care should be as physically and emotionally healthy as they can be and have access to the right health and leisure resources, opportunities for early years and statutory education and participation in further education, employment and training.
- The needs of young people leaving care and those that have left care will be assessed and these young people should receive the appropriate level of support and advice to enable the transition to adulthood. This includes 'staying put' with their foster carer, access to suitable, high quality housing and opportunities to engage in education, employment and training.

- Feedback is routinely sought from children, young people, parents and carers to inform decisions made relating to service delivery to drive continuous improvement.

3. Corporate Parenting Pledge

Gateshead's Corporate Parenting Pledge sets out Gateshead's commitment and responsibilities as a corporate parent, which is to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people in care. At the core of this responsibility is the moral duty to provide the kind of support that any good parents would provide their own children. This includes enhancing the quality of life of Children in Care as well as simply keeping them safe.

Our role as Corporate Parents is embedded within the Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2018-2023, and this document serves as the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy

Our approach is to provide services and support to Looked After Children and Young People and Care Leavers in Gateshead. To support children in the community where this is safe and appropriate, using the whole family strengths and recognising we need to reduce the demand for services and improve the offer from ourselves and partners to enable our young people to meet their full potential

Vision and Principles

We want every child and young person in care in Gateshead to reach their full potential and we believe they have a right to be healthy, happy, safe and secure and feel loved, valued and respected.

Our principles are

- safeguard the welfare, health and happiness of all children in care
- listen and respond to children and young people's views and wishes.
- provide a stable and supportive home with caring consistent relationships.
- have high aspirations for each child and young person
- respect and value diversity
- place children and young people within families whenever possible and as close to the local community as possible
- promote contact with family and friends
- respect and promote children and young people's rights
- make decisions based on assessments of need
- celebrate children and young people's achievements

What children in our care say

- Find moving into a new home a difficult experience
- Need to understand why they came into care
- Need to be able to build relationships with adults they can trust
- Rely on the adults caring for them to help keep them safe.
- Support to maintain relationships once they leave care, on an informal basis
- Want professionals who provide support to have high aspirations for them
- Reported that leaving care still felt like a 'cliff-edge',
- Felt that the process of leaving care itself was often rushed and that planning for leaving care should start earlier.
- Wanted more choice about where they lived and who supported them;
- Know what they were entitled to from universal services

Our priorities are

Informed by what our Looked after Children and Young People say is important to them, we have identified 7 key priorities which are at the heart of this strategy:

- Our Children and Young People are **respected** and **involved**
- Our placements are **safe** and meet the **needs** of our Children and Young People
- **Positive** relationships and **identity**
- Our Children and Young People will be **supported** to **improve** their physical and emotional health and wellbeing
- Our Children and Young People are **encouraged** to **reach** their educational, employment and training potential
- Our Young People moving into adulthood will be **supported** to **achieve** their full potential in life
- **Improve** our role as the Corporate Parent

To enable young people's voice to be heard during the commissioning of services we have asked young people to:

- support modelling of services
- provide questions for the tender process
- be involved in provider forums as they are available

and this will continue to be the case.

4. Gateshead Demographic context

Gateshead has a population of around 201,600 people. Gateshead's population is projected to increase by 11,000 (5.5%) between 2014 and 2039 to 211,500.

The population is ageing: it is projected that by 2039 there will be an additional 14,400 people aged 65 or older, an increase of 38%. There will also be a slight decrease in the number of children and young people aged 0-15 of around 500 or 1.5%.

1 in 4 children in Gateshead live in poverty. Children who live in poverty are significantly more likely to experience poor mental as well as physical health.

Entering care is strongly associated with poverty and deprivation, and with emotional and mental health problems. Research suggests that around **45-60% of looked after young people have emotional and mental health problems**, increasing to **72% for those in residential care**.

At the end of reception, just under **6 in 10 Gateshead pupils achieve a Good Level of Development at Foundation Stage**. This is similar to the North East and just below the England averages. Nationally there is a gap of around 10% achieving a good level of development between the richest and poorest areas (based on IMD 2015 deprivation).

In recent years, on average around **180 young people aged 10 - 24 have had an emergency hospital admission for self-harm** each year. Compared to England, Gateshead's emergency admissions are significantly higher and have been consistently so over recent years.

At the 31st March 2018 there were **295 children the subject for a CPP**, a slight reduction on 313 at the same point last year. However, the rate per 10,000, compared with the national average Gateshead remains significantly higher. At the 28th October 2018 the number of cases has risen to **339**, with 11 being from other Local Authorities and 25 are LAC and have a CP Plan.

For these children, neglect is the single most significant reason for the plan (defined as a persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development).

The number of Looked After Children cared for by the local authority has increased over the past 12 months. At the 31st March 2018 there were 392 looked after children compared with 377 at the same time last year. As a rate per 10,000, compared with the national average Gateshead remains significantly higher. There are now **413 looked after children at the 28th September 2018**, and a further 3 Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers.

Research tells us. Looked after children compared with the general population:

- Do less well educationally
- Are over represented in the criminal justice system
- Have poorer health outcomes including an increased risk of suffering from mental health difficulties

- Have an increased likelihood of becoming homeless and experience economic and relationship difficulties in their own families

The number of Looked After Children in Gateshead

The number of Looked after Children in Gateshead on the 31st March 2018 was 392. That number has now risen to 413 at the 28th September 2018 and a further 3 cases are unaccompanied asylum seeker children.

The number of care leavers in Gateshead

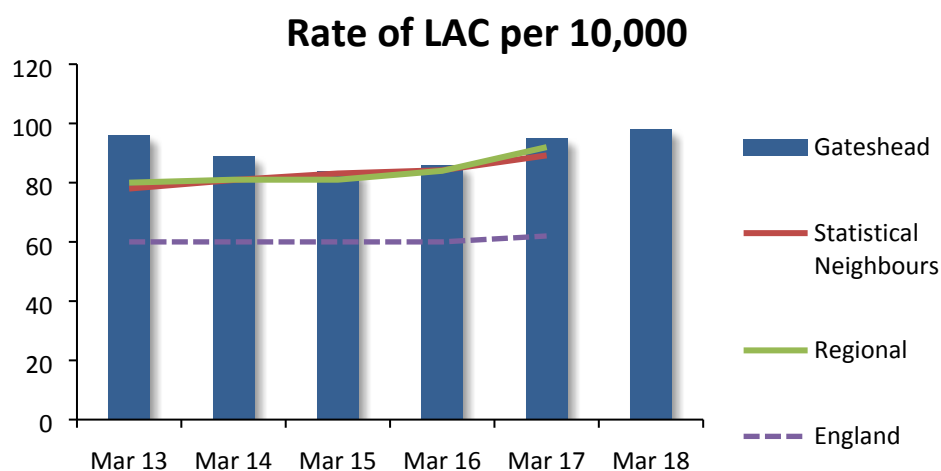
There are 127 active open care leaver cases at March 2018.

	Number of LAC	LAC Change
Mar 12	382	
Mar 13	389	7
Mar 14	357	-32
Mar 15	338	-19
Mar 16	344	6
Mar 17	377	33
Mar 18	392	15

5. Children in Care and placement profile

Children in Care Rate per 10,000

As highlighted in the graph from March 2013 to March 2018 Gateshead has been an outlier compared to the national average per rate of LAC per 10,000 population however we are comparable to regional neighbours in recent years.



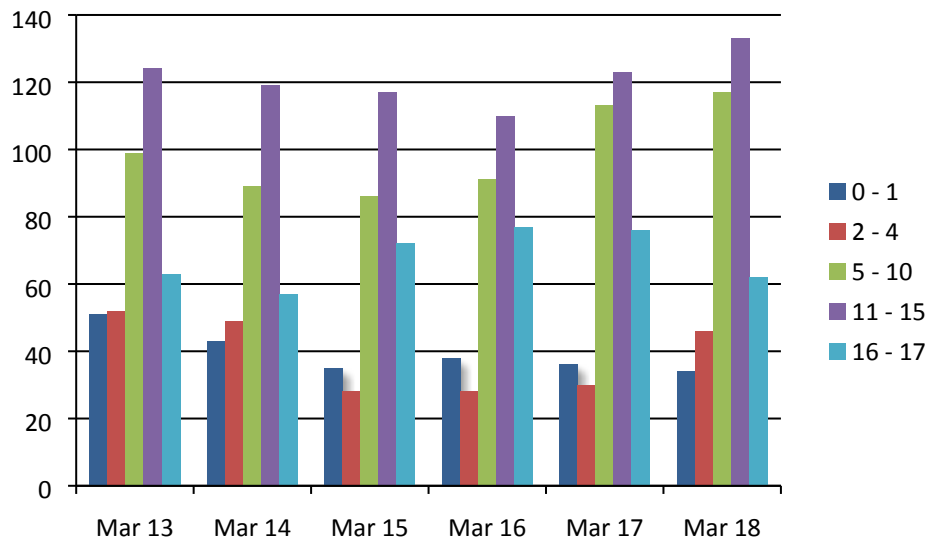
At March 2018 there were 392 (98 per 10,000) children and young people who were classed as being looked after. This compares with 376 (94 per 10,000) reported in the previous year at March 2017 - an increase of 3%. The figure for Gateshead is also 58% higher than the latest England rate (62), and 6.5% higher than the latest reported North East rate (92). When examining the numbers of children who came into care over the last 12 months (April 2017 - March 2018), there have been similar numbers to the previous year, although there has been a reduction in the those aged 16 and over.

Age Distribution

The largest cohort of children in care continues to be the 5 - 10 and 11 - 15 age groups.

The Council needs to consider the growth of these age groups in their commissioning activity over the next 12 months both to prevent entry into care and secure appropriate accommodation if they do come into care.

Age range of LAC



Gender and Ethnicity

In respect of gender, the proportion of boys to girls has remained steady.

There are more boys than girls in the care population. As at March 2018 there were 225 boys compared to 167 girls.

The vast majority of our young people in care are white with a small proportion from other ethnic groups.

	Mar 13	Mar 14	Mar 15	Mar 16	Mar 17	Mar 18
Asian or Asian British	8	9	6	8	6	8
Black or Black British	9	12	11	9	13	13
Chinese or other ethnic group	2	6	6	3	8	5
Mixed	20	11	9	9	9	11
White	350	319	306	315	341	355
Total	389	357	338	344	377	392

	Mar 13	Mar 14	Mar 15	Mar 16	Mar 17	Mar 18
Female	182	164	161	154	154	167
Male	207	193	177	190	223	225
Total	389	357	338	344	377	392

Legal Status

237 young people in Gateshead are accommodated under a care order (60%). The number who are accommodated with consent of their parents (Section 20 Care Act 1989) is 76 (19%), this has decreased by 19% since March 2017

The number of young people placed with connected persons under Reg 24 arrangements is increasing

	Mar 13	Mar 14	Mar 15	Mar 16	Mar 17	Mar 18
S20	102	101	109	91	94	76
Care Order	166	196	190	189	214	237
In LA on Remand or Committed for Trial/Sentence		2		1		
Interim Care Order	56	8	12	34	35	49
Placement Order Granted	65	50	27	28	34	30
Total	389	357	338	344	377	392

Admissions

The number of children being discharged from care has decreased since 2016. The number of children coming into care since 2016 has also decreased, but due to the drop-in discharges there has been an overall increase in the figure.

The number of children entering care has reduced from March 2016 to March 2018 by 15. The number of children leaving care in the same period has also reduced by 44.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Entered care	177	181	209	220	197	185
Left care	171	215	228	214	164	170
LAC Change	6	-34	-19	6	33	15

Number of Children Entering Care by Age Group

Age when starting care	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
02. 0 - 4	86	86	85	96	81	80
03. 5 - 11	42	53	53	73	64	64
04. 12 - 17	49	42	71	51	51	41
05. 18+					1	
Total	177	181	209	220	197	185

Leaving care by duration of stay

Duration of Care	2012/2013	%	2013/2014	%	2014/2015	%	2015/2016	%	2016/2017	%	2017/2018	%
01. 1 - 30 days	29	17%	32	15%	50	22%	37	17%	25	15%	24	14%
02. 1 - 6 months	25	15%	51	24%	65	29%	63	29%	40	24%	42	25%
03. 6 months - 1 year	27	16%	46	21%	41	18%	44	21%	35	21%	31	18%
04. 1 - 2 years	44	26%	33	15%	23	10%	30	14%	19	12%	25	15%
05. 2 - 5 years	23	13%	32	15%	33	14%	23	11%	20	12%	30	18%
06. 5 years +	23	13%	21	10%	16	7%	17	8%	25	15%	18	11%
Total	171	100%	215	100%	228	100%	214	100%	164	100%	170	100%

Looked after Children with Mental Health and Disability

The number of Looked After children with a medical Condition or disability was 56 in 2011/12 and has decreased to 49 by 31st March 2018.

Disabilities	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
Has Physical Disability	5	4	4	4	3	3
Has Sensory Disability	4	4	3	3	3	5
Has Learning Disability	35	35	34	30	27	28
Has Diagnosed Conduct Disorder	12	9	9	10	11	13

No of placements by type of placements (LAC)

The greatest impact is the number of children in residential placement which has risen from 14 to 26 currently from March 2017 with an increase in 12 placements

	Mar 13	Mar 14	Mar 15	Mar 16	Mar 17	Mar 18
1 Residential Non-GMBC	19	19	18	22	14	26
2 Agency Fostering	48	28	22	23	24	19
3 GMBC Homes	7	8	9	5	5	4
4 Mainstream Fostering	225	218	226	239	256	256
5 Family & Friends	58	55	47	36	52	66
6 Awaiting Adoption	27	26	12	14	18	16
7 Other	5	3	4	5	8	5
Total	389	357	338	344	377	392

6. Provision and market analysis

Commissioning of children's services in Gateshead is focussed on delivering excellent outcomes for children and families, achieving the best value for money and building local capacity. We do this by engaging children and families in a process of collaborative commissioning, embedding a programme of continuous improvement in our commissioned activity and ensuring all services are delivered by appropriately skilled providers.

Models of service delivery

Children's services are delivered through a mixed economy of in-house and independently commissioned provision. We focus on evidence-based solutions which offer choice and flexibility, including frameworks and collaborative commissioning across geographical and organisational boundaries. In Gateshead there is a broad range of provision that is across the borough that is provided by the Local Authority and the private sector. Gateshead Council will continue to work with providers alongside regional partners to expand what is available to meet the needs of the children in our care. This provision includes:

- NE7 Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) framework
- NE10 independent advocacy service
- NE12 is a Flexible Procurement Agreement for delivery of placements for children and young people as outlined below:
 1. Department for Education registered, independent special schools and colleges; day placements, weekly boarder placements and 52-week

- residential placements. All placements in these settings are for children and young people Pre-16 years and Post-16 years
2. Residential Children's Homes for Children and Young People aged 0 - 18 years
 3. Ofsted Registered Residential Short Break services for Children and Young People aged 0-18 years
 4. Short breaks framework for community outreach and home care services for disabled children

Gateshead Council has a range of internal provision including:

- **In house fostering** – At 31st March 2018 there were 186 approved fostering households, a slight decrease on the previous year. During the year ending 31st March 2018, 23 new fostering households were approved at fostering panel, with 30 being deregistered.
- **In house residential** - The Council has one in house residential Children's Home at Blaydon, however it does have an offer of short break respite services for children with disabilities at Grove House. The residential home offers 5 long-term placements for young people aged 11-18 years. With young people assisted to move onto independence and outcomes are consistently positive for those individuals in the home. Both Blaydon and Grove House are registered through Ofsted and their recent inspections both were inspected as "Good" and "Outstanding" respectively.

In addition, Grove House provides short breaks for children with disabilities including those with complex health needs, learning disabilities and challenging behaviour. The service provides breaks for approximately 50 young people and contributes to their health and wellbeing and supports with planned respite for families.

Date of Last Inspection	Blaydon	Grove House
09/01/2018 (Full)	Good (in all areas)	
30/01/2018(Full)		Outstanding
29/11/2016 (Full)		Outstanding

- **Adoption and Permanence** - Gateshead received 128 enquires from members of the public regarding adoption during 2017/18. There were 137 enquires in the previous year (a slight decrease). Adoption and post adoption support has a high priority in national policy and locally. Current measures have included, extending children's rights to priority school admission, free early years education, adoption leave and financial support and placed a duty on local authorities to inform adopters about their rights.

Gateshead has invested in marketing recruitment and parenting skills for adopters.

There was 1 Foster to Adopt placement in 2016/17 and an additional Foster to Adopt placement was successfully granted an adoption order in 2017/18

7. Financial analysis

General

Over the past 4 years, Gateshead Council expenditure on placements for looked after children has consistently exceeded budget, and this overspend is also projected for 2018/19. This overspend is attributable to an increase in looked after children over and above the level which is budgeted for but is also exacerbated by the increased use of more expensive external residential placements.

Total Spend and Unit Costs

The Council will continue to focus on the unit costs of placements, within the context of focussing on quality of provision, improving value for money and delivering the best outcomes for young people.

4 Years Spend Analysis

Category	Spend			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Internal Fostering	£5.197m	£5.474m	£5.506m	£5.905m
External Fostering	£1.056m	£0.995m	£0.934m	£0.828m
Internal Residential	£1.081m	£1.171m	£0.791m	£0.543m
External Residential	£1.843m	£2.432m	£2.598m	£3.466m
Total	£9.177m	£10.072m	£9.829m	£10.742m

Category	Average Unit Cost (per week)			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Internal Fostering	£363	£380	£354	£379
External Fostering	£845	£792	£750	£758
Internal Residential	£2,079	£2,252	£2,173	£2,088.46
External Residential	£1,693	£2,417	£2,721	£2,656
Total	£535	£586	£543	£588

8. Commissioning intentions

Our commissioning intentions going forward are focussed on:

- An integrated commissioning approach for children and families across social care and health
- Shifting resources downstream towards prevention and early help to reduce the demand on specialist services
- Tackling the root causes of disadvantage and developing more responsive and personalised services
- Increasing focus on outcomes, rather than inputs and outputs

Market opportunities

- NE12 Phase 2 – The Flexible Procurement Agreement commenced on 01 February 2018 for a period of 36 months with a further 3 x 12-month options to extend. The Flexible Procurement Agreement will remain constantly open during the first year to allow Providers to join the solution and have a minimum of two openings per year after that
- Review of Carers Services to develop a better offer for young carers and parent-carers of disabled children.
- Development of integrated, clear services and pathways for mental health and emotional health and wellbeing services.
- Enhanced short breaks offer for families with disabled children and expansion of personal budgets
- Development of an accommodation pathway for care-leavers and young people in housing need, including expansion of supported lodgings provision and move-on options for high risk young people.
- Gateshead Council will be going to the market for an Alternative Education Offer – SEND and Post 16.
- Gateshead Council alongside 11 other North East Local Authorities will be going to the market to commissioning specialist foster placements from Independent Foster Agencies during 2019.
- It has bid for funding for Social Workers into School and Social Work support into Edge of Care, award is to be notified in November 2018, for a 15-month pilot project to start December 2018.
- It has successfully through and Invest to Save, collaboratively commissioned specialist support to 2 women in Gateshead, who have had multiple pregnancies and then children removed to see if this additional support can limit the affect for the future by investing in those women.