# Gateshead Local SEND Reform Plan

Developing a Local SEND Reform Plan is an important first step for local areas to set out how they will lay the foundation for reform, and design an approach tailored to their local context. A shared plan which focuses on co-designing the local approach as system partners and with children, young people and families will help foster collective responsibility for delivering the reforms.

It is critical that all system partners, including health, education and childcare settings, work together to design and deliver the Local SEND Reform Plan, under the local authority's leadership. It is also crucial that representative family carers e.g. the local Parent Carer Forum, are involved in the development of the plan.

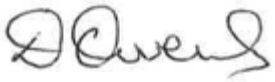
The expectation is that this plan is discussed, agreed, and signed off at your relevant SEND Governance Board. As a minimum, the plan must be formally signed off by the Local Authority Chief Executive (CEO), the Integrated Care Board (ICB) Chief Executive, the Local Authority Director of Children's Service (DCS), the Integrated Care Board NHS Place Director, and the Local Authority Chief Financial Officer (CFO/Section 151 Officer). We encourage other colleagues and partners who have contributed to also review and sign-off the plan, particularly early years, school, college and trust leaders.

**Name of Local Authority:** Gateshead

**Name of Integrated Care Board:** North East and North Cumbria

**Local SEND Reform Plan SRO:** Laura Smith

## Signatories

| Role | Name | Signature | Email contact | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Director of Children's Services & Lifelong Learning | Helen Fergusson |  | helenfergusson@gateshead.gov.uk | 17.06.2026 |
| CEO – Gateshead Council | Dale Owens |  | daleowens@gateshead.gov.uk | 17.06.2026 |
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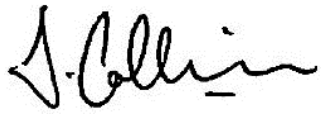
| Section 151 Officer | Darren Collins |  | Darrencollins@gateshead.gov.uk | 16.06.2026 |

# Executive Summary

A brief summary of your local system 'change story' – your local context, where you are now, where you want to get to in the next 3 years, how you know you are succeeding and how you will know you have achieved your vision for the next 3 years. Please include a brief qualitative summary. This summary should also include your assessment of current and forecast performance against the headline metrics.

Please structure your 'change story' using the following aims:

- *Build a 0-25 system where children and young people receive support to achieve and thrive through (a) more inclusive settings and (b) stronger local partnerships*
- *Improve capacity and capability of the mainstream and specialist workforce to identify and meet need*
- *Improve confidence of children, families, and stakeholders in reform and readiness of the system*
- *Stabilise finances and improve value for money*

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Gateshead's Local Area Reform Plan sets out a three-year transformation programme to deliver an inclusive, sustainable 0–25 SEND system where children and young people can thrive in their local communities. Central to this is strengthening mainstream provision so that needs are identified earlier and met more effectively, reducing escalation into statutory processes and high-cost provision.

To achieve this, we will prioritise improving the capability of education settings by embedding a clear graduated response framework alongside rapid access to specialist support and advice at the point of need. By ensuring that emerging needs are addressed early through consultation, problem solving and evidence-based intervention, children and young people will receive timely support within their local setting. This will reduce the need for escalation to Education, Health and Care Plans, minimise exclusions and absence, and improve overall outcomes and experiences for families.

We will strengthen partnerships across education, health and social care by integrating services into a coherent, locality-based delivery model with shared responsibility for outcomes. This model brings together Experts at Hand, locality-based Inclusion and Intervention Teams and Family Hubs as a single, joined-up system. Experts at Hand will provide immediate access to specialist advice and support at the point of need, locality teams will coordinate ongoing multi-agency intervention, and Family Hubs will act as accessible community-based points of support for children and families. Together, this integrated approach will ensure clearer pathways, reduce duplication and provide a more consistent, joined-up experience for families.

A key pillar of our reform is rebuilding confidence among children, families and stakeholders. We will do this by improving communication, co-producing solutions with families, and increasing transparency in decision-making. As support becomes more accessible, timely and effective, families will have greater confidence that needs can be met without escalation. This will contribute to stronger relationships, improved experiences and a reduction in disputes and appeals.

Over the next three years, the partnership will transition to this locality-based, multidisciplinary system underpinned by evidence-based practice. The focus is twofold: to build capability and capacity in mainstream settings to include children and young people with SEND, and to ensure consistent access to specialist expertise without over-reliance on referral and statutory processes. By bringing professionals together into locality teams aligned to Family Help services and Family Hubs, we will ensure support is coordinated, responsive and delivered at the right time.

Financial sustainability will be achieved through this shift from reactive, high-cost provision to preventative, system-wide support. Earlier intervention and strengthened mainstream inclusion will reduce demand for specialist placements, particularly independent and out-of-area provision, while maximising the impact of existing services and resources.

Implementation will be delivered in phases.

**Year 1 -** focuses on establishing the foundations, including shared expectations, governance and a test-and-learn approach to the Experts at Hand model within one locality.

**Year 2 -** focuses on scaling and embedding the integrated locality model, strengthening workforce capability and expanding access to early intervention.

**Year 3 -** secures system-wide consistency and impact, with reduced escalation, improved experiences for families and a more financially sustainable system.

Progress will be tracked through a robust monitoring framework, including an enhanced SEND dashboard, quarterly data returns and regular partnership review cycles. Governance will be strengthened through clear accountability across the Local Authority, Integrated Care Board and education partners, led by a named Senior Responsible Officer.

This reform represents a shared commitment across partners to deliver a more inclusive, responsive and sustainable SEND system, where children and young people receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

**North East Regional Statement**

Across the North East, we will work collectively, using the strength of our established regional partnership to drive consistent, high-quality support for children and young people with SEND. Through strong collaboration between local authorities, education, health and care partners, we will share learning, align approaches and deliver at scale to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities. By working regionally where it adds most value, we will accelerate improvement, strengthen local delivery, and create a more coherent and sustainable system for children, young people and their families.

# Section 1 – Vision and Goals

1. **What the local area partnership is trying to achieve?**

   Please set out your goals for your local system. These should be clear, aligned to the vision set out in the Schools White Paper, small in number and measurable. These goals should include clear reference to:

   - Outcomes for children
   - Confidence of parents, carers and young people in the system
   - Management of finances to secure value for money

**1. Strengthening Inclusion**

**Goal:**
Increase the proportion of children and young people with SEND educated successfully in mainstream settings with appropriate support.
**Measure:**

- Year-on-year increase (minimum +5% over three years) in pupils with SEND supported in mainstream schools
- Reduction in requests for specialist placements where needs can be met locally
- 80% of settings (EY, primary, secondary, post 16, out of area and AP) over the next 3 years will be implementing a consistent graduated response framework

**2. Outcomes for Children, Young People (CYP) and Families**

**Goal:**
Improve educational, attendance, and wellbeing outcomes through earlier identification and effective intervention.
**Measure:**

- 20% reduction in persistent absence, suspensions and permanent exclusions for CYP with SEND support over a 3 year period
- Measurable improvement in attainment/progress indicators for SEND cohorts year-on-year
- Increased proportion of needs identified and met at a targeted and targeted plus level in early years and KS1

**3. Value for Money**

**Goal:**
Ensure SEND resources are used efficiently and sustainably while improving impact and outcomes.
**Measure:**

- Reduction in high-cost placements and alternative provision spend (target 10–15% over three years)
- Increased investment in early intervention and locality-based support services
- Demonstrable cost-benefit improvements through the SEND performance framework

**4. Review and Expansion of Placement Sufficiency**

**Goal:**
Develop sufficient, high-quality local provision so children can be educated closer to home.
**Measure:**

- Increase in local placement capacity (including inclusion bases and post-16 support) by at least 10% over the next 3 years
- Reduction in out-of-area placements year-on-year
- Increase the number of children and young people accessing appropriate provision within a reasonable distance of their home over the next 3 years

**5. Confidence of Parents, Carers and Young People in the System**

**Goal:**
Build trust through transparent, timely, and responsive SEND processes and communication.
**Measure:**

- Improved satisfaction scores from parent/carer and CYP surveys
- Increased timeliness of assessments and support delivery (e.g. EHCP timelines consistently met in 90% cases)
- Reduction in complaints, disputes, and tribunal cases over the next 3 years

# Section 2 – Strategy

2. **Where the local area partnership expects to be in the next 3 years**

A description of what your local system would look like in the next 3 years in line with the national vision set out in the Schools White Paper and set within the context of where you are starting from as a local system.

In particular, as commissioning system partners, you should reflect on and agree what your fully fledged **Experts At Hand Offer** model should be and how this will be deployed via mainstream settings and providers (including those not based in your area – e.g. further education colleges attended by your young people) to build their capacity as well as identify and meet the needs of children and young people earlier and without the need for a statutory assessment for Education, Health and Care.

To help you fully consider the scope and scale of change required, you may find it useful to structure your response using these 4 building blocks of an inclusive system, reflecting on what is working well in your system, what you are most worried about, what needs to change, and how the enablers will help you achieve your 3 year vision.

When summarising where your local area partnership currently is, please include an assessment of where you are in reference to the core minimum requirements above and how you bridge the gap, making reference to and attaching additional documents that provide underlying evidence for your summary.

**Strengthening inclusion across education settings–** organising places and provision to meet as many needs as possible, as close to home as possible, with all settings and providers moving towards a shared understanding and consistent practices around inclusion.

**System leadership, local partnership collaboration and co-production** – putting in place the enabling conditions across a local area that ensures planning and provision reflects the local area & is joined up, including strategic co-production with parent carers and children and young people.

**Access to specialist support and local placements** – improving collaboration between settings and deploying expertise from a range of specialist and expert sources, to support schools and settings to meet the needs of children and young people earlier and locally.

**Encouraging inclusive culture & behaviours** – using funding and shared accountability towards a system that works for children and families while achieving value for money.

| Local blueprint for the next 3 years | Where we are | Where we will be in the next 3 years |
|---|---|---|
| **Building blocks**<br>*Strengthening inclusion across education settings*<br>*Access to specialist support and local placements*<br>*System leadership, local partnership collaboration and co-production*<br>*Encouraging inclusive culture and behaviours*<br><br>**Enablers**<br>*E.g.*<br>*Capital – investment strategy across EY, mainstream, FE*<br>*Workforce*<br>*Data/digital systems* | *(a short summary of where you are now including a reflection on what is working well, what needs to change and the status of the enablers that underpin your system)* | *(a short summary of the vision for your local system in the next 3 years including the system enablers, reflecting how your Experts At Hand Offer model will underpin this vision, helping you scale and enhance what is working well and change what is not working so well)* |
| **Success measures**<br><br>***Drawing on metrics from the accompanying data template E.g.***<br><br>*Improve attendance of pupils in all maintained schools (mainstream*<br><br>*and special) with SEN*<br><br>*Reduce reliance on independent special school places*<br><br>*Mainstream settings with increased access to Education*<br><br>*Psychologists/SaLT/OT*<br><br>*Reduced NEET rates for SEND YP at age 16* | *Baseline*<br><br>*(outline the baseline for your success measures reflecting where you are now – these should be drawn from the metrics in the data template)* | *Target Metrics*<br><br>*(outline the target metrics that will demonstrate you have achieved the vision summarized above – these should be drawn from the metrics in the data template)* |

***INSERT DOCUMENT UPLOAD LINK***

**STRATEGY HAS BEEN SENT AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT**

3. **What is the local area partnership's strategy for delivering on the above?**

   A brief summary of your local system's theory of change or reform strategy. Reflect on the output of your **Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool**, particularly your *Local System 'change story.'*

Delivery of Gateshead's SEND reform strategy is underpinned by a set of critical assumptions and dependencies that reflect both the current maturity of the system and the scale of transformation required. The theory of change assumes sustained commitment across the partnership, with strong shared accountability between education, health and social care, supported by established governance, active co-production and continued engagement of children, young people and families. It is predicated on the system's ability to strengthen workforce capacity and capability over time, enabling practitioners to deliver inclusive, trauma-informed and evidence-based support at the earliest point of need, while maintaining sufficient specialist capacity to support the Experts at Hand locality model.

A core assumption is that mainstream settings will increasingly embed inclusive practice and consistently apply the graduated response, supported by improved access to multi-agency advice, resulting in earlier intervention and a reduction in escalation to statutory processes and high-cost provision. The model also depends on improvements in the quality, sharing and use of data to inform decision-making, commissioning and sufficiency planning, alongside the continued development of co-production so that lived experience consistently shapes service design and delivery. Financial sustainability is dependent on the successful rebalancing of resources towards preventative approaches and the effective use of capital and revenue investment to increase local capacity. Delivery is, however, contingent on a number of external dependencies, including the pace and direction of national SEND reform, the impact of NHS and Integrated Care Board changes on workforce capacity and commissioning, the implementation of Children's Social Care reforms including Families First, and the delivery of Family Hubs and Best Start for Life priorities to support early identification.

Progress is also dependent on local factors such as workforce supply, capital delivery and organisational stability across partners. These assumptions and dependencies are actively monitored through governance arrangements to ensure that the programme remains adaptive, responsive and aligned to both local need and national reform expectations.

4. **Please upload a completed copy of the Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Tool.**
   ***INSERT DOCUMENT UPLOAD LINK***

   **MATURITY ASSESSMENT HAS BEEN SENT AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT**

5. **What is the local area partnership roadmap for the next 3 years?**
   Reflecting on the broad timescales and expectation for deliverables set out in the Schools White Paper, key documents and core minimum requirements set out in this document, please provide a high-level roadmap for the next 3 years. Please highlight key milestones and a trajectory to the target metrics identified above, including leading indicators.

   In the 2026-27 column, in particular, please reference how you plan to meet the core minimum requirements in your narrative, including details and evidence in supporting documents.

   You can insert or upload supporting documents including graphics/visuals that illustrate your data trajectory.
   **3 YEAR ROAD MAP HAS BEEN SENT AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT**

   **Also see words below to support document**

**Gateshead Local Area Partnership Road Map (2026–2029)**

Across the three-years, the Local Area will consistently meet and strengthen the core minimum requirements of the reforms through a deliberately sequenced focus on strengthening inclusive mainstream provision consistently across all settings 0-25, ensure and strengthen early identification and intervention through aligning the Gateshead graduated approach to the National Inclusion Standards, strengthening the universal, targeted, targeted plus and specialist offer. This will be achieved through strong partnership governance and will ensure financial sustainability.

Year 1 prioritises establishing shared definitions of inclusive practice across all settings from 0-25, introduce a test and learn 'Experts at Hand' working with one locality cluster of settings, co-produce with settings an Inclusion Strategy ensuring financial efficiency in removing barriers to inclusion. We will begin to deliver advisory services to the post 16 sector and by the end of year 1 will have worked with partners in post 16 settings to shape the service delivery required for a successful Experts at Hand model of working.

Inclusion bases will be reviewed both at a support and specialist level strengthening and defining our place planning for the next three years. As a partnership, we will scope the workforce requirements over the next three years to successfully implement the reforms and explore opportunities for aligning the SEND reforms with other current reforms; Social Care reforms and Neighbourhood Health Teams. We will work with all partners to achieve this, including parents' carers and children and young people.

We will embed and revise governance clarity to progress the reforms, mature co-production arrangements, and workforce capability in relation to specific areas of special educational need relevant to what we know about Gateshead. Year 2 embeds the expectations from year 1, through scaled up delivery models (including embedding National Standards, Experts at Hand, universal offer frameworks including strengthening this for short breaks, and increase in development of inclusion bases) supported by shared data and performance dashboards strengthened for the multiagency access and sharing of service level data intelligence.

By Year 3, the system will demonstrate sustained impact: reduced escalation to needs assessment request and reduction in out-of-area placements, improved consistency and transparency for families, who will begin to have more confidence in a confident and skilled workforce across mainstream settings, and a financially sustainable SEND system aligned with national reform and inspection expectations.

This three-year roadmap sets out how the Gateshead Local Area Partnership will deliver progressive SEND reform, moving from system building to embedded inclusive practice. It builds on existing strengths identified through the Partnership Maturity Matrix and aligns with national SEND reform expectations, including early intervention, inclusive mainstream education, locality working and shared accountability.

**Gateshead Local Area Partnership Road Map Objectives (2026–2029)**

The Gateshead Local Area Partnership is committed to creating an inclusive, sustainable, and transparent system that ensures children and young people with SEND achieve the best possible outcomes in their local communities. Our shared vision is for a system where needs are identified early, support is accessible and equitable, and families have confidence that provision is timely, effective, and responsive.

Our offer will enable early intervention through consultation, formulation, and problem-solving, ensuring that emerging needs are identified quickly and addressed through locality-based, multi-agency Experts at Hand. This approach will strengthen mainstream inclusion by building the capability and confidence of the education workforce, empowering settings to meet a wider range of needs specific to our Gateshead community. Clear and consistent access to evidence-based support will be provided across all education settings through universal, targeted, and targeted-plus interventions, reducing variation and ensuring fairness.

- Develop setting/provider inclusion clusters in each locality area across Gateshead to share best practice of inclusion across the borough maximising resources available in each locality, strengthening consistency of advice, support and partnerships between education services, early help, social care and neighbourhood health teams.
- Develop parental confidence in mainstream education through improving multi-agency relationships working into settings, strengthening inclusive provision.
- Strengthen early years to reception transition processes by improving multi-agency working between neighbourhood health teams, early help and the 0-5 service enabling early identification, better relationships with families at the earliest stage in their child's education and signposting to mainstream support services.
- Upskill 0-5 workforce across education, health and social care in order to develop their understanding of inclusion and in turn support increased parental confidence in mainstream destinations for their children – check data to support
- Build upon current High Incidence Needs team advisory support services to expand the offer to Post 16 providers to strengthen a shared understanding and consistent practices around inclusion
- Through a test and learn in one locality cluster introduce consultation and formulation processes to enable early access and early intervention to mainstream settings to create expertise from a range of specialists and expert sources
- Implement the Gateshead Re-engagement Strategy to support children who are not attending school due to mental health needs, repeated suspension, or who have been permanently excluded from school into Primary and Secondary Mainstream settings, by removing all barriers to education
- Through a test and learn approach develop local area resources to strengthen early identification and deploying expertise from a range of specialists in relation to speech, language and communication and social, emotional, mental health needs
- Increase schools workforce capability in relation to meeting the needs of children with SEMH needs and those who have experienced trauma
- Review the type and scope of existing Inclusion bases across mainstream settings, considering locality resources, identifying gaps in sufficiency and associated transport implications
- Prioritise within one locality cluster a test and learn, led by locality data, to support the development of inclusive learning environments and meet more children and young people's needs in their communities – secondary specific
- Expand local area specialist base provision to meet the needs of children with EBSA and SEMH needs

End of Year Outcomes (By 2029)

By the end of the three-year period, Gateshead will have an embedded, inclusive SEND system where:

- More children and young people with SEND are successfully supported in local mainstream settings.
- Access to early help and specialist advice is timely, consistent and equitable.
- Escalation to EHCPs and reliance on independent and out-of-area placements is reduced.
- Families experience clearer pathways, earlier support and improved confidence in local provision.
- The system is financially sustainable and aligned with national SEND reform expectations.

6. **What will the local area partnership deliver in the first year?**

Please outline the key workstreams, milestones and trajectory your local area partnership will deliver and achieve in 2026-27 as well as how you plan to spend the investment allocation that will help fund this year's delivery. Please share key milestones and anticipated dates, success measures, cost breakdown and category. These should incorporate the core minimum requirements, be mapped to the building blocks above and should reflect a more detailed trajectory to the narrative, milestones and target metrics outlined in the 2026-27 column above.

| **2026-27 Local delivery plan** | | **Q2** | | **Q3** | | **Q4** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Workstream outline – mapped to building block***<br><br>***Outcome -*** *what you want to achieve with this workstream* | ***Responsible lead per workstream*** *– accountable for the delivery of the workstream and the identified outcome.* | ***Milestones per workstream*** *What key milestones will enable you achieve your targeted trajectory* | ***Target trajectory per workstream*** *Where do you expect your data to be?* | ***Milestones per workstream*** *What key milestones will enable you achieve your targeted trajectory* | ***Target trajectory per workstream*** *Where do you expect your data to be?* | ***Milestones per workstream*** *What key milestones will enable you achieve your targeted trajectory* | ***Target trajectory per workstream*** *Where do you expect your data to be?* |

| | | | | | | | |
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| ***Success measures –*** *how you measure progress drawing on metrics from the accompanying data template* | | | | | | | |
| **Building block - Workstream 1**<br><br>*Outcome*<br><br>*Success measure*<br><br>**Building block - Workstream 2**<br><br>*Outcome*<br><br>*Success measure*<br><br>**Building block - Workstream 3**<br><br>*Outcome*<br><br>*Success measure* | | | | | | | |
| **Projected Investment Spend per quarter**<br><br>*Please specify funding source for each category*<br><br>*Example categories*:<br>Programme oversight/additional leadership capacity.<br>Workforce<br>Recruitment<br>Workforce training and development<br>Data/Digital<br><br>**Total Spend** | | | | | | | |

***INSERT DOCUMENT UPLOAD LINK***

**1 YEAR ACTION PLAN AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT**

**SEE ADDITIONAL EXPERTS AT HAND DRAFT MODEL OVERVIEW AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT**

7. **How will the local area partnership deliver the first-year plan?**

Please set out how you will ensure the required capacity and capability is in place from organisational corporate functions to support implementation of the plan. This could include reference to how you plan to build or bring in project delivery capability to manage delivery against the plan, support prioritisation, and effective use of resources; and how you plan to build the capacity and capability in data and analytics to support effective tracking against the measures in the plan and reporting that informs decision making.

Delivery of the Year 1 SEND Reform Plan will be supported through existing programme, performance, commissioning and SEND capacity within the local authority and partner organisations. The local area recognises that delivery at pace will require active management of capacity, with flexibility to build, repurpose or recruit resource as the programme develops.

The programme is led by a named SRO and overseen by an Education & SEND Reform Board, accountable to the SEND Board. Delivery is structured through defined workstreams with named leads across education, health and social care, supported by programme management capacity within Children's Services to coordinate planning, manage risks and track delivery against milestones.

The SEND reform programme is supported by a dedicated SEND Project Officer, originally funded through the Change Programme and now repurposed to support Year 1 delivery, providing continuity and operational grip. Programme management activity is currently underpinned by existing leadership and management roles. As delivery progresses, the local area will review the need for additional capacity, including releasing leadership time through backfilling roles, targeted recruitment or time-limited external support.

Analytical support is provided by Gateshead's corporate Performance and Systems Team, including maintenance of SEND dashboards drawing on Synergy and wider system data. During Year 1, this will be strengthened through improved data quality, shared dashboards and regular performance reporting.

Commissioning and finance capacity is embedded, with a named business and finance partner. Progress, risks and capacity pressures are reviewed through regular SEND Reform Board cycles, supported by workstream-level delivery meetings and escalation routes.

Contingency arrangements are in place to respond to any potential recruitment delays or emerging capacity gaps that may impact delivery. The local area will actively monitor capacity across workstreams through programme governance and, where pressures arise, will prioritise the repurposing of existing resource, including the temporary redeployment of staff from aligned programmes and services. Where this is not sufficient, contingency measures include the use of time-limited external expertise, agency or interim capacity, and commissioning support to maintain delivery momentum. The programme will also explore opportunities to flex partner resource across education, health and care to ensure system-wide resilience. These arrangements will ensure that delivery risks linked to workforce capacity are mitigated effectively, maintaining progress against key milestones even where recruitment timelines are extended or demand increases.

8. **Other funding** .

Block Transfers: If you have made a block transfer (Schools Block to High Needs Block) for 26-27, please set out how your plans for this funding align with the activities outlined above.

For the 2026–2027 financial year, Gateshead Council has made a block transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant. Based on the DfE's estimated Schools Block allocation of £160.1 million, this equates to approximately £0.81 million. The transfer responds to sustained and growing pressures within the HNB, which is forecast to overspend by £3.208 million in 2025–2026, reflecting continued growth in both the number of children with SEND and the complexity of need.

The proposed transfer will be prioritised to support SEND placement sufficiency and system sustainability. Funding will be directed towards stabilising existing provision and strengthening local capacity to meet need, thereby reducing reliance on high-cost out-of-borough and independent placements. This includes investment in early intervention, enhanced graduated response arrangements, and support for mainstream settings to increase inclusive practice and reduce escalation to specialist provision where needs can be met locally.

The approach aligns with the SEND and Alternative Provision reforms by improving outcomes, promoting inclusion, and ensuring resources are deployed effectively across the system. By rebalancing funding, Gateshead Council aims to protect statutory provision while enabling planned development of local specialist places that better reflect current and projected demand.

The block transfer represents a proportionate and necessary step within a broader programme of SEND sufficiency planning and financial recovery. It supports the transition to a more sustainable, place-based SEND system while longer-term reforms and funding solutions continue to be developed in partnership with Schools Forum and local stakeholders.

Capital: We have announced at least £3 billion in high needs capital between 2026-27 and 2029-30 to support children and young people (CYP) with SEND, or those requiring alternative provision (AP). This funding is intended to support place delivery across the full 0-25 age range, including early years and post-16. We expect funding to support the following outcomes:

a. Inclusion at the core of high needs sufficiency strategy, resulting in more children and young people with SEND accessing suitable places in mainstream settings, across all phases of education
b. Every child or young person who needs a place in an inclusion base can access one
c. Fewer children and young people with SEND needing to travel a long way to access a suitable placement
d. Improved suitability of the mainstream estate to support children and young people with SEND, with adaptations to improve inclusivity and accessibility of the physical environment

We also welcome innovative uses of high needs capital to drive inclusion, for example, investment in assistive technology for use in mainstream settings.

Please outline your strategy for how this funding will meet the outcomes above, with reference to the core minimum requirements and other workstreams in this reform plan where appropriate. We would like to see detail around your plans to increase capacity for inclusion bases (formerly known as SEN units, resourced provision and pupil support units – SU/RP/PSUs), such as schools, colleges or early years providers identified, engagement with relevant settings and trusts, and target cohort of needs.

If your plans include increases to places in special schools or specialist post-16 institutions, please include a clear rationale, showing the need that is being met, and why it cannot be met through other types of provision, such as inclusion bases.

If you are receiving additional capital funding to replace one or more planned special or AP free schools, please set out how this funding will meet need in your area, and plans for engaging relevant trusts in your sufficiency planning.

Gateshead intends to utilise its share of the additional high needs capital funding available between 2026/27 and 2029/30 to deliver a coherent and inclusion-led programme of investment. This programme will increase local capacity, reduce travel distances for families, and strengthen mainstream provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) across the 0–25 age range. Evidence from the School Sufficiency Report highlights sustained growth in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), alongside increasing complexity of need and significant pressure on existing specialist provision. Demand is particularly high for pupils with autism, severe learning difficulties, and complex needs, with the most acute pressures seen in early years and primary phases. The EHCP rate for 2024–2025 stands at 34.7 per 1,000 population, reflecting an average growth rate of 11.5% over the past three years. Despite this increase, Gateshead remains below both the national average (35.8 per 1,000) and the North East rate (35.9 per 1,000). Currently, 46% of pupils with an EHCP are placed in specialist settings, a proportion that has also risen over the same three-year period.

A central focus of the capital programme will therefore be the expansion of Local Authority commissioned Specialist Bases, as informed by the Sufficiency strategy. These bases are designed to strengthen inclusive pathways within mainstream schools, enabling more pupils to have their needs met locally while reducing escalation into specialist placements. Currently, only 4% of pupils with an EHCP are placed in specialist provision, despite settings operating at approximately 95% capacity. While there is still some availability within the Physical Disabilities base, all Autism and SEMH bases are currently full. These specialist bases will be quality assured through the same process as the existing bases, via a dedicated School Improvement Partner for SEND and the Quality Assurance and Monitoring officers.

At the primary phase, funding will support the creation or expansion of three specialist bases within existing mainstream schools in central and south Gateshead. Typically offering 8 places, these provisions will cater for pupils with autism, communication and interaction needs, and associated social, emotional, and sensory vulnerabilities. These pupils present with complex needs due to the interplay between their social communication needs and their SEMH needs, resulting in a higher level of need than that which could be consistently met within a support base; therefore, these young people require specialist base places. At secondary level, investment will establish a new autism and complex needs base for 15 pupils in central and south Gateshead, addressing a clear geographical gap in provision.

Current specialist bases are largely concentrated in the west of the borough, limiting access for many families. These developments will increase local capacity, reduce reliance on specialist, independent or EOTAS placements, and support pupils to access education closer to home thus also reducing transportation costs. The developmental of the specialist bases will not only be informed by sufficiency, but also by local demographic need. Currently south Gateshead has the largest 0-25 population, and alongside central Gateshead, has higher prevalence of SEMH needs identified within schools.

Adaptations to the mainstream estate will enable pupils to access inclusive environments with specialist teaching and targeted support and will be aligned to the Local Authority's Accessibility Strategy. This will include the development of sensory-friendly spaces, small group teaching rooms and dedicated therapy areas to support the delivery of interventions within the school day. Improvements will also include enhanced hygiene and changing facilities, accessibility adaptations such as ramps and improved wayfinding, and the creation of safe outdoor and transition spaces to support pupils' regulation and access to learning. These improvements will support mainstream settings to meet a wider range of need and strengthen inclusive practice. Collectively, these developments are intended to create sufficient local capacity for pupils whose needs can be met in mainstream-based specialist provision, thereby reducing reliance on independent specialist and out-of-area placements over the spending review period.

While the strategic direction is to expand specialist capacity in mainstream wherever appropriate, a limited increase in special school provision is also required for cohorts whose needs cannot be met consistently through specialist bases alone. One priority is the development of an existing special school, who we have had recent Cabinet agreement to refine designation of the school for pupils with severe learning difficulties and autism across Key Stages 3 to 5. This provision will include enhanced facilities and support continuity into post-16 education, strengthening transition pathways and reducing reliance on independent or out-of-area placements. Additionally, an expansion of primary-aged specialist provision will address immediate pressures in Reception and Key Stage 1, where demand is particularly high. This will align with wider early years developments, supporting earlier identification of need and smoother transition into education.

This expansion is essential given that Gateshead's special schools are currently operating at approximately 143% capacity with an average increase in places year on year over the past 3 years of 4.9%. Rising demand is driven not only by increasing complexity of need but also by growth in tribunal decisions favouring specialist placements. Existing specialist bases are also at full capacity, significantly restricting system flexibility. Without additional specialist places in the short term, pressures on mainstream schools would intensify, increasing the likelihood of costly independent or out-of-area placements.

To ensure value for money and effective use of resources, the Local Authority will review existing school estate capacity, including opportunities to repurpose available or underutilised accommodation within mainstream schools. Our recently completed school place sufficiency review will inform schools identified as having reducing rolls ensuring we can plan this surplus provision/space into plans of creating specialist bases. This will mean that consideration of changes in pupil numbers and any opportunities created through falling rolls, will be enabling provision to be developed across the next three years within existing buildings where appropriate. Following this sufficiency review, the Local Authority has begun to work with Multi Academy Trusts and school leaders to discuss school sufficiency and estates planning process with a view to collaboratively developing any specialist bases.

The programme is also expected to reduce reliance on out-of-area placements and associated travel. The Local Authority will continue to assess the impact of planned developments on pupil travel, including journey times and transport requirements, to ensure that children and young people are able to access suitable provision closer to home wherever possible. We will use learning from a recently commissioned Home to School Transport review to prioritise proposed actions, particularly the focus on reducing long-distance travel from central and south Gateshead. A fuller impact assessment of journey times, travel distances and transport implications for each scheme will be completed as part of the detailed design and approval process in Year 2.

The Local Authority will continue to work closely with education partners, including Multi-Academy Trusts and local providers, to support the delivery of this programme. This includes ongoing discussions with local trusts in relation to the development of specialist provision and consideration of different delivery models to ensure high-quality, sustainable placements. This will support the development of provision that meets local need and is delivered in partnership with experienced providers.

Finally, investment will also support the development of inclusive support bases within mainstream schools, informed by learning from Local Inclusion Support Offer (LISO) pilots and supported by the spending on adaptations within the mainstream estate to develop inclusive environments. These provisions will offer short- to medium-term support for pupils with emerging or lower-level needs, strengthening early intervention and reducing escalation. It is expected that places created will include PVI support bases typically offering 4 places, primary bases offering 8 places, secondary bases providing a minimum of 10 places, and a new expansion to up to 20 places within post-16 provision. The settings selected will be those who have shown a strong commitment to inclusion from ongoing monitoring, alongside ongoing discussions with MATs and school leaders. As part of this programme of work, a new post will be created within the already established SEND Quality Assurance and Monitoring team to ensure the development of support bases are inline with the standards set by Gateshead, which is currently conducted through a quality assurance and monitoring framework which includes the SEND Thresholds. Once released this framework will be aligned with the National Inclusion Standards, to ensure that all settings are operating at the expected standard and support can be targeted to where required. This balanced approach ensures that specialist capacity growth is targeted, while the wider system continues to move towards greater inclusion and resilience.

9. **System partner and stakeholder engagement, and co-production.**

Please outline how the local area partnership plans to engage system partners and stakeholders to develop and implement the plan – include planned engagement with schools and early years settings, alternative providers, FE and post-16 providers (including those your young people attend that are not within your local area), Parents and Carers and children and young people with SEND, with reference to the core minimum requirements. Consider changing roles and responsibilities in the context of the Schools White Paper and how you work collaboratively to manage the transition. Please indicate where additional support is required to engage partners or stakeholders - senior officials at the Department for Education will be available to contribute to summer term events with education leaders and parent carer forums.

The development and implementation of the LARP will be underpinned by meaningful engagement, coproduction and strengthened accountability across the local SEND system. This will include structured engagement with system partners, stakeholders, parents, carers, and children and young people with SEND, alongside clear involvement from education leadership and governance. The local area is committed to ensuring that the plan reflects lived experience, professional expertise and shared ownership across education, health and social care, in line with core minimum requirements and emerging SEND reforms.

A key element of this approach will be targeted engagement with Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) CEO's, academy trust SEND leads and governance representatives, recognising their central role in shaping inclusive culture, overseeing admissions practice and securing improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Engagement with senior leaders will support shared accountability for inclusion, place planning and admissions, and ensure expectations for reform delivery are clear and consistent across the system.

A coordinated programme of engagement activity has taken place across the summer term to ensure a wide range of voices contribute to shaping the plan prior to submission. Engagement has combined in-person stakeholder sessions and an online survey to maximise accessibility, flexibility and participation. Stakeholders will help shape priorities and will continue to impact on implementation. Their feedback will directly inform decisions, sequencing and accountability arrangements.

A stakeholder engagement presentation, adapted from sector best practice, has been used consistently across all sessions to support a shared understanding of the reforms, changing roles and responsibilities, and the local context. The presentation included focused discussion on inclusive practice, early intervention, targeted and specialist support, governance oversight, admissions responsibilities and the role of trust-level leadership in supporting system sustainability and improvement.

The local area will ensure co-production is appropriately resourced through dedicated officer support, planned engagement capacity, accessible materials, and agreed arrangements with the Parent Carer Forum and participation partners to support sustained involvement over the life of the plan.

Children and young people's views will be captured directly and separately from parent and carer feedback through age-appropriate group work, one-to-one engagement, accessible tools and existing participation forums, ensuring their priorities are visible in decision-making in their own right, A clear 'you said, we did' process will be used to demonstrate how feedback from children, young people, parents, carers and partners has shaped priorities, decisions and delivery. By the end of year 1, the local area will adopt a minimum coproduction benchmark informed by NHSE guidance and complete a self-assessment with partners, children and young people and the parent carer forum to identify strengths, gaps and priority improvement actions. A strengthened participation worker capacity will be allocated to ensure ongoing feedback is embedded across the next three years of reforms implementation.

The independence of SENDIASS is and will be clearly communicated to families including within mediation pathways, with service standards, referral routes and advocacy support designed to reinforce confidence, the advice is impartial and separate from the local authority's decision making. The current contract specification includes clear key performance indicators and robust expectations around user engagement, with quality and effectiveness monitored through regular contract management with the current provider and user feedback.

Alongside this, Gateshead has established a graduated mediation and dispute resolution offer which forms a core part of how parent, carer and child voice is captured, responded to and acted upon. This includes:

- **Early informal resolution arrangements**, where parents can request a review meeting with the Local Authority, education settings and relevant professionals to reconsider decisions, explore new information and agree next steps. These meetings provide an opportunity to hear directly from parents and, where appropriate, children and young people, often resulting in early resolution or agreed actions that are monitored over time.

- **Formal independent mediation**, facilitated by a DfE-registered mediator, with agendas co-produced with parents. This ensures structured and equitable participation, with dedicated time for families to present their views, articulate concerns and challenge decision-making in a supported environment.

- **Direct capture of child and young person voice**, including the use of accessible views forms and, where appropriate, engagement by Quality Assurance and Monitoring officers to gather a more holistic understanding of lived experience and inform resolution pathways.

- **Pre-tribunal review processes**, ensuring that all partners revisit positions, consider new evidence and pursue early resolution wherever possible, recognising that tribunal is a last resort within the local area.

- **Direct capture of child and young person voice**, including the use of accessible views forms and, where appropriate, engagement by Quality Assurance and Monitoring officers to gather a more holistic understanding of lived experience and inform resolution pathways.

- **Pre-tribunal review processes**, ensuring that all partners revisit positions, consider new evidence and pursue early resolution wherever possible, recognising that tribunal is a last resort within the local area.

This approach ensures that dispute resolution is not a standalone process but is aligned to the wider coproduction model, placing families and young people at the centre of decision-making and continuously informing system improvement.

To strengthen accountability and transparency, a robust performance and monitoring framework will be applied across engagement and mediation activity. This will include:

- **Timeliness measures** (e.g. response times to mediation requests and time to resolution)
- **Resolution rates** across informal, formal and pre-tribunal stages
- **User experience and confidence indicators**, including parent and young person feedback
- **The extent to which child and young person voice is evidenced within decision-making**
- **Trends in appeals and escalation**, including key cohorts such as transition points

Performance against these measures will be:

- **Monitored monthly** at an operational level
- **Reviewed quarterly** through SEND governance structures such as the Education and SEND Reform board
- **Reported to the SEND Partnership Board**, ensuring oversight and challenge
- Supported by the **Tribunals and Complaints Officer**, who will oversee mediation processes and drive early resolution, alongside the **Quality Assurance and Monitoring team**, who will ensure accuracy, consistency and learning across cases

As the SEND system continues to develop, there is an increasing emphasis on clearly defined and shared responsibilities across Multi-Academy Trusts, individual schools and wider local partners. Trusts will play a strategic role in embedding inclusive practice, overseeing governance, and aligning resources across their academies, while schools retain responsibility for delivering high-quality, inclusive teaching and meeting the needs of pupils at an operational level. Local authority and wider system partners, including health and social care, will continue to provide coordination, specialist support and statutory oversight. This collective approach ensures clarity of roles, reduces duplication and strengthens joint accountability for improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Any future development of alternative provision, including discussions regarding an Evolve School model (for young people in key stage 3 and 4 with EBSA) will be informed through engagement with families, schools, trusts and wider partners to ensure proposals reflect local need and lived experience.

## 10. Risks and Mitigations

What are the key risks that could affect the successful implementation of your Local SEND Reform Plan, and what mitigation strategies are in place to manage these risks? Please include a maximum of 5 risks with impact and likelihood RAG for each risk. See Annex C for suggested risk matrix.

| Risk | Impact | Likelihood | RAG | Mitigation | Residual RAG |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Inconsistent adoption of Inclusive practice across settings – Variation in how settings implement the universal offer, graduated response could prevent system wide impact<br><br>**Link to building block 1 – Governance workstream 1**<br><br>**Owner**<br><br>Strategic lead for SEND & Inclusion | Moderate | Possible | Amber | Continued development of a partnership wide inclusion statement aligned to national standards, refreshed SEND thresholds, consistent quality assurance audits, build upon existing Inclusion clusters to cover all settings, 0-5, post 16 and specialist in order to share best practice. The above work will be enabled through additional capacity within the quality assurance team.<br><br>**Review point**<br><br>Building block governance workstream will report quarterly via a published forward plan to the Education SEND reform board, each workstream will have representation from Education (Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and AP), Health, Children and Adult social care, commissioning, performance, ICB, PCF, VCS and 0-19 service. The single responsible officer will feed an overview of workstream into a quarterly SEND board. | Unlikely |

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| Workforce capacity and capability constraints – Insufficient workforce skills, confidence or capacity could delay implementation<br><br>**Link to building block 3 – Governance workstream 3**<br><br>**Owner**<br><br>Strategic commissioner for Children and young people - SEND | Moderate | Possible | Amber | Workforce development is a focus on our plan, staff are In place to deliver training across education, health and social care. Specific plans drafted for early years, MAT's and Post 16 providers as these areas will require more focus in relation to workforce development.<br><br>**Review point**<br><br>Building block governance workstream will report quarterly via a published forward plan to the Education SEND reform board, each workstream will have representation from Education (Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and AP), Health, Children and Adult social care, commissioning, performance, ICB, PCF, VCS and 0-19 service. The single responsible officer will feed an overview of workstream into a quarterly SEND board. | Possible |
| Pressure of current system delivery alongside implementation of the reform plan – pressure on services and stakeholders to continue business as usual as well as test and learn each reform evaluate and build on evaluations over the 3 year period.<br><br>**Link to building block 1 – Governance workstream 1**<br><br>**Owner** | Critical | Likely | Red | Service managers are using formula to map how they can deliver their existing service offer and contribute in year 1 to the test and learn of Experts at Hand. The Experts at Hand in year 1 will be resourced using staffing in the Local Authority from current teams, these staff will be backfilled through agency, commissioned services or secondments. They will be existing staff offering a new offer to a cluster of settings.<br><br>**Review point**<br><br>Building block governance workstream will report quarterly via a published forward plan to the Education SEND reform board, each workstream will have | Possible |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strategic lead for SEND & Inclusion | | | | representation from Education (Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and AP), Health, Children and Adult social care, commissioning, performance, ICB, PCF, VCS and 0-19 service. The single responsible officer will feed an overview of workstream into a quarterly SEND board. | |
| Availability of professionals to form the Experts at Hand – resource across 4 locality wards, as the pressure of said experts continuing to deliver the current offer to the locality<br><br>**Link to building block 3 – Governance workstream 3**<br><br>**<u>Owner</u>**<br><br>Strategic commissioner for Children and young people - SEND | Critical | Possible | Amber | Graduated draft working model produced to demonstrate how we will deliver the current offer as well as build an expert at hand model over the next 3 years. We have a well-resourced Educational Psychology Service and current projects such as PINS which speech and language therapy have inputted towards. We have good relationships with commissioning to develop joint commissioning procedures.<br><br>**<u>Review point</u>**<br><br>Building block governance workstream will report quarterly via a published forward plan to the Education SEND reform board, each workstream will have representation from Education (Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and AP), Health, Children and Adult social care, commissioning, performance, ICB, PCF, VCS and 0-19 service. The single responsible officer will feed an overview of workstream into a quarterly SEND board. | Possible |
| Ongoing risk from the delays in Capital delivery and the potential effect on placement forecasts and costings as a result | Critical | Possible | Amber | Recent restructure of schools asset team into Education, Schools and Inclusion will enable more joined up working arrangements to ensure progress in relation to projects, revise agenda and terms of reference of the Capital | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Link to building block 4 – Governance workstream 4**<br><br>**<u>Owner</u>**<br><br>Strategic Lead for Early Years and Schools and Strategic Lead for Post 16 | | | | Investment group to ensure project completion and ongoing discussion around the reforms and associated work, lastly additional capacity to schools building and assets team to respond to anticipated increase in demand.<br><br>**<u>Review point</u>**<br><br>Building block governance workstream will report quarterly via a published forward plan to the Education SEND reform board, each workstream will have representation from Education (Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Post 16 and AP), Health, Children and Adult social care, commissioning, performance, ICB, PCF, VCS and 0-19 service. The single responsible officer will feed an overview of workstream into a quarterly SEND board. | |

## 11. Dependencies

Please detail the key areas of the local area partnership's proposed SEND future state and roadmap that may be impacted by wider reforms nationally and locally and outline how you will manage these. We expect these will include but not be limited to:

- NHS reforms
- Local Government Re-organisation
- Reforms to Children's Social Care

- Best Start in Life, including Family Hubs
- Best Start In Life Strategy
- Curriculum and Assessment Review

The delivery of Gateshead's SEND Reform Plan sits within a wider context of national reform and local system change. Progress towards the SEND future state and three-year roadmap depends on several external reforms progressing as anticipated. A dependencies and mitigation table is maintained and reviewed through the SEND Reform Board, providing oversight of risks, ownership and mitigation. This section summarises the key dependencies and how Gateshead is managing their impact to ensure delivery remains resilient, adaptive and aligned to local priorities.

To ensure the roadmap remains responsive to the pace and direction of national and local reform, dependencies will be actively and dynamically reviewed throughout the programme cycle. This will be achieved through structured oversight via the Children's Services Transformation Board and the Education & SEND Reform Board, alongside existing SEND governance arrangements. These forums will routinely review emerging national policy, system pressures and delivery risks, using performance intelligence, stakeholder feedback and delivery milestones to inform decision-making. Where external reforms shift, the partnership will use this intelligence to re-sequence priorities, refine delivery models and adjust the three-year roadmap, ensuring continued alignment with both national expectations and local need.

National SEND reform, as set out in *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*, aligns closely with Gateshead's ambition to strengthen early identification, inclusive mainstream practice and graduated support. However, changes to national guidance, expectations around targeted support or implementation timescales may affect the sequencing of local activity. Gateshead will mitigate this through an adaptive roadmap, test-and-learn approaches within locality pilots and the use of professional discretion while aligning to national direction. This dependency is overseen by the SEND Reform SRO and monitored through changes to national guidance and inspection frameworks.

Ongoing NHS reform, including the shift towards neighbourhood and place-based integrated care, presents both a key dependency and a significant opportunity for SEND delivery. This national direction emphasises delivering care closer to home through multidisciplinary teams aligned to local populations, with stronger integration between health, local government and community services. In Gateshead, this aligns directly with the SEND reform ambition to develop locality-based, multi-agency inclusion and intervention teams through the Experts at Hand model.

In practice, this will mean that therapy services such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and mental health support are increasingly planned and delivered as part of integrated locality teams, rather than accessed solely through referral-based pathways. Professionals will work collaboratively with schools, early help services and Family Hubs to provide consultation, joint assessment, early intervention and ongoing support within mainstream settings. This supports more timely and coordinated responses to need and strengthens the capacity of the universal and targeted offer.

The shift to place-based working will support improved access to therapies through proactive deployment of specialist expertise into locality clusters, strengthen multi-agency collaboration through shared formulation and planning, and reduce fragmentation of pathways for children and families. This approach is central to achieving earlier intervention and reducing escalation to statutory processes and specialist placements, in line with the three-year roadmap ambitions.

However, changes to commissioning arrangements, workforce models and accountability through NHS reform and the introduction of CQC system-level assurance may affect health partner capacity and delivery models. Gateshead will mitigate this through strengthened joint governance, alignment of SEND performance with CQC expectations, integrated therapy planning and continued oversight through place-based ICB leadership and SEND Board governance.

Children's Social Care reform, including Families First, presents both opportunity and dependency. Changes to thresholds and practice models may affect SEND interfaces with early help and statutory pathways. Gateshead is aligning SEND reform with Families First through locality working, embedding SEND within early help delivery and supporting joint workforce development. This dependency is monitored through Families First milestones and SEND Board oversight.

Best Start in Life priorities and the rollout of Family Hubs are central to early SEND identification and parental confidence. Variability in pace or delivery could affect access to early support. Mitigation includes using Family Hubs as delivery partners for early SEND identification and aligning educational psychology, ELSA/MELSA and early years SEND support within hub-based models.

Locality-based SEND reform depends on successful piloting and scaling. Capacity or engagement challenges may affect pace. Gateshead is mitigating this through a test-and-learn pilot in the South Cluster, refining the model before phased expansion using feedback and outcome indicators such as attendance, exclusions and escalation.

Care-experienced and adopted children are disproportionately represented in SEND and often require therapeutic support. Gateshead is strengthening pathways for this cohort by aligning SEND, health and social care responses, monitored through disproportionality data, EHCP escalation and placement stability.

Changes to leadership or organisational arrangements could affect pace or priorities. Mitigation includes a values-led, adaptable roadmap, shared ownership across partners and continuity through SEND Board governance and named SRO arrangements.

Overall, these strengthened governance and partnership arrangements ensure that Gateshead's SEND reform programme remains adaptive, integrated and resilient, with the flexibility to respond to a changing national reform landscape while maintaining a clear focus on improving outcomes for children and young people.

## Section 3 – Monitoring and Evaluation

12. **How will the local area partnership know delivery is on track?**

Please set out how you will monitor and track progress referencing:

- ***Monitoring tools and processes*** - the specific tools, systems, and data you will use to track delivery milestones and measure the impact on outcomes.

> *Some Local Area Partnerships hold data in a central SEND operational dashboard. This is used by teams on a weekly basis to identify trends in demand or inform conversations with local school or setting leaders.*
>
> *In some Local Area Partnerships, a view of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is reviewed monthly by a SEND Board to take decisions on prioritisation, resourcing and delivery of services informed by regular data.*

Please set out how you will use data to track demand (e.g., EHCP applications for assessment), Service delivery (e.g., Speech and Language Specialists deployment; places created), Service quality (e.g., parental satisfaction) and outputs (e.g., pupil attendance; pupil exclusions)

- ***Feedback and adaptation mechanisms*** - what feedback loops and stakeholder input you will use to review progress and adjust your approach.

The Gateshead SEND Partnership operates within a robust performance management framework designed to monitor delivery, evaluate impact and support informed strategic decision-making across the local area. Performance information is coordinated through the Council's Performance and Systems Team, working closely with Education, Health and Care services, alongside wider operational leads. Data is routinely used to track demand, service delivery, quality of provision and outcomes, ensuring services remain responsive to emerging pressures. Reporting is aligned to the priority areas and actions set out in the SEND Improvement Plan, enabling progress against milestones and intended outcomes to be consistently reviewed. Regular multi-agency performance meetings enable partners to review progress, assess impact and adapt approaches where outcomes are not improving as expected. A partnership dashboard brings education, health and co-production measures together into a single routine reporting view, enabling partners to identify issues early and take jointly owned corrective action. This collaborative approach ensures accountability and supports timely intervention.

Stakeholder voice is a key component of governance arrangements and plays a direct role in shaping decision-making. Feedback from families, schools and partner agencies is routinely presented to the SEND Board and senior leaders. Emerging themes from engagement activity, surveys and complaints are considered alongside performance data to identify priorities for improvement.

This integrated approach ensures that both data and lived experience inform decision-making, service planning and resource allocation. As a result, the partnership is better positioned to respond effectively to need and deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND across the local area.

A wide range of data sources are used to monitor delivery and outcomes across the SEND system. These include the Synergy case management system, school census data, attendance and exclusion figures, specialist placement sufficiency information, health waiting lists and therapy data, as well as tribunal, mediation and parental feedback. Participation activity and stakeholder engagement findings also contribute to a comprehensive understanding of service performance.

These combined datasets provide insight into demand, capacity and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Operational dashboards are reviewed monthly by service managers and teams to track progress, identify trends and respond quickly to pressures or delays in service delivery.

Strategic performance is reviewed on a quarterly basis by senior leaders, the Group Management Team and the SEND Board. These forums provide oversight, challenge and assurance regarding progress against SEND reform priorities. A central element of this approach is the Synergy system, which supports both case management and reporting of SEND and Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) activity. It provides key indicators including assessment requests, timeliness of statutory processes, annual reviews, tribunal activity, placements and transitions.

This information is analysed alongside partnership intelligence to identify trends, forecast future demand and inform sufficiency planning, commissioning and resource allocation. The SEND Board reviews a core set of performance indicators to support prioritisation, planning and service delivery. These include statutory assessment demand, timeliness, specialist provision capacity, attendance, exclusions and post-16 participation outcomes.

Service quality and stakeholder experience are monitored through both quantitative and qualitative measures. These include parental surveys, complaints and compliments, mediation outcomes, and engagement with parent carer forums, as well as feedback from children, young people, schools and practitioners. This feedback is embedded into a continuous cycle of review and improvement, ensuring that service development is informed by lived experience.

13. **Reporting to DfE**

Using the attached data template, the local area partnership is required to provide quarterly data returns to DfE against selected key metrics. DfE will, in turn, provide quarterly data reports with visualised analysis and benchmarking that will support your local delivery, monitoring and evaluation. This will include data the department holds on **Attendance**, **Exclusions**, and **Unauthorised absence**.

Please use the attached data template to upload your initial data return to DfE.

***INSERT DOCUMENT UPLOAD LINK***

**DATA TEMPLATE HAS BEEN SENT AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT**

## Section 4 – Governance

14. **How will the local area partnership ensure delivery of plans remain on track?**

Please outline the governance structures in place to oversee delivery. Clearly set out who is responsible for overseeing reform delivery, what each governance group or individual is accountable for, and how these arrangements ensure progress is monitored and decisions are made transparently. Please identify where the named SRO for the Local SEND Reform Plan sits within the governance structure and ensure your response incorporates the core minimum requirements.

Delivery of the Local SEND Reform Plan is overseen through a clear and established governance structure, with a named Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) providing overall accountability. The Education & SEND Reform Board leads delivery of the reform programme and reports to the SEND Strategic Board, ensuring alignment with the wider SEND Strategy and partnership priorities. The SEND Strategic Board, in turn, is aligned to the Children's System Board and Health & Wellbeing Board, providing whole system oversight across education, health and care. Budget oversight is provided through the joint High Needs Block and SEND Reforms strategic finance meeting, chaired by the Director of Children's Services, ensuring strong financial governance and alignment with delivery priorities. Where appropriate, accountability will also be shared with the Director of Commissioning for Gateshead, ICB, reflecting the joint partnership approach to delivery across education, health and care.

Any gaps identified through the SEND maturity assessment will be reflected within the Gateshead Reform Delivery Plan, ensuring that areas for development are fully integrated into programme priorities and actions. Reporting and oversight of these will sit initially with the Education & SEND Reform Board, with further governance and strategic oversight provided by the SEND Board.

Priority workstreams aligned to the four SEND reform building blocks lead day-to-day delivery and escalation of risks, supported by strong engagement with Head Teachers Reference Groups. This governance structure ensures clear decision making, shared accountability, effective escalation routes and transparent monitoring of progress against reform priorities.

| **Governance Mechanism**<br>*This may be a governance group, or an individual (e.g. SRO).* | **Purpose/ Responsibilities**<br>*What is the function of this governance mechanism? What are they accountable for overseeing? What information is reported to this governance mechanism?* | **Membership**<br>*Who does this governance mechanism comprise of? [should include health and PCF representation] What stakeholders are represented at this governance mechanism? Please indicate who chairs this. (Include n/a if an individual).* | **Cadence**<br>*How regularly does this governance mechanism meet?* | **Decision Rights**<br>*What decisions can this governance mechanism make?* | **Escalation Route**<br>*Where can this governance mechanism escalate issues or decision to?* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) | Overall accountability for delivery of the Local SEND Reform Plan; provides strategic leadership, oversees performance, risks and dependencies, and acts as the single point of accountability to DfE. | Senior Local Authority officer – Laura Smith | Ongoing | Sets strategic direction, approves key delivery decisions and prioritisation | Director of Education<br><br>Director of Children's Services<br><br>Corporate Leadership |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education & SEND Reform Board | Oversees delivery of the SEND Reform Plan and Year 1 delivery programme; monitors milestones, data and risks; resolves barriers to delivery. | Chaired by Director of Education<br><br>LA education and SEND leads; ICB/place-based health partners; social care; Parent Carer Forum representation. | Monthly | Approves delivery plans, agrees mitigations and commissions further work. | SEND Strategic Board / SRO |
| SEND Strategic Board | Provides strategic partnership oversight for SEND; ensures alignment with SEND Strategy and wider system priorities; receives assurance on reform delivery. | Chaired by Director of Children's Services<br><br>Local Authority, ICB, education representatives, social care, Parent Carer Forum and partners. | Monthly | Strategic endorsement, challenge and system assurance. | Children's System Board / Health & Wellbeing Board |
| Children's System Board | Provides whole-system oversight across children's services, ensuring alignment between SEND reform, Families First, early help and safeguarding. | Chaired by – Senior Local Authority leadership and health and care system partners. | Quarterly | System-level alignment and resolution of cross-cutting risks | Health & Wellbeing Board / Corporate Governance |
| Priority Workstream Groups (Priorities 1–4) | Lead delivery of the four SEND reform priorities; manage operational | Named workstream leads from education, health, | Monthly / Bi-monthly | Operational decisions within agreed remit and resources | Education & SEND Reform Board |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | risks and track milestones. | social care, PCF and partners as appropriate. | | | |
| Head Teachers Reference Groups | Provide professional advice, challenge and feedback from schools to inform SEND reform and inclusive practice. | Head teachers across sectors (SEND, safeguarding and school improvement groups) | Monthly | Advisory Only | Education and SEND reforms Board |

If you have a diagram to show the relationship between these governance mechanisms, please upload this here.

***INSERT DOCUMENT UPLOAD LINK***

**GOVERNANCE CHART HAS BEEN SENT AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT**

## Section 5 – Central Government Support

15. **How can we help you?**

Please outline any practical support you need from central government to implement your plan effectively.

This may include:

- Access to specialist expertise or advisory support
- Help with workforce development or recruitment challenges
- Tools or templates to support data collection, reporting, or evaluation

- Facilitation of peer learning or regional collaboration
- Support with system-level coordination across education, health, and care
- Guidance on navigating regulatory or policy barriers

To implement the Gateshead Local SEND Reform Plan effectively and at pace, we welcome targeted practical support from our DfE advisor and financial advisor to complement strong local leadership and delivery arrangements.

Specialist expertise and advisory support would support the development and refinement of our Experts at Hand model, including learning from other areas implementing locality-based, multi-disciplinary approaches. This would help ensure consistency with national expectations while retaining flexibility to respond to local need.

Support with workforce development and recruitment challenges would be beneficial, particularly in relation to educational psychology, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and specialist SEMH expertise. National initiatives that support workforce growth, retention and new models of deployment would strengthen local capacity and reduce pressure on statutory processes.

We would also welcome national tools, templates and guidance to support data collection, reporting and evaluation, including standardised approaches to measuring access, timeliness and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. This would support consistent monitoring and reduce duplication across local systems.

Opportunities for peer learning and regional collaboration, facilitated by the RIIA, would enable Gateshead to share learning, test approaches and accelerate improvement alongside other local areas facing similar challenges.

Finally, continued support with system-level coordination across education, health and care, including clarity on policy expectations and regulatory alignment as reforms progress, would help ensure local delivery remains coherent, sustainable and focused on improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

The Orthodox Jewish community represents approximately 6% of school aged children in Gateshead. Gateshead Council works proactively with this community to ensure children and young people are fully supported in relation to their special educational needs within the remit of the Section 63 legislation. Our Jewish community accesses independent settings within Gateshead as their religious and cultural needs cannot be met at state settings. The council works in partnership with Jewish independent schools and in particular with Rabbi Sugarman, Director of Haskel special school where the council commissions 30 places for children with the most complex needs and EHCP’s. It is important to note, whilst this is an independent setting it is specific to the Jewish community and more cost efficient than out of area independent settings with a comparable offer. In order for Gateshead council to continue to meet the needs of all children and young people in the local area and deliver on the improvement proposed in our local area reform plan it is important to recognise the Jewish community as integral to the successful implementation of reforms.

| Document | Link |
|---|---|
| **The Schools White Paper** | Every Child Achieving and Thriving |
| **SEND Consultation Document** | SEND reform: putting children and young people first. |
| **LA and Schools Budget 2026-27** | Schools Operational Guide 2026-27 |
| **Local Partnership Maturity Assessment Guidance and Tool** | Included in commission pack |
| **Local SEND Reform Plan – Data template** | Included in commission pack |
| **Local SEND Reform Plan Quality Assessment Framework** | Included in commission pack |
| **Local Inclusion Partnership Grant 2026-27** | To be published Spring 2026 |
| **Experts at Hand Guidance** | To be published Spring 2026 |
| **High Needs Capital Allocations 2026-27** | To be published Spring 2026 |
| **Guidance on Inclusion bases** | To be published Spring 2026 |

# Annex C – Risk Matrix

| IMPACT DESCRIPTION | IMPACT LEVEL | PROBABILITY/LIKELIHOOD | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ≤ 10% | >10% - <30% | >30% - <60% | >60% - <90% | >90% |
| | | Very Unlikely | Unlikely | Possible | Likely | Very Likely |
| Cannot deliver Reform Plan; Failure of mission critical activity. | Crisis | | | | | |
| Significant impact to objectives; Significant and sustained disruption to activity. | Critical | | | | | |
| Delivery targets are compromised; Project delay / budget overrun. | Moderate | | | | | |
| Limited impact on delivery targets; Deviations from project resource, timescale or targets. | Marginal | | | | | |
| Minimal impact on delivery targets; Minimal impacts to project / programme efficiency. | Negligible | | | | | |