

# wavehill

Social and economic research  
Ymchwil cymdeithasol ac economaidd

[wavehill.com](http://wavehill.com)

# Evaluation of the Child Poverty Prevention Programme 2024/2025

Final Evaluation Report



**NE** North East  
Combined  
Authority

Working Together

# Wavehill: Social and Economic Research

## Our offices

- Wales office: 21 Alban Square, Aberaeron, Ceredigion, SA46 0DB (registered office)
- West England office: St Nicholas House, 31-34 High Street, Bristol, BS1 2AW
- North of England office: The Corner, 26 Mosley Street, Newcastle, NE1 1DF
- London office: 2.16 Oxford House, 49 Oxford Road, London, N4 3EY

## Contact details

Tel: 0330 1228658

Email: [wavehill@wavehill.com](mailto:wavehill@wavehill.com)

X: @wavehilltweets

## More information

[www.wavehill.com](http://www.wavehill.com)

<https://X.com/wavehilltweets>

© Wavehill: social and economic research.

This report is subject to copyright. The authors of the report (Wavehill: social and economic research) should be acknowledged in any reference that is made to its contents.

## Report authors

Beth Tweddell, Eddie Knight, Greta Dennis, Şimal Altunsoy

Any questions in relation to this report should be directed in the first instance to Beth Tweddell at [beth.tweddell@wavehill.com](mailto:beth.tweddell@wavehill.com)

October 2025

## Client details

Joanna Unthank

Delivery Lead

Child Poverty Reduction

[www.northeast-ca.gov.uk](http://www.northeast-ca.gov.uk)

# List of abbreviations

North East Combined Authority	North East CA
Child Poverty Prevention Programme	CPPP
Child Poverty Reduction Unit	CPRU
North East Child Poverty Commission	NECPC
Not in Employment, Education or Training	NEET
Durham County Council	DCC
Disability Living Allowance	DLA
Universal Credit	UC
Theory of Change	ToC
Value for Money	VfM
North East Mayoral Combined Authority	NEMCA
Pupil Premium	PP
English for Speakers of Other Languages	ESOL
Special Education Needs and Disabilities	SEND
Welfare Rights Advisor	WRA
Continual Professional Development	CPD

# Contents page

## Contents

Executive Summary.....	5
Introduction .....	4
The Evaluation .....	5
Programme Context and Rationale .....	12
Child Poverty in the North East.....	12
Workstream 1: Poverty Interventions in Schools .....	17
Workstream 1 Rationale.....	17
Workstream 1 Delivery.....	18
Workstream 1 Performance .....	24
Workstream 1 Impact.....	25
Workstream 2: Welfare Support Through the School Gates .....	36
Workstream 2 Rationale.....	37
Workstream 2 Delivery.....	38
Workstream 2 Performance .....	46
Workstream 2 Impact.....	46
Workstream 3: Employer Support.....	53
Workstream 3 Rationale.....	53
Workstream 3 Delivery.....	54
Workstream 3 Performance .....	58
Workstream 3 Impact.....	59
Workstream 4: Supporting the 1,001 Critical Days .....	65
Workstream 4 Rationale.....	65
Workstream 4 Delivery and Management .....	66
Workstream 4 Performance .....	72
Workstream 4 Impact.....	72
Lessons Learnt and Key Recommendations .....	77
Programme Management.....	77
Programme Lessons Learnt and Recommendations .....	79
Appendices .....	84
Workstream 1 Theory of Change .....	84

<b>Workstream 2 Theory of Change</b> .....	86
<b>Workstream 3 Theory of Change</b> .....	87
<b>Workstream 4 Theory of Change</b> .....	88

# Executive Summary

The Child Poverty Prevention Programme (CPPP), delivered by the North East Combined Authority (North East CA), represents a coordinated regional effort to reduce child poverty and its long-term drivers. The programme is built around four interconnected Workstreams:

- Workstream 1: Poverty Interventions in Schools
- Workstream 2: Welfare Support Through the School Gates
- Workstream 3: Employer Support to Tackle Child Poverty
- Workstream 4: Supporting the 1,001 Critical Days

Together, these strands aimed to prevent poverty by improving family income, wellbeing, and access to support across key stages of a child's life, from early years to school and the workplace.

## Programme Design

Stakeholders agreed that the programme was grounded in a strong rationale that reflected the realities faced by families in the North East, particularly low income and barriers to educational engagement. Its preventative, whole-family approach and use of schools as trusted access points were widely valued. Providers highlighted the programme's flexibility as a key strength, allowing delivery to be tailored to local contexts and needs, from providing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) support to provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Whilst feedback on programme design was positive, some gaps were identified, particularly in support for post-16 young people, suggesting future programmes could be better integrated with pathways of support into training and employment. Overall, providers viewed the programme's collaborative and adaptable design as a major asset, enabling more holistic and responsive support for families.

## Programme Delivery

Delivery across the four Workstreams was flexible, locally tailored, and responded to a range of needs. In schools, providers adapted activities to meet local needs, from family learning and creative enrichment to welfare advice embedded on site, enabling schools to reach families who might otherwise avoid formal services. Employer engagement focused on practical support to address in-work poverty, while early years delivery provided vital material assistance to families in crisis through Baby Boxes and baby bank support. Across all strands, success relied on trusted local partnerships, responsiveness to community needs, and a strong shared focus on prevention and reducing financial strain for families.

## Programme Performance

Across the four Workstreams, the programme has demonstrated strong delivery performance overall, with most outputs meeting or exceeding targets. Workstream 1 exceeded its school engagement target (reaching 230 schools, 105% of target), significantly surpassed targets for the number of children and parents supported, and delivered more than twice the target of Inspire Grants. Workstream 2 outperformed across all measures, reaching 127 schools and over 1,000 families, securing £1.6 million in unclaimed entitlements for households. Workstream 3 exceeded its employee support target more than sevenfold, engaging over 29,000 employees and 85 employers. Workstream 4 also surpassed delivery goals, distributing 1,631 Baby Boxes (112% of target) and reaching more families and children than planned. Together, these achievements reflect the programme's extensive reach, flexibility, and ability to respond to local needs across the region.

## Programme Impact

Evaluation findings suggest the programme has delivered meaningful and wide-ranging impacts for children, families, employers, and communities across the North East.

### **Children and Families (Workstream 1 & 2)**

Workstream 1 has played an important role in strengthening children's engagement in learning, building confidence, and contributing to wellbeing, particularly among those less suited to traditional classroom settings. Creative, practical, and family learning sessions helped children feel more motivated, improved classroom participation, and supported stronger parent-child relationships. School leads also reported improved readiness to learn, behaviour, and attendance amongst pupils. Workstream 2 has delivered clear financial gains for families and contributed to wellbeing. Welfare advice led to over £1.6 million in confirmed benefit gains, alongside improved awareness of entitlements and greater confidence to seek support. Parents reported reduced stress and anxiety, improved family relationships, and greater financial stability. School leads also reported that their schools benefited from reduced pressures on staff and increased capacity to support families effectively.

### **Employers and Employees (Workstream 3)**

The evidence suggests that Workstream 3 has raised employer awareness of in-work poverty and prompted practical changes to workplace culture and policy. Many employers introduced wellbeing drop-ins, financial inclusion officers, and inclusive recruitment practices, improving staff morale and engagement. Employees benefited from reduced financial stress, improved mental health, and greater workplace stability, with employers reporting reductions in absenteeism and stronger staff retention.

### **1,001 Critical Days (Workstream 4)**

Workstream 4 has supported hundreds of families during the critical early years through the distribution of over 1,600 Baby Boxes and Baby Bank items. These have reduced financial pressures, improved home safety, and strengthened parents' confidence in supporting their child's development. Parents consistently reported feeling more prepared, less stressed, and better able to bond with their babies.

Overall, the CPPP provides clear evidence that can directly inform and strengthen the delivery of the North East Region Child Poverty Action Plan published in July 2025. The programme has demonstrated that prevention-focused, place-based support delivered through trusted community and school settings can improve family wellbeing, reduce financial strain, and build longer-term resilience. The learning and evidence from CPPP offer a strong platform for scaling effective approaches across the region and driving forward the vision, strategic aims, and actions set out in the regional plan.

# Introduction

The North East Combined Authority (North East CA) commissioned Wavehill to evaluate the Child Poverty Prevention Programme (CPPP) for the 2024/2025 academic year. The CPPP aimed to reduce child poverty and the impacts of child poverty across the North East by delivering targeted support through four interrelated strands of activity.

The programme aimed to tackle both the immediate challenges faced by families living in poverty and the wider factors that contribute to long-term disadvantage. It takes a holistic, place-based approach that recognises child poverty as a complex issue requiring coordinated action across education, welfare, employment, and early years support. This approach is demonstrated through the programme's four key Workstreams, which include:

1. **Poverty Interventions in Schools:** which support school leaders to select and implement context-specific approaches that reduce barriers for disadvantaged pupils.
2. **Welfare Support Through the School Gates:** which brings income maximisation and welfare rights advice directly into school settings to support families with issues such as debt, benefits, and food insecurity.
3. **Working With Employers to Tackle Child Poverty:** which helps businesses better understand in-work poverty and equips them to support employees through improved practices and policies.
4. **The 1,001 Critical Days:** which focuses on reducing socio-economic disadvantage from conception to age two, including practical initiatives to support infant development, bonding, and safe sleeping.

The CPPP builds on the learning from delivery of two previous iterations delivered across the academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24. It was delivered by specialist providers with expertise tailored to the 4 different Workstreams (overpage).

### Workstream 1

- Children North East
- Challenging Education
- Northern Learning Trust
- Newcastle United Foundation
- Durham County Council
- YMCA
- International Centre for Life
- Groundwork North East
- Budget Bites South Tyneside Family Learning
- Gateshead Council Family Learning
- Newcastle Carers
- RISE North East

### Workstream 2

- Newcastle City Council Welfare Rights Service
- Northumberland Citizens Advice
- North Tyneside Citizens Advice
- Gateshead Citizens Advice
- South Tyneside Citizens Advice
- Durham County Council Financial Inclusion Service
- Sunderland Citizens Advice

### Workstream 3

- Society Matters CIC

### Workstream 4

- Durham County Council Start for Life Fund
- The Children's Foundation
- Love, Amelia

## The Evaluation

The evaluation of the CPPP was designed to understand its effectiveness in achieving intended outcomes, explore the experiences of beneficiaries and delivery partners, and identify lessons for future delivery. Specifically, the evaluation sought to:

- Assess the extent to which the programme's activities contributed towards reducing the impacts of child poverty and improving family wellbeing.
- Capture the perspectives of parents, employers, schools, and delivery partners on what worked well and where improvements could be made.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening programme design and implementation in future versions of the programme.

## Evaluation Activities

The evaluation was carried out through a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. Activities included:

**Evaluation Framework and Theory of Change Development:** A Theory of Change (ToC) workshop was conducted with North East CA programme staff to understand the intended pathways of change, the assumptions underpinning delivery, and the specific outcomes expected from each Workstream.

From this process, an evaluation framework was developed as well as separate ToCs for each Workstream, which are included in the Appendices of this report. These Workstream ToCs set out how programme activities are expected to lead to short and medium-term changes, such as improved skills, confidence, and access to support, and, in turn, how they contribute to longer-term outcomes. They also acted as a guide for the evaluation, helping to ensure that data collection and analysis for each Workstream were directly tested the logic and progress towards intended objectives.

**Delivery Provider Engagement:** We spoke to 33 individuals representing 23 different delivery organisations. These interviews explored the delivery models, approaches, and activities used across the programme; experiences of engaging with target participants; challenges and enablers encountered during delivery; perceptions of programme impact; and recommendations for future delivery.

**Beneficiary Surveys:** Surveys were conducted across all Workstreams to capture the perspectives of those directly involved in or affected by programme activities. For parents and carers (Workstreams 1, 2, and 4), the surveys explored their experiences of the support received, changes in their skills, confidence, and financial situation, and any improvements in their family's wellbeing. For employers (Workstream 3), questions focused on engagement with the programme, perceived benefits for employees, and organisational changes prompted by participation. School leads were surveyed to understand how the Workstream 1 and 2 activities supported parents and influenced their ability to support pupils and families. Response rates were as follows:

- Workstream 1 - Parents/carers: 23 responses
- Workstream 2 - Parents/carers: 25 responses
- Workstream 3 - Employers: 12 responses
- Workstream 4 - Parents/carers: 35 responses
- School Leads: 23 responses

**Case study interviews:** Five case study interviews were carried out: two employers (Workstream 3), two parents (Workstream 2), and one parent (Workstream 1). Additional case studies drew on provider data and the parent/carer survey (Workstream 1 and 4), helping us capture participants' experiences, context, and perceived changes as a result of the programme.

## Evaluation Limitations

Several factors limited the scope and depth of the evaluation:

- **Parent response rates:** Engaging parents in the survey process proved challenging, resulting in lower than anticipated response rates.
- **Time constraints:** The evaluation was delivered to a tight timeline, which restricted the ability to undertake additional outreach to boost survey participation.
- **Value for Money analysis:** Due to the short delivery timeframe and limited data availability, it was not possible to conduct a full Value for Money (VfM) analysis. While some indicative insights into cost-effectiveness could be drawn from qualitative data and delivery numbers, a comprehensive VfM assessment would require additional resource, financial data, modelling, and a longer period of delivery to understand the longer-term impacts of the interventions.
- **Year on year evaluation approach:** Funding arrangements required the evaluation to be conducted on an annual basis. Whilst this allowed for timely reporting, it limited the extent to which changes and impacts could be tracked longitudinally across the programme's duration.
- **Absence of a counterfactual:** The evaluation did not include a counterfactual or comparison group, meaning it was not possible to directly attribute observed outcomes to the programme with full confidence. While qualitative and quantitative data supports the role of the programme in generating these positive impacts, these cannot be definitively separated from other contextual factors such as wider cost-of-living pressures, changes in local service provision, or individual family circumstances. Including a counterfactual in future evaluations would strengthen the robustness of impact measurement by enabling comparison between participants and a matched group not receiving support. This could be achieved through:
  - Collecting baseline and follow-up data on key outcomes (such as subjective wellbeing) throughout the support journey.
  - Identifying a suitable matched comparison group with characteristics representative of those that engaged with the CPPP (for example using secondary longitudinal datasets such as [Understanding Society](#))
  - Tracking both groups over time to identify any changes between the intervention group and the control group.

This approach would require effective monitoring systems to be embedded from the outset meaning that the evaluation approach should be considered in line with programme design. Future approaches should ensure data-sharing agreements, and sufficient timescales and resources are in place to track participants longitudinally.

# Programme Context and Rationale

## Summary points

- Between 2014/15 and 2021/22, the wider region saw a 9 percentage point increase in children living in relative poverty after housing costs, from 26% to 35%, the steepest rise of any UK region.
- Over the same time period, the North East experienced a sharper rise in in-work child poverty and a real-terms fall in household earnings for families with children, unlike much of the UK. Additionally, the region has higher proportions of children living in families at higher risk of poverty (e.g., single parents, families with disabilities) and a growing economically inactive population.
- The North East CA has made child poverty reduction a strategic priority, exemplified by establishing the UK's first Child Poverty Reduction Unit in 2024, backed by investment and wide ranging initiatives. This includes a Child Poverty Action Plan focused on immediate family support, breaking down barriers, and tackling long-term structural challenges through coordinated and community informed efforts.
- Providers agreed that the CPPP's rationale is well founded, effectively addressing deep-rooted challenges like long-term unemployment, low household income, and barriers to education through a preventative, whole family approach.

## Child Poverty in the North East

Child poverty has been a persistent issue in the North East for decades. For the past 25 years, the region has consistently reported higher child poverty rates than the UK average. Between 2014/15 and 2021/22, the North East region experienced a significant rise in child poverty, with the proportion of children living in relative poverty (after housing costs) increasing by nine percentage points from 26% to 35%.<sup>1</sup> This represented the steepest increase in child poverty of any UK nation or region during that period, leaving the North East with the second highest child poverty rate in the country.

Research by the North East Child Poverty Commission (NECPC) has identified several factors explaining this steep increase, particularly during the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike many other regions, the North East saw a much sharper rise in in-work child poverty, coupled with a real-terms fall in household earnings for families with children, while earnings rose across the UK as a whole. Additionally, the region did not experience the reductions in out-of-work child poverty seen elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [North East Child Poverty Commission \(2024\) No time to wait: An ambitious blueprint for tackling child poverty in the North East, North East Child Poverty Commission, p. 12](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Ibid.](#)

A growing proportion of families in the North East are also economically inactive,<sup>3</sup> meaning they are less likely to be able to work without appropriate support. The region also has a higher than average proportion of children living in family types that are more vulnerable to poverty, including those with disabilities, single-parent families, young parents under 25, and families living in rented accommodation.<sup>4</sup> These economic and demographic trends, combined with the weakening of the national social security safety net over the last decade, have disproportionately impacted families in the North East - whether they are in or out of work.

Looking closer at local areas within the North East CA area, child poverty rates increased across all seven local authorities. In 2014/15, all were below the national average of 28.5%, but by 2021/22, all had surpassed the UK average of 29.1%, with Newcastle reaching the highest rate at an estimated 37.9%.<sup>5</sup>

Compounding these challenges, over half (53%) of children in the North East region live in families receiving Universal Credit or legacy benefits, compared to a UK average of 39%, underscoring the extent to which national social security policies and their administration critically affect the region's children.<sup>6</sup>

The regional data also reveals differences in the depth of poverty with (in the years 2019/20 to 2021/22):

- Around 80,000 children (15%) living just below the poverty line but not in deep poverty.
- Over 100,000 children (one in five) being in deep poverty (below 50% of median income) - of which approximately 60,000 (11% of all children) were living in very deep poverty (in a household with less than 40% of median income)<sup>7</sup>

To put this in context, a family with two primary school-aged children in deep poverty would need an average income increase of £9,100 annually to escape poverty, while those in very deep poverty would require an additional £12,800 just to reach the poverty line.<sup>8</sup>

## Policy Context

In response to the growing issue of child poverty, the North East CA has embedded child poverty reduction as a cross-cutting strategic priority. This commitment is shown through the establishment of the UK's first Child Poverty Reduction Unit (CPRU) in September 2024 - a region-wide initiative led by the Mayor and backed by an initial £500,000 investment.

---

<sup>3</sup> Note: Economic inactivity refers to people not in employment who have not been seeking work within the last 4 weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next 2 weeks

<sup>4</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs 2021/22 \(2023\), J. Stone](#)

<sup>6</sup> [No Time to Wait, North East Child Poverty Commission, p. 14](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Ibid, p.16](#)

<sup>8</sup> [UK Poverty 2024 \(2024\), Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

The CPRU has since played a pivotal role in developing a grassroots-led Child Poverty Action Plan, shaped through extensive engagement with communities, schools, local authorities, charities, and families across the region<sup>9</sup>. The Action Plan was published midway through this year of CPPP delivery, and whilst the CPPP predates the Action Plan, the evolving policy context has further strengthened the rationale for the programme, with the North East CA committing additional medium-term funding.

The CPPP sits within this ambitious regional strategy, forming part of the Mayor's £2.7 million commitment in 2024/25 to tackle the drivers of poverty and deliver immediate support to families. This investment has been channelled into schools, welfare advice services, and early years initiatives, including free after-school activities, reducing the cost of education, and the roll-out of 1,500 baby boxes to new parents.

Although the CPPP is separate, the broader Action Plan includes:

- The Mayor's Childcare Grant, piloted in spring 2025, to reduce employment barriers for families with young children.
- A £50 million regional programme to support disabled people and those with health barriers into sustainable employment.
- Continued investment in affordable transport, including the extension of the £1 youth fare.
- Breaking down the barriers to opportunity that poverty can bring, including by collectively investing more in giving babies, children and young people the best start in life.<sup>10</sup>

The Child Poverty Action Plan is structured around three strategic priorities<sup>11</sup>:

1. Supporting families here and now
2. Breaking down the barriers to opportunity that poverty can bring
3. Tackling longer-term structural challenges

These priorities underpin a wide range of policy initiatives, from inclusive growth and skills development to reforms in childcare, education, and employer practices. The CPPP is therefore a central pillar of the North East CA's wider economic and social ambitions, aligning with the North East Local Growth Plan, which recognises that reducing child poverty is essential to unlocking inclusive, sustainable growth.<sup>12</sup> Initiatives such as the SHINE Accreditation Scheme, the Excellence in Education programme, and the emerging North East Youth Combined Authority reflect a commitment to embedding equity, opportunity, and youth voice across all levels of regional policy.

---

<sup>9</sup> North East Child Poverty Action Plan (2025), North East Combined Authority

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 10 - 16

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>12</sup> Interim North East Local Growth Plan (2025), North East Combined Authority

As the North East CA prepares to invest a further £28.6 million to expand child poverty work in 2025 and beyond, the CPPP provides an important opportunity to learn what works, what doesn't, and how these lessons can inform future investments, while continuing to model integrated, locally tailored, and impact-driven action that seeks not only to alleviate hardship, but to address the root causes of poverty.

## Measuring progress

While recognising that national policy and fiscal decisions will have the most significant impact on child poverty rates, the North East CA has committed to measuring and monitoring regional progress through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The Action Plan outlines a suite of headline measures designed to track progress at a regional level.<sup>13</sup> These include:

- Children living in relative poverty (before and after housing costs)
- Children living in deep and very deep poverty
- Children within income-deprived households (as per the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index)
- Children in food insecure households
- Children living in workless or long-term workless households
- Economic inactivity rates among working-age adults
- The proportion of young people (16–24) not in education, employment, or training (NEET)

These indicators provide an important picture of the structural conditions influencing child poverty. However, as the Action Plan acknowledges, many of these metrics are published only at regional or national levels, and are subject to time lags, data quality issues, and inconsistent coverage, particularly in relation to localised experiences at neighbourhood or household level. As such, there is a commitment to improving data sharing and making better use of real-time and administrative data, particularly from local authorities, schools, and the voluntary and community sector.

This evaluation has been developed to complement this approach, helping to provide a greater level of insight at an intervention level. For example, by capturing the lived experiences of children, families, schools, and employers that were engaged with this programme and contributing to a richer understanding of the impacts of the CPPP. The evaluation focuses on:

- The reach and uptake of programme interventions across all four Workstreams (including who is accessing support and how it is targeted)

---

<sup>13</sup> Child Poverty Action Plan, North East Combined Authority, p. 7

- The immediate and perceived impacts of interventions on families' financial wellbeing, access to services, and overall quality of life
- Changes in school practices, employer behaviours, and support systems that reduce barriers to opportunity
- The perspectives of children, parents/carers, and professionals, including what is working well, what could be improved, and what difference the programme is making

In particular, this evaluation uses feedback from families themselves, a central tenet of the Action Plan, recognising that understanding the experiences of programme participants is essential for shaping future investment and delivery.

### **Stakeholder perceptions on programme rationale**

Providers agreed that the CPPP's rationale was well founded and closely matched the challenges faced by children and families in the North East. They described the programme as tackling deep-rooted issues such as low household income, and barriers to educational engagement. Many valued its preventative, whole family approach, with schools acting as a trusted way to reach families who might otherwise avoid formal services.

A key strength was the programme's flexibility. Many Workstream 1 and 2 providers noted that delivery could be adapted to each school's context, to different age groups, and to the specific needs of individual families. This flexibility allowed activities to reflect local priorities, for example, offering English for Speakers of other Language (ESOL) support in schools with many families with English as an additional language, or tailoring provision for Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) settings. Providers felt this adaptability supported better engagement and made it easier to respond to emerging needs.

Despite this, some gaps were identified. The most common was a perceived lack of provision for post-16 young people. Providers felt that while early years through age 16 were well covered, there was less targeted support for transitions into further education, training, or employment - a stage they viewed as important for breaking cycles of poverty. It was acknowledged, however, that this cohort may not have been a key priority for the programme and that other provision exists locally; clearer communication of this to stakeholders could help manage expectations and understanding.

Overall, however, providers valued the collaborative nature of the CPPP and saw overlap between school-based welfare support and other Workstreams as positive, helping to provide holistic family support.

# Workstream 1: Poverty

## Interventions in Schools

### Summary points

- Workstream 1 offers a flexible range of school-based activities co-designed with schools, including family learning sessions, enrichment programmes, poverty proofing audits, and young carers support, all aimed at addressing different needs across different school communities.
- Key elements include short, targeted programmes of support focused on building confidence and engagement for both pupils and families, alongside practical actions to remove cost barriers and raise awareness of poverty within schools.
- School engagement and participant selection were most effective when schools proactively opted in and led recruitment sensitively, using their knowledge of pupils and families to tailor support while minimising stigma.
- Some providers found that engagement from schools could be problematic. This led to some providers taking proactive steps, such as holding meetings and sending reminders, to clarify programme aims and ensure smoother delivery, while staff turnover and shifting priorities sometimes disrupted engagement with schools.
- Workstream 1 has positively impacted children’s engagement in learning, particularly for those who struggle in traditional classrooms, by boosting confidence, curiosity, and motivation through creative and practical sessions.
- Children and families gained access to enriching opportunities, such as creative workshops, science experiments, and trips that many would not have been able to afford or access otherwise, helping to reduce barriers related to cost, transport, and inclusion.
- Schools reported improvements in children’s readiness to learn, behaviour, attendance, and early signs of attainment, with the support offering inclusive activities within familiar settings that increased participation among pupils.

## Workstream 1 Rationale

### Rationale and Context

Schools play an important role in the lives of children and families, both as places of learning and as trusted spaces that can help to mitigate the effects of poverty and reduce barriers to opportunity. In the North East, where child poverty is disproportionately high and closely linked to educational inequality, schools are uniquely placed to identify disadvantage early, tailor support to local need, and act as anchors for wider community and family engagement.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> [No Time to Wait, The North East Child Poverty Commission](#)

Workstream 1 of the CPPP comes from the recognition that poverty affects children's ability to access, engage with, and benefit fully from their education. Research consistently shows that children growing up in poverty face greater challenges at every stage of the education system, from early years to post-16. These include lower school attendance, reduced attainment, limited access to enrichment activities, and more barriers to home learning. The North East has seen this gap widen in recent years: in 2023, students from disadvantaged backgrounds were almost 22 months behind their peers by the end of Key Stage 4 - the largest gap in the country. A key part of the rationale for Workstream 1 is therefore to open up access to experiences and opportunities, such as cultural, sporting, and extracurricular activities, that children from disadvantaged backgrounds may not otherwise have, helping to broaden horizons and support longer-term aspirations.<sup>15</sup>

Workstream 1 supports these priorities through a tailored package of school-based interventions, including:

- Poverty Proofing Audits, which help schools identify and remove cost-related barriers to participation; from uniform and equipment, to school trips and food;
- Family Learning opportunities, designed to build parents' confidence in supporting their child's learning and strengthen relationships between families and schools;
- Poverty Intervention Grants, small-scale grants that enable schools to design bespoke responses to the specific challenges their pupils and families face;
- Inspire Grants, targeting areas most affected by pandemic-related learning loss and socio-economic disadvantage;
- Physical activity and outdoor learning sessions, aimed at increasing physical activity among children, supporting parents, and embedding active play and outdoor learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and primary phase.
- And the development of Young Carer Leads, helping to ensure that the needs of young carers, a group particularly vulnerable to educational exclusion, are recognised and supported.

## Workstream 1 Delivery

### Delivery Models

Workstream 1 of the CPPP includes a broad and varied set of school-based activities, reflecting the different needs of children, families, and school communities across the North East. As such, delivery models vary across providers, however the delivery models do share common features in supporting schools and pupils.

---

<sup>15</sup> [Ibid., p. 37](#)

Across the programme, providers typically worked in close partnership with schools to co-design and agree on the format and focus of activity. Many offered a menu of options or modular programmes, which schools could ‘pick and mix’ depending on their needs. This flexibility was seen as important to tailoring delivery to different school contexts, for example, by age group or school type, and helped build stronger relationships between schools and delivery partners.

Most interventions were delivered as short, targeted programmes, usually ranging from four to twelve weeks. Family Learning sessions, often delivered to small groups of parents and children in weekly sessions, focused on building parents’ confidence to support their child’s learning, often using seasonal crafts, cooking, or other practical activities as an accessible entry point. These activities were also used to support families’ wider development, including speech and socialisation for younger children, or signposting to adult learning and careers advice for parents.

Enrichment programmes for pupils, often linking hands-on, creative activities to curriculum themes, were also a key part of Workstream 1. For example, children helped develop community gardens, learned about local biodiversity, and explored climate issues through interactive tasks. Many of these sessions aimed to build young people’s confidence, life skills and enjoyment of learning, with an emphasis on pupil voice and ownership.

Within these enrichment programmes, some delivery models also focused on improving physical activity, play, and wellbeing through outdoor learning and youth-led activities, such as the provision provided by YMCA. These programmes combined early years development with a whole-school approach to building healthy, active habits.

Another form of support included adopting a whole school approach to influence policies and practices that to help alleviate challenges related to child poverty. For example, Poverty Proofing audits formed involved working closely with school leaders to understand and remove cost-related barriers to education, such as uniform policies, access to food, or participation in school trips. Rise adopted a similar approach, working with schools to audit their provision and strengthen their approach to embedding physical activity across the school day.

Support for young carers was also delivered as part of Workstream 1, with one provider offering one-to-one mentoring over a six-to-twelve-week period. Sessions focused on attendance, engagement, and wellbeing, with young carers supported to reflect on their role and develop individual action plans to help them stay connected to their education.

### **Targeting Schools and Pupils/Families**

School selection was often driven by local deprivation data, with many providers initially identifying schools located in areas ranked within the most deprived deciles. In some areas, a deliberate effort was made to ensure geographic spread across the

borough, ensuring coverage beyond a handful of schools and reflecting the reality that disadvantage exists in different forms across the region.

In practice, however, engagement often worked best where schools proactively expressed interest - schools that opted in willingly were more likely to take ownership of the programme and engage with its aims fully. This demand-led approach also helped tailor activities to each school's priorities, with schools often choosing from a menu of available options.

Within schools, identifying which pupils or families would benefit from support was largely led by school staff. Providers rarely had direct access to parents or the ability to target individuals themselves, so they relied on schools to recruit participants in ways that suited their context. In some cases, this meant blanket recruitment across a class or year group, particularly in schools where the overall level of deprivation was high, to avoid any sense of stigma or singling out families. In others, schools used more targeted approaches, drawing on the knowledge of family support workers, year group leads, or pastoral staff to identify those who would benefit most.

---

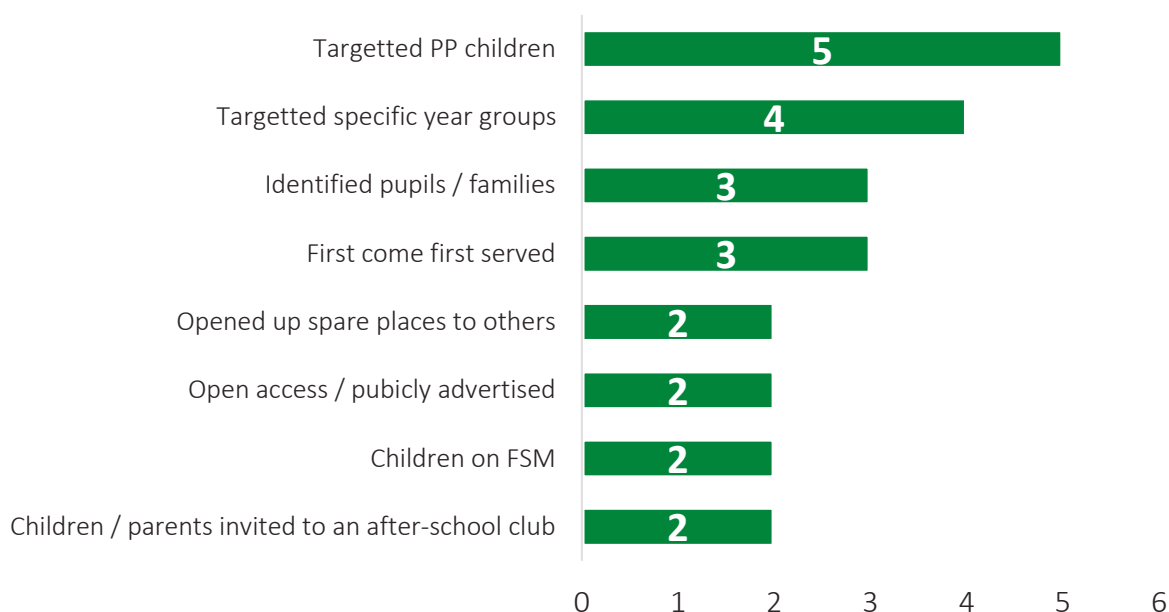
“As a school we looked at families in the year group where we wanted to encourage the parent to come in to school and feel comfortable with supporting their child. We sometimes identified a family where the parent did not know many families in school and was quite isolated. The sessions gave them a chance to get to know other parents and build friendships.” **School lead**

---

Providers worked closely with school staff at the outset to agree on inclusive and sensitive ways of engaging children. Some held face to face meetings with school leads to talk through the aims of the programme and explore how to avoid children feeling forced into participation. In one example, providers visited classrooms to introduce themselves and explain the activities, encouraging voluntary sign-up from pupils while teachers directed support toward those in need. Where sessions took place outside of school hours, food was often provided to help remove barriers to participation and ensure children were supported holistically.

As shown in Figure 3.1, schools most often focused on engaging children eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) or specific year groups, alongside inviting identified families and pupils in need. This shows that whilst the support was open to wider participation, schools prioritised those most likely to benefit.

Figure 3.1: How schools targeted pupils and families



Source: Wavehill School Leads Survey, N= 23

Providers generally felt that this collaborative approach to recruitment worked well in ensuring the right pupils were reached. They valued schools’ understanding of their pupils’ needs and circumstances, which enabled targeting to be both accurate and discreet. In their view, this meant that those who would benefit most from the activities were able to take part.

---

“Schools have different ways of targeting beneficiaries and we work with them to identify pupils and families, sometimes they’ll target specifically and sometimes they’ll do blanket recruitment, as the schools are in more deprived areas so it’ll still reach families who most need it.” **Provider**

---

## Maintaining Engagement from Schools and Pupils

Providers worked with different models under Workstream 1; some focused on pupils, others on families, school leadership teams, or a combination. Across these approaches, three factors consistently underpinned sustained engagement: building strong relationships, tailoring delivery to each school’s context, and maintaining flexibility.

Face-to-face meetings with school leadership teams before delivery began were particularly effective. These early conversations clarified programme aims, aligned activities with school priorities, and built trust. Providers stressed that each school operates differently in terms of staffing, capacity, and experience addressing poverty, so adapting delivery was essential, whether that meant working with a younger age

group, aligning with existing wellbeing or curriculum priorities, or reshaping activities to fit the timetable.

Schools also valued the flexibility and accessibility of professional development, with some providers offering both in-person and online training so that staff could take part individually or as a team, during or outside the school day. This flexibility helped overcome capacity pressures and encouraged more staff to engage in Continued Professional Development (CPD).

Clear, accessible communication helped avoid stigma and encourage participation. This included avoiding jargon, producing user-friendly materials, and framing activities positively (e.g. using “numbers” instead of “maths” in family learning). Established networks, such as headteacher briefings and previous partnership work, also smoothed the process of securing buy-in, particularly where trust had already been built.

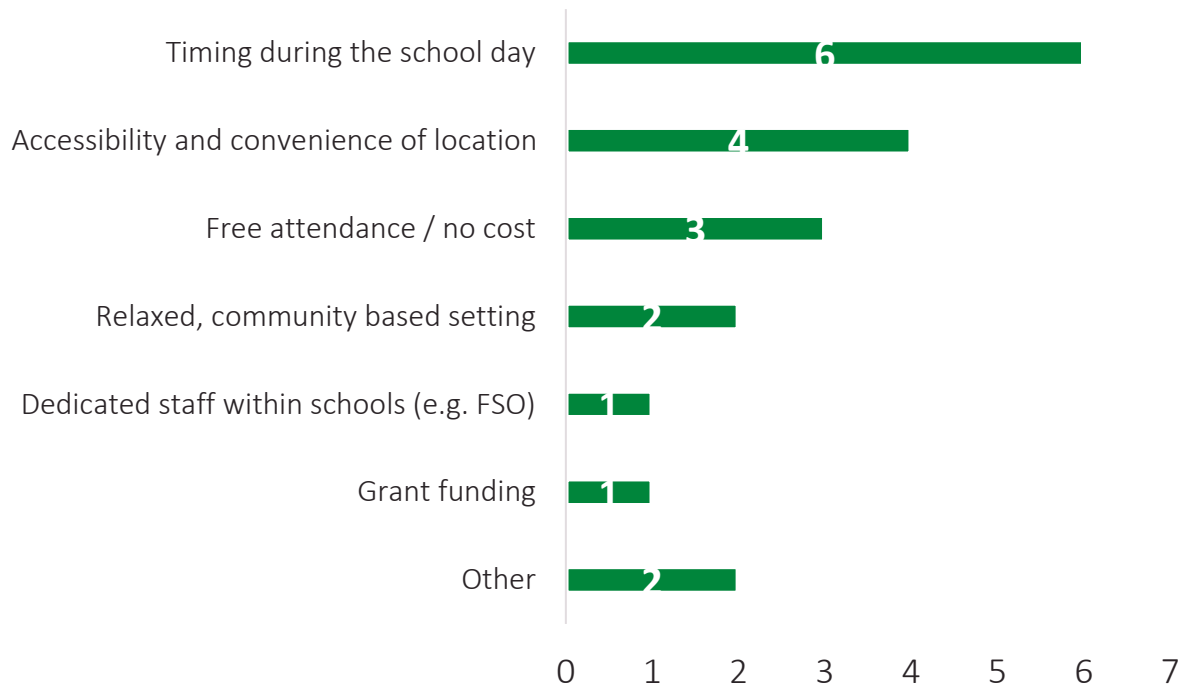
Schools valued a collaborative, non-judgemental ethos. In delivering Poverty Proofing support, for example, Children North East positioned themselves as partners rather than inspectors, which reduced anxieties and encouraged openness. Building internal buy-in across staff teams was seen as important for sustaining change.

To maintain pupil and family engagement, providers used strategies such as:

- Introducing activities in class before formal sessions.
- Running sessions at the start or end of the school day.
- Offering food and practical incentives (e.g. goodie bags, free craft materials).

Similarly, as shown in Figure 3.2, school leads highlighted that holding activities during the school day, ensuring they were free of charge, and making them easy to access within familiar school settings were the biggest factors in increasing and maintaining pupil and parent/carer participation.

Figure 3.2: School leads perceptions on what made the Workstream 1 more accessible to pupils and families



Source: Wavehill School Lead Survey, N= 17

### Addressing Delivery Challenges

One of the most commonly cited challenges by Workstream 1 providers was variation in how well schools understood the offer at the outset. Some providers noted that initial information shared with schools, often just a leaflet, did not always fully explain the aims or structure of the support. This created misunderstanding or a lack of clarity about what was being delivered, especially for new providers. To address this, many adopted a proactive approach including holding introductory meetings with school leaders, sending reminder emails ahead of delivery, and offering flexible sessions that could be shaped around school needs. Providers felt this helped schools better prepare and ultimately led to smoother delivery.

---

“One of the challenges was gaining understanding from schools and the children. There could have been more preparation from NECA on what their offer is, as we only had a leaflet to showcase their activities. We managed to adapt their offer, but would've been better if the schools were clued up from outset.” **Provider**

---

Internal changes within schools also posed challenges. In several cases, schools that had signed up for the programme were no longer fully engaged by the time delivery began, due to staff turnover or competing priorities.

Providers addressed this by building in lead in time before starting a block of work, using that period to confirm expectation, and remind schools of the support available. However, this wasn't always sufficient to overcome the issue entirely, and in some cases, follow-up support from programme coordinators was needed to re-establish momentum.

Tailoring delivery to different age groups and settings also required thoughtful planning. While many providers had originally worked more with secondary age pupils, they adapted their approaches to suit younger children, incorporating more hands-on and sensory activities for primary and early years groups, which in most cases worked well. Several providers emphasised that working with younger families was often easier, as they tended to be more open to new experiences, while older children and their families could be harder to engage due to more scepticism about interventions.

Rural and small schools raised specific logistical challenges. Lower pupil numbers in these settings could make it harder to fill group sessions, and the availability of suitable venues – especially where parents needed to attend – was often limited. Transport was also a barrier, both for families and for providers needing to travel between schools. In one case, the physical space in a SEND school could not accommodate the equipment required by pupils, meaning the provider had to withdraw. To manage these issues, providers leaned heavily on their local knowledge, worked closely with schools to find suitable times and formats, and, where possible, offered alternative delivery methods.

---

“Sometimes rural schools can be more difficult if parents or children are having to come on the school bus. Parents can be on zero hour contracts so its difficult to commit to sessions.” **Provider**

“There was one school in... we were delivering at where we couldn't really continue anymore. This was a SEND school for children with complex needs, it was difficult for us to host sessions because the venue space couldn't accommodate the assisting machinery for the children. It can be harder with older children as their behaviour has become more entrenched, both for children and families.” **Provider**

---

## Workstream 1 Performance

Performance data for Workstream 1 shows mixed progress against the set targets. Table 3.1 shows that the number of schools supported reached 94% of the target, reflecting challenges in engaging as many schools as originally planned. However, this was offset by an overachievement in the number of children and young people supported, substantially exceeding the target, suggesting that where schools did engage, delivery reached more pupils than anticipated. Support also extended to a substantial number of staff (1,064) and parents/carers (6,968), even though no specific

targets had been set for these groups. The number of schools supported through the Young Carers Leads programme also exceeded the target, and the number of young carers supported met the target.

Additionally, delivery performance under this workstream was strengthened by the School-led grant funded projects, with 31 grants awarded against a target of 15 (206%).

Table 3.1: Workstream 1 Performance Against Output Targets

Output	Actual output	Target output	Progress towards output
Schools supported	230	220	105%
Children and Young People supported	13486	5,100	264%
Staff members supported	1064	N/A	N/A
Parents / carers supported	6968	N/A	N/A
<b>Young Carers Leads</b>			
Schools supported	19	7	271%
Young Carers supported	50	50	100%
<b>School-led Grant Funded Projects</b>			
Inspire Grants awarded	31	15	206%

Source: CPPP Monitoring Data

## Workstream 1 Impact

### Children’s Engagement in Learning

Workstream 1 has had a positive impact on children’s engagement in learning, particularly for those who may not always be best suited to traditional classroom environments. This was particularly evident in creative and practical sessions, where children felt empowered to explore ideas without fear of getting things wrong. One provider described how pupils’ representations of nature became more detailed and imaginative over the course of the support, reflecting growing confidence and engagement. Another noted that children who were initially withdrawn began actively participating, designing their own projects and sharing ideas with peers.

Workstream 1 also had a strong impact in the Early Years Foundation Stage, helping children to develop communication, social, and motor skills through outdoor, play-based learning. Children participating in these sessions were typically aged between two and five, with groups selected by schools based on local needs. Activities were designed to be inclusive and accessible for all children, including those with SEND or in specialist provision, with facilitators adapting sessions to meet individual needs. This inclusive, sensory-based approach supported children to discover their own learning

through play, develop teamwork and communication skills, and build confidence in outdoor environments.

The sessions also appeared to have knock on effects within the classroom. Teachers reported that children were more likely to contribute in lessons and felt a stronger sense of ownership over their learning. This was echoed in parent/carer feedback, with many highlighting how their children returned home from sessions eager to talk about what they had learned and to continue exploring those interests outside of school. Several children developed a newfound interest in science, a subject that some had previously felt excluded from.

---

“[My child is] more inquisitive about science related topics, is keen to understand more about science and keen to learn more at home.”

**Parent/carer**

“It gave my child an excitement about science which wasn’t present previously.” **Parent/carer**

---

For Family Learning sessions in particular, both parents and providers said the activities gave families valuable opportunities to spend quality time together. Parents described enjoying time with their children in a relaxed and supportive setting, often taking part in activities they would not otherwise be able to afford or access. Providers saw that these shared experiences helped strengthen family relationships, giving parents and children the chance to learn, play, and have fun together.

This time together was especially important for families facing stress or financial pressures, as it created positive time together that could help improve relationships and support overall family wellbeing.

---

“He said he had a fantastic time. As a parent it was a great opportunity to be involved in learning with them.” **Parent/carer**

“Really great, engaging programme and fantastic that I could join in with him.” **Parent/carer**

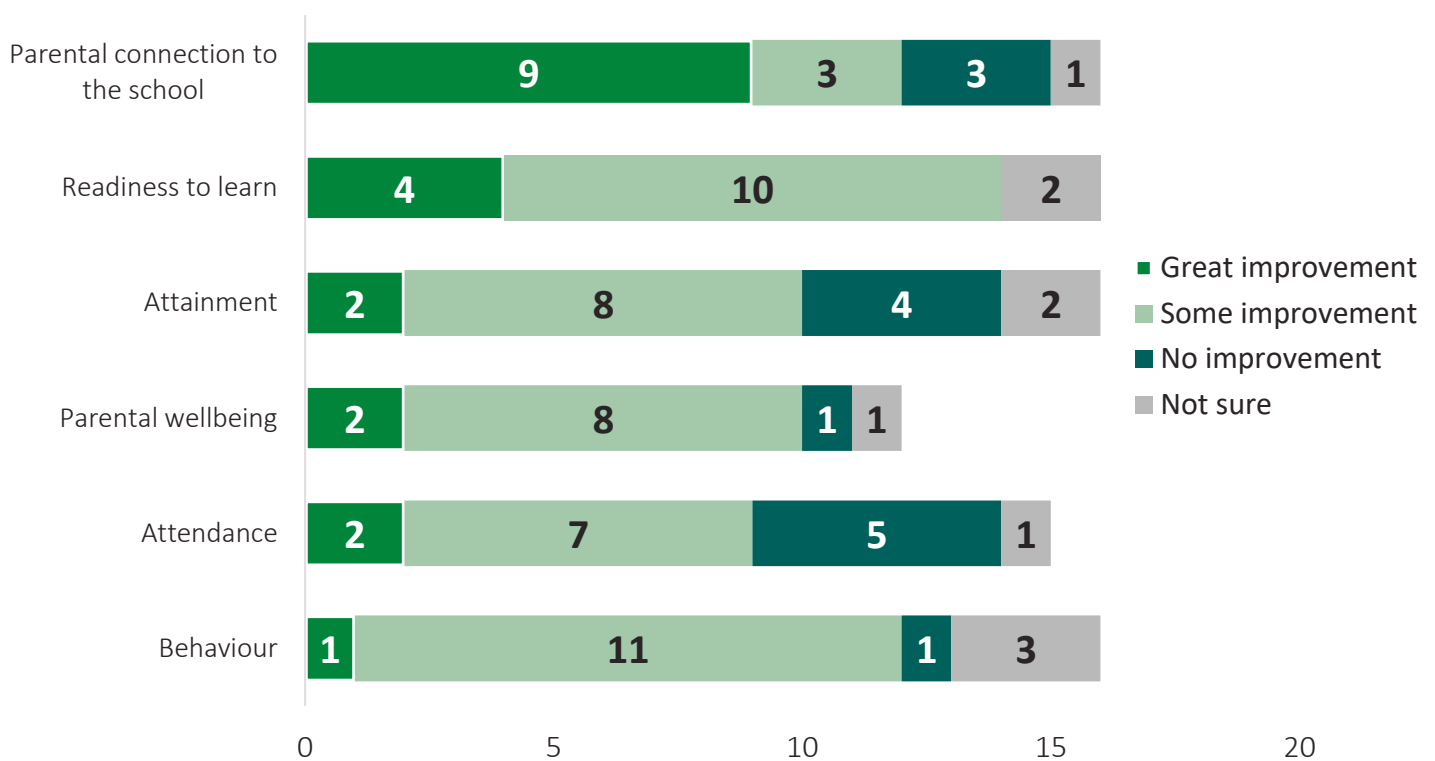
“The sessions were delivered well and were evidence based. The children were genuinely excited and engaged well with the content. They still often mention it!” **School Staff Member**

---

Survey responses from school leads also support this. Figure 3.3 shows that schools most commonly reported improvements in children’s readiness to learn and behaviour,

both of which are important indicators of engagement. A number of schools also noted early signs of improved attainment and attendance. While some schools indicated that it was too early to observe change, the overall pattern of responses suggests that the programme is beginning to make a difference in how children relate to school and learning.

Figure 3.3: Workstream 1 Impacts Reported by School Leads



Source: Wavehill School Leads Survey, N= 20

“It gave the children a chance to interact with peers that they may not have in class. They also gained confidence working with new adults. Attendance was impacted as families did not want to miss sessions, this also helped punctuality.” **School Lead**

“Children were able to access new learning in an exciting, engaging and motivating way. The resources provide to support the activities were excellent and not something that we can replicate in school.” **School Lead**

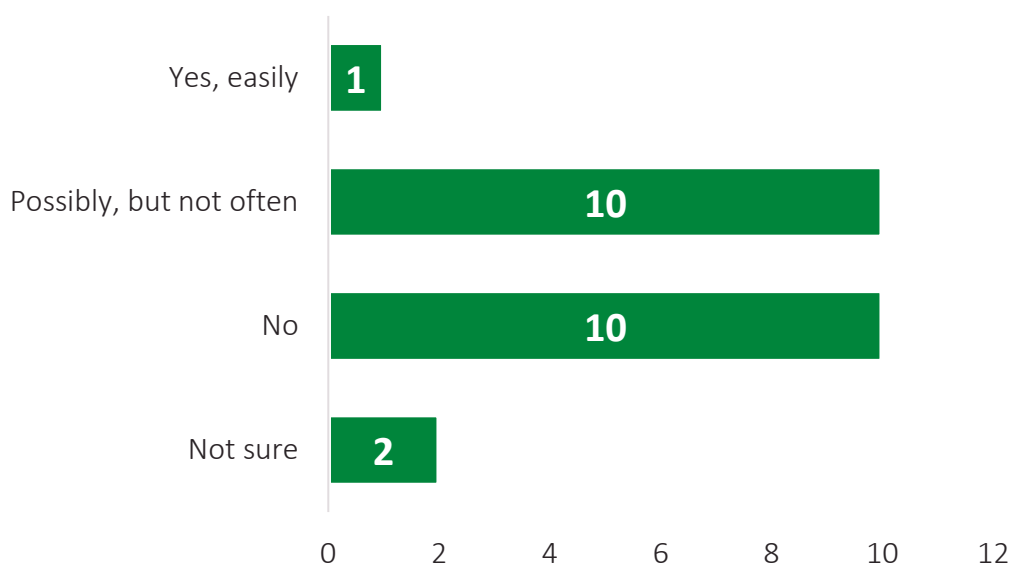
Although no primary data about the Young Carers in Schools pilot was collected as part of this evaluation, this was due to non-response from the relevant schools and parents to both the School Leads and Workstream 1 survey, we have drawn on secondary evidence from the evaluation by Newcastle Carers and partners (Evaluation of Pilot

Programme Young Carers in Schools across North East Combined Authority), has also demonstrated meaningful and measurable improvements in the engagement and educational outcomes of participating young carers. Across the 50 young carers supported through the 6–12-week interventions, average school attendance increased by 2.2 percentage points, with some pupils improving by as much as 10% over the short delivery period. While a small number of young carers experienced reduced attendance due to increased caring responsibilities, providers were able to mitigate the impact of these pressures, helping to prevent more severe disengagement from education. In several cases, young carers transitioned successfully into alternative provision, achieving sustained full attendance. It is also likely that the programme reached a wider cohort of young carers through other Workstream 1 activities, such as family learning or creative enrichment, where caring responsibilities were not formally captured in monitoring data, indicating that the programme may have supported an even broader invisible community of young carers than reported.

### Access to Opportunities

Workstream 1 activities have clearly improved children’s and families’ access to opportunities they might not otherwise have had. As shown in Figure 3.4, nearly all parents indicated that their child would have had limited or no access to a similar activity outside of school. Only a very small number said their child could have accessed this kind of experience easily. For the majority, these sessions offered a valuable opportunity to access/take part in? enrichment activities that might otherwise have been out of reach due to cost, availability, or other barriers.

Figure 3.4: Parent views on whether their child could have accessed similar activities without Workstream 1



Source: Wavehill Workstream 1 Parent/Carer Survey, N= 23

---

“They thoroughly enjoyed all of the activities and got the chance to go on a trip, which they otherwise would not have been able to do.”

**Parent/carer**

---

School Leads also echoed this, highlighting improved access to enriching, high-quality experiences as a key impact of their school’s involvement in Workstream 1. Many reflected that the programme had enabled children to take part in activities they would not otherwise have the chance to experience. They noted that these opportunities were especially valuable for pupils who may face financial, transport, or social barriers to accessing provision outside of school.

By embedding the activities into the school day and delivering them onsite, Workstream 1 removed many of the common obstacles that prevent participation. One school lead explained that pupils were enthusiastic about the science club and spoke positively about their visit to the Life Centre. Others emphasised that providing activities at no cost, within familiar environments, and with trusted staff, was important for equitable access and uptake.

---

“We have a high percentage of PP pupils, who are new to our community who also need a wealth of experiences. It is experiences such as that provided with Centre for Life that help our pupils engage in the school community and promote more positive outcomes in later life. Many of our pupils grow up in families without working parents therefore it gives them insights into possible careers in the future.”

**School lead**

“Activities like these are not available in our local area so if they are not offered at school, there is little chance for the children to engage.”

**School Lead**

---

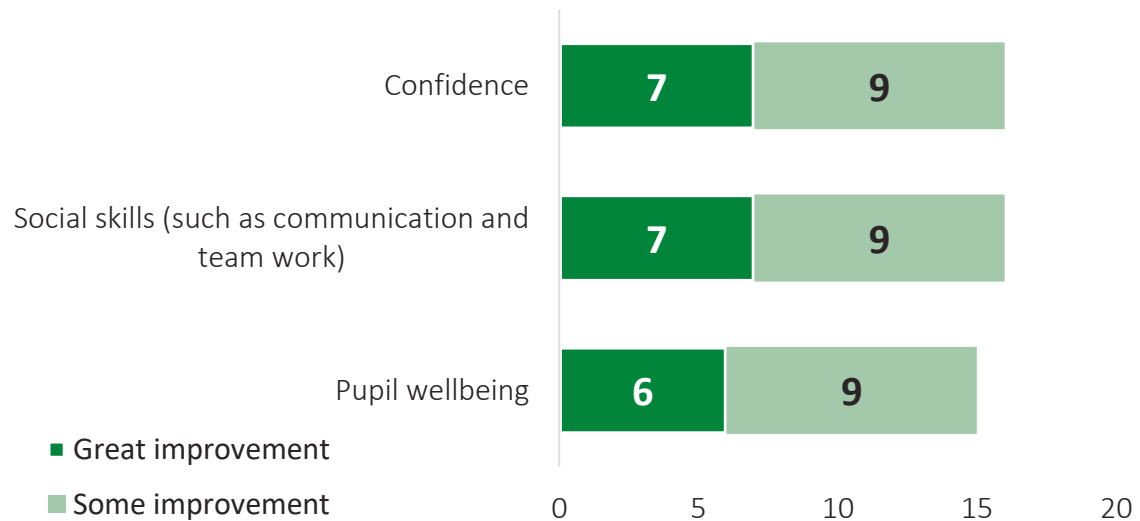
## **Children and Family Wellbeing**

Parents and carers observed notable benefits to children’s wellbeing as a result of Workstream 1 activities, particularly through the family learning sessions. They described these sessions as a rare opportunity for children to learn alongside their parents in a relaxed, supportive environment, which helped strengthen their relationship and boost children’s confidence. Parents noted improvements in children’s communication, teamwork, and willingness to try new things, as well as a greater sense of belonging within the school community.

Similarly, Figure 3.5 shows school leads broadly agreed that Workstream 1 had a positive impact on children’s confidence, social skills, and overall wellbeing. Most

reported at least some improvement across all three areas, with several noting great improvement, particularly in confidence and social skills such as communication and teamwork. This indicates that the support both helped with children’s immediate participation and also contributed to their personal development and emotional wellbeing, helping them to feel more capable and supported in the school environment.

Figure 3.5: School leads perceptions on the impacts of Workstream 1 on participating pupils



Source: Wavehill School Leads Survey, N= 16

---

“My son came away very happy after each session, which was great as he is not happy after school most other days.” **Parent/carer**

---

The case study below details the impacts of Family Learning sessions on a participating family, demonstrating the wellbeing and social benefits of taking part.

### **Case study: Family Learning Sessions – Building confidence, connection, and support**

An older parent, a former member of the armed forces awaiting an ADHD diagnosis, has three children aged 10, 8, and 6, each with additional needs. She described feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and easily distracted, particularly when her husband worked away.

At her first family learning session, she found it hard to focus, complete paperwork, and avoid talking over others. She was attentive to her children but struggled to participate fully in the group environment. To help her settle, the tutor arranged for her to arrive before sessions for a quiet 1:1 catch-up, and to stay afterwards for extra support. This structure gave her a calm space to share her week, break down challenges into manageable steps, and gradually build rapport with other parents.

She began to open up about her difficulties, including household safety concerns and feeling isolated. Another parent immediately offered practical help, arranging for broken window handles to be fixed the same day and offering to attend a school meeting with her.

She reported that her home was safer, she had tackled household tasks in small steps, and felt more in control. She began accepting advice from peers, and started walking to school with another parent to improve punctuality.

By the end of the course, she was on time for school every day, had enrolled her daughter in a school trip (something she initially thought was impossible), and felt confident enough to ask school staff about the support her child would receive.

Her children benefited too. At first, her eldest found group activities stressful, but with 1:1 explanations and flexibility to complete activities in her own way, she began to enjoy the sessions, make crafts she was proud of, and form friendships.

By the end of the course, the family was happier, more capable, and better connected to their community. The mother had gained confidence to speak up in meetings, learned to manage tasks in smaller steps, and felt supported by both the tutor and peers. She later said she wished the course was longer, as it had given her new friendships, positive experiences with her children, and opportunities she would not normally do.

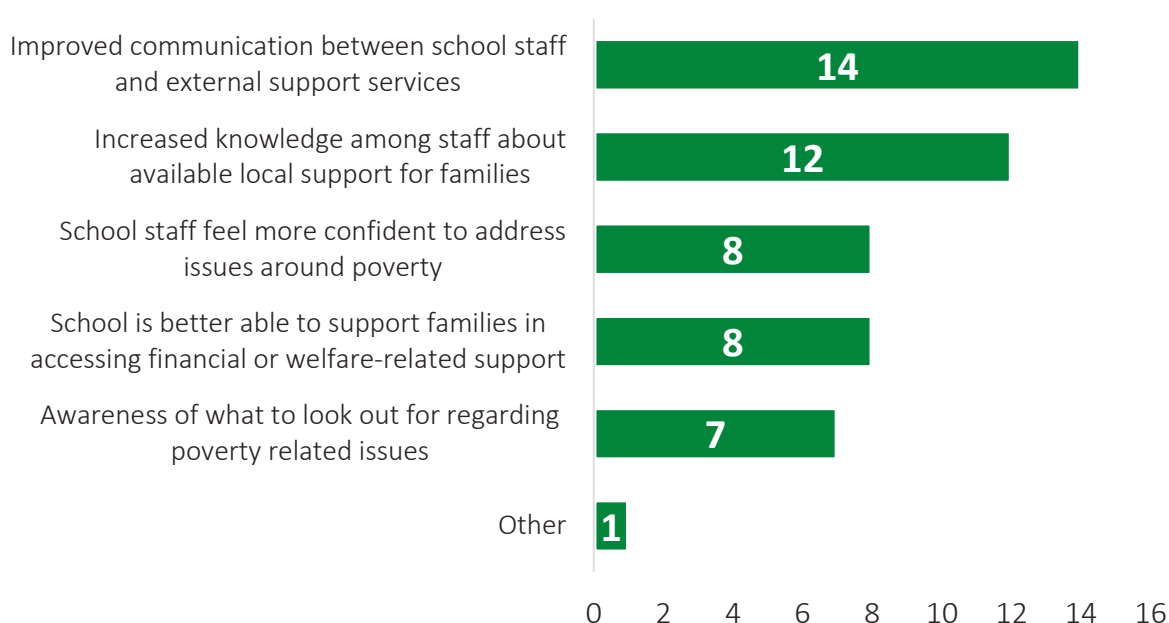
**“For the first time, I wasn’t scared to speak up.” Parent**

## Schools Impacts

Schools involved in Workstream 1 reported a range of positive impacts from the programme. As shown on Figure 3.6, the most common benefit was improved communication between school staff and external support services, mentioned by 14 school leads, which helped create stronger and more coordinated responses to families' needs.

Many also noted increased knowledge among staff about local support available to families, which in turn boosted staff confidence in addressing poverty and helping families access financial or welfare related assistance. These changes suggest the programme is strengthening schools' role as a gateway to wider support, enabling earlier identification and more effective responses to families facing hardship.

Figure 3.6: School impacts of Workstream 1



Source: Wavehill School Leads Survey, N= 50

Providers also reported that Workstream 1, particularly the Poverty Proofing support delivered by Children North East, significantly increased schools' awareness of the barriers that poverty creates for pupils and families. This process gave schools a structured way to reflect on how everyday policies, practices, and assumptions could unintentionally disadvantage children experiencing financial hardship.

### **Case study: LEAP and Step Outdoors Programmes, Kielder Primary School**

Kielder Primary School is one of the most remote schools in England and faces unique challenges linked to rural deprivation. Despite this, the school has embraced Rise's LEAP and Step Outdoors programmes with real enthusiasm, working closely with Rise to create meaningful opportunities for physical activity and community engagement.

Through this work, the school has been supported to strengthen its connections with parents and the local community. A particularly exciting outcome has been the discovery that one parent works for Forestry England. With their support and use of volunteer time, the school is now redeveloping its overgrown forest school area, creating new opportunities for outdoor play and learning.

During LEAP visits, Rise has also worked with the school on practical ways to embed activity into everyday routines. This has included consulting on the introduction of a whole-school active uniform, which will be implemented in the new academic year, as well as offering advice on classroom seating plans and arrangements to create more chances for movement during lessons.

Kielder staff have shown great enthusiasm for professional development, attending Step Outdoor training, LEAP's Power of Play training and Community of Practice networking opportunities, immediately applying their learning to deliver outdoor lessons. In addition, the whole school benefitted from four Step Outdoors sessions, which, given Kielder's small pupil numbers, meant every child, teacher, and parent was directly engaged. This experience has been so inspiring that the school has now created its own parent "Step Outdoors Champions" to continue promoting outdoor opportunities.

**"The sessions were perfectly planned to get children thinking about the world around them and how to explore our outdoor space. I learned a lot and look forward to incorporating more outdoor learning into my own lessons.."** Teacher from Kielder Primary School

---

“We have taken part in Poverty Proofing - understanding the barriers and challenges faced by pupils and families who are living in poverty. We need to continue to work closely with organisations that want to make a difference for those living in poor households, who live with inequality, so that we can improve their life chances. We need the opportunity to continue to educate children, help families meet their basic needs, safeguard them wherever possible.” **School lead**

“We live in a rural community where access to resources such as museums, science centres etc is limited. Cost/ availability of transport is prohibitive for both parents and schools.” **School lead**

---

Through in-depth reviews, confidential pupil voice activities, and staff consultations, Poverty Proofing highlighted the often-hidden ways costs and expectations can limit children’s participation, including uniform requirements and trips to less visible pressures such as access to resources or social events.

Elements of Workstream 1 activity also impacted on building staff capability and embedding more inclusive practice within schools. For example, outdoor learning and physical activity initiatives provided by Rise North East gave staff opportunities to develop practical skills and confidence while working directly with pupils. Stay and Play sessions in early years settings were valued as a form of on-the-job professional development, allowing teachers and support staff to see outdoor play in action and apply ideas to their own classrooms.

Staff also benefited from practical resources (such as booklets of low-cost, curriculum-linked activity ideas) to help sustain delivery and reinforce learning. Similarly, whole-school initiatives promoting active learning led some schools to adapt uniform policies or rethink PE provision to enable all children to participate more comfortably and frequently in physical activity.

### Workstream 1: Key Lessons Learnt

- **Targeting and engaging those who will benefit most** – The most effective delivery occurred when schools used their close knowledge of pupils and families to discreetly identify and engage those most likely to benefit, ensuring support reached children facing the greatest barriers and needs.
- **Practical accessibility** – holding sessions during the school day, offering food, and running activities in familiar settings removed barriers.
- **Early relationship-building** – face-to-face meetings with school leaders at the outset increased buy-in and alignment with school priorities.
- **Flexibility is essential** – offering a menu of options and adapting activities to school type, age group, and timetable helped meet varied needs.
- **Ongoing promotion and reminders** – maintaining awareness of the offer through regular contact helped sustain participation despite school staff changes or competing priorities.

# Workstream 2: Welfare Support Through the School Gates

## Summary points

- Workstream 2 used a variety of flexible delivery models; including school-based drop-in sessions, referral and appointment-based support, and remote or home visit options to make welfare advice accessible and tailored to families' differing needs and preferences.
- Delivering welfare advice and income maximisation support through schools effectively reached families who might not engage with mainstream services, leveraging the trust and familiarity parents have with schools to reduce barriers and normalise conversations about financial hardship.
- Parents and carers accessing Workstream 2 support received help on diverse issues, especially disability-related benefits, reflecting the model's flexibility and responsiveness; almost all rated the support as very useful, highlighting the advisors' expertise, clear communication, and ease of access.
- Building and maintaining strong relationships with schools was a key challenge, with delivery easier when a dedicated staff member understood and supported the programme; staff turnover and varying school types, especially secondary and SEND schools, complicated engagement efforts.
- Capacity limitations affected service delivery, as funding often covered only initial advice rather than full casework, creating challenges in supporting complex cases; engaging families also required persistence to overcome stigma and build trust through a consistent, approachable presence in schools.
- Workstream 2 enabled many families to access benefit entitlements, sometimes resulting in lump sums and annual increases of up to £8,000, with examples including successful claims for DLA, PIP, and UC.
- More than half of parents/carers reported that the support helped a lot in reducing stress and anxiety, with many describing feeling more able to cope, less isolated, and better prepared to manage challenges.
- Workstream 2 strengthened schools' capacity to support families by reducing the burden on staff, increasing their confidence in signposting to financial help, and improving relationships between schools and parents/carers through the integration of welfare rights services.

## Workstream 2 Rationale

Workstream 2 of the CPPP funds welfare rights advice to be delivered in school settings, with the aim of helping families access the financial support they are entitled to and addressing issues such as debt and food insecurity. The rationale for this Workstream is also aligned with the strategic commitments set out in the North East Action Plan to tackle child poverty, which places a strong emphasis on maximising family incomes and reducing the financial pressures that contribute to hardship.

This approach builds on a growing recognition, both nationally and locally, that many families entitled to social security support are not currently accessing it. This may be due to a lack of awareness, the complexity of the benefits system, stigma, or challenges in navigating support services. By locating advice services in schools, a setting that is already familiar and trusted by families, Workstream 2 aims to remove some of these common barriers to access. The school environment offers a discreet and accessible space where families can engage with support without the need for additional appointments, travel, or the potential stigma associated with visiting advice centres or job centres.

This aligns with the North East Child Poverty Action Plan's commitment to delivering welfare rights and income maximisation advice within "a wider range of trusted community spaces," including early years settings and schools. Schools are one of the few places that almost every family engages with on a regular basis which makes them an ideal informal touchpoint to access broader family support. The rationale is built on the assumption that embedding welfare support in these settings can help reach families who may otherwise be overlooked, especially those in low-paid work, experiencing in-work poverty, or hesitant to approach traditional services.<sup>16</sup>

Workstream 2 also reflects the Action Plan's wider ambition to improve the consistency of local welfare support, including initiatives such as free school meal auto-enrolment, uniform assistance, and reducing the cost of the school day. Schools are central to the delivery and coordination of many of these measures, so they are well positioned to identify families in need and offer or signpost appropriate support. The Action Plan builds on this by identifying that families with children not in school e.g. 0-5 year olds would also benefit from welfare rights advice delivery in their local area<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, providers noted that this Workstream supports the broader principles of preventative and place-based working that underpin the CPPP. Rather than responding to crises, it aims to intervene early by making sure families are receiving the income and entitlements that can help them avoid financial strain and its knock-on effects on health, education, and wellbeing.

---

<sup>16</sup> [North East Combined Authority. Child poverty Action Plan](#) (2024)

<sup>17</sup> [North East Combined Authority. Child poverty Action Plan](#) (2024)

# Workstream 2 Delivery

## Delivery Models

Workstream 2 has been delivered through a range of flexible, responsive models that reflect the different contexts of participating schools and the varying needs and preferences of families. Delivery providers have adopted different approaches based on school capacity, parental engagement styles, and existing relationships within communities. Despite the variation, all models share the core aim of bringing welfare advice directly to families in ways that are accessible and effective.

### School-based and drop in models

Many providers, including North Tyneside Citizens Advice (CA), Gateshead CA, Sunderland CA, and Northumberland CA described using regular drop-in sessions hosted on school premises as a central part of their delivery. Sessions were often scheduled to coincide with existing school activities such as coffee mornings, parent evenings, early years sessions, or school events like plays and sports days. This made engagement more convenient for families who were already present and reduced the potential stigma of accessing support.

In some cases, providers reported being embedded more deeply within the school environment, including attending assemblies, hosting information tables, and maintaining a near permanent presence in certain schools. This visibility helped build familiarity and trust, particularly among parents who may be hesitant to approach more formal services. Schools appreciated that this visible model offered clear value without creating additional work for already stretched staff.

### Appointment-based models

Alongside drop-ins, several delivery partners, including Durham County Council FISO, South Tyneside CA, North Tyneside CA, and Newcastle City Council also operated appointment-based models, where schools could refer families directly to advisors. These referrals often came via email, pastoral staff, or online forms with QR codes. In some cases, schools shared a list of families with additional needs (e.g. those with education health and care plans) that providers used as a starting point for outreach.

Following a referral, advisors made initial contact with the family, usually by phone or text, and established their preferred method of communication. Some cases required just a single interaction and quick signposting; others required multiple in-depth appointments over several weeks or months to complete benefit applications, debt management support, or tribunal appeals. Providers emphasised the importance of tailoring the level of support to the family's circumstances, with some needing more intensive through complex processes and others confident enough to act on advice independently.

### Remote and hybrid models

Flexibility was a defining feature of many delivery approaches. Some families preferred remote support, via telephone, email, or video calls, due to work commitments, health needs, or concerns around stigma. Providers, including Newcastle City Council, noted that remote engagement could feel less intrusive, particularly when families were anxious about discussing financial issues in school settings.

Some delivery models also included home visits where needed, particularly for complex or sensitive cases. These visits allowed for a more thorough assessment of need and were especially helpful where digital access or mobility was a barrier.

Overall, the variety of delivery models within Workstream 2 illustrates the value of flexibility in meeting family's needs. By adapting their approach to fit each school's context, engagement patterns, and community relationships, providers were able to offer welfare support in ways that felt accessible and responsive.

Across the delivery models, it is also evident that the success of each approach depends on both school and family preferences. Many providers noted that they were able to offer a range of delivery approaches, but delivering the support worked best when it was led by the parent/carer. For example, some parents/carers felt more comfortable with telephone appointments and others felt it would be more convenient to come to drop in sessions that coincided with when they would need to be at the school to pick up their child(ren). Equally, providers noted that some schools preferred the Advisor to be more visible within the schools – attending coffee mornings, events, hosting tables etc. – whilst other schools (often operating under time pressure) felt it would be better if they were able to refer parents/carers out and then the Advisors take it from there. As a result, it is clear that having flexibility in the model in order to deliver the support in a way that is best suited to parents/carers and schools is important.

### **Reaching Families Facing Barriers**

Delivering welfare advice and income maximisation support through schools has been an important route for reaching families who might otherwise not access mainstream services. Providers consistently reported that being embedded in school settings, either physically present or closely linked through referrals, was important in reducing barriers to access.

A key factor was the familiarity and trust that families often already have with their child's school. Providers noted that their presence in these settings helped normalise conversations around financial hardship. Many families, especially those facing multiple pressures such as working single parents or carers, are unlikely to approach advice services independently. By delivering support in schools, providers were able to engage families in ways that felt informal and accessible and non-threatening.

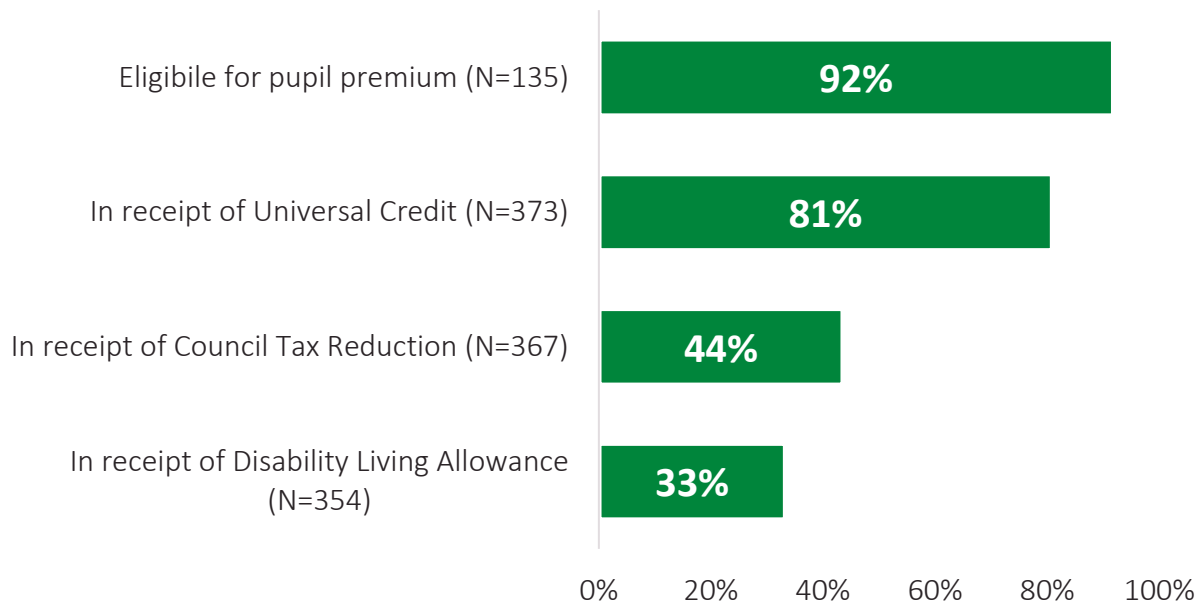
Crucially, providers used delivery methods that removed typical access barriers. These included:

- Flexible and discreet communication options, such as WhatsApp or text messages, which reduced the need for families to visit offices or answer unexpected phone calls.
- Printed leaflets and school displays that clearly communicated the independent and confidential nature of the support, helping to challenge assumptions that providers were linked to social services or the local authority.
- Use of case examples and quotes from other families to reduce stigma and increase relatability.
- Opportunities for parents to engage in conversation through everyday school activities or events, where advice could be introduced naturally.

There is also some evidence to suggest that Workstream 2 successfully reached households with risk factors associated with child poverty. Although not all providers collected monitoring data, as shown on Figure 4.1, a large majority of families supported were eligible for Pupil Premium (92%, 124 out of 135) and in receipt of Universal Credit (81%, 302 out of 373), indicating effective targeting towards low-income households. In addition, 44% (160 out of 367) received Council Tax Reduction and one-third (33%, 118 out of 354) received Disability Living Allowance, highlighting that many participants were managing additional financial and caring pressures.

The data also shows that economic inactivity was common among supported households, with 68% (258 out of 377) having adults who were economically inactive and 53% (162 out of 306) having adults classed as economically active. This underlines the programme's reach among families facing limited or unstable income sources and the importance of support focused on maximising household income and financial resilience. Together, these findings suggest that the school-based model is a highly effective for identifying and supporting families most at risk of financial insecurity.

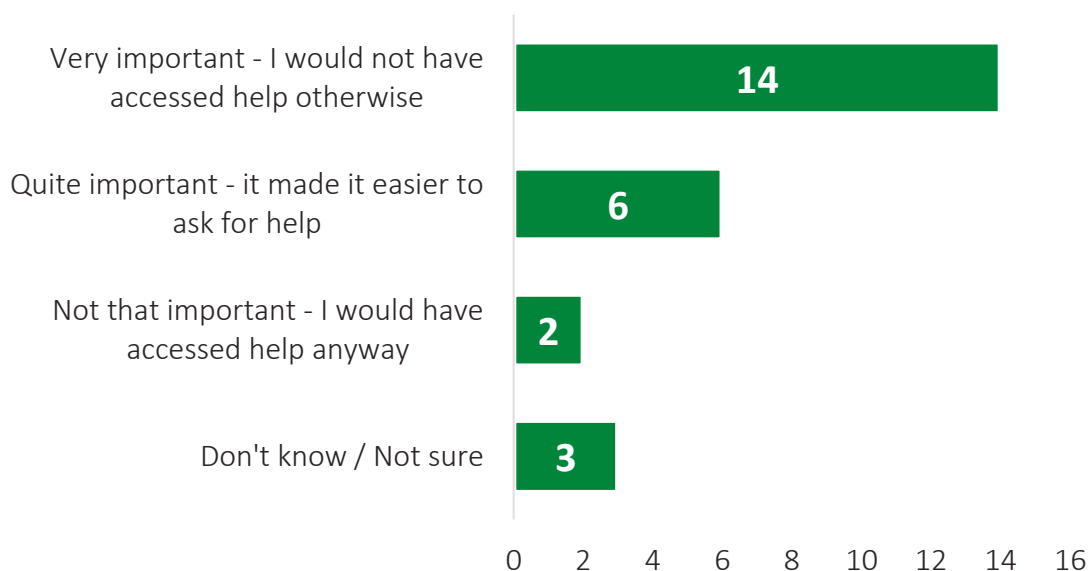
**Figure 4.1: Profile of Families supported through Workstream 2**



Source: CPPP Workstream 2 Monitoring Data

As shown on Figure 4.2, survey responses from parents reinforce the value of delivering welfare support through schools. Over half of respondents said the school-based delivery model was very important, stating they would not have accessed help otherwise. A further quarter said it made it easier to ask for help.

**Figure 4.2: Parent/carer views on the importance of delivering the support in a school setting**



Source: Wavehill Workstream 2 Parent/Carer Survey, N= 25

Providers also emphasised the importance of tone and framing. Rather than presenting support as crisis intervention, conversations were often framed around missed

entitlements or financial gains the family might be missing, making it more about opportunity than deficit. For example, a conversation about struggles with uniform or trip costs could lead into a discussion about possible benefit entitlements or grants.

This approach helped to build trust incrementally, with some families returning for support weeks or months after first seeing a leaflet or meeting a provider at a school event. It also meant that children, through seeing trusted professionals present in their school, could begin to associate welfare support with care and normalcy.

---

“[The support was] more accessible. It felt a lot more approachable and easier to attend” **Parent/carer**

“Having [the support] through the school meant it was trustworthy and fully understanding of our needs” **Parent/carer**

---

School leads described a strong, collaborative relationship with Workstream 2 providers, which they felt directly improved engagement with families. Schools were particularly positive about models which provided flexibility in meeting families’ varied needs, offering one-to-one support, phone calls, drop-ins, and attending school events like fayres and coffee mornings. This adaptability made it easier to reach parents in ways that felt comfortable and accessible.

Schools also highlighted how their pastoral teams close, trusted relationships with families complemented the providers’ work. By knowing their families well and working in a relational way, school staff could identify those in need and connect them to support quickly. This partnership approach meant that even families with complex and vulnerable circumstances felt confident in seeking help.

---

“Our families all work in different ways and being able to be flexible in respect of this has been incredibly helpful. [Welfare Rights Advisor] will accommodate our families in a number of ways, one to one, by phone, at school, drop ins, she has attended our school fayres and attended coffee mornings.” **School Lead**

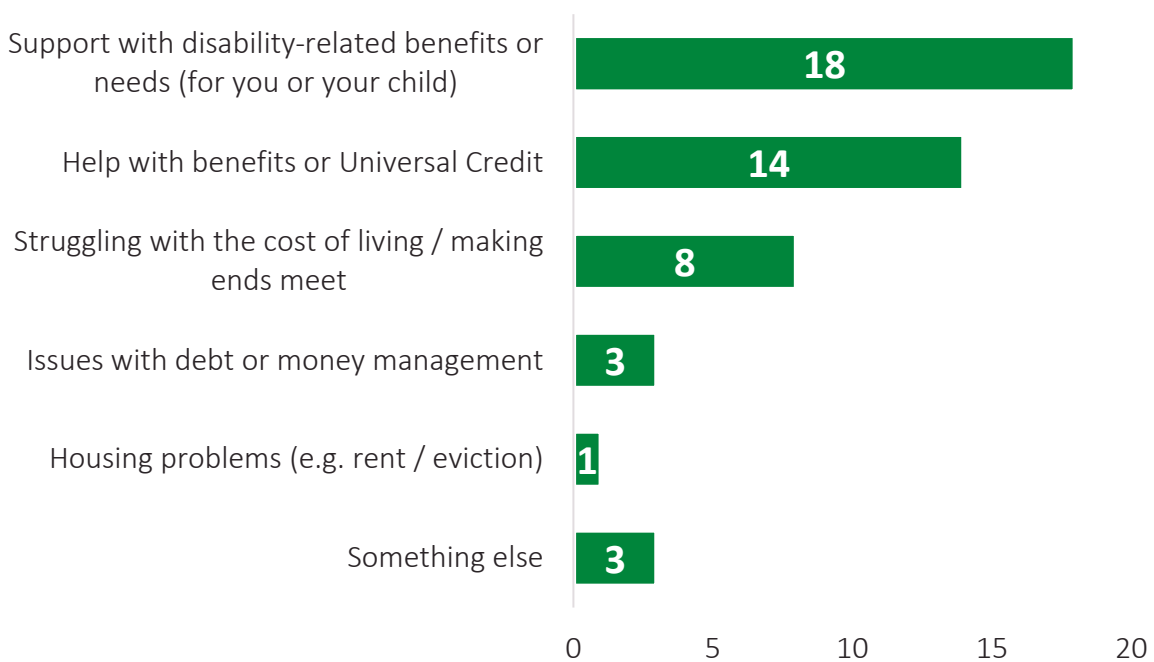
“Our pastoral team help identify families in need of support- we know our families very well and work in a really relational way with [Welfare Rights Advisor]. This has resulted in families feeling they can trust us to come to us when they are struggling or in need of help. Our families have very complex lives and situations leaving them in a very vulnerable position.” **School Lead**

---

## Quality of Support

Parents and carers who accessed support through Workstream 2 received help on a wide range of issues, reflecting the flexibility and responsiveness of the model. As shown in Figure 4.3, the most common type of support was related to disability benefits or needs which providers noted reflects both the complexity of navigating these entitlements and the high level of unmet need among families. Many also received help with Universal Credit and other benefits, while others sought advice around cost of living pressures, debt, and housing.

Figure 4.3: Types of support received

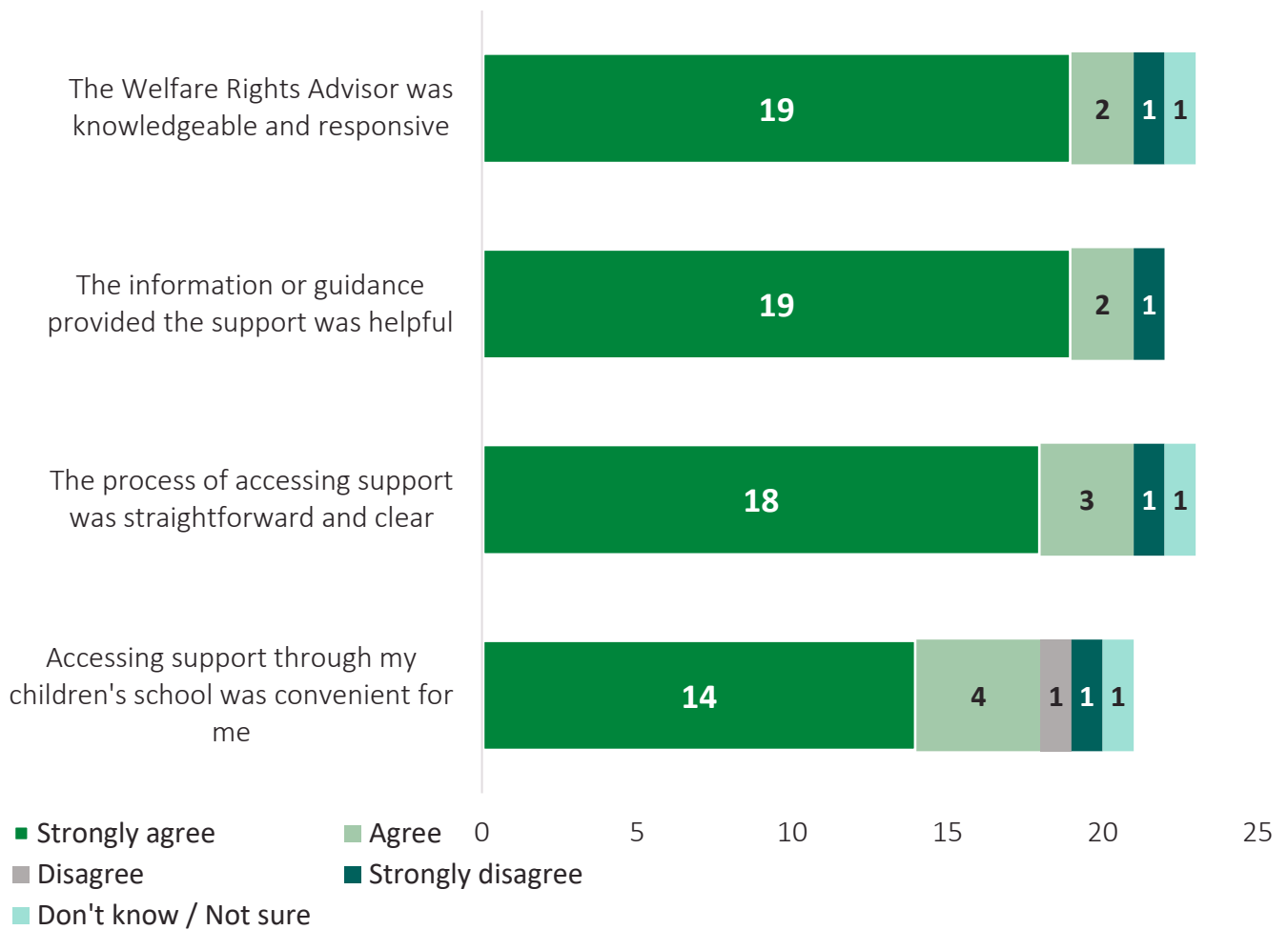


Source: Wavehill Workstream 2 Parent/Carer Survey, N= 25

The majority of parents and carers rated the quality of support received through Workstream 2 positively, with 24 out of 25 reporting that the support was either very or extremely useful. As shown on Figure 4.4, nearly all respondents strongly agreed that the Welfare Rights Advisor was knowledgeable and responsive, indicating confidence in the expertise and professionalism of the advisors. Similarly, most strongly agreed that the information and guidance they received was helpful, suggesting that the support offered was not only accurate but also practically useful in addressing their needs.

The process of accessing support described as straightforward and clear, with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. This reflects well on the design and communication of the service, indicating it was easy to navigate and accessible to families with a range of needs.

Figure 4.4: How parents felt about the support they received



Source: Wavehill Workstream 2 Parent/Carer Survey, N= 23

---

“It was great to have one to one face to face time to discuss issues we were having. From the onset a plan was put in place and followed through with regular updates and checkups along the way. I am now more aware of the help out there which seemed to be a bit of a minefield previously. I am fully satisfied with the help and service received.” **Parent / carer**

“[Welfare Rights Advisor] is brilliant, she had so much knowledge and experience. She is a super star and a pleasure to be around; thank you [Welfare Rights Advisor].” **Parent / carer**

---

## Delivery Challenges

Delivering welfare support through schools has brought tangible benefits, but providers also highlighted several practical challenges in implementation.

A key challenge has been building and sustaining relationships with schools. The level of engagement from schools varies, often depending on each school's internal capacity and the presence of a committed staff member who understands the value of the service. Staff turnover in schools can disrupt these relationships, requiring time and effort to rebuild connections. Providers found that when a school had a dedicated contact who understood the aims of the programme, delivery became easier.

---

“It can be difficult building up relationships with schools, some have more capacity and resource to engage than others. I find that if I'm engaging with non-teaching school staff, they usually have a bit more time and availability to help identify and send through referrals to me, or to facilitate my presence within schools.” **Provider**

---

The type of school also influenced how delivery was carried out. For example, engaging with secondary and SEND schools proved more challenging, as parents were less likely to be on-site regularly and there were fewer informal opportunities for face-to-face contact. Unlike primary schools, where parents are regularly present at drop-off and pick-up, secondary schools required more targeted engagement through events or scheduled appointments. This meant that regular drop-ins (an effective model elsewhere) were not always feasible. In these contexts, providers found it more effective to promote available support through alternative channels such as parent newsletters, school Facebook pages, text messaging systems, or via form tutors and pastoral teams. Learning from these experiences suggests that a blended approach (combining occasional in-person opportunities with consistent digital and written communication) can help maintain visibility and reach families in schools where casual face-to-face engagement is limited.

Provider capacity also emerged as an issue. Some providers had existing models in place from previous projects, but the current programme only funded initial advice rather than ongoing casework. This created difficulties when more complex cases arose, as families had to be internally referred elsewhere. Providers suggested that future models could benefit from resourcing the full cycle of support.

---

“There are two kinds of things we can offer - Advice (one-off) vs case work (ongoing). This project only funds the prior, so we’ve had to refer people on internally to help with ongoing challenges. So, we’re struggling with capacity. It would be useful if future projects can deal with ongoing casework element.” **Provider**

---

Engaging families themselves, though successful, could also take persistence. Some parents avoided seeking support due to stigma or fear of judgment. Providers found that maintaining a visible, approachable presence in schools helped to build trust over time. They noted that engagement often required repeated contact, both to build confidence, and also because families’ circumstances and advice needs can change. Having support consistently available meant that when a need did arise, parents already knew where to go and felt more comfortable accessing it.

## Workstream 2 Performance

For Workstream 2, delivery has exceeded the target for the number of schools supported, reaching 127 schools compared to the original target of 77 (165% of target). Support for families has also exceeded the target, with 1098 families reached against the goal of 900 (122%). In addition, the support has helped secure substantial financial gains for families, with a total of over £1.6 million in benefits identified or accessed, highlighting the tangible economic impact of this Workstream.

Table 4.1: Workstream 2 Performance Against Output Targets

Output	Actual output	Target output	Progress Towards Output
Schools supported	127	77	165%
Families supported	1098	900	122%
Benefit gains	£1,659,977	N/A	N/A

Source: CPPP Monitoring Data

## Workstream 2 Impact

### Financial Impacts

Many families received substantial income boosts as a result of accessing welfare advice and completing benefit applications they may not have pursued otherwise. In some cases, this led to lump sum payments or increased monthly income, transforming families’ financial situations. As stated above, across delivery partners,

confirmed benefit gains totalled £1,659,977 for 2024/2025, highlighting the financial impact of the programme. Importantly, this is also likely to be higher as families continue to receive entitlements beyond the year of the programme.

Examples included successful claims for Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payments, and Universal Credit (UC), often for families with complex needs or multiple children with disabilities. One provider described securing over £11,000 in backdated benefits for a large family, enabling them to buy a minibus to transport their children. Another noted cases where families were now up to £8,000 better off annually following a series of coordinated support interventions, including benefit claims, rehousing applications, and grants for white goods or travel costs.

Survey responses from parents/carers provide further evidence of the financial impact of Workstream 2. As shown in Figure 4.5, most respondents reported that the support had made a substantial difference to both their awareness of financial entitlements and their overall financial situation. Over half said their awareness of available financial help had improved a lot, and more than a third said their family’s financial situation had also improved a lot as a result of the support. Only a small number reported no change.

This suggests that beyond direct financial gains, the programme has also helped build families’ understanding of the benefits system and entitlements, equipping them to seek support more confidently in future, with a further 17 out of 19 respondents reporting that the support has helped with their confidence to reach out for support in the future.

Figure 4.5: Financial impacts on parents/carers



Source: Wavehill Workstream 2 Parent/Carer Survey, N= 14

Feedback from parents/carers reinforces the financial benefits many families experienced through Workstream 2. Survey responses highlight that support with completing applications for benefits such as DLA and UC was particularly impactful. Several families said that this allowed them to receive backdated payments and has

increased their monthly income. Several families also said they would have found the process overwhelming or confusing without the help of a Welfare Rights Advisor, and some may not have applied at all without this support.

---

“It's built my confidence up to ask if I need help and also I got help with food and other things which I am grateful for and appreciated all the help I had got” **Parent/carer**

“[Without the support] I would not have known the benefits that I was entitled to.” **Parent/carer**

“[WRO] has helped me with forms, and getting the right care and financial help I needed for me and my family. Without her time and help, I wouldn't know where to begin or even have the courage to ask or look into. This service in general has opened up many positive doors for me and my children” **Parent/carer**

---

## Wellbeing Impacts

Feedback from parents/carers highlights the positive impact of Workstream 2 on wellbeing, particularly in easing the pressures associated with financial difficulties. Figure 4.6 shows that most parents/carers reported that the support helped to reduce their stress and anxiety levels, with over half saying that it helped a lot. Many also felt less alone or isolated in dealing with problems, highlighting the emotional reassurance of the support provided. The data also shows that the support contributed positively to children's mental wellbeing indicating the broader benefits for family life beyond financial support.

Figure 4.6: Wellbeing impacts on parents/carers and children



Source: Wavehill Workstream 2 Parent/Carer Survey, N= 20

In providing qualitative feedback, many parents/carers described feeling overwhelmed by their circumstance prior to receiving support, especially when navigating complex benefits systems. The guidance and one-to-one support helped to alleviate that pressure, offering clarity and emotional reassurance.

---

“It has helped me be able to breathe and stress less.” **Parent/carers**

“[The advisor] took the worry and stress away from completing the DLA forms and made sure that everything we discussed on our call was relayed accurately and precisely. To say their help and assistance was a relief and great help is an understatement.” **Parent/carers**

---

Similarly, providers also highlighted the positive impacts of the support on families’ wellbeing, particularly in giving them a sense of stability and relief. They reported that for some, this meant being able to reduce working hours to care for their children, access tailored equipment or sensory aids, or afford better food and clothing – all of which have had ripple effects on overall family wellbeing.

---

“For some families there's been huge financial gains. For one family with nine children, most of them had physical and learning difficulties and the parents had health problems. They managed to receive a lump

sum of £11,000 a few weeks ago to get a minibus to help transport the whole family.” **Provider**

“[We see] parents who are in full-time employment and on a low income; their children have health needs so we support them to complete PIP and disability allowance form and benefits checks. We had one example with a child with suspected ADHD, so we supported with an application for DLA - and got a grant for getting a cooker.”  
**Provider**

---

School leads echoed this, observing that families benefitted not just from the financial outcomes, but from the relief that came with receiving clear and expert guidance. The ability to talk through problems with an Advisor who understood the system and could advocate on their behalf reduced stress and anxiety for many parents. School leads noted that this, in turn, had positive effects on children’s wellbeing – reflected in survey responses where over half of parents reported that the support had helped with both their child’s wellbeing and learning or school experience.

---

“[The support] has resulted in families feeling they can trust us to come to us when they are struggling or in need of help. Our families have very complex lives and situations leaving them in a very vulnerable position. It also had wider ripple effects onto their children's wellbeing and engagement with school.” **Provider**

---

The case study below demonstrates how the support has delivered measurable financial gains alongside wider wellbeing improvements.

### **Case study: Stabilising a lone parent household through school-based welfare support**

Following the breakdown of an abusive relationship, a lone parent of two working 20 hours a week faced a sudden drop in income. The council tenancy was already in her name, but with the children's father leaving, household income dropped substantially. One of her children also has sensory difficulties, adding extra pressure on daily routines. She was unsure what support she could access and felt overwhelmed by the paperwork and appointments required to change her benefit claims.

A Welfare Rights Officer contacted her quickly, helped her apply for emergency support to cover essential costs, and guided her step by step through the process of updating her benefit claims. They explained what evidence she needed, what to expect at appointments, and kept in touch by phone and text to answer questions and reassure her. The WRO also helped her apply for Council Tax support to prevent arrears.

#### **Outcome and Impacts**

The WRA's calm, practical approach helped her take the right steps before debt or arrears could escalate. The intervention averted a food and rent crisis, stabilised her income, and enabled her to keep working while ensuring her children attended school regularly. She re-established a secure home and regained stability. She later said that without this support, she could not have managed benefit claims while coping with emotional trauma.

### **School Impacts**

Workstream 2 has had a positive impact on schools by relieving pressure on staff and improving their capacity to support families facing financial difficulties. Providers consistently reported that school staff welcomed the welfare rights support, particularly because it reduced the burden often placed on them to offer financial advice or assist with benefits applications.

The presence of the welfare rights service also helped to build school staff confidence in signposting families to appropriate support. Advisors shared information, attended school briefings, and offered training or resources such as basic advice sessions. This helped school staff to feel more informed about entitlements and referral pathways. As a result, some reported feeling more confident when difficult issues arose in conversations with parents.

---

“The general picture from schools is that they were really happy for us to come in. We've been relieving some pressure. Just filling out benefit forms for child Disability Living Allowance. Staff would help parents - but they'll be helping without expertise and knowledge. We have been

able to take this off their hands. Frees them up to do other things in school, leads to a better use of their resources.” **Provider**

---

The availability of welfare support within schools has also had positive impacts on the relationship between school staff and parents/carers. Providers described how parents/carers began to see the welfare rights service as an extension of the school’s support offer. In some cases, this helped to reduce parents’/carers’ apprehension about seeking help and made it easier for them to open up to school staff more generally. One provider noted that parents recognised the service as a specialist offer that could deal with complex needs, showing the school’s role in offering support beyond education.

---

“[This has] shown that there are people helping out those who struggle and that they’re working with schools.” **Parent/carer**

“Having [the support] through the school meant it was trustworthy and fully understanding of our needs.” **Parent/carer**

---

### Workstream 2: Key Lessons Learnt

- **Targeting and engaging families most in need** - Effective delivery relied on schools’ close knowledge of their pupils and communities to identify those who would benefit most, including families unlikely to approach advice services independently. Embedding support in familiar school settings and using trusted staff to make referrals helped ensure engagement with those facing the greatest barriers.
- **Flexibility in delivery models** - Offering a blend of drop-ins, appointments, remote support, and occasional home visits meant providers could adapt to families’ preferences, school contexts, and practical barriers such as work schedules, mobility, or stigma.
- **Building trust over time** - Visible, approachable advisors in schools helped normalise conversations around financial hardship. Repeated, low-pressure contact, often starting at everyday school events, meant families were more likely to seek help when needs arose.
- **Strong school-provider partnerships** - Success was greatest where there was a committed school contact and strong collaboration with pastoral teams, enabling quick referrals and consistent follow-up.
- **Capacity for complex cases** - One provider found that the support needs of families often went beyond initial advice, suggesting future models could be strengthened by resourcing ongoing casework for families with more complex needs.

# Workstream 3: Employer Support

## Summary points

- Workstream 3, delivered by Society Matters CIC, engaged employers across sectors to raise awareness of in-work poverty, provide practical training and tools, and develop tailored financial wellbeing strategies that improved support for employees facing financial hardship.
- Society Matters CIC targeted employers across sectors, prioritising large organisations for their potential reach while engaging smaller third-sector employers for quicker wins, and tailored its approach to overcome lower awareness and longer lead times in the private sector.
- Workstream 3's confidential employee survey and tailored support gave employers valuable insights into staff financial wellbeing, built trust, and provided practical, staged strategies with ongoing guidance to help embed sustainable changes.
- Engaging employers required tailoring approaches to each organisation's unique context and workplace culture, using broader wellbeing conversations as an entry point to discuss in-work poverty.
- A flexible menu of support options enabled employers to better understand and address issues of in-work poverty and financial resilience, even when they initially lacked relevant data or awareness.
- Employers developed greater awareness of in-work poverty, with many becoming advocates and adjusting their approaches to staff challenges, shifting from disciplinary to supportive responses.
- Workplace culture improved through increased empathy, better staff morale, and stronger engagement, with some employers noting improved attendance linked to addressing financial pressures.
- Many organisations implemented practical strategies such as wellbeing drop-ins, financial inclusion officers, pension advice, and benefit checks at induction, alongside inclusive recruitment changes.
- Employees experienced reduced stress and anxiety, improved financial resilience, and lower absenteeism

## Workstream 3 Rationale

While children in workless households remain at the highest risk of poverty, in-work poverty has become a growing concern in the North East. Between 2014/15 and 2021/22, the proportion of children in poverty whose parents or carers were in work rose from 56% to 67% – a sharper increase than seen nationally.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> [No Time to Wait, North East Child Poverty Commission, p. 23](#)

Today, up to two-thirds of children living below the poverty line in the wider region are in working families, showing that having a job is no longer a guaranteed route out of poverty.<sup>19</sup> It is particularly notable that, between 2019/20 and 2021/22, more than one in five children (21.5%) in households where all adults were in work were still growing up in poverty – the highest rate in the UK and twice the proportion seen in the North East in 2014/15. This reflects the combined impact of low pay, limited working hours, and insecure employment.

The North East also has the lowest median weekly pay for full-time employees of any UK nation or region (£614 in 2023, £68 below the UK average).<sup>20</sup> Many local jobs are in routine, lower-paid occupations, and although the proportion of jobs paid below the voluntary real Living Wage has fallen over the past decade, it remains high at 14.8% (around 155,000 jobs).<sup>21</sup> In some areas, such as South Tyneside, the figure exceeds 20%.<sup>22</sup>

Insecure work further adds to the problem. Almost one in five workers in the North East Combined Authority area (19.7%) are in insecure employment - characterised by no guaranteed hours, low or unpredictable pay, and limited employment rights. Rates vary across the region: Sunderland has the highest proportion of workers in severely insecure work (23.9%), compared with 16.9% in County Durham, where more than half of workers are in secure employment. South Tyneside also faces additional challenges, with the lowest employment rate (62%) and highest inactivity rate (30.6%), and levels of severely insecure work above the England average (20.2%).<sup>23</sup> These conditions are more common among women, young people, disabled workers, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Against this backdrop, Workstream 3 was established to address the workplace and systemic issues driving in-work poverty. By working directly with employers, it aims to increase awareness of the scale and impact of in-work poverty, encourage fair pay and more secure contracts, and support the introduction of policies and practices that improve financial stability for employees. The Workstream recognises that tackling child poverty requires not only creating jobs, but ensuring those jobs provide a genuine and sustainable route out of poverty.

## Workstream 3 Delivery

### Delivery Model

Society Matters CIC was contracted to deliver Workstream 3, bringing its specialist expertise in tackling poverty and social disadvantage into direct engagement with

---

<sup>19</sup> [Ibid., p. 48](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Ibid.,](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Employee jobs paid below the Living Wage 2022 \(2022\), Living Wage Foundation](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Ibid.,](#)

<sup>23</sup> [North East City Region Employment Profile, Work Foundation](#)

employers. Their role involved working with businesses of varying sizes and sectors to raise awareness of in-work poverty, explore its causes and impacts, and support employers to implement practical changes in pay structures, working conditions, and employment practices.

Society Matters CIC's delivery model began by prospecting organisations across the private, public, and voluntary sectors, identifying those most likely to benefit from support. Engagement ranged from small charities requiring highly tailored assistance to large employers such as NHS Trusts and educational institutions.

The core offer comprised two fully funded workshops: Living Below the Breadline and Understanding In-Work Benefits. These were delivered either face to face or online and targeted at leadership teams, project managers, and team leaders. The Living Below the Breadline workshop explored the realities of poverty, aiming to increase empathy and awareness among senior decision-makers whose staff may be affected. The Understanding In-Work Benefits session provided practical knowledge on the financial support available to employees, helping leaders better advise and signpost their teams.

A key entry point for many employers, particularly larger ones, was the Making Ends Meet survey. This tool provided detail on employees' financial circumstances, including how they were coping with cost-of-living pressures and what forms of support might make a difference. Society Matters CIC's data and research specialist analysed the results and produced a tailored report, which was then presented back to the employer. This process led to the development of a financial wellbeing strategy, complete with a timeline of recommendations and information on relevant support services.

Beyond these core elements, the offer included access to additional tools and insights, one-to-one strategy support for specific challenges, and the Life Links service – providing quick, practical help for staff in financial difficulty. Employers were also invited to Leaders for Change cross-sector events, which brought leaders from across the region together and encouraged knowledge-sharing and collaboration. Further opportunities were available around financial fitness, debt management, and related topics, enabling employers to take a sustained and multi-faceted approach to tackling in-work poverty.

## **Targeting Employers**

Society Matters CIC adopted a broad targeting approach, engaging employers across the private, public, and voluntary sectors. While the offer was open to all, targeting was informed by an understanding of which organisations were most likely to respond positively and where the potential for impact was greatest.

In practice, third-sector organisations, including charities and community interest companies, were the most readily engaged. These organisations often already worked with communities affected by child poverty, understood the challenges involved, and

were motivated to act. As a result, they were quicker to see the value of the support on offer and to make decisions to participate.

By contrast, engaging private sector employers required a more deliberate approach. For many commercial organisations, tackling in-work poverty was not part of their day-to-day focus, and the concept was often unfamiliar. Society Matters CIC viewed this both as a challenge and an opportunity, recognising that once private sector employers were engaged, they could be strongly influenced by evidence of impact.

Initially, the targeting strategy prioritised the largest employers during the first six months. This was based on the recognition that while these organisations could deliver the greatest potential reach, they also required longer lead times to navigate internal processes and secure buy in. Smaller employers, particularly within the charity sector, proved quicker to engage and implement changes, but their reach was more limited. Over time, Society Matters CIC were able to balance these priorities, acknowledging that early engagement with large employers should begin well in advance, while smaller organisations could help deliver quicker wins and visible outcomes.

### **Quality of Support**

An important part of the support offer was the employee survey, which employers were strongly encouraged, though never forced, to adopt as a starting point. This survey gave employers access to sensitive, valuable data about their workforce's experience of in-work poverty and financial resilience - information they would not otherwise have had. As both employees and employers often find these topics difficult to discuss openly, Society Matters CIC noted that the survey's highly confidential nature and delivery through a trusted third-party organisation created a safe space for employees to share their experiences.

Employer feedback echoed the effectiveness of the support provided under Workstream 3. Employers consistently highlighted the expertise and professionalism of Society Matters CIC. They noted that the sessions were led by knowledgeable facilitators who demonstrated a strong understanding of in-work poverty and financial resilience, which helped build trust and credibility from the outset.

This expertise translated into advice and guidance that was not only relevant but also practical and actionable within their organisations. Employers appreciated that the support was tailored to reflect the unique needs of their workforce, ensuring that strategies and recommendations could be realistically implemented rather than being generic or theoretical.

---

“The staff were very knowledgeable and professional, and the recommendations were simple to implement and relevant. Sessions were also led by knowledgeable facilitators who had a good understanding of in-work poverty and how financial difficulties can occur.” **Employer**

“The presentation [facilitator] delivered was excellent and really supported us in our decision making.” **Employer**

---

Several employers also commented on how the support was sensitive to the challenges faced by their employees. This responsiveness helped create a supportive environment where staff felt their concerns were acknowledged and addressed, increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes. The focus on confidential, evidence-based approaches, such as the employee survey, was seen as particularly valuable in enabling employers to gain honest insights without risking employee discomfort or distrust.

---

“The survey was an excellent way to get insight into our staff, and because it was done by a third party I think that removed discomfort and meant staff could be as honest as possible” **Employer**

---

### Implementing Recommendations

A key factor in the success of Workstream 3 has been Society Matters CIC’s commitment to ongoing support beyond simply delivering recommendations. They noted that one of the main strategies is establishing clear, staged timelines that break down objectives into short, medium, and long-term goals. This structured approach helps employers to plan and prioritise actions realistically, making the overall strategy more achievable.

Account management is also important in this process. Society Matters CIC assigns dedicated support to each employer, providing continuous guidance from the initial induction through every stage of implementation. They noted that this hands on approach means employers feel supported as they embed changes in their organisations.

### **Addressing Delivery Challenges**

In delivering support under Workstream 3, Society Matters CIC encountered challenges in tailoring their approaches to the diverse contexts of different employers across different sectors.

A key challenge was understanding each organisation’s unique circumstances and workplace culture to ensure the support was relevant and effective. To initiate conversations about sensitive topics like in-work poverty and financial wellbeing, Society Matters CIC began by exploring how employers currently addressed employee wellbeing more broadly. This helped to create a natural and constructive dialogue. They also incorporated targeted questions about business practices, such as policies around long-term sickness absence, to gain deeper insight into how organisations were currently supporting their employees.

However, many employers were unsure or lacked detailed information about these issues within their own workplaces. To overcome this, Society Matters developed a flexible “menu” of support options designed to respond to varying organisational needs and contexts. The support they provided helped employers generate the data and understanding they needed to identify issues related to in-work poverty and financial resilience, enabling them to take more informed and effective action.

---

“Each strategy is unique to each organisation. We’re unsure what it’ll look like until we do a survey with them. Each survey is unique to that organisation. Some are very common, or have pain points across all sizes or sectors of business. We make it really easy to implement strategies as we support them.” **Provider**

---

## Workstream 3 Performance

Workstream 3 has significantly exceeded its target for the number of employees supported, reaching 40,317 employees compared to the original target of 4,000 (1,008% of target). This reflects the broad targeting approach outlined in the previous section and success in engaging organisations, particularly larger ones or in the third sector, that were already motivated to address poverty-related issues and could implement changes quickly.

Progress towards the target for employers supported was met, with 85 employers engaged, showing that for those that did participate, particularly larger organisations, were able to generate a substantial reach, increasing the overall employee impact.

Table 5.1: Workstream 3 Performance Against Output Targets

Output	Actual output	Target output	Progress Towards Output
Employees supported	40,317	4000	1,008%
Employers supported	85	85	100%

Source: CPPP Monitoring Data

## Workstream 3 Impact

### Employer Impacts

Workstream 3 has had evident impacts on employers, with participating organisations reporting increased awareness of in-work poverty and the ways it affects both employees and business performance. The following sections discuss the key impacts on employers from the Workstream 3 survey and interviews with Society Matters CIC.

#### Greater awareness of in-work poverty

Society Matters CIC observed that, through their involvement in Workstream 3, many employers had increased their understanding of in-work poverty compared to their knowledge prior to the programme.

By the latter stages of the support, many organisations had become active advocates for addressing in-work poverty. They openly shared their experiences through press releases, social media posts, and peer encouragement, helping to raise awareness beyond their own workplaces. This growing openness was accompanied by increased uptake of direct support services, such as Society Matters Life Link advice, and a willingness among employers to introduce initiatives like staff wellbeing drop-in sessions and financial inclusion officers.

Society Matters CIC observed that third-sector organisations generally had a stronger prior awareness of in-work poverty issues, while many private sector employers, particularly at senior leadership levels, were initially far removed from the realities their employees faced. For these organisations, engaging with the programme was often eye-opening, revealing hidden struggles among staff that had previously gone unnoticed.

Better awareness of in-work poverty is also evidence through employer survey responses. Several employers described changes in their approach to common challenges such as absenteeism, attendance, and behaviours previously dismissed, like theft. Where these issues might once have been met with disciplinary responses, there were examples of where employers now take time to understand the underlying personal and financial difficulties their staff face. This empathetic approach has

enabled them to provide tailored support, improving both individual wellbeing and workforce stability.

---

“We have changed our thinking towards how we challenge things like absenteeism, attendance and theft. Where we would previously have dismissed them, we have taken extra time to understand and as a result we’ve supported individuals with challenging non-work-related situations.” **Employer**

---

Workplace culture has also benefited from the support. Management teams reported a greater consideration of in-work poverty that was previously lacking, leading to improved staff morale, increased positivity, and stronger engagement with workplace activities. One employer noted better attendance patterns, especially toward the end of the month, after recognising the connection between financial pressures and employee absence.

---

“Culture has improved a lot, management have a consideration to in-work poverty that they did not previously have.” **Employer**

---

### Implementing strategies to address the impacts of in-work poverty

Society Matters CIC observed that many employers have actively implemented, or begun to implement, a range of strategies to address the impacts of in-work poverty following their engagement with Workstream 3.

Employers have introduced new initiatives such as staff wellbeing drop-in sessions and appointed dedicated financial inclusion officers to provide ongoing support. Many have developed action plans informed by employee survey results, helping them target interventions more effectively. A number of organisations have also incorporated pension advice services and extended financial wellbeing support to employees’ beneficiaries, demonstrating a broad commitment to tackling financial hardship.

Workforce strategies have evolved as well. For example, some employers have reviewed and adjusted their recruitment processes to promote inclusivity and better reflect the needs of financially vulnerable staff. Others have integrated benefit checks into induction procedures, helping new employees access entitlements they may not have been aware of.

Employer feedback echoes these successes. Many reported that recommended changes were straightforward to implement, low-cost, and yet had substantially positive effects on employee wellbeing, attendance, and workplace culture. While some systemic changes require longer timelines and cross-team collaboration, the

majority of employers expressed satisfaction with the support received and confidence in continuing to build on initial successes.

---

“The changes we have been able to make were very reasonable and little cost and time needed to implement yet the difference for the staff has been significant. I think because they were very knowledgeable and approachable this also helped to build trust.” **Employer**

---

## Employee Impacts

Workstream 3 has had positive impacts on employees across participating organisations, particularly in terms of wellbeing, confidence, and overall financial resilience. Employers reported that the support provided has led to improved employee wellbeing, with many staff experiencing reduced stress and anxiety related to financial pressures. For example, several organisations noted that employees no longer worry about being out of pocket for work-related expenses, which has positively influenced their mental health and ability to focus at work.

---

“Improved mental health as (staff) no longer worry about being out of pocket for work-related expenses.” **Employer**

---

In addition to wellbeing improvements, employers observed reductions in absenteeism, particularly related to financial stress and its knock-on effects. Employees were more likely to attend work consistently when financial concerns were addressed, reducing the need for time off due to stress-related illnesses. Further, by proactively supporting staff facing financial difficulties, employers created a more trusting and supportive workplace culture, which encouraged employees to seek help early and prevented issues from escalating.

---

“Staff feel more valued and are showing more positivity around work. Some staff are more engaging with events required for their role meaning we have needed contacts and support for the service.” **Employer.**

“Productivity has also increased and we have been able to keep people in work who we would have previously exited from the company. We also see better attendance at the end of the month where we had previously not identified the correlation between finance and attendance.” **Employer**

---

The case study below highlights how North East Museums worked with Society Matters CIC to tackle in-work poverty, strengthen staff wellbeing, and make lasting organisational changes that improved both financial security and workplace culture.

### Case study: North East Museums

North East Museums manages twelve museums and galleries across the North East, as well as the Tyne and Wear Archives. It operates these services on behalf of local authorities in Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North and South Tyneside, Sunderland, and Newcastle University. With a collection of over 1.5 million items, its mission is to connect people with the past, present, and future, with a strong focus on equality, wellbeing, and social mobility. Staff are employed by Newcastle City Council but work within an independent governance structure.

North East Museums engaged with Society Matters as part of their broader commitment to social value and staff wellbeing, recognising the importance of addressing in-work poverty and financial challenges faced by their workforce. They also recognised how improvements in this area would contribute to supporting a reduction in child poverty in the region. North East Museums began their engagement with Society Matters in 2022, initially participating in free workshops such as Living Below the Breadline and In Work Welfare Benefits. They then opted for a more detailed follow-up, focusing on staff financial wellbeing - as a small HR team having access to external expertise and resource was invaluable.

Key activities and support included, but are not limited to:

- Conducting Making Ends Meet confidential employee surveys in 2023 and 2025, with strong staff participation encouraged through incentives such as vouchers.
- Detailed analysis and user-friendly reporting of survey results by Society Matters, including recommendations and an actionable plan.
- Implementation of recommendations to increase income, reduce work-related and household costs, and facilitate staff access to support.
- Review and improvement to some HR policies and practices such as use of fixed-term contracts, recruitment processes, induction for staff and volunteers, and pay systems.

The support helped North East Museums better understand in-work poverty among staff, including that some permanent employees still face financial hardship. This shifted organisational attitudes towards greater empathy and flexibility, for example, taking a supportive approach to repayment of overpayments rather than enforcing rules rigidly. A new roster system enabled the organisation to identify regular additional hours and, where possible, add them to contracts to provide guaranteed income, while still allowing casual work where preferred. Recruitment and induction processes were also improved, with clearer information on benefits, discounts, and signposting to benefits checks.

### Workstream 3: Key Lessons Learnt

- **Engagement works best when targeting is strategic** – Prioritising employers most open to change (often third-sector organisations) helped secure early successes, while beginning conversations with large employers well in advance allowed time to navigate complex decision-making processes. However, employers that are more difficult to engage likely have the most to gain from accessing this type of provision. As such, future programmes should ensure a balance between engaging with harder to reach employers.
- **Clear entry points build trust and insight** – Tools like the confidential Making Ends Meet survey created a safe way to discuss sensitive issues, generating valuable workforce data that employers could act on without negatively impacting employee trust.
- **Tailoring to organisational context is essential** – Understanding each employer’s workplace culture, policies, and existing wellbeing efforts allowed recommendations to be relevant, realistic, and more likely to be implemented.
- **Expert facilitation drives credibility** – Employers responded positively to facilitators with deep knowledge of in-work poverty, noting that sessions combined awareness-raising with practical, actionable solutions.
- **Flexible delivery meets varied needs** – Offering a menu of workshops, one-to-one strategy sessions, and additional resources meant employers could engage in ways that suited their capacity and priorities.

# Workstream 4: Supporting the 1,001 Critical Days

## Summary points

- Support during pregnancy and the first two years of life can reduce health inequalities and improve long-term outcomes. Workstream 4 reflects priorities in the Action Plan and the No Time to Wait report, both of which stress starting poverty prevention before birth.
- The Children’s Foundation, Love Amelia, and Durham County Council each deliver/fund essential items through structured referral systems, working with trusted professionals to identify and support families in need.
- The support consistently reaches households facing poverty, disadvantage, or crisis situations, including families at risk of homelessness, domestic abuse, or unsafe living conditions.
- Support provided eases financial pressure, improves parental wellbeing, and ensures children have safe equipment, clothing, and essentials.
- Barriers include stigma, challenges with multi-agency collaboration funding constraints, and safeguarding concerns such as safe access to infant formula, all of which require flexible and adaptive responses.
- Data and parent feedback show the schemes are well-targeted, widely appreciated, and delivered with kindness and dignity, with high uptake in the most deprived areas and families reporting strong positive impacts.

## Workstream 4 Rationale

The early years of a child’s life, particularly up to age two, are crucial for lifelong health, wellbeing, and development. Workstream 4 of the CPPP focuses on addressing socioeconomic disadvantage during this important period, recognising that targeted support in the earliest stages of life can reduce health inequalities and improve long term outcomes for children and families.

This approach has also helped inform the North East CA’s Child Poverty Action Plan, which highlights the importance of investing in early intervention and support for families during pregnancy and early years.<sup>24</sup> It also aligns with the evidence from the No Time to Wait Report, which emphasises that tackling child poverty must start before birth.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> [Child Poverty Action Plan, North East Combined Authority](#)

<sup>25</sup> [No Time to Wait, North East Child Poverty Commission](#)

## Workstream 4 Delivery and Management

### Baby Boxes

The Children’s Foundation delivers Baby Boxes that contain essential items to families experiencing hardship across the region. Their Baby Boxes are unique and the first to take a developmental approach. They include resources that promote parent and baby bonding and are based on the basic principles of Love and Laugh, Play, Talk and Sing, Read and Count. The organisation’s model is tailored to respond quickly and compassionately to need, with the understanding that meeting basic needs underpins wider family wellbeing and development.

The Children’s Foundation operates a structured and supportive delivery model for the Baby Box scheme, designed to ensure timely and meaningful support for families. Referrals are processed once a week via email, with details entered into a dedicated database. A key part of the process involves checking the baby’s due date, as the Foundation aims to send the Baby Box ideally between 32 and 36 weeks of pregnancy, although boxes can also be sent after birth when necessary.

Following referral processing, the Foundation contacts parents directly to send a welcome letter. This letter introduces the service and sets expectations for what families will receive. At this initial stage, parents complete a questionnaire to share their thoughts and expectations, allowing the Foundation to tailor support effectively.

The Baby Boxes themselves are stored and managed by Stiller’s Warehousing and Distribution, a trusted partner organisation with whom The Children’s Foundation maintains a strong working relationship. Once families receive their boxes, health visitors and midwifery teams play a vital role by demonstrating to parents how to use the items included, ensuring the resources are fully understood and accessible.

All parents who were surveyed agreed that the items included in the Baby Box met their immediate needs, with many parents appreciating the practical support during what was often a challenging time, expressing gratitude for the kindness and respect they experienced throughout the process, and for the items they received.

The ease and timeliness of delivery were also valued, with some parents noting that having the boxes sent to convenient locations such as local libraries made access much simpler, especially for those with limited means of transport.

---

“The baby box provides everything you need.” **Parent/carer**

---

### Targeting Families Experiencing Disadvantage

The Children’s Foundation relies primarily on health visitors and midwifery teams as the main points of contact for referring families to the Baby Box scheme, typically around the 24-week stage of pregnancy. Additionally, each local authority has a designated

contact who can signpost families to the service, ensuring a wider network for reaching those in need.

Referral decisions are made at the discretion of these health and midwifery teams, who apply eligibility criteria that vary between local authorities. This approach allows the Foundation to work closely with frontline professionals who have a detailed understanding of family circumstances and can identify those most in need of support.

Families referred to the scheme often face multiple challenges, including poverty, the risk of homelessness, domestic abuse, or struggles related to loss and bereavement. Many are identified through existing vulnerability screening tools and advanced care pathways, which provides a robust method for targeting support. By working through trusted local professionals, The Children's Foundation can be confident that these boxes are targeted towards families experiencing the greatest need.

Analysis of delivery data confirms that the scheme is effectively targeted, reaching families most likely to be experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, poorer health outcomes, and limited access to essential resources during the critical early stages of a child's life. More than four-fifths (81%) of Baby Boxes were delivered to families living in deprived areas, with almost two-fifths (39%) going to those in the 10% most deprived nationally. In total, 70% were delivered to areas within the 30% most deprived overall. These areas also scored among the lowest nationally for income (71%), employment (73%), education and skills (69%), and health (81%).

### [Addressing Delivery Challenges](#)

The Children's Foundation has identified some challenges in delivering the Baby Box scheme, particularly around ensuring equitable access for all eligible families. A key barrier is the stigma that can sometimes be associated with receiving the boxes, particularly when eligibility is narrowly defined. To tackle this, they aim to broaden eligibility criteria in the future to make the programme more inclusive, in the hope that more universal approaches would mitigate any stigma which exists.

### **Baby Bank**

The baby bank support provided by Love, Amelia offers practical help to families with babies/young children who are experiencing financial hardship. It provides essential items such as clothing, nappies, toiletries, equipment, and toys, either new or high quality pre-owned donations, free of charge.

The intention is to make sure that no child goes without the basic items they need for a safe and happy start in life, while also easing the financial pressure on parents/carers during the critical early years. The service is designed to be discreet and stigma-free, with referrals often coming from health visitors, midwives, social workers, and other trusted professionals.

By meeting these immediate needs, Love Amelia aims to reduce the stress and anxiety associated with material deprivation, enabling parents to focus more on bonding with and caring for their children. It also plays a preventative role, helping to mitigate the

effects of poverty in the early years, which can have long-term impacts on health, development, and wellbeing.

Referrals are received from a wide range of trusted professionals and partners, including:

- Family Hubs
- Citizens Advice
- Refugee support charities
- Midwives
- Childcare providers
- Other early help professionals

Once a referral is received, Love, Amelia captures only the essential information needed to process the request, including demographic information, the reasons why the parent/carer needs support, and what items they need. Referrals are typically processed on the same day, especially where the need is urgent (e.g. lack of clothing, babies without cots, children sleeping on the floor, or families requiring items like highchairs, toys, or books). The most commonly requested items are clothing.

In the north of the region, with funding from the North East CA, items are delivered directly to professional partners (e.g. Family Hubs), who then pass the items onto families. This helps professionals build trust and maintain relationships with families, particularly where safeguarding concerns are present.

Between October 2024 and June 2025, Love, Amelia supported 777 child beneficiaries, representing 399 families.

During this period, Love, Amelia:

- Distributed an estimated £97,321 worth of pre-loved items as part of its core service
- Diverted and reused 5.94 tonnes of goods, promoting environmental sustainability
- Delivered £20,000 worth of additional support via Christmas and Easter projects, reaching 407 children and 134 adults
- Supported a total of 1,318 beneficiaries in the north of the North East CA area from October to March.<sup>26</sup>

Love, Amelia noted that their delivery model is underpinned by a trauma-informed, non-judgemental approach, and feedback from families reflects the care and dignity with which support is provided. As shown in Figure 6.1, responses to the parent survey were overwhelmingly positive. Most respondents strongly agreed that they felt treated with kindness and respect throughout the process, and that the items they received were high-quality, useful, and met their immediate needs.

They also strongly agreed that they felt no judgement when receiving support. This feedback illustrates the value placed on dignity and discretion in the delivery model, as

---

<sup>26</sup> Love, Amelia Monitoring Data

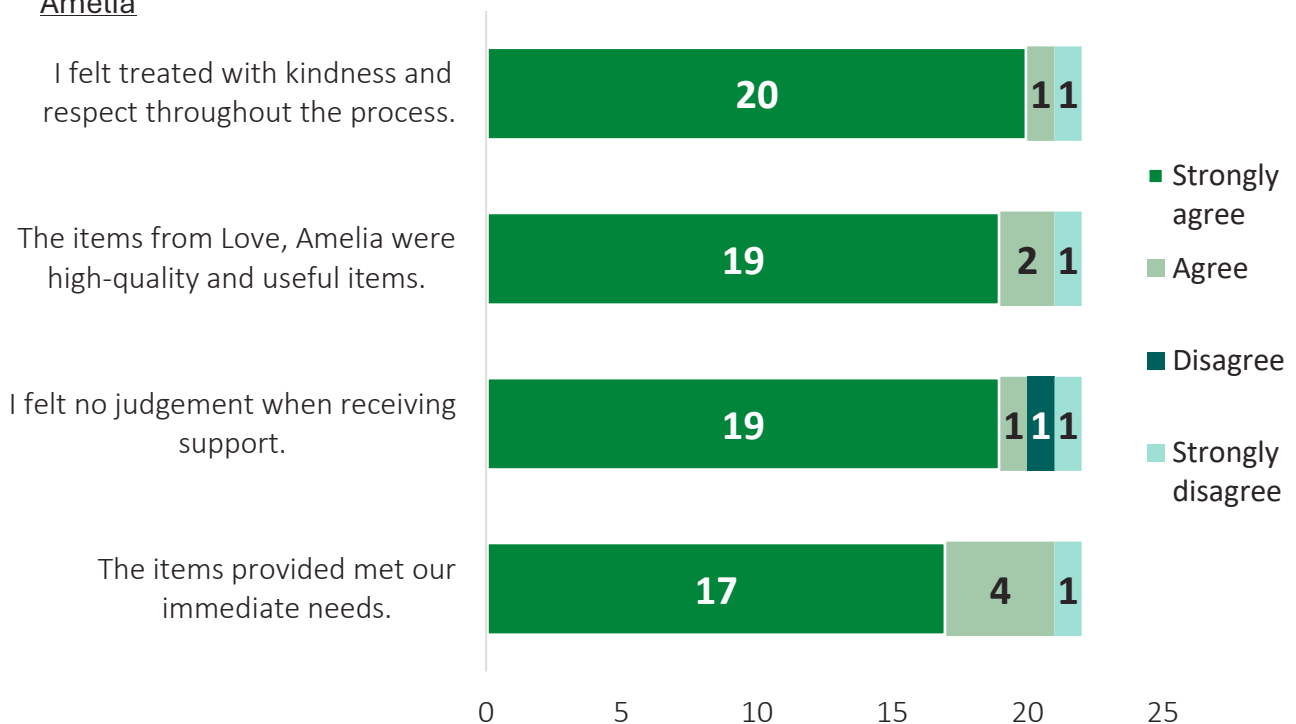
well as the responsiveness of Love, Amelia in meeting practical needs during times of crisis. While a very small number of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements, this was minimal and may reflect isolated experiences.

“Love, Amelia helped us in a difficult time. The clothes and toys we received were in excellent condition. We felt support and care for us. Our box was assembled in one day.

“Love, Amelia really helped me and my family. I could not have got the items my children needed without their help. It has been really difficult as a single mum and they have been my lifeline. God bless them.”

**Parent/carer**

Figure 6.1: Parent/Carer perspectives on the quality of support provided by Love, Amelia



Source: Workstream 4 Parent/Carer Survey, N= 28

## Blossom

As part of this project, Love, Amelia introduced Blossom, a new service developed to strengthen the charity’s response to the increasing complexity of family needs. With a 68% increase in requests for essential items and equipment in 2024, it became clear that while emergency material support remained vital, additional help was needed to address the underlying causes of hardship and prevent future crisis.

Blossom was created to provide a bridge between immediate relief and longer-term change. It aims to tackle the causes of poverty by helping families navigate the social, financial and practical challenges that led them to require Love, Amelia's support for their children.

Blossom offers priority, same-day access to advice, guidance and advocacy for families referred through Love, Amelia. Support is delivered in partnership with Society Matters CIC, the social enterprise arm of Citizens Advice, whose expertise ensures high-quality, accredited advice provision.

The service provides practical, personalised assistance in key areas including:

- Welfare benefits and income maximisation
- Debt advice and financial inclusion
- Housing and homelessness prevention
- Employment and training
- Charitable and community support
- Family and relationship issues
- Immigration and community care

Blossom is exclusively available to families already receiving material aid from Love, Amelia, ensuring an integrated approach that meets both immediate and underlying needs. It is believed that this model has the potential to strengthen early intervention, prevent crisis escalation, maximise income and support families to build stability and resilience.

#### Addressing delivery challenges

Love, Amelia highlighted a number of operational and relational challenges that affected delivery across areas. While frontline professionals universally expressed support for the offer, valuing its practical benefits for families and the way it eased pressure on their own services, senior service leaders were sometimes reported to be more cautious about the approach to ensure alignment with other relevant policies and procedures.

One barrier stemmed from concerns about the inclusion of infant formula being provided. Love, Amelia adapted their delivery model in response, replacing direct provision of formula with vouchers that families could choose how to spend. This was seen as a necessary safeguarding step in circumstances where families were unable to access formula by other means and were resorting to unsafe alternatives such as cow's milk. Flexibility in approach and a clear commitment to infant safety helped to build professional buy-in over time.

Capacity and resource limitations also posed challenges. The scale of demand items often exceeded the level of funding available, particularly in areas with high levels of

need. Love, Amelia reported overdelivering in some areas in order to ensure no families were left unsupported, especially where the alternative might be families turning to high-interest loans or loan sharks.

---

“The delivery of the items that we have requested to Newcastle Library was a great help, as we didn't have the means to travel to Sunderland to pick up.” **Parent/carer**

---

In total, Love, Amelia has supported 686 families and 1105 babies, children and young people within the CPPP 24-25.

### Start for Life Funding

The Start for Life Fund is delivered under Workstream 4 to support families with children aged 0-5 in County Durham facing financial hardship. The fund aims to reduce unsafe sleeping practices and accidents at home by providing essential items such as safe sleeping equipment, prams/pushchairs, and home safety items.

The fund was administered by Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Service (Social Inclusion Team), in partnership with East Durham Partnership and County Durham Furniture Help Scheme. These partners handled delivery of items such as cots, bedding, safety gates, and stair guards directly to families.

Professionals working with families, including nursery staff, housing officers, and other frontline workers, submitted online applications on behalf of eligible households. Eligibility for support was based on a clearly defined set of criteria indicating financial hardship or vulnerability. These included:

- Job loss
- Relationship breakdown
- Unexpected bill or increase in utility costs
- Unmanageable levels of debt
- Fleeing domestic abuse
- Unexpected house move (e.g. eviction)
- Delay in benefit payments
- Illness or disability
- Serious risk to health and safety of resident
- Death of a family member
- Resettlement back into the community
- Sudden misfortune involving the destruction or loss of property or belongings (e.g. house fire, flood)
- Not receiving monies from DWP (e.g. sanction, disallowance, or waiting for UC payment)

Providers noted that professionals were well placed to identify eligible families and submit applications on their behalf. These frontline workers had established relationships with families and a clear understanding of their circumstances.

This meant they could quickly recognise when a family was experiencing financial hardship that could compromise children’s safety, for example, through inadequate heating, lack of food, or unsafe housing conditions, enabling support to be provided in a way that was both targeted and timely. Providers also pointed out that their involvement also reduced the burden on families, who were not required to navigate application processes themselves during already stressful periods.

**In total, the Start for Life Fund has supported 196 families.**

## Workstream 4 Performance

Table 6.1 shows that Workstream 4 exceeded its target for the number of baby boxes delivered, with 1,631 boxes distributed - 112% of the original target. This reflects the strong demand for tangible resources to support families during pregnancy and the early years, and the delivery partners’ ability to scale up distribution. The number of children and young people supported with baby bank items (1105) and the number of families supported across all other provision (882) both substantially exceeded their target, suggesting the programme reached its intended audience size in this area.

Table 6.1: Workstream 4 Performance Against Output Targets

Output	Actual Output	Target Output	Progress Towards Output
Boxes delivered	1631	1450	112%
Families supported	882	750	118%
Children and young people supported	1105	750	147%

Source: CPPP Monitoring Data

## Workstream 4 Impact

### Baby Bank and Baby Box Impacts

The following sections highlight the key impacts across the Baby Box and Baby Bank support provision.

### Improved access to essential baby care and safety items

The Baby Box provides a curated set of high-quality essentials, such as clothing, bedding, and safety-tested products, which help ensure a safe environment for newborns. Many parents have said the scheme has saved them substantial amounts of money, reducing financial pressure at a critical time. Health visitors and midwives play a role in explaining how to use the items, further supporting safe and effective use. The result is not only improved material readiness but also peace of mind for parents.

---

“This is a great idea and perfect for parents struggling financially or are underprepared to give their baby a good start in life.” **Parent/carer**

“Receiving a baby box has made me feel more cared for, and my baby more cared for. It takes some pressure off finding the right things for my baby as a newborn. There is so much to think about and pay for that it’s a relief to have some things taken care of.” **Parent/carer**

---

In terms of the Baby Bank, the primary impacts are ensuring that children have access to safe, suitable, and good-quality items, including cots, prams, and car seats. This improves home safety and meets immediate care needs. By providing these items, the Baby Bank reduces the financial burden on families, preventing them from resorting to unsafe borrowing or financial practices such as using loan sharks.

The case study below demonstrates the impact of the Baby Bank and support from Love, Amelia for parents in crisis.

### **Case study: Supporting families through crisis**

A young family in North Tyneside, referred to Love, Amelia through their midwife, was struggling to prepare for the arrival of their new baby. Living on Universal Credit, they faced severe financial hardship and could not afford essential items such as a cot, clothes, or nappies. The father described the stress of trying to save money, including skipping meals so that his wife could eat during pregnancy. Despite their best efforts, the family could not meet the costs of basic baby care.

Through Love, Amelia, the family received a wide range of items that immediately eased financial and emotional pressures. These included:

- A cot, clothing, and nappies for the baby.
- A pushchair, enabling the family to get out of the house without carrying their child long distances.
- Clothes and essential toiletries for the older children, such as shoes and soaps.
- Maternity clothing for the mother during her pregnancy.

The provision of essential items had both practical and emotional impacts on the family. It gave them much-needed financial relief, helping them avoid major expenses at a time when money was already stretched and allowing them to cope on a low income without turning to unsafe coping strategies. The parents also reported improved wellbeing, feeling less anxious and more prepared for their baby's arrival, with the support easing constant worries about how they would afford the basics. By providing for the older children as well as the baby, the intervention also supported family stability, reducing pressure across the household and ensuring all children had appropriate clothes and essential items for school and daily life. In addition, access to a pushchair gave the family greater confidence and mobility, making it easier for them to get out together, reducing isolation, and improving their overall quality of life.

**“We were given everything we needed for our baby that we didn't have the money to buy. They have helped us with everything after we tried everything else”**

**Parent/carer**

**“It has been a blessing for my family. We were trying to save money, I wasn't eating some meals so my wife could eat while we saved but it wasn't enough. We are blessed by Love, Amelia”** Parent/carer

### Improved confidence of parents to support baby and child development

The Baby Box scheme has also been shown to increase parents' confidence in supporting their baby's early learning and development. The inclusion of a large playmat encourages activities such as tummy time and crawling practice, while books and bath toys promote interactive play and language development. Parents report feeling more prepared for their baby's arrival and more capable of providing stimulating experiences from the earliest stages. Feedback from post-delivery questionnaires consistently shows that parents feel happier and more confident in their role as caregivers after receiving the box.

---

“The mat for the floor, it increased my confidence in playing on the floor instead of feeling I had to hold/carry him all the time.”

**Parent/carer**

“(The) bath toys were great for helping my confidence during bathtime.” **Parent/carer**

---

For the Baby Bank, the provision of toys, books, and outdoor equipment supports children's cognitive, physical, and social development. These items encourage parents to engage in developmental play, from reading together to encouraging active play outdoors. One refugee parent, for example, was able to request a scooter for their child to travel to school, which not only built physical confidence but also encouraged peer interaction and social inclusion. Parents report feeling more equipped to meet their child's developmental needs when they have access to the right resources.

---

“(Its) really helping young parents to take care of their children and helping their babies to develop really fast.” **Parent/carer**

---

### Stronger parent-child bonding

The items in the Baby Box are deliberately chosen to encourage shared moments between parents and their babies. Reading books together and engaging in play during bath time are cited as key bonding opportunities. The scheme's link with wider social and healthcare support services also means parents feel less isolated and more able to focus emotionally on their child, rather than on the stress of sourcing essential items. Parents have described having time and space to engage with their baby, leading to more relaxed and positive interactions.

---

“100% helped me bond with baby.” **Parent/carer**

“My baby likes when I read, baby touches the pictures in books. It really helps us interact together.” **Parent/carer**

---

Similarly, the Baby Bank’s provision of items that facilitate shared activities, such as books for reading together or toys for collaborative play, creates more opportunities for quality time between parents and children. For some families, reducing the stress of financial insecurity also frees up emotional capacity, allowing them to engage more positively with their children.

---

“I am on UC and couldn’t afford the pushchair; this has helped me so much to get out with my child. I don’t have to keep picking my child up when she can’t walk too far.” **Parent / carer**

---

#### **Workstream 4: Key Lessons Learnt**

- **Targeting is most effective when referrals come through trusted professionals** – Working with health visitors, midwifery teams, Family Hubs, and other frontline workers ensured that Baby Boxes, Baby Bank support, and Start for Life funding reached families facing the greatest need. Existing vulnerability screening tools and advanced care pathways provided a robust way of identifying households most likely to benefit.
- **Clear eligibility criteria combined with professional discretion balance consistency and responsiveness** – While defined criteria helped ensure fairness and focus, allowing professionals to exercise judgement meant urgent or exceptional needs could still be met quickly.
- **Timeliness of delivery is critical to impact** – Processes such as weekly Baby Box referral checks, same-day Baby Bank responses, and rapid Start for Life equipment provision ensured that families received support at the moment it could make the biggest difference, whether that was before a birth, during a financial shock, or in response to an urgent safety risk.
- **Sustainability remains a challenge** – Demand for support often outstripped available funding, particularly in areas of high deprivation, leading some providers to overdeliver to avoid leaving families without essential items.

# Lessons Learnt and Key Recommendations

This section draws together key lessons emerging from the delivery of each of the four Workstreams of the CPPP. While each strand addressed distinct needs with tailored approaches, several common themes and insights have emerged that cut across the programme as a whole. These lessons provide valuable guidance to inform the design and delivery of future iterations of the programme to maximise impact and equity.

## Programme Management

Across all four Workstreams, providers were consistently positive about the way the CPPP was managed and administered by the North East CA. Delivery partners described the team as supportive, approachable, and committed to the aims of the programme, with many highlighting the trust placed in providers to shape delivery in ways that reflected local need. The balance of oversight and flexibility was widely valued, enabling organisations to apply their professional expertise and adapt delivery to diverse school, community, and family contexts.

---

“Management have been excellent, very supportive and flexible. They've clearly been invested in our work, they understand what we do and the value that it brings for children and families.” **Provider**

---

Communication was generally seen as open and constructive, with many partners noting that the North East CA were responsive to queries and quick to resolve issues when they arose. In several cases, they played a direct role in facilitating relationships with other agencies or key stakeholders, bridging local gaps and helping providers overcome practical barriers to delivery. Regular check ins, whether monthly meetings or ad-hoc conversations, helped build strong working relationships.

Reporting processes evolved over the course of the programme, with providers noting that the North East CA were willing to adapt requirements to make them more proportionate and user friendly. While some providers found aspects of the Microsoft Forms based system challenging, particularly the inability to access submissions once sent, most recognised that the underlying intention was to streamline monitoring. In some cases, this iterative approach led to simpler, more targeted reporting that reduced administrative burden while still meeting accountability needs.

That said, a number of providers identified opportunities for further improvement. Some newer or smaller organisations felt that the onboarding process could be strengthened, with more structured early engagement, welcome meetings, or guidance on promoting their offer to relevant beneficiaries. Others suggested that peer learning forums or more frequent provider network meetings could enhance collaboration across Workstreams, enabling the sharing of good practice and collective problem solving.

---

“Possibly the only thing that could've been better, is if we were told earlier what information they want us to capture from the advice. That took a bit of time for us to know what was relevant. The spreadsheet at the start was really onerous per client, now it's been more streamlined” **Provider**

“There are a lot of agencies delivering this service across the region. It could have been nice to do more collaborative work, opportunities to share best practice, rather than us all doing potentially different things. We would have wanted more engagement with other providers...as we're always up for tweaking and developing” **Provider**

---

Timing was also raised as a practical issue in some areas, particularly where late confirmation of delivery roles limited providers ability to plan ahead or engage partners early. Providers felt that earlier notice, ideally prior to when planning took place for upcoming academic or financial years, would help maximise uptake and ensure a smoother delivery start.

Despite these areas for refinement, delivery partners described the programme as underpinned by strong management, open communication, and a willingness to listen and adapt. Many described their relationship with the North East CA as among the most positive they had experienced with a commissioning body, noting that the team's responsiveness, shared vision, and collaborative ethos had been an enabling factor contributing to successful delivery.

---

“I think the NECA team have been phenomenal, been really responsive and supportive and their vision aligns with our own... I would say it's one of the best working relationships I've had between a delivery team and project manager for a long time” **Provider**

---

# Programme Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

## Programme Design

Lessons from across all four Workstreams demonstrate that outcomes are most achievable when programme design is preventative and intentionally focuses on reducing long-term poverty risks rather than responding to crisis. A clearer focus on prevention, through targeted early intervention with those at highest risk, would strengthen the programme's ability to deliver sustained impact.

The programme's design, built around four distinct Workstreams, has enabled targeted action across schools, employers, and families. Evidence shows that its impact is strongest where these strands work in a joined-up way. When in-school support, welfare advice, and early years provision were connected, families accessed help earlier, outcomes were broader, and duplication was reduced. Future programme design should therefore place greater emphasis on integration across Workstreams, ensuring that interventions operate as part of a coherent preventative system. Establishing shared referral routes, joint planning, and a shared outcomes framework would help create a more integrated offer for families and maximise the programme's long-term preventative impact.

The design and targeting of the programme have been critical to its effectiveness, shaping how and where support was delivered and determining the extent to which preventative outcomes were achieved. The programme has demonstrated that preventative outcomes are strongest when support is clearly directed towards families, schools and employers with the greatest poverty risk. Across Workstreams 1, 2 and 4, schools and frontline professionals were central to identifying households who would benefit most, drawing on their trusted relationships and detailed local knowledge. This helped ensure that support was targeted, accessible, and delivered early enough to reduce escalation of need. Within Workstream 3, a focus on employers already open to improving support for lower-income staff helped secure early traction. However, the biggest long-term gains will depend on engaging larger and harder-to-reach employers where structural changes in pay, flexibility and progression can shift poverty risk at scale.

### Key recommendations

#### For North East CA:

Ensure all future programme design explicitly focuses on preventing poverty, not just mitigating its effects. This means prioritising early intervention, directing resources to those at greatest poverty risk, and building prevention objectives into funding criteria, delivery plans, and performance measures.

Design the next phase of the programme as an interconnected programme of support rather than four separate strands. Create shared referral routes, cross-Workstream

delivery models, and a unified outcomes framework to encourage joint planning and reduce duplication across partners.

### **3. Build sustainability through joined-up commissioning.**

Coordinate future funding rounds to incentivise collaboration between education, welfare, and early years providers. Consider commissioning multi-year, multi-partner projects to sustain preventative support and allow time for measurable long-term impact.

## **Programme Delivery**

Engagement was strongest where delivery remained flexible and adaptable to local circumstances. Across all Workstreams, providers were able to tailor the format and content of support, for example, school sessions, hybrid welfare advice, and personalised workplace support, ensuring families and employers received what was most relevant to them. Accessibility also played a vital role. Delivering support in familiar places, offering food or childcare, and providing non-threatening entry points helped break down stigma and practical barriers. As a result, carers, parents and employees were more likely to participate and stay involved.

Strong relationships also supported these successes. Where providers were visible and present within communities, and where senior level buy-in was secured early, staff turnover and competing priorities were less likely to disrupt delivery. Examples included effective communication between Workstream 1 providers and schools (for example through regular contact or introductory meetings); ongoing conversations with employers for Workstream 3; and the strong relationships between early years professionals and Workstream 4 providers supporting referrals. Additionally, many positive outcomes resulted from ongoing, sustained engagement rather than one-off interventions. Repeated contact with families, regular check-ins with employers, and structured lead-in times helped overcome barriers like staff turnover, misconceptions, or lack of engagement.

Effective targeting has also proven essential. In order for the programme to achieve the greatest impact, support must be carefully targeted at those who need it the most. Without this, there is risk of duplicating services that are available elsewhere or engaging with families / pupils that may not face the greatest barriers, which reduces the overall effectiveness of the programme. The evaluation found that Workstreams 2, 3 and 4 adopted effective approaches to targeting. This was evidenced by delivery providers engaging with families that wouldn't have accessed universally available support (Workstream 2) or working with employers that were not aware of the extent of the issue of in-work poverty in their organisations (Workstream 4).

Whilst delivery providers of Workstream 1 described adopting a range of approaches, targeting of this type of in-school support is both challenging and sensitive. Without profile information on the makeup of the cohort of pupils supported by Workstream 1, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the targeting which is an important consideration in the overall return on investment the programme provides.

## Key recommendations

### For North East CA:

Future programmes should be designed with sufficient flexibility allowing delivery partners to adapt both content and delivery methods to suit local circumstances and the specific needs of participants. This includes enabling schools, employers, and community organisations to tailor activities, language, and engagement approaches so that support is relevant, accessible, and culturally appropriate. This could be achieved through:

- **Setting clear overarching goals** but allowing delivery partners discretion in how they achieve them.
- **Providing modular or menu-based activities** so schools, employers, and community organisations can select the most relevant components for their context.
- **Encouraging ongoing feedback loops** so delivery can be adjusted in real time based on participant needs and emerging challenges.

Additionally, future programmes should strengthen the consistency and quality of data collection across all Workstreams to evidence how effectively support is being targeted and the difference it is making. Each Workstream should adopt a standardised data framework, including data collection of agreed participant characteristics (including protected characteristics). This will ensure comparability across delivery partners, provide clearer insight into whether support is reaching those most in need.

#### For example:

##### **Workstream 1 - Schools and Children:**

**Targeting data:** proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals or pupil premium; school-level deprivation index; pupil attendance data; and indicators of wider vulnerability (e.g. safeguarding concerns, referrals to early help). Additionally, in future delivery, data collection could also include indicators relating to hidden needs, for example, pupils with caring responsibilities.

##### **Workstream 2 - Welfare and Income Maximisation:**

**Targeting data:** household income band; benefit eligibility (e.g. Universal Credit, Council Tax Reduction- including those who may be eligible but are not currently claiming); employment status of adults in the household; and disability or caring responsibilities.

#### For delivery providers:

- Maintain **menu-based delivery** approaches that can be adapted by schools, families and employers based on need and capacity.
- Develop **structured onboarding and engagement processes**, such as leadership briefings, pre-delivery scoping, and intro sessions for families, to support strong early buy-in.
- Strengthen **visibility in local settings**, including regular presence in schools, Family Hubs, and workplaces, to support ongoing trust-building.

## Programme Impact

Workstream 1 strengthened children's engagement in learning and improved their wellbeing through creative, hands-on, and family-based activities. Children who often struggled in traditional classroom settings became more confident and motivated to learn. Teachers and parents observed knock-on benefits for attendance, behaviour, and readiness to learn. Family Learning sessions also helped strengthen parent-child relationships, offering valuable shared experiences that supported both learning and emotional wellbeing.

Workstream 2 had clear and measurable impacts on families' financial circumstances. Thousands of pounds in unclaimed benefits were secured, directly improving household income and reducing financial strain. Alongside these tangible gains, the welfare support helped increase families' confidence to navigate complex systems, apply for entitlements, and seek help in the future. This combination of practical and emotional support helped ease stress, reduce isolation, and improve overall family wellbeing.

Workstream 3 built lasting understanding among employers of how financial hardship affects their workforce and business outcomes. Participating organisations reported shifts in mindset and practice, from more empathetic management approaches to the introduction of new wellbeing and financial inclusion initiatives. These changes helped improve workplace culture, morale, and retention, demonstrating how employer engagement can form part of a broader strategy to prevent child and family poverty.

Workstream 4 delivered tangible improvements in access to essential baby and child items, helping families provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. Parents reported increased confidence in supporting their baby's early development and more opportunities for bonding through shared play and reading. The reduction in financial pressure during the critical early months contributed to improved wellbeing and stability for both parents and children.

Across all Workstreams, the programme demonstrated that sustained, relationship-based support is most effective in driving meaningful change. Impacts were strongest where delivery was flexible and locally embedded - addressing practical needs while building confidence and resilience over time. Together, these strands show how a coordinated, preventative approach can improve financial stability, wellbeing, and long-term prospects for families experiencing poverty.

### Key recommendations

#### For North East CA:

**Plan impact measurement from the outset.** Future programmes should consider from the design stage how short, medium, and long-term impacts will be captured. This will ensure that evaluation activities are embedded throughout delivery, rather than added retrospectively, and that the data collected aligns with the intended outcomes of the programme.

**Develop a clear Theory of Change.** Establishing a robust Theory of Change at the outset will help articulate the logical relationship between programme activities, outputs, and intended outcomes. This framework should guide delivery partners in understanding the mechanisms of change, ensure consistency across workstreams, and provide a foundation for monitoring and evaluation.

**Embed evaluation into programme design.** Incorporating evaluation planning into programme design will enable more systematic and consistent collection of impact data. This should include agreed definitions of outcomes, standardised data collection tools across workstreams, and clear responsibilities for reporting and data sharing.

Additionally, North East CA should consider the feasibility of incorporating quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs in future programmes to strengthen evidence of impact. Where these are not viable, alternative qualitative approaches—such as contribution analysis or realist evaluation—could be used to better understand how and why change occurs, and the role of the programme within wider systems of support.

#### **For delivery providers:**

##### **Maintain flexible, localised delivery approaches**

Continue to adapt content, format, and timing of support to reflect community contexts and participant needs. Flexibility has been critical to high engagement and sustained participation.

##### **Prioritise trusted relationships and accessibility**

Deliver support in familiar, stigma-free settings such as schools, community hubs, or workplaces. Invest time in visibility and relationship-building with both families and referral partners.

##### **Maximise opportunities for cross-referral and joint working**

Strengthen connections between providers across Workstreams, for example, signposting families from welfare advice to family learning, or from early years support to school-based provision.

# Appendices

## Workstream 1 Theory of Change

Inputs	Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
<p><b>2024/25 investment:</b>            £1,356,500 North of Tyne            £1,356,500 South of Tyne</p> <p><b>Delivery team:</b>            1 FTE N11 Senior Programme Manager            1 FTE N9 Programme Manager            0.5 FTE N6 Programme Officer</p> <p>Delivery providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Northern Learning Trust</li> <li>- Children North East</li> <li>- Newcastle United Foundation</li> <li>- YMCA</li> <li>- Rise</li> <li>- Challenging Education</li> <li>- Durham County Council</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poverty Interventions in schools, including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family Learning opportunities: Activities that help parents and carers support their child’s learning at home and build engagement with school.</li> <li>- Poverty Proofing Audits: Whole-school reviews to identify and remove cost-related barriers for students.</li> <li>- Poverty Intervention Grants: Small school grants for bespoke poverty interventions as part of suite of poverty interventions</li> <li>- Inspire Grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 220 schools supported (120 in North, 100 in South)</li> <li>• 5,100 pupils supported (3,600 in North, 1,500 in South)</li> <li>• Number of parents/carers supported</li> <li>• Number of staff supported</li> <li>• Number of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium supported</li> <li>• Number of pupils eligible for Free School Meals supported</li> <li>• Number of pupils with SEND supported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved engagement in learning               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Improved behaviour</li> <li>○ Improved attendance</li> <li>○ Improved attainment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Pupils accessing enrichment opportunities that they otherwise wouldn’t have access to</li> <li>• Improved social and emotional mental health of parents</li> <li>• Young people demonstrate improved mental health and wellbeing, increased confidence</li> </ul>

Inputs	Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International Centre for Life</li> <li>- Budget Bites South Tyneside Family Learning</li> <li>- Gateshead Council Family Learning</li> <li>- Newcastle Carers</li> </ul>	<p>Young Carer Leads</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of schools awarded funding for bespoke poverty interventions</li> <li>• 6-10 schools awarded funding for test-and-learn poverty interventions</li> <li>• Up to 15 Inspire Grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased school awareness of poverty-related barriers</li> <li>• Stronger parental engagement in children’s education</li> </ul>
<p><b>Young Carer Leads delivery organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Newcastle Carers (Newcastle LA)</li> <li>- Carers Northumberland (Northumberland LA)</li> <li>- Family Action (Durham LA)</li> <li>- Groundworks (South Tyneside LA)</li> <li>- Carers Federation (Gateshead LA)</li> <li>- North Tyneside Carers’ Centre (North Tyneside LA)</li> <li>- Sunderland Carers (Sunderland LA)</li> </ul>		<p>Young Carers Leads:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with 7 schools</li> <li>• Support 50 Young Carers</li> <li>• Deliver at least 300 one to one sessions</li> <li>• 4 best practice sharing sessions across the 7 partner organisations</li> </ul>	

## Workstream 2 Theory of Change

Inputs	Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
<p><b>2024/25 investment:</b>            £1,356,500 North of Tyne            £1,356,500 South of Tyne</p> <p><b>Delivery team:</b>            1 FTE N11 Senior Programme Manager            1 FTE N9 Programme Manager            0.5 FTE N6 Programme Officer</p> <p><b>Delivery providers:</b>  <b>North:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Newcastle Welfare Rights</li> <li>- Northumberland Citizens Advice</li> <li>- North Tyneside CA</li> </ul> <p><b>South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gateshead Citizens Advice</li> <li>- South Tyneside Citizens Advice</li> <li>- Sunderland Citizens Advice</li> <li>- Durham Council (FISO)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Welfare at the School Gates</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 77 schools supported (45 in North, 32 in South)</li> <li>• 900 families supported (500 in North, 400 in South)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved financial security for families</li> <li>• Reduced stress and anxiety</li> <li>• Improved parent/carer confidence and knowledge – (e.g. better understanding of rights and the support available)</li> <li>• Strengthened trust between families and schools</li> <li>• Increased confidence in parents/carers accessing support in the future</li> <li>• School staff have confidence and tools to identify and respond to poverty related queries</li> </ul>

## Workstream 3 Theory of Change

Inputs	Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
<p><b>2024/25 investment:</b>            £1,356,500 North of Tyne            £1,356,500 South of Tyne</p> <p><b>Delivery team:</b>            1 FTE N11 Senior Programme Manager            1 FTE N9 Programme Manager            0.5 FTE N6 Programme Officer</p> <p><b>Delivery providers:</b>  <b>North and South:</b>            - Society Matters CIC</p>	<p><b>In work poverty employer support</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 85 businesses supported (45 in North, 40 in South)</li> <li>• 4000 employees impacted (2000 in North, 2000 in South)</li> </ul>	<p>For employers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased employer awareness of in-work poverty</li> <li>• Strategies implemented to reduce the impacts of in-work poverty</li> <li>• Greater employer engagement with Combined Authority employer accreditations</li> </ul> <p>For employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved social and emotional mental health of employees</li> <li>• Lower employee absenteeism</li> <li>• Stronger employee retention</li> </ul>

## Workstream 4 Theory of Change

Inputs	Activity	Outputs	Outcomes
<p><b>2024/25 investment:</b>            £1,356,500 North of Tyne            £1,356,500 South of Tyne</p> <p><b>Delivery team:</b>            1 FTE N11 Senior Programme Manager            1 FTE N9 Programme Manager            0.5 FTE N6 Programme Officer</p> <p><b>Delivery providers:</b>  <b>North and South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Children’s Foundation</li> </ul> <p><b>South:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Love, Amelia</li> <li>- Durham Council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Baby boxes to vulnerable parents</li> <li>- Start for Life funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 750 vulnerable pre-school babies and children supported</li> <li>• Number of boxes delivered</li> <li>• Number of items delivered</li> <li>• Number of Start for Life grants awarded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved confidence of parents to support baby development</li> <li>• Improved access to essential baby care and safety items</li> <li>• Earlier identification of additional needs and uptake of support</li> <li>• Stronger parent/child bonding</li> </ul>

## Contact us



0330 122 8658



wavehill@wavehill.com



[wavehill.com](http://wavehill.com)

## Follow us on our social



@wavehilltweets



wavehill