

# Getting the building blocks wrong: Early childhood poverty in the North East

September 2022



NORTH EAST

CHILD  
POVERTY  
COMMISSION

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>The impact of poverty on young children and families in the North East</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>		
<b>Child poverty in the North East</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Common themes</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Trends in child poverty by work status</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Specific areas of concern</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>In-work poverty</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Challenging early childhood poverty in the North East</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Out-of-work poverty</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Economic inactivity</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Characteristics of households with an under-5 in poverty</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Absolute poverty</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>About us</b>	<b>36</b>



“ Giving every baby ‘the best start in life’ means getting the building blocks right. ”

If you have any questions about this report, please contact Amanda Bailey (Director, North East Child Poverty Commission), via [amanda.bailey@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:amanda.bailey@newcastle.ac.uk)

# Summary

**Almost two in five children in the North East (38%) are living in poverty. This rises to almost half – 47% – of North East children living in a household with an under 5.**

This report seeks to understand **why** child poverty, and in particular early childhood poverty, is now so high in the North East and why it has risen so steeply in recent years – as well as the impacts of this for families with young children in the region.

**“ People are relying on charities to get them through. We are the plug between nothing and nowhere else to turn. ”**  
North East frontline advice service

## Key findings

- There is a growing chasm between welcome Government commitments on ‘levelling up’ and the reality of rising child poverty in every part of the North East in recent years.
- Indeed, the gap between the living standards and opportunities of children in the region compared to the UK average has reached a twenty-year high – and this is part of a clear trajectory that began around 2014/15, well before Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis.
- **Child poverty in the North East is not inevitable – but a combination of economic trends and demographic factors help explain recent steep increases in child poverty in the region, particularly for our youngest children.** These include:
  - The North East experiencing a much steeper increase in in-work child poverty than across the UK; and a real terms fall in median household earnings for families with children (over a period when they rose across the country)
  - The region not seeing the fall in out-of-work child poverty observed across the UK, which may be explained by the ‘economic activity’ rate staying constant in the North East (over a period when it rose across the country)
  - The North East seeing a larger rise in the proportion of families who are much less likely to be in a position to work, or who find it much harder to work without the right support in place (and may therefore be ‘economically inactive’) – this includes larger rises in families where someone has a disability, and a rise in families with an under-5 (when they fell slightly across the UK)
  - The North East not seeing an increase in the share of children in households with an under 5 with parents or carers in work (over a period when this rose across the country)

- The North East having the highest proportion of children (or higher than the UK average) in a number of groups of families who are much more likely to be in poverty. These include families where someone has a disability; lone parent families; families with parents aged under 25; and families in rented homes.

**Almost half of North East children are living in poverty**  
in households with an under 5.

- Critically, these factors mean that **North East families – whether in or out of work – have been disproportionately impacted by the erosion of our social security safety net over the last decade.**
- The consequence of long-term inadequate incomes for thousands of North East families has been growing levels of hardship and this, combined with the economic shocks of a global pandemic and now a cost of living crisis, means that **charities and community groups across the region are experiencing significant, and possibly unsustainable, increases in demand to help young families meet their basic needs.**

**Until the erosion of our social security system – and the ongoing challenge of low paid work and lower household earnings in the region – are fundamentally addressed, the Government's flagship levelling up agenda will continue to be fatally undermined.**

## Recommendations

As the overwhelming majority of policy levers available to tackle child poverty in England still rest with the UK Government, our recommendations in this report are largely focussed on the transformative, ambitious action it could take to get the building blocks right and support families with young children in our region.

In the immediate term, **the vast shortfall between the cost of living measures announced to date by Government, and bills for households essentials which continue to rise, threatens to have devastating consequences** – both for those young families across the North East who already had absolutely nothing left to cut back on, and for the overstretched services currently supporting them.

**There are further urgent steps the new Prime Minister and Chancellor should take to ease the immediate crisis for struggling North East families:**

- **Raise social security payments like Universal Credit to match inflation now, not next April as currently planned**
- **Pause deductions from Universal Credit, which are disproportionately impacting children in the North East**
- **Lift the two-child limit and benefit cap, which hit families with young children hardest**
- **Pause Universal Credit sanctions, particularly for families with children.**

In the medium to longer-term, it is clear that we have to stop lurching from crisis to crisis if the Government is to deliver on its levelling up pledges to improve living standards and increase opportunities for children and young people in places like the North East.

Giving every baby 'the best start in life' means getting the building blocks right. This will require **a commitment from the new Prime Minister to take comprehensive, ambitious and joined-up action to reduce and then end child poverty as a central plank of levelling up.**

**Comprehensive, ambitious and joined-up action is required from the new Prime Minister to reduce and then end child poverty.**



**To support all North East families with young children to thrive, this joined-up action should include:**

**Committing to undertake, and act upon, 'levelling up impact assessments'** of all major Government policy and spending decisions, including those taken by the Department for Work and Pensions.

**Investing in our social security system**, so that it provides a genuine, timely and dignified safety net – protecting families (in and out of work) from poverty and eradicating destitution, as well as adequately responding to life events and the additional costs of raising all children. This includes:

- Ensuring benefit payments are always increased in line with the cost of living, and in a timely way
- Permanently ending the two-child limit and benefit cap
- Ending the 5-week wait for Universal Credit and therefore the need for 'advance payments', the most common reason for UC debt deductions

- Increasing Child Benefit by at least £10 per child per week
- Reviewing the use of Universal Credit sanctions for families with children
- Ending the lower rate of Universal Credit for parents under 25.

**Addressing in-work poverty, including by:**

- Ensuring the Government's National Living Wage is pegged to the actual cost of living
- Introducing the same National Living Wage rate for all workers aged 18+
- Introducing the long-promised Employment Bill, to improve people's rights at work
- Ensuring the reduction of in-work poverty is made an explicit aim of any future or expanded devolution deals, and levelling up and skills funding, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

**Improving access to affordable childcare/early years education**, including by:

- Funding universal free breakfast clubs and after-school clubs/ wraparound care
- Providing upfront support towards childcare costs in Universal Credit
- Extending the 30 hours of funded early years education to all 3- and 4-year-olds.

**Supporting those who are economically inactive** – by recognising the need to provide a dignified level of support to those who are unable to work, and providing tailored employment support programmes for those who find it harder to work, including people with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities.

**Providing transformative investment for Family Hubs** – to ensure all parents and carers can easily access universal, inclusive and non-stigmatised early help, parenting and family support services.

**Taking action to address high costs and poor quality housing for renters**, including by:

- Pressing ahead with the Renters Reform Bill
- Ensuring support for housing costs keeps pace with local rents
- Investing in a large-scale programme of retrofitting energy efficiency measures, starting with the social and private rented sectors
- Ending the under-occupancy charge (the 'bedroom tax').

**Most importantly – listening to and involving children, young people and families in the North East** in all of this work, including future policy development on levelling up and poverty reduction.



# Introduction

**The North East of England has many strengths and assets – and can be the most fantastic place to grow up and raise a family.**

Yet increasing numbers of young people are unable to benefit from everything our beautiful region has to offer, with **two in five children (38%) living below the poverty line in 2020/21 and their opportunities and life chances limited as a result.**

**For children in households with an under-5 in the North East, this figure is even higher – such that almost half (47%) were growing up poor in 2019/20 (the latest available data).<sup>1</sup>**

The North East now has the highest child poverty rate of any UK region or nation – and crucially this is part of a clear trajectory that began around 2014/15, well before the Covid-19 pandemic or cost of living crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Across the UK, we know that families with young children are more likely to be in poverty than those with older children and this gap is growing.

Poverty for families with at least one child under 5 has risen faster over the last decade than for families with children older than this.<sup>3</sup>

As the overall child poverty rate in the North East is now so high – and has risen more steeply than anywhere else in the UK in recent years<sup>4</sup> – it is sadly unsurprising that the picture for our region's babies and youngest children is even starker.

**“When I first heard the figures, they did shock me but only because I think we hadn't been in the trenches long enough. 47% now...that's what I'm seeing, day in and day out.”**  
– North East baby bank

**“No, it doesn't surprise me at all, which is very sad. The need is great at the moment.”**  
– North East baby bank

In 2020/21 in the North East of England there were almost

**2 in 5 children living below the poverty line**



**“ I think it's shocking in the sense it should never be happening...but no, I don't think it's surprising.**

North East baby bank **”**

“It’s really sad that the figures don’t shock me. It definitely chimes with what we are experiencing, and I’d say that quite a significant proportion of the families we see are in work.”

– North East children’s charity

However, this makes the situation no less intolerable, given both the immediate and lifelong impacts the evidence tell us experiencing poverty in childhood can have – on infant mortality rates,<sup>5</sup> physical health and mental wellbeing, cognitive development, friendships, educational outcomes, employment opportunities, healthy life expectancy<sup>6</sup> and future economic productivity.<sup>7</sup> Experiencing poverty at the very start of life and in early childhood, a child’s most formative years, can be particularly damaging.<sup>8</sup>

This report seeks to understand **why** child poverty, and in particular early childhood poverty, is now so high in the North East and why it has risen so steeply in recent years – as well as the impacts of this for families with young children in the region.

It is divided into four sections:

- Quantitative analysis exploring the data behind rising child poverty in the North East;
- Qualitative research on the impact of this for children, families and local organisations;
- Examples of the way in which early childhood poverty is being challenged across the region; and
- A series of policy recommendations to address this issue.

The quantitative analysis was compiled with support from Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG). The qualitative research is based on insights gathered from a range of organisations supporting families with young children across the North East, in a series of semi-structured interviews undertaken by the North East Child Poverty Commission in summer 2022, in addition to the Commission’s regular conversations with stakeholders throughout the region.

**Our research highlights the growing chasm between what have been welcome Government commitments on ‘levelling up’, and the reality of rising child poverty in the North East – finding that the gap between the living standards and opportunities of children in the region compared to the UK average has reached a twenty-year high.**

We all want a North East in which **every** baby, child and young person can thrive, access opportunities, enjoy childhoods filled with possibilities and follow their dreams. But until we get the building blocks right, and ensure that they and their families have the support and resources they need to do this, levelling up cannot be meaningfully achieved. Nor will our region be able to fulfil its enormous potential.

As our country continues to face a cost of living emergency, the attentions of the new Prime Minister and Chancellor must remain squarely focussed on taking decisive and immediate measures to further support families – and particularly those on the lowest incomes – through the autumn and winter months.

It is clear from our findings that failure to do so would be absolutely devastating for many thousands of families across the North East already struggling to afford basic essentials, and with nothing left to cut back on. Despite previously confirmed cost of living measures and the recently-announced ‘energy price guarantee’, rising household costs will still leave low income families with an average £800 shortfall.<sup>9</sup>

In the medium to longer-term – as the new Prime Minister appears to have recommitted to both levelling up places

like the North East and giving every baby ‘the best start for life’<sup>10</sup> – this report sets out why ambitious, joined-up action to reduce and then end child poverty, including for the youngest children, is a prerequisite to improving both the current living standards and future life chances of those growing up across the region.

Poverty is the leading driver of inequalities between children in the North East and their counterparts in the rest of the country.<sup>11</sup> But child poverty in the North East is not inevitable, as this report illustrates, with the right policies, support and investment for families in place.

Things can, and must, change. Babies, children and young people across the North East deserve better – and they don’t have time to wait.

“Investing in every child, so they know they are loved, they are special and they have potential will have more far-reaching value in reducing inequalities than anything else.”

North East baby bank

# Child Poverty in the North East

## Getting the building blocks wrong: Early childhood poverty in the North East

### So, why is child poverty in the North East now so high – especially for the region’s youngest children – and why has it increased sharply in recent years?

Figure 1 shows how the poverty rate for children in the North East has changed over time compared to the UK average. While the broad trends are the same, there are two notable features:

- Over the past 25 years, child poverty has almost always been higher in the North East than the UK on average. But it did fall markedly in the region between 1999/00 and 2013/14, and dipped below the UK-wide rate by the end of that period. **This demonstrates that child poverty in the North East is not inevitable.**

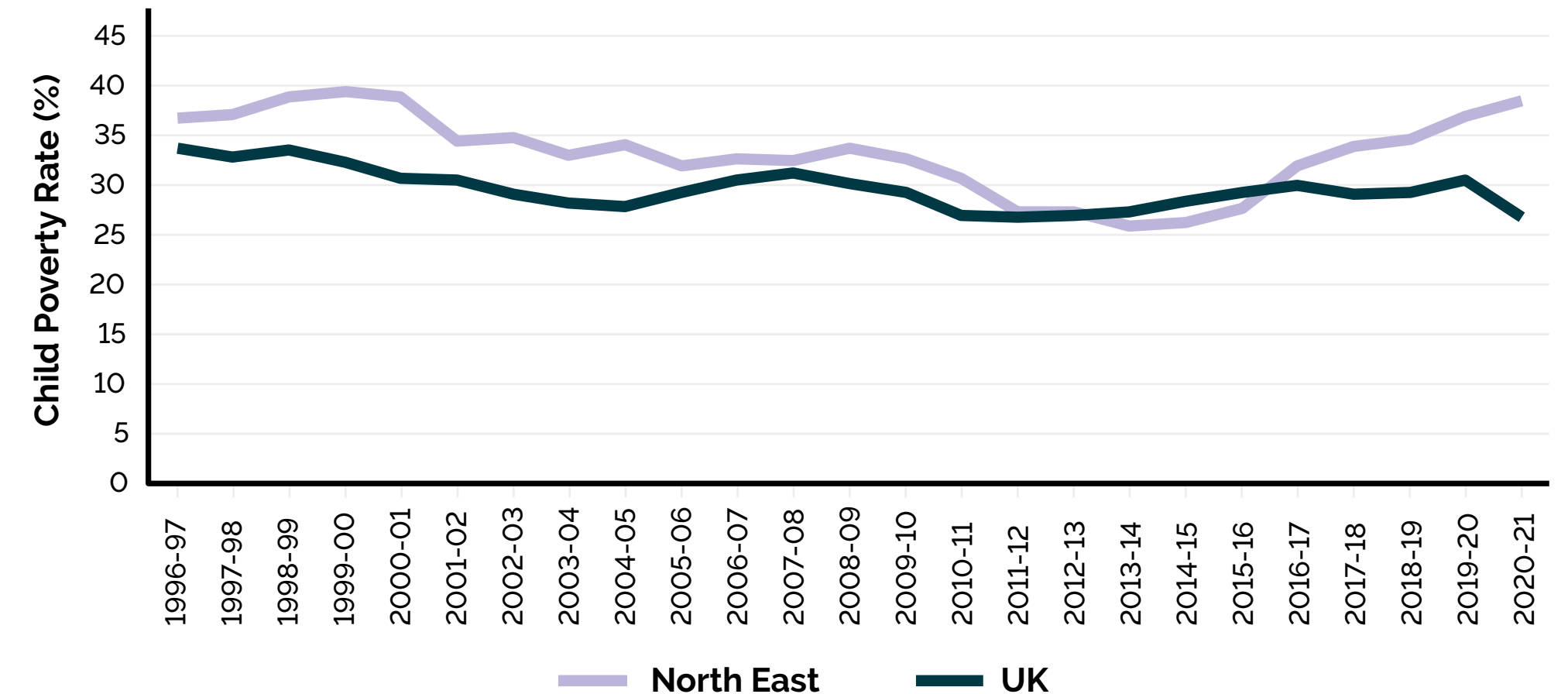
- The sustained rise in child poverty that took place across the North East from 2014/15 until the year before the pandemic (2019/20) was far more drastic than that observed across the whole of the UK, with the rate continuing to rise in the region in 2020/21. **As a result, the gap between the UK average and the North East is now as large as it has ever been.**

That the North East has gone from having a child poverty rate below the UK average to the highest of any UK nation or region, in the space of only seven years, illustrates how rapidly progress on tackling this issue can be undone.

“ **Something needs to be done around helping families to understand that this is not their fault.** ”

North East children's charity

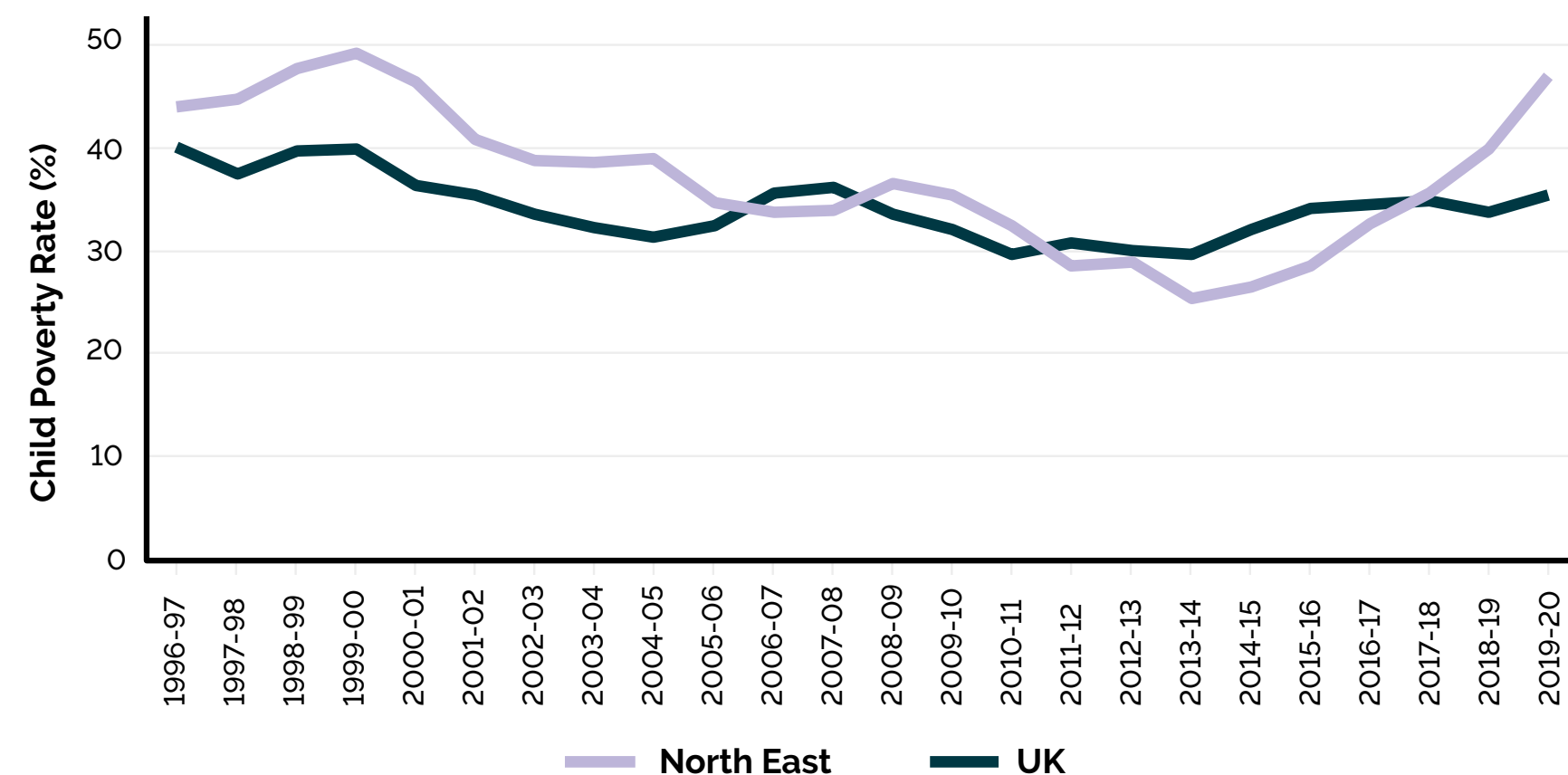
**FIGURE 1: Child poverty rate in the UK and North East (relative, after housing costs), 1996/97 to 2020/21**



Note: CPAG calculations from Households Below Average Income (HBAI) 1994/95 to 2019/20, Department for Work and Pensions, 2021 and Loughborough University/End Child Poverty calculations from HBAI for the year 2020/21. North East is calculated as the average from that year and the two previous years, to overcome the small sample size. HBAI figures for 2020/21 are less reliable than earlier years due to sampling issues related to the pandemic, but the impact of this is lessened by the use of three-year averages for regional figures.



**FIGURE 2: Share of children in households with a child aged under 5 in poverty (relative, after housing costs) in the UK and the North East, 1996/97 to 2019/20**



Note: CPAG calculations from Households Below Average Income 1994/95 to 2019/20. Department for Work and Pensions, 2021. North East is calculated as the average from that year and the two previous years, to overcome the small sample size. Even with the three-year average there is still a high degree of uncertainty around households with a child aged under 5 child poverty calculations at the regional level. However, the size of the increase and the indicative evidence presented later in this report suggests that households with a child aged under 5 child poverty did rise substantially in the North East.

Source: Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2020/21: [www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/](http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/)

**FIGURE 3: Child poverty rate (relative, after housing costs) in the UK and each North East local authority, 2014/15 and 2020/21**



Figure 2 shows the poverty rate for children in households with a child under 5 across the UK and the North East, over almost the same time period (data beyond 2019/20 is not currently available). It shows that the fall and subsequent rise in child poverty in the North East has been even greater for families with young children:

- Poverty in the North East halved between 1999/00 and 2013/14 for children in families with an under 5 – from 49% to 25% – far greater than the fall across the UK as a whole. **Again, this demonstrates that child poverty in the region is not inevitable, including for our youngest children.**
- The subsequent steep increase in poverty in the North East means the poverty rate for children in a household with an under 5 has reached a 25-year high. **As a result, the gap for these children between the UK average and that in the North East is now almost as large as it has ever been.**

This too is a stark indication of just how quickly progress on child poverty can be lost. The dramatic reduction in poverty rates for the North East's youngest children during the 2000s and early 2010s has been almost entirely reversed in less than half the time it took to achieve it.

Analysis recently published by the End Child Poverty coalition has also highlighted that child poverty is now consistently high across every part of the North East.

Figure 3 shows that (unlike in London, where there is much greater variation across different boroughs) overall child poverty has risen steeply in all twelve of the North East's local authorities since 2014/15, to the extent that each area is now notably above the UK average.<sup>12</sup>

Local authority-level poverty estimates do not exist for children in households with an under-5, but it is reasonable to assume that the region-wide steep increase for these children will be reflected in all parts of the North East.

## Trends in child poverty by work status

To explore recent changes in child poverty rates in the North East and how these differ from those across the country, we can look at the share of children in poverty broken down by their household's work status.

Figure 4 shows how this has evolved across the UK since 1998/99, from which it is clear there has been a sustained fall in the number of children in out-of-work poverty over the past twenty years. Over the same period the number of children in in-work poverty fell slightly in the early 2000s but rose steadily over the 2010s.

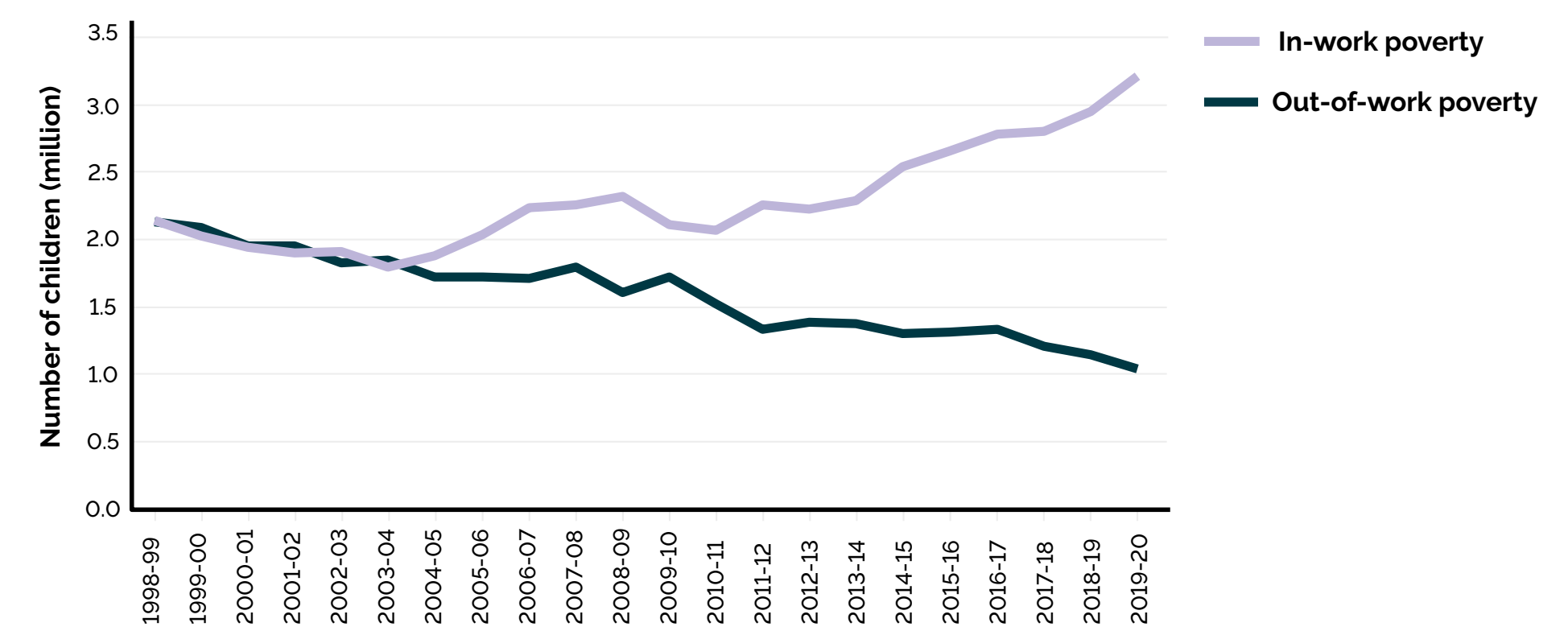
Figure 5 presents the same breakdown for the North East, which mirrors the UK trend – and the large majority of children in poverty in the region (68%) are in working families.<sup>13</sup> However, there are two crucial differences which help explain why the rise in child poverty has been so pronounced in the North East over the past few years:

- **The rise in in-work child poverty from 2014/15 to 2019/20 was greater in the North East** – over this time period the number of children in in-work poverty rose by 60,000 (91%), much steeper than the 27% increase observed across the UK.
- **The North East has not seen the fall in out-of-work child poverty observed across the UK in recent years.** Across the UK, there was a sustained fall in out-of-work poverty from 2014/15 to 2019/20. However, in the North East, the number of children in out-of-work poverty stayed fairly constant (around 70,000).

What has driven these differential trends in in-work poverty and out-of-work poverty for families with children in the North East?

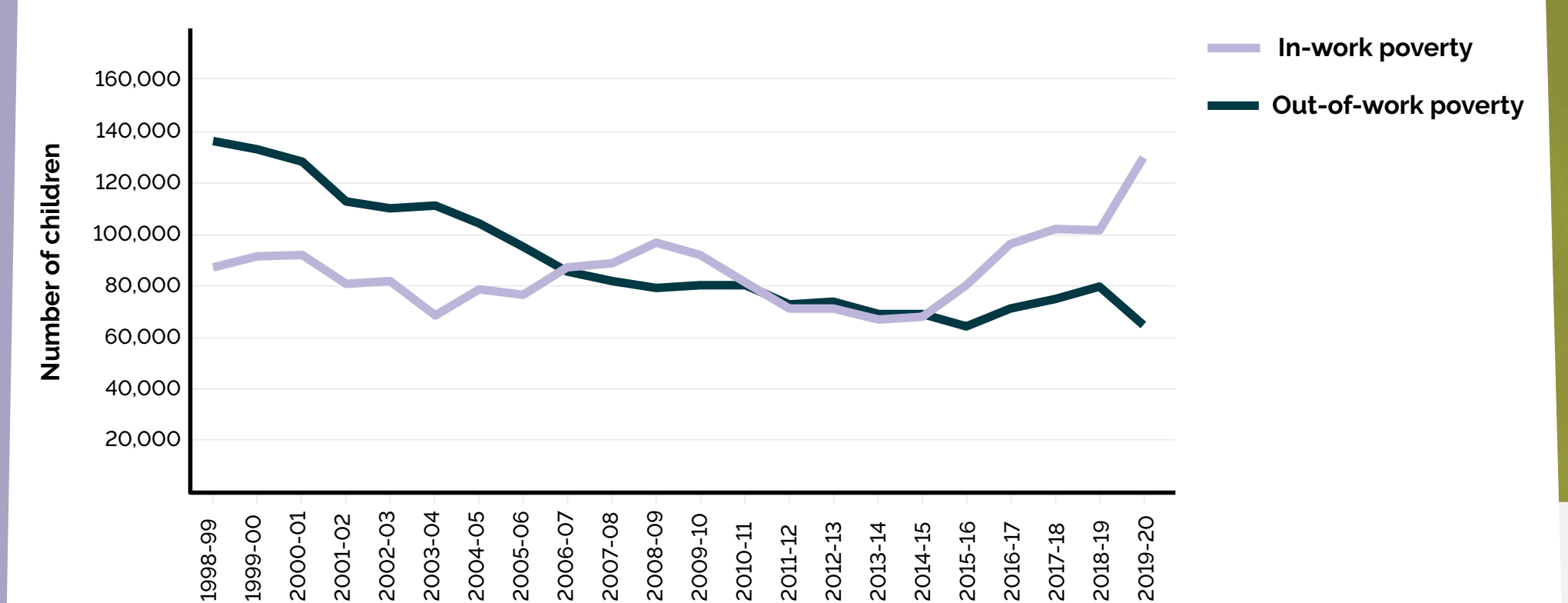
In the North East, from 2014/15 to 2019/20, the number of **children in in-work poverty rose by 60,000**

**FIGURE 4: Number of children in poverty (relative, after housing costs) by household work status in the UK, 1998/99 to 2019/20**



Note: See Figure 1

**FIGURE 5: Number of children in poverty (relative, after housing costs) by household work status in the North East, 1998/99 to 2019/20**



Note: See Figure 1

## In-work poverty

A key driver of in-work poverty is low pay.

The prevalence of lower paid work in the North East is a well-documented and longstanding challenge. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has noted that high poverty rates in the North East are driven in part by higher proportions of adults in lower-paid 'routine' occupations.<sup>14</sup>

More recently, TUC analysis has found that more than two in five (41%) children in key worker families in the North East are living below the poverty line, which represents an increase of 18,000 children or 34% in just two years.<sup>15</sup>

Low pay is particularly prevalent in Northumberland and Middlesbrough, with both being in the 25 local authorities across the UK with the highest proportion of jobs in their areas paid below the real Living Wage (28.3% and 27.7% respectively) – this rate currently sits at 19.6% across the region.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the North East has the lowest weekly median pay for full-time employees of any UK nation or region,<sup>17</sup> and average household earnings are therefore lower than the national average.

Of particular concern, however, is what has happened to household earnings in the region over the last decade.

Figure 6 illustrates that **whilst median household earnings rose by 11% (in real terms) for families with children across the UK from 2014/15 to 2019/20, they fell by over 4% in the North East over the same time period – with the gap between the two at a 25-year high.**

**An increase of 18,000 children**  
living below the poverty line in key worker families in the North East, in just two years.

It is important to place these trends in the context of what has been happening to our social security safety net and overall poverty rates.

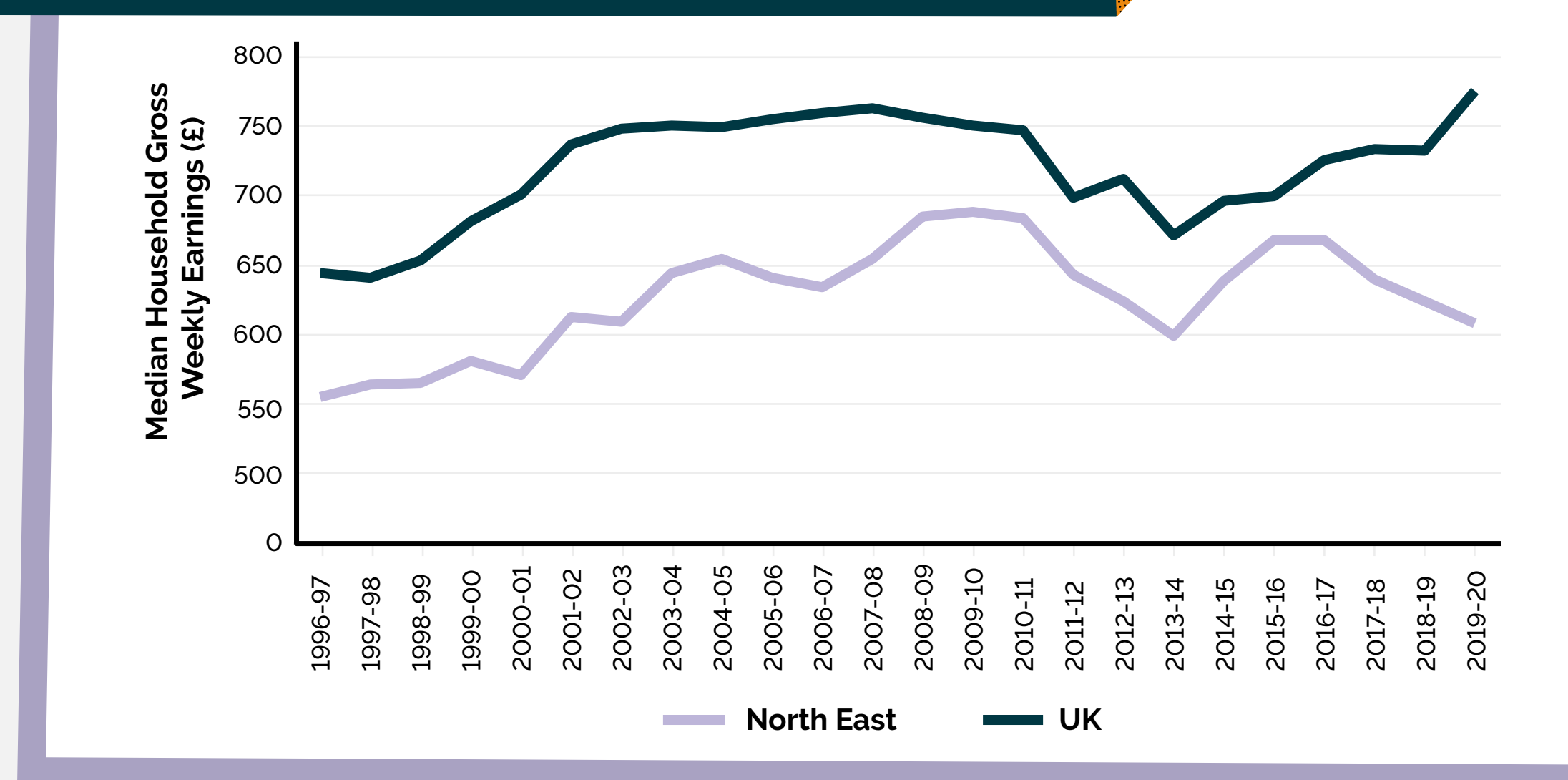
Across the UK, in-work poverty has risen as the value and availability of in-work social security was cut and, while there was earnings growth for low income households, this earnings growth more generally pushed up median household income (and therefore the poverty line).

**But the rise in in-work poverty was particularly large in the North East as the region did not see the growth in earnings experienced across the UK to partially mitigate the cuts to social security.**

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why this has been the case – given low household earnings can be a combination of low hours (due to factors like childcare and the availability of sufficient work) and low hourly pay.

However, this clearly demonstrates why the Government 'centring any child poverty strategy on getting workless households into work is problematic', when work alone is clearly not the answer to poverty for millions of households, including tens of thousands of families across the North East.<sup>18</sup>

**FIGURE 6: Median household gross weekly earnings for households with children in the North East and the UK, 1996/7 to 2019/20**



Note: See Figure 1

## Out-of-work poverty

To understand why out-of-work poverty merely fluctuated in the North East during the 2010s when it fell dramatically across the UK, figure 7 compares the share of children in working households in the North East with the UK as a whole. We can see that, **while there has been a sustained rise in the number of children in working households across the country over the past decade, the share in the North East stayed relatively constant.**

This contrasts starkly with the picture in the preceding decade. In 1999/00, just over 70% of children in the North East were in working households – 10 percentage points lower than the UK share. Throughout the 2000s, there was a rapid rise in the share of children in working households in the North East, so that by 2009/10 the rate was nearly the same as the UK average (which only saw modest growth).

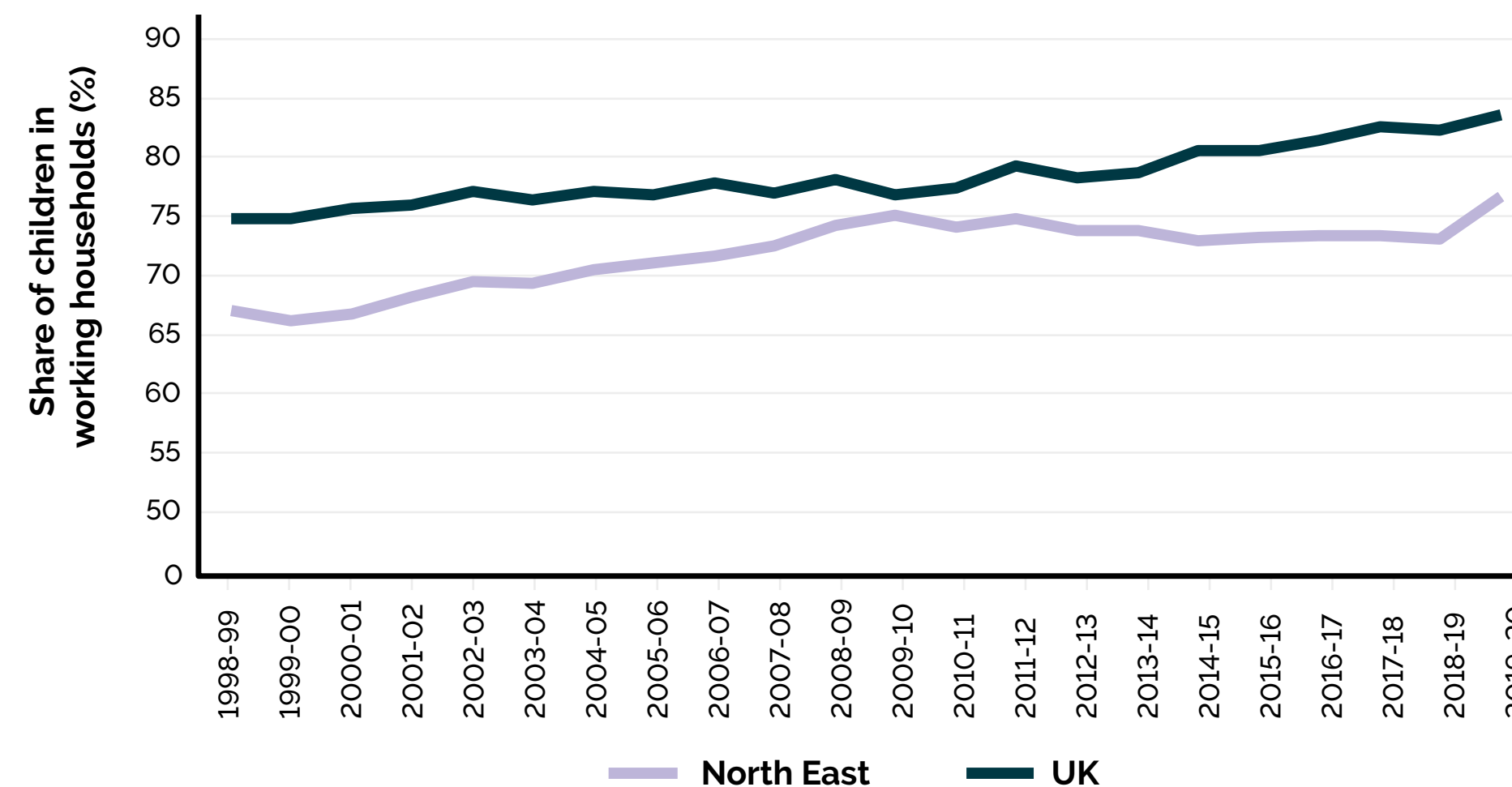
This then begs the question why the share of children in working households has risen since 2014/15 across the country, but not in the North East.

Given the Government's determination, particularly since 2016, to 'put a huge emphasis' on reducing parental worklessness as its primary strategy to reduce child poverty,<sup>19</sup> the lack of progress in doing so in the region is striking.

The differential trends between the North East and the UK illustrated by Figure 7 cannot be explained by the unemployment rate. Whilst the region consistently had the country's highest rate of unemployment for all of the last decade covered by this graph<sup>20</sup> (which contributes to our higher rates of poverty), from 2014/15 to 2019/20 the unemployment rate fell by more in the North East (9.0% to 5.6%) than across the UK (6.1% to 4.0%).<sup>21</sup>

However, the unemployment rate only looks at households who are actively participating in the labour market – and the majority of out-of-work households are not doing so, described as being 'economically inactive'. Over the same period, **the economic activity rate stayed constant in the North East (77% to 77%), while it rose by two percentage points across the UK (78% to 80%).**<sup>22</sup>

**FIGURE 7: Share of children in working households across the UK and in the North East, 1998/99 to 2019/20**



Note: See Figure 1

**The unemployment rate only looks at households who are actively participating in the labour market – and the majority of out-of-work households are not doing so.**

## Economic inactivity

The most common reason for households not participating in the labour market is disability. Although sample size limitations mean it is not possible to look at the evolution of out-of-work households with a disability at a regional level, we can look at the number of children who live in households containing someone with a disability, regardless of work status.

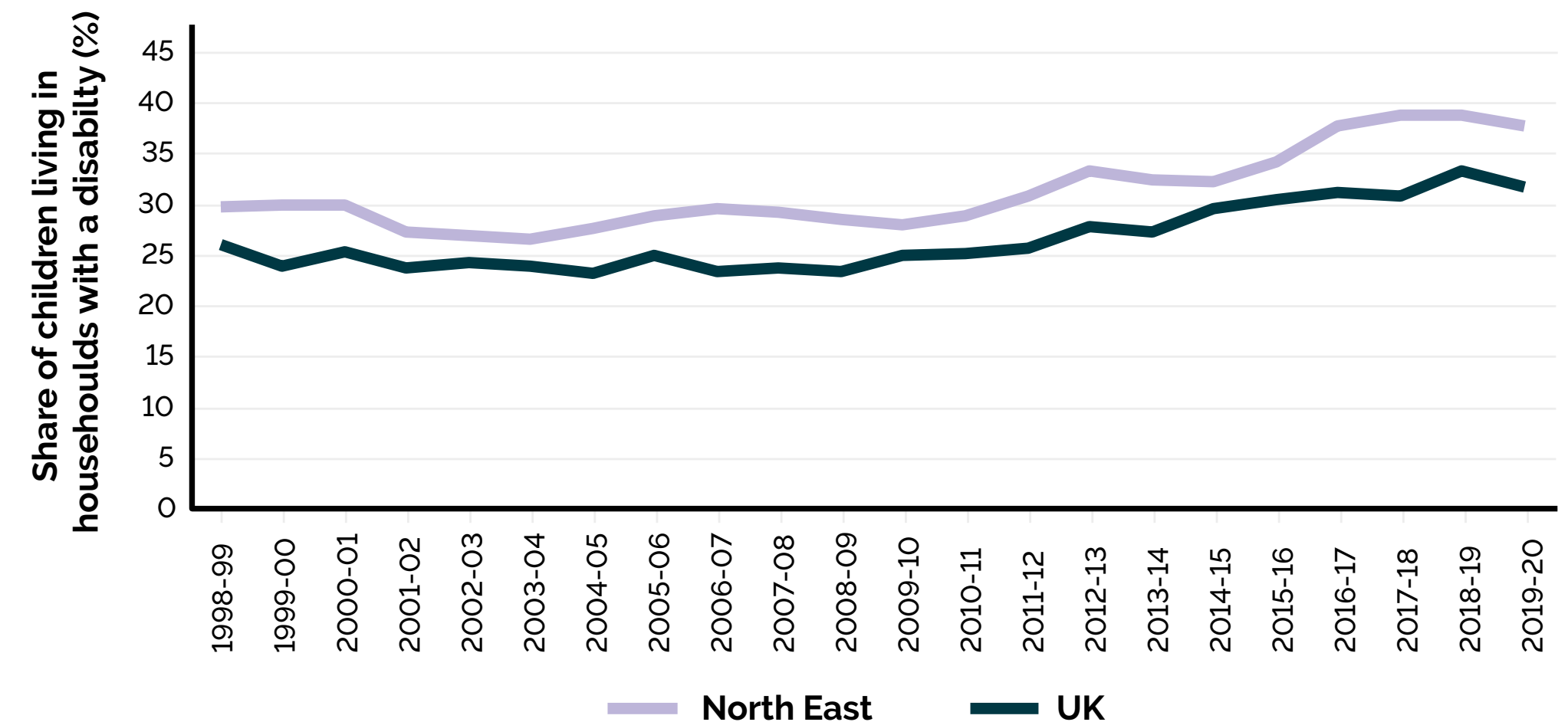
Figure 8 shows how the number of children who live in households containing someone with a disability has evolved since 1998/99, in the North East and across the UK. The rate is consistently higher in the North East than the UK, and for most of the time period there is a consistent gap between the two lines.

However, from 2014/15 onwards there is a 6 percentage point rise in the share of children in the North East living in households where someone has a disability (from 32% to 38%, which is the joint highest rate in the UK alongside Wales).<sup>23</sup> Over the same period, the rise across the UK has been 2 percentage points (30% to 32%).

Given recent JRF findings on the growth in the number of disabled people trapped in 'deep poverty' or 'very deep poverty' – and therefore likely to be going without the 'bare essentials'<sup>24</sup> – this higher rate of increase of children in households where someone has a disability in the region is particularly concerning. Of those disabled people who are 'economically active', the evidence suggests they are more likely to experience 'severely insecure work', compared to non-disabled workers (25% compared to 19%).<sup>25</sup>

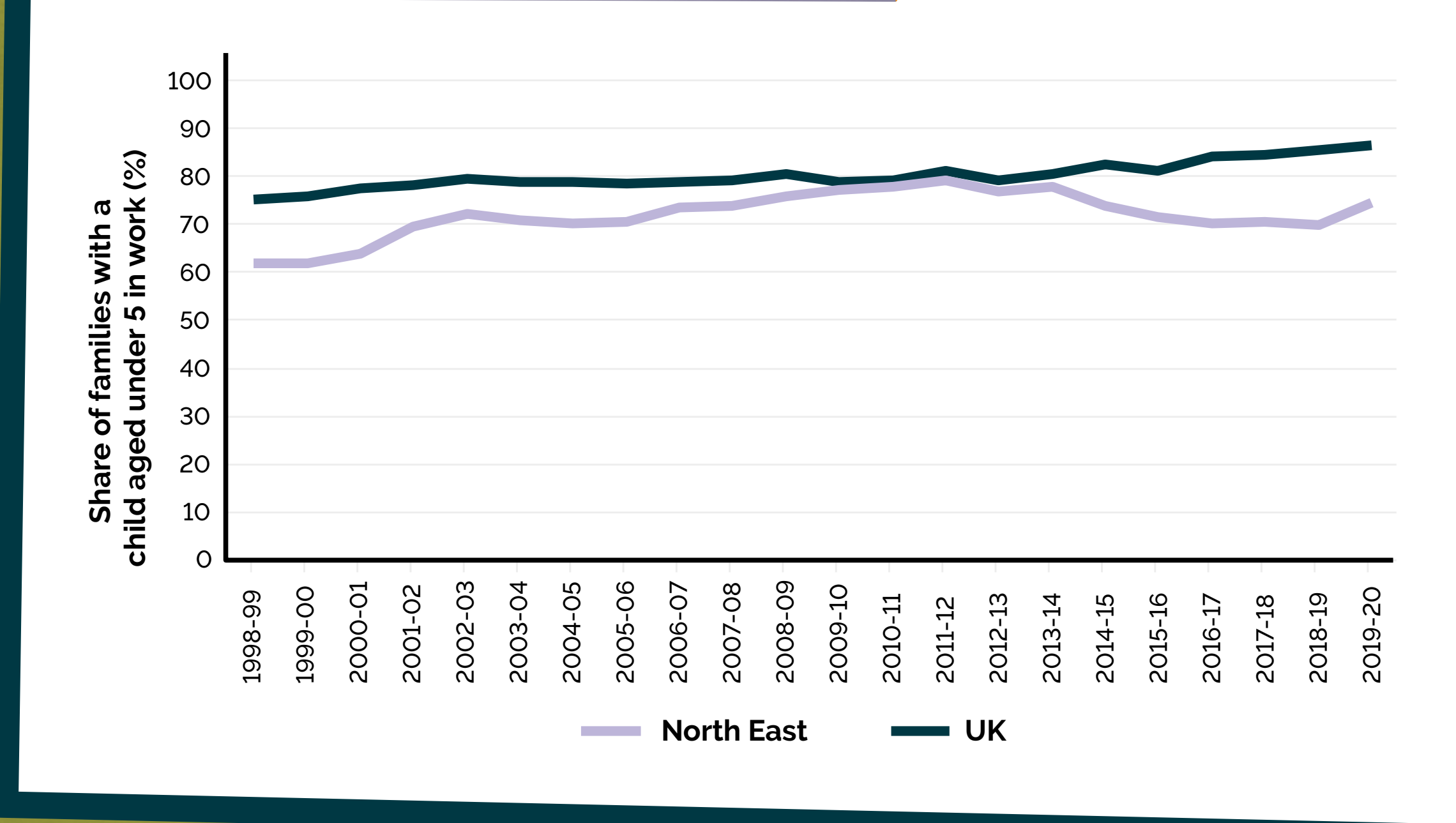
**The most common reason for households not participating in the labour market is disability.**

**FIGURE 8: Share of children living in households with a disability across the UK and in the North East, 1998/99 to 2019/20**



Note: See Figure 1

**FIGURE 9: Share of families with a child aged under 5 in work across the UK and in the North East, 1998/99 to 2019/20**



Another common reason for what is known as economic inactivity is that parents are caring for young children.

Across the UK, the share of all children living in a household with a child aged under 5 fell from 44.1% in 2014/15 to 43.5% in 2019/20. However, in the North East, the rate rose from 41.8% to 43.3% over the same period.<sup>26</sup> Though this may seem like a small difference, these are changes across the whole population and match up with the divergent economic inactivity rates seen in Figure 7.

It may also partially explain why household earnings fell in the North East, whilst they rose across the UK (see Figure 6). Across the country, families with a child aged under 5 earn less, on average, than families without a child aged under 5.<sup>27</sup>

It is also interesting to look at trends in labour market status among households with a child aged under 5. Figure 9 shows the share of children in families with a child aged under 5 in work, which we can see closely mirrors Figure 7 (the share of all children in working households).

In 2019/20, across the UK, 86% of children living in a household with a child under 5 had parents or carers in work – up from 82% in 2014/15, a rise of 4 percentage points. There was no corresponding rise in the North East, and the gap between the two is the largest in twenty years.

**Families with a child aged under 5 earn less, on average, than families without a child aged under 5.**

Note: See Figure 1

So, out-of-work poverty remained fairly constant in the North East as the share of children in out-of-work households also saw no growth. In contrast, across the UK, the share of children in out-of-work households fell, therefore the number of children in out-of-work poverty fell too.

The reasons behind the differential trends in out-of-work poverty appear to be threefold:

- **The growth in children living in households where someone has a disability was greater in the North East than in the rest of the UK.**
- **There were more children living in households with an under-5 in the North East in 2019/20 than in 2014/15, whereas the opposite is true across the UK.**
- **There has been no growth in the share of children in families with an under-5 that are in work across the North East, whilst the rate has risen across the UK.**

This means that **the North East has seen a larger rise in the proportion of families who are much less likely to be in a position to work, or find it much harder to work without the right support in place.**

This undermines the Government's ongoing emphasis on reducing parental worklessness as its primary means of tackling child poverty – and highlights the need for investment in our social security system, to ensure that those not in a position to work – whether temporarily or on a longer-term basis – have a decent standard of living, as well as the need to improve the support available for those who find it much harder to work without this in place.

Examples of this include tailored employment programmes for parents and carers, such as the Your Work, Your Way project (delivered by CPAG and funded by Barclays) which is being piloted in Bury, Coventry, Luton and Taunton Deane and supports mothers into employment or self-employment and progression in work, through individualised employment support, specialist welfare rights advice and access to a support budget to assist with work-related costs such as course fees, childcare and transport.<sup>28</sup>

**Lone parent families, particularly those with young children, are also much more likely to be in poverty and to find it harder to work.**

Gingerbread research indicates that lone parents are currently almost twice as likely to be unemployed and underemployed compared with couple parents<sup>29</sup> – and indeed almost half (49%) of children in lone parent families were living in poverty in the year prior to the pandemic, nearly double the rate for children in two-parent families.<sup>30</sup> This rises to 56% for lone parent families with an under-5.<sup>31</sup>

JRF explain that 'even prior to the current cost of living crisis hitting, [lone parent families] were three times more likely to be behind on bills or stuck in a cold house, and five times more likely to be unable to afford to eat properly compared to couples with children'.<sup>32</sup>

It is therefore significant that **the North East has the UK's highest proportion of children in lone parent families, at 28%** – compared to the national average of 22%.<sup>33</sup>

And all of the issues explored so far help explain why **the North East has the highest proportion of children living in families in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent legacy benefits – with more than half (52%) of the region's children in families relying on this support**, compared to a national average of 41%.<sup>34</sup>

It also means that families in the North East – whether in or out of work – have been disproportionately impacted by the erosion of our social security system over the last decade (some of which is detailed from page 25).

North East families – in and out of work – have been **disproportionately hit by the erosion of social security.**

## Characteristics of households with an under-5 in poverty

Across many dimensions, families in poverty with a child aged under 5, and families in poverty with older children are fairly similar. However, there are some important differences.

**The North East has one of the UK's highest proportions of children with a parent aged under 25.**

**The North East has seen the UK's largest increase in the proportion of children living in rented accommodation over the last decade – rising from 36% in 2007-10 to 49% in 2017-20.**

### Households with a child under 5 are more likely to be larger.

This compounds the household's risk of poverty, as 47% of children living in families with 3 or more children are living below the poverty line (this is predicted to rise to 'a clear majority' of children in larger families by 2026/27, up from one in three in 2012/13).<sup>35</sup>

The intersection between the two is clear: across the UK, **54% of children in poverty and in a household with an under-5 also live in a household with 3 or more children.** Whereas 36% of children in poverty without an under 5 in the household live in a household with three or more children.<sup>36</sup>

### The parents of children aged under 5 are, on average, much younger.

The average age of a parent/guardian with a child aged under 5 and in poverty across the UK is 35, compared to 43 for a parent/guardian with older children.

For young children growing up in families with parents under the age of 25, the risk of being trapped by poverty is particularly stark – with 52% of all parents under 25 with at least one child below 5 'struggling to make ends meet'.<sup>37</sup> This is unsurprising given some of the financial challenges facing this age group, who are two and half times more likely to be in 'severely insecure work' than those in the middle of their working lives (43% of 16-24 year olds, compared to 17% of 25-65 year olds);<sup>38</sup> receive 20% less in the standard allowance of Universal Credit than those aged over 25; and are entitled to a lower National Minimum/Living Wage rate if they are aged under 23.

**It is therefore notable the North East has one of the UK's highest proportions of children with a young parent (aged under 25), at 5% compared to the national average of 3%.<sup>39</sup>**

### Households with a child under 5 and in poverty are also slightly more likely to rent.

75% of children in poverty living in a household with an under-5 live in rented accommodation, compared to 71% of those in poverty with older children in the household.

Renters are much more likely to be in poverty after housing costs – and **just under half (49%) of all North East children are living in rented accommodation (24% in the private rented sector; 25% in social housing). This is the highest proportion outside London** and compares to a national average of 44%.

Indeed, **the North East has seen the UK's largest increase in the proportion of children living in rented accommodation over the last decade** – rising from 36% in 2007-10 to 49% in 2017-20 (a 13 percentage point increase, compared to the UK-wide rise of 9 percentage points),<sup>40</sup> which may be both a consequence and driver of rising poverty rates.



## Absolute poverty

All child poverty figures discussed thus far refer to **relative poverty, after housing costs**; that is, the proportion of children living in households with below 60% median household income, equivalised for family size, and after housing costs have been taken into account.

The End Child Poverty coalition explains that this relative poverty measure can be more useful as it compares a household's income with the current incomes of other households in the UK – giving 'a more accurate picture of what life is like now.' Rises in relative poverty 'show that more households are falling below the UK average household income and are not able to meet the financial costs of a basic standard of living'. Producing these figures at a local level after housing costs gives both a more accurate measure of households' disposable income, and takes account of differential housing costs in different parts of the country.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, **absolute child poverty** measures the number of children today living below the relative poverty line of a fixed point in time (in this case 2010) – which we would ordinarily expect to fall as a matter of course, as general living standards increase over time.<sup>42</sup>

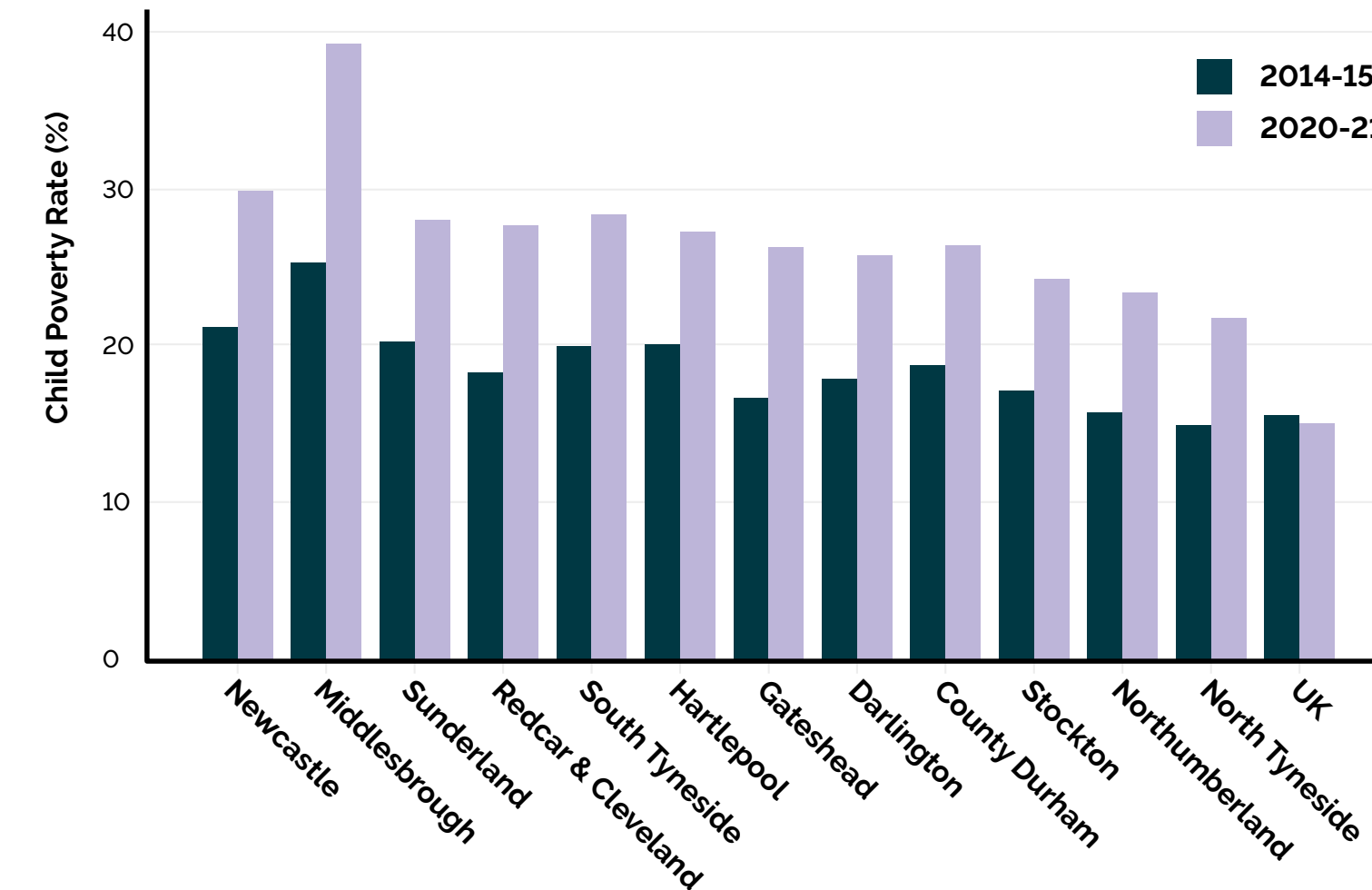
We would argue that relative poverty is more relevant to the Government's 'levelling up' agenda and commitment to reduce inequalities, as this measure compares household incomes of children across the country today with those of their contemporaries, not those of over a decade ago. Indeed, 'nearly all definitions of poverty make reference to having the financial resources to participate in society today – not society years ago'.<sup>43</sup>

However, as the Government has repeatedly made clear, it 'believes, and has always believed, that absolute poverty is a better measure of living standards than relative poverty'.<sup>44</sup>

In light of this position, it is worth looking at the share of children living in absolute poverty in the North East – compared with the share across the UK – and how this has changed in recent years. From Figure 10, we can see that – **whilst absolute child poverty has fallen marginally across the UK since 2014/15, it has increased across the region over that time period. Indeed, it has risen in every local authority area of the North East, in every year since 2017/18.**

Given the Government's steadfast focus on absolute poverty as a better measure of living standards for families, including those with young children, this sustained and growing gap between the North East and the rest of the UK is both striking and deeply concerning.

**FIGURE 10: Share of children living in absolute child poverty (before housing costs) in the UK and each North East local authority, 2014/15 and 2020/21**



Source: [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2021](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-in-low-income-families-local-area-statistics-2014-to-2021) (absolute child poverty estimates are not available at a local authority level after housing costs)

**Absolute child poverty has increased**

in every local authority area of the North East, in every year since 2017/18.

# The impact of poverty on young children and families in the North East

## Common themes

Behind the hard-hitting statistics are the daily lives of babies, young children and their parents or carers across the North East.

**It's just getting the right people to know that poverty has a first name, with a story and a two-year old child. We keep trying.**

North East baby bank

## A complex, constant struggle

The constraints, complexities and stigma of **life on a very low income** – and the cumulative impact this relentless grind can have on young families held back by poverty in the region – was raised repeatedly by the organisations we spoke with as part of this research.

Almost all organisations also emphasised the **significant mental health challenges often facing the young families they support**, which can be both a consequence and driver of poverty, as well as the linked issues of **intense loneliness and isolation**.

**"The guilt and shame is part and parcel of everyday life...it brings so much stress, which is a recipe for family breakdown."**  
– North East children's charity

**Stress and daily survival are just the most prevalent things, which can affect people's capacity to budget, make decisions or think long-term. Families are literally surviving, living hand to mouth daily.**

North East children's charity

**"Poverty feels like shame. It feels like failure. It feels like mum guilt. It looks like wearing the wrong size shoes and hoping nobody notices. It's wearing a dressing gown instead of a coat. It's not fitting in. It's a mum who told me yesterday, I can't afford to replace his trousers right now...I know they're too short and I just hope his dark socks hide the gap."**  
– North East baby bank

**"Parents aren't leaving the house, because they don't have a pram. They don't have shoes that they can wear or the kids can wear out of the house. People cutting the feet off babygrows to make them last just that little bit longer. It's all these little things families are experiencing that actually makes life feel really hard."**  
– North East baby bank

**"Poverty is time-consuming. But people don't understand not everyone has the time to go to Aldi and Lidl, then Asda to get the best deals. If you don't have a car, how much effort and time does that take to trek with your kids between them?"**  
– North East baby bank

**“What we see with single parent families is a much worse situation altogether. The opportunity to ever get out of poverty just seems completely unattainable.”**

North East children's charity

**“The majority of families we are seeing are massively struggling...and they're presenting with more complex issues, they're presenting with multiple issues. If you've got someone who is constantly worried about the fact that they've got debts, and they can't afford to pay for food or heating...children pick up on this, and children know.”**

– North East frontline advice service

**“So many people are working to just live...to just exist – they can pay the bills but that's it. You have no quality of life and that's only going to have a knock-on effect on your mental health, which is going to put mental health services under even more strain. And families are obviously not going to have opportunities for their children.”**

– North East baby bank

**“It's just a constant struggle working out what their money's going to go on. And they are really worried about the winter and what's going to happen if the prices of heating and electricity increase even more. The everyday experience is just working out where? Where is the money going to come from?”**

– North East baby bank

**“It's getting more and more complex for families. It isn't just one factor, there are multiple factors and the complexity of that is getting worse. If just one thing goes wrong – or there's a big purchase, like a child's bed – it's just all those added stresses and pressures of things that I guess most folks aren't even thinking about.”**

– North East children's charity

**“We hope we are reducing risk-taking behaviours – by supporting a family it means they are not having to take out finance on a pushchair on x amount of interest that they can't afford. Or get involved with loan sharks, where the interest can be unlimited.”**

– North East baby bank

### Can things change?

Whilst we know from relatively recent history that child poverty is not inevitable in the North East, nor any other part of the UK – with the right policies, investment and support for families in place – several organisations reported a **pervading and concerning lack of hope amongst young families that things could, or even should, be different.** This has to change.

**“Many people in the community will shrug their shoulders and say ‘it is just what it is’. They have accepted that ‘this is my lot...I'm clearly not meant to have anything more than this’.”**

North East children's charity

**“I don't know if the families we support would class themselves as being in poverty. They would just be like, ‘This is how it is. Life is hard.’ Sometimes they may not know why life feels so hard, but it does.”**

– North East baby bank

**“What we see with single parent families is a much worse situation altogether. The opportunity to ever get out of poverty just seems completely unattainable.”**

– North East children's charity

**“The stories we hear from people who come in are just heartbreaking.”**

North East baby bank



## Cost of living

Much of the data referred to in this report relates to the years leading into the Covid-19 pandemic, which clearly illustrates a sustained and longer-term trend of growing levels of poverty and hardship for families in the North East, particularly for those with the youngest children. This predates the challenges endured over the last two and half years – and the impossible challenges facing families in the coming months.

Given the widening gap between the financial circumstances of families in the North East and those in many other parts of the country, it is unsurprising that – immediately before the pandemic – **children in our region were most likely to live in families with no, or little, savings to shield them from economic shocks.**<sup>45</sup>

This lack of any financial buffer, and the fact that the families already struggling to make ends meet are now being hit harder by rising inflation (as they spend a much larger share of their budget on essentials such as electricity, gas and food than those on higher incomes<sup>46</sup> – whilst inflation on ‘baby products’ alone most recently hit 15%)<sup>47</sup> means that **the soaring cost of living was inevitably the key concern raised by the organisations we spoke with for this research.**

Most of the families they work with have absolutely nothing left to cut back on, and many were already reliant on charities or community organisations to plug the gaps of their inadequate incomes. Of course, the cost of living crisis is not only impacting the families accessing their services but those working to provide them, many of whom are on a low income themselves.<sup>48</sup>

Concerns were also flagged about the rate of support received by asylum seekers, which has increased by just £3.90 per person per week since 2015 (it currently stands at £40.85 per week to cover all essential living needs, except housing costs). The North East has welcomed the highest number of ‘dispersed’ asylum seekers per 10,000 population of anywhere in the UK, with rates being particularly high in Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Newcastle, Stockton and Gateshead.<sup>49</sup>

**“Almost half of people we’re seeing have a negative budget or are in a deficit, so how can they afford to put clothes on their children’s backs, to feed their children? We’re seeing parents going without because they can’t afford to live.”**

North East frontline advice service

**“People have been kind of just managing – particularly working families – but wages have not changed and the cost of living has.”**

North East baby bank

**“We are inundated with requests for baby milk, nappies and children’s food – people simply cannot afford £9 or £10 for a tin of baby milk.”**

– North East food bank

**“We saw so many families in Covid, where they were just managing and just about making ends meet. But now, all of a sudden, you’ve got your income on which you were just about managing and everything else around you is so inflated, you can’t make it work. It’s just not manageable.”**

– North East baby bank

**“One of our families’ sons was struggling because he can’t have his friend over anymore, because they can’t afford to feed that child as well. They aren’t able to give them snacks or food because they haven’t got enough for themselves, never mind for other people.”**

– North East baby bank

**“We’re getting people complaining about the cost of bread and milk – because any tiny rises in your benefits are just gone. My tiny rise in Child Benefit I spent on bread and milk...just bread and milk, it was gone.”**

– North East charity worker

**“We’re also seeing people washing in cold water because they can’t afford to put the heating on, and it’s not necessarily that they’re choosing between heating and eating, it’s actually that they’re doing neither.”**

– North East frontline advice service

“Parents are struggling now – and it’s not just heating, it’s also not being able to shower with hot water. And you need to put your electricity on to be able to have WiFi within your home, to be able to do online job searches or keep on top of your Universal Credit journal. Or you have to use public transport, which again costs, to do that on the computer at the library.”

– North East frontline advice service

“We are finding more and more families can’t afford to top up their prepayment meters, but they are still accruing standing charges which are very, very high and getting no benefit from that. We are now seeing people refusing a free boiler, because what’s the point? They’re not going to use it this winter.”

– North East frontline advice service

**It’s just becoming more and more difficult for a lot of families.**

North East baby bank

“The bog-standard, basic, tiny snack-sized pizza I buy my kids every Tuesday has gone from 49p, to 55p and now 69p in about six months.”

– North East charity worker

**People are trying to do what they can, but they’re already scrimping back on everything possible, they’re already not using gas and electricity because they can’t afford it. There’s no other ‘thing’ that they can do, it’s just that they don’t have enough to live on, which is a systemic issue.**

North East frontline advice service

### Demand for VCS support

The consequence of long-term inadequate incomes, combined with the economic shocks of a global pandemic and now a cost of living crisis, is that **charities and community groups across the region are experiencing significant, and possibly unsustainable, increases in demand to help young families meet their basic needs** – with those accessing services directly now added to by growing numbers of referrals from statutory or public services such as health visitors, midwives, social workers, local authorities, family support workers, hospitals, asylum support workers and even the police.

Given the very serious implications of babies and young children not having somewhere safe to sleep, a warm home or enough food to eat, it was clear from our conversations that this growing level of demand is placing a totally unfair burden or sense of responsibility on people operating what are often small organisations with very limited capacity and funding.

**“People are relying on charities to get them through. We are the plug between nothing and nowhere else to turn.”**

– North East frontline advice service

**“I would say the number of families coming to us for help has trebled since the cost of living crisis began. Demand for our family care packs is going through the roof.”**

– North East food bank

**“We started off supporting six families a week. Then it grew to about 30 families a week. Now it’s 120 families a week, every week, and it’s rising. I don’t know where we get the capacity from.”**

– North East baby bank

**“We’ve seen a 155% increase in demand from families with an under-5 in the last six months, compared to the year before.”**

– North East food bank

**“In the early days we were maybe getting 1 or 2 referrals a week, but last week we had 61 requests come in. We are about to hit a milestone of our five thousandth bundle that’s gone out.” [since late 2019]**

– North East baby bank

**“We’ve had a rise of about 43% in clients advised on things we can support with, but we haven’t had any additional capacity. That is simply advisers doing more, and we don’t want to lead to adviser stress and burnout.”**

– North East frontline advice service

**“This year, we ran out of coats for the first time ever. We ran out of shoes for the first time ever. And the last few weeks we’ve been struggling to get clothes.”**

North East baby bank

**“Demand is growing, and we’re seeing many more people asking for basics. We expected the rise to be for the expensive stuff – the basics took us by surprise. So, we’ve had to be stricter on some of the stuff we give out, for example, really monitoring who has already had one bottle of shampoo that month, to make sure there is enough to go around.”**

– North East baby bank

**“We keep going back to the Council for additional funding to service the level of demand we are seeing. They have stipulated families can only receive two [support packs] in any six-month period, but what are they supposed to do in the meantime? We are having to plug these gaps.”**

– North East food bank

**“I’ve got mums coming in and getting frustrated with me because I don’t have an item and until recently we never ran out of items, it was never an issue. That’s how I know it’s even harder than ever because they’ve never been frustrated with us before.”**

– North East baby bank

**“We’ve seen a big increase in asylum seekers being dispersed here who are pregnant and have absolutely nothing.”**

North East baby bank

**“We’ve been seeing more and more people coming as they are pregnant, that have nothing and have only a few weeks to go. Some of them are refugees and asylum seekers, but some of them aren’t – some of them are local people that have got hardly anything, or they’ve got a Moses basket but nothing else. And I think we’re finding that, where before people might come to us for a pram or some clothes, or they might have some bits but might want help with one or two others, we’re getting more and more people that it’s almost everything they need help with.”**

– North East baby bank

**“A lot of families aren’t going to food banks, because they can only go to food banks three times. So, they’re buying into things like The Bread and Butter Thing. Most of our local schools have now got some level of co-op going on, and most of our schools have got it going on in a way that nobody sees what you’re taking, because everybody’s trying to make it OK for families to access. There’s so much that happens before anybody gets near a food bank. It’s just criminal that there’s the necessity for all of this.”**

– North East children’s charity

**“We’ve had referrals come through from the police, where people have been caught stealing school uniform and they’ve not gone down the criminal route, they’ve tried to support that family.”**

– North East baby bank

**“We shouldn’t – as a small charity – be getting the majority of our referrals through NHS services or social services, who get core funding to support families, because they can’t provide it.”**

– North East baby bank

**“Ideally in five years’ time, I wouldn’t want us to be here – we don’t want to be doing what we are doing. It’s not what I want to be here to do. But we do it because we need to do it.”**

– North East baby bank

**“The last thing I want is to have to say to people, ‘we can’t help’. What do you do? What is the alternative for those families? Because the reality of us not being able to help is that child’s got nowhere to sleep.”**

North East baby bank

## Statutory interventions and support

There is a substantial body of evidence on the effects of experiencing poverty in childhood, which can be particularly acute in a child's earliest and most formative years.<sup>50</sup> These impacts can adversely affect the outcomes of children and young people both in childhood and throughout their later adult lives, and they can be extremely serious.

Recent research has linked a rise in child poverty rates to an additional 10,000 children entering local authority care in England between 2015 and 2020<sup>51</sup> – and indeed all twelve Directors of Children's Services across the North East have expressed their joint concerns that 'exceptional levels of poverty in the North East are driving dramatic rises in child protection intervention and the number of children in care'.<sup>52</sup>

**“ People are afraid that if they say that, actually, they're not coping – then other things will start to rain down on them. ”**

North East children's charity

**It is the case that the North East has the highest proportion of looked after children in England at 108 children per 10,000 children** (compared with 71 per 10,000 across England) – and these rates are particularly high in Middlesbrough and Hartlepool (both at 172 children per 10,000 children – almost two and half times the England-wide average).<sup>53</sup> **23% of all looked after children in the North East are aged under 5, compared with 19% across England.**<sup>54</sup>

We were told by several baby banks in the region that a growing number of families accessing their services are **kinship carers** – usually grandparents who have found themselves caring for often very young infants at exceptionally short notice, and who are frequently on a low income and unable to buy the items they need to care for a baby (whilst receiving very limited, if any, financial support to recognise their additional costs).<sup>55</sup> Whilst now completely out of date, the only currently available regional breakdown (using census data from 2011) indicates that **the North East had the joint highest rate of children living in kinship care.**<sup>56</sup>

The lack of any real data collection on the prevalence of children in kinship care – or uniform level of support for kinship carers – is an issue both the Government and local authorities must address.

**“ We were asked by a professional for a cot for a family because a young child had gone over the top of their basket, because they were just too big for it and they just went out. Luckily, they were unharmed but it could have been a very serious thing. ”**

North East baby bank

The gravity of not being able to materially provide for a young child's basic needs is an issue that was raised by several of the organisations we spoke with for this research, as well as having been reported elsewhere. Others referenced the importance of professionals who are supporting young families understanding the impact that living on a sustained and very low income can have on a family's capacity and wellbeing, such that poverty is not simply accepted as what has been described as 'the wallpaper of practice'.<sup>57</sup>



“[A] health visitor was upstairs looking at the cot for a child, with a three-month old baby in a cot with a duvet cover. In an under one-year-old, we don’t recommend it because of the potential for sudden infant death syndrome. When we spoke to the mum, she said she didn’t have any heating – it’s the only way of keeping that child warm. She wasn’t doing it through any fault of her own – she had no heating. That’s the impact of not having any heating. That child could have had a sudden infant death.”  
– Local authority officer giving evidence to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council child poverty inquiry<sup>58</sup>



“The worst thing we’ve seen is a child who ended up with a permanent disability because he was in a Moses basket for too long and his skull just did not form properly – because he was just so big in his basket and didn’t fit, so ended up with a permanent impairment which is horrific.”  
– North East baby bank

**“The fear of accepting help is astronomical.”**  
North East children’s charity

A number of organisations highlighted that – despite the huge increase in demand they are experiencing – they know that **many families with young children in the region are reluctant to seek support (particularly from statutory services), or report that they need help, often through fear of what flagging that they are ‘not coping’ may incur.** This can result in young families often having reached crisis point before they receive support for their family.

We also heard that some families may find it difficult to accept that the support that is on offer – particularly from voluntary and charitable organisations – usually comes with ‘no strings attached’, and will not be clawed back at a later stage or result in other things being taken away.

“Some things are great barriers, including the fear of social services. Families just don’t want to access services in case they get ‘flagged’...Even something as simple as ‘I’m not very well today, but I’m not going to ring my GP because I don’t want my GP to know that I’m ill as they might think I can’t look after my children’...it just spirals in people’s heads.”  
– North East baby bank

“Families feel it was OK during Covid to admit you were struggling – it was OK to ask for help, or for a referral to a food bank etc. But now people think they’re back on their feet. Well, not everyone is and not everyone was to start off with.”  
– North East baby bank

“You know, ‘you don’t get anything for nothing’, so somehow or other the support is going to be clawed back, because that’s their experience of Universal Credit. Or you’ll start asking me questions and then you’ll look at my other benefits and you’ll tell me I’m not eligible for them. You’ll end up taking something away from me – you will give me something, but you will end up taking something away from me.”  
– North East children’s charity

**“Although it’s not said, we very much know that the fear is that a statutory agency will get involved somewhere along the line...because ‘I’m not a good enough mother, or not feeding my children right.’**  
North East children’s charity



## Specific areas of concern

The single biggest driver for those seeking to access the support of all the organisations we spoke with is **young families simply not having sufficient income to meet their basic needs – whether as a result of our now threadbare social security safety net, or the outcome of being trapped in low paid work (or both).**

**Benefits rose by less than half the rate of inflation** after a decade of erosion.

### Financial support for families

Numerous concerns were raised about the **general inadequacy of social security support for families (particularly for young parents), whether in or out of work**, as a result of the erosion of the national safety net over the last decade. Indeed, what were already inadequate levels of benefits rose by just 3.1% this April, less than half the then rate of inflation which has continued to soar.

The Government itself has appeared to acknowledge that our social security system has for some time been failing to deliver its most basic function of protecting people from destitution – that is, ‘not being able to afford the absolute essentials we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean’.<sup>59</sup> Press releases announcing the first two tranches of the emergency, discretionary and locally-delivered Household Support Fund in September 2021 and March 2022 variously described it as intended to help families with ‘**the essentials**’, ‘**daily needs**’, ‘**everyday costs**’, ‘**essential costs**’ and ‘**essential household costs**’.<sup>60</sup>

A number of specific issues were also repeatedly highlighted by those we spoke with for this research:

### Universal Credit deductions

**Deductions – most commonly a result of families having to take out a repayable ‘advance’ to survive the five-week wait for a first Universal Credit (UC) payment – are disproportionately impacting children in the North East.** Previous analysis by the North East Child Poverty Commission and CPAG has indicated that 53% of all children in families across the UK relying on UC are affected by deductions, having on average £61 per month clawed back from their entitlement. This rises to 63% in the North East,<sup>61</sup> which is unsurprising given children in the region were most likely to live in families with no, or little, savings to shield them from such economic shocks.<sup>62</sup>

**“One family is crippled by a loan [Universal Credit advance] that they took for that intervening period [5-week wait]. It’s stopping them from even going looking for a job because it’s untenable. It’s not affordable for them to go looking for a job.”**  
– North East children’s charity

**“Universal Credit deductions are a big issue. People simply cannot afford to pay back an advance and also live.”**

North East food bank

**“Sometime the deductions they are getting...the money that they’re getting is already sometimes unmanageable for people – but then to take a deduction off that...all it means is that people are going to be borrowing more to make up for that, and it’s just a never-ending cycle.”**  
– North East baby bank

**“I would say that some families don’t even know that the UC advance is a loan. It’s wrong, wrong, wrong on every level that that should be a debt. Families are desperately struggling because of it.”**  
North East children’s charity

## Universal Credit sanctions

There has been a recent surge in the use of 'sanctions' against Universal Credit claimants, where UC payments are reduced for a fixed period if 'claimant commitments' aren't met by those subject to conditionality. This regime was largely suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic, but is being enforced again – with a sharp increase in the number of claimants sanctioned across the country since early 2022 (way above pre-Covid levels), despite a fall in the proportion of UC claimants who are actually subject to conditionality and potential sanctions.<sup>63</sup>

**This picture is reflected in the North East, with 5,594 UC claims sanctioned in May 2022 (6.1% of those who could be subject to sanctions) – up from 244 (0.2%) a year earlier, and 1,953 (2.36%) in March 2020, the last month before the pandemic.**<sup>64</sup>

Of particular concern is the Government's apparent lack of monitoring of the number of children affected by UC sanctions.<sup>65</sup>

**"We've seen a big increase in sanctions recently – often for silly reasons. People can't afford to get the bus with their kids into town to have an interview at the Job Centre. And they are prioritising buying food for their children. But then they are sanctioned, leaving them with even less money to get to the Job Centre or buy food. We are regularly approached to cover the cost of bus tickets."**

– North East food bank

**"One mum was effectively saying, 'quite honestly, if my kids weren't around I wouldn't be here now' – which is really difficult to hear. She's been really adversely affected because of Universal Credit sanctions, but also because she's been living for a very long time with very little money."**

– North East frontline advice service

**"We're seeing a lot of sanctions at the minute. I'm trying to get to the bottom of this, and I've had people saying 'Dad didn't go to his appointment, so we've been sanctioned.' I had one of them in tears telling me she's at the point of asking him to leave because they can't live on fresh air."**

– North East baby bank

**"We are seeing higher numbers of families coming to us with Universal Credit sanctions. One client hadn't attended a Job Centre interview, so because of that the family had been living off the child element of Universal Credit for three months, and they've got two kids – aged 4 and 8. She couldn't afford to put her heating on and was really worried because one of her children couldn't sleep because she was so cold. Her daughter didn't want to go to school because she was tired and just wanted to sleep during the day."**

– North East frontline advice service

**5,594  
UC claims  
sanctioned**

in May 2022 in the North East.

**One mum was effectively saying, 'quite honestly, if my kids weren't around I wouldn't be here now' – which is really difficult to hear.**

North East frontline  
advice service



**Other major concerns that were raised by the organisations we spoke with about the social security system and financial support available for young families included:**

The **'two-child limit'**, which means that – since 6th April 2017 – almost all families having a third or subsequent child are no longer entitled to receive support for those children through Child Tax Credit and Universal Credit, worth up to £2,935 per child per year. Across the UK, 59% of families now caught by the two-child limit are in work and the policy has been linked to steep increases in child poverty for larger families over recent years.<sup>66</sup> **Over 15,000 families across the North East are currently affected by the two-child limit – which at present overwhelmingly impacts families with an under-5.**<sup>67</sup>

The **benefit cap** – which limits the amount of social security support families or individuals can receive – results in households having, on average, £55 a week less in support than they have been assessed as needing. The cap has remained frozen since it was lowered in 2016, and the vast majority of households impacted across the UK are recognised by Government as being exempt from working to increase their income, either because they have a disability or have caring responsibilities for young children. **The benefit cap affects a relatively small number of households across the North East (fewer than 3,000) – but almost all – 99% – are families with children (compared to 86% across the UK).**<sup>68</sup>

**Child Benefit** – years of freezes and sub-inflationary increases have seen the erosion of this formally universal benefit, such that **this vital support for families has lost one quarter of its value since 2010.**<sup>69</sup> The 'tiny rises' actually received by families in the last two years equated to an additional 65p per week for a first child and 45p per week for each subsequent child in April 2022 – having risen by just 45p and 30p respectively the year before.

Problems with the full digitisation of the **Healthy Start voucher scheme** (providing support to women who are 10 weeks or more pregnant, or have a child aged under 4, to buy milk, fruit and vegetables and pulses) were reported on earlier this year by researchers at Northumbria University and Feeding Britain,<sup>70</sup> and were also reflected by the organisations we spoke with. Given this is one of the Government's flagship schemes for supporting families with the youngest children, it is astonishing that Ministers still do not know what the impact of full digitisation since April 2022 has been on the take-up of Healthy Start, several months later and in the midst of a cost of living crisis.<sup>71</sup>

Child Benefit has lost  
**one quarter  
of its value  
since 2010**

## Low pay and in-work poverty

As set out earlier in this report, the much greater increase in the number of children affected by in-work poverty in the North East than across the UK, and the prevalence of low-paid work, help to explain the steep rise in child poverty rates across the region in recent years, including for the North East's youngest children.

Again, most of the organisations we spoke with reported increases in the number of working families seeking their support and many raised concerns about the type of work that is available, particularly for families with young children.

**“Of the working families we support, most are single parent families – they are working but just can’t make ends meet. We actually support one of our referrers – she refers families to us. She’s a nurse, but she’s also a single mam with two children who is struggling herself. She’s in a profession and just can’t manage.”**  
– North East baby bank

**“Decent waged work just doesn’t exist locally.”**  
– North East children’s charity

**“Both parents can be in full-time work, and all they’re doing is paying the bills. There’s no money for extras and things like that...they are working to exist and not doing anything else.”**  
North East baby bank

**“Most mums I know are teaching assistants, and that pays nothing.”**  
– North East charity worker

**“What kind of world is this where people [keyworkers] are working to try and better their own family – and supporting so many other families – but actually are needing that service themselves, because they can’t afford to live? It’s just obscene.”**  
– North East baby bank

**“People were told that being on Universal Credit would mean you were better off in work, but right now they’re just seeing they are not.”**  
– North East children’s charity

**“I think you get penalised for working and penalised if you don’t. It’s not a winning situation at the moment.”**  
– North East baby bank

**“I think you get penalised for working and penalised if you don’t. It’s not a winning situation at the moment.”**

North East baby bank





Several further areas of concern were also repeatedly raised by most of the organisations we spoke with – all of which can make raising young children on a low income much more challenging; severely impacting families' quality of life, adding additional costs, and often making it even harder to escape poverty's grip.

These included:

**Childcare/early years education** – in particular, **high childcare costs**; trying to navigate the **sheer complexity of the support that is currently available** towards this; the requirement to pay **childcare costs upfront** before receiving support for them via Universal Credit in arrears (which can act as a major barrier to employment, particularly for lone parents); and the **need for more free or very low cost wrapround / non-term time care** for children in school-based nurseries or the first few years of school.

**There's a need for more free or very low cost wrapround / non-term time care.**

A further concern is that one of the Government's flagship policies for supporting young families disadvantages children in the North East.

All 3- and 4-year-olds in England are entitled to 15 hours of free early years education/childcare per week during term-times and – since 2017 – that has been extended to **30 hours of funded early years education/childcare for 3- and 4-year-olds** in 'working families' meeting certain requirements. It excludes children in families where one or both parents are out of work, or in work on very low incomes, of which there is a disproportionately high number in the North East. The Sutton Trust reports that this policy has 'widened the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers', and will 'compound inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic and impact on children's life chances'.<sup>72</sup>

A charitable foundation has recently been established by the owners of Zizu's nursery in Middlesbrough to support families affected by this latter issue, and to provide parents with grants to cover the cost of the first month of childcare (in any early years setting) rather than having to find a large lump sum and wait to receive support towards it through Universal Credit.<sup>73</sup> It should not, however, be the responsibility of local business owners and charitable foundations to address these clear policy failings.

**It should not, however, be the responsibility of local business owners and charitable foundations to address these clear policy failings.**

The need for upfront support with childcare costs to be provided through Universal Credit is also an issue County Durham mum Vikki Waterman has been campaigning on for several years – alongside fellow 'Mums on a Mission' – as part of Save the Children's 'Make Childcare Work' campaign.<sup>74</sup>

**Housing** – namely high costs in the private rented sector for what is very often poor quality and/or unsafe accommodation. This is clearly a major concern given the large increase in the share of children in the North East living in rented accommodation in recent years – and indeed new analysis by the Northern Housing Consortium has found that 28.2% of all private rented housing in the region is deemed ‘non-decent’, compared to 22.8% across England.<sup>75</sup> For those in social housing, the under-occupancy charge (or ‘bedroom tax’) continues to unfairly penalise families in many parts of the North East where the size of the housing stock means that smaller properties are often simply unavailable to move to.

**Housing is a big thing in this area – the state of private rents. And that has a massive effect on mental health, when you’re living in a house that you’re paying a really high rent for but it’s in a really poor condition.**

North East baby bank

**“We had a referral the other day where the family couldn’t get social housing because they had rent arrears, so they were placed in a private rented property which didn’t even have a handle on the door. They had boxes piled up against the door to keep the house shut which obviously isn’t safe. They had three children living there, and they had nothing...literally nothing. A family – three children and two parents – all sleeping in one bed. They had no quality of life.”**

– North East baby bank

**Domestic abuse** – high rates of domestic abuse are a key driver for parents seeking the support of many of the organisations we spoke with (particularly baby banks who work closely with refuges), with very low incomes ‘implicated in’ parental conflict<sup>76</sup> and also making it much harder for those affected to leave abusive situations. **It is notable that the North East has the highest rate of police-recorded domestic abuse offences in England and Wales.<sup>77</sup>**

**Transport** – the cost and limited availability of public transport in many parts of the region was flagged as an exacerbating factor for families with young children on a low income, making it much harder for parents to access support services or things like medical appointments; cutting off employment opportunities and making fulfilling UC ‘claimant commitments’ very challenging; preventing families from making their limited budgets stretch further as they are unable to easily access cheaper food/other essential items; and stopping families from just being able to do things together.

**Support for young families** – families with young children being unaware of how to claim or access the support that is available to them was regularly raised by the organisations we spoke with, and this is a particular concern for those who had babies during the Covid pandemic and did not receive the same level of face-to-face advice or information as otherwise would have been the case. **The need to better communicate the local support that exists – including through non-digital means – was emphasised, as well as ensuring that it is accessible.** The challenges faced by low income families trying to access parenting support in the North East have recently been highlighted by Action for Children.<sup>78</sup>

**We’ve asked for some non-electronic signposting for people who are too poor to be using their data all the time, or don’t have the digital skills to read a website.**

North East baby bank

**A family – three children and two parents – all sleeping in one bed. They had no quality of life.**

North East baby bank

# Challenging early childhood poverty in the North East

**There is no shortage of organisations working tirelessly across the North East to prevent and mitigate the worst impacts of poverty for families with young children in the region, several of whom we spoke with as part of this research.**

From working across systems to make life less challenging, or remove barriers, for young families – to stepping in to ensure they have access to the basic essentials in the face of a threadbare social security safety net and rising in-work poverty – charities, community groups, baby banks, food banks, schools, early years settings, local authorities, mutual aid groups, Family Hubs and Children's Centres, frontline advice services and many others are all providing invaluable support at this crucial stage in every child's development and usually working in partnership to do so.

It's clear that this will be more important than ever in the coming months.

**Examples of this work include:**

**It's not about doing everything for everybody – it's about working together to get the best for each family.**

North East baby bank

## Getting the building blocks wrong: Early childhood poverty in the North East

### Baby banks

Little Village – a baby bank working across London – has powerfully shone a light on its work and that of its counterparts now operating across the country as part of its research on early childhood poverty.

Several baby banks have been established across the North East – mostly in the last 3-4 years – to provide families with a wide range of essential items to help care for their babies and young children, including prams/pushchairs, Moses baskets, cots, toddler beds, safety gates, clothes, nappies, wipes, baby baths, high chairs, baby milk and food, toys and basic toiletries – which are either collected directly by families and professionals, or delivered by volunteers to families without easy access to transport.

This is frequently added to by providing emotional support and advice, a welcoming, non-judgemental place to sit and chat, classes for parents and signposting to other services such as domestic abuse refuges, welfare rights, energy advice and mental health support.

The list of baby banks in the North East now includes: **Bundles for Babies** (Sunderland); **Clothe and Feed** (Tyne & Wear); **Darlington Baby Bank**; **Footprints in the Community First Steps project** (Redcar); **Grow Baby Teesside** (Thornaby); **Hartlepool Baby Bank**; **Little Acorns Baby Charity** (Chester-le-Street/Durham); **Love, Amelia** (Sunderland & South Tyneside); **Rosie's Corner** (Northumberland); **Stockton Baby Bank**; and **St John's Church Percy Main Baby Bank** (North Tyneside). Although not a baby bank, the **White Feather Project** (Middlesbrough) also supports families with young children as do many other independent food banks and those part of the Trussell Trust network.

The baby banks we spoke to are receiving large and growing numbers of referrals from statutory/public services – and are reliant on patching together small charitable grants, individual donations of items or money, and the commitment of volunteers to undertake this work.

## Children's Communities

Children's Communities bring together organisations supporting all aspects of children's lives and local families in one defined neighbourhood to provide stronger local support for children 'from cradle to career', with the aim of giving children in 'disadvantaged' areas a better start in life. The idea is modelled on the Harlem Children's Zone initiative in the US.

The Save the Children-backed **Wallsend Children's Community** in North Tyneside is the most well-established in the North East and has 'set out an ambitious vision to build, over a generation, a Wallsend where children and young people have access to the same high-quality chances as those in more advantaged areas.' A key part of this work has been the provision of **early years grants of up to £340** which any referral partner can access, to help local families with young children/expectant parents obtain essential household items.

Newer initiatives well under development in the region are the **West End Children's Community** in Newcastle (started as a partnership between the West End Schools Trust and Newcastle University), and the **Ashington Children's Community** in Northumberland (currently chaired and facilitated by the charity Children North East, working in collaboration with over 70 organisations).

**An ambitious vision to build (...) a Wallsend where children and young people have access to the same high-quality chances as those in more advantaged areas.**

Wallsend Children's  
Community

## Local authority strategies

**Durham County Council's new Poverty Action Plan** has been developed by the cross-local authority Poverty Action Steering Group in close co-operation with the county's VCS organisations and after consultation with local communities. This includes plans to roll out a **'Cutting the Cost of the Pre-School Day'** programme to 50 early years and pre-school settings, which aims to reduce costs and financial barriers for parents of young children; to ensure these settings are equipped to signpost parents to financial advice and support; and to help settings to reduce their costs so that they can remain viable in less advantaged areas.

**Hartlepool Borough Council's Strategy for the Early Years** places a strong emphasis on the impact of poverty on children – and the need for early years work in the town to have 'a robust understanding of the levels and impact of poverty in Hartlepool and support efforts to eradicate this.' The early years strategy will also be firmly linked to **a new town-wide anti-poverty strategy** the council is developing in partnership with others, including local organisation Thrive Teesside (which advocates for the voice of lived experience to be included in decision-making processes) and a new Hartlepool Poverty Truth Commission.





### North of Tyne Child Poverty Prevention Programme

The North of Tyne Combined Authority has started to pilot a two-year Child Poverty Prevention Programme across its three constituent authorities of Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside.

This will take the form of tailored poverty interventions in schools; delivering welfare rights and advice directly in school settings; and working with Society Matters cic to support local employers to undertake poverty-related training and develop poverty reduction strategies with their staff.

Given the issues outlined in this report, it is vital that this work reaches families with young children, and particularly those we have identified as being at even higher risk of poverty – both to provide them with additional support, but also as a means of better understanding the financial and non-financial challenges they face and potential local, regional or national solutions to address them.

**The North of Tyne Combined Authority has started to pilot a two-year Child Poverty Prevention Programme.**

### Poverty Proofing

The charity Children North East has pioneered the concept of 'Poverty Proofing' – which started by working with pupils, parents, staff and governors in schools in the region to identify the barriers children living in poverty face in engaging fully with school life and educational opportunities – and then creating an individual action plan for schools to address them.

**Children North East has pioneered the concept of 'Poverty Proofing'.**

This work is now taking place in other schools across the country, including in partnership with CPAG's Cost of the School Day project, and the Poverty Proofing model is also being applied by Children North East to health settings and cultural organisations.

Children North East will soon pilot the use of **Poverty Proofing in early years settings**, working with eight early years providers over six months to understand the experience of parents, children and early years staff.

### Family Hubs

Family Hubs are intended to provide families with children aged 0-19 (and up to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities) with a central access point to seamless, integrated local services with a focus on early help and prevention to support better outcomes for children and families.

Earlier this year, the Government confirmed which 75 local authority areas across England had been deemed eligible for a share of £302m funding to create new Family Hubs in their area – which included 9 out of 12 councils in the North East.

**North Tyneside Council** and **Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council** have been ahead of the curve on this issue having already developed a network of Family Hubs in their areas over recent years – followed by **Northumberland County Council** and **Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council** who jointly received funding to develop a virtual Family Hubs offer given their often rural and widely-dispersed populations. Northumberland are also working with a wide range of partners to co-locate services and make better shared use of facilities to deliver Family Hub support, and a regional Family Hubs network has been established to share best practice across the North East as this model is rolled out.

It is clear from this report how important this type of support will be to families across the North East. It is critical that the services offered are as universal as possible, to avoid the stigmatisation of accessing support. Family Hubs must also receive sufficient investment to make a difference to children and families after a decade of swathing cuts to such services – particularly as they are aimed at families with children aged 0-19, not 0-5 as Sure Start/Children's Centres were, and particularly in areas like the North East with across-the-board high levels of need.

Funding for Family Hubs should also be allocated on a long-term basis that doesn't require repeated applications for short-term funding rounds, and the ring-fencing of different pots of funding by Government for specific Family Hub services should be limited, as they do not always meet the needs of local families and communities. Critically, Family Hubs should have a significant focus on supporting families to maximise their incomes.

# Recommendations

**This report has sought to set out the structural reasons why child poverty in the North East is now so high, and has increased so steeply in recent years, particularly for the region's youngest children.**

It has explored the cumulative impact of rising levels of hardship on young families – and on the plethora of local organisations supporting growing numbers of parents and carers to meet their children's basic needs.

This trajectory – which means **the child poverty gap between the North East and the UK average is now at a twenty-year high** – clearly began almost a decade ago, and the many challenges low income families already faced have been exacerbated by both the Covid-19 pandemic and the soaring cost of essentials over the last year.

The **vast shortfall between the cost of living measures announced to date by Government, and bills for households essentials which continue to rise, clearly threatens to have devastating consequences** – both for those young families across the North East who already had absolutely nothing left to cut back on, and for the overstretched services currently supporting them.



There are further urgent steps the new Prime Minister and Chancellor should take to ease the immediate crisis for struggling North East families:

- **Raise social security payments like Universal Credit to match inflation now, not next April as currently planned**
- **Pause deductions from Universal Credit, which are disproportionately impacting children in the North East**
- **Lift the two-child limit and benefit cap, which hit families with young children hardest**
- **Pause Universal Credit sanctions, particularly for families with children.**

In the medium to longer-term, it is clear that we have to stop lurching from crisis to crisis if the Government is to deliver on its levelling up pledges to improve living standards and increase opportunities for children and young people in places like the North East.

Giving every baby 'the best start in life' means getting the building blocks right. This will require **a commitment from the new Prime Minister to take comprehensive, ambitious and joined-up action to reduce and then end child poverty as a central plank of levelling up.**

It will also require an understanding that, whilst we have a national social security system, its erosion over the last decade has had a disproportionate impact on North East families, both in and out of work – and that has been a leading driver of many of the inequalities the levelling up agenda seeks to tackle.

**Until this erosion – and the ongoing challenge of low paid work and lower household earnings in our region – are fundamentally addressed, the Government's flagship policy will continue to be fatally undermined.**

**To support all North East families with young children to thrive, this joined-up action should include:**

**Committing to undertake, and act upon, 'levelling up impact assessments'** of all major Government policy and spending decisions, including those taken by the Department for Work and Pensions.

**Investing in our social security system**, so that it provides a genuine, timely and dignified safety net – protecting families (in and out of work) from poverty and eradicating destitution, as well as adequately responding to life events and the additional costs of raising all children. This includes:

- Ensuring benefit payments are always increased in line with the cost of living, and in a timely way
- Permanently ending the two-child limit and benefit cap
- Ending the 5-week wait for Universal Credit and therefore the need for 'advance payments', the most common reason for UC debt deductions
- Increasing Child Benefit by at least £10 per child per week
- Reviewing the use of Universal Credit sanctions for families with children
- Ending the lower rate of Universal Credit for parents under 25.

**Addressing in-work poverty**, including by:

- Ensuring the Government's National Living Wage is pegged to the actual cost of living
- Introducing the same National Living Wage rate for all workers aged 18+
- Introducing the long-promised Employment Bill, to improve people's rights at work
- Ensuring the reduction of in-work poverty is made an explicit aim of any future or expanded devolution deals, and levelling up and skills funding, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

**Improving access to affordable childcare/early years education**, including by:

- Funding universal free breakfast clubs and after-school clubs/ wraparound care
- Providing upfront support towards childcare costs in Universal Credit
- Extending the 30 hours of funded early years education to all 3- and 4-year-olds.

**Supporting those who are economically inactive** – by recognising the need to provide a dignified level of support to those who are unable to work, and providing tailored employment support programmes for those who find it harder to work, including those with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities.

**Providing transformative investment for Family Hubs** – to ensure all parents can easily access universal, inclusive and non-stigmatised early help, parenting and family support services.

**Taking action to address high costs and poor quality housing for renters**, including by:

- Pressing ahead with the Renters Reform Bill
- Ensuring support for housing costs keeps pace with local rents
- Investing in a large-scale programme of retrofitting energy efficiency measures, starting with the social and private rented sectors
- Ending the under-occupancy charge (the 'bedroom tax').

**Most importantly – listening to and involving children, young people and families in the North East** in all of this work, including future policy development on levelling up and poverty reduction.

As the overwhelming majority of policy levers available to tackle child poverty in England still rest with the UK Government, our recommendations in this report are largely focussed on the transformative, ambitious action it could take to support families with young children in our region.

However, the North East Child Poverty Commission will now also undertake a programme of work with organisations and individuals across the North East – including local authorities, combined authorities, other public sector organisations, the voluntary and charity sector, faith and community groups, business organisations and trade unions, and, crucially, families and young people with direct experience of poverty.

We will do this to further explore the findings of this research, particularly around economic inactivity, low paid work, lower household earnings and barriers to employment, and how local actors may be able to address them with the powers and resources they have – including through devolved funding. Some examples of the type of work they could support are included throughout this report.

# Endnotes

### Acknowledgments

The North East Child Poverty Commission would like to particularly thank all the organisations across the North East who gave up their valuable, and increasingly hard-pressed, time to share their insights for this research, without which it would not have been possible.

We greatly appreciate the extensive data analysis, support and advice provided by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) for this project – and remain grateful to the Millfield House Foundation and Newcastle University for their ongoing support for the Commission's wider work.

We also acknowledge the important earlier work on early childhood poverty published by Little Village and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, as well the Nuffield Foundation, which inspired this research.

### About Us

The North East Child Poverty Commission (NECPC) is a regional, cross-sector network which believes child poverty in the North East of England is not inevitable and ending it is worth working for, together. We are chaired by Anna Turley, and hosted by – but independent of – Newcastle University.

NECPC is ambitious for **every** baby, child and young person in the North East, with a shared vision of all growing up in our region not just healthy and secure, but having the best start in life: able to fully participate and thrive in education and extra-curricular activity; to pursue the things they love, with exciting futures ahead of them; and able to benefit from everything our beautiful region has to offer.

However, we know that growing up in poverty makes it much more difficult to enjoy that inclusive childhood; restricting choices, opportunities and the ability to participate fully in society. Far too many children and young people across the North East are consequently being prevented from fulfilling their potential, an injustice which is holding our region back.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> **It Takes a Village: The Little Village family poverty report, 2022**, Little Village supported by Joseph Rowntree Foundation, April 2022
- <sup>2</sup> **Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2020/21**, Juliet Stone (Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University) for End Child Poverty, July 2022
- <sup>3</sup> **It takes a village: how to make all childhoods matter**, Little Village supported by Joseph Rowntree Foundation, April 2021
- <sup>4</sup> **North East child poverty now highest in the UK**, North East Child Poverty Commission, July 2022
- <sup>5</sup> **Assessing the impact of rising child poverty on the unprecedented rise in infant mortality in England, 2000-2017: time trend analysis**, David Taylor-Robinson, Eric T C Lai, Sophie Wickham, Tanith Rose, Paul Norman, Clare Bamba, Margaret Whitehead, Ben Barr (published in *BMJ Open*), October 2019
- <sup>6</sup> See, for example, **Child Poverty: Aspiring to Survive**, Morag C. Treanor (Policy Press), February 2020
- <sup>7</sup> **Child of the North: Building a fairer future after Covid-19**, Northern Health Science Alliance and N8 Research Partnership, December 2021
- <sup>8</sup> **Changing patterns of poverty in early childhood: The changing face of early childhood in the UK**, Nuffield Foundation, September 2021
- <sup>9</sup> **Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlights the gap in support that remains for people on low incomes after Liz Truss energy announcement**, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, September 2022
- <sup>10</sup> **Answers provided during Prime Minister's Questions**, Hansard, September 2022
- <sup>11</sup> **Child of the North: Building a fairer future after Covid-19**, Northern Health Science Alliance and N8 Research Partnership, December 2021
- <sup>12</sup> **Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2020/21**, Juliet Stone (Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University) for End Child Poverty, July 2022
- <sup>13</sup> **Poverty in the UK: statistics**, House of Commons Library, April 2022
- <sup>14</sup> **UK Poverty 2022: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK**, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, January 2022
- <sup>15</sup> **1 in 5 key worker households have children living in poverty**, TUC, August 2022
- <sup>16</sup> **Employee jobs paid below the Living Wage: 2021**, Living Wage Foundation, November 2021
- <sup>17</sup> **Average earnings by age and region**, House of Commons Library, November 2021
- <sup>18</sup> **Briefing for civil society organisations: child poverty measurements and targets**, CPAG, February 2021
- <sup>19</sup> **Oral evidence: Children in poverty: measurement and targets, HC 188**, Work and Pensions Committee, June 2021
- <sup>20</sup> **Labour market statistics: UK regions and countries**, House of Commons Library, May 2021
- <sup>21</sup> **Unemployment rate by sex, age, educational attainment level and NUTS 2 regions**, Eurostat, 2021
- <sup>22</sup> **Regional labour market statistics: H100 Headline indicators for UK regions and countries**, Office for National Statistics, 2022
- <sup>23</sup> Analysis undertaken by Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) using **Households Below Average Income 2017-20**
- <sup>24</sup> **Going without: deepening poverty in the UK**, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 2022
- <sup>25</sup> **The UK Insecure Work Index: Two decades of insecurity**, The Work Foundation, Lancaster University, May 2022
- <sup>26</sup> CPAG calculations from **Households Below Average Income 1994/95 to 2019/20**, Department for Work and Pensions, 2021
- <sup>27</sup> CPAG calculations from **Households Below Average Income 1994/95 to 2019/20**, Department for Work and Pensions, 2021. Due to sample size constraints, this can only be calculated at the UK level
- <sup>28</sup> **Your Work, Your Way project**, CPAG
- <sup>29</sup> **Interim report: The Single Parent Employment Challenge – job losses and job seeking after the pandemic**, Gingerbread, March 2022
- <sup>30</sup> **Pre-pandemic relative poverty rate for children of lone parents almost double that for children living with two parents**, IFS, July 2022
- <sup>31</sup> **It takes a village: how to make all childhoods matter**, Little Village supported by JRF, April 2021
- <sup>32</sup> **Going without: deepening poverty in the UK**, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, July 2022
- <sup>33</sup> Analysis undertaken by JRF using **Households Below Average Income 2017-20**
- <sup>34</sup> Analysis undertaken by JRF using **Households Below Average Income 2017-20**
- <sup>35</sup> **The Living Standards Outlook 2022**, Resolution Foundation, March 2022
- <sup>36</sup> CPAG calculations from **Households Below Average Income 1994/95 to 2019/20**, Department for Work and Pensions, 2021. Due to sample size constraints, all of these calculations are at the UK level
- <sup>37</sup> **It takes a village: how to make all childhoods matter**, Little Village supported by JRF, April 2021
- <sup>38</sup> **The UK Insecure Work Index: Two decades of insecurity**, The Work Foundation, Lancaster University, May 2022
- <sup>39</sup> Analysis undertaken by JRF using **Households Below Average Income 2017-20**
- <sup>40</sup> Analysis undertaken by JRF using **Households Below Average Income 2017-20**

- <sup>41</sup> **Frequently Asked Questions on our Child Poverty Statistics**, End Child Poverty, July 2022
- <sup>42</sup> **Frequently Asked Questions on our Child Poverty Statistics**, End Child Poverty, July 2022
- <sup>43</sup> **Briefing for civil society organisations: child poverty measurements and targets**, CPAG, February 2021
- <sup>44</sup> **Department for Work and Pensions written evidence**, published by the Work and Pensions Committee, February 2021
- <sup>45</sup> **Most children in England 'a pay cheque away' from going without essentials like food**, Action for Children, April 2020
- <sup>46</sup> **Inflation hits 9% with poorest households facing even higher rates**, IFS, May 2022
- <sup>47</sup> **Tweet posted by Nicole Sykes** (Pro Bono Economics), 17 August 2022
- <sup>48</sup> **The price of purpose? Pay gaps in the charity sector**, Pro Bono Economics, August 2022
- <sup>49</sup> **Asylum statistics**, House of Commons Library, March 2022
- <sup>50</sup> See, for example, **Changing patterns of poverty in early childhood: The changing face of early childhood in the UK**, Nuffield Foundation, September 2021
- <sup>51</sup> **Child poverty and children entering care in England, 2015-20: a longitudinal ecological study at the local level**, Davara L Bennett, Daniela K Schlüter, Gabriella Melis, Paul Bywaters, Alex Alexiou, Ben Barr, Sophie Wickham, David Taylor-Robinson (published in *The Lancet Public Health*), June 2022
- <sup>52</sup> **North East Submission to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care**, North East Association of Directors of Children's Services, July 2021
- <sup>53</sup> **Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18 in the North East**, LG Inform, November 2021
- <sup>54</sup> **Children looked after in England including adoptions**, Department for Education, November 2021
- <sup>55</sup> **Kinship care: Financial Allowances Survey 2022**, Kinship, June 2022
- <sup>56</sup> **The prevalence and characteristics of children growing up with relatives in the UK – Briefing Paper 001**, Dinithi Wijedasa (Hadley Centre for Adoption & Foster Care Studies, University of Bristol), October 2015
- <sup>57</sup> **Social work, poverty and child welfare interventions**, Kate Morris, Will Mason, Paul Bywaters, Brid Featherstone, Brigid Daniel, Geraldine Brady, Lisa Bunting, Jade Hooper, Nughmana Mirza, Jonathan Scourfield, Calum Webb (published in *Child & Family Social Work*), January 2018
- <sup>58</sup> **Teesside mum risked tragedy to keep baby warm as she couldn't afford to heat her home**, Teesside Live, 10 December 2021
- <sup>59</sup> **Destitution in the UK 2020**, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, December 2020
- <sup>60</sup> **Government launches £500m support for vulnerable households over winter**, UK Government press release, 30 September 2021 and **Household Support Fund doubled to help most vulnerable tackle cost of living**, UK Government press release, 31 March 2022
- <sup>61</sup> **Nearly 2 million children living in households with Universal Credit deductions**, North East Child Poverty Commission and CPAG, April 2022
- <sup>62</sup> **Most children in England 'a pay cheque away' from going without essentials like food**, Action for Children, April 2020
- <sup>63</sup> **Benefit sanctions statistics to April 2022 (experimental)**, Department for Work and Pensions, August 2022
- <sup>64</sup> NECPC analysis of UC sanctions decisions data available at <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>
- <sup>65</sup> **DWP Minister's answer to written parliamentary question**, Hansard, June 2022
- <sup>66</sup> **New analysis: Families hit by two-child limit face additional £900-plus shortfall this year as costs spiral**, CPAG, April 2022
- <sup>67</sup> **Over 15,000 North East families now caught by two-child limit**, North East Child Poverty Commission, July 2022
- <sup>68</sup> NECPC analysis of benefit cap data available at <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>
- <sup>69</sup> **2021 Budget Representation**, CPAG, January 2021
- <sup>70</sup> **Families' early experiences of pre-paid cards under Healthy Start: Yet another barrier to entitlement?**, Northumbria University and Feeding Britain, February 2022 and **The bungled digitisation of Healthy Start is hampering low income families' access to healthy food**, Margaret Anne Defeyter, Marion Hetherington, Mike McKean, Andrew Forsey (published in *BMJ Opinion*), June 2022
- <sup>71</sup> **DHSC Minister's answer to written parliamentary question**, Hansard, July 2022
- <sup>72</sup> **Disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds 'locked out' of crucial early years opportunities**, The Sutton Trust, August 2021
- <sup>73</sup> **North Yorkshire couple launch new charity to help struggling families afford nursery fees**, ITV Tyne Tees, 17 August 2022
- <sup>74</sup> See for example, **Mums on a Mission go to Parliament to #MakeChildcareWork: Vikki's story**, Save the Children, August 2019
- <sup>75</sup> **Keynote Chapter: The North's Private Rented Sector**, Northern Housing Consortium, August 2022
- <sup>76</sup> **Child of the North: Building a fairer future after Covid-19**, Northern Health Science Alliance and N8 Research Partnership, December 2021
- <sup>77</sup> **Child of the North: Building a fairer future after Covid-19**, Northern Health Science Alliance and N8 Research Partnership, December 2021
- <sup>78</sup> **Parenting services under pressure: unequal access to early years support in England**, Action for Children, August 2022 and **Levelling up for Under 5's: North East families 'missing out'**, The Northern Echo, 23 August 2022