



Department  
for Education

# **Fostering Recruitment and Retention programme**

**Application guide**

**May 2023**

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Programme objectives and design.....	5
Recruitment Support Hub .....	5
LA cluster groups will be expected to: .....	6
Communications Campaign .....	6
Retention .....	7
LA cluster groups will be expected to: .....	7
Proposed Outcomes .....	8
Funding and eligibility .....	10
Delivery requirements and available funding.....	10
Mockingbird Funding .....	11
Recruitment Support Hub Funding .....	11
Who can submit an EOI? .....	13
The Application Process .....	14
How to apply .....	14
Completing your application .....	14
Evaluation and Selection: .....	19

## Executive Summary

Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. Last year, three independent reviews looked at the changes that are needed to achieve this<sup>1</sup>. Between them they looked at the full breadth of children's social care and heard from thousands of people with lived experience of these services or who work in them. Both the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) and [Competition and Markets Authority review into Children's Social Care](#) have called for urgent action to recruit more foster carers. We recognise the urgent need to change the way local authorities (LAs) recruit and retain foster carers.

We have pledged to put love, relationships, and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care. When care is the best choice for a child, it is critical that the care system provides stable, loving homes close to children's communities. Homes that provide consistency, stability and warmth. To start changing the way we provide stable, loving homes for children in care, over the next two years the government has pledged to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme so foster care is available for more children who need it, investing over £27 million over the next two years. This will boost approvals of foster carers in areas of specific shortage, as well as addressing retention through better support to existing foster carers.

The programme is designed to deliver end-to-end improvements that support boosting foster carer numbers: starting with attracting new leads to and expanded support offer to those already fostering. The programme includes:

- A recruitment support hub to provide information about fostering and support alongside the assessment and approval process to maximise the number of people who take forward a fostering application
- A marketing campaign to attract new foster carers
- Roll out of Mockingbird - an evidence-based programme across the region to support retention of foster carers

All three strands will be delivered on a footprint covering a self-selected group of LAs, with precise boundaries to be determined through the application process. The programme aims to boost fostering capacity and build an evidence base on how to effectively recruit and retain foster carers. Delivering a regional programme for fostering recruitment and retention signals the first step in moving the system to deliver care for

---

<sup>1</sup> The three reviews are; The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the National Review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Competition and Markets Authority study into Children's Social Care placements.

children in a regional model. We intend to build capacity at regional level and improve our understanding of the challenges around this as well as what works.

Following an initial pathfinder in the North East, we want to work with more local authorities across England, working together in small groups referred to in this document as 'LA clusters', to deliver this programme more widely.

## Programme objectives and design

Our goal is to deliver end-to-end improvements in fostering, addressing key known weak points in the approval and application process, whilst including a significant retention programme. This work will be done on a regional basis.

We would like Local Authorities to work in self-selected cluster groups (LA clusters) to enable innovation across pre-existing relationships, and successful partnership working. We want to empower LAs to use existing relationships to deliver this programme quickly, ensuring support is delivered to foster carers and the children who depend on them.

As such, while we are setting parameters for the LA cluster groups, we are flexible. We anticipate cluster groups to have between 7 and 12 LAs, but this may vary depending on the number of Children in Care across the LA cluster-region.

Once a cluster group has been established, a lead LA should be named and will bid for the programme funding.

The fostering recruitment and retention programme will consist of three core elements; a recruitment support hub, a communications campaign, and Mockingbird. Our expectation is that the recruitment support hub and communications campaign would be co-designed with the LA cluster and therefore adapted to fit local need.

## Recruitment Support Hub

The aim of the recruitment support hub is to redesign the prospective foster carers journey from initial enquiry through to application. No statutory duties will be transferred to the lead LA, so the fostering panel will continue assess suitability of the prospective foster carer and then approval will be made by the fostering service provider. The hub will be a centrally run front door across the LA cluster which will act as the first point of contact for prospective carers making an enquiry. Prospective foster carers will benefit from a responsive and dedicated initial information and support service following enquiry to help with their decision about whether to proceed, before being handed on to individual LAs who will continue to take forward assessment and approval. Prospective foster carers can continue to access ongoing support alongside preparation and assessment. The nature of support may vary but our expectation is that it would include a dedicated point of contact for those enquiring to foster, providing timely, accurate and sensitive information about fostering and, ongoing emotional and practical advice on the nature and impact of the approval process. This may include experienced foster carers, either acting as part of the support hub or who the support hub refers onto. Delivery models for the hub may vary depending on local need, but we anticipate that it may be hosted in the Lead LA on behalf of the LA cluster, with prospective foster carers being warmly welcomed and, when ready, given a warm handover to their LA.

Individual LAs will continue to be responsible for preparation, assessment and approval of foster carers. However, our expectation is that LAs within the cluster will standardise their processes to provide a consistent experience, informed by best practice within the cluster and wider evidence on effective approaches to maximising conversion of suitable candidates. Any practice must also be in line with the NMS for Fostering (Standard 13) and also Statutory Guidance. Additionally, LAs within the cluster should harmonise their financial and support offer to prospective carers.

The recruitment support hub is expected should be operational between April and May 2024.

DfE will put in place a delivery partner to support this strand of work who will offer support and challenge as well as provide expertise in change management and specific technical support that LAs may require to deliver this work, such as IT and data systems.

### **LA cluster groups will be expected to:**

- Work with a DfE appointed Delivery Partner who will provide high level coaching support and challenge;
- Appoint a programme manager to deliver this programme;
- Set up, staff and manage a 'regionalised' recruitment support hub to provide initial and ongoing support to prospective foster carers from initial enquiry through to application;
- Work across the cluster to standardise the process for preparation, assessment and approval of foster carers in individual LAs, learning from best practice;
- Develop an offer that will standardise the 'package' for foster carers across the LA Cluster, including an agreed formula for calculating fees and benefits, and agreeing standard terms and conditions that are in line with National Minimum Allowances published by DfE;
- Monitor and track applications from initial enquiry through to application, gathering data and information on those who do not complete application; and
- Undertake new reporting on key measures set by the DfE, including the development of a new/ existing tool to track initial enquiries through to application across the LA cluster.
- Work towards this model becoming a long-term sustainable and viable 'front door' for the LA cluster group.

### **Communications Campaign**

Subject to approvals, we anticipate running a centrally funded and managed communications within the LA cluster, working closely with regional leads to determine the specific focus and links to the wider programme. Communications will direct prospective carers into the recruitment support hub. We are seeking to recruit and retain

more foster carers where there are particular shortages. Depending on local need, this may include sibling groups, teenagers, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, other children who have suffered complex trauma or parent and child foster homes. Communications will be tailored to ensure they are targeted to local need.

Communications activity will be dependent on the hub being operational. We anticipate a communications campaign would run when the recruitment support hub is operational.

LA cluster groups will be expected to:

- Work with the communications agency to communicate user journey once hub is underway and establish the local focus for the campaign; and
- Use the regionalised recruitment campaign work in all their fostering material. This can be used alongside existing communications material and does not need to replace existing successful approaches.

## Retention

To enhance the offer to existing carers, and to prospective carers enquiring about fostering, DfE will fund the expansion of the [Mockingbird Family model](#). Mockingbird is an innovative approach to strengthening the delivery of foster care, matching 6-10 satellite families grouped into a constellation around a hub home carer. The hub home provides sleepovers and short breaks, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. The hub carer builds relationships with all those in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown.

DfE will fund the expansion of the Mockingbird programme for all LAs within each cluster who wish to take this forward. Funding will include The Fostering Network fees (the license holders for Mockingbird) for LAs not already partnered with them to deliver the Mockingbird model, together with LA fees for establishing a first constellation. For LAs partnered with Mockingbird, funding will cover LA fees for an additional constellation.

### LA cluster groups will be expected to:

- Work in partnership with The Fostering Network to implement or extend Mockingbird; and
- Report on progress to DfE.
- Meet the ongoing costs for Mockingbird when the funding period has finished.

## Proposed Outcomes

The objectives of this programme are to deliver end-to-end improvements in the experience of prospective and registered foster carers, and to boost the numbers of foster carers registered with LAs and Children's Trusts. The proposed outcomes are:

- **To improve the experience of children in care** by ensuring there are more foster carers for children who need them. The programme will focus on recruiting carers where there are areas of shortage, creating good matches in children's own communities.
- **To increase the number of foster carers who are successfully recruited by their Local Authority.** The support hub will redesign the application process, in so far as is possible within the existing regulatory framework, addressing points in the system where numbers of prospective foster carers leave the application and approval process. We will work with successful clusters to set realistic but ambitious targets for enquiries through to approvals.
- **To reduce the number of foster carers who de-register.** The support hub will ensure foster carers entering the system are better prepared and less likely to deregister, tackling the high rates of deregistration within the first two years of approval.<sup>2</sup> Mockingbird family support model will be used to provide support for foster carers, reducing de-registrations. As referenced in the evaluation, households in the model were 82% less likely to de-register than households who did not participate.<sup>3</sup>
- **To increase placement stability for children in care.** The benefits of having more foster carers in the system, who are better supported, will lead to increased placement stability as LAs will be able to form stronger matches between child and placement, and foster carers will be less likely to de-register.
- **Deliver cost savings for LAs.** By expanding the pool of local authorities foster carers, we intend to create cost savings for LAs who will have access to foster homes for children who need them.

---

<sup>2</sup> 31% of deregistration's of LA carers were within 2 years of approval. [Fostering in England 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933119/Fostering_Network_Mockingbird.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/933119/Fostering\\_Network\\_Mockingbird.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933119/Fostering_Network_Mockingbird.pdf)



- **To support implementation of Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs).**

Delivering a regional programme for fostering recruitment and retention signals the first step in moving the system to deliver care for children in a regional model. We intend to build capacity at regional level and improve our understanding of the challenges around this as well as what works.

# Funding and eligibility

## Delivery requirements and available funding

In the financial year 2023 - 24, LAs will commit to

- Appointing a programme manager to deliver this programme;
- Setting up, staff and manage a 'regionalised' recruitment support hub, to provide initial and ongoing support to prospective foster carers from initial enquiry through to application;
- Working across the cluster to standardise the process for preparation, assessment and approval of foster carers in individual LAs, learning from best practice;
- Developing an offer that will standardise the 'package' for foster carers across the LA cluster, including an agreed formular for calculating fees and benefits, and agreeing standard terms and conditions; and
- Undertaking new reporting on key measures set by the DfE, including the development of a new/ existing tool to track initial enquiries through to application across the LA cluster.

In the financial year 2024 - 25 LAs will commit to

- Working with the communications agency to communicate user journey once the recruitment support hub is underway and establish the local focus for the campaign;
- Using the regionalised recruitment campaign work in all their fostering material. This can be used alongside existing communications material and does not need to replace existing successful approaches; and
- Monitoring and tracking applications from initial enquiry through to application, gathering data and information on those who do not complete application.

Across both years LAs will commit to

- Working with a DfE appointed Delivery Partner who will provide high level coaching support and challenge.

LAs who wish to take forward Mockingbird will also commit to:

- Working in partnership with The Fostering Network to implement or extend Mockingbird; and
- Reporting on progress delivering Mockingbird to DfE.

Funding will depend on the specific LAs and Trusts within the cluster. It will comprise of two elements.

## **Mockingbird Funding**

The Mockingbird Family Model is an approach to supporting foster carers and children and young people placed with them, which brings together clusters of between 6 and 10 'satellite homes' to form a 'constellation'. The constellation is supported by 'hub carers' who provide a range of support to the adults and young people within the constellation. This programme has already been implemented in a large number of locations and has received substantial funding from the Department through Round One and Round Two of the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, the Covid Recovery Fund, and the Supporting Families: Investing in Practice programme.

Required services would include:

- A lead LA to oversee the process of cluster members partnering with Mockingbird, or expanding their Mockingbird programme, including distribution of funding to individual LAs and The Fostering Network.
- LAs not already partnered with Mockingbird to become The Fostering Network partners, accredited to deliver the programme, and rolling out a first constellation.
- LAs already partnered with Mockingbird to expand their provision with the addition of a new constellation.

The DfE will cover the full fees for phases one and two for any LAs or trusts not partnered with The Fostering Network. For LAs with pre-existing Mockingbird constellations, the DfE will fund the cost of adding an additional constellation. We will not cover outstanding fees due to LAs who have an existing relationship with the Fostering Network prior to joining the programme. The fee structure and funding detail is set out in Annex C.

Funding will be issued under section 14 of the Education Act 2002. Funding will be paid in arrears based on delivery against the agreed terms and payments and will be staged throughout the length of the programme, subject to the provisions of the DfE General Grant Terms and Conditions.

LAs and Trusts will be expected to meet the ongoing costs for running constellations as well as ongoing "community package" fees for the Fostering Network.

## **Recruitment Support Hub Funding**

Regional clusters will be able to bid for funding up to a maximum amount. This maximum amount will be shared through application stage 2. This funding should be used to pay for the set up and staffing of the recruitment support hub. The DfE will fund the cost of a delivery partner to support this work.

Funding will be issued to the lead LA or Trust on behalf of the cluster under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

The **regional support** hub would require:

- The nominated lead LA to deliver the development and delivery of the recruitment support hub.
- Lead LA to convene and oversee activity across the cluster to harmonise terms and conditions and identify targeting for the recruitment programme. Set up, staff and manage a 'regionalised' recruitment hub, comprising of a website and data collection platform and central phone line that the communications for fostering in the cluster will feed in to. The LAs should agree on a standard script to be used when dealing with initial enquiries and supporting prospective foster carers. This will manage prospective foster carers from initial enquiry through to application.
- Appointment of a regional fostering programme manager to be accountable to the lead LAs DCS.
- Regular participation at an appropriate level in programme management.
- Legal framework / partnership agreement to establish regional working.
- Agreement of a business plan, budget and funding formula.
- Undertake new reporting on key measures set by the DfE, including the development of a new/ existing tool to track initial enquiries through to application across the LA Cluster.
- Monitor and track applications from initial enquiry through to application, gathering data and information on those who do not complete application.

A collaborative and iterative process will be crucial to ensure each cluster designs an approach that specifically targets their own sufficiency pressures.

To release funding via a s31 grant there will be a MOU in place with the following expectations:

- 1) Funding will be released annually.
- 2) The regional programme manager and the delivery partner will report regularly to the DfE including financial updates.
- 3) We will ask the Lead DCS to provide an annual report detailing expenditure.

Regional partnership working will be arranged through a legal partnership agreement, in which there is no hard transfer of staff or budgets.

LAs and Trusts will be expected to work towards this model becoming a long-term sustainable and viable 'front door' for the LA cluster group.

## Who can submit an EOI?

The programme is open to Local Authorities and Children's Trusts.

Applications should be made on behalf of self-selected cluster groups by a lead LA or Children's Trust.

LAs and Trusts can only be named in one EOI application.

**Applicant Lead LAs and Trusts:** Please articulate why you believe you have the capacity and capability to lead. This should include any strategies to mitigate any anticipated risks.

**LAs and Trusts within the cluster must meeting the following criteria:**

### Essential

- All LAs included in the cluster to have a signed partnership agreement in development.
- To be geographically connected.

### Desirable

- To have at least one LA with a current overall Ofsted inspection judgement of Requires Improvement or below.
- Synergy with existing regional and sub-regional footprints.

# The Application Process

## How to apply

The application period for will open from 26<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and will close at midday on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. The DfE must receive all completed applications by email by the deadline and will not be able to consider applications that miss this deadline. Key dates and deadlines for the application process are set out in the table below.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Expression of Interest (EOI) launched	24 <sup>th</sup> May 2023
EOI opens	26 <sup>th</sup> May 2023
Application Stage 1 and initial meet with DfE	By 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2023
Feedback from stage 1:	By 7 <sup>th</sup> July 2023
Application Stage 2 complete	By 1 <sup>st</sup> September 2023
EOI closes	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2023
Assessment of EOI applications	W/C 4 <sup>th</sup> September 2023
Decisions announced	Early October 2023
Proposed payment date for S31 Grant	13 <sup>th</sup> October 2023
Application for S31 funding 2024 – 2025	Complete by 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2024
Proposed payment date for S31 Grant 24/25	June 2024
Funding period ends	March 2025

## Completing your application

Please complete the accompanying EOI application form. Further information and prompts have been provided for each question.

We have decided to complete this application in two stages with the aim of making it as supportive and accessible as possible.

Some sections will require accompanying text to support your response and have stated word limits. Please ensure that you adhere to these, as your response beyond the word limit will not be considered. Please include the total number of words for each section at the bottom of each text box.

**All sections are mandatory and must be completed for your application to be accepted.**

**Application Stage 1: Deadline to be completed by: 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

**Light touch EOI: to be completed by the proposed Lead LA.**

**1) Cluster Group Arrangements:**

A) Please list the LAs and Children’s Trusts that will form your cluster group into a table as below:

LA or Children’s Trust	No. Of CLA in LA	Mockingbird in LA?	Overall Ofsted Judgement of LA

B) Are these LAs all geographically connected? Y/N? If no, please explain why.

C) Does this area have synergy with any pre-existing footprint? Y/N? Please provide details.

2) Please include a copy of a working partnership agreement or a copy of your formal agreement if one is already in place.

3) Applicant Lead LAs and Trusts: Please book an interview with the DfE to discuss your capacity and capability to lead. Please submit your responses to questions 1 and 2 before the meeting. **Meetings can be scheduled from 12/06/23 until 30/06/23.** Please contact [fostering.programme@education.gov.uk](mailto:fostering.programme@education.gov.uk) providing us with up to three available 1-hour slots in your diary and we will schedule a meeting with you.

**Application Stage 2: Deadline to be completed by 1st September 2023**

For stage 2, we are asking cluster groups to work with our appointed delivery partner to develop a fully costed proposal and implementation plan for this project.

### **Question 1) Regional Working**

**Word count: 1200 words. Weighting 30%**

**A key part of this programme is the ability to work on a regional basis, including working towards a harmonisation of the offer to foster carers in your LA Cluster.**

Please include a copy of your working or final partnership agreement with all LAs in your proposed cluster group.

Please articulate how you will approach regional working on this project. This could include examples of previous work done on a regional basis as well as strategies to mitigate anticipated risks.

Your response should:

- Provide previous examples of successful partnership working within the LA cluster group.
- Articulate your vision for a regional approach to fostering, including considerations of how the communications campaign and the recruitment support hub will work in your LA cluster. This should also consider how you intend to approach working towards a harmonisation of your offer to foster carers.
- Consider your strategies for mitigating anticipated risks within your LA cluster.

### **Response and Attachment requirements:**

You may embed diagrams/charts to support your response. Any text included in diagrams/charts will be included in the word count for this question.

Please include your signed partnership agreement as an attachment. This will not count towards your word count.

### **Question 2) Implementation Plan**

**Word count: 2500 words. Weighting 50%**

**This programme includes three overarching strands of work, but the key focus for the Lead LA will be the work on the regional recruitment support hub and harmonisation of foster carer terms and conditions.**

Please provide a detailed implementation plan outlining key activities, including associated timescales, milestones, key tasks and the roles of those responsible for key activity. (Milestones and policy document attached as Annex A and B).



You should also include a risk register, highlighting the key risks, barriers and challenges associated with this programme and how these will be mitigated.

Your response should:

- Demonstrate your approach and vision, including how you intend to engage foster carers and care experienced people in your model.
- Include a clear articulation of the resources and staff needed to deliver this programme.
- Demonstrate how you anticipate collecting performance data across the LAs in your cluster.
- Develop key measures of success and performance indicators for your programme of work.

### **Response and Attachment Requirements:**

You may embed diagrams/charts to support your response. Any text included in diagrams/charts will be included in the word count for this question.

**Your risk register can be provided as a single separate attachment in either Excel or PDF format and will not count towards the word limit for this question.**

### **Question 3) Costings.**

**Word count: 1000 words. Weighted 20%**

**This work will be funded by the DfE and funding will be delivered via two grants. S31 will fund the regional support hub work and S14 will fund Mockingbird.**

#### **Mockingbird:**

With reference to the detailed Mockingbird costings in Annex B, please detail your funding requirements for Mockingbird.

#### **Recruitment Support Hub:**

Each successful LA cluster will receive funding to set up and run a recruitment support hub. Funding is indicative and will be discussed in detail following the outcome of application stage 1. This funding will cover the cost of this programme to the Lead LA, as well as fund new staffing requirements. With reference to your roles listed in the implementation plan in Q2, please provide a proposed costing breakdown for delivery of this programme of the roles you anticipate you will need to deliver this programme.

The breakdown should show the split between financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25, and we anticipate the majority of your costs will be weighted towards this current financial year (2023-24) due to the intensive set-up period of October 2023 – March 2024.

Below is an illustrative example of the roles that may be needed, with some example costs included as a benchmark. We understand there will be regional variation to these costs and these are therefore provided as an example only.

We will require clusters to consider the resource needed in their own regional cluster group to set up and then implement activity. We anticipate cost breakdowns to be weighted in favour of this current financial year as set-up activity will be intensive from October 2023 – April 2024.

Role	Requirement	Anticipated cost 23/24	Anticipated cost 24/25
Programme Manager	1 full time programme manager	£54, 000	
IT support / systems manager	IT support to develop a 'front door' and implement a data management system across LAs in the cluster.	£60, 000	
Project Support	1 full time project officer	£34, 000	
Service Development Officer (Social Worker)	1 part time supervising social worker	£58, 000	

**Response and Attachment Requirements:**

Please provide a full costed breakdown of the programme of work. You may embed diagrams/charts to support your response. You may include text to explain your costings.

## Evaluation and Selection:

### Stage 1:

Interviews in stage 1 will have set questions and responses will be scored by a DfE evaluation team consisting of the delivery team. Questions will be consistent across each interested LA cluster and will focus on the Lead LAs capacity and capability to lead this programme of work. Questions will be scored using the scoring scale below and feedback will be provided.

Other criteria will be taken into consideration following stage 1:

- Does the cluster group meet the desirable criteria in the EOI Y/N
- Does the cluster group have a partnership agreement in place Y/N

**Successful applicants at stage 1 will be invited to apply for stage 2. This has been designed to minimise the burden on LAs. Final numbers of LA clusters selected to progress to stage 2 will be determined at the Department's discretion. If an LA cluster scores below 3 in any of the interview questions they will be automatically withdrawn. Desirable criteria will be used to make a decision in the case of high number of applicants. LA cluster groups who meet the minimum criteria but are not invited to progress their application will be held on a reserve list.**

**At stage 2, each prospective cluster group will be able to work with the appointed delivery partner to develop their application.**

### Stage 2:

Bids will be evaluated by a team in the DfE which will include analysts and delivery teams. Responses to the questions in stage 2 will be scored using the scoring scale against the criteria and weightings.

### Scoring scale for stage 1 and stage 2:

Score	Acceptability	Scoring rationale
5	Excellent	The response demonstrates that the Potential LA cluster possess the relevant ability, understanding, skills, resource and quality measures required to meet the Department requirements in full. The answer also identifies some recognisable additional benefits (relevant and proportionate to the question) such that the Potential LA cluster demonstrates that it will not only meet but also exceed the Department requirements. Full evidence provided to support the response, including any requested supporting documentation
4	Good	The response demonstrates that the Potential LA cluster possess the relevant ability, understanding, skills, resource and quality measures required to meet the Department's requirements in full. Full evidence provided to support the response, including any requested supporting documentation.

3	Acceptable	The response demonstrates that the Potential LA cluster possess most of the relevant ability, understanding, skills, resource and quality measures required to meet most of the Department's requirements but with minor omissions. Adequate evidence provided to support the response, including any requested supporting documentation.
2	Major Omissions	The response demonstrates that the Potential LA cluster possess some of the relevant ability, understanding, skills, resource and quality measures required to meet some of the Department's requirements but with major omissions. Partial evidence provided to support the response, including any requested supporting documentation
1	Unacceptable	The answer does not demonstrate that the Potential LA cluster possesses the relevant ability, flexibility, understanding, skills, resource and quality measures required to meet the Department's requirements. Inadequate evidence provided to support the response and requested supporting documentation may be missing
0	No answer provided	No answer provided

Evaluators will have the scope to use their own judgement and discretion when awarding scores under each evaluation criteria heading, and they should make appropriate notes to validate all scores awarded.

In general terms, higher scores will be awarded when the evidence provided demonstrates and provides high confidence in reliable delivery of the programme of work. Lower scores will be given when the evidence provided does not demonstrate and/or provide confidence in reliable delivery of the programme as specified.

## Annex A:

### Outline Project Plan:

Date:	Milestone:	Output:
26 <sup>th</sup> May 2023	EOI Launched	EOI to be sent to LAs and Children's Trusts
July 2023	Delivery Partner contract awarded	Delivery Partner available to work with interested regions to develop a detailed implementation plan.
September 2023	EOI closes	Successful regions selected following evaluation.
October 2023	Clusters awarded funding	Formal clearance to award received and grant agreements signed
October 2023 – April 2024	Co-design and set up phase of recruitment support hub	Including regional collaboration, staffing and website building.
April – May 2024	Recruitment Support Hub operational	Recruitment support hub functional, including landing page live, and support staff in place.
May – September 2024	Communications campaign live (subject to Cabinet Office approval for comms spend)	Communications campaign live and directing to support hub
October 2024	First Mockingbird constellations in operation	New or additional constellations to be ready to launch.
March 2025	End of funded set up period.	LAs to meet ongoing funding.

## **Annexe B: Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme: Policy Overview**

There is rising pressure on the sufficiency of available foster homes, with the number of mainstream places decreasing by 5% whilst the number of children living in care has increased by 9% in the same period.

Both the Independent Care Review and the CMA report highlight the urgent need to increase capacity in fostering. In the Government's response, *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, the government pledged to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme so that foster care is available for more children who need it.

The Department for Education is looking for a delivery partner to provide support and challenge for local authorities as they work together in self-selected 'cluster' groups to deliver this ambitious programme on a regional basis.

While the whole programme contains three, interconnected strands, the role of the delivery partner will be to support LA leaders to implement a regional fostering service by implementing a recruitment support hub. The aim of the recruitment support hub is to improve the journey from enquiry to application (where there are known and significant drop-off points), as well as establishing a regional approach to fostering recruitment work.

This programme will include the following:

- **1) Recruitment Support Hub**

*The recruitment hub is to redesign the prospective foster carers journey from initial enquiry through to application. No statutory duties will be transferred to the Lead LA, so the fostering panel will continue assess suitability of the prospective foster carer and then approval will be made by the fostering service provider. Foster carers will be provided support following enquiry to help with their decision about whether to proceed, and access ongoing support alongside preparation and assessment, which will continue to be taken forward by individual LAs. The nature of support may vary but our expectation is that it would include a dedicated point of contact for those enquiring to foster, providing timely, accurate and sensitive information about fostering and, ongoing emotional and practical advice on the nature and impact of the approval process. This may include experience foster carers, either acting as part of the support hub or who the support hub refer onto. Individual LAs will continue to be responsible for preparation, assessment and approval of foster carers.*

LA cluster groups will be expected to:

- Work with a DfE appointed Delivery Partner
- Set up, staff and manage a 'regionalised' recruitment hub, comprising of a website and central phone line that the communications for fostering in the cluster will feed in to. This will manage prospective foster carers from initial enquiry through to application.
- Undertake new reporting on key measures set by the DfE, including the development of a new or existing tool to track initial enquiries through to application across the LA cluster.

- Offer (or work towards offering) a standardised 'package' for foster carers across the region, including an agreed formular for calculating fees and benefits, and agreeing standard terms and conditions.
- Agree on a standard script to be used when dealing with initial enquiries and supporting prospective foster carers.
- Monitor and track applications from initial enquiry through to application, gathering data and information on those who do not complete application.
- Meet the ongoing costs of the Recruitment Support Hub following the end of the funding period.

## **2) Communications campaign**

*Subject to approvals, we anticipate a regional communications campaign will direct interest to recruitment hubs. We anticipate DfE will manage this contract in close collaboration with the lead local authority, working with individual LAs and focus groups within each region to establish the local focus for the campaign.*

LA cluster groups will be expected to:

- Work with communications delivery partners to drive traffic to the regional support hub once operational
- Work with communications delivery partners to establish the local focus for any supportive communications campaign.
- Support the regionalised recruitment campaign work in all their fostering material by either adopting the regional campaign look and feel, regional call to action and/or by including the regional campaign logo.

## **3) Retention (Mockingbird)**

*Each LA in this programme will have the opportunity to implement a Mockingbird constellation, or extend their offering through an additional constellation. (we will not exclude LAs who wish to continue with their own retention programme, but this will not be funded).*

LA cluster groups will be expected to:

- Work in partnership with The Fostering Network to implement or extend Mockingbird.
- Meet the ongoing costs for Mockingbird following the end of the funded period.

## **Annex C: Mockingbird Costings**

### **Do you currently have Mockingbird within your LA?**

*N.b Each region may have a mix i.e. some local authorities may already have Mockingbird whilst others don't, the costs are calculated per local authority on an individual basis.*

**Yes** – You are entitled to apply for funding to cover the cost of an additional constellation. As the implementation fee is only for the first constellation, this does not include that nor any outstanding costs to The Fostering Network from your previous constellation. Please estimate the costs of adding an additional constellation in your region. This can include the cost of an additional hub home carer, and the additional cost of a liaison worker. We have asked one LA to estimate these costs for us as a benchmark. The estimated costs are around £41,000 for a second constellation (4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> etc), and £72,000 for a third constellation (5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> etc).

The cost variation is in recognition that there will be some initial set up costs and the liaison worker can work across 2 constellations, but their costs will always be factored into years 1, 3, 5 etc.

**No** – You may include the costs of implementation for Phase 1 and Phase 2 within your bid.

### **How much are the Phase 1 and Phase 2 costs?**

The costs vary but as a starting point, we can split them into 3 categories depending on your membership level of The Fostering Network (note – these costs exclude VAT which may be recoverable and if so, we would not expect VAT to be added to your bid. Your own finance team will be able to confirm if they are recoverable.)

#### **Full Membership of The Fostering Network**

If you are a full member of The Fostering Network the costs are set at £40,000 for Phase 1 and £20,000 for Phase 2. Full membership applies to LAs that hold both organisational membership and foster carer membership.

#### **Partial Membership of The Fostering Network**

The fees for partial members vary and are calculated based upon the number of fostering households within your local authority. Partial membership applies to LAs that hold either an organisational membership or foster carer membership. The table below shows the associated cost depending on the number of registered fostering households - which may contain one or more carers and may or may not have a child in placement.



Number of Fostering Households in LA	Implementation Package Fee	
	Phase 1	Phase 2
0-49	£40,000	£20,000
50-149	£48,000	£24,000
150-299	£56,000	£28,000
300-499	£64,000	£32,000
500+	£72,000	£36,000

### Not a Member of The Fostering Network

If you are not a current member of The Fostering Network, your rates will be calculated based on the number of registered fostering households within your local authority - which may contain one or more carers and may or may not have a child in placement. The table below shows the fees applicable.

Number of Fostering Households in LA	Implementation Package Fee	
	Phase 1	Phase 2
0-49	£60,000	£30,000
50-149	£70,000	£35,000
150-299	£80,000	£40,000
300-499	£90,000	£45,000
500+	£100,000	£50,000

A worked example is available below for reference.

### Example of Phase 1 and Phase 2 funding

Region A are submitting their bid which is made up of 5 local authorities. LA 1 will be the lead and LA 2, LA3, LA4 and LA5 all participating.

LAs 1 and 2 already have Mockingbird and therefore do not qualify for implementation funding.

LA 3 does not have Mockingbird so are eligible and as a full member of The Fostering Network pay a set fee of £40,000 for Year 1 and £20,000 for Year 2 which they can claim.

LA 4 does not have Mockingbird and is a partial member of The Foster Network. As they have 125 registered foster homes within their LA their fees are set at £48,000 for Year 1 and £24,000 in Year 2 which they can claim.

LA 5 does not have Mockingbird and are not a member of The Foster Network. As they have 79 registered foster homes in their region their fees are set at £70,000 for Year 1 and £35,000 for Year 2.

The total bid for this region for the implementation element only would therefore be £237,000.

Local Authority	Mockingbird Already?	Membership of The Fostering Network	Number of Registered Fostering Households in LA	Phase 1 Costs	Phase 2 Costs	Bid Amount for Implementation
1	Yes	Full	246	N/A	N/A	£0
2	Yes	Full	380	N/A	N/A	£0
3	No	Full	48	£40,000	£20,000	£60,000
4	No	Partial	125	£48,000	£24,000	£72,000
5	No	No	79	£70,000	£35,000	£105,000
<b>Total</b>						<b>£237,000</b>

### Example of New Constellation Funding

All LAs, regardless of whether they have Mockingbird or not are eligible to bid for the costs of establishing a new constellation.

As LA 1 and LA 2 both have one Mockingbird already, they would be increasing to two Mockingbirds and an example of their likely costs are below.

Constellation 2,4,6 etc	Local Authority					Bid Amount for Implementation
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>Project Management</b>	£5,000	£4,750	n/a	n/a	n/a	£9,750
<b>Hub Carer Fees</b>	£34,000	£32,500	n/a	n/a	n/a	£66,500
<b>Recruitment &amp; Liaison</b>	£1,200	£1,500	n/a	n/a	n/a	£2,700
<b>Supplies &amp; Services</b>	£6,000	£5,500	n/a	n/a	n/a	£11,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>£46,200</b>	<b>£44,250</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£90,450</b>

These costs are less than implementing a 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> etc constellation as the liaison worker can cover up to 2 constellations and will already be in place and paid for from the previous constellation along with some one-off costs.

The remaining LAs will all be implementing their first Mockingbird constellation and an example of their costs are below.

Constellation 1, 3, 5 etc	Local Authority					Bid Amount for Implementation
	1	2	3	4	5	
Item						
<b>Project Management</b>	n/a	n/a	£4,500	£2,500	£5,000	£12,000
<b>Hub Carer Fees</b>	n/a	n/a	£33,000	£30,000	£35,000	£98,000
<b>Recruitment &amp; Liaison</b>	n/a	n/a	£29,000	£30,000	£32,000	£91,000
<b>Supplies &amp; Services</b>	n/a	n/a	£5,000	£4,800	£5,500	£15,300
<b>Total</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£71,500</b>	<b>£67,300</b>	<b>£77,500</b>	<b>£216,300</b>

Overall, this regional cluster would be bidding for £543,750 for Mockingbird.



Department  
for Education

© Crown copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit [nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3).

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

About this publication:

enquiries [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](https://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

download [www.gov.uk/government/publications](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications)



Follow us on Twitter:  
[@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk)



Like us on Facebook:  
[facebook.com/educationgovuk](https://facebook.com/educationgovuk)