



Department
for Education

MUTUAL
VENTURES

Guide to Establishing Regional Fostering Recruitment Support Hubs

Version 2 – December 2024



Introduction

Fostering Recruitment Support Hubs are centrally-run recruitment services, working across groups of local authorities. They provide a single point of contact for people interested in fostering in a region, supporting them throughout the recruitment journey from initial enquiry to application.

The aim of hubs is to increase the number of local authority foster carers recruited and provide more loving homes for vulnerable children. They also build and maintain relationships with prospective foster carers even if they are not ready to foster at the point they enquire.

This guide provides a roadmap for establishing a hub, based on experience from the Department for Education's Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme. It is intended as a 'how to' guide and is not a statement of policy or an evaluation report.

This guide is designed for:

- **local authorities in the process of establishing a hub** – to help them navigate the process and understand all key considerations
- **local authorities that may want to establish a hub in the future** – to understand what is required and the process to get there
- **the wider local authority and children's sector** – to share learning from the process of setting up hubs, which may be transferrable for other regional working programmes

The Department for Education announced additional funding of £15 million in October 2024 to ensure all local authorities in England have access to a recruitment support hub. This is in addition to further funding for the nine recruitment support hubs that launched in 2024 to help these hubs become self-sustaining models.



DfE Fostering Recruitment & Retention Programme

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. There is a long-standing placement sufficiency problem in foster care and a need to recruit the right foster carers to support harder to place children, such as sibling groups or Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

The Government in 2022 to 2024 responded to the reports and published “Stable Homes, Built on Love”, the Department for Education made fostering a priority commitment and pledged to deliver the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme, investing £36 million from 2022 to 2025. The Department then announced an additional £15 million investment to ensure every local authority in England has access to a recruitment support hub.

The programme provides funding to local authorities to work in self-identifying, geographically linked ‘clusters’ to redesign the experience for prospective foster carers, improving the recruitment journey from initial enquiry through to application, with the aim of increasing the conversion rate between initial enquiry and application.

This aims to deliver end-to-end improvements across foster care, by encouraging more people to consider foster caring, boosting approvals of foster carers in areas of specific shortage, as well as addressing retention through funding of the evidence-based Mockingbird model.

Nine self-selected “clusters” of local authorities successfully bid to deliver the programme from October 2023 to March 2025, alongside Foster with North East, the pathfinder for the project.

Programme elements:



1. A Fostering Recruitment Support Hub which should cover the foster carers journey from initial enquiry through to application and be a centrally-run ‘front door’ to foster care recruitment across each local authority cluster. Prospective foster carers will benefit from a responsive and dedicated initial information and support service following an enquiry to help with their decision about whether to proceed, before high-quality prospective foster carers are handed over to individual LAs who will continue to take forward assessment and approval. The development of recruitment support hubs is expected to increase the number of foster carers across a region. DfE also wants local authorities to standardise processes and explore working towards agreeing common terms and conditions.



2. A targeted foster care recruitment communications campaign to drive interest to Recruitment Support Hubs and boost the number of quality enquiries.



3. Roll out of the evidence-based ‘Mockingbird’ model to enhance the offer to new applicants and boost retention of existing carers. Local authorities will be funded to develop new Mockingbird “constellations”, based around building strong and supportive relationships among groups of foster carers and children in an area, empowering them to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate.

The benefits of a regional approach to foster care recruitment

Foster carers play a critical role in the care system, comprising 67% of placements for children.

But demand for foster carers is not keeping up with supply. Over the last five years, there has been a downward trend in the number of applications, coupled with a striking gap between those expressing interest and those going on to foster. This leaves us with a shortfall of carers – and not enough homes for children that need them.

Why move to regional working?

Working across a wider geographical footprint provides an opportunity to address some of the challenges faced by individual local authorities, and benefit from doing things at scale. Establishing a regional fostering recruitment support hub means local authorities have a **greater ability to offer a focused, specialist service** – one that is able to give its full attention to and champion prospective foster carers.

Acting together, local authorities can **think differently about recruitment**. Feedback suggest that prospective foster carers are not always getting the dedicated support needed to encourage them to make it to the end of the journey and foster a child. Local authorities can **redesign the process to address points of weakness**,

including making sure prospective foster carers feel supported and that all enquiries are treated in an authentic, respectful and compassionate way.

A coordinated regional campaign can allow local authorities to target particular sufficiency issues and new types of foster carers to address need.

Cooperating across a region also provides opportunity to **share learning, expertise and skills**. The strengths of one local authority can be complemented by the strengths of others, for example, in sharing experience recruiting specialist foster carers or commissioning support for families.

Local authorities should also be able to identify **clear financial benefits**. More foster carers will reduce their need to buy high-cost residential placements – with a single avoided placement saving potentially thousands of pounds – making a strong business case for investment. **Economies of scale** may be found in back office and support services.

Ultimately, the benefits of a more effective approach to recruiting foster carers should be experienced by children, **with more loving homes in their own communities when they need them**.

Objectives of the DfE's Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme:

- To improve the experience of children in care by ensuring there are more foster carers, and good matches in children's own communities
- To increase the number of foster carers successfully recruited, by redesigning the recruitment processes, and addressing points of weakness
- To reduce the number of foster carers who de-register. Foster carers entering the system can be better prepared, tackling the high rates of drop-out within the first two years.
- To increase placement suitability. Having more foster carers, who are better supported will mean local authorities will be able to form stronger matches between child and placement.
- To deliver cost savings for local authorities. By expanding the pool of local authority foster carers, it will reduce dependency on higher-cost alternative placements.

Purpose

This guide provides a roadmap for establishing a Regional Fostering Recruitment Support Hub, drawing insights from the experiences gained through the Department for Education’s Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme. It is structured in four stages: Define, Design, Implement and Go Live.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is designed for:

- **local authorities in the process of establishing a hub** – to help them navigate the process and understand all key considerations
- **local authorities that may want to establish a hub in the future** – to understand what is required and the process to get there
- **the wider local authority and children’s sector** – to share learning from the process of setting up hubs, which may be transferrable for other regional working programmes



Links to Resources

Throughout this document, you will find links to useful resources, including tools and templates. Click on the [title](#) to access these.



Cluster Examples

This guide contains examples from the ten local authority clusters participating in the Department for Education’s Fostering Recruitment & Retention Programme.

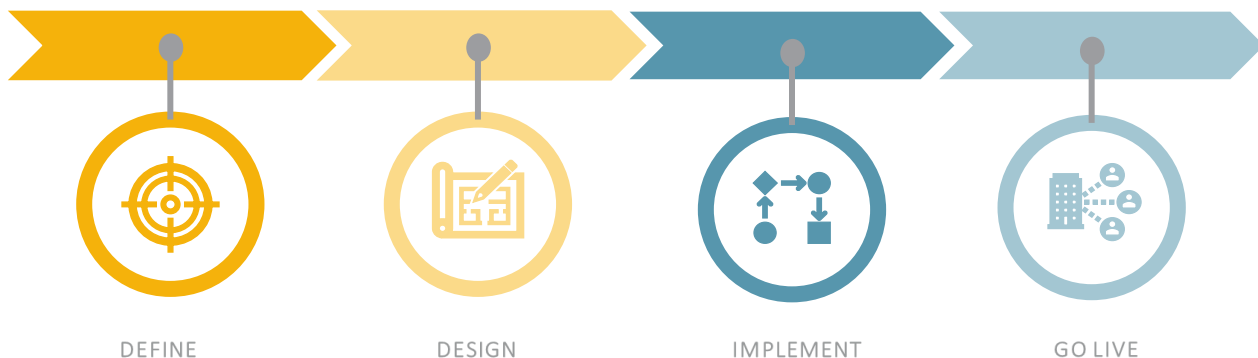


Learning

At end of each of the four stages of set-up described in this report, we provide a summary of key learnings from the first year of delivery.

Contents:

The four stages of setting up a Fostering Recruitment Hub



DEFINE

- 1.1 Understanding your Fostering Recruitment & Retention Needs
- 1.2 Defining Partnerships
- 1.3 Vision
- 1.4 Leadership
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- 1.6 Working Arrangements
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DESIGN

- 2.1 Hub Design
- 2.2 User Journey Mapping
- 2.3 Staffing
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IMPLEMENT

- 3.1 Managing Risks & Change
- 3.2 Project Communications
- 3.3 External hub communications and marketing
- 3.4 Monitoring & Tracking Performance
- 3.5 Managing Your Data

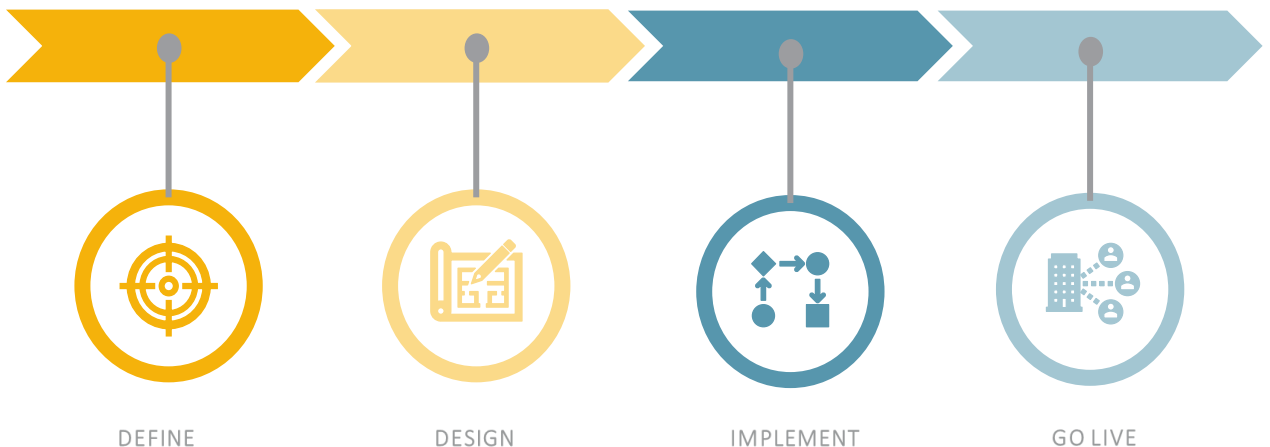
GO LIVE

- 4.1 Launch Communications
- 4.2 Celebrating ‘Go Live’
- 4.3 Business As Usual
- 4.4 Sustainability planning



1. Define

- 1.1 Understanding your Fostering Recruitment & Retention Needs
- 1.2 Defining Partnerships
- 1.3 Vision
- 1.4 Governance
- 1.5 Leadership
- 1.6 Working Arrangements
- 1.7 Project Resourcing
- 1.8 Project Planning
- 1.9 Project Budget
- 1.10 Key learning





Define



1.1 Understanding your Fostering Recruitment & Retention Needs

At the outset, it is important to understand the current position of fostering recruitment and retention in your area, the experience of prospective foster carers, and whether you have the right number and type of foster carers for your children and families, now and in the future.

Conducting a needs assessment is a valuable approach to understanding these issues. It is also essential for you to better understand what you have in terms of resources across a region – and crucially, what you are missing.

Developing a collective understanding of need will enable groups of local authorities to take a more strategic approach to developing their Recruitment Support Hub that targets their specific sufficiency pressures. It will provide insights that will inform strategies to attract and retain foster carers effectively, and enhance the overall support they receive through the Recruitment Support Hub.



The North East Pathfinder

In the early stages of designing their fostering Recruitment Support Hub, the North East Pathfinder held focus groups with foster carers to understand their experiences of current recruitment processes in the North East.

Engaging with individuals at various stages of their fostering journey was deemed essential to gaining a well-rounded understanding of the foster carer experience in the region.



Exit Interview Toolkit



The Fostering Network's Exit Interview Toolkit is a useful tool for understanding why foster carers leave their fostering service.



Needs Analysis Template



This needs analysis template was created by the Department for Education and The Fostering Network as a starting point for fostering services to inform recruitment and retention strategies.

Key areas it focuses on include:

1. Local children looked after (CLA) population profile, including existing CLA and edge of care population
2. Foster carer population profile
3. Quality of placements being provided
4. Quality of your recruitment and assessment processes, including feedback from applicants and your recruitment team
5. Comparison with other LAs
6. Costs, including how much it costs to recruit a foster carer, costs of different types of foster placements, and the cost of a placement breaking down
7. Gap analysis – does your local foster care workforce meet the needs of the current and projected population of CLA?
8. Recruitment and retention strategy
9. Recruitment and retention action plan



Regional Hub Intelligence Tool

The purpose of this tool is to provide access to publicly available data from Ofsted and the Department for Education on a regional basis, to help local authority clusters ask questions about performance, and allow areas to compare themselves.



Define



1.2 Defining Partnerships

To deliver a regional Recruitment Support Hub, you need to identify and define who you will work with. This includes identifying your regional footprint and understanding the role for foster carers.

Your Area

Determining which local authorities will be working together on your fostering Recruitment Support Hub is a fundamental question. Key questions to consider when making that decision include:

- What existing regional footprints are there in your region, and what local authorities are involved? For example, what is the Regional Adoption Agency model in your area or the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance footprint?
- What existing collaboration and partnerships exist in the region - for example, the regional ADCS group?
- Where are there shared challenges between local authorities which you could address in setting up a regional fostering Recruitment Support Hub?
- What capacity do local authorities have to engage in the project?
- Where is there greatest support for a regional fostering Recruitment Support Hub, particularly at Director of Children's Service (DCS) and senior level?
- Where will your hub be? i.e. will it be virtual or have a physical location?
- Is there a local authority that is a 'natural' candidate to lead the process?

Partnership with foster carers

For your Recruitment Support Hub to be a success, it is vital that foster carers are engaged as authentic partners. It is important to define this partnership with foster carers at the outset to ensure they are kept at the centre of your Recruitment Support Hub throughout the process of design and implementation, and when the hub is live. You may have existing partnership with foster carers which can be engaged as part of developing your recruitment support hub, such as Fostering Associations.

Consider how you will engage care experienced young people and siblings of foster children.

Principles for engaging foster carers:

- **Inclusive approach:** including a diverse group of foster carers in this process will ensure representation of your community and enable you to capture a range of experiences and perspectives. Ensure engagement methods are flexible and accessible.
- **Recognise foster carers as experts in their field:** their practical experience is invaluable and respecting their expertise will enhance the credibility and effectiveness of your Recruitment Support Hub. Acknowledge and appreciate their efforts and time.
- **Transparent communication:** keep foster carers informed throughout the process through regular updates on how their feedback is being used and contributing to the design of the hub, and how these decisions impact them.
- **Engage foster carers with a range of fostering experience** e.g. specialist foster carers, new foster carers, experienced foster carers. Try to engage prospective foster carers who decided not to proceed as this will help you understand key drop-off points and how your fostering hub could mitigate this.



Example: South East's Foster Carer Reference Group

The South East cluster have created a Foster Carer Reference Group to consult foster carers on the development of the Recruitment Support Hub. For example, members conducted mystery shopping of local authority fostering websites to give their view on existing websites and what works. Foster carers have also been involved in interview panels for hub staff.



1.3 Vision

Defining a clear, shared vision is an essential step for your Recruitment Support Hub and will help you identify and agree the core activities of the hub. Agreeing this with partners from the outset will help mitigate conflicts and allow you to measure the success of the hub.

Key questions to consider when defining your vision:

- What does a regional approach to fostering recruitment mean in your area?
- What does a successful Recruitment Support Hub look like?
- What do you want your hub to achieve, including long-term and short-term outcomes?
- What is the scope of the hub?
- What is needed for successful regional cooperation between local authorities across your footprint?

Example Theory of Change:

Theory of Change

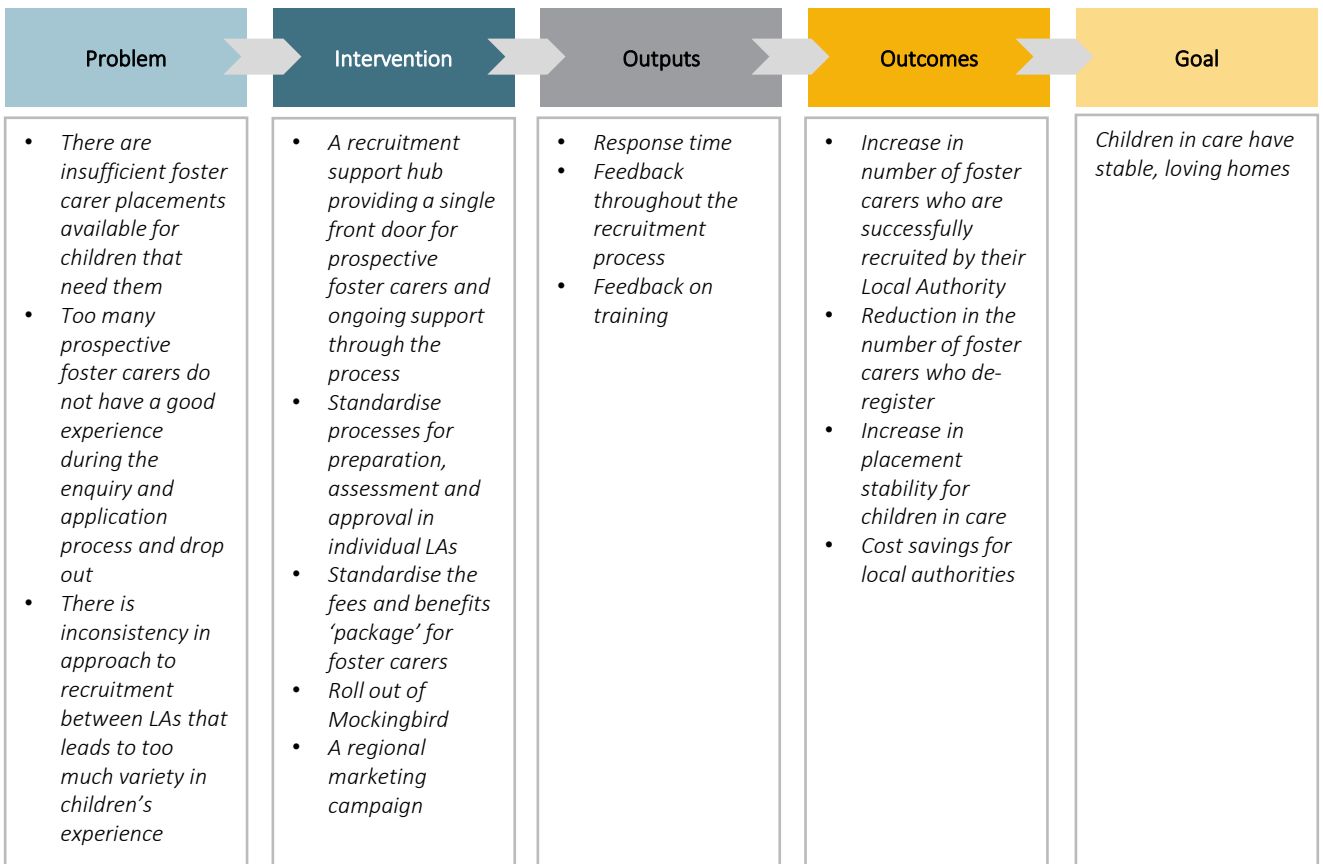
A theory of change is a logical framework connecting your vision to your activities, and what outcomes you want to achieve. It is a method of visually describing the change you want to see, and the steps to making it happen. It forces you to take a clear view and capture the key aspects of what you do.

Key questions when creating a theory of change are:

- **Problem:** What is the problem we want to solve?
- **Intervention:** What will we do to address them?
- **Outputs:** What are the measurable effects of our work?
- **Outcomes:** What are the benefits of our work?
- **Goal:** What is the long term change we want to see?



[Theory of Change Template](#)





1.4 Governance

Establishing a clear governance structure will be crucial for your fostering Recruitment Support Hub. Everyone needs to be clear about what decisions need to be taken, by who and when, and how they will be held to account.

Establishing a clear governance structure before the implementation phase ensures that the project benefits from:

- Strategic leadership at a senior level (i.e. the DCS from each LA involved in the hub)
- A shared understanding of who is responsible/accountable for each aspect of the project
- Clear lines of accountability between the strategic and operational levels of the project
- Clear lines of delegation between strategic and operational levels to enable delivery and innovation at pace
- A shared sense of what decisions need to be taken, by who and when
- A clear way in which project progress, risks and issues will be monitored
- Escalation routes, so that risks and issues can be resolved quickly once identified



Terms of Reference Templates

1. [Project Board](#)
2. [Operational Working Group](#)



Local Community Fostering (LCF) Greater London East

Initially, LCF had a project working group, but key decisions were taken outside of these meeting by relevant DCSs. However, as the project and governance needs developed, this was replaced by a regular Project Board which took on responsibility for key decision-making. This was chaired by the lead DCS for the lead authority – Waltham Forest.

Key questions to consider:

- What should the governance structure look like, and what levels of strategic and operational decision-making are required?
- Who will provide strategic leadership and act as ‘chairperson’ within the governance structure?
- Are DCSs from all LAs sighted on the project and signed up?
- Who will need to be engaged at each level of governance?
- What decisions will be made at different levels of governance?
- How frequently will elements of your governance structure meet?
- How will you ensure your governance is robust, but does not limit delivery day-to-day?
- How will you ensure Lead Members are sighted as needed?

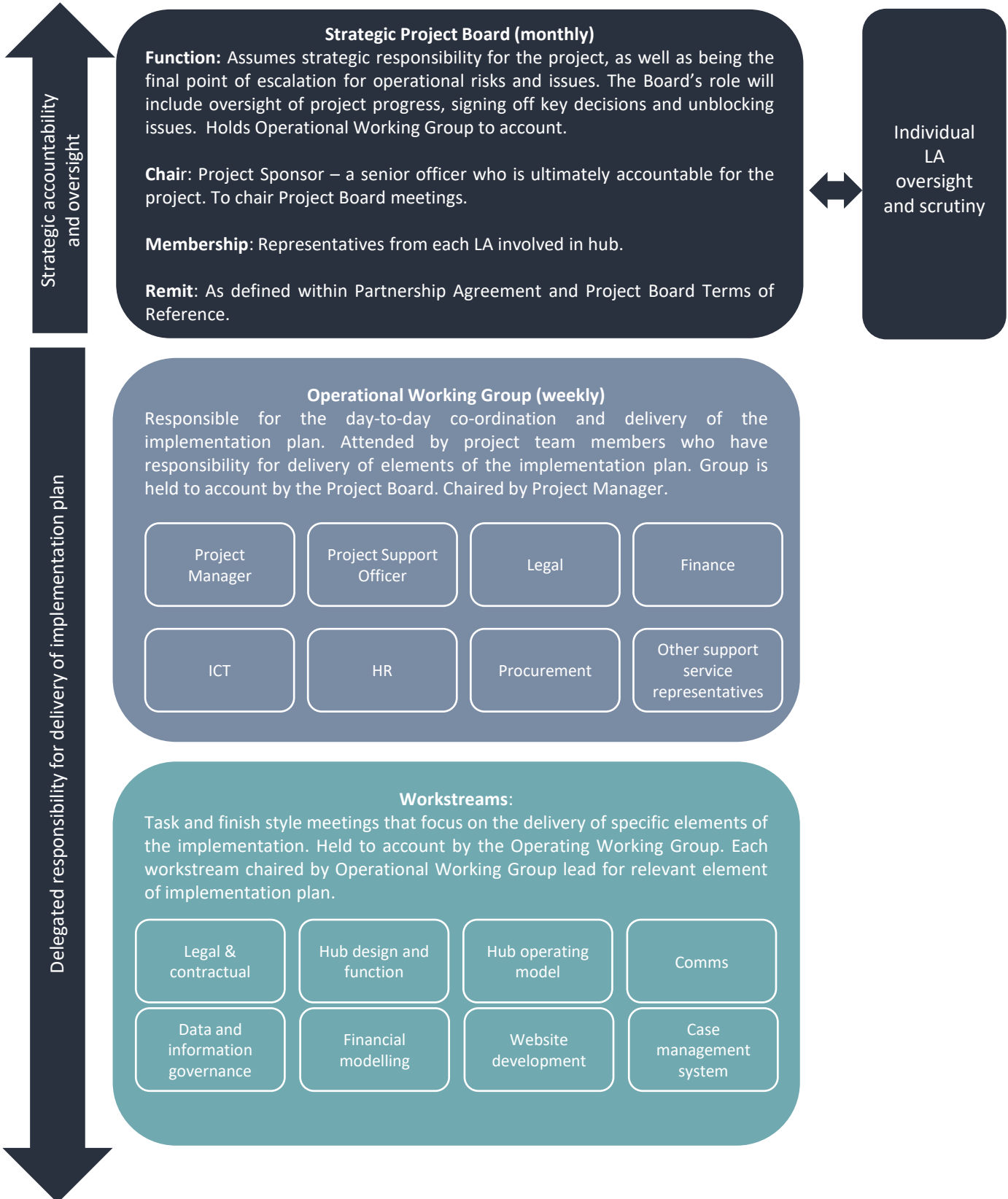




Define



Project Governance Structure Example





1.5 Leadership

To deliver a Recruitment Support Hub, you will need strong strategic and operational leadership.

Strategic leadership

It is important to think about what you need from senior leaders to help shape your transformation and ensure that expectations for the project are understood and acknowledged across the region. You should identify a senior project sponsor who will take the lead across the region and champion the project. Where possible, this should be a Director for Children's Services. Having a strong project sponsor will enable you to drive forward delivery and address challenges at a strategic level.

Key questions to consider when identifying strategic leadership:

- How can you select a project sponsor with the experience, credibility and relationships to lead across the region?
- How will this leadership role align with your governance structure?
- What will the leader's role be in anticipating and managing change within partner local authorities?
- How will you ensure senior leaders in local authorities are consistently engaging with their fostering teams?



Foster4

Amanda Perraton, Director of Children's Services at Warrington Borough Council, has played a critical role in the progress of Foster4. Using the region's DCS network, Amanda engaged directly with Directors to emphasise messages around the importance of a strong regional culture of collaboration. Her efforts were pivotal in local authorities across the region signing up to join Foster4 and committing to the regionalisation agenda. She has also been active in pushing the regional hub to innovate to improve fostering recruitment practices across Cheshire and Merseyside.

Operational leadership

The role of a hub manager, will be crucial to ensure you can successfully deliver your recruitment support hub and run it on an ongoing basis. You should recognise that a hub manager is a new role within children's services.

Your recruitment support hub manager will need to be effective at engaging existing local authority fostering team managers and the staff in your recruitment support hub. A key part of this will be managing change within the region and providing support to existing staff who may have questions or concerns.

During implementation, you should consider how the project manager and hub manager will work together and clearly define their roles and responsibilities. See 1.7 for information about the role of the project manager.

Key questions to consider when identifying your hub manager are:

- What do you need from the role, and what qualifications, skills or experience will they need?
- How will a hub manager fit within existing local authority staffing structures?
- How will a hub manager work with your project manager?
- What support will you need to put around them to ensure they can perform the role effectively?



[Draft Job Description for Recruitment Support Hub Service Manager](#)



1.6 Formalising Your Working Arrangements

To support regional working, you will need to have an agreement in place which articulates how you will work together as a group of local authorities.

This could be a partnership agreement (more formal and structured) or a collaboration agreement (more informal and flexible). Your agreement should define the scope of the project and clarify the roles and responsibilities of the local authorities involved.

Key questions to consider:

- Do you have existing collaboration or partnership agreements which enable regional working?
- When do you need the collaboration agreement complete?
- Who will lead the development of your partnership / collaboration agreement?
- How will you ensure legal colleagues from all local authorities are sighted on the agreement?
- What are the sign-off processes and timelines for securing agreement from individual local authorities?



The North East Pathfinder

The North East experienced challenges in obtaining LA signatures for their collaboration agreement due to the timescales available and the length and varied approval processes across the region. Some LAs required formal cabinet approval, and local elections were due to take place during this time, meaning future cabinet meeting dates were uncertain. The project manager advised that deadlines were tight for coproduction between regional legal and operational colleagues, and more collaborative workshop sessions would have been preferred had time allowed.



[Collaboration Agreement Template from the North East Pathfinder](#)

1.7 Project Resourcing

To successfully implement your recruitment support hub, you will need to have the right staff in place during the design and implementation phase.

You will need a Project Manager who has responsibility for project delivery. Activities will include oversight of project planning, relationship management, and overview of the project budget.



[Draft Job Description for Recruitment Support Hub Programme Manager](#)

Further questions on resourcing the project during design and implementation include:

- Is additional project support required?
- Do you need to recruit staff?
- Who will employ project staff?
- Who will manage the recruitment of project staff?
- Do you have clear job descriptions, with defined roles and responsibilities?
- What mitigations will be in place if recruitment is not successful?
- What will be the Project Manager's role once the hub is launched?
- In terms of the wider project team, are individuals across key areas of the project (Finance, ICT, procurement, HR, premises etc.) aware of the need to support this project?
- What will their role be?
- Will these individuals be available to attend Operational Working Group meetings?
- Will they have the capacity to support this project (i.e. progressing with actions)?



Learning from the Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) Programme

Identifying leads in each local authority for key project areas such as IT and HR was crucial when implementing RAAs.



1.8 Project Planning

Underpinning any successful project is a comprehensive project plan. The plan should break down activities into manageable chunks and describe timescales and resources. It is a vital tool to managing the project, and reporting progress through the governance structure.

A robust plan should set out tasks and milestones including:

- Go live date
- Decision making points, including around political oversight and budget setting
- Engagement with foster carers and care experienced people
- Agreeing design of the delivery model and governance
- All key implementation tasks
- An understanding of the ‘critical path’ to completion, so that tasks can be prioritised
- Who is responsible or will complete each task
- Resource required to complete key implementation tasks, to inform your budget
- Stakeholder mapping and internal communications plan

You should consider how will you review your project plan as you work through the implementation phase.



[Implementation Plan & Risk Register Template](#)

1.9 Project Budget

A robust budget will enable you to allocate resources effectively and ensure your Recruitment Support Hub is affordable. Your project budget should include one-time implementation costs. See 2.4 in the Implementation phase for guidance on ongoing operational costs.

Your project budget should be informed by your implementation plan, including the resource responsible for tasks and the time you’ve estimated it will take to deliver tasks.

Key areas of spend will include:

Implementation cost areas
Leadership / oversight
Project Management
Service design
Professional advice e.g. legal, HR, finance
IT solutions including website and case management system
Foster carer / care experienced children input
Project costs e.g. resources, room hire
Implementation staff e.g. user researcher, comms
Hub staff



[Financial Costings template](#)



[Relational Project Management](#)

Relational project management puts human relationships at the centre of projects. It is about establishing and embedding the conditions to get the best out of people.

It is based on Mutual Ventures' experience of running projects over more than decade, working with colleagues across central government, local authorities and the NHS.

To learn more about this approach and what it means for managing your project, read our report [here](#).





Key learnings

Find your champion

All local authority clusters had a lead LA responsible for delivery. The ability of the lead LA to drive transformation relied on an effective senior project sponsor. Clusters with a strong Director of Children's Services championing the work tended to have a less difficult journey. Effective champions created a regional vision aligned with local authorities' needs and maintained stakeholder support. These leaders provided clear strategic direction, challenge, and support to their delivery teams.

Build on existing relationships

The makeup of each regional fostering recruitment hub varies. Some LAs chose to work with each other based on geography alone, whereas others did so because they had existing, tested partnerships. These clusters, with experience in regional working, typically were able to better articulate their vision, align the goals of different LAs, and constructively challenge each other. Their knowledge of each other's strengths created an environment of collaboration over competition. This was further supported when the lead LA had experience leading other regional initiatives and the capacity to drive change.

Getting your governance right from the start

It took time for some clusters of LAs to establish the right governance structures and involve the right stakeholders, particularly engaging DCSs. While this didn't delay programme delivery, it slowed decision-making and led to miscommunication and misaligned expectations. However, once the right governance was in place, transparency and accountability improved, fostering trust and prompt decision-making.

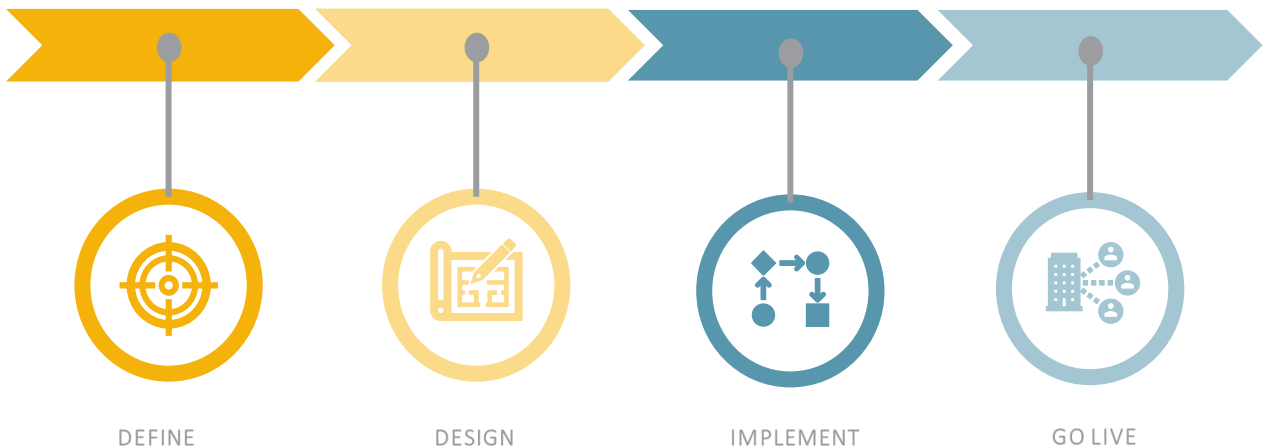
Recruiting the right project manager

A skilled project manager is essential for any programme's success. In this programme, those who could think strategically and engage at all levels were more successful in driving the set-up and development of their hubs. Clusters with the right project manager built better relationships across different levels in each LA, creating a collaborative environment. Even when the collaborative culture wavered, the most effective project managers focused on relationships and the programme's strategic direction to keep things on track.



2. Design

- 2.1 Hub Design
- 2.2 User Journey Mapping
- 2.3 Hub Staffing
- 2.4 Ongoing Budget
- 2.5 Case Management
- 2.6 Website
- 2.7 Telephony
- 2.8 Key Technical Considerations
- 2.9 Data Protection
- 2.10 Key Learning





Design

2.1 Hub Design

A key task is developing and agreeing the design of the services to be delivered by your Recruitment Support Hub. This is a significant piece of work and will take multiple workshops and discussions to finalise.

Before you start, think about who you will engage in the design process. How will you engage staff from across the local authorities, as well as foster carers and care experienced young people where appropriate?

It is also helpful to capture and map current fostering recruitment processes across the local authorities in your region. This will highlight key similarities and differences, what is already working well that could be incorporated into your Recruitment Support Hub, as well as challenges that the hub needs to address.



Fostering Service Information Gathering Form

Section 1 focuses on recruitment processes. Questions can be adapted for a survey, workshop or one-to-one conversations.

Key hub design questions include:

- What are the functions of the hub?
- How will enquiries be recorded and processed in the hub?
- What approach will the hub take to the initial screening of prospective foster carers?
- Who will conduct initial home visits?
- What are the handover points in the hub process?
- How will you ensure a seamless transition for prospective foster carers between the hub and individual LAs?
- What is the package of support offered by the hub?
- What are the agreed standards of practice for the hub?
- What role will foster carers play in the hub?
- How can the demand for foster carers (see 1.1 Understanding your Fostering Recruitment & Retention Needs) be best met through the service?



Foster for Greater Manchester

In Foster for Greater Manchester, experienced foster carers play a crucial role in hub operations as 'Foster Carer Ambassadors'. The Ambassadors support the hub to conduct initial visits by attending the visit alongside an Enquiry Officer. They are able to answer questions from prospective carers and share their first-hand perspective to inform the write-up of the visit.



Foster carer retention and recruitment in England: Key research findings and recommendations (May 2023)



Based on their recent research into foster carer retention and recruitment in England, the Fostering Network (2023) recommended that fostering services consider the following principles when reviewing their application processes:

- **Lived experience:** young people and foster carers should be involved throughout the recruitment and approval process.
- **Quality relationships:** limit the number of social workers that prospective foster carers work with, from initial contact through to matching.
- **Flexibility:** the assessment should consider the needs and schedules of the applicant.
- **Transparency:** about what the process entails, how long it is expected to take and the support available.
- **After an application is withdrawn:** Fostering services should seek the relevant permissions to store the details of and keep in touch with people who enquire to foster but don't submit or withdraw an application.

The Fostering Network also recommended introducing and evaluating **buddying/mentoring schemes** to offer wrap-around support to prospective foster carers during the approval process.



2.2 User Journey Mapping

User journey mapping can be a useful tool for ensuring that the experiences and perspectives of prospective foster carers accessing the services are driving the design of your Recruitment Support Hub.

Creating a user journey map will help you to understand the requirements and practicalities of the hub, including the required staffing structure.

It will also highlight parts of the journey where there are gaps or unanswered questions to address.

Key elements to consider during the user journey mapping process:

- Actions – the behaviours and steps taken by users including the prospective foster carers, the hub and local authorities
- Mindsets – the user’s thoughts, questions, motivations and information needs at different stages in the journey
- Requirements – what is needed to be in place for each action in the journey

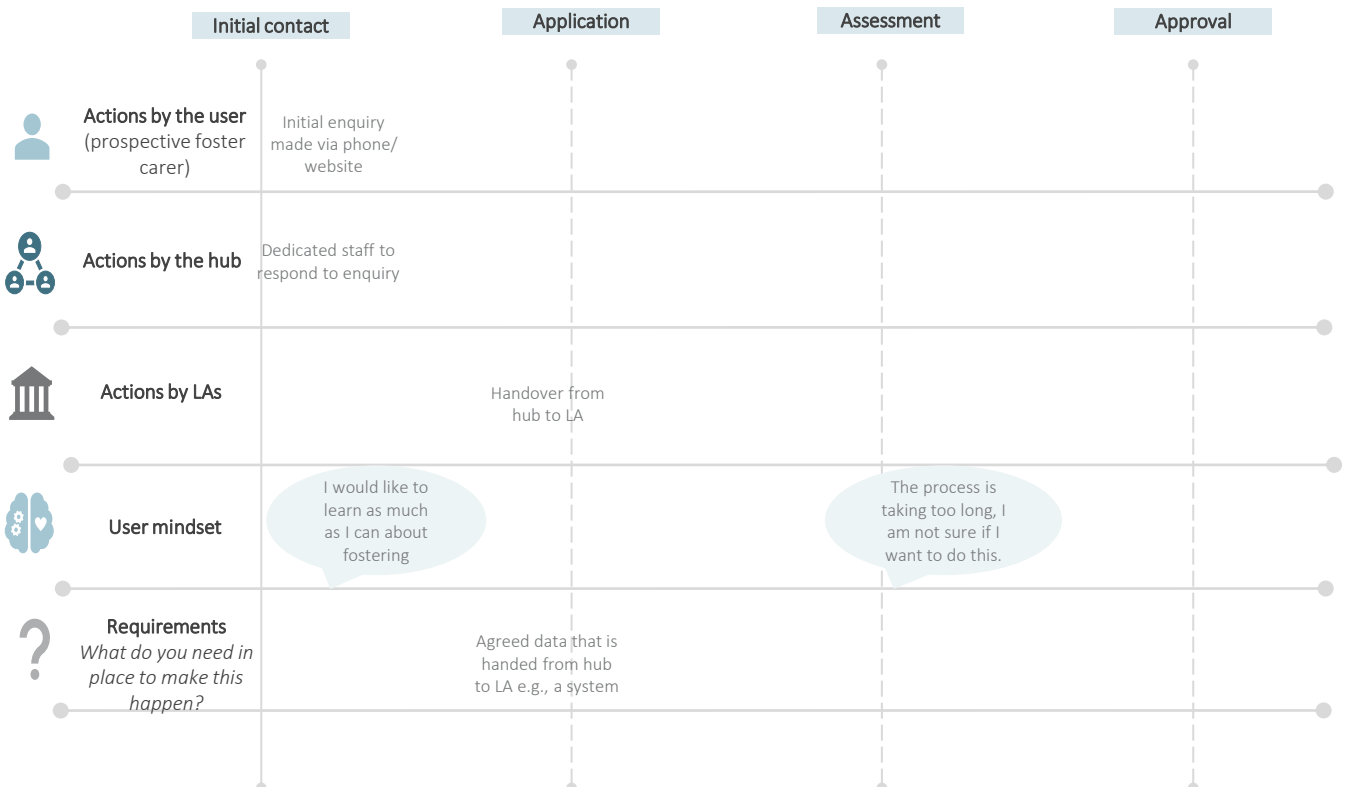
You can also consider:

- Staff capabilities – different skills and responsibilities required by staff at different stages of the process
- Information – the information required at different stages of the recruitment process
- Technology – the technology required to support the recruitment process



User Journey Mapping Exercise

Example user journey template:





2.3 Hub Staffing

Your Recruitment Support Hub will require a robust staffing structure, with the right expertise to ensure you can deliver the right support for prospective foster carers. Key areas to consider in designing this are laid out below.

Staffing structure:

- What is the level of demand experienced by local authorities and how many staff process these?
- How many enquiries from prospective foster carers are you aiming for, and how do you intend to manage these?
- How will you ensure sufficient social work oversight of hub activities?
- What other skills will you need in your hub around communications, marketing and data analysis?
- What is the role for foster carers?



Fostering Service Information Gathering Form

To support the design of your staffing structure, it is helpful to capture and map existing staff structures across the local authorities in your region. Section 2 focuses on understanding your existing staff structures. These questions can be adapted for a survey, workshop or one-to-one conversations.

Staffing methods

As part of their operational model, hubs should consider how they wish to staff the service. Options include recruitment through advertised vacancies, secondment, or transferring staff from other local authorities.

Transferring staff is completed through a process known as TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment), which protects the terms and conditions of those moving from another local authority. This should be undertaken with legal advice

Key questions include:

- Who will manage the recruitment of hub staff?
- Who will be the employer of staff working within the hub?
- What mitigations or options will you have in place if recruitment is not successful?
- Have job descriptions and personal specifications been developed for each role?
- What type of contract/T&Cs will you recruit staff on and what is the impact of this? Are staff transferring employer? Will TUPE apply?

Impact on existing staff:

- What will the impact be on existing staff carrying out similar / the same roles?
- How will you engage staff so they understand the programme and how it will impact their work?
- Do new hub staff require training?



Foster for East Midlands

When designing its team structure, a key priority for Foster for East Midlands was to have experienced staff, that already knew each of the local authorities within the cluster. As such, the hub is now staffed with the equivalent of 5.3FTE recruitment officers, all of which are seconded from the four local authorities. The recruitment officers bring understanding of the LAs' recruitment processes, the knowledge and ability to access systems, as well as existing relationships with key stakeholders.

Other staff members in the hub include a Service Manager, Team Manager, two social workers and a business support officer. The hub is also supported by a marketing officer, digital marketing officer and a data analyst.



2.4 Ongoing Budget

Developing a budget is an important part of the design process and helps you understand all the costs associated with running your Recruitment Support Hub.

The process of developing a budget is valuable as it prompts you to ask questions and look in detail at all areas of expenditure. It also means that local authority partners all have a clear understanding of likely costs. Projected budgets should be produced for a minimum of three years.

Key questions to consider:

- What are the key areas of cost associated with running a Recruitment Support Hub?
- What costs are fixed? What costs are variable, and what is the likely magnitude in these areas?
- What risks does the hub face and what is the potential financial impact of these risks?
- Is it appropriate to consider whether cost savings might be identified through a regional approach?
- Where will local authorities continue to spend individually, such as on marketing?
- Who will need to be kept informed of the ongoing budget in your local authority and across the region?
- Who will need to sign-off additional spend or changes in budget spend?

Key areas of spend will include:

Leadership / governance
Staffing, inc. Involvement of foster carers
Communications and campaigning, inc. website
Case management system
Training and development
Back office support costs, including ICT
Travel costs for staff

2.5 Case Management

Your recruitment support hub will need to manage and track enquiries coming in through the front door and pass these to local authorities in your region for them to conduct assessments.

Key questions to consider when identifying the technology you need to manage and track enquiries:

- What case management systems do local authorities use currently?
- Do you need to procure or build a new system, or develop an existing system?
- Does capability exist in-house in local authorities in the region to develop what is required to track enquiries or will external support be required?
- If you are procuring a new system, how will this be done and what are the timelines?
- What data is currently collected from prospective foster carers at different stages?
- What data will you need to collect to track prospective foster carers through the hub and to handover enquiries to local authorities?
- What requirements does a case management system need to meet?
- Who will develop your specification for a case management system?
- How will data be collected in your case management system support reporting?
- Who will support and manage your case management system on an ongoing basis?



Identifying a Case Management system

Across the ten recruitment support hubs a range of systems were used to monitor and track enquiries. In some hubs existing internal systems were used, whilst in others new systems were procured. To identify a suitable system regions mapped key requirements and processes and then reviewed system functionality.



2.6 Website

Your Recruitment Support Hub will need a clear and informative website for prospective foster carers.

This should provide a simple route for foster carers to submit enquiries and provide information about fostering in your region and the local authorities involved in your hub. To avoid confusion, you will also want to consider how your website links to the local authority websites in your cluster.

Test existing websites with foster carers and care experienced people to see what works well and what could be improved. As you develop your new hub website, engage foster carers throughout so the final product meets the need of foster carers.

Key questions to consider when designing your recruitment support hub website:

- Will you adapt an existing website or build a new website?
- Where will your recruitment support hub website be hosted?
- How will local authority fostering websites link to the new recruitment support hub website, without adding confusion for prospective foster carers?
- How will your website link to your case management system?
- Will you have a form on your website for foster carers to enquire? If so, how will it connect to your case management system?
- Will local authorities have the same form on their websites for foster carers to enquire?
- How will you make your website accessible for prospective foster carers that are disabled?



Recruitment Support Hub websites

Each of the ten recruitment support hubs have a website where prospective foster carers anywhere in the region can find information about fostering and submit enquiries.

Whilst the layout and content of the recruitment hub websites are vary they provide some core information to prospective foster carers. This includes information about:

- The recruitment support hub
- The local authorities involved
- Fostering for a local authority
- The application process
- The support offer
- Types of fostering



[Foster with us](#)



[Local Community Fostering Greater London East](#)



[Local Authority Fostering South East](#)



[Fostering South West](#)



[Foster for East Midlands](#)



[Foster4](#)



[Foster with North East](#)



[Foster with West London](#)



[Foster East](#)



[Foster for Greater Manchester](#)



2.7 Telephony

Your recruitment support hub will need a phonenumber for prospective foster carers to contact your hub.

You should consider how your telephony will support the single front door of your recruitment support hub.

Key questions to consider:

- How do local authorities currently answer telephone enquiries?
- How do current foster carers experience telephony?
- Will your Recruitment Support Hub need a new phone number?
- How will existing local authority phonelines redirect to the Recruitment Support Hub?
- How will you divert existing local authority phonelines that current have a dual purpose (e.g. duty numbers that also manage fostering enquiries)?
- Could you utilise existing technology solutions such as Microsoft Teams to set up a new phonenumber?
- Do you have capability in your region to support with setting up a phonenumber or do you need external support?
- How will telephone enquiries out of hours be recorded?
- How will you monitor and continually test the system is working? Via weekly checks?



Foster with us

Foster with us set up a '0300' number that has been included on all regional marketing from the outset. To ensure prospective foster carers that called an existing local authority phone number were not lost, all fostering numbers were diverted to the new hub number.

2.8 Key Technical Considerations

Establishing a shared service requires local authorities to think through legal, regulatory, and tax implications.

This page briefly describes these key issues and the questions that clusters should think about when setting up their hubs. *Note that this is intended to provide an overview of key areas and does not constitute legal advice.*

Legal basis for shared services

Hubs should understand the legal basis of their plans to create a shared service. The Local Government Act 1972 sets out the following principles for these arrangements:

- one local authority cannot subsidise another local authority
- local authorities can delegate functions to other local authorities, but the delegating authority remains ultimately responsible for the execution of the functions
- Section 102 makes a provision for local authorities to establish joint committees to discharge their functions. (Joint committees usually involve a legal agreement signed by the participating local authorities.)
- Section 113 allows local authorities to place an officer at the disposal of another local authority for the purposes of discharging the latter's functions

Organisation form

Whilst all existing Recruitment Support Hubs have been established as a shared service, hosted by one local authority, clusters have the option to establish a separate legal entity to deliver the services. This could take the form of a local authority trading company.



Design



When establishing new legal entities, local authorities will need to agree arrangements for ownership, governance and procurement of services. This should be undertaken with clear legal advice.

Regulation

Recruitment Support Hubs should consider the extent to which they are likely to be subject to inspection by Ofsted.

Ofsted's remit is to inspect and regulate activities involving care for children, including fostering services. In particular, in the case of recruitment, services subject to regulation are those that involve the assessment and evaluation of prospective foster carers, including visits, checking references, making the initial 'stage 1' decision, and panels.

As services hosted by local authorities, those hubs that do provide services subject to regulation will not require separate registration as a fostering agency. If a cluster establishes a new legal entity and is providing such services, registration will be required.

Tax

Where Recruitment Support Hubs are 'hosted' by a local authority, there are unlikely to be any tax implications.

Where a Recruitment Support Hub is exploring establishing a new legal entity for the service (e.g. a local authority trading company), there will be a VAT liability.

Depending on their chosen structure and operating model, other forms of tax that may be relevant to look at include corporation tax, business rates and Stamp Duty Land Tax.

2.9 Data Protection

Recruitment Support Hubs will require local authorities to share data they have not done previously.

Engaging your Data Protection Officer early in the design phase will allow you to explore the data protection impacts of your Recruitment Support Hub and identify risks early. Your Data Protection Officer will be able to help you navigate the data protection legislation and regulations.

You should also begin drafting a Data Protection Information Assessment (DPIA) to assess and demonstrate your data protection obligations.

A DPIA is a process designed to help you systematically analyse, identify and minimise the data protection risks of a project or plan. It is a key part of your accountability obligations under the UK GDPR, and when done properly helps you assess and demonstrate how you comply with all of your data protection obligations.

A DPIA will not necessarily eradicate all risk but should help you minimise and determine whether or not the level of risk is acceptable in the circumstances, taking into account the benefits you want to achieve.

There is no definitive DPIA template you must follow. You may want to use the Information Commissioner's Office's DPIA template or adapt an existing template for your Recruitment Support Hub.



[Information Commissioner's Office DPIA template](#)



Key learning

Lived experience is invaluable

The experience of foster carers and the outcome for children and young people should be at the heart of everything recruitment support hubs do. For hubs in the set-up stage, this meant placing them at the centre of their design process. To do this, clusters used existing networks to run workshops to embed lived experience in the design, ensuring the new service addressed challenges, provided better support, and led to improved outcomes for children and young people.

Be ambitious in the scope of your regional service

The extent to which clusters regionalised the fostering recruitment journey varied. Ambitious recruitment support hubs saw rewards from regionalising more of the recruitment journey, including initial visits, training, and application and assessment support. One hub introduced a therapeutic social worker support model for the whole region. For those hubs with a wide scope, this has led to enhanced working relationships, better collaboration and support for foster carers. For other hubs, there are plans to go further in years 2 and 3. All ten hubs have set this as their strategic direction of travel.

Recruit an experienced hub manager

Hub team structures vary across the programme, including the leadership roles. Some hubs have both a Service Lead and Hub Team Manager, while others only have a Hub Team Manager. The level of seniority also varies. However, while the team structure and level of seniority are important, it is the skill set and experience of the hub leadership that has mattered. Hub Managers who were recruited with experience in regional working, team management, and fostering or customer service, have been able to successfully drive and progress the hubs.

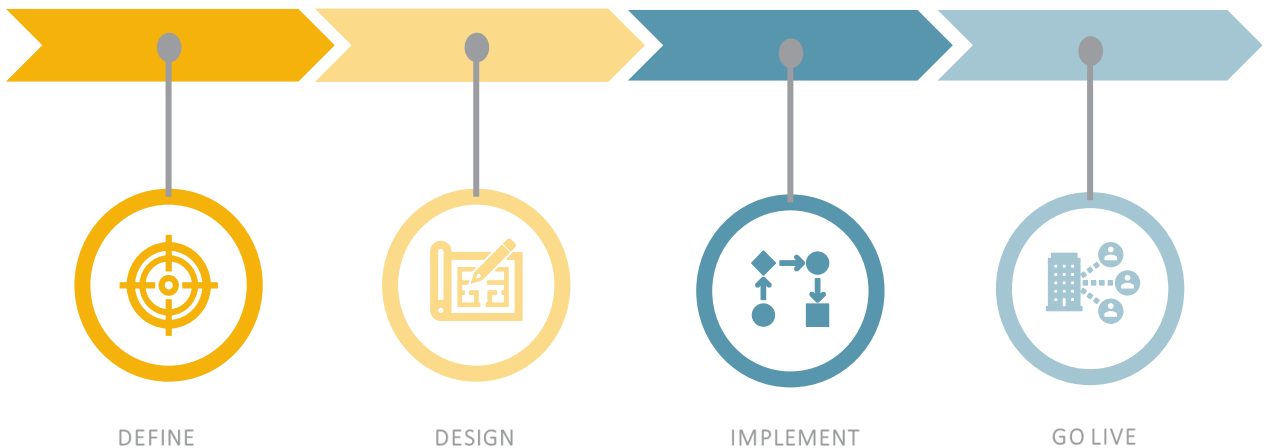
Engage specialist support in the design process

Establishing a Foster Carer Recruitment Hub, like any new service, is a team effort. It relies on the expertise of a range of professionals, including in ICT, information governance, finance, legal and HR. These professionals are critical for the decision-making process as well as the implementation of the project. A key feature of successful hub set-up was those engaging with these professional early in the design process, to ensure that they understood the ambition of the hub, could identify any issues at the outset, and accurately plan the decisions required and timescales. Where engagement did not happen early enough, there were more likely to be delays.



3. Implement

- 3.1 Managing Risks & Change
- 3.2 Project Communications
- 3.3 External hub communications and marketing
- 3.4 Monitoring & Tracking Performance
- 3.5 Managing your data
- 3.6 Key learning





Implementation



3.1 Managing risks and change

Alongside your implementation plan, you should identify project risks and issues.

Risk types include operational, financial, security and safety, regulatory and compliance, reputational and quality control.

It is important to take a proactive approach to risk and issue management, which means risks are identified and mitigated early on.

A risk register with mitigation strategies should be maintained by the Project Manager and be reviewed at your regular project boards.

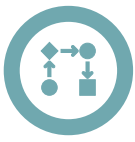
Your approach to governance should also articulate escalation routes, so that risks and issues can be resolved quickly once identified.



[Implementation Plan & Risk Register Template](#)

Example risk register template:

Risk	Description	Owner	Likelihood (1=low; 3=high)	Impact (1=low; 3=high)	Risk score	Mitigating actions
Tight timeframe for delivery	If decisions are not made quickly within the tight timescales of the project, there would be delays to project delivery.	Project Sponsor	2	3	6	Clear implementation plan with regular reviews and risk monitoring by the Project Board.
Change in leadership	If leadership, such as the Director of Children's Services changes in a local authority, new leaders may lack understanding of the project or its ambition and buy-in to the project could be lost.	Project Sponsor	2	2	4	Each local authorities lead engaging with the Project Board should ensure strong awareness of the remit of the recruitment support hub and impact on existing local authority fostering services to avoid disagreement. The Project Sponsor should quickly build relationships with new leaders.
Unable to agree contents of partnership agreement	If local authorities are not able to agree on the contents of the partnership agreement within the agreed timescales, this could stop the recruitment support hub going live.	Project Sponsor	1	3	3	Ensure there is a strong leadership commitment to participate in coproduction for project activities such as the partnership agreement, within clear timescales.
Local Authority wants to leave the cluster	A local authority could want to leave the cluster during implementation having an impact on the funding from DfE and the aims of the recruitment support hub.	Project Sponsor	2	3	6	Clear stakeholder understanding of the project benefits at all levels of each organisation from the outset of the project. Strong relationships maintained at leadership level by the Project Sponsor.



3.2 Project Communications

Clear and consistent ongoing communications around the set-up of the Recruitment Support Hub is vital to ensure a successful project, a smooth transition of service and continuous fostering recruitment. A key first step is identifying a communications lead and developing a comprehensive plan to engage all stakeholders.

Stakeholder mapping

Stakeholder mapping is an approach to create a clear understanding of the people and groups impacted by the project and allow a plan to be developed for each group. When undertaking this mapping, you will need to consider the following audiences:

- Staff that will be working for the Recruitment Support Hub
- Staff that will remain in the Council but continue working on fostering recruitment and retention, including fostering leadership and management
- Staff working in children's services
- All Council staff
- Existing foster carers
- Prospective foster carers
- Care experienced young people
- Politicians
- Local networks, such as ADCS
- Partners, including IFAs and local voluntary sector groups

Communications plan

Once you have mapped your stakeholders, you can develop an outline communications plan. A communications plan should describe type and regularity of communication required for each stakeholder group – both during the implementation of the hub and after go live.

Key questions include:

- What communications are local authorities currently delivering?
- How will local authority communication link to Recruitment Support Hub communication?
- How will you communicate about the new Recruitment Support Hub and the impact it will have on each stakeholder group?
- What communication channels and activities will you use?



Examples of Internal Communication Channels

- **Newsletters and update emails:** Local Authority Fostering South East introduced a weekly project newsletter and Foster with Us produced weekly project progress emails. These provided 'drumbeat' updates to the participating local authorities.
- **Information events:** Foster East held internal events to share information on the project with colleagues from local authority fostering teams. This gave DCSs across the cluster the opportunity to introduce the regional vision, and staff the opportunity to ask questions about the hub and address any concerns.
- **One-to-one engagement:** Fostering South West held one-to-one meetings with local authority fostering teams to answer specific questions and concerns. This has supported relationship building and provided a forum for existing staff to ask questions they might not feel comfortable asking in a wider forum.
- **Weekly problem-solving meetings:** Foster for Greater Manchester held problem-solving meetings on specific topics with stakeholders to identify solutions to specific challenges such as communications or technology systems.



[Stakeholder Mapping & Communications Plan template](#)



Implementation



3.3 External hub communications and marketing

External communications will be an important part of attracting prospective foster carers to your recruitment support hub. As you set up your recruitment support hub, you should consider what communications and marketing will be delivered at a regional level to direct enquiries to your recruitment support hub single front-door for the region.

Map existing local authority communications and marketing

At the outset, understand each local authorities existing communications campaigns to attract new foster carers, as well as their communication budgets. This will help you understand the drumbeat of communications in your region and where you may be able to target communications at a regional level, rather than in each individual local authority.

Key questions to consider:

- What communications campaigns are local authorities currently delivering?
- By which methods are communications campaigns delivered? Such as social media or TV.
- Are communications campaigns targeting specific groups or sufficiency challenges?
- How much money is each local authority spending on communications and marketing activity?
- Do local authorities understand the effectiveness of their current communications and marketing activities?
- What existing evidence do local authorities have about what communications and marketing activity drives enquiries?

Developing your regional communications and marketing strategy

As part of developing your recruitment support hub, you should consider what communications and marketing will be delivered at a regional level and at a local authority level. This will involve identifying a regional brand and planning communications activities. You may want to commission an agency to support you to develop your campaign and establish your brand.

You should ensure that all communications at a regional and local level have a single call to action and direct all traffic to the recruitment support hub. This will ensure local communications compliments regional marketing.

Key questions include:

- Who are your target audience and how well do you understand them? For example, understanding the demographics of carers you want to attract, their motivations, barriers and media consumption
- Where do you have a shortage of placements across your region? What key messages or communications will you develop for target groups for these shortages?
- What communications and marketing should be delivered by the hub?
- How will communications and marketing at a regional level complement local authority activities?
- Who will be involved in the development of regional communications and marketing?
- What do you want the hub branding and marketing to look like? What do you want it to say?
- Do you have existing capacity in the region to develop this marketing or do you need to identify a delivery partner to support this?
- Do you have an existing regional campaign you want to build on?
- What needs to change in local authority communications to direct prospective foster carers to the hub?
- Are there any misconceptions about fostering you want to address in your comms campaign?

Testing your communications and marketing with foster carers

As you develop your communications and marketing materials, you should build in time to test these with existing foster carers. This will ensure you can test what images, wording and branding stand out to foster carers in your region.



Implementation

Understanding the effectiveness of your communications and marketing

From the outset of designing your communications and marketing for your hub, consider how you will measure its effectiveness. You will need to understand where new enquiries have come from, such as regional or local campaigns.

3.4 Monitoring and Tracking Performance

Tracking data and reporting on the performance of your Recruitment Support Hub is critical to ensure you understand the effectiveness of your approach and can communicate the benefits to stakeholders.

Key questions to consider:

- Have you identified a performance lead?
- What data will the hub collect? How different is this from what is already being collected by LAs?
- Do you have a baseline of current performance for your region? Does this include baselines above and beyond the annual Ofsted data?
- Can you use existing systems or do you need a new case management system? See section 2.5
- If you procure a new system, is there a requirement to work alongside or integrate with existing systems?
- What key performance indicators (KPIs) will your recruitment support hub have?
- What reporting software do you have, is it compatible with your case management system?
- How do you ensure data quality and accuracy?
- Have you checked you can collect data for your performance indicators?
- How will your performance indicators add value either by demonstrating impact or managing performance?
- Have you identified metrics which will enable you to identify if the hub is effective and support long-term funding decisions?
- What data will be collected by the hub and what will need to be shared with the hub by local authorities?



Regional Hub Intelligence Tool

The purpose of this tool is to help local authority clusters ask questions about performance, provide access to public data in a regional format, and allow areas to compare themselves. It also has a feature allowing hubs to monitor their in-year recruitment performance. The tool is based on publicly available data from Ofsted and Department for Education.

Example KPIs and data points to track

Example KPIs:

- X % increase in enquiries to become a foster carer
- X % increase in foster care approvals
- X % Increase in the number of foster placements delivered in-house by LAs in the cluster
- Initial enquiry to initial visit conversion rate
- Initial visit to application conversion rate
- Initial enquiry to approval conversion rate
- Number of approved foster carers
- Number of households deregistered
- Timeliness of the recruitment process:
 - Enquiry to initial response in X days
 - Enquiry to initial visit in X days
 - Enquiry to application in X days
 - Assessment to approval in X days

Data points to track

- Number of foster carers at:
 - Initial enquiry
 - Initial visit
 - Skills to Foster
 - Stage 1 and 2
 - Panel
- Foster carer satisfaction via feedback
- Effectiveness of hub recruitment campaigns:
 - Engagement metrics
 - Website/social media insights
 - Attendees at events/open days
- Number of training sessions delivered/ attendees



Implementation



Foster with North East

The North East Pathfinder developed a Microsoft Power BI dashboard to report on recruitment support hub performance, including contacts received, enquiries, EOIs authorised, and referrals to LA. This is shared with a range of key stakeholders each month



Foster with North East Data Dashboard



Example of an Information Sharing Agreement from the North East Pathfinder

Alongside their Information Sharing Agreement, the North East Pathfinder maintain supplementary guidance providing the detail around the data exchange processes between local authorities and the recruitment support hub. This provides the specifics needed to ensure ISA compliance.

3.5 Managing Your Data

Managing and maintaining your data securely will be vital to ensure confidence in your Recruitment Support Hub and to ensure you meet legal requirements.

Managing and demonstrating accountability for data is also a legal obligation under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR. It also demonstrates to your foster carers that you are trusted to look after their personal information.

Key questions to consider;

- What personal data will you be collecting in the recruitment support hub and sharing with local authorities?
- Have you completed your Data Protection Impact Assessment (see section 2.8)?
- Who will be responsible for developing a Data Sharing Agreement for the recruitment support hub?
- Who will be the Data Controller and Data Processor?
- What processes and safeguards will be in place to ensure safe and appropriate use of information?
- Are there any sign-off processes that individual local authorities will have to engage with to sign-off data sharing agreements? How long will these take?

Data sharing agreement

The data sharing agreement for your recruitment support hub should set out:

- What information is shared
- That the information shared is accurate
- That the information shared follows agreed formats
- How it considers retention and deletion of shared information
- How information is to be shared and what data breach arrangements are
- How staff will be trained on using information and understanding their responsibilities
- How you will deal with requests for information from the public including Subject Access Requests and complaints
- How you will review the data sharing agreement
- What will happen if the agreement is terminated and how shared data will be deleted

Key questions to consider:

- Who will complete your data sharing agreement and implement the actions?
- If you are a host authority for the recruitment support hub, what additional data management responsibilities do you have on behalf of the region?
- Have you ensured you are only collecting information you need?
- Where will you publish information on how you manage prospective foster carers data in line with UK GDPR? Will this be on your recruitment support hub website?



Key learning

Agree a common language for data collection

Having consistent data is crucial for understanding impact, identifying opportunities for improvement, and supporting evidence-based decision-making. Many hubs faced challenges due to varying data collection methods and reporting practices across the region. Agreeing on what data to collect was difficult because LAs within a cluster used different definitions, particularly for 'contacts' and 'enquiries'. Establishing a baseline data set for the region was therefore a significant task. Clusters that took the time to analyse their data and understand regional differences were better able to navigate these challenges. This approach allowed them to agree on a common language for data collection across the region.

Engage across local authorities consistently

Consistent and timely messaging at all levels is crucial for success. How hubs engaged with operational staff across the different local authorities during the implementation stage varied. Once all hubs were operational, it became clear that there were gaps in understanding and different levels of support for the hubs. When staff were not updated, concerns about job security led to mistrust. Clusters that did engage well, for example by scheduling regular communications to keep staff informed of progress and key decisions, avoided many of these issues.

Think about operational *and* strategic buy-in

Achieving widespread buy-in and maintaining that during implementation of any programme is a challenge. However, when all stakeholders are invested in a programme's success, they are more likely to contribute positively and work collaboratively towards achieving the desired outcome. During the programme, some lead LAs focussed all their attention on maintaining leadership buy-in and neglected operational colleagues. Lead LAs that engaged both operational and strategic stakeholders were more successful, creating higher level of trust, and encouraging staff to invest time, effort, and resources into the programme's implementation.

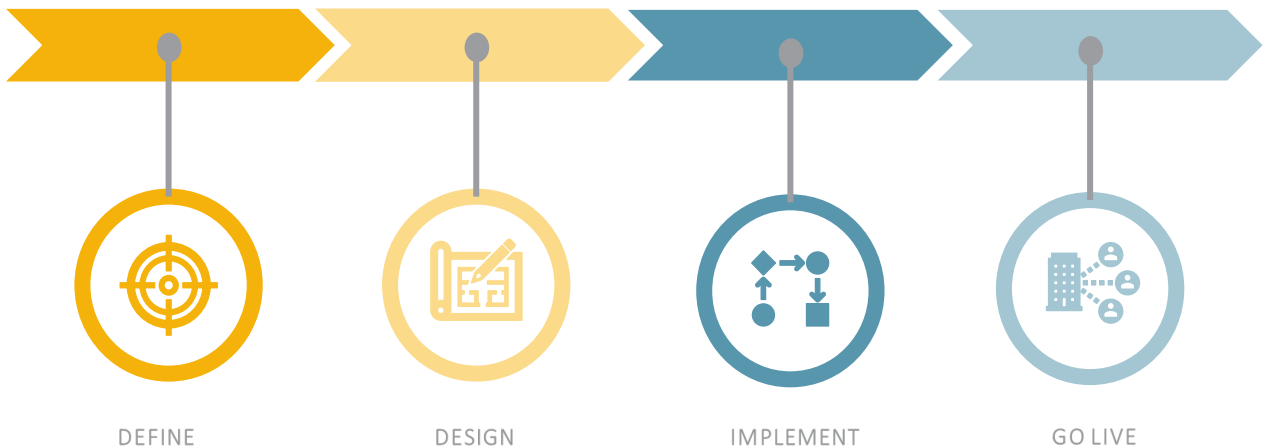
Capture data across the whole recruitment journey

All local authorities need to be able to demonstrate the impact of their hub. Clusters that developed and agreed key performance indicators early on were able to capture the right data and generate accurate reports from launch. In most cases, this included developing a system to track the entire recruitment journey. This meant that, even in the absence of foster carer approval data which takes 6-9 months to come through, hubs could show impact on conversion rates from enquiry to application. Additionally, hub found it was important to capture qualitative data and case studies to provide rich and balanced evidence of progress.



4. Go Live and ongoing delivery

- 4.1 Go live guidance
- 4.2 Testing before go live
- 4.3 Regional engagement
- 4.4 Launch comms
- 4.5 Continual hub development
- 4.6 Review governance structures and internal comms
- 4.7 Long term viability
- 4.8 Launching your campaign
- 4.9 Delivery examples
- 4.10 Key learnings





Go Live and ongoing delivery

'Go live' describes the moment that the new fostering Recruitment Support Hub becomes fully operational, with all necessary preparations complete.

'Go live' should include the following:

- A hub website that is live and accessible to the public
- A single brand for foster carer recruitment across all local authorities
- All fostering recruitment enquiries are received by the hub, with individual local authorities diverting any enquiries that come directly to them
- A system for data capture and monitoring
- Governance finalised and board meetings regularly scheduled

4.1 Go live guidance

Ahead of go live, you should produce guidance for local authorities outlining what it means for them and what they need to do. This should include:

- When go live will be
- Advice on what to communicate to their staff and stakeholders
- Any process or policy changes across the region
- Any technical updates to local authority websites, phone numbers and contact forms
- Who they can contact if they have questions

West London go live guidance

Foster with West London produced detailed go live guidance which was shared weeks before go live with local authority fostering teams. This allowed time to hold meetings with local authorities and answer any outstanding questions. Due to this, the region went live with all local authorities changing processes without any technical issues.

4.2 Testing before go live

To ensure go live is smooth, you should have a clear and robust plan to test the end-to-end process of a prospective foster carer applying to foster.

You should test:

- Submitting an enquiry through the regional website and form, email or telephone

- Receiving an enquiry through the backend system and responding
- Local authority website updates and forms
- Exporting data into spreadsheets and reports for monitoring performance

You should engage colleagues across your region ahead of go live to ensure they understand when go live is happening and what the change means for them.

Regular engagement as you go live and in the early weeks following the launch will also provide an opportunity to tease out any issues within local authorities and support strong regional relationships.

4.3 Launch communications

As the hub launches it is important that local authority stakeholders and partners are aware of the new service and its purpose. An internal communications plan for launch will be important, with clear, consistent and positive messaging that explains what the changes mean for people. Tools to communicate can include newsletters, team meetings, council intranet, face-to-face talks or team visits by hub staff.

Local authority clusters should think about what they can do to celebrate the launch of the new service. Marking the launch – and all the hard work to get to that point – can help set the tone for the new service and raise the profile within the region. Hubs may wish to think about hosting an event or commissioning additional merchandise.

South East internal launch event

The South East held an internal launch event at Bracknell Forest Council, who are the lead local authority. Over 50 staff attended including fostering teams, councillors and DCSs from across the 20 local authorities. The event celebrated the collaboration to set up the recruitment support hub across the South East. Children and young people also facilitated a session with attendees focused on qualities of a good foster carer.



Go Live and ongoing delivery



4.5 Continual hub development

Go live isn't the end of the design and implementation process for your recruitment support hub – you will need to continue to adjust and learn as you proceed with ongoing delivery. For example, some regions went live with a support offer that they later enhanced. Other regions later extended the remit of the hub to include initial visits.

For all hubs, it is important to monitor performance throughout the foster carer recruitment journey and consider how the service might develop.

4.6 Review governance structures and internal comms

You should review your governance structures to ensure they effectively support ongoing delivery and enable regular internal communications updates.

Your governance structure should include a board, where key decisions can be agreed and performance can be monitored. Depending on your future hub development, you could set up working groups to drive delivery for example a comms working group to manage the delivery of your regional marketing campaign.

Your internal communications should continue to update regional stakeholders on hub performance and future changes that are being developed.

4.7 Long-term viability

Once operational and capturing data, hubs will need make a business case for future investment to ensure their long-term viability. Discussions on this should start as early as possible with finance, service leads and senior leaders across all local authorities. The final business case will need to be agreed at the governance board and may require internal business cases within each local authority.

These decisions may have to go to Cabinet for sign-off, so planning for decision-making deadlines early will be important.

Key to the case for investment will be robust evidence on impact – and how this is different to before the recruitment support hub was established. In the first 6-12 months, impact should be visible from metrics including enquiries and applications. This will be followed by evidence on change in approvals and any knock-on impact on placement budgets.

To support the case for investment, you should identify the 'invest to save' case for long-term funding of the hub. For example, you should identify the average cost of in-house foster carer placements versus private placements and whether savings will be made if more children are placed in in-house placements. You should also include evidence of the qualitative impact the hub is having, via feedback from prospective foster carers and local authority colleagues.

4.8 Launching your campaign

For the recruitment support hub to recruit more foster carers, a communications campaign is crucial to drive enquiries to the hub. You should develop a regional marketing strategy, that reflects what activity will happen regionally and what will continue at a local level, such as local events.

Ensure all stakeholders agree to the marketing approach and are aware of the regional campaign, so it compliments local activity.



Foster4 roadshow

To promote Foster4, the team hired a double decker media bus with a high-resolution screen. They drove around the region playing their fostering campaign, parking the bus in high footfall areas to speak to people about fostering. This led to a huge spike in enquiries and helped promote their brand.



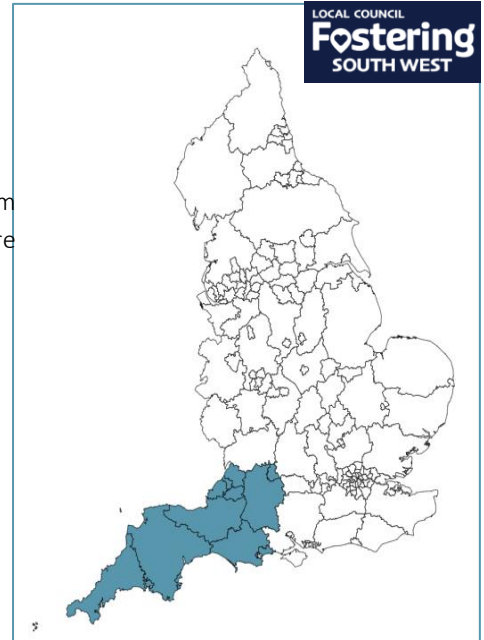
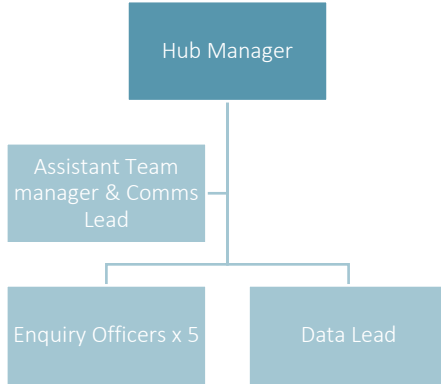
Go Live and ongoing delivery

4.9 Delivery examples: Fostering South West

How the hub describes itself

Fostering South West represents a partnership of 15 local councils from across the South West of England. Fostering services across the region are collaborating to actively recruit prospective foster carers.

Hub Team



Key features

Regional events: Fostering South West has facilitated joint events between local authorities to attract foster carers and increase capacity to deliver events across the South West.

Partnership offers: Fostering South West developed partnerships with companies across the South West who promote fostering across the region and offer unique discounts to existing foster carers.

Regional Employers: Fostering South West have been working with regional employers to develop their knowledge and awareness of fostering and supporting their employees to consider fostering.

Local authorities involved

Bath and North East Somerset	Isles of Scilly
Bristol, City of	Wiltshire
North Somerset	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole
South Gloucestershire	Dorset
Plymouth	Devon
Torbay	Somerset
Swindon	Gloucestershire
Cornwall	

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023





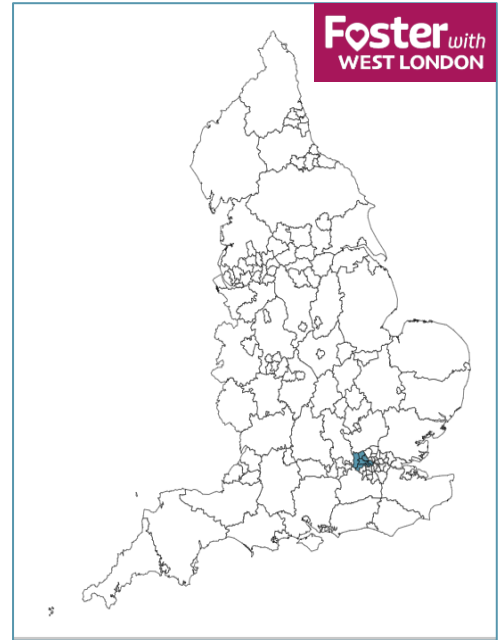
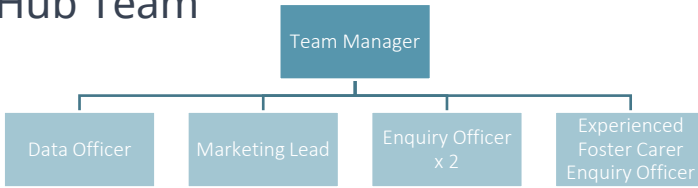
Go Live and ongoing delivery

4.9 Delivery examples: Foster with West London

How the hub describes itself

Foster with West London is a partnership between eight local authorities, working collaboratively to recruit foster carers who can provide a loving and safe home to children in care in West London, increasing and enhancing placements for children and young people locally.

Hub Team



Foster with WEST LONDON

Key features



Check-in calls with carers: as part of the initial enquiry process, the Foster with West London team conduct check-in calls with prospective foster carers. These calls provide support and reassurance, build on the existing relationship developed during the initial enquiry stage and ensure there have been no issues following transfer to the local authority. The check-in calls also provides feedback on the experience with the hub and with local authorities to improve future support.



Fostering Ambassador and Enquiry Officer: An experienced West London Foster Carer is employed as part of the Foster with West London team. They offer advice and can answer specific questions prospective foster carers have and also review documentation and processes to improve the enquiry process for prospective carers. They also provide one to one and group support throughout the assessment process to prospective foster carers.



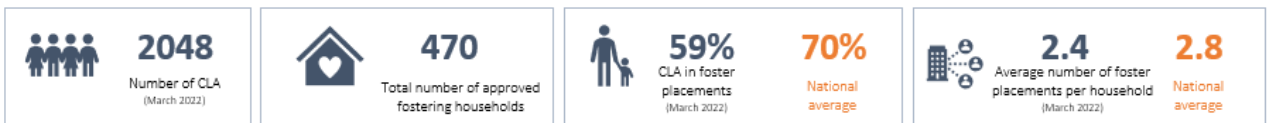
Regional application form: Foster with West London have piloted a regional application form, which standardises the questions asked to prospective foster carers across West London. The team explain how to complete the form and offer support to prospective carers if they are struggling to complete the application form. This will be expanded to all local authorities in the region.

Local authorities involved

Brent	Hillingdon
Ealing	Hounslow
Hammersmith and Fulham	Kensington and Chelsea
Harrow	Westminster

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023





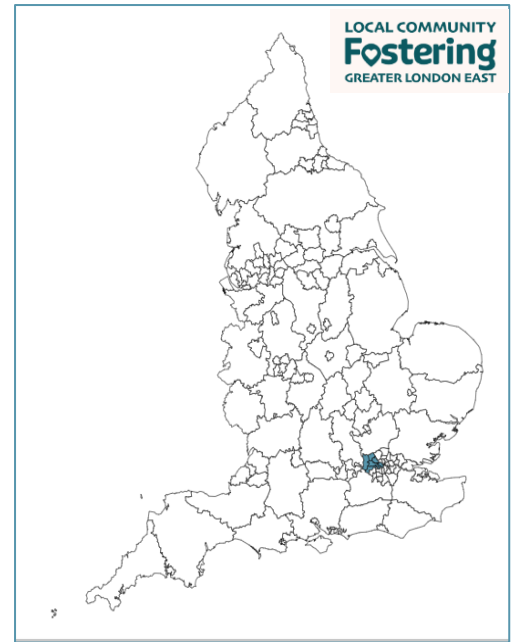
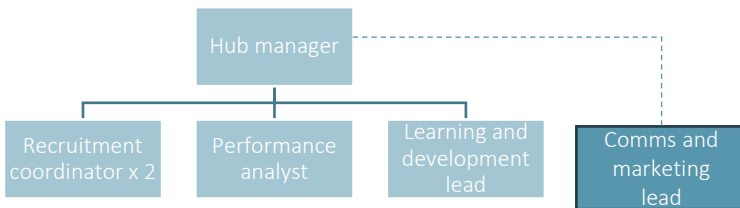
Go Live and ongoing delivery

4.9 Delivery examples: Local Community Fostering Greater London East

How the hub describes itself

Local Community Fostering is a network of six northeast London councils working together to inspire more people from all walks of life to become foster carers. As a hub they provide a package of support that includes training, peer support and dedicated specialist advice on becoming a foster carer.

Hub Team



Local authorities involved

- Waltham Forest
- Newham
- Redbridge
- Barking and Dagenham
- Tower Hamlets
- Wavering

Key features



Experienced foster carer recruitment coordinator: Recruitment coordinators have vast experience of fostering, both from their professional and personal life, and are able to advocate for fostering and answer any questions from the very start of an applicant's journey.



Buddy scheme: Each prospective foster carer is offered the opportunity to pair up with an experienced foster carer as a buddy. Buddy's will check in regularly and provide insight into fostering. Applicants can access a foster carer buddy after their initial home visit.



Regional events: Local Community Fostering are running events across each local authority. They attend key regional events, and activities, providing additional capacity and attendance to support foster care recruitment.

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023



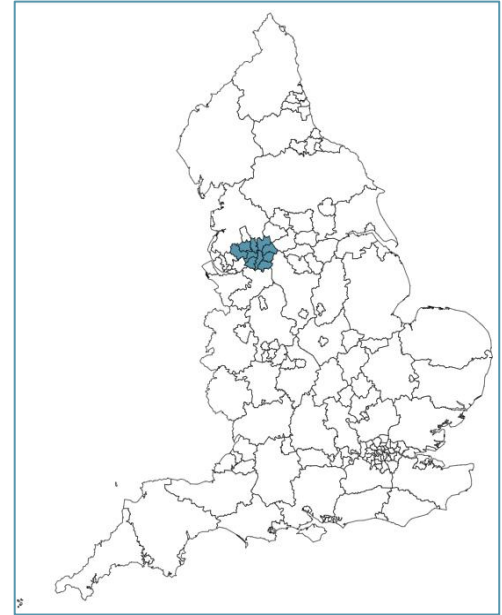
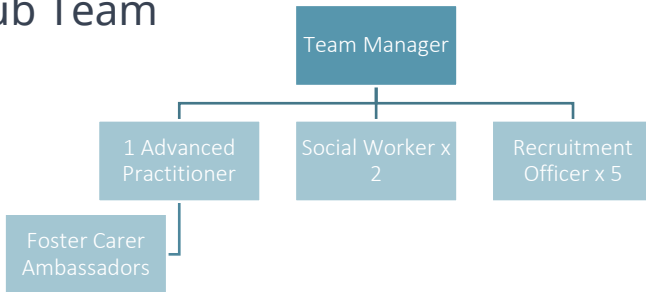


4.9 Delivery examples: Foster for Greater Manchester

How the hub describes itself

Local Community Fostering is a network of six northeast London councils working together to inspire more people from all walks of life to become foster carers. As a hub they provide a package of support that includes training, peer support and dedicated specialist advice on becoming a foster carer.

Hub Team



Key features



Initial Visits: The hub’s scope of activities includes conducting initial visits. The Recruitment Officer’s on the team conduct IVs with Fostering Ambassadors. The team felt that this enabled them to continue to the relationship they had already built with prospective foster carers at the initial enquiry stage. Seeing an enquiry through to the initial visit and application has been a source of satisfaction for team members and been good for morale.



Foster Carer Ambassadors: Provide end to end support to prospective Foster Carers sharing their knowledge and experiences of fostering for their Local Council. The recruitment hub provides bespoke training to Foster Carer Ambassadors who support the hub with initial visits. Prospective Foster Carers have found it useful to speak to a peer during initial visits about their experiences.



Training: Greater Manchester have standardised Skills to Foster training for prospective Foster Carers, the recruitment hub team are also running an additional Skills to Foster to increase capacity. This has reduced time prospective Foster Carers are waiting to attend training.

Local authorities involved	
Bolton	Salford
Bury	Stockport
Manchester	Tameside
Oldham	Trafford
Rochdale	Wigan

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023





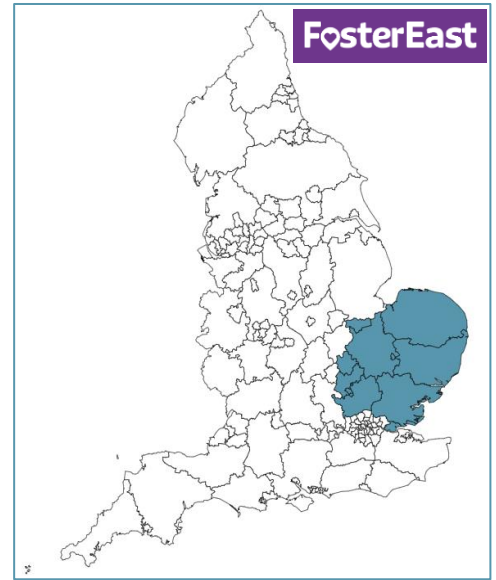
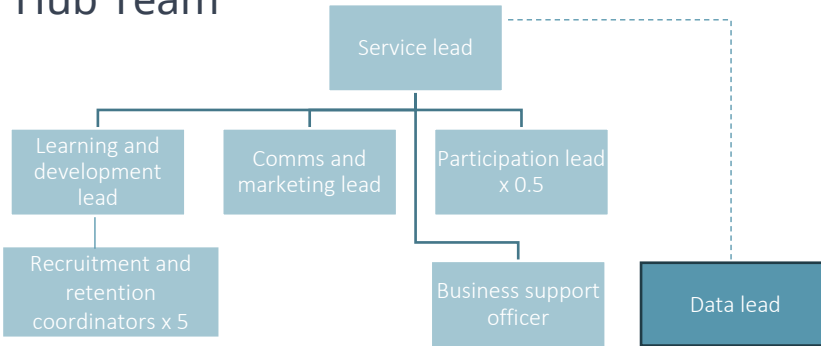
Go Live and ongoing delivery

4.9 Delivery examples: Foster East

Hub Mission

Eleven local authorities responsible for Children's Services in the East of England are working together to deliver Foster East. Foster East is a collaborative approach to foster carer recruitment and support. Every individual will be nurtured through their fostering journey with their local council, with free expert training and support.

Hub Team



Local authorities involved	
Luton	Hertfordshire
Bedford	Norfolk
Central Bedfordshire	Southend
Essex	Peterborough
Thurrock	Cambridge
Suffolk	

Key features



Enquiry options model: To recognise the differences across the 11 LAs within the cluster, Foster East has an options model, whereby LAs can utilise the hub at different levels. The three option levels include: out of hours enquiry support, all hour's enquiry support, and then all hour's enquiry support and initial visits.



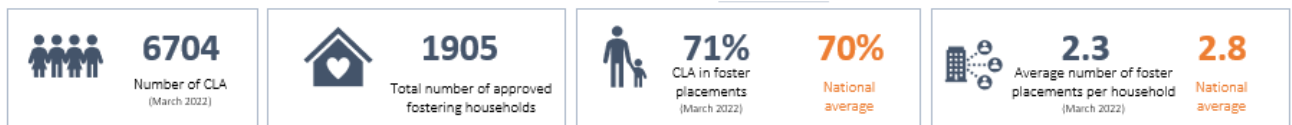
Training programme: Foster East are providing regional Skills to Foster and Trauma Informed Practice; this also includes a foster carer qualification at the University of East Anglia. The cluster are also benefitting from VR headsets that aim to equip prospective foster carers with the skills needed to support children and young people.



Regional ambassador programme : Foster East set up an ambassador programme to support prospective foster carers by offering them the opportunity to speak with experienced foster cares from their very first conversation with the hub. Regional ambassadors also support with recruitment events, answering any questions about the realities of fostering.

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023





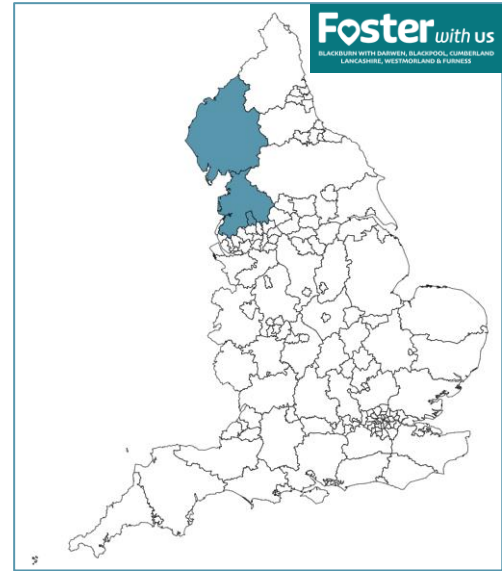
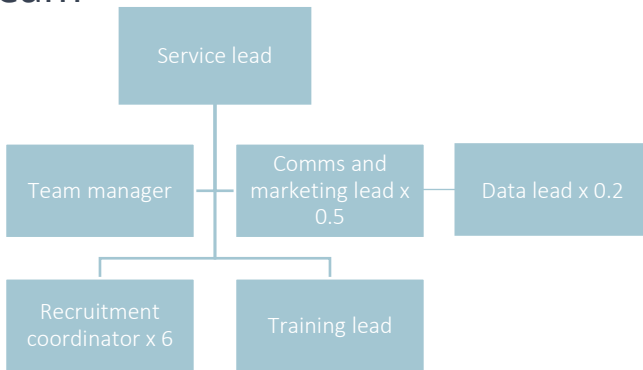
Go Live and ongoing delivery

4.9 Delivery examples: Foster with us

Hub Mission

Foster with us is a collaboration, uniting five local authorities in the northwest. They are combining their knowledge, skills and expertise to provide the best experience for prospective foster carers, existing foster carers and the children they care for through their recruitment hub.

Hub Team



Local authorities involved

- Blackburn With Darwen
- Blackpool
- Cumberland Council
- Westmorland and Furness Council
- Lancashire

Key features



Regional events: Recruitment officers run regular pop-up events, attend local businesses and networking activities across the region. These events provide an informal way for people to find out more about fostering.



Training offer: Foster with us have set up a regional training offer for all prospective foster carers in the region. The offer includes 15 online bitesize courses that foster carers can access during pre-approval. This training is addition to Skills to Foster, which the hub team are also supporting to deliver in each LA within the region.



Buddy scheme: Each prospective foster carer is offered the opportunity to pair up with an experienced foster carer as a buddy. Buddy's will check in regularly and provide insight into fostering. Applicants can access a foster carer buddy at any point in the process. Buddies are also supporting with recruitment events to ensure questions can be answered and lived experience shared from the very first engagement.

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023





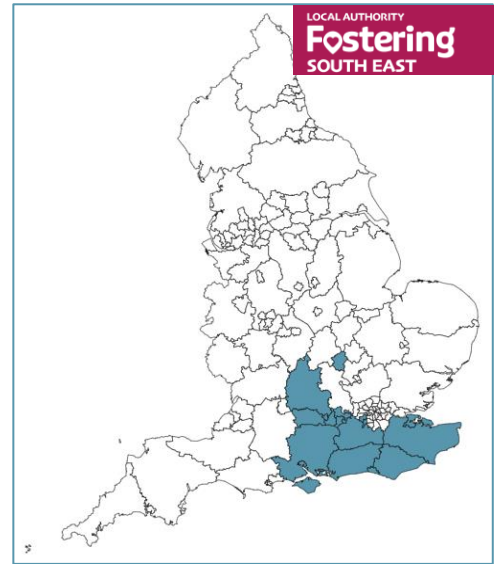
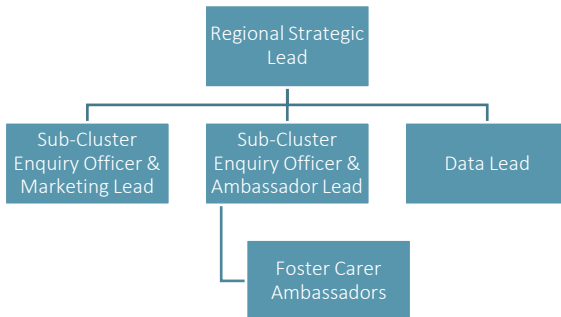
Go Live and ongoing delivery

4.9 Delivery examples: Local Authority Fostering South East

Hub Mission

Local Authority Fostering South East is a new virtual hub, bringing together 20 councils across the region with a shared common goal – to recruit and support more amazing foster carers to provide safe, loving and local homes for children in our communities.

Hub Team



Local authorities involved

Bracknell Forest	Medway
Brighton & Hove	Milton Keynes
East Sussex	Richmond upon Thames
Hampshire	Slough
Isle of Wight	Southampton
Kent	Surrey
Kingston upon Thames	West Berkshire
Oxfordshire	West Sussex
Portsmouth	Windsor & Maidenhead
Reading	Wokingham

Key features



Regional events: The recruitment hub team run a programme of online and in-person events across the region. These provide an opportunity for people to find out more about fostering and target specific groups who may have thought they could not foster.



Foster Carer Ambassadors: Each prospective foster carer is offered the opportunity to speak to an experienced Foster Carer Ambassador who can provide insight into fostering.



Training: The hub team have developed a training package which can be accessed by prospective and experienced foster carers and staff. These focus on building understanding and skills to support foster carers.

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023



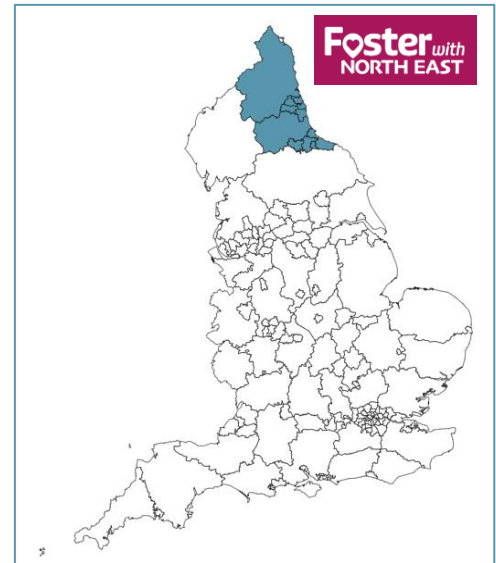
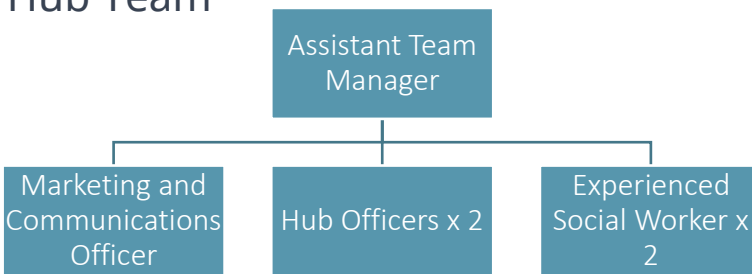


4.9 Delivery examples: Foster with North East

Hub Mission

Foster with North East represents local authority foster care across the whole region. We are joining together for the first time to recruit more foster carers and better the experiences and outcomes for foster carers and the children they care for. We're also offering prospective foster carers increased levels of support through the creation of a specialised support hub.

Hub Team



Local authorities involved	
Darlington	North Tyneside
Durham	Northumberland
Gateshead	Redcard & Cleveland
Hartlepool	South Tyneside
Middlesbrough	Stockon-on-Tees
Newcastle	Together for Children Sunderland

Key features



Training: Foster with North East have centralised Skills to Foster training, operating a rotating location of training across the region to help Foster Carers attend by increasing capacity. The region are also providing Children in Care training and training for children of applicants.



Buddy scheme: Each prospective foster carer is offered the opportunity to pair up with an experienced foster carer as a buddy. Buddy's will check in regularly and provide insight into fostering. Applicants can access a foster carer buddy at any point in the process.



Initial Visits: The region agreed to extend the remit of the hub beyond processes initial enquiries and delivering training to deliver initial visits. Regional initial visits have been rolled out over 7 of the 12 local authorities in the region, with the aim for the hub to conduct initial visits for all local authorities eventually.

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023





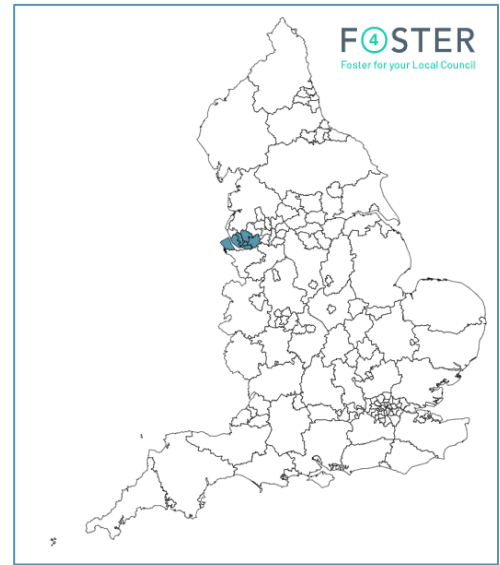
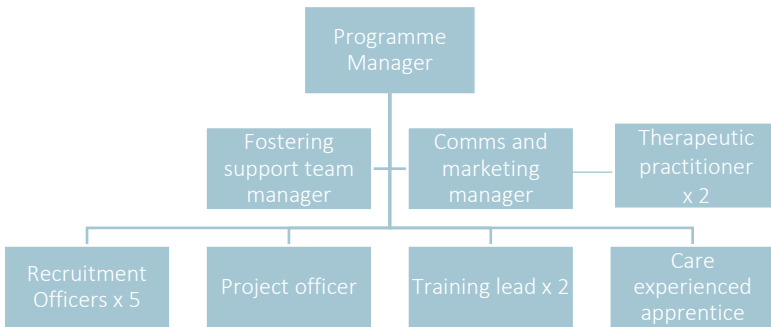
Go Live and ongoing delivery

4.9 Delivery examples: Foster4

Hub Mission

Foster4 is a collaborative foster carer recruitment service, recruiting foster carers on behalf of eight Cheshire and Merseyside Local Authorities. By pooling resources, Foster4 aims to recruit more foster carers, provide greater support to existing foster and keep more local children with local foster carers.

Hub Team



Local authorities involved

Warrington	Knowsley
Cheshire West	St Helens
Chester	Cheshire East
Halton	Liverpool
Wirral	

Key features



Regional events: Recruitment officers run regular pop-up events and coffee mornings across Cheshire and Merseyside. These are events aimed at providing an informal way for people to find out more about fostering.



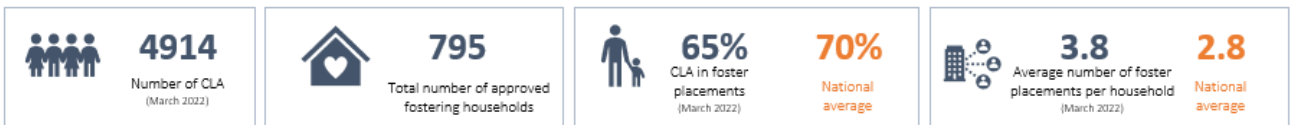
Training portal: Foster4 have set up a regional training portal for all foster carers to access. This provides a streamlined approach for prospective foster carers to sign up to pre-approval training. To support consistency in training and free up LA capacity, some courses will also be delivered on behalf of all LAs by Foster4 training leads.



Therapeutic support: This support addresses the challenges foster carers may face from supporting a child who has had difficult early life experiences and developmental trauma. The support and training provided by the hub offers a safe and empathetic space to explore these challenges during assessment and continues throughout the first 12 months of approval.

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023



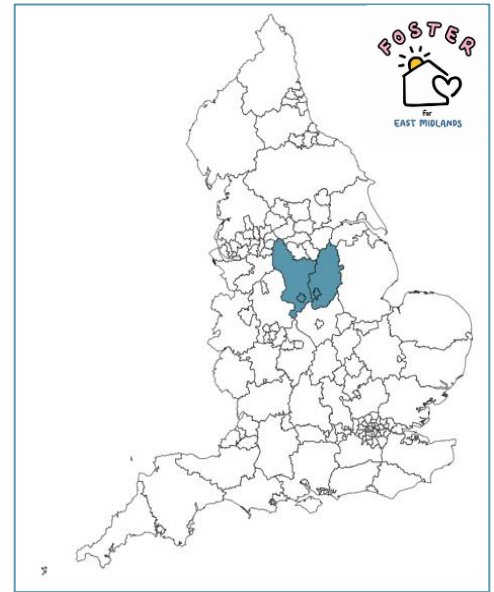
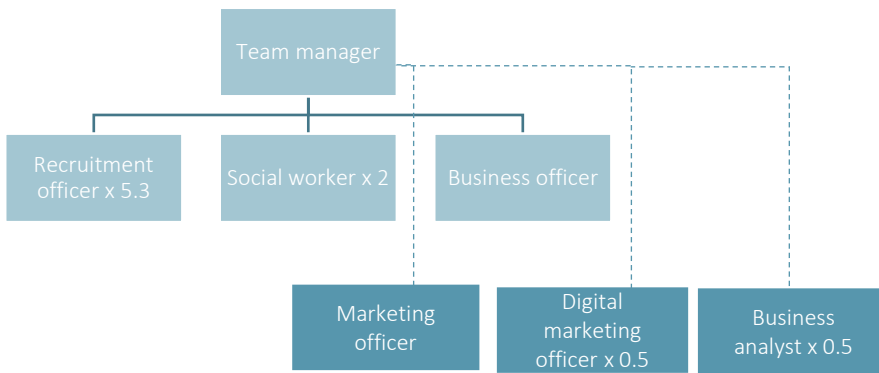


4.9 Delivery examples: Foster for East Midlands

Hub Mission

Foster for East Midlands represents local authority foster carers across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. They have come together to recruit more foster carers and improve their journey, as well as improve the outcomes for the children they care for. They are offering prospective foster carers increased levels of support, sharing resources and knowledge to improve the journey of becoming a foster carer.

Hub Team



Local authorities involved

- Derby
- Derbyshire
- Nottingham
- Nottinghamshire

Key features



Initial Visits: The hub’s scope of activities includes conducting initial visits. Two social workers on the team conduct IVs. This has enabled the hub team to continue the relationship they had already built with prospective foster carers at the initial enquiry stage. Seeing an enquiry through to the initial visit and application has improved the experience of prospective foster carers.



Regional allocations process: The allocation process is foster carer led, with enquirers being asked at each stage of the process which of the 4 LAs they want to foster for. This is then considered by the Hub Manager and each team managers from all 4 LAs. This helps to ensure a fair distributions of applications across the clusters.



Hub staff: The hub team is staffed by people who have worked in each of the LAs within the cluster. This has enabled them to bring a good level of knowledge of each LA’s processes, as well key relationships to support a smooth transition for prospective foster carers.

Context

Summary indicators - Children Looked After (CLA) and fostering (year ending 31 March 2023)



Summary indicators – recruitment outcomes for the region year ending 31 March 2023





Go Live and ongoing delivery



Key learning

Spread the word both regionally *and* locally

In the most successful hubs, all local authority partners were active participants in the communications campaign. The most effective approach to spreading the message on foster carer recruitment was launching a new regional communications campaign, whilst complementing this with local activities. This ensured a cohesive marketing strategy, adding to and harnessing existing local knowledge and relationships between communications colleagues across the region. Campaigns that were less successful saw individual local authorities pause or reduce local marketing. This learning was supported by Verian's evaluation of the North East Pathfinder's campaign.

Go live isn't the end of the journey, it is the start.

Some recruitment support hubs viewed go live as the end of the design and implementation phase. In contrast, other hubs explicitly set the ambition to continue to develop and innovate recruitment across their region. Hubs that set this expectation from the outset, with the support of partner local authorities, were able to set up additional workstreams to further test and develop their service. This worked best when hubs used data to identify areas for improvement, for example delays during the application stage, leading to consideration of how hubs could provide additional support.

Think about the future from the start

Due to the challenging financial landscape in which many LAs operate, discussions about long-term funding were difficult. This was further complicated by LA budget decision-making timelines not aligning with hub operations, resulting in limited evidence to support the efficacy of the recruitment support hubs. Despite these challenges, hubs that considered long-term viability from the start were better equipped to handle funding conversations and secure future funding. This involved capturing data throughout the recruitment journey, regularly reporting this data to the whole region, and understanding individual LA decision-making processes and the levels at which financial contributions needed to be approved.

Get support from the community of hub leaders

Managing a new service, whilst starting a new job and possibly even joining a new organisation is a tall order. However, speaking and learning from others in the same position can help. Hub leaders benefitted from leaning on each other, sharing their experiences and insights to improve their service and address challenges collectively. Meeting at least once a month, and often speaking to each other on a more regular basis, hub leaders created a supportive environment, helping to encourage continuous improvement and innovation and share resources across the programme.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the individuals who contributed their time and expertise to review and provide feedback on the guide:

- ▼ **Hub Leaders** from the ten recruitment support hubs for sharing their insight and learning
- ▼ **Sarah Thomas**, Chief Executive of The Fostering Network
- ▼ **Mark Owers**, Co-author of the 2018 review of foster care, Chair of the National Adopter Recruitment Steering Group, and former CEO of the CVAA
- ▼ **Caroline West**, Project Manager in Transformation Programme Team, Together for Children Sunderland and North East Pathfinder
- ▼ Colleagues from **Achieving for Children**, including **Suzanne Payne**, **Matthew Edwards** and **Tom Chapman**.

