

Department for Education

# Renewing fostering: Homes for 10,000 more children

## Loving Homes for England's children

February 2026

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**The fostering system is under acute strain**

- Demand is rising whilst supply is falling:** Children in care numbers have reached their highest level in recent years while the number of mainstream foster carers has dropped by 12% since 2019.
- Carers are ageing and leaving early:** A third of carers are over 60, and nearly 30% quit within two years – citing exhaustion, lack of support, and not being treated as trusted partners.
- Children pay the price:** Too many are placed far from home, split from siblings, or moved repeatedly—losing relationships with family, friends and teachers.
- Residential care is increasing – and costly:** A 24% rise in children in residential care, despite worse outcomes and doubling costs, driven largely by lack of foster homes.
- The system is outdated and bureaucratic:** Assessments take too long, support is inconsistent, leadership fragmented, and red tape prevents carers from offering normal family life.
- High interest, low conversion:** 150,000 people enquire about fostering each year—yet only 7,365 are approved because the process is slow, confusing and unresponsive.
- A broken cycle:** Shortages drive costs up; high costs weaken local authority budgets; weakened support pushes carers out; fewer carers reduce placement choice for children.

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**Our plan**

Renewing fostering: Homes for 10,000 more children

- England-wide action
  - National communications campaign
  - Room Makers
  - Digital Tools
- Enhanced regional collaboration
  - Redesign of recruitment hubs
  - Regional Care Cooperatives
- Innovation
  - Innovation fund
  - Build the evidence base and share best practice
- Strengthened support
  - Training and networks
  - Handling of allegations
  - Financial transparency
- A simplified rulebook
  - Steps to improve recruitment and retention
  - Trusted relationships

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Our Plan: England-wide action

**We will launch a major national communications campaign to inspire more people to foster**

National communications campaign

- Campaign planning is underway, with initial activity being scoped for spring. We're currently seeking ministerial approval through the Cabinet Office and expect a decision shortly.
- National activity will ensure we reach a broader and more diverse pool of potential carers and reflect the diversity of children in care. We know there are thousands of households across England who could offer loving, stable homes - but may not yet see themselves as foster carers.
- We're looking at how we reach people who may have considered fostering but been put off by myths - for example, that you need to own your home, or that you can't foster if you're single, or have a disability, or smoke.
- National comms activity will support regional recruitment in a way that helps inspire people to consider fostering supported by authentic story telling.

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Our Plan: National action

**We will launch a capital programme enabling home adaptations that rapidly create new foster places and reduce reliance on residential homes**

Room Makers

- Experienced foster carers offer a significant untapped source of placements, but lack of space is a major barrier - particularly impactful for siblings and in urban areas.
- We want to enable experienced foster carers (with at least two years of experience) to increase space in their homes and create more foster placements.
- Builds on successful pilots including Greater Manchester Combined Authority - 'Room Makers' scheme won 'The Children in Care Award' at the Children and Young People Now Awards in 2023.
- We will award up to **£25 million in capital grants** over the next two financial years to:
  - expand placement capacity where it is most needed
  - improve matching options and outcomes for children, including siblings
  - reduce pressure on residential care
  - make full use of the skills and experience already in the system

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Our Plan: National action

**We will develop a new end-to-end digital service simplifying the journey for prospective carers**

Digital tools

- We will provide a clear and engaging entry point for prospective foster carers.
- Enable fostering hubs and local authorities to manage and assess applications seamlessly.
- Digital enhancement will deliver greater data transparency.

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## Slide 6

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**DGO** [@SADIQ, Adetayo] are you able to attend the Coram engagement event we have on Monday (and/or perhaps [@BURTON, David] someone from Digital may want to join).

Please could you add/amend bullets here? Plan to keep high-level / have on screen and talk to any detail we can.

GREEDUS, David, 2026-02-05T11:47:09.750

**BDO 0** Yes, happy to join - [@SADIQ, Adetayo] please could you forward me the invitation?

BURTON, David, 2026-02-05T16:39:17.401

**0 1** Yes I am able to. I don't have the invite yet. Can you forward it to me please? [@GREEDUS, David]

SADIQ, Adetayo, 2026-02-05T16:52:36.141

### We will expand and redesign the Fostering Hubs so that they encompass the entire assessment, approval process and on-going support for foster carers

#### Investment and redesign of recruitment hubs

- Expansion of **Regional Fostering Hubs** to deliver a full end-to-end model, covering recruitment, assessment, approval, and ongoing support.
- **£12.8m investment** to help existing hubs transition and support **new local authorities to join**.
- New 'end-to-end' model built around **seven core principles**, including targeted recruitment, a single front door, 'journey guides', regional assessment & approval, strengthened support networks, enhanced data, and consistent post-approval support.
- Introduction of a **performance framework** and mechanisms for best-practice sharing, ensuring hubs meet expectations and continuously improve.
- Rollout September 2026 for existing hubs.
- For LAs seeking to set up new hubs - we expect an expression of interest for areas wishing to join the end-to-end model will launch in the Spring.

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### We will scale Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)

#### Regional Care Cooperatives

- RCCs aim to transform children's social care by pooling local authority resources, improving forecasting, and collaborating regionally to secure high-quality, local homes for children in care.
- Pathfinders in Greater Manchester and the South East show early success, including improved data-driven planning, increased specialist local provision, better workforce development, and reduced reliance on costly out-of-area placements.
- RCCs will act as regional delivery organisations, managing provision, sharing data, coordinating with health, education and policing partners, and negotiating collectively with providers to improve quality and value.
- Rollout will be accelerated, launching an over-£10m expression-of-interest process in spring 2026 with a long-term vision for every local authority to join an RCC to deliver sustainable, child-centred care close to home.

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### We will launch a £12.4m Fostering Innovation Programme to test and scale new fostering models that improve sufficiency, stability and outcomes.

#### Innovation

- **Accelerate the development and adoption of innovative foster care models** that better meet children's needs, improve stability, and strengthen family-based care across the system.
- **Provide targeted national investment** to help test new approaches, identify promising approaches and scale effective models.
- **Build a stronger evidence base to inform future policy and practice**, ensuring innovation translates into improved outcomes, stronger relationships, and more sustainable fostering arrangements.
- More information on how to access funding will be available in the coming months.

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**We will continue to support the rollout of Mockingbird, and design a stronger regional training and support offer**

Training and networks

- We will test and develop an **enhanced training and support offer from 2027-28**, drawing on learning from programmes like Mockingbird.
- This might include areas like therapeutic training, peer support or reflective practice.
- Connected carers approach, making it easier for foster carers to use their wider networks to support both children and carers, including taking short breaks from caring responsibilities.
- Continue **Mockingbird** rollout in 2026-27 with at least 100 constellations expected to be delivered in 2026-27.

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**We will reform the handling of allegations with clearer distinction between allegations and care-standard concerns**

Improving the handling of allegations

- This will be addressed within new **standards and guidance**.
- **Consultation** seeking views from the sector and those with lived experience.
- **Greater support for children:** careful consideration on ending placements; voice of the child and advocacy; effect on other children in the home.
- **Greater support for carers:** reiterating importance of independent support; continued support from supervising social workers - leaning in, not withdrawing.
- **Greater transparency and fairness:** timeliness; continued financial support; training and information sharing; ability to respond before panel.

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**We must modernise support and regulation to retain carers and make fostering fit for family life**

Financial transparency

- Seeking views in the **call for evidence**.
- **Significant regional variation** in financial support - allowances, fees, and expenses
- Lack of clear information or transparency for carers.
- Lack of clarity on different components of pay.

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Our Plan: A simpler rulebook

### A relationship-centred rulebook that empowers carers to make day-to-day decisions and reduces red tape.

A simplified rulebook

- **Improving how we recruit** foster carers, myth busting and driving consistency in assessment practice
  - Consulting on the removal of panels in assessment
  - Consulting on updated **standards and guidance** (to follow later this year)
- **A more trusting approach** to carer decision making - making it explicit in revised guidance and standards that foster carers can make day-to-day decisions about the children in their care
- **Raising expectations** for services to build peer networks
- **Promoting kinship** and protecting children's existing trusted relationships
- Encouraging **multi-disciplinary approaches**, fewer but stronger practitioner relationships and the use of advocacy

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Consultation and Call for Evidence

### We have a live consultation and call for evidence to inform the next steps on fostering

Consultation

Amending the role of fostering panels and strengthening quality assurance standards within the assessment process

- Remove requirement for approvals
- Reduced for deregistration
- Decisions made by Agency Decision Maker
- Strengthened standards and guidance for carrying out this role
- Decision makers held to account

Improving the handling of allegations and standards of care concerns

- Greater support for children
- Greater support for carers
- Greater transparency and fairness

Call for evidence

Financial transparency

A foster care register

Fostering limit

DBS and vetting

Allegations

Innovation

Kinship

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