

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- The system is outdated and bureaucratic:** Assessments take too long, support is inconsistent, leadership fragmented, and red tape prevents carers from offering normal family life.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:** there were 150,000 enquiries about fostering last year—yet only 7,365 carers were 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	Enhanced regional collaboration	Innovation	Strengthened support	A simplified rulebook
National communications campaign	Redesign of recruitment hubs	Innovation fund	Training and networks	Steps to improve recruitment and retention
Room Makers	Regional Care Cooperatives	Build the evidence base and share best practice	Handling of allegations	Trusted relationships
Digital Tools			Financial transparency	

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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
  - Retained 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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