



Last year saw the publication of two reports on our fostering system – the independent review, [Foster Care in England](#), and the Education Select Committee's [Fostering Report](#). I was very encouraged by the assessment of fostering in this country presented by the reports, particularly the conclusion that foster care is a protective factor for the majority of looked after children. However, as both reports highlighted, there is more work to be done to ensure that all children in foster care have as positive an experience as possible.

A key message from both reports, and a priority for the National Stability Forum (NSF), is the need to increase stability for children in care. We know from the Children's Commissioner's Stability Index that placement instability is not only detrimental to the young person's wellbeing and outcomes, but also drives school instability and future placement breakdowns.

To provide young people in care with stability and prevent unnecessary placement breakdowns, we need to have sufficient placements in all areas and for all levels of need; giving local authorities a choice of potential placements allows them to match their children with the right foster family, rather than the only available option. It is therefore crucial that we have foster parents with the right skills and capabilities to meet the needs of the young person in their care throughout their childhood and teenage years and beyond. While recruiting new foster parents is necessary to achieve this, it is also important that we ensure that those foster parents we already have are supported to develop any skills they require through training. We also need to work on developing strategic approaches to commissioning and sufficiency planning, with a focus on longer-term supply of provision tailored to the specific needs of children in the area.

[Fostering Better Outcomes](#), the Government's response to the reports, outlined the steps being taken to address the challenges set out above. These include creating a network of Fostering Trailblazers to identify and share best practice, exploring how cost and value analysis tools might be used, and exploring how digital solutions could improve the way information moves around the system.

However, I would also like to see local authorities considering the practical steps they could take to address these challenges. For example, commissioning practice and value for money could be improved by forming partnerships with each other, allowing resources to be pooled and reducing unhelpful competition for recruitment of foster parents. Similarly, building constructive relationships with independent fostering agencies and other stakeholders has the potential to increase strategic, demand-driven commissioning, improve cost-effectiveness, and reduce reliance on emergency spot-purchasing, which limits choice and leads to placement disruption. Local authorities might also consider improving sufficiency by adopting new approaches to recruiting, training and retaining foster parents, or consider improving placement stability directly, by implementing models that create or strengthen links between different types of care placements, ensuring smooth transitions that are driven by children's needs rather than placement availability.

The NSF was established in part to challenge the Department for Education to give due consideration to stability and permanence during all aspects of strategic thinking and policy-making. It also has a role in galvanising opinion and action by local



authorities and providers, as well as shaping and promoting effective practice across the sector. This policy brief is an invitation for local authorities to assess the feasibility of introducing new or expanded collaborative approaches across sufficiency planning and commissioning of foster care, foster parent recruitment and training, and movement between home, foster care and residential care. I am interested to see how local authorities and their partners will work together to identify and address challenges affecting fostering in the area. Only by working in partnership will we be able to deliver the degree of change needed to increase stability and improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Indra Morris'.

Indra Morris

Chair of the National Stability Forum



Improving Commissioning and Sufficiency Planning to Increase Stability and Permanence for Looked After Children

The Department for Education is inviting proposals to improve sufficiency planning and commissioning of care placements, particularly foster care, with the aim of increasing stability and improving outcomes for children in the care system. We would like to hear from groups of local or combined authorities, ideally working with cross-sector partners such as IFAs, who are interested in carrying out a feasibility exercise into how their region can introduce new or expanded collaborative approaches across sufficiency planning and commissioning of foster care placements (including support care), foster parent recruitment and training, and movement between home, foster care and residential care.

This brief sets out the areas we would like proposals to address, together with the key criteria we will use to evaluate the proposals.

DfE has an initial fund of up to £500k and is inviting bids to access some of this funding in order to carry out detailed feasibility studies (see section 4 for desired outputs).

1. Background

Fostering is the most common type of care provision – 73% of all looked-after children are cared for in a foster placement. Although, on the face of it, the supply of foster placements is sufficient to meet demand at a national level, many local authorities report a shortage of placements, particularly for children with high needs. As at 31 March 2018, 38% of children in foster placements were located outside the boundary of their responsible local authority.

Both the independent review of the fostering system, [Foster Care in England](#), and the Education Select Committee's [Fostering Report](#) identified the following factors contributing to some of these capacity issues;

- An increasingly large and older population of looked-after children, which creates a greater demand for more and different types of foster placements;
- Inconsistency in the quality of sufficiency planning, which prevents strategic recruitment of foster parents based on local need;
- A lack of effective partnerships between local authorities and IFAs, which increases the use of inefficient spot-purchasing;
- A lack of long-term placement planning as part of supply and commissioning processes; and
- Inconsistency in the quality of recruitment and retention of foster parents, which has resulted in a decline in the number of registered fostering households and available placements.



The steps being taken to address these issues were described in the Government's response to Foster Care in England, [Fostering Better Outcomes](#). The DfE is creating a network of Fostering Trailblazers to identify best practice and to share expertise around the country to address practice issues found in the fostering system. We are exploring how tools for in-depth cost and value analysis can be more effectively used to improve service delivery and outcomes for children and young people. Finally, there is a project underway to explore how digital solutions could be used to improve the way information moves around the system, which will ensure that children and young people, their foster parents and their fostering services are better equipped to plan and deliver services.

In addition to these measures, we are inviting bids for seed-funding from local or combined authorities, either alone or as part of a consortia, working with providers or other partner organisations. Successful bidders will carry out feasibility studies into projects that will introduce new or expanded collaborative approaches across sufficiency planning, commissioning, recruitment and training of foster parents, and arrangements for young people preparing to step up to or down from residential care or return home from foster care.

2. Proposals

We are interested in receiving proposals which clearly outline the problem you are trying to solve, your plan to fix it and your capacity to deliver that plan. Proposals should outline a feasibility exercise to address commissioning, sufficiency and market issues within fostering in the local area or region. We are particularly interested in hearing from partnerships of local authorities and providers.

We are interested in receiving proposals that target areas such as:

- Sufficiency planning at scale, with a view to increasing stability and permanence;
- Recruitment and retention of foster parents, particularly based on the results of needs analysis;
- Building the capability of foster parents through training in order to reduce placement breakdowns and/or increase capacity of specialist provision;
- Improved commissioning practice, including joint commissioning arrangements;
- Gaining a better understanding of the relationship between children's needs and placement costs to ensure greater value in spend on placements;
- Models that create or strengthen links between different types of care placements, e.g. supporting children moving between residential care and fostering;



- Enabling children on the edge of care and their families to gain earlier access to foster care through support foster care; and
- Introducing fostering respite to enable looked after children to return home.

These are just a few examples – we are open to receiving a range of proposals that address specific local problems. These proposals could involve expanding an existing model with a proven track record, introducing a model that has worked elsewhere, or implementing a new model.

The feasibility exercise should deliver an evidence-based needs analysis. The proposal should describe how you will:

- Collect and use data to enable authorities to accurately forecast demand, based on the needs of looked after children in the region and placement costs; and
- Create a strategic approach to sufficiency planning to ensure longer-term supply, to ensure provision is tailored to the specific needs of the children and secure greater value for money.

3. Scope

We are open to receiving proposals for a wide range of projects, and do not want to limit the scope unnecessarily.

However, proposals should be related to fostering; we are not looking to fund projects that only involve looked-after children in other forms of care provision. That said, we welcome projects that could address issues that apply to all, or a range of, provision for looked after children alongside fostering.

We are currently not looking to fund development of standalone digital solutions. However, we acknowledge that some projects will require the use of new tools and these are included within the scope.

We expect projects to take learning from existing or similar projects – for example, those funded through our £200m Innovation Programme.

4. Delivery Outputs

Examples of the outputs we would hope to see delivered through the feasibility study include:

- A documented feasibility exercise, including a plan for progressing to delivery and projected impact of roll out;
- A needs analysis;
- An identification of potential revenue funding streams;



- A business case proposal; and
- In principle agreement from the Chief Executive(s), elected members and other partners.

5. Assessment Criteria of Bid

Please format your proposal using the below criteria as sub-headings, making note of the word limit for each section.

Ref	Outcome	Score
1	Delivery Model (40%, 750 - 1000 words)	
	<p>The proposal should;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearly set out the projected benefits of the feasibility study, the impact the work would have, and the outcomes which you aim to realise for your looked after children• Clearly describe how your feasibility study will be developed and delivered;• Show how the relationship between needs and costs will be defined and reviewed;• Outline your experience and expertise in working with partners;• Outline your experience and expertise in developing some or all of the following – feasibility studies, business cases, impact assessments and service innovation;• Explain your delivery model and how it will deliver on the requirements and outcomes of the feasibility study;• Demonstrate how evidence of local/regional needs informs the project; and• Show a clear understanding of the costs involved.	



2	Effective Implementation (25%, 750 - 1000 words)
	<p>The proposal should;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify key activities, milestones and timescales, as well as risk and contingency arrangements;• Outline which partners will be engaged during this period, and how this engagement will be carried out;• Include a clear plan for obtaining approval and buy-in from agency partners, such as Chief Executives, elected members and partner organisations;• Include an outline plan for securing capital and revenue funding from other sources and demonstrate the project's financial sustainability in the long-term; and• Include an outline plan for assessing impact, as well as the potential for impact if the model were rolled out.
3	Stakeholder Engagement (10%, 500 - 750 words)
	<p>The proposal should;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outline how children, birth families and foster families will be engaged throughout the project and how their views will be taken into consideration;• Outline how stakeholders will be engaged throughout the project and how their views will be taken into consideration; and• Outline your expertise and experience of working with a large range of stakeholders, including, but not limited, to local, regional and national government.



4	Quality Assurance (10%, 500 - 750 words)	
	<p>The proposal should;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outline any evidence supporting your proposed model.• Outline the involvement of any experts with your proposal; and,• Include a comprehensive list of the types and sources of data you anticipate collecting and sharing, as well as the frequency of data recording.	
5	Value for Money (5%, 250 - 500 words)	
	<p>The proposal should;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outline how you will ensure that your proposal will provide value for money; and• Provide a detailed budget breakdown, detailing each major cost line. <p>DfE welcomes any other additional value through 'in kind' match or other ways that service users will receive added value.</p>	



6. Evaluation Criteria

Scoring Standards	Criteria	Score
Outstanding	The evidence demonstrates that the requirement is fully met and provides demonstrable added value.	5
Good	The evidence demonstrates that the requirement is fully met.	4
Satisfactory	Evidence provided shows that the requirement is met but minor reservations exist about the quality or extent of the evidence provided.	3
Poor	Evidence provided shows that the requirement is met but significant reservations exist about the quality or extent of the evidence provided.	2
Unacceptable	Fails to demonstrate or provide evidence of an ability to meet a specific requirement.	1
Non-Compliant	Fails to provide the required information.	0

7. Acknowledgement and Intention to Bid

Please email to acknowledge receipt and confirm your intention to bid by **11.59pm** on **24 March 2019**.

8. Clarification Questions

Clarification questions should be emailed to sara.rajendran@education.gov.uk by **5pm** on **29 March 2019** with the subject: **Improving Commissioning and Sufficiency Planning to Increase Stability and Permanence for Looked After Children**.

All questions submitted will be responded to and sent via email to all parties who have signalled an intention to bid.

9. Submission Deadline

You should email your final bid to the following email address: sara.rajendran@education.gov.uk by **5pm** on **17 May 2019** with the subject: **Improving Commissioning and Sufficiency Planning to Increase Stability and Permanence for Looked After Children**.



If you have not had an acknowledgement from us that we have received the bid within one working day of submission, please contact us to ensure receipt of bid.

10. Grant Award and Notice to Unsuccessful Bidders

All bidders will be emailed directly to inform them of the outcome of their bid.

Full terms and conditions, including agreed dates for key milestones and reporting requirements, will be set out in the contract with the successful provider.

11. Indicative Timeline

Deadline	Activity
11 March 2019	Policy brief distributed
24 March 2019	Deadline to acknowledge receipt and intention to bid
29 March 2019	Deadline for clarifications
17 May 2019	Deadline for submission of bids
17 June 2019	Grant letters issued to successful bidders
08 July 2019	Project initiation
10 January 2020	Deadline for completion

12. Distribution

This brief has been distributed to;

- All Directors of Children's Services in England
- The Children's Services Development Group
- CoramBAAF
- Fostering Network
- FosterTalk
- The Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers