

Call-Off Schedule 20 (Call-Off Specification)

This Schedule sets out the characteristics of the Deliverables that the Supplier will be required to make to the Buyers under this Call-Off Contract

OVERVIEW OF THE AUTHORITY

1. The Department for Education (DfE), is responsible for children's services and education, including early years, schools, higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills in England. We work to provide children's services, education and skills training that ensures opportunity is equal for all, no matter background, family circumstances, or need. At our heart, we are the department for realising potential. We enable children and learners to thrive, by protecting the vulnerable and ensuring the delivery of excellent standards of education, training and care. This helps realise everyone's potential – and that powers our economy, strengthens society, and increases fairness.

BACKGROUND TO REQUIREMENTS

2. DfE is looking for a delivery partner to provide support and challenge to Local Authorities (LAs) working in small, self-selected, groups, or "clusters", to deliver an ambitious programme to overhaul fostering recruitment, delivering on a commitment made in [*Stable Homes, Built on Love*](#).
3. 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. The Government made fostering a day one commitment in their response to these reviews. There is a long-standing placement sufficiency problem in foster care, which is likely to worsen due to increasing concerns over the rising cost of living, with strong evidence this is negatively impacting on retention¹. The implications for this to children's outcomes, as well as local authority finances, demand action. In her oral statement, responding to the Independent Review, Secretary of State Keegan stated that we will 'reform the care system to make sure we have the right homes for children in the right places'. To do this, we must 'deliver a fostering programme to recruit and retain more foster carers'.
4. In the Government's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, and CMA markets study, *Stable Homes, Build on Love*, DfE have pledged to put love, relationships, and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care.

¹ [A survey conducted by FosterTalk](#) of 4,349 foster carers reports that 43% of carers are considering ceasing to foster in the next 2 years without further financial support. In a survey conducted by The Fostering Network, 70 per cent of respondents said they have considered quitting due to the rising costs and not being able to afford to look after children in their care anymore.

When care is the best choice for a child, it is critical that the care system provides stable, loving homes close to children's communities. Homes that provide consistency, stability and warmth. The way we currently plan, commission and provide homes for children in care is not working. This means too often children are living far from where they would call home or in the wrong type of home for what they need. We need to transform the way we provide homes for children, so they are the right homes in the right places. We must also be ambitious for children in care and care leavers - to help them recover, thrive and achieve their potential into adulthood.

5. To start changing the way we provide stable, loving homes for children in care, over the next two years the government has pledged to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme so foster care is available for more children who need it, investing over £27 million over the next two years. This will boost approvals of foster carers in areas of specific shortage, as well as addressing retention through better support to existing foster carers. We will test and develop a best practice regional model that can then be delivered more widely.
6. The full programme will contain three strands of work:
 - A. **Foster recruitment support hub** to improve the journey from enquiry to application and approval across clusters of LAs and establish a pan-local authority approach to fostering recruitment work. This will include a regionally run support hub as well as the standardisation of the approval processes and offer to foster carers in the LAs within this, so there are smooth and consistent processes for managing enquiries handed over by the hub,
 - B. **Foster care recruitment communications campaign** – to boost the number of quality enquiries and build evidence of effective marketing strategies through a pathfinder communications campaign.
 - C. **Retention** - to enhance the offer to new applicants and boost retention of existing carers by implementing the evidence-based model 'Mockingbird'², which has been found to substantially improve retention.
7. Strands A-C offer an end-to-end improvement in attracting new leads, converting them to approved carers where appropriate and retaining those who are approved to foster. The central shift in this programme will be around strand A which seeks to convert existing high levels of interest into applications and approvals. Data of foster care recruitment shows key weak points in the process.

² The [Mockingbird Family model](#) is an innovative approach to strengthening the delivery of foster care, matching 6-10 satellite families grouped into a constellation around a hub home carer. The hub home provides sleepovers and short breaks, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. The hub carer builds relationships with all those in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown.

In the year ending March 2022, there were 138,075 initial enquiries from prospective fostering households, an all-time high. However, only 8,280 foster carer applications were received. Whilst this data should be treated with caution due to likely duplication in numbers caused by individuals enquiring with more than one service, there are clear drop off points with 94% of enquiries not resulting in an application. Even fewer go on to be approved, with 4,035 new foster carers last year.

8. An initial pathfinder to test the foster care recruitment and support model is underway in the North-East (with all 12 LAs in the NE region a partner), which is currently being co-designed with the region and will go live from September 2023. This is being rolled out more widely from 2023, with a view to going live in September 2024. We anticipate funding a further 9 clusters of around 7-12 LAs per cluster.
9. We require a delivery partner to work alongside us and the sector to provide challenge, independent oversight and support to LAs in relation to foster care recruitment support hubs, to ensure that this programme results in real, lasting change. The delivery partner would provide oversight of the project and leverage regional working at a senior strategic level to establish regional working patterns. The purpose of a delivery partner is to provide appropriate levels of both challenge and support to LAs to ensure new ways of working are embedded, as well as gathering and sharing insights between groups of LAs on approaches, successes and challenges to bring shared learning to the regions taking part in this programme nationally and inform DfE policy development. We also require access to specialist and technical skills to support LAs on an ad hoc basis. In summary, our service requirements are for:
 - A. **Central and strategic oversight of the programme**
Including delivering monthly progress checks to the DfE, collating insights, challenges and successes across projects and delivering live lessons to DfE and other projects.
 - B. **Coaching support and change management**
Including convening high level strategic meetings with senior leaders of the LAs, supporting them to articulate their vision for regional cooperation in fostering, and providing challenge where necessary to ensure that this programme delivers against its objectives.
 - C. **Technical expertise**
Including drawing down on the technical expertise such as IT and data collection and high-level strategic oversight.
10. The delivery partner will be expected to work with up to 9 new regional cluster groups and the North East Regional Innovation and Improvement Alliance. The

contract for the delivery partner will start in June 2023 and conclude in March 2025 at the latest. As the NE Pathfinder is already underway and working to co-produce a regional support hub which will be formed by May 2023 and fully operational by September 2023, we anticipate the delivery partners most useful input will be in capturing learning to date so it can be shared with other areas. However, offering a degree of challenge in terms of measuring the impact of the hub and problem solving as it moves towards becoming operational in September will help ensure the pathfinder delivers against its objectives.

CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS

Knowledge and skills

11. The following is not an exhaustive list, but the successful supplier will be able to demonstrate that their organisation/consortium possesses the requisite skills and expertise for the Delivery Partner role:
- i. A demonstrable record of working in a Children's Social Care context, for example supporting on previous fostering or adoption programmes;
 - ii. Experience of working with local authorities, and particularly with DCSs, including credibility within the sector to influence delivery at a senior level;
 - iii. Experience in managing conflict resolution;
 - iv. Expertise in delivering transformation programmes in complex delivery environments;
 - v. Experience of change management, including a track record of programmes that embed sustainable change across complex organisations and systems; and
 - vi. Ability to deliver specialist skills and resources e.g., IT coaching.

Services

12. While we will work closely with the successful bidder to design the specifics of a programme of work, there are three main areas we expect the Delivery Partner to service: central and strategic oversight of the programme; coaching and change management; and technical expertise. We have specified further details and deliverables for each of these areas below.

Requirement 1: Central and strategic oversight of the programme

13. *Description* – The delivery partner will act as a central strategic link between the Department and LAs taking part in this work. DfE will provide a detailed vision and plan for the programme and the delivery partner will work with LAs to ensure they are delivering against this, providing support and challenge to do so, reporting back to DfE on progress and collating and sharing learning between LAs.

14. *Deliverables* – The delivery partner will

- Work with interested regional clusters of LAs to prepare bids, including testing regional boundaries and partnerships against the criteria set by DfE;
- Provide the DfE with monthly progress, risks and issues monitoring of successful LA cluster groups as they take work forward;
- Be actively involved in monthly programme meetings with senior DfE officials and other stakeholders involved in the programme;
- Ensure that learning is captured and effectively recorded to ensure lessons are learned for and used to support projects at different stages, as well as full national roll out in the future;
- Identify and support examples of best solutions or best practice, ensuring that they are supported to be great, and lessons are spread across the sector;
- Identify and then work with projects, the DfE and key sector stakeholders to solve cross cutting issues through joint problem solving;
- Provide real-time feedback of emerging evidence to the fostering delivery team; and
- Develop a formal learning programme that is responsive to the sector's needs and is delivered in a timely fashion. This could be made up of all project learning events, as well as masterclasses on specific topics.

Requirement 2: Coaching and change management

15. *Description* – The delivery partner will provide regular support and challenge to successful LA cluster groups. This will include supporting interested clusters to write their proposals, as well as supporting LA leaders to harmonise fostering processes and offers across the cluster region. This will likely include identifying differences and brokering solutions. We have estimated that each project would require four days of project support per month, with some time being given to direct project support, and some time to evaluation and programme oversight.

16. *Deliverables* – The delivery partner will

- Work with the lead for LA cluster groups to articulate the case for change and developing detailed implementation plans;
- Provide high-quality, impartial advice and appropriate strategic challenge to cluster leads, particularly to increase the robustness, ambition and innovation of the preferred approach;
- Act as a critical friend to projects and challenging their plans and thinking where appropriate;
- provide high-quality, impartial advice to pathfinder local areas and use mediation skills to support local relationships to flourish, including when dynamics between partners are challenging; and

- Provide advice on change management and how to drive practice transformation across an organisation.

Requirement 3: Technical expertise

17. *Description* – We require a delivery partner with access to specialist and technical skills to support LAs on an ad hoc basis with issues where internal expertise may need to be supplemented. Examples of this may include design and build of a regional website, linking into the LAs own requirements and the communications plan as devised by an external comms agency or data sharing solutions between LAs to ensure accurate and timely regional reporting of the enquiry pipeline across LAs who may use different case management systems.

18. *Deliverables* – The delivery partner will

- Assess individual regional fostering project needs, including diagnosing the need for technical support; and
- Provide technical support to each region on a ‘draw down’ model.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

19. Key performance indicators will be linked to overall programme goals. This will be set by the time of contract award but will be linked to the key deliverable set out above, as well as the key milestones at point 24.

SOCIAL VALUE

20. Social Value has been included as part of the tender questions. The criteria chosen is Tackling Economic Inequality. All guidance is included in the question. Further information can be found at [Procurement Policy Note 06/20 – taking account of social value in the award of central government contracts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/procurement-policy-note-06-20-taking-account-of-social-value-in-the-award-of-central-government-contracts).

BASE LOCATION

21. Flexible, UK.

PAYMENT

	2023-24	2024-25	Total
Maximum contract payment profile (excluding VAT)	£650,000	£350,000	£1,000,000

22. Costs will be based on day-rates, as set out in the framework rate cards, but total costs will be capped at the maximum levels set out above.

23. We would expect the supplier to invoice based on actual days worked on a monthly basis, with payment made monthly in arrears.

KEY MILESTONES

24. The potential provider should note the following project milestones.

Approx. date	Milestone	Outputs
May 2023	NE support hub operational	NE support hub operational
May 2023	Roll out EOI live	EOI for wider roll out live to all LAs and open for bids
June-July 2023	Delivery partner appointed	Delivery partner in place to work with LAs on shaping bids to meet DfE policy requirements
Sept 2023	NE support hub go live	NE recruitment support hub go live, alongside communications campaign
Sept 2023	Funding awarded	Grant agreements signed for successful LA cluster groups
April 2024	Support hub operational	LA clusters recruitment support hub operational
May – Sept 2024	Go live	Wider roll out regional recruitment support hub go live, alongside communications campaign
Mar 2025	Funding period ends	

STAFF VETTING, EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS

25. At a senior level, the Supplier must have a demonstrable record of leading significant culture and practice change in a children's social care setting.

26. Access by Supplier staff to Departmental Data shall be confined to those individuals who have a "need-to-know" in order to carry out their role; and have undergone mandatory pre-employment screening, to a minimum of HMG Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS); or hold an appropriate National Security Vetting clearance as required by the Department. All Contractor or sub-contractor staff must complete this process before access to Departmental Data is permitted.

27. All Contractor or sub-contractor employees who handle Departmental Data shall have annual awareness training in protecting information

DfE RESPONSIBILITIES

28. DfE will manage the EOI process and will notify the successful supplier of the successful regional clusters.
29. DfE will provide the successful supplier with details of the funding and processes for LA cluster groups to bid for funding.
30. DfE will keep the successful supplier informed of the communications campaign, including contract requirements, and successful suppliers.

REPORTING

31. The supplier will be required to provide regular reporting to DfE via
- i. Weekly informal progress meeting with DfE programme management team
 - ii. monthly progress reports including
 - Hours of support time delivered in each regional cluster area
 - Progress of design/delivery in each regional cluster area
 - Risks/issues and mitigations
 - iii. quarterly performance delivery reports against KPIs

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

DfE

Department for Education

LA

Local authority

Clusters

Self-selected groups of around 7-12 LAs working together to deliver the fostering recruitment programme

CMA

Competition and Markets Authority

Annex A: Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme - Policy Overview

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

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

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

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

This programme will include the following:

1) Recruitment Support Hub

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

LA cluster groups will be expected to:

- Work with a DfE appointed Delivery Partner

- Set up, staff and manage a 'regionalised' recruitment hub, comprising of a website and central phone line that the communications for fostering in the cluster will feed in to. This will manage prospective foster carers from initial enquiry through to application.
- Undertake new reporting on key measures set by the DfE, including the development of a new/ existing tool to track initial enquiries through to application across the region
- Offer (or work towards offering) a standardised 'package' for foster carers across the region, including an agreed formular for calculating fees and benefits, and agreeing standard terms and conditions.
- Agree on a standard script to be used when dealing with initial enquiries and supporting prospective foster carers.
- Monitor and track applications from initial enquiry through to application, gathering data and information on those who do not complete application.

2) Communications campaign

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

LA cluster groups will be expected to:

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

3) Retention (Mockingbird)

Each LA in this programme will have the opportunity to implement a Mockingbird Con-

stellation, or extend their offering through an additional constellation. (we will not exclude LAs who wish to continue with their own retention programme, but this will not be funded).

LA cluster groups will be expected to:

- Work in partnership with The Fostering Network to implement or extend Mockingbird.