



Department for Education

Policy paper

# Regional care cooperatives policy statement

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Applies to England

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## Meeting children's needs through a regional care model

Every child deserves safe, high-quality care close to home. Regional care cooperatives (RCCs) will help make this a reality by transforming the approach local areas take to commissioning and providing homes for children in care.

Local authorities spent around £9 billion on care in 2024 to 2025, yet too often this investment does not deliver the outcomes children deserve. By pooling resources, improving forecasting, strengthening multi-agency collaboration, building expertise and capability and acting collectively as a single customer and provider, RCCs will help to transform the care available for children.

RCCs were proposed in the [Independent review of children's social care 2022](#) (IRSCS) as a response to longstanding challenges in the children's social care (CSC) market, including:

- rising numbers of children in care and a shortage of appropriate local care, especially for children with complex needs
- a growing reliance on spot purchasing and increasing care costs

- the use of unregistered and unregulated homes, with corresponding concerns about quality
- fragmented data sharing and intelligence on cost, quality and sufficiency across local authorities

Government will work closely with the sector to fulfil this shared ambition. The cost of care for looked-after children continues to rise and, despite the money being spent, children are not always getting the care they need.

The creation of RCCs provides an opportunity to address the growing issues with the CSC placement market. By developing an innovative approach, we can build on the best local practice to meet the needs of children close to their communities and drive down costs.

## **National acceleration of Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)**

In 2025, 2 RCC pathfinders were launched in Greater Manchester and the South East. The evaluation of the pathfinders has provided valuable learning and highlights the high potential of the RCC model. The pathfinders have begun to test new approaches and have shown early signs of how a more coordinated regional model can support better outcomes for children and young people.

In these areas, the RCC has helped to build a shared sense of purpose and responsibility for securing the right homes for children, moving the system gradually away from reactive, competitive commissioning and towards more proactive and collaborative planning. Learning from the pathfinders to date, we now intend to accelerate a phased rollout of RCCs and work towards making RCCs the future model that underpins the system providing homes for children in care.

### **Progress from Greater Manchester RCCs**

The Greater Manchester regional care cooperative (GM RCC) is already demonstrating the transformative potential of the RCC model, showing how shared purpose, collective accountability and regional scale can reshape children's social care.

It has launched high-impact programmes that move the system from reactive commissioning to a proactive, needs-led approach.

Its regional data and demand forecasting platform is strengthening planning and market oversight, and the RCC is creating an increased supply of specialist

residential homes solely for GM children with additional health funding, providing an enhanced mental health support offer.

The RCC has also secured investment to support the local workforce through collaboration with local colleges and securing access to higher level qualifications for residential registered managers.

By acting as a single regional customer and uniting local authorities, voluntary community and social enterprise partners and providers, the GM RCC is strengthening commercial leverage, reducing reliance on out-of-area care and helping build the sustainable, ethical market children and young people deserve.

## **Progress from South-East RCC**

The South-East Regional care cooperative has set up as an independent not-for-profit company (Home and Future) with a board working to 17 local authorities.

It has developed a regional data platform which enables timely sufficiency analysis, forecasting and benchmarking of costs. Home and Future has supported the creation of new beds in LA homes and developed an agreement for local authorities to share placements.

The RCC is transitioning towards managing all the regional commissioning frameworks for residential placements across the region, as well as developing new ones. It has also introduced new needs led practice tools to inform child centred commissioning.

To improve the residential workforce, the RCC is developing a Workforce Academy which will seek to develop new training pathways. It is working closely with its local authorities in the fostering hub to incorporate fostering into the work of the RCC.

## **What RCCs will deliver**

On behalf of local authorities across a region, RCCs will:

- deliver high quality provision, at a regional or sub regional level, on behalf of all local authorities in the region, including delivering fostering hubs, developing specialist local options to cut reliance on out-of-area care and supporting strategies to recruit, retain and strengthen the children's home workforce
- ensure a clear understanding of local supply, quality and cost through needs assessment tools, routine data collection and benchmarking to support transparent, collective negotiations with providers to reduce costs and ensure care meet the needs of the children who need them

- share data across local authorities to strengthen market oversight and work collaboratively with regional partners, including integrated care boards (ICBs), youth justice services and police, to secure the most appropriate provision and support for children
- be their own entities and operate on behalf of local authorities under shared accountability, with transparent data reporting
- align regional footprints strategically to enable effective multi-agency collaboration – working with ICBs, youth justice services, police and education partners – to streamline decision-making, strengthen safeguarding and ensure joined-up support for children and families

## Next steps

RCCs will become powerful new delivery organisations. Government wants to work in partnership with local areas to drive forward the development of RCCs quickly.

To support this, an expression of interest (EOI) will be launched in spring 2026 backed by more than £10 million, with the expectation to be able to support the setup of up to 6 new RCCs.

The vision is for every local authority to be part of an RCC in the future, operating at scale to deliver homes for children in care and delivering what matters most: children thriving in safe, supporting environments.

Alignment with RCCs is currently voluntary, and the next phase involves exploring ways to ensure that alignment with an RCC is a mandatory criterion to receive a range of Department for Education funding.

This is an ambitious vision for RCCs and it will take time to embed in the system. By working closely with areas, government support will be provided to help build towards the full vision of an RCC in a way that is sustainable locally.

Further detail and guidance on the EOI process and phases roll-out will be published shortly.

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