

# Q&A Bid Support Webinar

## Overall bid

What would ensure that regional clusters deliver a successful bid?

A fully costed, realistic implementation and delivery plan, within your maximum allocated budget, with clear agreement to proceed from all local authority (LA) leaders.

How will MV help with regional cluster's bids?

The DfE expects that everyone who has passed the stage 1 interviews will receive the funding, provided they submit a successful bid at stage 2. Stage 2 is an assurance process to ensure DfE have the information they need to trigger funding – a costed, realistic delivery plan and staff and leadership identified and in place. DfE have secured additional funding to ensure that this programme can be rolled out to all regions who were successful at stage 1 interviews.

## Question 1

For question 1, what would the DfE accept as a partnership agreement, particularly where clusters will not have the time to draw up a new agreement for the 15 September?

The DfE understands that this whole process is being done on a very tight timeframe and clusters partnership agreement may not be formalised and signed by the deadline. For stage 1, clusters provided a copy of an example working agreement or confirmation from all DCSs in the regional cluster that they were content to proceed. For stage 2, please include:

either

- a signed partnership agreement;

or

- a copy of the regional cluster's working partnership agreement (this might be one already used across the region) or statement of where the regional cluster is up to drafting a new one.
- a clear plan for individual local authorities approving a partnership agreement, including the level of sign-off required, what stages are required and where they are up to, and individual timetables for approval. Please present this in a table format with a row for each local authority.

## Question 2

For question 2, what does a successful implementation plan look like?

DfE would like to see regional cluster's vision for the recruitment support hub and their implementation plan. As the DfE are aiming for this to be delivered at pace and up and running by April 2024, they have front-loaded the funding allocation to this financial year to support regional clusters to deliver within this timeframe. Regional clusters should use the budget to support them to do so.

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## Question 3

For question 3, what if a regional cluster's costings are higher than the amount DfE have sent to us?

The recruitment support hub funding is an indicative amount, calculated by the number of CLA within your region. Using the North East Pathfinder as a benchmark, this funding has been sufficient.

DfE has calculated the maximum bidding amounts based on the information they hold about each regional cluster. If regional clusters feel DfE has made an error, please contact DfE to clarify. Clusters should consider how their costings in question 3 will align with the implementation plan they have provided in question 2.

For Mockingbird costs, phase 1 and phase 2 costs are set by The Fostering Network. DfE has calculated the cost of running a constellation for each LA, using a benchmark from Sunderland and adding in a 40% increase, to account for regional variation. This amount therefore represents the maximum amount an LA within a regional cluster can bid for, and DfE anticipate that regions should use comparable LAs within their region to calculate the cost of running a constellation.

## Overall programme design

What happens when the funding runs out?

Funding for this programme will run until March 2025. Future funding is subject to Spending Review outcomes. Evaluations of Mockingbird found the programme to be cost-effective for LAs. The recruitment support hub is the unevaluated element, but recent research supports the concept of a 'central recruitment agency' (Ispos, 2023).

What if a regional cluster wants to opt-out of an element of the Fostering Recruitment and Retention programme?

This is a holistic recruitment and retention programme, and DfE's expectation is all LAs within the regional cluster group will participate in both the recruitment support hub and Mockingbird. If, however, an LA within a regional cluster already has a retention programme in place with evidence of its success, DfE is happy for an LA to opt out of Mockingbird and continue to run their own scheme. Please note, funding is only for Mockingbird, not LA run schemes.

As a regional cluster, we will not be able to harmonise our fostering offer throughout the lifetime of this programme. Are we unable to participate?

LAs within the cluster should work towards harmonising their financial and support offer to prospective carers because of the benefits that can bring, however, this is an ambition and not a set requirement of the programme. DfE understands if clusters want to focus on this at a later stage.

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## Mockingbird

### How do we calculate our Mockingbird costs?

Please refer to Annex C on page 24 of the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme Application guide.

The costings for Phase 1 and Phase 2 implementation package are set out in detail. Mutual Ventures have provided all regional clusters with their prepopulated LA calculations based on existing DfE data which will enable LAs to input their costings.

### How much project lead resource is likely to be needed within LAs to support the implementation of Mockingbird?

It will vary across LAs, but Fostering Network will need one person who is the key link with your Mockingbird coach and lead governance in the constellation. This isn't consistent across months but in intense periods will be 3-4 days a month, during quieter months this will be 2-3 days a month. LAs should also think about who else will need to be involved to ensure Mockingbird can be delivered. The project lead role does not need to be a project manager, it can be a service manager or senior social worker, but this is up to LAs based on what will be effective within their organisational structures.

### Are we expected to have a hub for every foster carer to access?

That would be DfE's ambition but currently the funding is for each LA to have one new constellation or one additional constellation. DfE's ambition is that this will expand but future is subject to Spending Review outcomes. The Fostering Network do not currently have full coverage in LAs but have areas that are ambitious to ensure that there is support available for all foster carers, even if outside of Mockingbird.