



**Hartlepool**  
Borough Council

**Legal, Governance and Human  
Resources Department**

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Our Ref: JS  
Your Ref:

20<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Councillors Anderson, Bailey-Fleet, Bruce, Buglass, Clayton, Cook, Cowie, Darby, Dodds, Doyle, Dunbar, Feeney, Gaiety, Gaines, Hall, B Harrison, G Harrison, Holbrook, Hughes, Jorgeson, Lindridge, Little, Male, Napper, Nelson, Oliver, Reeve, Roy, Scarborough, Smith, Stevenson, Storey, Thompson, Wallace, Wiley and Young

Dear Councillor,

Children's Services Committee – 1<sup>st</sup> June 2026 at 2pm

The Annual Meeting of Council on Thursday 21 May will appoint the memberships of all the Council Committees for 2026/27, including the Children's Services Committee. On this occasion it has been necessary to schedule a meeting of the Children's Services Committee for 1<sup>st</sup> June 2026 and in order to meet access to information and statutory notice requirements notice of the meeting must be given before Annual Council.

As the appointment of the membership of the Children's Services Committee will not be formally made until the meeting of Annual Council the papers of the Committee are being issued to all Councillors. Once the membership is appointed, only the members of Children's Services Committee will be required for the meeting.

Yours Faithfully,

JO STUBBS  
PRINCIPAL DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND LEGAL SUPPORT OFFICER  
LEGAL, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

# Children's Services Committee

## Agenda

Monday 1 June 2026

**Time:** 2.00 pm  
**Location:** Council Chamber  
**Members:** Children's Services Committee

Co-opted Members: Gillian Hood, C of E Diocese and Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Adam Palmer (Secondary), Sue Sharpe (Primary), Zoe Westley (Special).

Parent Governor Representative: Martin Pout

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Chair of Adult Services and Public Health Committee

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### 1. Apologies for absence

### 2. To receive any declarations of interest by members

### 3. Minutes

- 3.1 To receive the Minutes and Decision Record in respect of the meeting held on 10 March 2026 (previously published and circulated).

#### CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone. The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.



#### **4. Budget And Policy Framework Items**

None.

#### **5. Key Decisions**

5.1 Foster with North East Expansion (*Executive Director of Children's Services*)

#### **6. Other Items Requiring Decision**

None

#### **7. Items for information**

None

#### **8. Any other business which the chair considers urgent**

For Information

Date of next meeting – To be confirmed



# Children's Services Committee

1 June 2026

**Report of:** Executive Director of Children's Services  
**Subject:** Foster with North East Expansion  
**Decision Type:** Key (I and II)

## 1. Council Plan Priority

<b>Hartlepool will be a place:</b>
where people live healthier, safe and independent lives. (People)
that is welcoming with an inclusive and growing economy providing opportunities for all. (Potential)
with a Council that is ambitious, fit for purpose and reflects the diversity of its community. (Organisation)

## 2. Purpose of Report

2.1. The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval for the Council to take part in the expansion of the Regional Fostering Hub in line with the Department for Education (DfE) expansion programme. This will build on the Foster with North East (FwNE) pathfinder that has been in operation since 2023, which all North East Councils are part of, however, this expansion requires a move to an 'End-to-End' model encompassing all aspects of the Fostering process.

## 3. Executive Summary

3.1. Children in Care sufficiency is the most significant risk and financial pressure to Councils across the North East and nationally. Following the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in 2022, national policy, supported by proposed legislation in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, has

identified regional working as key to addressing these challenges. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) have also reported that the current model is dysfunctional, driving up costs and delivering poor outcomes.

- 3.2. DfE is progressing at pace on this agenda, publishing a blueprint including regional fostering, 'Renewing Fostering: homes for 10,000 more children', in February 2026 and guidance on the next stage of development for Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs) in March 2026 'Apply to set up a regional care cooperative - GOV.UK' along with an Expression of Interest (EoI) for six further regions to become RCC's.
- 3.3. Foster with North East (FwNE) was established in 2023 as the National Fostering Pathfinder, hosted by Together for Children and with all 12 councils in the region participating. An evaluation of FwNE was carried out last year, and it was recognised that expansion of the model to an End-to-End approach was essential to achieve the benefits of the regional approach. It is positive that national policy and some additional funding have now aligned with that view.
- 3.4. DfE policy statement sets out seven minimum requirements for an expanded Regional Fostering Hub, along with a specification and very tight timelines to establish and implement the model. A fully costed plan needs to be submitted to DfE by 1st June 2026. The work undertaken in the region to develop the model, financial planning and implementation is set out in the body of this report.
- 3.5. DfE provided over £2m of funding to FwNE to establish it and for initial running costs, however, in 2025-26 the current model was fully funded by the 12 LA's through a population-based formula. In 2026-27 it is projected that the model will cost approximately £2m with £500k of funding provided through a government grant. A commitment has been made that the financial contributions from individual LA's will be maintained at 2025/26 levels, and the efficiencies will be sought to support the expansion of the Hub. For context, in 2023-24 the region spent £540m on children in care placements, and costs continue to rise at an exponential rate. Financial details are set out in the body of the report.
- 3.6. To ensure the benefits of regional working are fully realised, and we operate as efficiently as possible, it is proposed that FwNE will be fully integrated into a proposed North East RCC. It is recommended that a regional bid be submitted as part of the RCC EoI by May 22nd, building on extensive work that has taken place regionally over the last 18 months. If successful, it would bring at least £1.5m additional funding into the region and enable significant efficiency and benefits by integrating with FwNE.
- 3.7. A high-level structure for regional working through a proposed RCC and delivery of FwNE via a locality model is described in detail in the report. Whilst it will be required to operate across a full regional footprint of all 12 LA's, our design is based on 3 Locality delivery teams taking the learning from FwNE Pathfinder. It is proposed that the 3 localities are:

- North Locality – Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland
- Central Locality – Durham, South Tyneside and TfC/Sunderland
- South Locality – Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton

3.8. Hartlepool will maintain a local fostering footprint, which includes Kinship care and connected carers remaining within the local authority, and the commissioning of any independent fostering placements.

3.9. This report presents a clear rationale for the recommendations in paragraph 11 and the move to regional arrangements to address chronic shortfalls in the sufficiency of children in care placements, and the benefits of this approach for Hartlepool and children in our care. The risks presented by the current dysfunctional market approach impacting on children's outcomes and the financial sustainability of LA's must be addressed, and this work provides an opportunity to do so.

## 4. Background

4.1. Children's Social Care has been operating in a very challenging context in recent years, in particular with the sufficiency of places for children in care being constrained by a dysfunctional market model. These issues have been well documented through the Independent Review of Children's Social Care led by Josh McAllister, which reported in May 2022 and a report by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) published in March 2022.

4.2. The government formulated a response to these reviews and started the process of primary legislation to take forward recommendations in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which is now at its final stage in Parliament. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care recommended the development of RCC's, and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will give the Secretary of State powers to direct regions to establish RCC's, taking on a range of duties for commissioning of fostering and residential care.

4.3. DfE established a 'pathfinder' programme for RCC's in 2024, and the two successful regions following Expressions of Interest, Greater Manchester and South East, went live with their RCC's in 2025. The pathfinders have tested out different governance models, shared commissioning approaches and provider engagement, regional collaboration on data and insights and moving away from reactive approaches to commissioning to a more proactive, planned approach across the regional footprint.

4.4. A complementary recommendation from the national review was to develop collaborative approaches at a regional level to foster care recruitment and retention following a decline in the number of foster carers nationally after Covid. This reduction in foster capacity, combined with an increase in the number of children in care requiring foster placements, has created a perfect storm. We are not able to fully meet children's needs close to their homes and

have seen significant financial pressures due to increased usage of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and residential care.

- 4.5. Financially, there is a 'burning platform' driving change, with nationally around £9bn now spent on supporting children in care, with costs rapidly outpacing budgets, creating significant risks to the financial sustainability of councils. An external review commissioned in 2024 showed that the region spent £540m on children in care placement in 2023-24, with around £300m of that on residential placements. It was also estimated that just over 30% of children in residential placements could have been placed in foster care if sufficient challenges are addressed.
- 4.6. In the North East, our regional fostering hub, Foster with North East (FwNE) was the first national fostering hub Pathfinder established in 2023 and hosted by Together for Children. This has enabled substantial learning in the region, and we have also benefited from approx. £2m of DfE investment in our hub. An evaluation of FwNE was commissioned last year, and recommendations from that have been integrated into this proposal.
- 4.7. Josh MacAlister, in his Ministerial role now has the national political leadership for the implementation of the recommendations he made in 2022, and that has seen an acceleration in the national rollout of both RCC's and Fostering Hubs.
- 4.8. The DfE published a policy statement on RCC's in February 2026, which sets out the national direction of travel, giving the high-level expectations of an RCC building on the work of the 2 pathfinders in Greater Manchester and the South-East regions. This was followed by the publication of detailed guidance setting out requirements and a route for regions to submit an EoI to become an RCC – this was published on 26th March 2026: Apply to set up a regional care cooperative - GOV.UK.
- 4.9. It has been confirmed that there will be 6 regions joining the pathfinder programme as part of the national rollout of RCCs. RCC's will be expected to develop in 3 stages: foundation, development and delivery, with a checklist of minimum requirements at each stage set out in the guidance. National funding of up to £10.8m over 2 years will be provided across the new pathfinders for initial costs of set up and implementation, so the North East could expect around £1.5 - 2.0m if successful.
- 4.10. The DfE launched a new policy paper, 'Renewing Fostering,' in February 2026, which sets an 'ambitious' target of securing an additional 10,000 new fostering places by 2029, underpinned by 5 'Pillars of Reform'. This includes a clear expectation that existing fostering hubs, which are currently a primarily 'front door' recruitment model, will expand to an 'End-to-End' to include assessment, approval and expanded support to help both recruit and keep foster carers in the system for longer.
- 4.11. The DfE's expectation is that regions will move towards an End-to-End model (enquiry to approval) during the 2026-27 financial year. A proposed model has been developed through the regional governance arrangements led by

the North East Association of Directors of Children's Services (NE ADCS) and the regional Directors of Resources (DRG). A number of workshops with DCS's and operational leads have taken place to shape the regional proposal and ensure we can meet the national requirements in a way that works in our context. Hartlepool Assistant Director for Children and Families is the Vice Chair for the operational group and attends the executive board, ensuring that Hartlepool are placed front and centre of the project and decision-making.

- 4.12. It is expected that the proposed model will significantly reduce duplication across the region and could result in more efficient use of resources, a better experience for prospective foster carers and sharing of best practice. The ambition is ultimately to recruit and retain more foster carers, giving more children access to loving homes within their own communities, and reduce pressure on Children in Care budgets that are unsustainable across the region. A regional fostering hub for Hartlepool would strengthen the support network for foster carers, lead to improved placement stability and outcomes for children, create a safety in numbers regional approach, and link us with larger, more financially affluent authorities in terms of recruitment campaigns, and create efficiencies for the local authority, making fostering a more attractive and sustainable option for the community. It is also vital that Hartlepool is part of the regional proposal that includes all 12 authorities, and is part of the National changing picture for foster care.
- 4.13. The national guidance provided by the DfE sets out a range of 'minimum requirements' for regional fostering hubs against which we must design a model that fits our local context and needs. Those requirements are:
- Recruitment: Regional approach to recruitment led by the Hub
  - Single Front Door: All enquiries regionally to be routed through a single point of entry
  - Journey Guide: A dedicated person to support and steer carers through assessment and approval processes
  - Support Network for Carers: Core regional offer establishing lasting support networks
  - Regional Assessment: Single assessment function for the region with the Hub
  - Regional Data: Regional systems and data collection with oversight of progress
  - Post Approval Support: Regional offer of training and support
- 4.14. The proposal to move to a fully End-to-End fostering model across the region, covering all aspects of fostering services from initial enquiry through to post approval support and supervision, will require structural change. Learning from the experience of the Foster with the North East national pathfinder, the proposal is to build a locality delivery structure into the Regional Hub. Working through NE ADCS and DRG, the preferred option is for three locality delivery teams to be established covering the following areas:

- North Locality – Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland
- Central Locality – Durham, South Tyneside and TfC/Sunderland
- South Locality – Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesborough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton

- 4.15. The national minimum requirements include the management and oversight of all resources, including staffing, to be through the regional hub. Therefore, structural change and a formal HR process will be required as part of the transition to new arrangements. The proposed high-level structures are set out in section 6 of this report. A detailed capacity and demand analysis is being undertaken to design the structures required in each locality to deliver against the new model. This will inform a formal consultation process likely to take place in the summer of 2026 with transition to the new locality structure during the autumn of 2026
- 4.16. There is a requirement to submit to DfE by 1st June, a fully costed plan setting out how the region will meet the minimum requirements and the allocation of resources. An interim plan giving high-level direction of travel, outline of model and costs was submitted to DfE on 31st March, and feedback on this will inform the final version.
- 4.17. In relation to RCC development, for the past 18 months, North East ADCS has been proactively preparing for these announcements and has established a new governance arrangement for both the development of our northeast RCC and fostering expansion activity. The RCC Executive Board meets every 6 weeks and includes DCS's, Chief Executives, Section 151/Finance Directors, Legal and Commissioning strategic representation.
- 4.18. All indications suggest we are in a strong position for the North East to be successful in a bid to become one of the next round of RCC pathfinders, to take advantage of additional national funding and support. DCSs and Section 151 Officers/Finance Directors have been directly involved in developing the regional approach and are supportive of the proposed EoI bid.
- 4.19. Our regional work to date has included:
- Establishment of a Complex Needs Board in September 2023, working with the ICB and health partners on four workstreams – market management, integration, transition and prevention.
  - Commissioned and external partner (Newton Consulting) to conduct a regional deep dive and diagnostic exercise analysing the cost of placements for children with the most complex needs.
  - Developed and published a regional 'Sufficiency Statement' in Spring 2025 and a subsequent rolling programme of provider engagement activities NE ADCS Sufficiency Position Statement
  - Held a number of workshop sessions to develop regional thinking and learn from the two National Pathfinders. We also commissioned additional support from a consultant who had previously worked with the

Greater Manchester (GM) pathfinder to share their experience of the process.

- Successful in a regional bid to work with Social Finance, funded by DfE, to develop a regional data platform to support our commissioning activity and form a core foundation of a future RCC.
- Used DfE RIIA grant to invest in additional regional leadership and programme management capacity to progress FwNE's development and prepare the region to become an RCC.

4.20. As a result of this work, we are in a strong position to submit an Expression of Interest to become an RCC and already have in place or are developing the key building blocks required to meet the national requirements DfE have set out in the RCC guidance. DCSs and Section 151 Officers/Finance Directors have been directly involved in developing the regional approach and are supportive of the proposed Eol bid.

## 5. Finances

5.1. Whilst DfE provided grant funding in a total of over £2m for the set-up and initial running costs of Foster with North East, it is now fully funded by LA contributions using a formula based on population. In 2025-26, the FwNE budget was fully funded by local authority contributions, with a total running cost budget of £1,125,504. Taking into account an agreed uplift in contributions of 4%, the core budget for the existing FwNE activity in 2026-27 prior to expanding its remit, is £1,170,524.

5.2. The DfE have offered a grant fund of up to £500,000 to support the region's ability to expand to an end-to-end model. DfE's modelling indicates that to receive the full grant, it needs to equate to 25% of the budget, with the remainder funded by the LA financial contributions, in-kind contributions or sharing resources with the RCC infrastructures. NE ADCS had already agreed in 2025 that for the Regional Fostering Hub to be sustainable and fulfil its potential, it needed to go further to eliminate duplication in the current model. Therefore, it is welcome that the national policy position and additional funding has aligned with that approach.

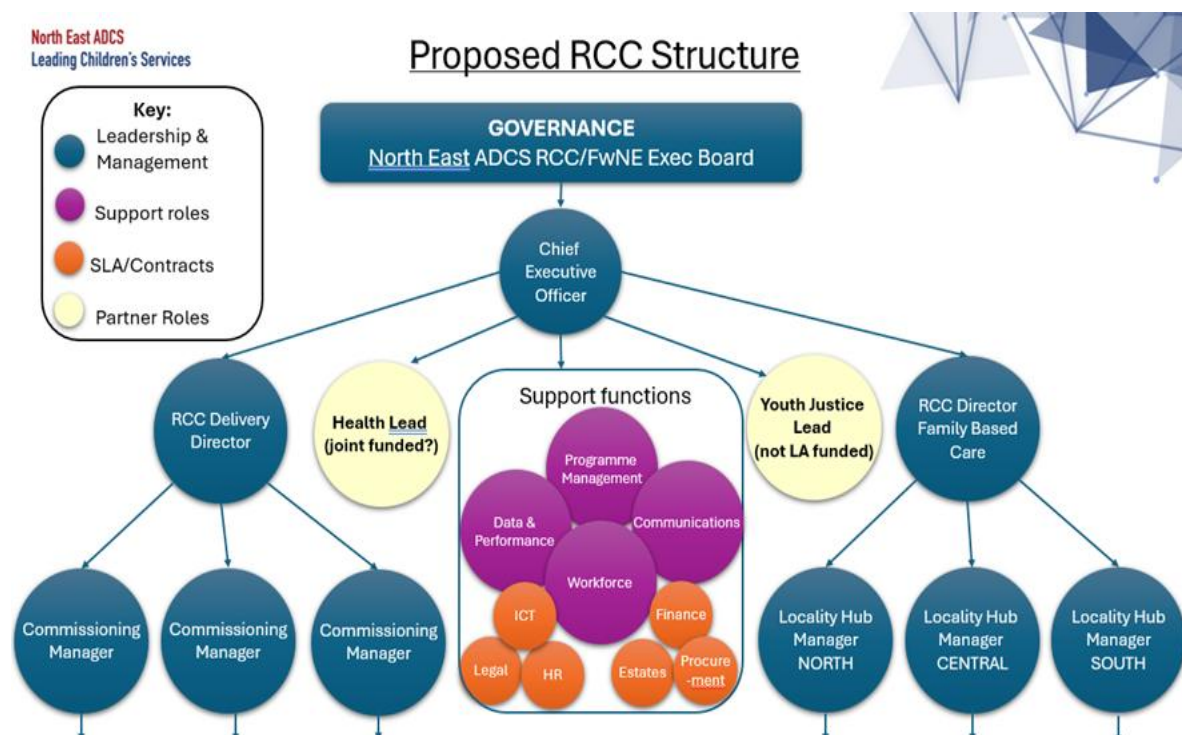
5.3. Given the DfE indicative contribution for 2026-27 of £500k is calculated on the basis it is 25% of the overall cost, the hub expansion programme aims to work towards a funding envelope of £2,000,000 to develop the most efficient model possible whilst maximising access to national funding. Initial high-level costings for the extension to End-to-End Expansion activity estimate the cost for the Regional Fostering Hub for the 2026-27 financial year to be **£2,072,817**.

5.4. If the full DfE allocation of **£500,000** towards the costs is received, split between core functions and expansion activity, this leaves an initial funding gap of £402,292 to be mitigated by in-kind activity, alignment with broader regional work and other efficiencies (£500,000 grant + £1,170,524 LA12 contributions + £402,293 in-kind/alignment/efficiencies = £2,072,817. In

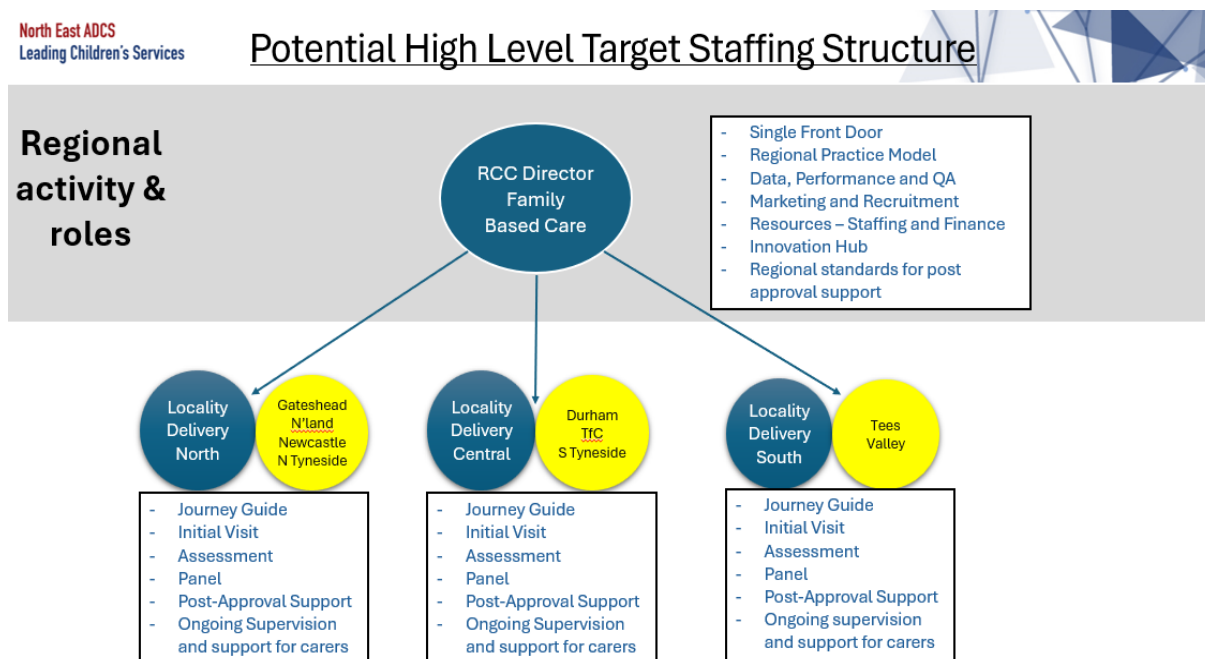
addition, in-year slippage on new posts and activity is anticipated in 2026-27, which will help reduce costs. Once we know the outcome of a possible RCC EoI, a medium-term financial strategy can be developed to ensure a sustainable model. Therefore, local authorities are not being asked to fund any additional costs in 2026-27, only to maintain last year's costs plus a 4% inflation uplift, as above. **The 2026-27 financial contribution from Hartlepool Borough Council will be £40,374.84.**

## 6. Proposed High-Level Regional Structure

6.1. All our planning has been based on the opportunity to fully integrate the fostering hub with a future NE RCC. The high-level structure developed takes a proactive view that our expanded fostering hub will be 'nested' within the overarching Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) structure. The following graphic shows the proposed high-level structure:



6.2. To meet the requirement for Fostering Hubs to have a senior accountable person operating at the regional level, it is proposed that the 'Director of Family Based Care' role will hold this accountability and oversee 3 Locality Hubs, each with its own manager. NE ADCS have recommended the groupings of local authorities within these localities, as outlined on the following graphic:



6.3. The regional programme team are preparing the job descriptions for the senior roles and will be seeking to recruit to these positions as quickly as possible. Durham County Council, as the host for the regional team and accountable body for DfE funding allocated to the region, have agreed to host these senior posts and act as a 'shadow RCC' host LA until the RCC comes into existence.

## 7. The Benefits for Hartlepool

7.1. A regional fostering hub for Hartlepool would bring several significant benefits to both foster carers and children in our care, as well as to the local authority and the wider community. Key advantages:

### 7.2. Centralised Support and Resources

- A regional hub provides a single point of contact for foster carers, making it easier to access information, advice, and support services, and removing competition between authorities.
- It can offer tailored training, peer support groups, and specialist resources, improving the quality of care for children.

### 7.3. Improved Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers

- Streamlined recruitment processes and shared marketing campaigns can attract more potential carers, and shared costs making it a more financially beneficial and attractive option for Hartlepool.
- Evidence from pathfinders suggests that ongoing support from a hub increases foster carer satisfaction, helping to retain experienced carers for Hartlepool.

### 7.4. Greater Placement Stability

- With access to a wider pool of carers across the region, children are potentially more likely to be matched with suitable placements, creating

more options for specialist placements and respite, and so reducing the number of moves and disruptions.

- The hub can facilitate emergency and short-term placements more efficiently.

#### **7.5. Shared Best Practice and Expertise**

- The hub model encourages collaboration between local authorities and agencies, enabling the sharing of knowledge, training, and best practices, thus benefiting Hartlepool carers and our retained local footprint.
- Hartlepool Foster carers will benefit from access to a wider network and specialist advice.

#### **7.6. Economies of Scale and Cost Savings**

- Pooling resources regionally can reduce duplication of services and administrative costs, thus creating savings and preventing additional costs.
- Joint commissioning and procurement can lead to better value for money, responsible spending of the Hartlepool taxpayers' pound.

#### **7.7. Enhanced Outcomes for Children and Young People**

- Improved support for carers leads to more stable, nurturing placements, positively impacting children's well-being, education, and future prospects.
- The hub can coordinate targeted support for children with complex needs.

#### **7.8. Community Engagement and Awareness**

- A regional hub can run larger, consistent regional outreach programs and awareness campaigns, increasing a consistent public understanding of fostering and encouraging community involvement.

## **8. HR and Workforce Implications**

8.1. It is a minimum requirement with the national guidance that the fostering workforce will move from within their current local authorities to be fully absorbed with the Fostering Hub. As part of the implementation phase, we will explore the best HR process to achieve this in the short term, pending permanent transfer to a future RCC structure to meet the DfE's requirements.

8.2. There is learning from the region's previous experiences of setting up Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) and we need to ensure the approach to moving staff across into the Regional Fostering Hub must be fair and equitable. This may create some challenges as all LA's will currently be resourced at different levels and not necessarily in line with future demand and targets.

8.3. Bringing together our 12 separate fostering workforces under one hub structure will result in significant change for many of our region's fostering staff, and this will be managed carefully and sensitively involving the workforce extensively in both informal and formal consultations. It is expected that TUPE

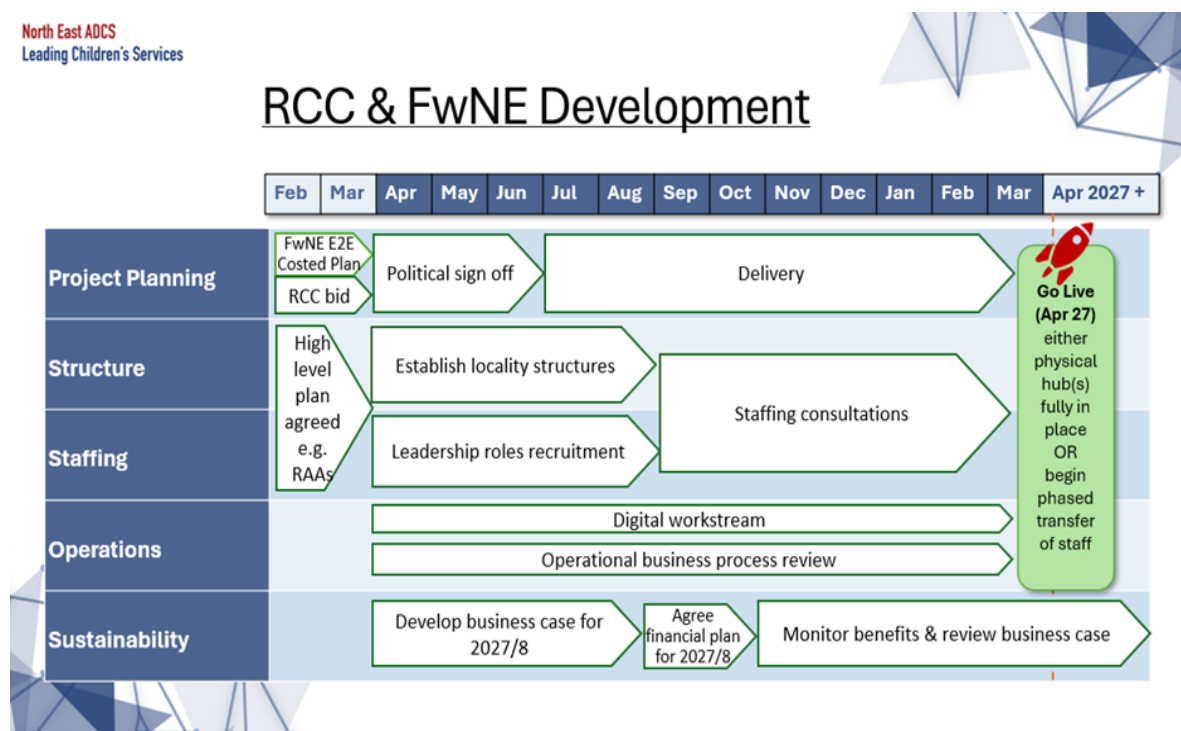
arrangements will be required in 2027/28 as part of the setup of our RCC entity, therefore an interim approach will be required for 2026/27 until the RCC is established. The financial implications from 2027/28 will be considered as further information is known and provided.

8.4. Given the short timescales, the staffing structures are still being gathered from local authorities and explored in preparation for submission of our final plan to meet the DfE's final deadline of 1st June.

8.5. Foster carers and children in our care will also be involved in the design of the expanded service and their views captured through a structured engagement programme to ensure the new model can maximise the opportunities available to improve and support our families to the best of our ability. This will be essential if we are to achieve our objectives on foster carer recruitment and retention.

## 9. Project Plan and Timelines

9.1. A detailed project plan has been developed and is being led through the regional team. The following graphic outlines the high-level view of key workstreams of activity required to bring the RCC and FwNE expansion activity together.



## 10. Other Considerations/Implications

<b>Risk Implications</b>	Please provide details for environment, sustainability and climate change considerations here in plain language.
<b>Financial Considerations</b>	Detailed financial considerations are contained with section 5 of the report.
<b>Subsidy Control</b>	Please provide details for environment, sustainability and climate change considerations here in plain language.
<b>Legal Considerations</b>	Under section 22G of the Children Act 1989, the Authority has a duty to take steps, so far as reasonably practicable, to secure sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of children it looks after, where it is consistent with their welfare to be accommodated locally (the "sufficiency duty"). To discharge this duty effectively, the Authority must ensure it has an adequate number of foster carers able to provide safe, appropriate and suitable accommodation for looked-after children.
<b>Single Impact Assessment</b>	Attached as <b>Appendix 1</b> .
<b>Staff Considerations</b>	Detailed in section 7 of the report.
<b>Asset Management Considerations</b>	Please provide details for environment, sustainability and climate change considerations here in plain language.
<b>Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change Considerations</b>	N/A

<b>Consultation</b>	Consultations will take place in line with the TUPE process and/or Hartlepool Borough Council's <i>Managing Restructures and Redundancy</i> policy.
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## 11. Recommendations

11.1. It is recommended Committee:

- Gives approval for the Local Authority to enter into an agreement to be part of the expanded North East Fostering Hub in line with national policy and guidance.
- Agrees to allocate the resources (financial and workforce) as required by the regional model as set out in this report.
- Gives approval for the Local Authority to support a North East Regional bid to become a 'Wave 2' RCC national pathfinder and support submission of a bid to DfE by 22nd May 2026.
- Authorises the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, to take all necessary steps to implement the recommendations in line with National Policy.

## 12. Reasons for Recommendations

12.1. Foster carers provide high-quality care for some of our most vulnerable children, and as such, we highly value the part they play in making a difference to children's lives. Our ambition is to be able to offer more children and young people high-quality family-based care provided by our foster carers. It is also important that we are able to maintain lifelong connections for our children with siblings, extended families and their wider community. Enhancing our recruitment and retention of foster carers to reverse the decline in numbers seen in recent years is essential to achieving that.

11.1. There is also a financial imperative with rapidly escalating costs driven by a dysfunctional market model within the care system. This has led to costs escalating well in advance of budgets, creating substantial pressure and sustainability risks for Councils across the region and nationally. A different approach is needed, and these developments give us the opportunity to completely redesign this critical service area with an enhanced regional approach that is still embedded in locality.

11.2. The Directors of Children's Services within 12 North East local authorities in scope for this activity have agreed to support this programme, and there is a national expectation to deliver the 'End-to-End' expansion. On a national and regional level, recruiting sufficient numbers of foster carers for the number of children requiring care remains a challenge, and this approach is designed to reduce the challenges faced. The costs associated with using external fostering providers and children's homes can be high, and so it is hoped that this will see a reduction.

## 13. Background Papers

'Renewing fostering: homes for 10,000 more children' February 2026 at: [Renewing fostering: homes for 10,000 more children - GOV.UK](#)

Regional Care Cooperatives policy statement February 2026 at: [Regional care cooperatives policy statement - GOV.UK](#)

Regional Care Cooperatives guidance and Eo1 March 2026 at: [Apply to set up a regional care cooperative - GOV.UK](#)

Independent Review of Childrens Social Care at: [Independent review of children's social care: final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation at:  
[Children's social care stable homes built on love consultation \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

## 14. Contact Officers

Alison Sutherland, Executive Director of Children's Services  
[alison.sutherland@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:alison.sutherland@hartlepool.gov.uk)

Laura Gough, Assistant Director, Children and Families  
[laura.gough@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:laura.gough@hartlepool.gov.uk)

Sign Off:

Chief Executive	Date: 19.05.2026
Director of Finance, IT and Digital	Date: 19.05.2026
Director of Legal, Governance and HR	Date: 19.05.2026

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Potential impact</b>	<b>Controls/Mitigations</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Foster carer resignations or reduced capacity due to uncertainty of the future and fear of the unknown	Placement breakdown risk; reduced matching options  Increased reliance on external high-cost placements, cost to the LA without input in decision-making	Early engagement with the planning and changes- written assurance on payments/support; retention and recognition plan; rapid response to concerns; maintain support groups/training. Clear and timely communication	Fostering service will take responsibility for ensuring that support is consistent and all information is shared with carers.
Staff anxiety due to uncertainty of employment and conditions leading to sickness/reduced capacity	Reduced oversight; delays in response; quality dips  Staff leave	Staff briefings, consultations with HR, and clear communication plans	AD and HOS to support staff teams throughout. Communication to be clear, concise, and timely.
Regulatory non-compliance during transition	Enforcement action; reputational harm; service restrictions	Regulatory plan and timeline; complete registrations/variations; update statement of purpose and policies; compliance checks pre go-live	AD and HOS to liaise with the regional project board to ensure that compliance continues through transition.
Data loss or inappropriate data access	Safeguarding risk, data breaches, and service disruption	Data sharing, tested migration, access controls, contingency recording process, and incident response plan	The CICT team to manage any migration and data sharing.