



Department
for Education

Home Again: Improving outcomes for children experiencing or at risk of deprivation of liberty

**Application guidance for Regional Care
Cooperatives and their partners**

July 2026

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About this guidance

This guidance is for Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) and their partners in local authorities, health, education and youth justice services wanting to apply to deliver Home Again in partnership together. It provides information on the programme, application process and the requirements.

If you wish to apply for funding, you should familiarise yourself with this guidance before you complete your application.

One application should be submitted on behalf of an RCC area. Each area should state which local authority will be the lead local authority and grant recipient, reflecting the expectation that a single accountable body will hold funding on behalf of the partnership. Where the RCC is established as a separate legal entity (for example a corporate body), applicants should clearly set out the proposed funding and accountability arrangements.

Local authorities, integrated care boards (ICBs), virtual school heads, youth justice teams

and other relevant partners should only commit to joining one partnership applying to participate in Home Again.

We would like to fund up to 5 RCCs in Wave 1. These areas will be selected following this competitive application process.

Improving outcomes for children at risk of or experiencing deprivation of liberty

Children at risk of or being deprived of their liberty are likely already known to the system of help, support and protection and will have multiple and complex, overlapping needs. They have often experienced other specialist, expert or intensive interventions but often not had access to the right support and will almost always be in acute crisis where placement and relationship breakdown is likely or has already happened.

Implementing Home Again effectively requires a clear and integrated system of help, support and protection for children at risk of, subject to, or stepping down from being deprived of their liberty. The approach must be embedded into the whole-system response, bringing together children's social care, health, youth justice and education to provide coordinated, timely and effective support, which for many children will wrap around the existing services and support they are receiving.

Our ambition is that Home Again provides children with tailored, streamlined interventions through a single plan across agencies. This will provide stability, avoid escalation and unnecessary use of deprivation of liberty, drawing on the most effective, proportionate and evidence-based support. While we recognise that for some children, deprivation of liberty is necessary for a short time to protect them from harm, we want to see a reduction in the length of deprivation of liberty orders, a reduction in the number of children experiencing repeat orders and an end to the use of unregistered placements for these children.

Embedding Home Again across a regional footprint at a regional level offers opportunities to work across multi-agency boundaries to pool resources, create economies of scale and share learning across systems and professions, and creates centres of expertise focused on improving outcomes for these children.

Achieving this ambition will depend on clarity of role, accountability and consistency across strategic and operational partners in the co-design, set-up and delivery stages. This will be crucial to sustainability. Local authorities, police and health have specific responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in their areas through local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASAs). Responsibilities are set out in chapter 2 of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 statutory guidance and this should underpin the local approach to implementing Home Again. Home Again should also be underpinned by the Children's Social Care National Framework which describes the purpose and principles of children's social care, the outcomes that local authorities should achieve for children and families, and the enablers of good practice, including for partners.

Keeping children safe, helping families thrive

In May, we published [Delivering the children's social care reset: an implementation plan for local partners](#), setting out the next steps in achieving this vision. It sets out how reform offers a transformative opportunity for the country and how this is being delivered. Delivering this reform means children can be better supported to remain with their families and where possible safely prevented from entering the care system, one where more children who cannot remain at home can be supported to live with their wider family networks, and one where children who need to be in care can be provided with stable, high-quality and registered homes. Achieving this means creating a more joined-up, child-centred system that brings together services across education, health, social care and youth justice, with a stronger focus on prevention, stability and long-term outcomes for children.

On 4 June, we published the [Enduring Relationships strategy](#) which set the ambition for all children in care and care-experienced young people to have strong, stable and loving relationships in their lives. Positive, consistent relationships with trusted adults are critical to children's safety, stability and long-term outcomes. The aim is to strengthen how children are helped to build and sustain these relationships, including through improved support for foster carers and residential staff, greater continuity in professionals around the child, and a stronger emphasis on lifelong connections to family, friends and communities. Delivering Home Again is at the heart of this, centring sustained, trusted relationships as fundamental to reducing instability, preventing escalation, and improving outcomes for children with the complex and overlapping needs who often require specialist, targeted and expert support and placements.

The [10 Year Health Plan](#) sets out how the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England (NHSE) will work with schools and colleges to better identify and meet children's mental health needs by continuing to roll out mental health support teams in schools and colleges, with an accelerated target of achieving full national coverage by the end of 2029. DHSC are also developing a new cross-government mental health strategy for England, covering all ages, to be published later this year. The strategy will aim to transform mental health care into a system that responds earlier, reduces waiting times for support, intervenes before distress escalates to diagnosis or crisis, and supports children and young people to stay active and participate in education, family and community life.

In parallel, NHSE is delivering programmes such as [the Framework for Integrated Care \(Community\)](#). This programme is an opportunity to strengthen and pull together existing provision around the child and intervene earlier to achieve better outcomes. Over the next three years, NHSE will also [pilot how systems embed mental health support in local authorities for children with social care involvement](#), so care-experienced young people receive integrated, evidence-based approaches that address their specific needs, including childhood trauma.

A significant proportion of children in the youth justice system have complex, overlapping needs related to mental health, trauma, instability in care, and family or community risk factors. Where these needs are unmet, this drives crisis escalation, placement breakdowns and increased risk of offending and custodial outcomes. The [Youth Justice Policy Paper: *Cutting Youth Crime, Changing Young Lives*](#) highlights the increasingly complex needs of children in the youth justice system. It sets out the importance of earlier, joined-up intervention. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is developing more effective community-based alternatives to custody, strengthening youth justice support, and aligning youth justice practice with integrated care models to reduce escalation into secure settings.

Building the foundations for Home Again

Since 2023, DfE, NHSE, MoJ and DHSC have worked together through a joint programme to improve support for children at risk of, or subject to, deprivation of liberty. This programme has combined national research and analysis (including examination of children's journeys, needs and outcomes, and analysis of court and system data) with test-and-learn activity in local areas, helping to build a stronger evidence base of both how the system currently operates and what more effective interventions look like in practice. Together, this has improved understanding of the increasing use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DoLOs), the support currently available, and the gaps in provision for this group of children.

Alongside this, a national peer collaborative convened by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (NFJO) has brought together seven areas to test and share approaches to supporting children in complex situations across health and social care. This work has been building the evidence base for delivery of interventions that support children with complex and overlapping needs. Areas are developing and testing a range of approaches, including new residential provision, integrated multi-disciplinary teams, and system-wide models of support. They are at different stages of delivery - from early development, through implementation and testing, to refining and adapting established models, and have generated shared learning on system challenges, integration across agencies, and innovative responses to meet complex need.

On 12 March 2026, we launched a national online Community of Practice, designed to share promising approaches and resources for professionals working with children with complex needs across local authorities, health partners and providers. This is funded by the department for Education and delivered by Anna Freud/UK Trauma Council.

On 29 April 2026, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act received Royal Assent. The Act places deprivation of liberty in therapeutic and specialist placements on the same legal footing as secure children's homes, creating a single framework so that decisions can be safely integrated into a child's overall care plan rather than managed separately through the courts. When commenced (date to be set in regulations), it will extend the section 25 framework so that any decision to restrict a child's liberty in care and treatment settings is subject to the same legal thresholds, safeguards and regular reviews as in secure homes. In practice, this will enable children to receive care in placements that better meet their needs, with coordinated support from health and social care professionals. It will also support greater stability by allowing children to remain in placements as restrictions reduce, avoiding unnecessary moves and helping them to recover and build more stable relationships.

Since December 2025, the Department for Education has been funding West Sussex children's social care to work closely with the ICB to test a place-based approach supporting children with complex and overlapping needs at risk of or deprived of their liberty. The focus is on how a multi-agency team can deliver support, build an

understanding of need, including through a streamlined assessment, and identify gaps in the current health, social care and youth justice plans for these children.

West Sussex Case Study

Background, timeline and overall value for money

“Daniel”, aged 15, underwent a multi-agency assessment following an assessment of need (AoN), including a Cognitive Assessment, to better understand needs, reducing escalation and supporting more consistent care. “Daniel” is looked after under Section 20, and has complex needs including autism, ADHD, PDA profile, attachment disruption, grief, self-harm risk, high supervision needs, police involvement and disengagement from education.

A subsequent Value for Money (VfM) review evaluated the impact of the assessment on outcomes, care planning, and potential cost savings. The timeline was from January 2025 to July 2026: The AoN was completed in January 2026, the vMDT was in April 2026 and the review was completed in July 2026.

Overall, the review rated the intervention 4.3 out of 5, representing good value for money, while it was rated as a high risk. The multi-agency assessment improved understanding of “Daniel”’s needs, leading to improved wellbeing, reduced risk-related incidents and stronger coordinated support.

Assessment added value

The Cognitive Assessment used a trauma-informed and neuro-affirming approach, assessed cognitive functioning through WISC-V UK. It added value through clinically informed understanding, neuro-affirming insight, safety and containment planning, communication support and multi-agency coordination.

Improved outcomes

Improved outcomes are reported in better emotional regulation, reduced self-harm behaviours, better communication, and reduced police call-outs and allegations. Most impact levels are high, with engagement and relationships assessed as medium.

Risks to manage

There are also key risks which require continued management. They include a risk of harm to self and others, escalation linked to loss or perceived abandonment, and the need to balance restrictive measures with relationship-based support and repair.

Potential annual savings

Potential annual savings are stated as £833k+, demonstrating impact and strong value for money. This is including:

- Reduced police call out and interventions: £10k+
- Reduced restraint, incidents, sickness and agency costs: £27k+
- Specialist placement step down: up to £780k+

Recommendations

- Continue cognitive-informed support;
- Maintain clinically informed and neuro-affirming practice;
- Strengthen communication and emotion regulation support;
- Stabilise relationships and contact planning;
- Re-engage with education when ready; and
- Monitor longer-term outcomes and savings

Home Again

Home Again focuses on children with complex and overlapping needs - many of whom are at risk of, or experiencing, deprivation of their liberty. The number of children subject to applications for Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DoLO) under the High Court has risen significantly in recent years, from around 300 in 2019/20¹ to over 1,400 in 2025².

These children present across multiple systems and settings, including children's social care, inpatient mental health services, youth custody and unregistered provision. They often have a combination of needs linked to trauma, mental health, neurodiversity and risk behaviours, and many have experienced instability and disruption in their relationships and placements over a sustained period. Without the right support, their situations can quickly worsen – for example through increased missing episodes, self-harm, involvement in exploitation, or behaviours that place them or others at risk. This can lead to repeated placement and relationship breakdowns, more restrictive interventions, entry into custody, and long-term disengagement from services. Disruption also impacts children's education, affecting engagement, stability and attainment, with consequences that can extend into adulthood.

Alongside the human impact, these children are also those most likely to generate significant financial costs to local services and to the public purse across their lives. At an individual level, the lifetime cost for a child in care has been estimated at up to £1.2 million³. For a small number of children with the most complex needs, placement costs alone can reach extremely high levels. Local authorities are now frequently commissioning placements costing over £10,000 per week, with some exceeding £60,000 per week, and a small number of cases costing more than £1 million per year⁴, reflecting the intensity of need and the cumulative cost of crisis-driven, late intervention responses.

The current system

Despite this level of need, these children often experience support that is fragmented, delayed or inconsistent. Many come into contact with multiple services - children's social care, health, education and youth justice - yet a lack of shared understanding, disjointed decision-making and unclear accountability can mean that support does not come together around the child. Help may arrive too late or fail to respond to the underlying drivers of behaviour and risk, contributing to escalation and crisis, and, in some cases, the use of highly restrictive forms of care, including deprivation of liberty.

¹ Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (2022), evidence review [What do we know about children and young people deprived of their liberty in England and Wales?](#)

² Ministry of Justice – Family Court Statistics Quarterly collection [Family Court Statistics Quarterly \(MoJ\)](#)

³ [Paying the Price – the social and financial costs of children's social care](#)

⁴ [High-cost children's social care placements survey | Local Government Association](#)

The national work through Nuffield found that children's needs are often not recognised or responded to effectively across services, with support frequently delayed until crisis point. Fragmented systems can lead to decisions focused on managing immediate risk rather than supporting longer-term recovery and stability, and children can fall between services where responsibilities are unclear⁵.

This sits alongside rising levels of need, with referrals to children's mental health services now exceeding 1 million per year, placing significant pressure on already stretched services⁶.

Local authorities and health partners often do not have access to the right type of placements, with the right support and the workforce lack the skills, expertise and experience to meet these children's complex and overlapping needs. As a result, children may be placed in settings that do not meet their needs, including unregistered or highly restrictive provision. In some cases, children remain in inappropriate environments, such as hospital wards, while suitable support is identified⁷, creating disruption for both the child and wider services.

In principle, Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DoLOs) are permissive, allowing for a range of restrictions up to a defined maximum. Restrictions should be proportionate to the child's needs, reduce over time where possible, and be subject to regular review. However, evidence suggests that in practice, the system becomes risk-averse, with the full range of restrictions often applied from the outset rather than tailored to the child's changing needs. This is sometimes reinforced by a perception that inspection and regulatory pressures, expect higher levels of restriction in order to evidence that risk is being effectively managed. Through Home Again, we will also work with inspectorates (including Ofsted and CQC), who share the ambition of reducing unnecessary restrictions, to support a more consistent understanding of effective risk management, ensuring that inspection and regulatory frameworks enable proportionate, child-centred practice rather than inadvertently driving overly restrictive responses.

Home Again builds on a strong and growing national evidence base from research, sector engagement and test-and-learn activity. This includes engagement with local authorities, health partners, education and youth justice services, providers, charities and academics; commissioned research into children's experiences of deprivation of liberty and system responses⁸; analysis of court cases; and learning from NHS-led programmes, local innovation and emerging provision models.

⁵ [Caring for children in complex situations: Five learning points and a case for change - Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)

⁶ [Children's and Young People's Mental Health Services: 2024-25 | Children's Commissioner for England](#)

⁷ [Children and young people - Care Quality Commission](#)

⁸ [Improving outcomes for looked-after children in complex situations \(DfE, 2026\)](#)

Taken together, these emerging findings highlight that the challenge is not a lack of effort or expertise within the system, but the way in which workforce, funding and resources are organised.

Support for children in complex situations is too often fragmented across services, with decisions made in isolation and without a shared understanding of need. Processes and pathways can limit flexibility, preventing professionals from responding in a timely and coordinated way. As a result, support is frequently reactive, arriving only once needs have escalated to crisis.

To improve outcomes, there is a need for a more integrated, system-wide approach that:

- enables a single, shared understanding of the child
- brings professionals together to make collective decisions
- provides consistent, expert support
- intervenes earlier to prevent escalation
- aligns resources and accountability across agencies⁹

Delivering this will require new ways of working that bring together expertise across systems and support more confident, proportionate management of risk. In particular, it will require greater shared responsibility for complex decisions, enabling services to move from risk-averse approaches towards more balanced, proportionate responses. By doing so, the system can reduce unnecessary restrictions, sustain placements and better support children's stability and recovery.

⁹ [Caring for children in complex situations: Towards a new ecosystem - Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)

Delivering Home Again

Home Again is a multi-year programme to test and embed an integrated, multi-agency approach to supporting children who are at risk of, or experiencing, deprivation of liberty. At its core, Home Again will deliver the right help to children at the right time, from the right practitioner to meet their needs. Children will remain connected to their families, communities and support networks wherever possible, and will avoid late, crisis-driven and restrictive interventions. For some children, deprivation of liberty is necessary for a short time to protect them from harm, but we want to see a reduction in the length of deprivation of liberty orders, a reduction in the number of children experiencing repeat orders and an end to the use of unregistered placements for these children.

Home Again brings together the strongest evidence of what we know works into a single, coherent and scalable approach. It builds on learning from test-and-learn activity, including in West Sussex, moving beyond isolated local innovation to a consistent, system-wide way of working. We are inviting RCC areas in England to apply to set up Home Again and will begin by working with up to five areas, consisting of RCCs and their partners from youth justice, health and education. These areas will work with us to put the programme into practice and as they move into delivery, we will learn and share what works well in different contexts to support national rollout.

We will share learning as we go, so that other areas can build on it. Over time, we will bring in additional areas, using what we have learned to expand the approach and move towards wider national reach. This will allow us to grow the programme in a way that is both purposeful and sustainable. Programme delivery is expected in two waves:

- **Wave 1** will include up to five areas. These areas will begin their set-up and co-design phase from October 2026 and move into delivery by April 2027.
- **Wave 2** is expected to begin from April 2028, bringing in further areas to build on the learning from the first wave and extend the reach of the programme.

Our funding is to launch and grow Home Again, with a clear expectation that areas will move to a self-sustaining model by the end of the funded period. As pooled funding and resourcing arrangements are established and the impact of earlier, coordinated intervention is realised, areas should transition to local funding, with ongoing delivery supported through system savings and shared investment. This approach reaches more areas while staying focused on what makes the biggest difference for children and allows us to learn, adapt and expand quickly, to support national rollout.

Eligibility

This application is for Wave 1 of the programme. Details on funding and delivery for Wave 1 can be found later in this document. RCCs, including all local authorities who

are part of the RCC footprint, the ICBs (and offices for pan-ICB commissioning (OPICs) where appropriate), youth justice/offending teams, virtual school heads, and other relevant services or agencies who work with children at risk of or being deprived of their liberty are eligible to apply together for Home Again. Applications must be as a region, encompassing the entire RCC footprint demonstrating evidence of readiness against the design specification below.

Local authorities and partners that are not part of an RCC are not eligible to apply for Home Again wave 1, reflecting our ambition that reform for children in care is delivered through RCCs to transform outcomes for children through pooling resources, strengthening multi-agency collaboration, building workforce expertise and capability across multi-agency partnerships and shared commissioning to create sufficient, targeted placements. The application will require sign up from all partners, with named leads for each agency. For successful areas, the lead local authority for the RCC will be the grant recipient and will need to outline a mechanism to distribute grant funding to partners as required in the application process. Where the RCC is established, or intends to operate, as a separate legal entity (for example a corporate body owned by public partners), applicants should clearly set out the proposed funding and accountability arrangements. In these cases, DfE will work with the RCC to determine the most appropriate grant recipient, ensuring this aligns with the agreed operating model and governance structures. In the case of RCCs transferring to alternative operating models, such as hosted by the Strategic Authority, DfE will work with the RCC to determine whether the grant recipient can be changed to match the new operating model.

The role of partners

Home Again requires RCCs, local authorities, ICBs and partner agencies to work together:

- **RCCs** are responsible for system leadership. This includes establishing the Home Again model, setting governance arrangements and ensuring consistent delivery across the regional footprint. RCCs are also responsible for planning and care placements.
- **ICBs, supported by OPICs** (where relevant), are responsible for commissioning and aligning health services. This includes contributing to pooled funding, ensuring access to specialist health support, placements in specialist health provision and coordinating health provision at a regional scale where appropriate.
- **Local authorities and multi-agency partners** remain responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including delivery of Family Help, child protection, care and leaving care arrangements. Partners can include other relevant agencies, charities, voluntary organisations and other third parties delivering high quality services and support to these children and their families.

The Home Again team should be based within RCCs and operate across the regional footprint as a specialist multi-disciplinary team, reporting into RCC and OPIC

structures. This team will bring together expertise across agencies to work directly with children who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, deprivation of liberty and their families. It will provide coordinated support for joint assessment (building on existing health and/or social care assessments and plans), multi-agency decision-making and joint, targeted and specialist interventions that wrap around the child whatever placement they are in, including where children are living with parents or wider carers in their family network.

Home Again teams will work alongside local authorities who retain statutory responsibility for decisions relating to children receiving their services. Lead practitioners in Family Help and social workers allocated to looked after children will retain the day-to-day responsibility for planning, support and review. The Home Again team wraps around existing provision where a child is at risk of, or experiencing, deprivation of liberty to provide specialist assessment (as needed), access to rapid, expert interventions and practitioners and a streamlined referral pathway to integrated specialist provision, placements and multi-agency resources. The Home Again team will strengthen existing support by either bolstering local capacity, providing specialist input, or both. It will also operate as a system oversight mechanism, supporting individual agencies to share and manage risk related to individual children and to rapidly unlock the right resources and provision to improve outcomes for a child. This will include providing real time support on restrictions where deprivation of liberty orders are in place to make sure the lowest, safest intervention and approach is adopted by the team around the child.

Delivery approach

Home Again will be delivered in two phases in Wave 1: the initial set up and co-design phase followed by the delivery phase. The set up and co-design phase will run from October 2026-March 2027 and include:

- Cross-sector co-design to define the local Home Again approach aligned to the design specification below
- Agreeing the operating and delivery model with all partners
- Using cost allocation models to develop and agree initial pooled funding and resource approach (to be implemented from April 2027 or before)
- Recruiting and mobilising the multi-disciplinary workforce required for delivery
- Participating in workforce and assessment of need tool training offers
- Agreeing local approaches to scaling Home Again across the regional footprint
- Setting out what local flexibilities are needed aligned with the design specification

The delivery phase will run from April 2027-March 2029 and include:

- Operationalising Home Again teams with a single referral pathway and integrated processes with the wider children's social care system for Family Help and looked after children.
- Using the assessment of need tool for all children referred to the Home Again team
- Implementing and using the cross-sector register consistently across different agencies to identify and prioritise support for children access Home Again
- Establishing pooled funding and resourcing arrangements through legal agreements and embedding in local systems for timely access to support for children in Home Again
- Working with DfE and the evaluation contractor to share insights and evidence to refine Home Again and monitor the impacts

Areas will deliver Home Again in line with agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). An evaluation lead by an external organisation will run in parallel to the delivery phase and areas will be expected to participate in evaluation activities including supplying regular monitoring information.

Who is Home Again for?

Depriving a child of their liberty should only be used when it is the only option to keep them safe from harm or harming others. Home Again aims to bring the right people together around children to prevent deprivation of liberty and to help children who are being deprived of liberty, or stepping down from being deprived of liberty, by safely reducing restrictions. The at risk of deprivation definition is:

'A child or young person whose needs, behaviours or circumstances are such that, without timely, coordinated intervention, there is a foreseeable likelihood that restrictive measures amounting to deprivation of liberty would be required to keep them or others safe.'

Whether a child meets this definition should be considered alongside the following children and young people factors:

- Escalating and/or a chronic/persistent pattern of risk-taking behaviours that challenge ordinary care arrangements
- Lack of collaboration/cooperation between young person and carers

And these placement factors:

- Lack of effective risk management (e.g. reliance on emergency services; regular use of physical restraint)
- Care requirements and day-to-day arrangements are not aligned with the child's age and developmental needs, including both highly restrictive approaches and situations where risk is not adequately contained

- Pattern of increasingly restrictive care practice in response to risk behaviours (e.g. restricted access to objects, physical restraint)

Design specification

To support a more consistent and effective approach for these children, Home Again will require areas to use a common approach to assessment of need (AoN), a shared register of children at risk of or deprived of their liberty (to support visibility and planning) and a common training and supervision framework for multi-agency practitioners working with these children.

This will address the challenge in the current system where children experience very different responses depending on where they live, the services available, and how well those services work together. As a result, children experience delays, inconsistent decision-making and support that does not reflect a full understanding of their needs - particularly as they move between placements, services or local areas. Through the community of practice and learning from wave 1, we will spread what works, including shared tools, training and learning to embed national rollout at the earliest opportunity.

Minimum Requirements

The following section sets out the **minimum requirements** of the Home Again approach. These should underpin the approach to be delivered across the regional footprint and agreed with partner agencies.

RCCs must:

Requirement 1: Establish Home Again across the regional footprint with full rollout expected by March 2027. This includes:

- Understanding the local needs profile of children at risk or deprived of their liberty
- System analysis of the existing provision available to these children and the quality and effectiveness of that provision (as part of their wider sufficiency work)
- Agreeing the operating model and governance arrangements for Home Again, including RCC level leadership across local authorities
- Working with partners to agree their contribution to delivering Home Again at the local and regional level, e.g. probation services where they are already involved with a family, specialist voluntary or charity organisations
- RCCs will have the Home Again team in place with access to trained assessment of need professionals and the register no later than March 2027.
- RCCs will achieve full regional coverage by March 2027. Where an RCC covers more than two ICBs, a limited extension of up to six months may be permitted to support implementation. Applications will be assessed against their proposed scaling plans with earlier readiness for full regional coverage assessed more strongly

- Agreeing a shared practice framework and service specification, developed with local authorities, ICBs and OPICs. This should establish a common ambition, language, outcomes framework and approach to interventions for this group of children. It should, set out a consistent approach to building on previous assessment to inform specialist provision, decision-making and intervention aligned with the outcomes in the Children's Social Care national framework¹⁰ and informed by the principles of the Framework for Integrated Care¹¹.

Requirement 2: Develop and implement pooled funding and resourcing arrangements for Home Again. RCCs must lead the development of pooled funding and resource arrangements across local authorities and ICBs, enabling integrated responses and flexible use of resources to meet the needs of children with complex and overlapping needs. Where OPICs are in place, RCCs should work with ICBs and OPICs to align and coordinate regional funding. OPICs may support the pooling and deployment of specialist health resources, particularly for low-volume, high-complexity provision.

Funding arrangements must reflect the reality that interventions are delivered as a single, integrated package. DfE funding is designed to taper over the life of the programme as pooled local funding arrangements are established. As a guide, DfE funding is expected to account for around 70–80% of total investment at the start of delivery. By March 2028, DfE and local contributions should be broadly equal (approximately 50% each). By March 2029, local contributions should account for the majority of funding (typically 60–80%).

We expect pooled funding arrangements to operate on the basis of shared system responsibility for cost, risk and outcomes. Decisions about support should be driven by children's needs and care planning. In early co-design we will expect to see agencies using local cost allocation models and evidence to create this integrated approach from the outset. The ambition is to move quickly away from models that rely on negotiations at an individual child level and instead focus on understanding, agreeing and testing individual agency costs and projected savings as a result of implementing Home Again and builds a strategic, efficient and fair cross-agency funding and resource model.

Funding and resourcing approaches should:

- Support flexible and timely access to placements, specialist interventions and workforce capacity across the RCC footprint
- Enable joint decision-making and shared ownership of cost, risk and outcomes across local authorities, ICBs and other partners

¹⁰ The Children's Social Care National Framework describes the purpose and principles of children's social care, the outcomes that local authorities should achieve for children and families, and the enablers of good practice.

¹¹ [Framework for Integrated Care: Supporting Service Integration | Anna Freud](#)

- Facilitate the use of OPICs to coordinate and deploy resources for services that are most effectively commissioned at regional scale
- Reduce fragmentation in commissioning arrangements, particularly for children with the most complex needs
- Be developed through co-design, with clear milestones to establish pooled funding and resourcing arrangements from April 2027 and transition to a sustainable, long-term model by March 2029
- Enable OPICs, on behalf of ICBs, to pool and deploy resources across systems for services commissioned at regional scale

In developing these arrangements, areas must:

- Avoid case-by-case cost attribution across agencies
- Ensure funding decisions follow agreed multi-agency plans, without re-opening 'who pays' discussions at the level of individual children
- Use financial information proportionately, focusing on overall package cost, system-level spend and key cost drivers rather than detailed cost breakdowns
- Establish clear governance, transparency and oversight arrangements to maintain confidence across partners including dispute resolution and financial risk sharing arrangements
- Put in place mechanisms for reviewing contributions and spend over time at system level, rather than retrospectively reallocating costs for individual cases
- Ensure a proposed legal mechanism is in place that will underpin pooled funding and resource sharing arrangements

These arrangements should support a shift towards shared investment in prevention, earlier intervention and system-wide responses, including through an 'invest to save' approach that reduces reliance on high-cost, restrictive or crisis-driven interventions over time. Areas should prioritise simplicity and timeliness in their approaches avoiding delay, over burdensome data or administrative requirements and processes that constrain delivery or access to services. Further detail on the delivery phasing for pooled funding can be found in the 'Available Funding' section of this guidance.

Requirement 3: Create joint governance and accountability frameworks to support delivery and sustainability of Home Again. RCCs must establish clear multi-agency governance arrangements to support effective delivery and long-term sustainability. Governance should enable coordinated responses, consistent decision-making and strong system leadership. Governance arrangements must be co-designed with local authorities, ICBs and other partners, including OPICs where in place. Where OPIC arrangements exist, governance should reflect shared decision-

making across RCCs, ICBs and OPIC-hosting ICBs, particularly where services and resources are commissioned at regional scale. Governance and accountability frameworks must:

- Define clear and swift decision-making and escalation processes
- Set out roles and responsibilities across RCCs, local authorities, ICBs, OPICs and partners
- Support shared ownership of outcomes, risk and resources
- Include OPIC involvement where services are coordinated across ICBs
- Align RCC, ICB and OPIC governance to avoid duplication
- Establish data sharing, oversight and assurance arrangements, including use of the regional register
- Support transparency and oversight of performance, outcomes and resource use
- Enable continuous learning and improvement across the RCC footprint

Requirement 4: Establish Home Again team(s) across the regional footprint to deliver assessment, planning, intervention, support and review alongside local authority support and services already in place. RCCs must establish multi-disciplinary Home Again teams to coordinate assessment, decision-making and intervention, ensuring children receive timely, joined up and effective support. Home Again teams will operate across the RCC footprint and act as the primary mechanism for multi-agency decision-making and coordination within Home Again. RCCs should work with local authorities, ICBs and other partners to determine how these teams are structured, including how specialist health expertise is accessed, including through OPIC arrangements where relevant. Home Again teams must bring together practitioners across social care, health, education and youth justice. We would expect local Home Again teams to include the following or similar practitioners:

- Clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and mental health nurses, alongside youth justice practitioners and practice leads. Teams should also include social work expertise across children's and adult services, and draw on wider specialist input such as occupational therapy and speech and language therapy.
- Health workforce will be integral, with a mix of Children and Young People's Wellbeing Practitioners and more specialist Band 6–8 clinicians across mental health and psychological services. Teams should also include expertise in serious violence, supported by appropriate business support and data/analytical capacity.

These teams should develop a shared understanding of need and risk, enabling coordinated and proportionate responses. Home Again teams must:

- Act as the main forum for multi-agency decision-making about the needs of individual children
- Undertake coordinated assessment that builds on the previous assessment and plans for a child, including use of a shared tool for assessing need (the AoN)
- Develop integrated plans for children that update plans for support and services already in place: for example, Family Help, child protection or care plans.
- Coordinate support for children across agencies
- Provide targeted specialist input where this is needed
- Enable earlier intervention and reduce escalation
- Support safe transitions and step-down

We expect Home Again teams to offer specific interventions that have a proven evidence base of creating positive change for these children. We would expect to see the following or similar interventions included as part of the local offer:

- Targeted psychological therapies, including Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR), to support children to process trauma and improve emotional stability
- Neurodevelopmental and communication support, including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and support for ADHD, autism and FASD, to address underlying needs that contribute to behaviour and risk
- Attachment- and relationship-based interventions, such as Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), to strengthen relationships between children and carers and rebuild trust
- Intensive family-based interventions, including Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT), to reduce risk behaviours and support children to remain safely within family or community settings where appropriate
- Emotional regulation and behavioural support approaches, including DBT-informed models and frameworks such as ARC (Attachment, Regulation and Competency), to support children to manage distress and risk more safely
- Support for carers and placements, including therapeutic parenting approaches (e.g. PACE-informed practice), practical behaviour support and reflective supervision, to enable carers to respond consistently and reduce placement breakdown

- Consistent relational support, including keyworker or mentor roles, ensuring children have stable, trusted relationships with adults who provide continuity across placements and services
- Education and structured daily support, including access to appropriate education provision, consistent routines and structured environments to support engagement, stability and reduced risk
- Practical and social support, including activities that build independence, confidence and positive relationships with peers, family members and trusted adults

Delivery of these interventions should reflect a whole-system approach. We expect that a significant proportion (typically around 50%) will be delivered through existing local authority, health, education and youth justice provision, with additional capacity funded via the Home Again pooled budget. Further provision (around 30%) will be supported through targeted Home Again-funded capacity to provide enhanced and flexible support, particularly in the early stages of implementation. A smaller proportion (around 20%) will require access to highly specialised or bespoke provision commissioned at regional level.

All interventions included as part of the Home Again offer should draw on a strong evidence base (NICE or strong evidence base around 70%) and be delivered as part of a coordinated, multi-agency response. We also recognise that areas will want to innovate and might expect to see around 30% of the work of Home Again teams to be testing new or emerging approaches to supporting individual children. We will use the Community of Practice to share evidence of this innovation.

Requirement 5: Establish a single, integrated approach to identifying, referring and having sight of children who need support from Home Again through a cross-agency register. Areas must design and implement a single referral pathway that provides a clear and consistent route across the RCC footprint into the Home Again team. Referrals should be initiated through existing safeguarding and service responsibilities and informed by multi-agency information.

The referral pathway must:

- Establish a clear and consistent process for identifying and referring children who may benefit from Home Again, including those at risk of escalation
- Ensure referrals are informed by input from relevant partners, including ICBs and, where appropriate, OPICs
- Enable timely Home Again team triage, decision-making and allocation, including determining the level and type of intervention required
- Align with local authority front door arrangements and existing multi-agency processes, avoiding duplication

- Ensure access to provision and services at both local and regional level, including those coordinated through OPICs where specialist support is required
- Support timely and appropriate information sharing across agencies
- Link to the regional register, enabling children to be tracked, prioritised and escalated where needed

There is good evidence that a cross-sector register, similar to the Dynamic Support Register used for adults and children with learning disabilities and autism is very effective for this group. This type of register support agencies to identify children in need of interventions and prioritise them according to immediate need. Home Again teams should have a single view of their children across social care, health, education and youth justice. This should support early identification, prioritisation and coordinated decision-making. The register must:

- Provide a single shared view across agencies of children who need Home Again oversight or intervention
- Use a shared approach to support consistent identification and prioritisation
- Be actively used by Home Again team to inform assessment, formulation, review and planning
- Include clear governance, access and data sharing arrangements

Requirement 6: Undertake a single, coordinated multi-disciplinary assessment of a child's need, risk and strengths - building on previous information - using the Assessment of Need (AoN) framework The AoN is a validated, standardised tool that provides a holistic view of a child's needs, risks and strengths across services. It should build on existing assessments and bring together information across agencies into a single, shared understanding of the child's needs, avoiding duplication and the child and family needing to repeat their story to multiple services to get the right help and support. The AoN should be initiated as early as possible where a child is at risk of or experiencing deprivation of liberty. As part of the set-up process, RCCs should identify practitioners in the wider system who are likely to be working with these children in Family Help or with looked after children to receive training on how to undertake the AoN. It is our intention that the assessment be completed prior to referral by those working most closely with the child. However, referral should not be delayed where there are urgent concerns, and the assessment is not complete. Home Again teams must ensure that the Assessment of Need (AoN) is used consistently to inform a shared, multi-agency understanding of a child's needs, risks and strengths, and to support formulation and intervention planning. This should be dynamic and regularly reviewed as needs and circumstances change.

Requirement 7: The Home Again team should create a single multi-agency intervention plan that builds on existing plans, including Family Help, child protection or care plans. This plan should align interventions into a coherent

set of actions and interventions with clear accountability across agencies, reducing the risk of conflicting or duplicative approaches. The Home Again team are responsible for creating and delivering these plans alongside other lead practitioners already working with the child. The plan should:

- Set out roles, responsibilities and actions
- Integrate input from all relevant services
- Be reviewed and updated as needs change and in line with the review of existing provision as part of Family Help planning, child protection conferences or care planning forums.
- Support coordinated interventions that improve stability and reduce the need for restrictive responses

Requirement 8: Establish an education offer that enables engagement and progression: RCCs must work with local authorities including Virtual School Heads to map existing education provision, identify gaps and create a coherent, place-based commissioning approach and education offer for these children. This should include existing mainstream schools, specialist provision, alternative provision and outreach services including tutoring and community-based services; commissioning new placements and services depending on local need: and, centring educational stability and continuity when children step away from Home Again into other less intensive provision.

The Home Again team should make sure that provision is matched to a child's education readiness, needs and stage of engagement, with a focus on flexible delivery, engagement and staged reintegration.

We would expect to see areas setting out plans for provision including integrated multi-agency hub or wraparound models (e.g. No Wrong Door¹² or iROC-style approaches¹³), which provide coordinated oversight and delivery across services; integrated therapeutic education provision such as the Somerset model¹⁴, bringing together teachers and CAMHS clinicians in a single setting with a staged 'relax, explore, practice, stretch' curriculum; specialist residential education such as the Mulberry Bush¹⁵, combining care, therapy and learning to build readiness and emotional regulation; and flexible alternative provision such as The Hive¹⁶, delivering short, tailored, interest-led sessions to rebuild engagement and identity as a learner.

¹² See: [Evaluation of the No Wrong Door Innovation Programme](#) for more detail.

¹³ [Toucan \(the West Midlands CAMHS Provider Collaborative\) - IROC | Toucan – West Midlands CAMHS Provider Collaborative; Learning from Provider Collaboratives – Back to their Futures Summit presentation](#)

¹⁴ [What We Do | Horizons Therapeutic Education Trust](#)

¹⁵ [Our school - The Mulberry Bush](#)

¹⁶ [Alternative Provision - The Hive](#)

RCCs must make sure the education offer is:

- Commissioned and aligned at system level, ensuring that existing education provision (including mainstream, specialist, alternative provision and outreach services) is clearly mapped, coordinated and accessible to these children where needed
- Ensure that local authorities and Virtual School Heads are actively engaged in planning and oversight, with delivery aligned to statutory duties, including PEP, SEND and placement processes
- Ensure a clear and deliverable education pathway for each child, setting out current provision, additional provision required, and how this will be accessed and coordinated through the Home Again team, including flexible and staged delivery across home, community, alternative and school settings. We expect that the provision should be face to face to support relationship building unless there is a clear child led reason for an alternative approach.
- Provide clear pathways for re-engagement, reintegration and progression, including transition to mainstream, specialist provision or further education, in line with statutory processes, and maintaining strong links with the child's registered school
- Ensure programme funding is deployed to address gaps, improve access and capacity, and strengthen the quality of the education offer for this cohort
- Include clear arrangements for monitoring engagement, attendance and progress, with the Home Again team using this to review and adapt provision over time.

Co-design

As part of Home Again, RCCs and partners will work with DfE to co-design key elements of delivery through the initial implementation phase. Co-design is fundamental to ensuring Home Again is:

- Grounded in local experience and existing system capability
- Responsive to the needs of children with the most complex presentations
- Capable of reducing escalation and avoiding unnecessary restrictive interventions
- Scalable and sustainable across RCCs over time

Co-design will also support the development of a shared, evidence-informed understanding of what works in supporting children at risk of, or experiencing, deprivation of liberty to remain safely in their homes, communities and family networks wherever possible.

Areas for co-design include:

- **The optimal skills mix and workforce model for Home Again teams, ensuring teams** bring the right balance of expertise across children's social care, health, youth justice and education, and that specialist health input is consistently accessible across the RCC footprint, including through ICBs and OPICs where provision is organised at regional scale
- **Development of pooled funding and resource allocation** approaches, including how local authorities, ICBs and OPICs contribute to and manage shared resources, how risk is shared across partners, and how funding can be flexibly deployed to meet complex needs
- **The role of OPICs in enabling regional commissioning**, including how OPICs support access to low-volume, high-complexity provision, coordinate specialist services across systems and contribute to delivering economies of scale
- **The 'invest to save' approach**, including how areas capture and evidence impact (such as reductions in high-cost placements, emergency interventions and use of restrictive practices), and how this informs joint investment decisions across RCCs, ICBs and OPICs
- **The functions and use of the regional register**, including how it supports identification of children at risk, prioritisation and escalation, how it links to Home Again team decision-making, and how it informs commissioning and resource allocation decisions across RCCs, ICBs and OPICs
- **The detailed local and regional delivery model**, while we expect that the RCC will operate a single, centrally coordinated Home Again team for the region we recognise that where demand and geography justify it, more than one Home Again team may be required to operate a swift service to the children and families who need it most. This will only be agreed where the evidence demonstrates it is necessary.
- **Interface with care planning, Family Help and other statutory processes**, ensuring Home Again strengthens existing arrangements, supports continuity of relationships and maintains clear accountability for decision-making at child level
- **Approaches to scaling delivery across RCCs**, including how initial models transition to full regional coverage by March 2027, and how learning is shared across systems to support consistency and improvement
- **Education offer that enables engagement and progression** must be in place, co-designed by RCCs, Local Authorities, education providers and health partners, including alignment of existing provision, identification of gaps, and agreement of how resources and funding will be used to strengthen the local offer

Co-design will be supported through continuous learning, data collection and shared evaluation throughout the design and implementation phase. Co-design will underpin the final design specification for national rollout.

Local flexibilities

While the minimum requirements set out the core expectations of the Home Again approach, local areas have flexibility to determine how these are delivered, reflecting local context, need and existing system arrangements. This flexibility is intended to support local areas to design an approach that support timely, coordinated interventions for children with complex and overlapping needs to prevent escalation to deprivation of liberty wherever possible.

Local flexibilities should be exercised collaboratively across RCCs, local authorities, ICBs and, where applicable, OPICs, ensuring that delivery and commissioning arrangements are aligned and mutually reinforcing

Flexibility includes:

- **Design of referral pathways**, including whether the pathway is managed through local authority front doors or regional arrangements, provided there is a single, clear and consistent route into Home Again team support that aligns with existing safeguarding processes
- **Workforce composition and deployment**, enabling areas to determine the wider skills mix within Home Again – beyond the required core team outlined above. We expect this to be no more than 20% of roles within the team, recognising that there will be some very specialist roles for particular children that are not permanent in the team
- **Commissioning and delivery of specialist health provision**, including how services for low-volume, high-complexity needs will be commissioned primarily through health systems, with access managed through regionally coordinated approaches supported by OPICs
- **Governance and funding arrangements**, including how pooled funding is structured across RCCs, local authorities, ICBs and OPICs, and how decision-making responsibilities are distributed across partners
- **Ownership and operation of the regional register**, allowing areas to determine how the register is maintained, governed and used, provided it supports consistent identification, prioritisation and system oversight and is informed by all relevant partners, including ICBs and OPICs
- **Approaches to implementation, scaling and continuous improvement**, including how models are tested, refined and expanded across the RCC footprint, and how learning is shared within and across regions to support system-wide improvement
- **Design of the local education delivery model**, including how provision is configured across mainstream, specialist, alternative and community settings, how it is delivered (e.g. through tutoring, outreach, alternative provision or community-

based models), and whether this operates through hub-based, outreach or dispersed approaches, reflecting local context and existing infrastructure

Available Funding

DfE intends to grant up to £3,043,750 per area to set up and deliver Home Again. Funding is allocated across three financial years:

- Financial Year 2026 to 2027: up to £825,000 funding will be provided for the set up phase activities.
- Financial Year 2027 to 2028: up to £1,640,000 funding will be provided for year one of the delivery phase. As areas implement pooled funding and resource arrangements they will move towards approximately 50% of Home Again being supported using the DfE funding and 50% coming from local pooled funding and resources.
- Financial Year 2028 to 2029: up to £578,750 funding will be provided for year two of the delivery phase. Local pooled funding and resources will be in a more mature position with approximately 70% of funding for Home Again coming from these arrangements.

We expect that the majority of the funding will be used for direct work and interventions for children being supported by Home Again. We anticipate that the remaining funding will be required to cover costs such as recruitment, project management, HR, resourcing, IT costs and other approved operational expenses as outlined in the grant funding terms and conditions.

This funding will be **programme only** and no capital funding is available from DfE for Home Again. Where additional capital investment is required to develop new care provision, RCCs should use their wider functions and pooled funding arrangements to plan and invest collectively across partners. In 2025, the Department for Education committed £53 million of capital match funding to support the development of around 200 new placements in local authority children's homes for children with complex and overlapping needs, at risk of, or experiencing, deprivation of liberty.

The funding will be provided via a grant made under Section 14 of the Education Act 2002 to the lead local authority for the RCC. Eligible expenditure must be directly related to the set-up and delivery of Home Again. This includes staffing costs, recruitment, project management, training, supervision, digital infrastructure, and overheads. Ineligible expenditure includes capital investment, non-project-related staffing, contributions to general organisational running costs, redundancy or severance payments, debt servicing, or expenditure not detailed in the approved budget unless agreed with DfE in advance.

A cost breakdown of the funding will be required as part of the application process. It is expected that this will be refined during the co-design phase.

DfE grant funding will not be available beyond March 2029, reflecting the expectation that areas will have established pooled funding and resourcing arrangements and transitioned to a locally funded, sustainable model by this point. The funding profile is deliberately tapered to support set-up and early delivery, with

local partners progressively increasing their contribution as pooled budgets and resourcing mature and reliance on high-cost, crisis-driven interventions reduces.

DfE will procure the assessment of need tool and delivery of training for all areas. As such, procurement and delivery of training costs related to the AoN does not need to be part of the proposed breakdown of funding.

To support the effective delivery of Home Again and moving to becoming self-sufficient by the end of the DfE funding period, areas must commit to establishing a pooled funding and resource arrangement across partners from April 2027. The DfE funding available is tapered due to the expectation that RCCs and partners will agree and operationalise pooled funding and resource agreements during and beyond the Home Again DfE funded period. A phased approach has been included in recognition that establishing pooled funding and resources agreements can be legally and operationally complex. The high level below phased approach is outlined below:

- Year 1 - FY26-27 (setup and co-design phase): RCCs and partners agree initial pooled funding and resourcing contributions by the end of December 2026: undertaking the work to determine how costs per partners will be allocated. RCCs and partners confirm their agreed approach to pooled funding and resources by end of March 2027.
- Years 2 and 3 - FY27-28 - FY28-29 (delivery phase): Shadow pooled funding and resources agreements start to be delivered in April 2027, with a review of arrangements implementation ahead of getting legal agreements in place by the end of September 2027. From October 2027, pooled funding and resources should be being used to support the children involved in Home Again.
- Year 4 onwards: A permanent pooled fund and resourcing arrangement is established, with Home Again funded and resources by local partners, supported by system savings from reduced reliance on high-cost placements avoided costs across health and justice services.

This commitment forms part of the wider expectation that resources, services, and practitioner capacity will be shared across agencies for Home Again. All partners, including youth justice services, education services, children's social care, and health, are expected to participate in the pooled funding and resources agreements, either through direct financial contribution or through demonstrable resource deployment. These arrangements should be reflected in the local governance structure and included in the pooled funding agreement referenced in the minimum requirements. DfE are not prescribing the mechanism that must be used to legally set up the pooled funding and resources agreements: this will be for areas to determine and Home Again funding in year 2 and year 3 can support with costs related to getting the legal agreements in place.

Grant Conditions

If your application is successful, you will be expected to comply with the [DfE's grant funding terms and conditions](#) which may be subject to change. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions will affect payment of the grant.

Grant conditions will include the (not exhaustive) requirements to:

- Report the progress of the project throughout its lifecycle such as monthly calls and regular reporting to DfE.
- Inform DfE of any changes/delays to planned project milestones and of any project overspends/underspends.
- Agree conditions of claw back, payment suspension and early termination clauses in circumstances where monies are not spent for the purposes as set out in the grant or if the programme is unable to be completed.
- Compliance with the evaluation and data-sharing agreements, to be specified by our evaluation partner when appointed. This will include providing regular monitoring data.
- Commitment to set up pooled funding arrangements

This funding can only be used for the set up and delivery of Home Again. Areas must ensure all procurement and commissioning activity funded through this grant complies with relevant procurement legislation, local Standing Financial Instructions, and demonstrates openness, fairness and value for money. Where services are subcontracted or commissioned, areas should be able to evidence competitive process unless there is a clear and approved justification for direct award. Any changes to a project's scope must be agreed in advance by DfE and the funding may be liable to cancellation or clawback if a change of scope is not agreed.

DfE may recover funding if you do not deliver the agreed key performance indicators or outputs. You also agree to conditions that allow DfE to suspend payments, apply clawback or end the grant early if funds are not used for the purposes set out in the grant, or if the project cannot be completed in full or within the agreed timescales.

It is the expectation that grant funding will be awarded in October 2026, with work starting immediately after the award has been given.

Funding cannot be extended past 31 March 2029.

Application process

The application process consists of one application form per RCC area. There are 5 sections on the application form, and all sections must be completed to be considered. The questions on applicants, lead contact, agreement to work together and commitment to delivering the minimum requirements will be scored as a pass or fail. Failure to pass this section will disqualify applicants and no further scoring of subsequent questions will take place. Written answers will be scored 0-4 with a pass threshold of 2 for the minimum requirements section. See evaluation section of this guidance for further information on scoring and moderation.

Indicative timeline

Table 1: Indicative timeline

Milestone	Date
Programme launch: information for applications circulated and application process begins	8 July 2026
Deadline for all applications	19 August 2026
Notify applicants of outcome	September 2026
Grant letters issued	September 2026
Set up phase begins	1 October 2026
Delivery phase begins	1 April 2027
DfE funding ends	31 March 2029

Applications will not be considered after the deadline date.

Completing your application

The questions on applicants, lead contact, agreement to work together and commitment to delivering the minimum requirements must be completed by populating the relevant fields within the application form. We are requesting written responses to the additional sections, each with a defined maximum word count. Please aim to remain within the stated word limits ($\pm 10\%$). Diagrams or charts may be included where they enhance clarity and support your response; these will not be included in the word count. We have outlined how to set out your responses by section below. All questions are mandatory (except the questions on existing use of an assessment of need tool and delivering beyond the minimum requirements if not applicable) and must be completed for your application to be accepted.

Please ensure your written submission is either **Microsoft Word or PDF, minimum font size 12** and **follows the structure outlined in the application form document.**

Section 1) Application and contact details

The questions on applicants, lead contact and agreement to work together **MUST** be completed to progress with your application, as indicated on the form. This section evidences the commitment from the RCC and partners across children's social care, health, youth justice and education to work together to deliver Home Again if your RCC is successful.

Applicants

This section should state a lead local authority for the whole applicant group. It should then list the ICBs, virtual school heads and youth justice teams within the RCC.

Lead contact

Applicants should nominate one person from the lead local authority **only** as the lead contact for the whole applicant group. After confirmation of a successful application outcome, the local authority will be responsible for supplying the named lead for each provider/partner including a named data/information lead to ensure governance and robust processes.

Agreement to work together

Please provide the name, job title and organisation of all those who have formally signed off the application from the lead local authority of the RCC, ICBs, virtual school heads, youth justice teams or other partners. This should be the Director of Children's Services (DCS) for the lead local authority, ICB Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Head of Youth Justice Services, and virtual schools heads as a minimum. This confirms the proposal has been discussed with these partners and that there is agreement to work together to deliver Home Again. By signing the application RCCs and partners are committing to setting up pooled funding and resource arrangements as outlined in the minimum requirements. Sign off demonstrates senior approval and cross sector commitment and is required for your application to progress.

Section 2) Population Context

This section helps DfE understand the current position across your region and should include key data about your population including the target cohort, information about existing services and provisions for this group of children and any services for other cohorts that could be adapted or built upon to support delivery of Home Again. This should include how provision is currently accessed by these children (including any barriers), and any gaps in availability, capacity or suitability. We would also like you to include proposals based on your current data for how you will measure success and what targets you will set at a local level to show the impact of Home Again. These will form the basis of discussion for agreeing KPIs.

Population context data - word count: 500

Please provide a clear overview of the demographic and needs profile of your local population, including relevant data. This is essential to show how Home Again may benefit children and young people at risk or being deprived of liberty within your area. Your response should:

- Describe the characteristics and needs of your population with a focus on the target cohort of children, drawing on information from children's social care, health, education, and youth justice systems.
- Include specific indicators that illustrate demand and complexity.
- Provide any relevant data to help us understand your population and the potential impact of Home Again. You do not need to provide extensive datasets but include information that supports your description.
- Where relevant for new RCCs, we encourage you to utilise information provided in your recent RCC EOI application.

Please ensure your response includes data on:

- Number of children subject to a deprivation of liberty order in the last 12 months
- Number of children in unregistered placements in the last 12 months
- Number of looked after children in the last 12 months
- Number of children who have been placed on remand to youth detention accommodation in the last 12 months
- Number of children who have stepped down from a deprivation of liberty order in last 12 months

Number of children at risk of deprivation of liberty using the definition for the 'at risk' children on page 15.

Applicants should strongly demonstrate how they have applied the definition consistently to the children included. This may include children with frequent episodes of self-harm or harming others, increasing high levels of supervision and placement costs, frequent missing episodes, frequent A&E presentations. We recognise there is a larger number of children with overlapping and complex needs, however, Home Again is explicitly focused on children experiencing or at risk of deprivation of liberty.

We would encourage you to utilise existing data collections that you already report into such as:

- Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care

- [Perinatal, children and young people's mental health | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care](#)
- [Mental Health Services Monthly Statistics, Performance January 2026 - NHS England Digital](#)
- [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2025 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK.](#)

Existing provision and services - word count: 400

Please describe any existing provisions and/or services specifically aimed at supporting children at risk of or deprived of their liberty including relevant supervision structures. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Residential children's homes
- Alternative education services
- Alternatives to custody
- Enhanced support offers for children and carers
- Mental health treatment pathways

Your response should summarise how these services currently operate for these children and any relevant oversight or supervision arrangements. It will also be helpful to understand where these services are already multi-agency. Where applicable, please also outline how these provisions connect to wider reform programmes, such as Families First Partnerships or Framework for Integrated Care (community) vanguards and highlight any opportunities for alignment or integration with Home Again.

Section 3) Minimum Requirements

Commitment to delivering the minimum requirements

Applicants must agree to commit to the minimum requirements of Home Again to be considered. Please select yes or no. This question is scored as pass/fail. If you select 'no' to the question your application will be disqualified.

Delivering the minimum requirements

Applicants must demonstrate how they will deliver the minimum requirements of Home Again across the regional footprint. Applicants should avoid repeating information across sections.

System leadership, governance and delivery model

Word count: up to 1000

RCCs, working with partners, must establish Home Again across the regional footprint by March 2027, this includes arrangements for phased pooled funding and resources and joint governance and accountability frameworks

Applicants should refer to requirement 1, 2 and 3 in the design specification.

Strong responses will demonstrate:

- a clear and coherent model, with integrated multi-agency working supported by a shared practice framework
- A sustainable approach to pooled funding and resources that demonstrates plans for cost allocation work and invest to save incentives across agencies
- Strong governance arrangements that support effective and timely multi-agency decision-making and commissioning
- Outline data sharing, assurance and oversight arrangements across multi-agency partners
- Clear plans to scale to full regional coverage from the outset and by March 2028

Home Again team

Word count: up to 1000

RCCs must establish a multi-disciplinary Home Again team/s that operates across the regional footprint to deliver assessment, planning, intervention, support and review for children at risk of or experiencing deprivation of liberty

Applicants should refer to requirement 4 in the design specification

Strong responses will demonstrate:

- A clear and practical delivery structure for teams outlining key practitioner roles, skills and expertise within the team
- How teams will coordinate assessment, planning, intervention and review, and enable effective multi-agency decision-making, including how they work alongside other services, provision and practitioners that the child is supported by
- Outline the interventions available from the Home Again team – based on current provision, analysis of gaps and commissioning needs and demonstrating a commitment to delivering evidence-based interventions (around 70% evidence based with 30% innovation)
- Appropriate use of co-design to refine team structure and delivery, whilst demonstrating a clear commitment to the core functions of the Home Again team

Understanding need and coordinating response

Word count: up to 1000

Partners must establish a single, integrated approach to identifying, referring and having sight of children who need support from Home Again through a cross-agency register

Applicants should refer to requirement 5, 6 and 7 of the design specification

Strong responses will demonstrate:

- a clear end-to-end process from identification to coordinated response
- how the referral pathway is clear, consistent and avoids duplication with other services, provision or activity that the child is receiving
- how the register will be actively updated and used in decision-making
- a clear approach to multi-agency assessment and shared formulation approach to understand a child's needs across agencies

Provision pathways and delivering support (including education)

Word count: up to 750

RCCs and partners must coordinate provision across education, health and care and ensure support is aligned around each child.

Applicants should refer to requirements 6, 7 and 8 of the design specification

Strong responses will demonstrate:

- a coherent and joined-up approach to provision across agencies and evidence on moving to a single integrated plan
- a clear description of what a child's journey will be in practice and how this will feel seamless, and supportive avoiding children and their families having to tell their story multiple times to access the right help
- a strong and integrated role for education in every child's plan
- a clear and timely approach to improving access to practitioners, interventions and provisions once these are identified for a child and addressing gaps in provision (linked to strategic commissioning across agencies above)

Section 4) Cost breakdown

DfE will provide programme funding for the set up and delivery costs of Home Again for successful applicants. We anticipate each area will be awarded up to £3,043,750m over the lifetime of the funding period. Costs for procuring the assessment of need tool and delivering the required training to areas will be absorbed by DfE therefore areas do not need to include this in their cost breakdown.

Proposed cost breakdown – no word count requirement

Please provide a proposed cost breakdown for setting up and delivering Home Again within the £3,043,750m envelope. The breakdown should be outlined to show the split between financial years 2026-2027, 2027-2028 and 2028-2029 in line with the funding envelopes available for each financial year and clearly demonstrate the breakdown across the different components. The cost breakdown must clearly explain underlying assumptions, such as staffing levels, pay grades, procurement costs and expected productivity benefits. Areas should demonstrate that costs have been benchmarked against local, regional or national comparators where available and that expenditure is proportionate to the expected outcomes and scale of delivery. It is expected that the cost breakdown will be refined during the co-design phase.

Table 2 below provides the main categories of the costs you may incur. DfE expects that the majority of the funding will be used for direct work and interventions for children being supported by Home Again. We understand there will be regional variation to these costs. Not applicable boxes represent components that DfE does not anticipate funding in the relevant financial year. If you anticipate other costs outside of these please outline your rationale and the cost breakdown.

Table 2: Cost breakdown table template

Cost breakdown	2026/2027	2027/2028	2028/2029	Justification
Home Again team workforce (including staffing assumptions, grades and on-costs)				
Health workforce (including staffing assumptions with a minimum of 5 roles, grades and on-costs)				
IT/data/systems costs			Not applicable	
Programme management including system leadership and coordination (including staffing assumptions, grades and on-costs)			Not applicable	

Table 2 continued: Cost breakdown table template

Cost breakdown	2026/2027	2027/2028	2028/2029	Justification
Recruitment		Not applicable	Not applicable	
Interventions				
Pooled funding/commissioning capacity workforce and enablers (including staffing assumptions, grades and on-costs)	Not applicable			
Contingency arrangements				

You cannot include any costs incurred before you submit your application or before you are notified of the outcome. You should be aware that if your application is approved in principle only, you cannot accept the Terms and Conditions, and DfE is under no obligation to make payments in those circumstances. Any expenses you, or a third party, have incurred prior to the acceptance of the Terms and Conditions (a signed Grant Funding Agreement) will only be paid where approved for payment by DfE.

Achieving value for Money (VFM) - word count: 300

VFM means making the best and most efficient use of public funding to improve outcomes for children and young people, including making effective use of existing provision and targeting investment to address gaps and improve access.

Applicants should demonstrate how their approach achieves value for money based on the proposed cost breakdown. Responses should include:

- How costs have been benchmarked or market-tested
- How duplication of existing services will be avoided
- How the intervention will optimise resource use across the system including addressing identified gaps in provision
- How VFM will be monitored throughout delivery including identifying avoided costs

Section 5) Project management and planning

Word count: 600

Home Again should be operational by 1 April 2027 following the set-up phase.

Please provide a high-level implementation plan which outlines key activity, associated timescales, dependencies, and milestones. You should also include a risk register (excluded from word count) which highlights the key risks, barriers and challenges along with proposed mitigation strategies.

We understand that plans might be at an early stage and expect that the set-up phase will support with refining project management and planning.

Evaluation and Selection

This evaluation framework sets out: the eligibility/mandatory pass/fail checks; the scored criteria aligned directly to the application form and guidance; and the scoring scale, thresholds, and moderation approach. Please ensure to refer to both tables so that you can map your responses to the exact criteria.

Step 1: Pass / fail checks

Before scoring begins, all applications are checked against the mandatory requirements. Applications must meet all pass / fail criteria in Table 3 to progress to scoring. Applications that do not meet these requirements will not be assessed further.

Table 3: Questions subject to pass / fail checks

Reference	Eligibility Requirement	Pass / Fail
Applicants	Lead local authority and collaborative partners named	Pass/Fail
Lead contact	Lead contact for the applicant group named	Pass/Fail
Agreement to work together	Agreement to work together demonstrated through relevant sign off from each agency (lead RCC local authority, health partners, education partners and youth justice partners). This should be the Director of Children's Services (DCS) for the lead local authority, ICB Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Head of Youth Justice Services, and virtual schools heads as a minimum.	Pass/Fail
Commitment to delivering the minimum requirements	Yes box populated	Pass/Fail

Step 2: Scoring each section (0–4)

Table 4 outlines the criteria being assessed, the scoring and weighting of each section. Each scored section of the application is rated on a scale from 0 to 4. Scores are awarded based on the extent to which the application clearly, comprehensively and credibly addresses the requirements of the question. Assessors will place greater weight on evidence of deliverable proposals, defined roles and responsibilities, realistic implementation arrangements and clear operating models. Responses should demonstrate how the proposal will work in practice, rather than relying solely on statements of intent, aspiration or high-level descriptions. Applicants are not expected to have fully developed operational plans at this stage; proportionate and credible thinking is sufficient, but the use of clear examples will strengthen your application. Table 5 outlines the descriptors for each score on the 0-4 scale.

Table 4: Assessment criteria for application questions

Reference: Application section	Criteria – what is being assessed	Examples of evidence assessors may consider	Weight %
Population context data	Understanding of need within the regional footprint	Relevant and proportionate local/regional data; clear description of scale and complexity of need; evidence of pressures across systems; clear articulation of the target cohort aligned with the Home Again definition including a justified estimate for the number of children at risk of deprivation of liberty; proposed measures for success and targets outlined	7
Existing provision and services	Understanding of current services and system context	Clear overview of existing provision; how services operate across agencies; strengths and gaps; how existing provision will align with or support Home Again, how commissioning for new provision will happen	6
System leadership, governance and delivery	Strength and credibility of cross-sector joint working and system delivery model	A clear, coherent and system-wide operating model is set out with roles and responsibilities clearly defined across RCCs and partners; governance demonstrates clear decision-making, escalation and shared accountability; evidence of a credible and deliverable approach to pooled funding, including how and when it will be implemented; evidence that governance supports timely and effective multi-agency decision-making in practice; a clear and realistic plan to achieve regional coverage (stronger responses demonstrate readiness earlier); the response clearly distinguishes between fixed requirements and co-designed elements; evidence of a credible transition to a sustainable, locally funded model by March 2029	15

Table 4 continued: Assessment criteria for application questions

Reference: Application section	Criteria – what is being assessed	Examples of evidence assessors may consider	Weight %
Home Again team	Strength and credibility of the Home Again team delivery model	Teams are clearly described in terms of structure, coverage, day-to-day operation and key practitioners; demonstrates teams will coordinate assessment, planning, intervention and review in practice; roles and responsibilities across practitioners and agencies are clear; evidence of how teams enable effective and timely multi-agency decision-making; a clear approach to developing and delivering a single multi-agency plan; a credible and deliverable approach to the workforce model and scaling by March 2027; co-design is used to refine structure and delivery, not to determine core functions	10
Understanding need and coordinating response (assessment, information sharing, identification, referral, register)	Strength of approach to identifying, understanding and coordinating support across the system	Children are identified consistently across agencies, including earlier stages of need; initial proposed referral pathway is clearly described; a clear end-to-end process from identification to coordinated response; the approach to joint assessment (including AoN) supports a shared understanding of need, risk and strengths Assessment information is used to inform decision-making, planning and intervention; evidence of a credible and deliverable approach to information sharing across partners; initial proposal for the cross-sector register provides a shared system-wide view and is actively used to prioritise and coordinate support; there is a clear approach to tracking and reviewing children over time; evidence the approach enables timely and coordinated multi-agency working in practice; co-design is applied to process detail, not to core requirements	15

Table 4 continued: Assessment criteria for application questions

Reference: Application section	Criteria – what is being assessed	Examples of evidence assessors may consider	Weight %
Provision, pathways and outcomes (including education)	Strength of approach to coordinating provision and improving outcomes	Provision is coordinated across education, health and care as a joined-up system; the response clearly describes what children will experience in practice; support is tailored to individual needs, including complex and escalating situations; provision supports placement stability and consistent relationships; the approach will reduce escalation in risk behaviours, restrictive interventions and placement disruption; evidence of a strong and integrated role for education; a clear and credible approach to improving access and addressing gaps in provision; a practical approach to monitoring impact and adapting support over time; co-design is used to refine delivery, not replace core expectations	15
Cost breakdown	Robustness and realism of the proposed cost breakdown	Clearly presented budget; alignment between costs and delivery model; realistic assumptions; appropriate phasing of spend across financial years	10
Value for money	Strength of the value for money case	Efficient use of resources; reduction of duplication; contribution to system-wide efficiency; targeting investment to need; plans to monitor value over time	7
Project management and planning	Readiness and credibility of delivery planning	Clear implementation plan; sequencing of set-up and delivery; alignment to April 2027 operational start; milestones and dependencies; risks and mitigations; realistic delivery timelines (stronger responses demonstrate earlier readiness and/or full coverage)	15

Table 5: Scoring descriptions

Score	Descriptor	Criteria
4	Excellent – very high confidence	The response: • Is of an excellent quality and of a level of detail and fully meets the minimum requirements. • Provides demonstratable added value of going over and above the minimum requirements • Provides compelling, detailed, and directly relevant evidence supporting deliverability and addressing key risks No weaknesses or gaps; demonstrates very high confidence in delivery.
3	Good – high confidence	The response: • Fully meets the minimum requirements • Provides good and relevant credible evidence supporting deliverability and addressing key risks No gaps or reservations and provides high confidence in delivery.
2	Satisfactory – reasonable confidence	The response: • Meets the minimum requirements with minor reservations • Provides a satisfactory level of supporting evidence and covers some key risks Demonstrates some gaps in the information but reasonable confidence in deliverability of the minimum requirements.
1	Poor – not confident	The response: • Does not fully meet one or more minimum requirements • Evidence is insufficient, unclear, or missing with omission of key risks Concerns and low confidence in deliverability or an understanding of requirements.
0	Unacceptable	Barely addresses the requirement; significant gaps; weak or no evidence; high risk of non-delivery.

Any application that receives a final moderated score of 2 or less, on one or more of the questions, will be rejected and their application will not be considered any further in the process.

Step 3: Applying weightings

Each scored section has a weighting, shown in table 4. This reflects how important that section is to the success of Home Again. Scores are adjusted using the weighting so that more important sections contribute more to the final score.

For each scored section, the score is converted into a weighted score using the following formula: $(\text{Score} \div 4) \times \text{Weight}$.

Step 4: Total score and percentage

All weighted scores are added together to give a total score. The total score is out of 100. This means the final score is also the application's percentage score. For example, a total weighted score of 72 represents a final score of 72%.

Step 5: Comparing applications

Final percentage scores allow applications to be easily compared. Higher scores reflect stronger alignment with the aims and requirements of Home Again. Where scores are close, moderation will be used to ensure consistency and fairness.

Moderation

In order to make a final selection for successful applications, a moderation meeting(s) will be carried out. The individual scores will be reviewed, and a consensus score will be agreed by an assessment panel and a moderator. Following the moderation meeting(s), final scores will be agreed and the five highest scoring applications will be deemed successful and proceed to grant funding subject to budget availability and the quality of applications received.

In the event that two or more applications achieve the same final weighted score following moderation, the Department will apply a set of objective tie-break rules to determine which application should be ranked more highly. This approach ensures fairness, transparency, and consistency across all assessments and aligns with recognised good practice in competitive grant-making.

Tie-break rules are designed to prioritise factors that are most critical to the successful delivery of Home Again. For this reason, the Department will first consider the sections of the application that directly reflect the core aims of the programme and its ability to achieve improved outcomes for children and young people at risk or being deprived of liberty.

Accordingly, if applications remain tied after scoring and moderation, the Department will apply the following tie-break sequence:

- Highest score in the Home Again Service section
- Highest score in the joint working and governance section
- Highest score in the value for money section

Application submission

RCCs and partners that wish to submit an application to DfE should send their completed application to: Home.Again@education.gov.uk by 23:59 on 19 August 2026.

No extension to the application deadline will be given.

Once you have submitted an application to DfE you will receive confirmation of this within 1 working day. If you do not receive this then please contact DfE at Home.Again@education.gov.uk to confirm this has been received successfully.

Any queries or questions regarding the application process should be sent by email to Home.Again@education.gov.uk. The deadline for questions to be submitted is 23:59 on 5 August 2026. Queries and responses will be shared with all potential applicants where applicable unless deemed commercially sensitive (the sender's identity and any other identifying data will be anonymised).



Department
for Education

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