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Planning

Fostering Recruitment Digital Solutions Preliminary Market Engagement Notice

Department for Education

UK2: Preliminary market engagement notice - Procurement Act 2023 - [view information about notice types](#)

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Scope

Description

As announced in Renewing Fostering: homes for 10,000 more children, the Department for Education (DfE) is exploring how digital solutions can support the successful onboarding of more prospective foster carers. This could include providing a simple and easy journey through the application process, minimising drop-off points caused by delays in communication about progress and outcomes, and enabling richer data on fostering recruitment through to approvals to support decision-making at a local and national level.

The number of foster carers in England has been steadily decreasing since 2021, which is reducing the number of loving homes available for children and young people who need foster care.

This is a preliminary market engagement notice to share DfE's interest in engaging with the market to help inform the design and potential delivery approach of digital solutions for fostering recruitment. We also want to understand market interest, capability and capacity for delivery and understand new or innovative ideas for supporting fostering recruitment with digital solutions that improve the end-to-end applicant journey, thereby reducing dropout at critical points of the recruitment process.

To deliver on the ambitious plan, we are seeking a digital solution that can:

- allow prospective foster carers to make an application and manage it throughout the fostering application process, from initial enquiry to approval (this may include making contact with their fostering service, booking appointments and monitoring the progress of their application online)
- help fostering hubs and local authorities to manage prospective foster carers through the application process through real-time insights and by engaging relevant agencies to support the onboarding process
- providing appropriate and timely information to enable applicants, hubs and local authorities to make informed decisions
- provide a simple customer journey that is interoperable with other key national and local fostering guidance, including potential new elements such as a national front door
- enabling the gathering of rich and consistent data on the hub fostering recruitment process and pipeline, supporting effective data sharing between DfE, hubs, local authorities and other relevant agencies, and helping to better target interventions and efforts where they are most needed.
- a scalable and secure solution that is interoperable with existing platforms and infrastructure, enabling improved data sharing and portability of applications across fostering services, while also strengthening the overall digital and data capability across the system
- align with government data, digital and technology standards to provide a seamless digital customer experience to the applicant (including the Government Digital Service (GDS) Standards and The Technology Code of Practice), legal compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 and The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018)

We are seeking to understand market capacity to deliver a private beta in late 2026 that will test and inform the potential for national scaling. Specifically, we are interested in hearing from suppliers with experience of:

- providing digital solutions to support better children's social care practice (may include fostering)
- designing accessible, inclusive and user-focused digital solutions that meet government standards
- delivering solutions using a test-and-learn approach with a limited number of users and

organisations to prepare for, and enable, a national rollout

- working with local government and interoperability of complex digital systems
- developing WCAG 2.2AA accessibility compliant digital solutions

Feedback from the market will help shape the department's proposed scope to ensure any offer meets sector needs.

This notice is not being used as a call for competition. All information in this notice will be subject to further agreement and internal approval, including the estimated funding amount. DfE reserves the right not to progress to a formal procurement process. .

Relevant Links:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69826905015e2ba11991bbef/Renewing_Fostering_-_homes_for_10_000_more_children_-_February_2026_accessible.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/service-standard>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-technology-code-of-practice>

<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/>

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/952/contents>

Contract dates (estimated)

- 1 July 2026 to 31 March 2028
- 1 year, 9 months

Main procurement category

Services

CPV classifications

- 72000000 - IT services: consulting, software development, Internet and support
- 85311300 - Welfare services for children and young people

Engagement

Engagement deadline

13 March 2026

Engagement process description

The purpose of this preliminary market engagement notice is to inform the market that DfE is considering procuring a digital solution that supports fostering recruitment and to consult on current thinking to help inform our approach. It is not being used as a call for competition.

The preliminary market engagement is intended to:

- help DfE gauge the market's interest, capability and capacity for delivering a digital solution that supports recruitment of more foster carers by enabling a simpler and supportive journey
- share further information about DfE's ambition and invite the market to share early thoughts to inform the shaping of our requirements, timelines, commercial approach and any other aspects relating to this opportunity

Market engagement will consist of a virtual event via MS Teams. This session will give an opportunity to discuss, clarify and highlight what aspects of the competition may be most attractive as well as anything that might be a barrier to bidding.

The virtual MS Teams event will be held on 24 February at 13:00 – 14:00pm. We will outline key questions and areas of interest during the session, and interested suppliers will be invited to complete a survey and schedule a 1:1 meeting to discuss their thoughts and the suitability of existing platforms in further detail.

To arrange an invite to the team session, please contact fostering.PROGRAMME@education.gov.uk. Details about how to sign-up for a 1:1 session will be shared during the event on 24th February.

Participation

Particular suitability

- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)
- Voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSE)

Contracting authority

Department for Education

- Public Procurement Organisation Number: PDZG-3487-DPVD

Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street

London

SW1P3BT

United Kingdom

Email: fostering.programme@education.gov.uk

Region: UKI32 - Westminster

Organisation type: Public authority - central government