

Children's  
Services

# Fostering Service

January 2024  
Sarah Smith

# Agenda

This presentation will cover the below areas;

- About the service
- Foster carer Retention and utilisation
- Standard Operating procedures
- Regional Recruitment hubs

# Introduction to the Service

Hampshire Fostering Service is a county service led by the Fostering Service Manager. The service will work with all in house foster carers, including our connected carers who may live across the UK.

There are five teams in Hampshire's fostering service;

Fostering Recruitment, Fostering Assessment, Fostering Support East, Fostering Support West and Hampshire Hives.

**Fostering Recruitment** – The Team consists of a Team Manager, Assistant Team Manager, 3 x Recruitment Officers, 2.5 Social Workers and 2 x Trainers.

This teamwork with marketing colleagues to produce targeted fostering recruitment campaigns to attract potential foster carers. The team are also responsible for engaging with the public at events and information sessions and responding to all enquiries from potential applicants. The team will complete an initial visit and start the applicants' standard checks and deliver preapproval training.

# Introduction to the Service

**Fostering Assessment** - The Team consists of a Team Manager, Assistant Team Manager and 5.5 Social Workers.

Once past the initial stages with the recruitment team, applicants will be allocated a worker from the assessment team who will take them through the rest of the very thorough assessment process right through to presentation at fostering panel.

**East and West Fostering Teams (2 Teams)** – Each Team consists of a Team Manager, 2 x Assistant Team Managers, 13.7 Social Workers and 2 Fostering Support Workers.

Once a foster carer is approved, they will allocate a worker from the East or West fostering team. The teams deliver support and supervision to foster carers and annually review their approval against the National Minimum Standards.

In addition, the East and West teams support placement stability through 1:1 support or training.

# Introduction to the Service

**Hampshire Hives** - The Hampshire Hives consist of a Team Manager, 2 Assistant Team Managers and 23 Hive Carer Support Workers.

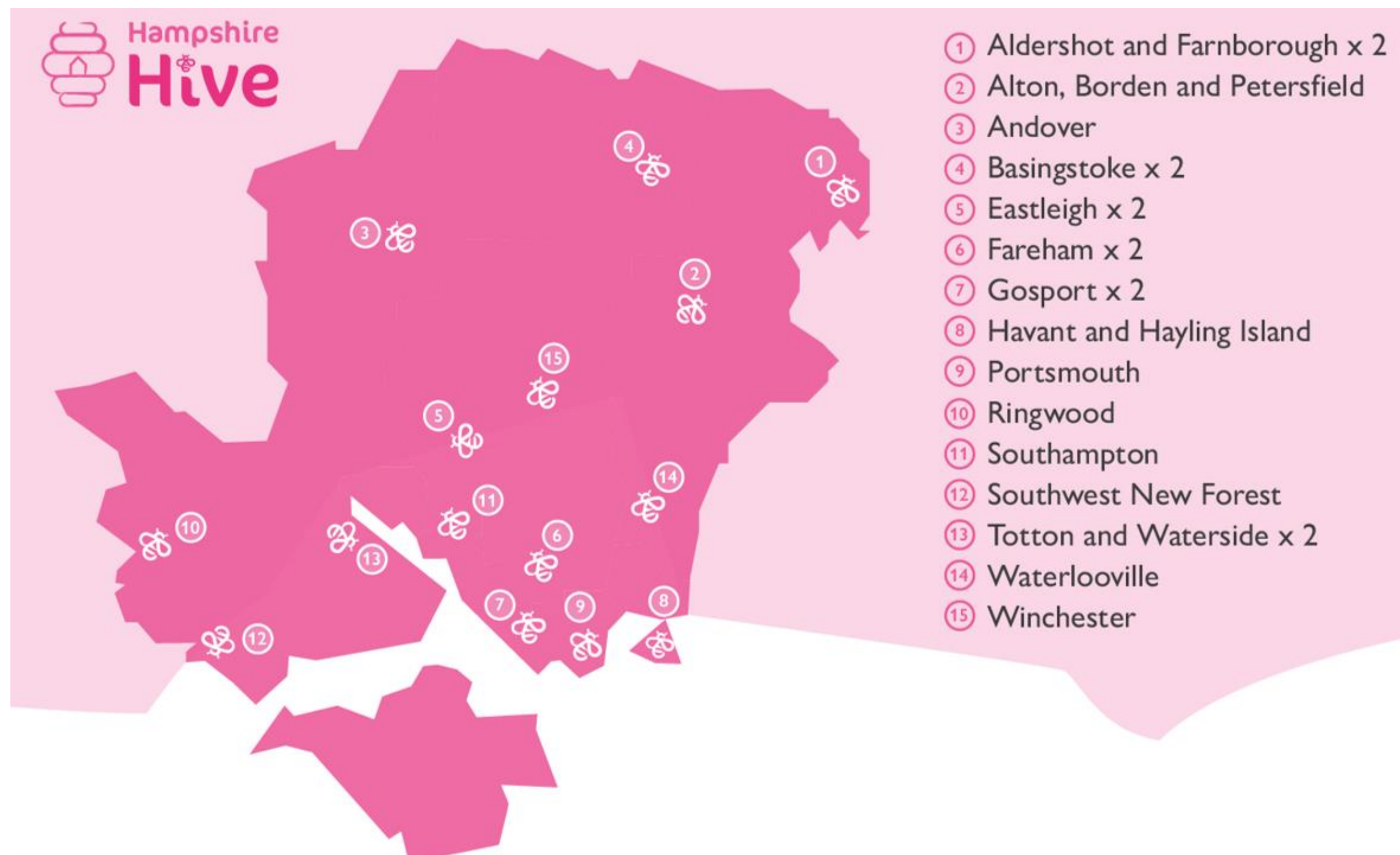
There are now **23** Hives across Hampshire

Each Hive has a Hive Carer Support Worker (HCSW) who is an experienced foster carer employed by Hampshire. This gives them a unique insight in supporting fostering families.

Each Hive links up to 20 fostering families together

HCSWs facilitate the development of relationships between the families in their Hive to create a support network like that of an extended family and encourage mutual support between Hive families

The Hampshire Hives facilitate an extend family model of support to foster carers.



# Foster carer support – Hampshire Hives

The support foster carers receive has a direct impact on the care children receive. Foster carers that are well supported are more likely to provide care to children that are demonstrating challenging behaviour and to maintain this care through difficult times.

We are now coming up to three years of Hampshire Hives and all foster carers in Hampshire are able to join a Hive if they wish to. Over two thirds of our foster carers have chosen to be in a Hive and are benefitting from the support they receive. They are many examples of Hive support resulting in a positive outcome for children.

## **Just one recent example:**

Hive carer support worker (HCSW) supported a bridging placement for 2 young children knowing there was a good match with a family in the Hive who couldn't take straight away due to prior commitments. Whilst with the HCSW the children attended a social event in the Hive and were able to meet the carer they would be going to live with and the other child already in placement. The children felt relaxed about the move and were excited to go and meet the carers cats that they had heard about.












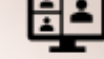
# Foster carer support

As well as Hive support, foster carers have at least six weekly supervision with their supervising social worker, an annual review of their circumstances and an annual unannounced visit as well as ad hoc support when needed.

Foster carers are expected to complete training provided by the fostering service and encouraged to access a variety of learning and development opportunities. There is a pathway for pre-approval training from years 1-3 with additional training and refresher training from year 4. This is an example of the year 1 essential training.

The fostering service also facilitate further support groups for foster carers both geographically based (NE, NW, SE, SW) and theme based for example there is a specific support group for those caring for refugee children.

## Year 1 Essential Development

3 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_EDCC_00002VLS   	5 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_SFG_00024ELG   
<b>Education: How You Make a Difference</b>	<b>E-Safety</b>
2 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_FSCR_00015VLS   	2 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_SWCS_12060DOC   
<b>Introduction to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</b>	<b>Introduction to Child Development</b>
1 hr   HCC_CS_CSWFD_PRSK_00006ELG   	2 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_SFG_00047ELG   
<b>Introduction to the Hampshire Approach</b>	<b>Attachment Theory</b>
4 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_FSCR_00009VLS   	2 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_SFG_00005ELG   
<b>Strength Based Conversations</b>	<b>Child Sexual Exploitation</b>
2 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_FSCR_08334VLS   	8 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_SFG_00002ELG   
<b>Moving On &amp; Letting Go</b>	<b>Safeguarding Children: Level 1</b>
3 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWFD_HLSF_0001ELG   	2 hrs   HCC_CS_CSWF_SCCF_00005VLS   
<b>Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene for Catering</b>	<b>Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Looked After Children</b>

# Hampshire Fostering data

In 2022 Fostering Hampshire Children launched a public recruitment campaign with an aim of recruiting 150 foster carers by December 2023.

This target was set with consideration of both previous approval levels and our service need.

In very challenging times for foster carer recruitment nationally we achieved **72** approved in this time frame.

Recruitment challenges are national and not Hampshire specific. Research has shown that financial challenges have impacted foster carer recruitment and retention which reports that over half (54%) of foster carers are considering resigning because of the cost-of-living crisis. [Half of foster carers considering quitting due to cost of living crisis, finds survey - Community Care](#)



# Hampshire and the National Picture

The [Fostering in England dataset](#) was released in November 2023 (for financial year 22/23), the dataset gives us the opportunity to compare some key fostering metrics with other local authorities.

## Headlines

### Top 10 growth in Foster Carers

There are 155 local authorities in the dataset, out of those 20 (12%) had an overall gain in foster carers, we were the second highest with a gain of 15.

Southampton (10) and Oxfordshire (5) were the only other LAs in the South East to see growth.

Local Authority	22/23	21/22	Difference
Lambeth	110	85	+25
Hampshire	365	350	+15
Northumberland	145	130	+15
Southampton	155	145	+10
Gateshead	150	140	+10
Hartlepool	105	95	+10
Greenwich	100	90	+10
Tower Hamlets	95	85	+10
Havering	80	70	+10
Redbridge	65	55	+10

### Total Approved Foster Carer Households

In the top 10 LAs for total approved households, we were the only one to grow our numbers (Kent, Essex, Hertfordshire and Lancashire have similar populations to Hampshire)

Local Authority	22/23	21/22	Difference
Kent	610	625	-15
Leeds	505	525	-20
Essex	415	435	-20
Birmingham [Note 5]	370	375	-5
Hampshire	365	350	+15
Hertfordshire	365	420	-55
Lancashire	350	350	0
Devon	300	310	-10
Suffolk	295	295	0
Bristol	265	290	-25

# Foster carer retention and utilisation

There is a national foster carer recruitment challenge and to help us ensure we can meet the needs of looked after children we have increased retention activity for Hampshire foster carers.

## Retention activity

- We have held Fostering Family days which have been very popular. In 2023 we held a summer event at Fairthorne Manor and an Autumn event at Winchester Science centre. Both events received positive feedback.
- We continue to send 'surprise and delight' thank you gifts to carers. These are token thank you gifts sent to 4 fostering households per month
- We have increased our communication with foster carers sending a fortnightly newsletter and engaging in a private Facebook group.
- We have held ad hoc workshops and presentations with foster carers throughout the year to engage foster carers in shaping service improvement and to provide topic-based information when needed.

In 2022/2023 this increased activity resulted in fewer foster carers deregistering than the previous year **34**, compared to 39 in 2021/2022.

# Standard Operating Procedures

- As part of the Modernising Placement Programme work, it was identified that there was an **absence of standard ways of working across the service**
- **In collaboration with the fostering service**, a new set of Standard Operating Procedures for a **selection of key activities** were designed and created.
- These were launched with the teams **w/c 8 January 2024**.
- To track the impact of these new Standard Operating Procedures, several **qualitative and quantitative measures and reporting mechanisms** have been set up to track the team's performance and gather feedback to **support the embedding process**.

Whilst all the areas covered in the standard operating procedures had localised ways of working there wasn't a consistent approach across the county.

# Standard Operating Procedures

The areas worked through are;

**Foster carers 'on hold'** – ensuring this is the shortest possible whilst providing the right support to foster carers

**Carers with no child in placement** – Supporting matching and working with the foster carer to expand their approval range

**Respite only foster carers** – Ensuring we are making the best use of carers that have more limited approval.

**Handover between the assessment team and the support teams** – ensuring we work with carer to taking their first child

**Solo placements** – ensuring that where a child needs to be placed without other children, this is reviewed regularly, and this decision changed when appropriate

**Practical arrangements for placement ending** – planned and unplanned – ensuring that belongings are picked up as soon as possible and that carers are supported to get the room ready for the next child

**Transition between foster carers** – ensuring information sharing between carers is supported to benefit the child settling in to their new home

**Data Protection** – ensuring all information shared between the service and foster carers is encrypted to comply with data protection

# SE Regional Recruitment Hub

The DfE awarded £4.4 million to the SE area to recruit and retain more foster carers. Bracknell Forest Council is hosting the SE Fostering Recruitment Hub on behalf of the region. The SE is the biggest cluster in the country, with 20 local authorities. Because of the size of our region, we are developing our approach through four sub-clusters which will be coordinated centrally

## Regional vision:

Ensure we can support more children to be fostered in the SE by:

- increasing the conversion rate from initial enquiry to approval (we know that nationally there were 138,000 enquiries last year, but this only resulted in 4,000 approvals)
- reducing our reliance on Independent Fostering Agency placements
- sharing and building on best practice
- being the place a nationally funded marketing campaign could direct potential foster carers to
- enabling harmonisation and join up where it makes sense to do so by using sub-clusters to work together

- further build the sense of a shared fostering community in the SE, both at regional and sub-regional levels (i.e. Thames Valley)
- improve our search engine optimisation

## Key features of the SE fostering recruitment hub:

- a single front door: shared website and phone number, with automated triage to local authorities where prospective foster carers know the local authority they want to foster with
- four sub-clusters, based around existing relationships, who will work closely together to support foster carers at the start of their journey
- a service lead for the

recruitment support hub who will oversee timelines and delivery across the region

- standardisation of peer support from experienced foster carers throughout the recruitment process
- dedicated recruitment staff to respond to enquiries from prospective foster carers as part of the virtual hub
- dedicated data analysis resource to monitor performance, build insight and share this across the region
- regional communications and marketing targeted campaigns and support for new and transferring foster carers



# SE Regional Recruitment Hub

## FAQ's

**How much funding has been given and for how long?** £2.4m has been awarded for the 18-month recruitment hub programme.

**Will there be a restructure? Is my job at risk?**

No. There is an opportunity for an operational service lead secondment role to lead the hub for 18 months. Some colleagues who work in fostering recruitment may be involved in the hub but you will remain employed by your existing LA.

**Will people working for the hub be based in Bracknell Forest?** No, this will be a virtual hub arrangement. The sub-clusters will have flexible boundaries and focus on recruiting carers within a 20 mile radius, given our belief that wherever possible (when it is in the child's best interests) we will seek to place a child within 20 miles.

**How will the triage work?** The virtual hub will be hosted in Bracknell Forest. Following basic triage and screening, the initial contact will be paired with a peer support experienced foster carer and passed onto the relevant LA lead working as part of the hub to take them through the next steps. For those enquirers who do not know which LA they want to foster for, they will be passed to the sub-cluster recruitment team who will build a relationship with the prospective carer until they are able to decide. Each LA will have dedicated recruitment officer capacity that will act as part of the regional team and foster carers which can be paired with prospective carers and will be paid for this peer buddy role.

**When will the hub be up and running?**

April/May 2024

**Will you be involving approved foster carers?**

Yes. We have already involved foster carers in helping to generate the insight which has informed this approach. There will be a foster carer reference group which will help design and test the new hub, and foster carers will be recruited to a pool to be buddies to new carers.

**Why is being part of this programme important?**

**98,000**

Children currently in care in the UK and three quarters live with foster families. The number of children in care has risen by 7% over the past five years.



**70,000**

Children live with almost 55,000 foster families across the UK each day. This is nearly three-quarters of the over 98,000 children in care away from home on any one day in the UK.



**Over 1/3**

Of foster care placements will be outside of a child's local authority boundary in England and Wales. Every year thousands of new foster families are needed in England.



# SE Regional Recruitment Hub

Hampshire is in a sub cluster with Portsmouth, Southampton and the IOW. The subcluster is meeting each fortnight in this planning stage. Hampshire have taken the lead for the subcluster and attend regional operational meetings fortnightly sharing information between the sub cluster and the regional group.

As we understand currently, the regional marketing campaign will sit as a layer above individual authority marketing campaigns and will focus on raising awareness of fostering and encouraging people to consider fostering with their local authority.

There will be a regional website and phone number to pick up enquiries from the regional campaign.

Whilst the specifics are not entirely clear at present, we understand that we will be able to continue directing people from our campaigns through to our website without having to go through the hub. Although those making telephone enquiries will go through the central phone number. There will be recruitment officers taking the central phone calls and supporting prospective foster carers to make decisions on who they wish to foster with. Very few people make enquiries by phone and therefore we do not envisage this element of the process being a significant impact for Hampshire.

A lead for the SE Regional Recruitment Hub has now been appointed.

(Just for information – the North East were the first region to launch their regional fostering recruitment hub in September 2023. [Foster with North East - Foster with North East](#))

**Thank you**

**Questions?**