

Eastern Region: Practice Principles and Relational Commissioning

Status:	Regional partnership principles developed with Local Authorities and providers
Regional coordination:	Commission East
Programme Lead:	Commission East Programme Manager
Audience:	Directors of Children's Services, Assistant Directors, Commissioning Leads, Provider representatives, ICB/ICS partners and Youth Justice partners
Review cycle:	12 months from approval, then annually thereafter, unless an earlier review is required due to significant policy, market, procurement or regional governance changes
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1. Introduction

These Eastern Region Partnership and Practice Principles have been developed by Local Authorities and providers to support a more consistent, transparent and relational way of working across the region.

They set out shared expectations for how Local Authorities and providers will work together to deliver high-quality, stable and child-centred care for children and young people. The Principles are grounded in relational commissioning: building trusted, transparent and collaborative partnerships, developing solutions together and working from a shared understanding of need, risk and outcomes.

They recognise the diversity of the Eastern Region, including different local contexts, market conditions, resource pressures and existing sufficiency strategies. The Principles are intended to support regional collaboration where it adds value, while recognising that some activity is best led locally.

Together, they provide a shared reference point for strengthening relationships, improving consistency and supporting better outcomes across the region.

2. Our Shared Purpose

Our vision is to ensure that all looked-after children grow up in a nurturing, safe and stable environment where their needs are met, their voices are heard and their potential is realised. We are committed to providing high-quality care and support that promotes their emotional, physical and social wellbeing, enabling them to thrive and succeed in all aspects of their lives.

We have a shared purpose in ensuring that children and young people experience:

- Safe, stable, and nurturing homes
- Meaningful relationships with trusted adults
- Support that builds independence and positive life outcomes
- Services that listen to children and young people's voices and lived experience

We believe the best outcomes are achieved when:

- Local Authorities and providers work in partnership
- Communication is open, timely, and honest
- Local Authorities and providers take shared responsibility for planning and problem-solving.

To help guide our approach and challenge conventional thinking, we have developed our core values. These underpin every decision we make and every action we take and help hold us to account as we develop our shared approach.

- **Purpose:** We recognise that care matters and are proud to make a difference for the children, families and communities we serve.
- **Ambitious:** We strive for the best possible outcomes and are deeply committed to making a positive difference in the lives of children and young people.
- **Innovative:** We are open, share learning and challenge traditional approaches by pursuing ideas to improve the services we deliver.
- **Together:** We listen, contribute and collaborate to achieve our common purpose.

3. Partnership and Practice Principles

The Practice Principles provide a broad, flexible framework for strengthening partnership working across varied local commissioning contexts. They are not fixed procedures; instead, they act as a shared language and compass for Local Authorities and providers, supporting regional collaboration where there is clear value while recognising that some activity is best led locally.

The Principles are intended to complement, not duplicate, the extensive commissioning activity already underway across the region. They have been developed in collaboration with providers and are designed to remain relevant as policy, practice and market conditions evolve.

Insights gathered during development highlighted diverse local contexts, system pressures, resource constraints and differing priorities across partner agencies. The Principles offer practical starting points, encouraging a “start small, start somewhere” mindset, while also supporting reflection, continuous improvement and shared learning across the Eastern Region.

The seven Practice Principles below set out the shared behaviours and commitments expected across regional partnership working.

1. Keep the child at the centre

- We will place children and young people’s outcomes, wellbeing and lived experience at the centre of decision-making, ensuring decisions are evidenced, recorded and shared where appropriate.
- We will actively involve children and young people in planning and review, ensuring arrangements remain effective, responsive and centred on their needs.
- We will promote consistent, relationship-based practice that helps children feel safe, known and supported.

2. Shared responsibility for stability

- We will take a joint approach to stability, risk and planned change, working collaboratively to address challenges at the earliest opportunity.
- Through open dialogue and joint problem-solving, we will seek to reduce avoidable unplanned endings.
- Where changes are required, we will co-develop transition plans that support children’s needs and use risks, system impacts and learning to inform future planning.

3. Relational and respectful working

- We will build trust through respectful, collaborative relationships, regular dialogue and shared understanding, resolving issues constructively where views or pressures differ.
- We will recognise and value the professional judgement, expertise and accountability of both Local Authorities and providers.
- We will approach difficult conversations with openness, curiosity and a focus on shared solutions.

4. Clear, timely and honest communication

- We will communicate early, clearly and transparently, sharing timely information about needs, plans, risks, constraints and decisions so issues can be addressed before they escalate.
- We will share accurate, strengths-based and contextual information to support safe matching, planning and decision-making.
- We will provide timely, informed responses and maintain clear points of contact, agreed processes and escalation routes.

5. Act with consistency and fairness

- We will apply shared standards, timescales, terms, notice periods, fee discussions and escalation routes fairly and transparently, recognising local context, statutory responsibilities, provider sustainability and Local Authority affordability.
- We will use shared language and agreed pathways to support consistent practice across the region.
- We will be open about constraints, pressures and risks, and seek to resolve issues constructively.

6. Continuous improvement

- We will learn, test and improve together, developing new ideas and models where they can strengthen outcomes, sufficiency or commissioning practice.
- We will create opportunities for joint learning, training and reflective practice, sharing themes and examples of effective practice across the region.
- We will use co-produced outcome measures, shared quality assurance, regular reviews and agreed evidence to understand progress and drive improvement.

7. Plan together for sufficiency and sustainability

- We will plan transparently together to shape sustainable provision that meets need and remains affordable, working regionally where collaboration adds value and locally where this is more effective.
- We will use local and regional sufficiency intelligence to understand need, capacity and gaps, and to inform commissioning priorities.
- We will engage transparently with providers and the wider market to shape provision, explore commissioning models, and balance provider sustainability with Local Authority affordability.

4. What this means in practice

In practice, the Principles are intended to support clearer expectations and more consistent working across the region.

For providers, this means clearer expectations, more consistent documentation and more transparent working relationships with Local Authorities across the Eastern Region.

For Local Authorities, this means using the Practice Principles consistently to support commissioning decisions, placement planning, communication, escalation and market engagement.

Together, partners will use the Principles as a shared reference point when planning services, resolving issues, reviewing practice and strengthening sufficiency across the region.

The Principles are intended to guide practical behaviours and decisions, not to replace local processes, statutory responsibilities or existing contractual requirements.

5. Monitoring and evaluating the Practice Principles

Monitoring should test whether the seven Practice Principles are visible in day-to-day commissioning, placement planning, provider engagement and contract management, rather than treating them as general statements of intent.

Local Authorities remain responsible for applying and reviewing the Principles within their own commissioning and contract management arrangements, with Commission East coordinating regional learning, shared themes and escalation through the agreed regional governance route.

Commissioners and providers should review progress through existing governance, quality assurance and provider engagement routes, using evidence linked to each principle to identify what is working well, where practice is inconsistent and where further action is needed.

The evidence examples below are indicative and should be adapted locally to reflect existing governance, data availability and agreed reporting arrangements.

Table 1 – Monitoring the Practice Principles

Practice Principle	What success should look like	Example evidence to review
1. Keep the child at the centre	Decisions are clearly linked to children's outcomes, lived experience and wellbeing.	Placement plans, review records, child voice evidence and decision rationales.
2. Shared responsibility for stability	Partners take a joint approach to stability, risk and planned change, addressing challenges early and reducing avoidable disruption.	Stability data, disruption themes, escalation records and transition plans.
3. Relational and respectful working	Local Authorities and providers describe relationships as constructive, respectful and solution focused.	Provider feedback, commissioner feedback, engagement attendance and issue resolution themes.
4. Clear, timely and honest communication	Information is shared promptly and accurately so that decisions are made safely and without avoidable delay.	Referral quality, response times, escalation logs and communication feedback.
5. Act with consistency and fairness	Shared standards, timescales, terms, notice periods and fee discussions are applied fairly and transparently, recognising provider sustainability and Local Authority affordability.	Contract management records, dispute themes, payment issues and use of agreed pathways.
6. Continuous improvement	Partners use shared learning, reflective practice, outcome measures and quality assurance to test new approaches and drive improvement.	Joint learning activity, shared KPIs, quality assurance findings and improvement actions.
7. Plan together for sufficiency and sustainability	Local and regional sufficiency planning is informed by shared intelligence about need, capacity, affordability and provider sustainability, with regional collaboration used where it adds value.	Sufficiency data, market engagement feedback, capacity intelligence and commissioning plans.

This evidence should be reviewed collectively to support regional learning, increase transparency, strengthen sufficiency planning and agree targeted improvement actions where the Principles are not yet being consistently demonstrated.