



Shared Lives growth and development: Best practice



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Introduction

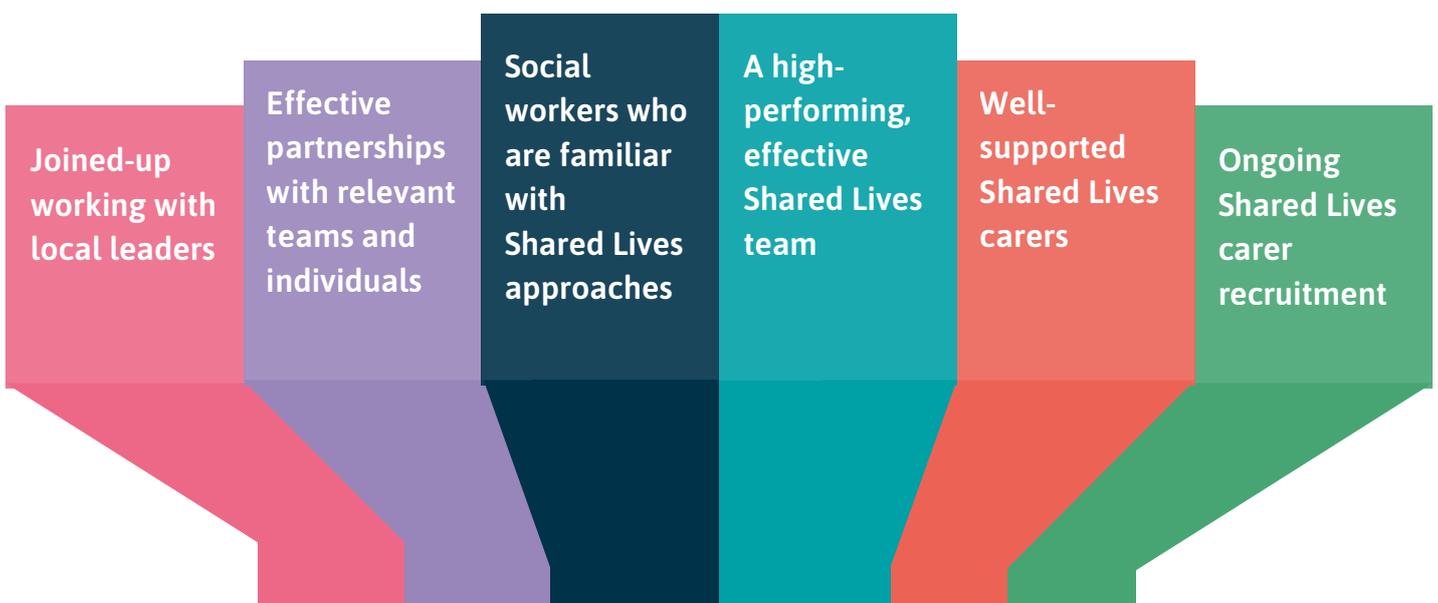
Over the past two years, Shared Lives Plus has been carrying out research to collect best practice insights from local Shared Lives schemes across the UK.

We identified the **Top ten scheme areas that reported significant growth in the number of people supported in Shared Lives**. Our research sought to extract the key drivers of successful Shared Lives growth and development, by identifying what works on the ground in local areas across the UK. We spoke to a variety of schemes, in terms of commissioning arrangements, scheme size, and composition of arrangements, to ensure our findings were relevant to scheme's experiences across the sector.

Through surveys and deep-dive interviews, we explored with schemes and their affiliated councils about the key drivers for them in establishing, growing and diversifying Shared Lives in relation to our six best practice building block areas:

1. **Joined up working with local leaders**
2. **Effective partnerships with relevant teams and individuals**
3. **Social workers who are familiar with Shared Lives approaches**
4. **A high performing Shared Lives team**
5. **Well supported and connected Shared Lives carers**
6. **Well resourced ongoing Shared Lives carer recruitment**

Throughout 2026, Shared Lives Plus will release briefings focused on each building block area, to give a detailed breakdown of best-practices, and how Shared Lives Plus can support the implementation of such practice.



Joined up working with local leaders



Schemes had strong working relationships with local leaders and strategic colleagues. This was founded on a few key areas:

- Leaders who are Shared Lives champions
- Overarching alignment of Shared Lives with fundamental local priorities, such as person centred and cost-effective support
- Alignment of Shared Lives with key local pressures
- Producing a clear and successful business case for increased capacity in scheme – centred on cost savings and realistic targets for growth - leading to investment

Strategic Advice support

Shared Lives Plus can help local areas strengthen strategic engagement and leadership alignment. This involves identifying growth opportunities, shaping compelling business cases, and supporting long-term planning, whether your priority is establishing, growing, or diversifying Shared Lives.

Effective partnerships with relevant teams and individuals

Schemes had strong partnerships with wider teams and individuals. This was centred on:

- Establishing a cross-directorate Shared Lives working group, involving colleagues from housing teams, children's services, fostering, and communications and marketing
- The scheme regularly attending boards, panels and forums to ensure Shared Lives is considered
- Schemes had a particular focus on developing relationships with children's services and transitions teams to support more care leavers



Strategic Advice support

Shared Lives Plus supports areas to build effective cross-directorate partnerships. This consists of developing joint ways of working, strengthening links with key teams, and creating clear processes and pathways that embed Shared Lives across the local system, at any stage of your development journey.

Social workers who are familiar with Shared Lives approaches

Schemes had strong working relationships with social workers, who had a clear understanding of the Shared Lives model and referral processes. This was founded on:

- The use and refinement of a Shared Lives first approach
- Regularly sharing Shared Lives carer vacancies
- Integration of Shared Lives in digital systems
- Clear referral guidelines and flow charts
- A soft referral approach



Strategic Advice support

Shared Lives Plus offer tailored support to increase social worker understanding of Shared Lives and improve referral quality. This includes reviewing and designing referral pathways, delivering tailored social worker training, and embedding Shared Lives in day-to-day practice, whether you're setting up, growing, or diversifying your scheme.

A high-performing effective Shared Lives team

Schemes had a highly competent and effective Shared Lives team, alongside robust and efficient processes. This was founded on:

- Training and development opportunities for staff
- Dedicated capacity, especially for administrative support
- Monitoring and tracking tools to analyse scheme data, including referrals and recruitment, guiding evidence based decision making and planning
- For independent schemes, commissioners had oversight of monitoring and tracking tools



Strategic Advice support

Shared Lives Plus can assist in reviewing operational approaches, identifying development opportunities, and creating practical implementation plans. This support helps schemes strengthen performance, systems and processes, and team capability at whatever stage of development you are in.

Well-supported Shared Lives carers



The schemes we engaged with had a clear and strong support offer for Shared Lives carers. This was centred on:

- A thought-out approach to Shared Lives carer fees, with fees benchmarked against other local authorities and regularly uplifted
- Building regular breaks into support packages
- A range of support options, including peer support and bespoke training when necessary
- Clear support and monitoring processes and systems

Strategic Advice support

Shared Lives Plus work with local areas to enhance their support offer to Shared Lives carers. This includes fee benchmarking, designing support systems, reviewing training, and exploring new ways to ensure carers feel valued and equipped, supporting your aims to establish, grow, or diversify Shared Lives. Our Shared Lives carer training platform also hosts a suite of key learning modules, specifically tailored to the role of Shared Lives carers.

Ongoing Shared Lives carer recruitment



Whilst word of mouth was the most fruitful recruitment avenue, schemes still used a range of techniques and channels for Shared Lives carer recruitment. This was centred on:

- A range of recruitment activities, including community and online engagement, and refer a friend incentives
- Employing various messages to appeal to different audiences
- Outcomes monitoring to track the success of different techniques and messages
- Streamlining recruitment and assessment processes

Strategic Advice support

Shared Lives Plus offers support to refresh and improve recruitment activity. We help you review previous approaches, streamline processes, and develop targeted recruitment strategies and materials, enabling you to build and sustain a strong base of Shared Lives carers at all stages of your scheme's development.

Shared Lives Plus understands the challenges councils, Integrated Care Systems (ICS), Shared Lives schemes, housing partners, the voluntary and community sector, and the NHS face. We have a well-established approach to supporting the development of Shared Lives, which we call Strategic Advice, working collaboratively to build sustainable, joined-up models of support.

Request a copy of our Strategic Advice consultancy brochure.

consultancy@sharedlivesplus.org.uk

Registered Charity Number (England and Wales): 1095562

Registered Charity Number (Scotland): SC042743

Company Number: 4511426

VAT number: 302 6201 63

**Our lives get better
when they're shared**

