

Cumbria Fostering

**Become part
of Cumbria's
biggest
family**

Thinking about

Fostering



Cumbria Fostering Information and Reference Guide

**There can be no greater reward than transforming
a child's life forever and building a happy and
fulfilled family.**

Find out more by visiting
cumbriafostering.org.uk

Speak to our friendly team today!
0300 0190 200



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Working for **Cumberland Council** and
Westmorland & Furness Council

Introducing Ourselves

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Foster Carer for Cumbria Fostering and requesting our Fostering Information and Reference Guide which we hope you will find useful.

We have an urgent need for foster carers and this is the first step to becoming part of Cumbria's Biggest Family!

The information contained within this Guide is intended to provide background information and a starting point for those considering becoming a Foster Carer. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time if you have any queries or just want to speak to someone.

If you require any of the information to be provided in another format then please let us know and we will do our best to meet any individual needs you may have.

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Why Apply to Cumbria Fostering?

We are a fostering agency with extensive experience in approving and supporting foster carers.

Ten reasons to foster with the Local Authority - Cumbria Fostering

1 Help to keep children in Cumbria

We try to keep children close to their friends, family and schools to maintain their familiar links. We strive to keep all Cumbrian children living within Cumbria.

2 Priority placements

You will get first priority for placements of children of all ages (within your approved age range); and if you are a former Independent Agency carer transferring to us, you can be fast tracked through the approval process.

3 Placement choice

We will find the best match for you and your family as we are responsible for all the children in care across Cumbria. Fostering with the Local Authority means that you will not experience long periods of time without a placement, unless you choose to have a break.

4 Cumbria Fostering is a non-profit making organisation

"To be honest, we picked the council because we pay our taxes into the council and want to make sure that they're well spent. Going through an Independent Agency would only mean paying a middle man, and we'd rather every penny got spent on the children" (Kevin, Foster carer for Cumbria)

5 Feel part of a community

Feel part of a wider community with monthly local support groups, foster carer associations run by our foster carers and regular social activities. We hold events throughout the year such as our Long Service Awards, the Children in Care Council Awards and Christmas parties. You can also influence policy development through our steering groups and forums.

6 High level of support available in your local area.

We offer a county wide service with offices based throughout the county: Kendal, Barrow, Carlisle and Workington. You will be allocated a Fostering Social Worker based at one of these offices nearest to you and will benefit from close links with the children's teams as they are based in the same offices as our Fostering Teams. We offer therapeutic support through our Emotional Wellbeing Practitioners who are managed by the Fostering Service. We offer an out of hour's helpline and we have extended outreach teams who can visit out of hours in an emergency. Our experienced foster carers are on hand to offer support through a buddying and Mentoring scheme.

7 We offer excellent, ongoing training

Ongoing training programme and monthly support groups in your local area. These are flexible to fit around your lifestyle, and can be tailored to meet your needs. You can also contribute to and influence the training on offer. We offer specific therapeutic courses such as Therapeutic crisis intervention (TCI). Fostering changes, Non-violent resistance training and Living with an angry child at regular intervals throughout the year. We also have regular professional speakers and trainers, such as Margot Sunderland and Dan Hughes, who are experts in child mental health and attachment.

8 We have lots of different schemes, so you can choose what types of placements will suit your family.

Short Term, Long term / permanence, Approved Support Care (also known as Respite), Short Breaks for children with disabilities (Shared Care), Homestays / Staying put scheme - children don't automatically have to leave you when they turn 18. You can continue to support them through these schemes and we will continue to support you with a dedicated worker of your own. We will advise you on which schemes may be best for you. There is more information about the different schemes later in this pack.

9) You are more likely to be considered for a permanent placement of a Cumbrian child (if you want to) if you are a foster carer with the local authority.

"I first began fostering as a short term carer, looking after primary school age children who'd come from neglected backgrounds. It quickly became evident that the children we were caring for would not be returning to their birth families in the short term and myself and my husband began to care for children longer term."
(Rosemary, Foster carer for Cumbria)

10 Become part of Cumbria's biggest family!

You'll be amazed at just how many Cumbria foster carers live near you. Did you also know that as a Foster carer for Cumbria, your wider family can also help to support you if they want to, so that children do not have to go to strangers if you need to have a break?

Our Commitment to You

If you choose to progress with Cumbria Fostering on your Fostering Journey we ensure you will have:

- A warm welcome.
- A personal, professional service throughout.
- Ongoing support whenever you need or want it.
- We will contact you within two days of you making your initial contact with us.
- We aim to reduce the time it takes to assess a foster carer and the majority of our foster carers will be approved within six months of making an application.



Chris and Heather from Barrow:

"We regularly meet with other foster carers in town for a chat and to share advice, and there are get-togethers for the kids at Christmas and in the summer. You get a lot of support, which is really essential."

What is Fostering?

Fostering is a way of providing a stable family life for children and young people, who are unable to live with their parents at a point in time. This allows children the chance to thrive in a safe, secure, loving and caring home environment with foster carers.

By deciding to become a foster carer you are making a challenging, yet very rewarding decision.

What is the difference between Fostering and Adoption?

The decision to foster or adopt is a life changing one for you and your family.

Fostering is often on a temporary basis, though it can be long-term, with the child remaining the legal responsibility of the Local Authority. Foster carers are regarded as professionals, working with Cumbria Fostering to offer children the best possible care. They are supervised and supported by Cumbria Fostering and are paid a fee for their time and skills.

Adoption is a way of providing a permanent new family for children who cannot be brought up by their own parents. The adopters become the legal parents of the children and have all parental responsibility. If you are looking to make a permanent addition to your family, we would recommend that you explore adoption. To find out more about adoption, please contact us on **03033 331216** or visit **cumbriaadoption.org.uk**

Different types of Fostering

There are a number of different fostering scenarios, reflecting the variety of backgrounds and needs of individual children. Whatever your situation, there will be a scheme to match the type of help you can offer.

Types of foster care include:

Emergency

This is where children or young people need somewhere safe to stay for a few nights until longer term arrangements can be made. In an ideal world, all foster placements would be well planned out in advance. However, in some situations it isn't possible to decide a placement ahead of time. For many reasons, some children come into the foster system on an emergency basis, requiring immediate care. There's no telling when an emergency placement might come up, which means that emergency carers need to be available at night and on weekends, as well as during the day.

Short-Term Fostering

Short term carers look after children for anything from a few days to a couple of years. During this time we work with children and their families to secure their future, hopefully by enabling them to return home or, if this isn't possible, via some other permanent means (for example, living with a relative, adoption, residence order or special guardianship).

Mother and Baby Placements

You may be interested in supporting a young or inexperienced mother to care for her child. Some mothers have very limited support or no positive role models who could guide and support them through the difficulties of parenting a new baby. You will need to work closely with the child's social worker and play an active role in mentoring and teaching the mother positive parenting skills, without taking over their responsibilities as mothers.

You will offer them a safe and secure environment where they can learn to parent their child in a positive and nurturing manner.

Long Term Fostering

If a child or young person is unable to return home to live they may need a substitute permanent family for the rest of their childhood to independence. For some children, adoption is not right for them as they still need to maintain a link with their birth families so permanence in foster care is better for them.

This usually involves children aged eight and upwards. Sometimes placements that are made on a short term basis can be changed to permanent placements if it is a good match for the child and for your family.

Approved Support Care (also known as Respite Care)

Approved Support carers provide temporary breaks to existing carers and families in the community at weekends and during holidays. People who work full time often find this type of fostering suits their lifestyle as it is very flexible and children can be placed at times that are convenient for you by prior arrangement.

Shared Care (Short breaks for children with disabilities)

The Cumbria Shared Care Scheme links carers with a family who have a child or children with disabilities. We aim to match you with a child who you can care for on a regular basis for a weekend, a holiday or occasional overnight stays, building up the child's trust and confidence.

The child benefits from making new friends and having different experiences. You and your family can have your life enriched by the experience of establishing a positive relationship with a disabled child, and gain confidence with disability and disability issues. Whilst you are caring for the child, the parents can have a break, perhaps spend time with their other children or simply re-charge their batteries.

We do not expect you to have expertise or experience with disability. Training, supervision, support and encouragement will be provided by our fostering support & supervision team and by the parents. Parents were not experts when their child was born with a disability. They have learned new skills. You can too.

Homestays (Supported Lodgings Scheme)

This is not strictly speaking a fostering scheme, but may be an attractive alternative for some people. The scheme provides supported accommodation, based within the community, for young people leaving the care system or vulnerable young people aged 16 to 18+ who are at risk of becoming homeless, and is a way of allowing young people to learn how to live independently. It attracts a wide range of providers, including families, couples and single people from differing backgrounds who feel they are able to offer a room in their homes along with some level of practical and emotional support. Homestays can be less intensive than fostering and usually involves offering support for 8-10 hours per week whilst the young person lives with you.

Private fostering

This is where the parents make an arrangement for the child to stay with someone else who is not a close relative and has no parental responsibilities, and the child stays with that person (the private foster carer) for more than 27 days.

Although this is a private arrangement there are special rules about how the child is looked after. The Local Authority must be told about the arrangements and visit to check on the child's welfare.

Who are the Children?

Cumbria Fostering has a recruitment strategy which identifies the current priorities in relation to the range of children who need foster placements now and the predicted future need. Our website reflects these priorities.

Basically, we care for children of all ages - from birth up to 18 years old and from all ethnic and family backgrounds. Some children have physical or learning disabilities; some need to stay together with brothers and sisters; sometimes we need foster carers for teenage mothers with their babies. Whatever the reason a child or young person needs to be placed with foster carers, it will be traumatic experience for them to leave their own family and move to live with someone they do not know.

All children will respond in different ways to this traumatic event and may display a range of behaviours and emotions in respect of this.

The complex family backgrounds of these children will often involve one or a combination of the following:

- Misuse of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Mental ill health difficulties.
- Domestic Violence.
- Parental learning difficulties.
- Criminality.

Consequently the children are likely to have experienced some or all of the following:

- Effects of drug/alcohol misuse by parents during the pregnancy or in the child's early years.
 - Neglect and/or physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse.
 - Inconsistency, poor parenting, chaotic home environment, many moves and changes of care-giver.
 - Special needs arising from disability or uncertainty about future development.
- These factors are likely to have impacted on their emotional and behavioural development and may well have long term implications for their future development, intellectually, socially and/or behaviourally. They may lack trust in adults and find difficulty in forming lasting secure attachments to their care-givers.

You will be provided with support and training to enable you to support the children and young people placed in your care.



Lyndsey from Whitehaven:

"I've been fostering for two years now and I've never looked back - it's been amazing! If you've got room in your heart and your family, I would urge anyone to foster. The difference you can make by offering a child love, attention and a caring home is so rewarding."

Who Can Foster?

There's no 'typical foster carer' and Cumbria Fostering welcomes people from a variety of different backgrounds, experiences and circumstances. We need people who are able to offer a genuine commitment to children.

We welcome all enquiries from prospective carers who live within Cumbria though we may consider enquiries from those who live within an hour's travel of the County's borders.

You can apply to become a foster carer if you are single, divorced or married/cohabiting for a minimum of two years. Your race, religion or sexuality won't affect your application. Other factors such as your health, or whether you have a job, or a disability, will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Age

We usually state a minimum age of 21 but there's no upper age limit on applicants - you just need to have the experience to provide a secure and stable environment for a child, as well as the energy to keep up with them and a good support network of family and/or friends.

Relationship Status

You don't have to be married to foster. You could be divorced, married, in a civil partnership or living with a partner but we expect a couple will have lived together for at least two years.

Families with Children

Having children already within your family is not a barrier to fostering. We welcome enquiries from experienced parents but will need to consider the impact of fostering on any existing children within the family. If you were considering long term fostering we would also expect a fostered child to be the youngest within the family and for there to be a two year age gap between the fostered child and other children, as we know from research and experience that this works best.

Gender/Sexual orientation

We welcome applications regardless of gender or sexuality. You can be heterosexual, gay or lesbian, single or a couple.

Lifestyle

Children who require foster placements come from a variety of backgrounds, so we need foster carers with a wide range of knowledge, experience, skills and lifestyles. You can own or rent your home but there will need to be space for children to live and to play. A fostered child will need their own bedroom.

You need to have a good support network of family and friends who you can rely on to support you in emergencies and to provide respite arrangements.

Although there aren't any particular qualifications needed to apply for fostering, you do need to have the basic skills, ability, commitment and enthusiasm to care for children and young people.

Employment

Whether you are working full time or are unemployed and receiving benefits your enquiry will be considered. If you are in work we would want to know about your availability to meet a child's needs, as a child being fostered will need your time and attention.

Health and Disability

Having health issues or a disability doesn't exclude you from fostering so please don't rule yourself out before you have spoken to us. We will need to ensure that you have the ability to manage the demands of parenting. All applicants are required to have a

medical assessment completed by their GP which will be considered by our Agency Medical Adviser as part of the approval process.

Smoking

Cumbria Fostering adheres to the practice guidance issued by Coram Baaf which is not to place children under the age of five, or a child over the age of five with other conditions e.g. chest problems or disability, within a smoking household. The guidance also states that a foster carer must have ceased smoking for at least 12 months before a child under the age of five is placed with them. Consequently we would welcome enquiries from applicants who have stopped smoking for a period of six months from the point of their enquiry. We may require evidence from your GP to confirm this. Cumbria Fostering also applies this guidance to the use of e-cigarettes.

Criminal History

Not all criminal convictions or cautions will prevent you from fostering as we will consider all enquiries on an individual basis. The key is to be totally honest from the onset. If you have offences against children, certain sexual offences against adults or significant offences of violence we will not be able to consider your enquiry.

Pets

We would make an assessment of all pets within the home and usually there would be no problem for pet owners adopting unless the pets are known to be dangerous. If you are a dog owner we may ask for a professional dog assessment to be undertaken as part of the approval process. If you own many pets we will want to be assured there are no health risks and that you have enough time to care for and prioritise a child.

Experience with children

Although there aren't any particular qualifications needed to apply for fostering, you do need to have the basic skills, ability, commitment and enthusiasm to care for children and young people.

We would like applicants to have some experience of caring for children preferably around the age they are considering fostering. Not having experience would not necessarily prevent you from moving through the process at this stage, but we would be keen to know how you planned to get the required experience, and would be happy to give advice and support on where to do this.

Rob and Christine from Penrith:

"It is daunting to make that first call but the council were very welcoming. They got us straight onto a course and we had six weeks of training, followed by our assessment. We were not left to drift and were well supported throughout by our social worker, who's a good friend now! It's been a life changing experience for us, so if you are thinking about fostering, pick up the phone and call them today."and a caring home is so rewarding."



Who do we need?

Foster Carers need to appreciate that children will potentially come from a wide range of experiences, culture, heritage, and religions. Children need to feel safe, secure and stable to thrive both physically and emotionally. You will help us to fulfil this by being patient, caring, empathetic and supportive of our children and young people.

Children need to feel valued and cherished and we expect our foster carers to make a child feel part of their family.

We need flexible, open, honest people who are able to consider a range of children and who can understand the difficult start these children will have had.



Call **0300 0190 200**

Your journey to becoming a foster carer

We regularly hold information events around the county, where you can find out more about fostering and have the chance to chat to staff from one of our fostering teams and some of our experienced foster carers. However you don't have to attend an information session to make an enquiry with us.

Enquiry stage

Initial Enquiry - Enquiries can either be made by telephone, online or in person. Once we receive your enquiry, one of our dedicated duty workers will call you back within 1-2 working days to discuss your enquiry further. This will be an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have or to be signposted to other information.

We will obtain your consent to enter your information onto our database so that we can progress your enquiry further.

This Information and Reference Guide will have been provided to you at the enquiry stage to give you all the basic information you need to take the first steps as well as details about the whole process. However, if after reading this information, you still have some questions, then you will have the opportunity to raise these when your allocated Fostering Social Worker contacts you following your enquiry to arrange further discussions.

An Initial Visit will be completed by your allocated Fostering Social Worker. This will usually involve more than one meeting with you and may take place at an office as well as at your home. The meetings will be recorded and your Social Worker will then make a recommendation about whether they feel it is the right time to progress your interest in fostering. Equally you will hopefully use these meetings to work out whether fostering feels right for you and your family. The recommendation following the Initial visit will be discussed and confirmed by the Team Manager.

Training - Skills to Foster

Should we mutually agree that you will proceed further, then the next step is to attend Skills to Foster training.

We offer a minimum of 12 courses a year and the yearly plan for training will be shared with you to identify the most suitable course for you.

The courses are run at different venues, countywide and vary from being held at weekends (full days) or as evening sessions during the week. Consequently the training can be either three full days or over 5-6 sessions.

At the training you will learn about all aspects of fostering and become more familiar with the role of foster carers and the realities of fostering. Training is informal and very interactive, and is your chance to meet other prospective foster carers and also existing foster carers who are able to share their experiences. It is important that you complete the whole course and, if you are a couple, you will both need to attend.

Once you have completed the training and we mutually agree that you can continue, you will be offered the opportunity to make an application to foster.

Your Fostering Social Worker will support you to complete the Application Form.

Once we receive your Application Form the assessment process will commence.

Assessment

The assessment process is made up of 2 stages: Stage 1 and stage 2.

Please remember: you will have a designated Social Worker who will guide and support you every step of the way.

In stage 1 we will be seeking checks and references. You will need to complete forms for these checks to be progressed and we need these to be completed as soon as possible.

A decision about completion of stage 1 has to be made within 10 working days of receipt of receipt of all the information. If we decide not to accept you onto Stage two, the Agency Decision Maker will have to confirm this decision and give the reasons in writing.

If we do decide that you cannot progress, and you wish to make a complaint, you will be able to do so by emailing **children's.complaints@cumbria.gov.uk**. You can also ring the complaints team on **01228 221 161**.

Information regarding Checks and References

- **A Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check** (formerly known as Criminal Records Bureau) is part of the approval process. Having an offence on record does not automatically exclude you from fostering. It is only the more serious offences, such as offences against children, violent offences, murder or serious fraud that would legally bar you from fostering.

We understand that many people make mistakes, particularly in their youth, and so may have some 'history'. Any offences, other than the really serious ones, will be treated with discretion and given consideration in light of the circumstances, nature of the crime, regularity and how long ago this happened.

The important thing is that you are honest and open with us from the start.

Secondly, it is important that if you are fostering as part of a couple, your partner needs to know, from you, if there is anything in your offending history which could cause us concern. It may be that we have to turn you down as foster carers based on your offending history, but we would not be able to tell your partner why. So please, tell us and tell your partner. Essentially, you cannot proceed to Stage Two where criminal record checks identify that you or an adult member of your household has been convicted of a specified offence committed at 18 or over, or received a police caution that they admitted at the time, in respect of a specified offence (mainly offences against children).

If you have lived abroad for a considerable time, you may have to get confirmation that there are no records of you offending during your time there. You may have to get that country's equivalent of a DBS or another similar check for the time you lived there, and you may have to pay for this.

As an agency we will only retain your DBS information for a limited time, and all information is destroyed once a decision is made to proceed or not to proceed.

- **Medical Report:** You will have a medical form to complete and take to your GP, with instructions. You will be responsible for making the appointment for a medical examination. Your GP completes the form and sends it back to us, and we arrange for the Fostering Agency Medical Adviser (who sometimes sits on the Fostering Panel) to write a report on your medical fitness for consideration by the Panel.

Medically there are few conditions that would result in an outright rejection of your application. Every case is looked at individually. However, the Medical Adviser will be asked to give an opinion on specific health needs - such as diabetes, kidney problems, heart conditions, mental health conditions and cancer. If necessary, they will ask your permission to communicate with your GP or specialist to discuss your case in more depth, before writing their report for panel. If we have approached the Medical Adviser at an earlier stage, before accepting your application, then they will advise us accordingly about whether or not to proceed on health grounds.

A special note on depression and other mental health conditions: potential foster carers often worry that because they have had some depression or other mental ill-health at some point in their lives that this may bar them from being Foster Carers. This is not necessarily the case. The Medical Adviser will look at each case individually and sympathetically in light of your history and a decision made depend on the potential impact of this on a child placed.

The Medical Report will also look at your lifestyle, including alcohol consumption, smoking and obesity. Alcohol consumption will need to be within the accepted limits. With regard to smoking, you are not considered a non-smoker until you have given up for over a year, and smoking outside or using an e-cigarette still counts as smoking. Obesity issues can be more complicated; the Medical Adviser will check your BMI, but there is no set minimum or maximum. The Medical Adviser is looking to be reassured that you have a reasonably active, healthy lifestyle. Weight issues are considered alongside other aspects of your health.

In short, the Medical Adviser is generally looking for you to be fit and well enough to care for a child.

- **Personal References:** We ask for at least three personal references.

They need to ideally be:

- From people who have known you for a significant period of time, both individually and as a couple.
- From people who have seen you interact with children.
- Two of the referees should not be related to you.

These referees need to be happy to complete a written reference and be interviewed face-to-face by a Social Worker.

If you have had some complicated issues in your life, we may ask you to provide additional references to verify certain parts of your history (see 'Former Partners' below).

- **Former Partners and Adult Children:** If you have had a significant relationship with a previous partner, we would want them to provide a reference. If you cared for children with them (either your own or step-children), we will send a reference regardless of how long ago this was - unless there are serious risks to safety.

We fully understand how difficult this may feel for some people, but unfortunately this practice is based on evidence from Serious Case Reviews and Cumbria County Council is similar to other Fostering Agencies in that we need to check out previous relationships for any factors that might be relevant. The reference is done with discretion and with consideration to previous difficult circumstances; it forms only a part of a much broader assessment process.

If the relationship had been violent or you would become at risk by our contacting your ex-partner, or if you genuinely have no contact details for your ex-partner, we would ask you to find us a supplementary referee who knew you at the time of the relationship who can verify your account of this time.

If there are adult children from current or previous relationships, we would expect to contact them too.

- **Previous Addresses:** We need to check with the local authorities covering all your previous addresses for the last ten years to see if you were known to them for any reason.
- **School Questionnaire:** If you have a school-age child within the family we send a short questionnaire to their school checking that there are no concerns about the child. We would want to know that they attend regularly and that the parents are active in their communication with school when needed.
- **Health Visitor Check:** We check with local Health Visitors if you are known to their service regarding children in the family.
- **Reference from previous work with children or vulnerable adults:** If you have done paid or voluntary work in any setting involving children or vulnerable adults, we will seek a reference from them also.
- **SSAFA check:** If you have served, or are currently serving in the Armed Forces or Reserves.

Why might we not progress to Stage two?

Stage one is all about checks, references and initial preparation. If there is anything of concern that has come from any of the checks, or matters raised by referees, these may need clarifying before you are able to move on to Stage two. In some circumstances the result of these checks may mean that you are unable to progress, such as specific offences on your Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, or serious medical issues.

In accordance with Regulations a Fostering Agency can run the two stages of the assessment concurrently. Cumbria Fostering usually aims to do this and will advise you of this at the time your assessment commences.

We will draw up a written agreement with you so that you are clear about what we expect from you, and as importantly, what you can expect from us, including timescales.

If we decide to complete Stage 1 before Stage 2 we will advise you of this and the reasons why we are choosing to complete your assessment in this way.

Stage 2

Within Stage 2 there will be in-depth discussions about, and analysis of, your life experiences to date, which will be relevant to your capacity to parent a child who needs a foster placement. Details on this process will be given to you at the time and form part of your agreement.

It is during this time that your Fostering Report will be completed. This is the report that will be presented to the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker for their recommendation and decision about your approval. If you are approved, this report will be used in the matching process.

Fostering Panel

Legislation outlines that an application should be presented to the Fostering Panel within eight months of acceptance. However in Cumbria we aim to complete this in a shorter timeframe of six months. If for any reason there has been a delay; for example, if you have needed more time or training, or if life events have meant that you needed to pause for a while, then this timescale can be extended. The important factor is that you need to feel ready. The panel will make a recommendation on your suitability to become a Foster carer. You will be told of the Panel's recommendation on the day.

Who is on the Fostering Panel?

The Fostering Panel is made up of a variety of people with different personal and professional backgrounds. It is chaired by a person who is suitably qualified and experienced in matters of fostering, and who is independent of the Agency.

Attending panel can feel quite daunting for prospective carers, but you are invited (and encouraged) to attend. Your social worker will be with you throughout. Panel members will have read your Fostering Assessment Report and will have some questions to ask you and your Social Worker on the day.

The panel will make a recommendation about your application in one of three ways:

- 1 They recommend that you are approved as Foster Carers.
- 2 They recommend that you are not approved as Foster Carers.
- 3 They defer the recommendation for some further work to be completed and make a date by which to return to panel.

Who makes the final decision about being approved?

The minutes of the panel will be sent to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) in these matters, who is a Senior Manager. This person will read all of the papers submitted to panel along with the minutes of the meeting, before making the decision on whether you are to be approved as Foster Carers. The ADM always takes account of the panel's recommendation before reaching a decision. This decision must be made within seven working days of the ADM receiving the final panel minutes. You will be verbally informed of the decision within two working days of it being made, and will receive written confirmation within five working days.

If the ADM decides not to approve you, then you will be told why in writing. You can, if you wish, ask for the Fostering Panel to reconsider your case, or you can apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for your case to be newly considered. The IRM is a totally independent Fostering Panel whose members will read all of the reports submitted to the original panel (they do not see the minutes of that panel) and make their own recommendations to the ADM. The ADM will make the final decision.



Call **0300 0190 200**

What happens once I am approved?

Placing a child

Once we receive a request to place a child into foster care, we will search for foster carers who are best able to meet the child's needs.

We will tell you as much as we know about the child's background as well as expectations for the foster placement - such as likely duration and the long term plans.

If it is an emergency, the child may be brought to you as soon as you agree to the placement. However, if it is a long term placement a more gradual introduction process can be implemented.

Support

Cumbria Fostering provides ongoing support after you've been approved and throughout your fostering career.

You will be allocated a supervising social worker who will visit you on a regular basis. They will offer you supervision, support, and prepare you for the task of being a foster carer.

You will be supervised on a monthly basis.

You will be offered the opportunity to be linked with an experienced foster carer via the Peer Mentoring Scheme

You will have the opportunity to attend foster carer forums throughout the year and you will be invited to the foster carer recognition evening and other events.

You will be kept in touch by receiving regular copies of the fostering newsletter and by going online via Facebook, Twitter, and Cumbria' Foster carer portal.

Other support we provide:

- A 'duty' worker is in place throughout the day to offer a variety of support and in an emergency and at short notice.
- There is also an out of hour's service for emergency issues outside of standard office hours.
- This is a wide variety of training available to carers, some is mandatory whilst other courses can be tailored to your specific needs.
- Foster carer support groups enable you to share experiences, knowledge and extend your support network.
- We also organise social activities for carers and their children,
- We pay for our carers to be members of Fostering Network - an independent agency which provides advice, support and advocacy to foster carers.
- We also have Emotional Wellbeing Practitioners managed by the Fostering Service to offer support and advice to foster carers and children if they are struggling.

Training & Development Standards

The Training and Development Standards were developed to support you as a foster carer and give you a framework for your training and development.

All new foster carers will be expected to show that they meet the standards by completing a portfolio within their first year of fostering. The standards are a national benchmark and will give carers the recognition they deserve, as well as ensuring their knowledge and skills are up to date. Don't worry we will support you through this process and it doesn't involve any exams!

Financial Allowances

Our fostering payments are a combination of:

- 1 A maintenance allowance for the child - this covers the costs of everything that you need to care for a child such as food, clothing, transport, personal items and household expenses.
- 2 A fee paid to the carer - this recognises the amount of time carers dedicate to fostering, as well as their skills and experience.

The level of fee and allowance paid varies dependent on the foster carers' experience and the age of the child.

Our foster carer fees:

Level	1	2	3
Weekly fee	£83.02	£160.23	£308.42

Our maintenance allowances:

Age of child	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-17
Weekly allowance	£161.98	£178.71	£204.61	£248.71

An extra two weeks allowance is split and paid over six weeks in the Summer Holidays, an extra weekly allowance is paid for the Child's birthday and an extra weekly allowance is made at Christmas.

Working as part of a team

Remember we work as a team. You as foster carers are valuable members of the team. The child, parents, health visitor, teacher, doctor, psychologist, solicitor, consultant, social worker for the child, supervising social worker, may all have pieces of the jigsaw but without your piece there will be no complete picture of the child. You are with them 24hrs 7 days a week and we value your knowledge and understanding of the child. Our foster carers are a vital part of our service.

Foster Carer Stories



Kath and Graham from Carlisle

"We always said when we got married that we'd become foster carers at some stage, it was never a question of "if", more of "when." So once our children were old enough to understand what was going on and also old enough to help out, we got in touch with the council.

"Our application with the council was processed relatively quickly, about nine months, and we've had children here pretty much from day one. Our friends ask whether we're tempted to adopt them ourselves, but we didn't start fostering to extend our family we're here to help the children on their way and give them a positive future.

"While the children are here they are part of our family. For example, we have parties for birthdays and invite all our family, just as you would for your own children.

"One thing we didn't predict was how involved our own children would be. They love it, and I guess that makes it so much easier. They're happy to baby sit or play in the garden with the kids. I'm not saying it's all been easy, it hasn't, but the good days make the hard ones worthwhile."



Ali and Angie, from Ulverston

Ali said: "Angie and I often talked about fostering but it wasn't until five years ago that we made the decision to pursue it further. We embarked on our training and felt supported as a couple from the start. Our only regret is that we didn't apply sooner.

"Being a foster carer is a privilege and is the most rewarding thing we have embarked on as a couple. No two days are the same, your home is full of fun and (and toys and mess!), you experience new things and enjoy making memories and you get the opportunity to make a difference."



Wendy and Lee from Maryport

"We've had our own family (we've got 5 children) and we're actually now grandparents but we missed having little 'uns in the house. The application process took quite a while and I lost count of the forms we filled in but the council kept us on track.

"There is quite a community of foster carers here in Maryport, and what with the coffee mornings, summer bbq's and Christmas parties you make loads of new friends. It's nice to know that if you've got a question - there is someone at the end of the phone with the answer.

"It breaks my heart to think that there are so many children out there without the loving and secure home that they deserve. So much so, we're in the process of moving into a bigger house so that we can help more children. It's the most rewarding job I've ever had."



James & Clare from Keswick

"We've been fostering for over two years and decided to go with Cumbria County Council rather than an agency as it seemed the right thing to do.

"Our first placement was four brothers all under the age of seven, who we looked after for about four months until they were split up and then we looked after two of them for another year. It was even better in some ways than we expected. It was challenging but we felt supported and it was such good fun!

"We did so many 'firsts' with the boys - took them on their first holiday abroad, on their first aeroplane and even took them swimming for the first time. Eventually they were adopted and they are very happy in their new home. It's nice to think we've been a stepping stone to a better life for these two boys."



Chris and Heather from Barrow

"We first thought about fostering during Foster Care Fortnight about nine years ago now. After a year of fostering with an independent agency and feeling unsupported we moved over to foster with the county council.

"We now feel part of a 'family', we can go to meetings with other local foster carers, share our experiences with each other and there's more people to listen to us. We've fostered short term, long-term and we've done emergency fostering. If you want to foster, don't hold yourself back, go for it with the help of the council."



Rosemary from Penrith

"Fostering was always something I wanted to do, after my own children left home me and my husband decided to go for it. For most of my life I've worked with children or had children in the house, I've raised my own children and looked after children as a child minder and nanny so I felt I had something to offer.

"I first began fostering as a short term carer, looking after primary school age children who'd come from neglected backgrounds. It quickly became evident that the children we were caring for would not be returning to their birth families in the short term and myself and my husband began to care for the children longer term."



Adele and Lee, from Penrith

"We were foster carers in Rochdale and when we moved to Cumbria in 2020 we wanted to continue to foster, so went through the approval process with the council. The whole process took around six months. We were keen to foster siblings as we had two spare rooms and we had experience of fostering siblings in Rochdale and enjoyed it. It is lovely to be able to keep brothers and sisters together by fostering siblings but also for me, it is also about giving the children the opportunity to develop their own personality and interests.

"I can honestly say that fostering is one of the best things we've ever done. You feel like you are making a difference - even though you don't feel like that all the time! We've really enjoyed being short term carers too and moving children on to adoption or back to family is incredibly rewarding. I would urge anyone thinking of fostering to speak to Cumbria Fostering and to other carers and find out more."



Frequently Asked Questions

We recognise that you may still have more questions to ask, or need more time to think things over. You can check out our 'frequently asked questions' section on our website or give us a call.

You may also wish to attend one of our Fostering information events that are held regularly throughout the year. You can find information about these on our website.



How to complain

If you have a problem about a council service please talk about it first to the person who provides your service.

Our aim is to deal with any complaints quickly and to your satisfaction. Your complaint will be taken seriously, no matter who you are or how you complain. Our staff can offer information and explain how the complaints procedure works. You can make your complaint in whatever way you prefer. If we need to have an interpreter to communicate with you, please do let us know.

Please note that complaints will not normally be accepted from complainants about matters that occurred more than 12 months earlier. In exceptional circumstances and where adequate reasons are given, a complaint will be accepted outside this timescale.

We would also like to hear your feedback on the services we provide or if you have a suggestion on how we can make improvements. Your comments will be passed on to the services involved.

Contacting Us

Email:	complaints@cumbria.gov.uk
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Email:	compliments@cumbria.gov.uk
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Online:	Online Complaints Form
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Telephone:	01228 221234
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