

Cumbria Fostering

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Statement of

Purpose



April 2024 to March 2025

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Westmorland
& Furness
Council

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

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1. Introduction

On 1 April 2023 local government in Cumbria changed. The six district councils and Cumbria County Council were replaced by two new unitary authorities Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council.

Cumbria's Fostering Service is a hosted model with Cumberland Council hosting Westmorland and Furness Council. As Cumberland Council Host Westmorland and Furness Council for the purposes of this report we will refer to Cumberland Council.

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims, objectives, values and principles of Cumberland Council's Fostering Service and describes how the aims and objectives will be met in partnership with carers, children, young people, their families and other partner agencies. It also explains the facilities and services of the Fostering Service which are delivered in accordance with fostering legislation and regulatory frameworks including:

- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services.
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011.
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: The Care Planning Placement and Case Review.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Foster Carer Charter 2011.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2015.

In Cumbria we believe that all children and young people have the right to be healthy, happy and safe; to be loved, valued and respected; and to have high aspirations for their future.

In Cumbria we would wish all children to have secure relationships with family, friends and carers, be eager, excited, curious and engaged in learning, have self confidence, be able to co-operate and communicate socially and have the best possible health and development.

The Fostering Service is one of many services provided for children that help to achieve this vision. More information about Children's Services in Cumbria can be found on the Council website.



2. Aims and Objectives

The service aims to provide high quality foster homes for the children of Cumbria who cannot, for a period of time, or permanently, live with their own family. (See each authorities Permanence Policy).

The key objectives in providing quality foster homes:

- To provide choice and positive matching of a child with a foster carer who is close to the child's home area and culture where appropriate.
- To find a foster care within the child's extended network wherever possible.
- Brothers and sisters should be enabled to live together wherever possible.
- Proactive positive health care.
- Maximisation of educational opportunities and achievement for children Planned beginnings and endings of homes that children may need to live in.
- Promotion of positive time spent with family and friends.
- Safe Care.
- Promotion of the child's culture and heritage.
- Promotion of child's interests and abilities.
- Rehabilitation to birth family wherever possible.
- Listening to the child and enabling their involvement in decision making.
- Working in an environment which promotes partnership with parents.
- Stability - Working hard to prevent moves of homes for each child.
- Progressing permanence without drift and delay for children.
- Preparation for independence and successful transition into adulthood.
- Standards of care for effective planning for the transition from care to independence, which meet or exceed the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011.

3. Guiding Principles

Our services are for children and their families therefore all service delivery, practice and plans must reflect their needs.

We are committed to safeguarding children in the community and understand that this will often require imaginative thinking to arrange packages of support to allow risks to be assessed and managed and maintain children with their families wherever possible.

We understand that placing a child in a Local Authority foster home, either voluntarily or with a legal order, is the most serious step the Local Authority can take. The decision to do this should only be taken after full assessment and when all other options to maintain the child within their family have been fully explored and assessed.

We recognise that, for most children, removal from their family is the equivalent in terms of life stress experience to the bereavement of a parent/divorce for adults. The experience of separation and loss will have both short and long term effects on their feelings and well being, self esteem and reactions to situations.

We recognise that attachment to primary care givers is a key issue in positive child care practice and the assessment of this and the prognosis for changes in the child's life always need to be part of the ongoing assessment.

We are committed, where the decision has been made to place a child away from their family, to returning that child to the care of their family wherever the assessment indicates that the child's welfare can be safeguarded and the care and circumstances are 'good enough'.

We recognise that, although the educational, employment and other outcome indicators for children adopted at a young age are improved for many children who are separated from their families, their prospects are not significantly enhanced by substitute care.

We are committed where a child cannot remain in the care of his/her parents to exploring fully the prospects for care in the extended family and friend network. When there are people in this network willing and able to care for the child, there must be very clear reasons why such a home is not utilised, the need to ensure that the carers are safe and able to meet the child's needs.

We recognise the value, skill and commitment required of foster carers and treat them, their families and homes with respect.

Our objective is to provide a range of quality foster homes to meet the identified needs of children who require substitute care. Educational and health progress is our high priority aiming at good opportunities for employment, housing and social relationships in adult life.

We recognise that stability is the key to improving outcomes for children and the need to secure a permanency, as soon as possible if the child cannot return to the care of his/her parents, is the greatest service we can offer a child.

We are committed to enabling siblings to live together wherever possible and promoting positive time with family members.

We are committed to engaging other agencies in the assessment of the needs of children and working together to clarify roles and responsibilities in ensuring that their needs are understood and prioritised.

We recognise that many children will have had damaging experiences prior to becoming cared for, as well as the effects of separation and loss. Their mental health needs may be complex and their need for understanding of their past and access to therapeutic input is essential.

We recognise that foster carers, caring for young people who have experienced trauma will encounter unknown situations on a daily basis and their own support needs need to be assessed and appropriate support systems deployed.

We recognise that foster carers caring for the majority of children are very valuable assets and that their time and commitment is worthy of a reasonable reward system.

All staff and carers involved in meeting the needs of children with complex needs require a robust commitment to training and learning opportunities.

Children experiencing disabilities are recognised as children first. The same principles of service apply, while accepting that additional support services will be required to meet all their needs.

We recognise the transition into adulthood is a major step requiring positive daily living support and enhanced connections with the adult world of opportunity and responsibility. A flexible range of accommodation and support options to meet different levels of need will be a factor in the services for young people leaving care.

We are committed to facilitating young people remaining in the foster home into early adulthood wherever possible.

We are committed to achieving the Training, Support and Development Standards for foster carers and will support carers in achieving the standards.



Services Provided

A range of family types are provided seeking to meet the variety of assessed needs for the majority of cared for children by the Council:

Family/Home SERVICES

Adoption

For those children who cannot return to their own families and where permanent legal security with a new family will promote their best life chances. A number of our carers are skilled at bridging children into their adoptive homes.



Legal Permanence

For those children where adoption is not appropriate but where a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order legally secure their future.

Permanent Fostering

For those children who will not be able to return to their family, but for whom Adoption, Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship are not the plan.

Short Term Fostering

For children where assessment of their needs is required before planning for their permanent care can be completed. A return home may be the outcome or a permanent home with another family.

Approved Support Care ASC (respite)

For children in the community who require a series of short term breaks to provide support and allow them to remain at home. Some of these are children with a disability, but also children in need in other ways.

Shared Care

This specialist scheme provides support to children with a disability and their family. Usually the child is linked with a carer who provides regular support e.g. one weekend a month. This gives the child positive experiences and their parents/carers a well earned opportunity to 'recharge their batteries'.

Friends and Family (Kinship) Foster Carers

Some children and young people who are cared for by members of their family or friends network who have been assessed and approved as carers.

4. Services to Foster Carers

Recruitment

Cumbria's Fostering Service has a recruitment strategy which is based upon the needs of our cared for children.

Foster Carers are recruited by a variety of methods, including personal recommendation by existing Carers and media campaigns highlighting a particular area of need. Social media, Newspapers, TV, radio, posters, leaflets, shows, fetes, organisational groups, schools etc. are targeted at different times. Members of the public who are interested are invited to contact the Fostering support workers. The fostering link on the Council's website offers more information and an opportunity to contact the service on line.

<https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/fostering/>

Enquirers have the opportunity for a telephone conversation with a member of staff within 24 hours of their enquiry. A home visit is offered within 10 days to discuss their interest further. Appropriate prospective carers are then invited to attend a series of preparation sessions. Fostering Preparation Training is based upon the nationally recognized Skills to Foster Course developed by the Fostering network.

This training is evaluated and reviewed by the service annually.

Assessment of Mainstream Foster Carers

Foster carers are assessed by qualified Social Workers, using the nationally recognised Form F developed by BAAF. This document requires detailed information and a wide range of evidence in respect of the carer's background, current relationships, family lifestyle, support networks and parenting capacity. The assessment is in two stages, the first incorporating statutory checks.

The assessing social worker has a duty to verify the information they are given and they will do this by taking up a number of references – with the Police, Probation, CAFCASS, Health, GP, Education, as well as contacting a number of personal referees, employers, former partners and children from previous relationships.

This process is designed to help the carers and the assessing social worker to identify the sort of caring which will fit in with their lifestyle, their own wishes and the age, sex and needs of the children they would best be able to care for.

Timely assessment is important for prospective carers and to meet the needs of children, so assessments are generally completed within four months of allocation to a Social Worker following preparation groups. This timescale can be affected by:

- The availability of the carers for the assessment work to be completed.
- The timely return of statutory checks/ references.
- The priorities within the Service in terms of the needs of children waiting for Foster homes.
- The complexity of the assessment and issues that need further exploration.

Assessment of Kinship Foster Carers

Kinship Foster Carers are assessed by Qualified Social Workers using the BAFF Form C Assessment. This Assessment is completed jointly with the Child Social Worker and undergoes the Same statutory Checks as a Mainstream Foster Carer.

A Kinship Foster Carer also sometimes referred to as a 'Connected Person'. A connected Person is someone who is related to the Child or anyone who has a pre-existing connection to a child through their extended network. This can include someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a childminder, a teacher, a youth worker, although these are not exclusive categories.

The Process of Assessment is very similar to that of a Mainstream Foster Carer however with a Kinship Application it is Child Specific so will contain information relating to the Kinship Carers abilities to care for a specific linked Child.

Where a family and friends foster carer is temporarily approved as a foster carer under regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, a full assessment is completed as soon as practicable, where the intention is for the child to stay with the carer, and always within the statutory timeframe set out in the Regulations.

Mainstream Approval

In the assessment document the Social Worker will make an analysis of the strengths and vulnerabilities in the application and make a recommendation in respect of the type of caring and number of children and age range and gender.

Kinship Approval

As like the process above with a Mainstream Application, for a Kinship Application the Social Worker will refer to the strengths and vulnerabilities of the application and make a recommendation which would be in keeping with the specific child's care plan.

All foster care applicants see the complete assessment report and have the opportunity to suggest changes and make their own comments. They are then invited to sign the completed document.

The Fostering Panel recommends to the Agency Decision Maker if approval is appropriate or not, or if further work is required before a decision can be recommended.

There are two Fostering Panels operating, one in the North and one in the South of the County.



Cumbria's Fostering Panel offers a hybrid approach, including both Face to face and virtual Fostering Panels. The Panels meet the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the associated regulations. The Panels take place on a fortnightly cycle so there are at least two per month. There is the opportunity to commence additional panels, should the business warrant this.

Panel members are made up of professionals from Children's Services, and independent members who have experiences relating to substitute care. The Panel also has access to legal, medical and educational advice.

All applicants seeking approval are invited to attend the Panel meeting. The Panel are able to ask them questions and they are able to address Panel members.

The Panels are also involved in the review of carers and when termination of approval is required.

Supervision and Support for Foster Carers

The service recognises that supervision and support for carers is vital if they are to feel valued and recommend the service to others. It is important that their work is recognised as providing the major component in meeting the needs of cared for children in Cumbria. Carer satisfaction and retention is essential for a healthy Fostering Service

The service acknowledges that it is reliant on the goodwill of carers' families and the professional conduct of carers and seeks to treat carers' homes and families with respect and acknowledge the demanding nature of the tasks they undertake.

Social Worker Fostering visit carers regularly to look at standards of care provided, assist the carer to play their part in promoting the outcomes in the child's care plan and identify any training needs. Over the first year assistance to carers to achieve the Training and support and development standards will be a major focus for development.

Foster carers are subject to annual review of their approval. The first review is considered by the Fostering Panel, and the Panel will then consider reviews at least three yearly. If significant changes to their approval details are recommended at other times, this is considered at Panel.

Types of Support Available:

Social Worker Fostering - Each foster carer has a Fostering Social Worker, who visits every 4-6 weeks to provide supervision and support. (There are exceptions to visiting frequency, for example if the carers are on hold, don't have a child in their care etc., exceptions will be agreed and documented on the carers case file) The Fostering Social worker monitors standards of care, encourages high standards and helps the carer manage problems arising and focus on what is needed to achieve the outcomes in the child's care plan. They are also available for telephone consultation and liaise with the Social Worker for the child regularly, along with aiming to complete joint visiting in the placement on a regular basis. They will meet with the carer when the child's care plan is updated to ensure clarity and identify support needed to carry out the work required.

Payments to Foster Carers - Foster Carers receive payments according to a scheme, which is reviewed annually with carer input, and circulated to all carers. They are paid the statutory weekly allowance to meet the child's needs. Carers can apply to progress on the Foster Care Career structure, which encourages carers to develop their skills, and which attracts a weekly fee payment.

Foster Care Associations - Each area of Cumbria is encouraged to have a Foster Care Association, representatives of which meet with managers in Children's Services on a quarterly basis to discuss areas of mutual interest, developments and any areas of tension.

Fostering Network - The Fostering Service enroll all foster carers as members and a contractual arrangement for independent advice and mediation is provided by this national organisation for a number of authorities in the England of which Cumbria is one.

Insurance for Foster Carers - Foster carers are insured by the County Council in respect of death and personal injury and are able to make claims against the County Council insurance in case of damage and theft by foster children and their families.

Support Groups for Foster Carers - Each Division runs support and development groups for carers providing speakers on matters of relevance and an opportunity for carers to share and problem solve together. These groups provide valuable, up to date training and development opportunities.

Foster Care Reviews - Foster Carers are reviewed annually where their care of children, approval details, their skill, development, and training needs are examined along with any issues they or others wish to raise. This process is the cornerstone of the provision of quality care and the relationship between carers and the Fostering Service. The review is carried out by an Independent Reviewing Officer who considers the views expressed and evidence provided by carers, children, Social Workers and others.

Foster Care Agreement - A written agreement between foster carers and Children's Services formalises mutual expectations.

Out of Hours Service - At evenings and weekends foster carers can call the Emergency Duty Team for advice and assistance.

Training for Foster Carers

All applicants attend preparation training (Skills to Foster) prior to approval, where they learn more about the fostering task, the children needing foster homes and have the opportunity to consider how fostering will fit in with their family life and what type of fostering they might be best suited to.

Following approval, carers learn more about roles and responsibilities, health and safety, promotion of education and health in children and prepare them more fully for the realities of fostering.

A programme of ongoing training is offered to foster carers to help them extend their knowledge and skills in line with the National Minimum Standards and to meet the expectations for progression on the foster care career structure.

Foster Care Career Structure - The Scheme allows mainstream foster carers to progress from Level 1 to 2 to 3 depending on their experience, training carried out and skill development. Carers can progress from Level 1 to 2 after gaining substantial experience, completing a range of training and using this in practice so skill development can be evidenced. After further experience, training and skill development they can be assessed for progression to Level 3. Level 3 carers are the most experienced and professional carers who act as role models for other carers, exhibiting child focused practice and assisting in recruitment and training of other carers and the development of the service.

The Children's Training, Support and Development Standards for foster carers are actively promoted. All foster carers are required to complete the induction standards within one year of approval.

5. Services to Children and Young People

Care Plans

Each child who needs to be cared for has a Care Plan which addresses the short and long term individual needs of the child. The child's Social Worker is responsible for co-ordinating the co-operative work between the carers and the relevant agencies to ensure that the aims and outcomes of the Care Plan are progressed. The Social Worker is also responsible for monitoring the welfare of the child and, within this, the standard of care and safety within the foster home. The Fostering Social Worker, Social Worker and Foster Carer work together to maximise the child's potential within the fosterhome.

Matching

Every effort is made to match the needs of a child with the appropriate carers and the following issues are considered:

- Continuity of the child's education Proximity to home.
- Ease of contact arrangements with family Health issues.
- Culture and ethnicity.
- Religion.

When considering foster families, the following are considered:

- Approval details - type of fostering, age and gender of children approval for age and needs of other children in the household.
- Proximity to home area and education for the child being matched.
- Ability to facilitate contact.
- Ability to meet the child's cultural background and religious needs.
- Ability to understand the child's past experiences and their influence on the child's behaviour and presentation.

Agreements

Foster carers, at the beginning of all children moving into their care, agree to care for the child appropriately and report any causes for concern to the Social Worker. The agreement meeting clarifies the timescales in care planning for the child and the expectations of all those involved.



Family Time/Contact

Positive family time between the child and his or her family is essential where it contributes positively to the child's development so long as it does not compromise the safety of the child, and all those involved encourage this to facilitate the child's understanding of their circumstances, minimise the feelings of loss and allow early return home where appropriate.

Social Worker Visits

Children's Social Workers visit in line with the minimum statutory requirements, but also over and above this to meet the needs of the child and his/her own care plan. The child is seen on his/her own regularly and their views in respect of the carers and home and their other needs are sought. Any concerns are explored with the Fostering Social Worker and the carers. Children should have access to the telephone in a carer's home to contact their Social Worker and are supplied with the correct number.

Education Of Cared For Children

The stability of schooling and educational achievement is seen as a major objective for cared for children. The Fostering Service recognises that high expectations are essential to encourage children whose self-esteem may have been damaged, that they too can achieve in school and college.

Every effort is made when a child is living with foster carers to maintain their school place until a permanence plan is in place. No child should have a change of school at the same time as a move from their family or subsequent move of home where this can possibly be avoided. On many occasions, school, teachers and peers can provide a level of stability, which allows the child a better chance of managing the changes, grief and loss in the other areas of their life.

Improving the educational outcomes for cared for children is a key priority. We want all our children to enjoy school and to achieve well. A Virtual Head Teacher has been in post since 2008, working with the Virtual School Team to ensure all cared for children and young people have access to the best possible provision.

On some occasions other matching issues will render it impossible to maintain a child's school place but every effort is made to ease the transition and ensure that the staff of the receiving school are fully briefed on the circumstances and the child's educational and support needs.

Each child has a Personal Education Plan where their education needs are highlighted and where all those involved seek to work together to maximise progress.

Foster carers are required to take children to good, local schools and encouraged to provide 'good parent' type support to the school and child and to give very positive messages about the value of achievement. At children's and Foster Carer reviews this area of practice is highlighted and any training needs identified.

Virtual School Team

The service promotes the educational achievement of cared for children, ensuring that all can enjoy and achieve. The team comprises of a Virtual School Head, teachers and Inclusion Officers. The team works closely with their colleagues and other services in their area.

The service provides support to cared for children/young people and their carers, teachers in schools and Social Workers. Key aspects of their work include:

- Securing school places and supporting transition e.g. primary to secondary.
- Ensuring high quality provision is in place for all cared for children.
- Tracking the progress of all cared for children.
- Support with Personal Education Plans.
- Advice to schools on the learning needs of cared for children.
- Support and advice for foster carers.
- Training events for foster carers.
- Training sessions for groups of teachers in schools.
- Providing additional learning materials e.g. revision guides for year 10/year 11.

Health Of Cared For Children

The health of children in foster care is another serious priority for the Fostering Service in recognition of the poor health care which some children may have received prior to being in our care.

Many may have missed immunisations, dental care or indeed follow up on specific health issues e.g. asthma, allergies and more serious physical difficulties.

Foster Carers are encouraged to ensure that they provide a 'good parent' approach to health care ensuring that health matters arising are attended to promptly and thoroughly and the child is given messages that his/her health is very important and that he/she is going to be well cared for. This also includes messages about healthy eating and appropriate exercise.

Each child has a full health assessment when they become cared for, which is reviewed annually and any needs/deficits identified with a plan for action. The foster carer will prioritise this important appointment.

All children are registered with a GP and should have six monthly dental checks. All these issues are monitored at the children's statutory reviews.

The arrangements with the Health Trusts for the conducting of initial and review of health assessments are now in place in all parts of the county. The strengthening Families Health team has dedicated nurses as well as access to doctors as required.

Many children who are cared for have emotional problems which may require specialist input from the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Workers, Child and Adolescent Mental Health or other specialist services.

Children With Disabilities

The Fostering Service does not discriminate between children and seeks to provide a service to meet the assessed individual needs of all children. Children with Disabilities have specialist Social Workers skilled in assessment and brokerage of service packages.

At any one time, a small but significant number of children with serious disabilities are cared for on a full time basis by foster carers. It is a credit to the foster carers involved, that many of these homes provide the highest quality of care and relationships. On occasions, foster carers have nursed terminally ill children in their own homes, providing loving care alongside medical interventions.

A variety of children who have moderate or severe learning difficulties and a growing number who are diagnosed along the Autism spectrum or with Aspergers syndrome, are cared for in foster care. In such foster homes it is essential that the carers are engaged with the specialist multi-agency network, which provides the package to meet the child's health and educational needs.

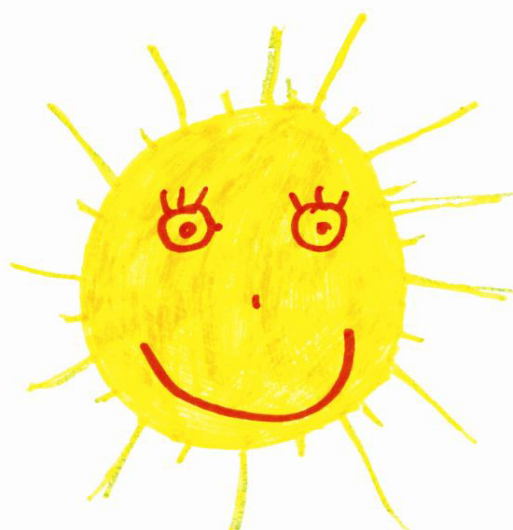
The Shared Care Scheme is targeted at maintaining children with a disability in their own homes by providing short term care or respite, to support the child's parents and give the child positive experiences.

A number of children who had some form of special needs require permanence through permanent fostering and the service seeks to identify families who have the capacity to provide a secure loving home. The demand for such foster homes often outstrips the supply but those carers who can and do meet the needs of children with a disability are exceptional in their commitment.

Children With A Minority Ethnic Heritage

The Fostering Service has a range of measures to ensure that each child's individual needs are identified and positive efforts made to meet them. The measures range from hair and skin care to the provision of permanent homes and support to carers.

Accessing potential carers from ethnic minority communities forms a key strand in the recruitment policy and plans.



6. Structure and Personnel

Staff In The Fostering Service

The staff of the Fostering Service are recruited and managed following the principles of positive selection, supervision, induction and appraisal processes of The Council and incorporating practice dictated by the National Minimum Standards in Fostering Services 2011.

Newly recruited staff receive an induction package and an annual programme of training which is designed to meet their needs for input in respect of current issues in the ever- developing field of childrens social work and fostering..

All Fostering staff are suitably qualified, the Social workers are registered with Social Work England and all staff subject to the Council's corporate standards for continuous professional development.

The Service is managed by the Senior Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Residential Care and the Service Manager Fostering.

The Fostering teams are based in three districts, Carlisle/Eden, Barrow/South Lakes and West Cumbria. In addition there is a Kinship team that is county wide.

The Carlisle and Eden Fostering team takes responsibility for placement finding and matching of all in internal Fostering homes . The commissioning team are responsible for the procurement of external fostering and residential homes .

The Three District based Fostering Teams have responsibility for recruitment, assessment ongoing supervision and support of foster carers, and also the Staying Put/Homestays service.

These teams are staffed by Team Managers, Advanced Practitioners, Social Workers, and Fostering Support Workers.

See Appendix 1 for current staffing structure as of April 2024

Foster Carers And Children Placed

Vacancies

At any one time there are a limited number of placement vacancies and this means that choice can be limited. The nature of a vacancy is always an area for review and discussion, as these will always depend on family circumstances and the needs of other children in the home. Where we cannot find a home for children with in-house carers, we seek homes from independent providers.

The Emergency Duty Team can access vacancies through our vacancy list.

This is regularly updated and contains information relating to Foster Carers that are available to care for a child in an Emergency.

A very small number of carers care for children, either above their approval details or the normal fostering limit. These arrangements are subject to the issue of an exemption certificate following an assessment of potential risks and measures to minimise these. Exemption certificates require the authorisation of the Senior Manager (Agency Decision Maker) followed by report to panel in order that the appropriate safeguards are in place for any children being placed or any children currently in the home and are only made after consultation with carers and children's social workers and their managers.

Moving homes

The service aims to ensure that moves for children are planned and to an appropriate home, which can meet the overall aims of their care plan.

However despite everyone's best efforts changes of foster homes sometimes have to be made on an emergency basis. Good matching between the needs of the child and the foster carer is always paramount, but matches for emergency homes may represent the best option available for a child or young person before a more suitable foster home can be identified.

We are always mindful that moves for children need to be minimised.

Stability for our Cared for Children

This is a key issue for the service as it can have a very significant impact on children's welfare and their long-term achievement and success into adult life.

Every effort is made to minimise moves and to work with the children and the carers where the home is under stress to re-establish a positive experience for the child.

Cumbria has good performance in stability of foster carer homes for our Cared for Children as identified in our performance reports, which is important given the high percentage of children who are cared for in foster care in the county.

Permanency

The service encourages good child care planning and recognises the need to establish every child in the placement which is most likely to meet their needs until they are ready to become independent. For many children this will be a return home to their birth parents, for others it will be within their own extended family network, for some it will be adoption and for some it will be permanent foster care.

Children's well being is best promoted by quality care in a stable home where they have been able to form a positive attachment with their care givers and have a full understanding of their history and circumstances.

Safety Of Children In Foster Care

The Fostering Service makes every effort to ensure that children are cared for by safe and caring people in a child-focused environment. However, it acknowledges that no method of assessment will tell us all we need to know about people who may abuse a child or how carers will react when under stress following extremes of behaviour from a child.

Concerns about foster care practice or allegations of abuse are treated very seriously and thoroughly investigated. There are detailed procedures in respect of the management of such incidents. The Fostering Service works within the frameworks set out by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership follows Safeguarding Policies and Procedures.

Most concerns raised in respect of the care of children are investigated under the Safeguarding Children Procedures, which give guidance as to how such issues are to be dealt with. Matters which are judged to be not of a safeguarding nature but concerns about foster care practice are investigated by the Fostering Team and recommendations made. The Fostering Service refers all matters of Allegation through the LADO service. This is completed through the internal reporting system by the fostering social worker or the children social worker. LADO can also be involved in discussions around whether an incident meets the allegation criteria. Consultation is encouraged.

Every serious incident has to be reported on a Safety of Children in Public Care Form which is scrutinised by the Service Manager. A note of each issue is also made on the allegation tab on each carer's case record so that any pattern developing can be examined. These forms also monitor children missing from their placement, episodes of restraint and violent incidents.

Ofsted are also informed of notifiable incidents in order to ensure external scrutiny of our practice and to demonstrate our compliance with regulations within the Fostering Service.

Staff have received copies of the whistle blowing procedures and have been made aware. Foster Carers are aware of the routes by which they can raise concerns about departmental practice regarding a child or themselves.

Foster carers can access independent support from The Fostering Network during the course of a safeguarding enquiry.

Children in foster care also have mechanisms to ensure their wishes and feelings inform their care plans and are also advised in our range of children's guides how to and who to complain to if they have any concerns or complaints they wish to make. Independent advocacy for children is provided via a contract with NYAS.

Multi-Agency Working

The Fostering Service recognises that it cannot meet the needs of cared for children without input and co-operation from other parts of the local authorities and outside agencies.

The needs of children who have had damaging experiences are complex and need the combined efforts of a multi-agency framework if we are able to redress the balance and improve outcomes for children who are cared for in Cumbria.

The most important partnership arrangements are with:

Support and protect teams, Cared for and care experienced teams and Children with Disabilities Teams - to process requests for foster homes and work together to maximise the life chances of children when living in care.

Children's Residential Homes - to ensure that children are placed in the most appropriate resource for their needs.

Virtual School Team - to maximise educational provision to improve the life chances of cared for children.

Health Colleagues - to maximise healthy provision to improve the life chances of cared for children.

Schools - to maximise positive opportunities and educational achievement of cared for children.

Local Foster Care Associations - to maximise the quality of care in foster homes and the opportunities for our children.

Fostering Network - to promote the profile and value of fostering at a national and local level and its place in meeting the needs of most cared for children and offer legal support and advice. Fostering network also provide the independent advice and mediation service for the Council's carers.

Independent Providers - to access provision for cared for children, which cannot be provided in the authority's own resources.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services - to help children deal with their past experiences and enable to reach their full potential.

Youth Justice Team - to work together to reduce the offending rate amongst cared for children in Cumbria.

7. Monitoring, Evaluation and Management of the Service

Performance and Statistical Information

Performance is scrutinised on a monthly basis via the performance reports and scorecard for the whole service

Statistical information is produced for these reports, as well as for the required DfE returns and annual OFSTED dataset.

A report on the service is produced on a biannual basis.

8. Complaints

Councils have a complaints procedure which is made available to all those in receipt of services.

A leaflet called 'Compliments Comments and Complaints' is available at all offices and is on the The Council's web page.

Stage 1: Any complaint will initially be looked at by a member of staff, usually the Team Manager who will contact the service user to see if things can be resolved. Once investigations are complete, the Manager will then write to explain what they have found and what action they propose to take.

If the service user is not happy that the problem has been resolved they can ask for their complaint to move to

Stage 2: A formal investigation led by an Independent Complaints Officer. A leaflet is available with details of the procedure. If the person making the complaint is still dissatisfied they can ask for the complaint to be heard at stage 3: A Review Panel. This panel will consist of three people, two who are independent of Children's Social Care and a third who is a Senior Manager from the department but who has not been involved in previous stages. The adjudicating officer will send a letter to advise the person making the complaint of the outcome of this stage.

9. Information on how to contact the Regulator

Ofsted

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Contact: General enquiries

General enquiries

0300 123 1231

Feedback

We would welcome feedback about the contents of this Statement of Purpose. If you would like to share your views, comments or concerns please contact:

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Appendix 1: Fostering Team Structure Chart April 2024

