



Adoption Makes a Difference

Cumbria County Council
ADOPTION SERVICE
STATEMENT OF
PURPOSE
2017-2018



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1. Introduction

This statement has been produced in accordance with adoption legislation and regulatory framework including The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (revised 2011), The Adoption Minimum Standards 2011, Adopters Charter 2011, The Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012 and the Action Plan for Adoption, Tackling Delay 2012. The statement outlines the Cumbria Adoption Service, our aims and objectives, principles and values. It also describes the services that are provided and how we monitor these services, and manage our performance against the objectives. The statement is reviewed annually.

Within 28 days of any amendment the Adoption Statement of Purpose must be sent to the Chief Inspector of Ofsted and be published on the Cumbria website.

The document will be made available upon request by any person working for the purposes of the Adoption and Fostering Service, children who may be adopted, their parents and guardians; people wishing to adopt a child, adopted persons, their parents, birth parents and former guardians

Adoption Policy Statement

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 want 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.

We believe children should remain with their birth family wherever possible when this is in the best interests of the child and where all of their needs will be consistently met in a safe and caring home. However, we recognize that sometimes that is not possible for a number of reasons. We believe that all children need a permanent home and family. (Cumbria Permanence Policy)

The Adoption Service is one of a range of services provided for children that help to achieve this vision. More information about children's services in Cumbria can be found on the Cumbria County Council website at

www.cumbria.gov.uk/adoption

Adoption provides permanence for many children, along with a sense of belonging, of having their own family who will care for them and meet their needs.

Cumbria's Adoption Service is child-centered and recognises the lifelong nature of adoption through the following services:

- Information, advice and counselling for parents who wish to choose adoption for their child
- Care planning for children where their parents or extended family members are unable to care for them
- Recruitment and commissioning of sufficient adopters to enable a realistic choice of a family for Cumbrian children
- Preparation, training, assessment and approval of adoptive applicants
- Family finding for children
- Matching and linking of children to families

- Support for the introduction, and placement of children with adopters
- Assessment of the support needs of those touched by adoption, specifically the adopted child, the adoptive parent and their family, birth parents, birth relatives and adopted adults
- Provision of information about the range of services available to those touched by adoption
- Provision of services to support those touched by adoption
- A counselling service for adopted adults who wish to have access to information about their birth family, and their adoption records
- Intermediary Service for birth relatives who wish to seek information about their adopted child or relative
- Inter-country adoption. Those wishing to apply to adopt a child from overseas will be referred to The Inter Country Adoption Centre who provide this service for us
- Independent counselling is provided to birth parents and relatives where a plan for adoption is made for a looked after child through our Affected by Adoption Service.

2. Aims and Objectives

Cumbria County Council's Adoption Service has the following aims and objectives:

The central purpose of the Adoption Service is to provide secure and loving homes for Cumbrian children, who for any reason, cannot be cared for permanently by their parents or other relatives under another legal order, and to provide and develop services for all those affected by adoption, by consultation/participation/joint working with adopted adults, adopters and their children.

Objective A

- To maximise the contribution adoption can make in promoting permanent families for looked after children.
- To promote the long-term welfare of all children in Cumbria who may need adoption, seeking best outcomes for them through excellent health and social care, education and therapeutic services.
- To promote a positive sense of identity by respecting their heritage, providing relevant information and helping them to understand their history.

Objective B

- To ensure that all the Adoption National Minimum Standards are met within the adoption service.

Objective C

- To recruit, prepare, assess and approve prospective adopters (including foster carers wishing to adopt a child in their care) who have

the potential to adopt children in Cumbria or elsewhere who need to be adopted.

- To match children who need adoption carefully with families who are able to meet all their needs, until they grow up.

Objective D

- To support adopters to help them provide a family for life.
- To provide support services to all adoptive families (including inter-country adoption) to enable the children's placements to last into adulthood and beyond.
- To prevent adoption placement breakdowns.
- To respond sensitively to the short and long-term needs of parents and other birth relatives of children who may be or have been adopted.
- To provide information and advice on adoption issues to all those with an interest in the subject.
- To advise adopted adults seeking information about their history or wishing to trace birth family members.
- To assist people searching for or seeking information about a relative who has been adopted.
- To seek continuously to improve adoption services in the county within available resources.

Objective E

- To provide an Adoption Service that is timely, fair and transparent to all who have an interest in the adoption service.
- To promote a service committed to equality and diversity to all those affected by adoption by having regard to the ethnicity, faith, sexuality or disability of applicants and children requiring adoption.

Objective F

- To maintain a qualified, experienced and skilled staff to satisfy the objectives of the service.

Service aims 2017 – 2018

In addition to the above the Adoption Service is working:

- To achieve the County target in adoption: that 70% of children are placed within 12 months of the decision they should be adopted.
- To recruit at least 30 new adoptive families who can offer a home to the children waiting for placement, including Foster to adopt, older children and siblings.
- To purchase suitable adoptive placements from other agencies where we cannot meet the needs of children in a timely way with in-house adopters.
- To prepare foster carers to adopt where appropriate for the child.
- To extend support group services to birth parents and family members, e.g. Grandparents.
- To seek the views of all those affected by adoption on the further development of the service by providing feedback forms to all service users.
- To ensure that where the need is identified, prospective adoptive applicants receive an Attachment Style Interview (ASI) early in the assessment process.
- To increase the availability of therapeutic services to adopted children and families in the County, including referrals to the adoption Support Fund.
- To provide a Life Appreciation Day for all children over 3 years with a plan for adoption.

3. Structure and Personnel

Introduction

3.1 Cumbria County Council Adoption Service is part of Children's Services and is managed by the Service Manager, Adoption and Fostering.

- There is a Team Manager for recruitment and assessment of adopters, mainstream and Connected Persons foster carers and a Team Manager for Adoption Support Services.
- There is a Team Manager Adoption and Fostering Adviser/Family Finding post to ensure quality assurance, manage panel members' activity and training and to quality assure reports in respect of obtaining the agency decision where the plan for the child is adoption. This post is also responsible for leading on matching and family finding.
- There are 8.6 FTE Recruitment and Assessment Team Social Workers with a target of providing 30 new adoptive families and 15 additional new foster families this year.
- There are 7.2 FTE Adoption Support Social Workers who support adoptive families from the point of approval onwards, including Letterbox exchange service, and a 0.5 Social Worker post providing independent services for birth parents whose children are in Court proceedings. One of the Adoption Support Social Work posts provides specialist therapeutic services to children with a plan of adoption, adopted children and their families.
- There are 3 experienced Social Workers who lead on Family Finding and timely progression of adoption matches.

Social Workers in the service work closely with colleagues in the Children's Teams, and in partnership with all those involved in providing partnership working to achieve adoption for children.

The Cumbria Adoption Team is a county wide service with staff in four office locations.

Qualifications and Experience

The Service Manager is a qualified Social Worker with over 30 years experience of Child Care Social Work and Adoption. Her qualifications include; BA (Hons) English and Psychology, CQSW and PG Diploma in Social Work, PG Diploma in Child Protection, CCETSW Practice Teacher's Award and NVQ5 in Operational Management.

Managers within the service are experienced and registered with HCPC and have access to managerial training courses. There are clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the service. All social workers are suitably qualified and registered with HCPC and have access to post qualification training and award schemes.

Details of the staff in the service are given below:

Adoption and Fostering Team (Assessment and Recruitment):

- 1 Team Manager
- 1 Advanced Practitioner
- 8.6 fte Social Workers
- 1 fte Adoption and Fostering Support Worker

Adoption Support Team:

- 1 Team Manager
- 1 Advanced Practitioner
- 7.2 fte Social workers
- 1.15 fte Adoption and Fostering Support Worker

Adoption and Fostering Advisor and Family Finding Service

- 1 Team Manager
- 3 Social Workers

Plus Central Support and Business Support staff:

Cumbria County Council has two Adoption Panels, one in the North and one in the South of the county.

The Cumbria County Council Adoption Panel is the primary mechanism for the placement of children. The membership is reviewed regularly to ensure the broad range of interests in adoption matters is fully represented and currently comprises:

- An Independent Chair
- A Medical Adviser
- A pool of members available to ensure Panel is quorate, this is made up from a central list of Panel members which include:
 - Social work representatives from Children's Services
 - Independent Members who have personal experience of adoption
 - Elected Members.

The Adoption Panel also has 2 advisers who are not members but are present at the Panel meetings to give advice when required:

- A Legal Adviser
- The Agency Adviser

The Adoption Panel makes recommendations to the Agency. Decisions are then made by the Agency Decision Maker for Cumbria County Council, this role being currently carried out by the Senior Manager, Children Looked After Provider Services.

4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Management of Service

The performance of the Cumbria Adoption Service is monitored to measure how well we are doing, and this contributes to the evaluation of Cumbria County Council's performance as a whole. Overall responsibility for Children's Services rests with the Lead Member for Children's Services, and the links between the service and the executive are important in ensuring effective service delivery. The Adoption Service is an important part of delivering the Children Looked After strategy to provide security, care and stability for children at risk.

The Children's Services Children Looked After Strategy was updated in September 2016 and key performance targets are set. These are included in the Adoption Service and Adoption Team plans and monitored monthly. The adoption scorecard provides data that is gathered nationally every six months. In addition, we report quarterly and annually to the Adoption Leadership Board.

Reports on the business activity of the Adoption Service are presented twice yearly by the Advisor and Service Manager. The report includes details of how standards have been met and other aspects of quality assurance. The Independent Panel Chair will raise any matters of concern with the Panel Advisor, Service Manager and Agency Decision Maker. A County Councilor is a member of each of the Adoption Panels. The Senior Manager; Children Looked After is responsible, on behalf of the Directorate Management Team, for leading the inspections of the service, agreeing and monitoring the improvement plan to meet any requirements and recommendations made by the Inspectors of the service

Performance Indicators for the Service's Aims and Objectives

Specific performance indicators have been identified for each of the Service's Aims and Objectives. The indicators are as follows:

Objective A

- **To maximise the contribution adoption can make in promoting permanent families for looked after children etc.**

Where it has been agreed that adoption is in the best interests of a looked after child, Cumbria's Adoption Service aims to secure a suitable permanent family for that child without unnecessary delay and to support families in providing a placement for life.

Measures of Success / Performance Indicators

Target – 70% of children who are in the care of Cumbria County Council will be placed within 12 months of the decision.

Objective B

- **To ensure that all the Adoption National Minimum Standards are met within the Adoption Service and Cumbria County Council.**

Cumbria County Council's Adoption Service is inspected by OFSTED against the Adoption National Minimum Standards. The 2015 Inspection Report is available on the OFSTED website. It is the Adoption Service's aim to meet all the required standards and to work in partnership with regional groups and other adoption agencies to achieve this.

Measures of Success / Performance Indicators

Copies of the six monthly reports are presented to the Assistant Director, Placement Commissioning Board and the Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure that minimum standards are met.

Objective C

- **To recruit sufficient adopters to enable a realistic choice of family for Cumbria children etc.**

The number and range of children and young people for whom the Court has made a Placement Order is carefully monitored by the Adoption Advisor. Cumbria Adoption Service aims to target recruitment of adopters to those who fit the profile of the families needed by the children and young people waiting for adoption. This enables resources to be concentrated on finding the right families for Cumbria's Looked After children.

Measures of Success / Performance Indicators

To complete the assessment and approval of 30 new adoptive families in 2017/18

Cumbria's Adoption Service aims to recruit and approve adopters who can provide a family for life and the service will strive to work with and support those families to enable this to happen.

Measures of Success / Performance Indicators

The numbers of disruptions of adoption placements in Cumbria is monitored annually.

The ratio of disruptions of adoptive placements of Cumbrian children is compared with both regional and national figures (where available), annually. Cumbria experiences low rates of disruption.

Objective D

- **To support adopters to help them provide a family for life etc.**

It is recognised that by adopting children and young people, families need continuing support. Cumbria Adoption Services placed 66 children in 2016/17, aiming to maintain this level in 2017/18 to reflect the number of children with a plan for adoption. We aim to create a culture of support to families throughout the lifetime of the adoption and by working in partnership with adopters and other agencies to ensure that families feel supported and able to ask for assistance at any point.

Measures of Success / Performance Indicators

In 2016/17 the Adoption Support Team provided a service to 94 families. This figure increases each year as we place more children, and children with complex needs, and is monitored by the Team Manager.

The team offers a wide range of services including therapeutic work to promote attachments and manage challenging behavior as well as running training and workshops, support groups and specific groups across the County. The support available in addition to individual work is detailed in the annual calendar of events.

The team already works closely with Cumbria's Educational Support staff to provide extra help to those children who require support to settle into the school environment. We have a therapeutic social worker who works with families to promote better preparation for placement, contribute to matching and to prevent

disruptions. The team will support our families throughout their "lifelong" adoption journey and vary the support provided to reflect this.

We also commission services for families giving access to Psychological assessments and support 2 days a week and a Family Therapy service 3 days per month. Applications are made to the Adoption Support Fund to provide additional therapeutic support for children and young people where required.

For those in need of an assessment for adoption support the adoption support team will offer a consultation session to complete an initial assessment, informing the level of intervention needed. These are run monthly across the County

The team requests feedback from adopters, children and other agencies about the quality of all support services provided.

Objective E

To provide an Adoption Service that is timely, fair and transparent to all. The Cumbria Adoption Service has aims and objectives, which are reviewed on an annual basis. Cumbria's Adoption Service will provide clear information to all stakeholders on what services can be provided and what cannot. All stakeholders will be treated equally and fairly and will always be given the opportunity to raise any concerns about the service.

Measures of Success / Performance Indicators

To record the percentage of adopters' assessments completed within 2 months at stage 1, and 4 months at stage 2, after making a formal application.

To report on the number and outcome of any complaints by adopters or anyone else receiving a service from the Adoption Service.

To carry out consultation with children, adoptive families and young people to evaluate their satisfaction with the services, measured via feedback, both formal and informal.

Through file audit, ensure that all adopters receive a working agreement, whenever an assessment is undertaken.

Through feedback forms from those receiving a service.

- **To provide a service that promotes equality and diversity.**

To reflect the Cumbria Equality and Diversity Policy document in place for all services. The additional support provided by trained Adoption Support Social Workers and commissioned services to children aged three and over and those with complex needs ensures any placement is fully supported to succeed. The matching process is rigorous and efficient.

Objective F

- **To maintain a qualified, experienced and skilled staff group to satisfy the objectives of the Adoption Service.**

Cumbria's Adoption Service aims to provide good quality services with a sufficient number of well-trained staff. The service aims to ensure that all staff are trained and vacancies are kept to a minimum to ensure that the aims and objectives are consistently achieved.

Measures of Success / Performance Indicators

To ensure that all staff complete sufficient training days for their continued registration with the HCPC.

To recruit and retain staff in the service to meet service needs.

To ensure that minimum time is taken to fill staff vacancies and reduce the amount of working time which is lost due to vacancies.

5. Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Support to Prospective Adopters

Cumbria County Council's Adoption Service has a Recruitment Strategy setting out the plan to recruit adopters to meet the needs of children with plans for adoption.

- Enquires of interest about adoption are received through a dedicated telephone number or the web page. Telephone enquiries are initially received by a member of the Business Support team who takes basic details. This ensures a timely response to all enquirers. The details are passed on to the Recruitment and Assessment Team Duty Worker who makes contact to complete the initial enquiry. Online enquiries are picked up directly by the Recruitment and Assessment Team and the duty worker contacts the enquirer and takes the Initial Enquiry. Information is provided at this point about Cumbrian children in need of adoption and how applications are prioritized.
- Initial Enquiries are then allocated to a Social Worker who then has a detailed discussion with the enquirer. Where there is no immediate bar to adoption the enquirer will be offered an Initial visit. At this visit the enquirer will be provided with more detail about the process towards becoming an adopter and the service offered. The visit is also undertaken as an Initial Assessment to ensure that applicants to be assessed are those most likely to meet the needs of Cumbria children who are in need of an adoptive placement. Management oversight is completed on all Initial visit reports and a decision made as to whether the enquiry will be progressed.

- Prospective adopters will be invited to formally “Register their Interest” in adopting with Cumbria County Council. Within 5 working days, Cumbria County Council will make a decision on acceptance of the “Registration of Interest” and if agreed the adopters will enter the Stage One process.

Stage 1 – an agreement with the prospective adopters will be completed which requires the following checks to be completed within 2 months:- Statutory checks and medical information, DSB checks are taken up on any other person in the prospective adopters’ household aged 18 years and over and all applicants undertake pre-approval training; “Preparing to Adopt” – which is a three day course. All applicants are requested to complete a Stage 1 Workbook.

- **Stage 2** - an agreement with the prospective adopters will be completed which requires the formal assessment process to take 4 months from this point until an Agency Decision is made following the report being presented to the Adoption Panel. Any issues that extend the assessment process will be recorded and agreed by a Manager. This includes any request from the applicants for further time for reflection or other reasons
- Assessments are undertaken in accordance with Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and 2011 and are completed by a qualified Social Worker.
- Selected prospective adopters receive an Attachment Style Interview (ASI) as part of their assessment where this will assist future matching. This can take place in either Stage 1 or 2.
- All adoptive applications are considered by the Adoption Panel, which makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about their approval. The Agency Decision Maker will make a decision within 7 working days of receipt of the Panel minutes/recommendation.

- Applicants are invited to attend Panel when their suitability to adopt is considered.
- All prospective adopters are supported by a Social Worker throughout their assessment and approval. A Social Worker from the Adoption Support Team is allocated following approval and works with the family through the matching process and during the placement of a child.
- A matching plan is completed with adopters following their approval and the transfer to the Adoption Support Team. This agreement is drawn up between Cumbria County Council's Adoption Service and the adopter(s) setting out responsibilities and expectations as well as the agreed training and development plan.
- Approved adopters are invited to attend Panel when the suitability of a match with them is being considered.
- Prior to any placement of a child, both the adoptive family's and the child's support needs will be assessed. Support plans are agreed with the adopters as part of the Placement report and plans are reviewed regularly up until the time an Adoption Order is made.



6. Adoption Support Services to Adopters and Their Families

The Cumbria Adoption Service is committed to supporting everyone affected by adoption throughout their life. A range of Support Services is provided by the Adoption Support Team in Cumbria:

- Telephone, postal advice and email information and signposting service.
- A consultation service
- Assessment of those in need of an Adoption Support service.
- Short-term specialist interventions, e.g. revisiting life-story work, contact, attachment issues, challenging behaviour.
- Psychological and Therapeutic Services (details section 4) and through the Therapeutic Social Worker post.
- Assistance with Letterbox contact system as appropriate. This may include administrative support, recording and monitoring, advice on writing letters and mediation on contact arrangements and a review of those arrangements.
- Counselling in preparation for tracing, intermediary services, reunion and post-reunion support.
- Access to support groups and workshops for members of adoptive families, adopted children and young people and adult adoptees and birth parents.

- Access to information about resources such as videos and books and a monthly newsletter for adoptive families.
- Opportunities for networking with other adoptive families including the annual adoption 'Fun Day'.
- Referral to specialist local resources e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Teams, commissioned therapeutic services, Multi Professional support teams, Education Specialists.
- Applications to the Adoption Support Fund in relation to therapeutic needs where appropriate.



7.Complaints

Cumbria County Council has 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 Cumbria County Council 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 Corporate Director of Children's Services will send a letter to advise the person making the complaint of the outcome of this stage.

Children and young people

There is a Children's Guide to adoption that details Cumbria County Council's complaints procedure, which is made available for children for whom adoption planning is taken forward or who are placed with adopters. The Complaints Manager, alongside a representative of the National Youth Advocacy Service, with whom we have a service level agreement, deals with complaints from young people.

The Guide also includes National Help-lines available to all Young people.

All complaints and compliments made to the service are the subject of a monitoring procedure. This assists service development and development of good practice.

The outcomes of complaints are regularly reviewed so that lessons can be learnt by the service.

Adopters and adopted children are also able to make complaints to OFSTED who are responsible for the inspection and registration of the Adoption Service. An inspector from the Commission can be contacted at:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings,
St. Anns Square,
Manchester,
Lancashire
M2 7EF
Tel: 0845 6404040

Feedback

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

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