

Cumbria Adoption



Statement of

Purpose

October 2023



0303 333 1216



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Working for Cumberland Council and
Westmorland & Furness Council

cumbriaadoption.org.uk

Contents

1. Introductions	1
2. Principles and values	2
3. The aim and objectives of the agency	3
4. Organisational structure of the agency and service users	4
5. The work of the adoption service	4
6. Qualifications, experience and numbers of staff	5
7. The service for prospective adopters	6
8. The adoption support service	12
9. Monitoring and evaluation of the adoption service	14
10. Concerns and complaints	14

1. Introduction

It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards for adoption services, that an adoption service produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives and a description of the service and facilities that it provides. It can be used by children and young people, and families as a guide to what they should expect a service to provide and to do.

This document is the Statement of Purpose for Cumbria Adoption. Cumbria Adoption is a shared adoption service working across the two local authorities of Cumberland, and Westmorland and Furness following Local Government Reorganisation in April 2023. This arrangement is operated under the terms of a Partnership Agreement between the two authorities. Cumberland Council hosts the partnership, employing all staff within the adoption service.

The Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011
- Care Planning Regulations 2010
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011)
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Local Authority Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011
- Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012
- Care Planning, Placement and Case and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Standards Act 2000

Adoption Agencies are inspected against these standards by Ofsted

2. Principles and values

The requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 underpin the principles and values of our service.

Principles and values: Children

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond, and where possible this should be within their own family;
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process;
- The child's wishes and feelings will be taken into account at all stages;
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children, and should be avoided wherever possible;
- The child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality will be fully recognised, positively valued and promoted when decisions are made;
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made;
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected;
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to deliver services;
- Birth/First parents and families are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

Equal opportunities

The adoption service abides by equal opportunities legislation and the policies of Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils. The service works positively and respectfully with all service users and partner agencies regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age.

Every attempt will be made to secure an adoptive family which meets a child's emotional and developmental needs taking into account their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability whilst being mindful the need to avoid undue delay.

3. Aims and objectives of the agency

The agency is committed to fulfilling the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Children and Families Act 2014 by:

1. Ensuring the provision of a high-quality adoption service which guarantees the best possible standards of care, safety and protection of children or young people who are looked after and who need adoptive placements.
2. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services.
3. Working in partnership with adoptive families and other agencies, ensuring the service is based on statutory requirements and good practice within the principles of value for money for the agency.

Objectives of the agency:

1. To recruit, assess and provide adopters that meet the needs of the children to be placed for adoption within the timescales laid down by National Adoption Standards.
2. To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption.
3. To ensure that adopters receive appropriate preparation, training, support and advice to enable them to offer the best possible standards of parenting, safety and protection for children or young people in their care.
4. To minimise delay in family finding, paying attention to the needs of the child at all times
5. To provide information on the services available to all those affected by adoption, recognising that as adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved and that their needs will change over time.
6. To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives, adopted adults, adopters and their children, in partnership with other agencies.
7. To provide information on the service that is available to those wishing to adopt from abroad; to ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair.
8. That concerns about the service are addressed and that information about the complaints procedure is made available.
9. That the organisation regularly reviews the services it provides, consults with, and learns from, those in receipt of their services through comments, compliments and complaints.

Cumbria Adoption provides an adoption service to:

- Children in need of an adoptive family
- Birth/First families
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Children and adoptive parents who need adoption support services
- Adopted adults

4. Organisational structure of the agency

Service Manager			
Ruth McHugh			
Recruitment & Assessment Team	Adoption Support Team	Permanence & Panels	Childrens Adoption Team
Zoe Chambers	Jane Gray	Yvonne Eardley	Ann Peerless
Social Workers Rhonna Serrano Helen Dixon Penny Hindle Ali Beattie Sue Huntley Marketing Richard Eccles	Advanced Practitioner Louise McConochie Social Workers Claire Colvan Sam Pringle Lucy Needham Estelle Ashbridge Liz Agar Margaret Murphy Support Workers Debbie Jackson Louise Davies	Hannah Dixon Laura Parker Lyndsey Mayne	Advanced Practitioner Kim Conyers Social Workers 4.4 Permanent 2 additional fixed term Support Workers Liz Burns Pat Clark Kayleigh Ward

5. The work of the adoption service

The service undertakes the following tasks:

Recruitment of prospective adoptive families.

Assessment and preparation of adoptive families, including visits to the home, meeting with the family network, taking up references and statutory checks and running preparation training.

Family finding for children who need a permanent home through adoption.

Support for families waiting for a child to be placed with them.

Advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process and after placement. This includes workshops and training and support groups.

Those wishing to adopt from abroad are referred to another agency that provide a service under contract for Cumbria Adoption.

The family finding team become involved with every child where adoption may be the plan during the decision-making process and takes the lead in family finding at the earliest point possible.

Children's social workers and adoption social workers undertake the task of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption. The responsibility for matching and supporting adoptive families is a shared task until the Adoption Order.

The Adoption Letterbox and contact service enables adopted children to maintain contact with their birth/first families.

Access to records service is provided.

Support and signposting to counselling services for adopted adults wishing to find out about their birth families and an Intermediary service are provided. .

Information about all aspects of the adoption service can be accessed via the Cumbria Adoption website. Cumbria Adoption social media channels provide additional channels to share information with prospective adopters and wider audiences. Approved adopters and adoptive families have access to the annual Calendar of events and regular updates on services available.

All enquiries are followed through by an Adoption Support Worker. Approved interpreters will be used if required.

The main office for communication is:

Cumbria House, 117 Botchergate, Carlisle. CA1 1RD

Staff are also based in offices in West Cumbria House in Workington, Kendal County Hall and Penrith Children's Centre.

6. Qualifications, experience and numbers of staff

Ruth McHugh is the Service Manager for Cumbria Adoption.

Qualifications: Degree in English and Psychology; PG Diploma in Social Work and Certificate of Qualification in Social Work; PG Diploma in Child Protection; NVQ Level 5 Certificate in Operational Management; MSc in Professional Practice (Senior Leadership); Institute of Leadership and Management (Senior Leadership) Ruth is an experienced social worker and manager across the full range of Children's Services and has been a service manager in adoption services since 2013.

The agency has four Team Managers:

Zoe Chambers manages the Recruitment and Assessment Team and leads on recruitment and assessment of adopters, including some matching. Zoe holds a BSc Hons Degree in Criminology, an MA in Applied Social Science and a Diploma in Social Work. She also holds a CEL management qualification awarded by the University of Manchester. Zoe is an experienced social worker who has worked in Children's Services since 2000 and has been a manager in adoption services since 2011.

Jane Gray manages the Adoption Support Team and is Adoption Support Services Adviser. Jane holds a BA Hons Degree in Sociology, a CQSW and BTEC management qualification. Jane has worked for Children's Services since 1991 and has been an adoption manager since 2005.

Yvonne Eardley manages the Panels and Permanence Team and is the Panel Adviser and Adviser to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to children's plans of adoption. Qualifications: BA Hons Degree in French; MA Degree Social Work Theory; PG Diploma in Social Work and Certificate of Qualification. Yvonne has worked in children and families social work and has worked in adoption since 2015. She has been an adoption manager since 2017.

Ann Peerless manages the Children's Adoption Team. Qualifications – Degree in Social Work awarded in 2000. She has worked as a social worker in child protection, child in need and children looked after, and has been a team manager since 2003. She has been an adoption manager since 2019.

7. The service for prospective adopters

Enquiries and first contact

Enquirers can access information on adopting with Cumbria Adoption via the website or make contact through the dedicated advice line. At first contact, enquirers are given information verbally about the adoption process. They are also encouraged to attend an information event or a bookable private appointment to find out more.

Applications for adoptions from overseas

Inter-country adoption is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own rules and regulations regarding adoption. Cumbria Adoption has a contract with another agency to provide this work. Applicants pay a fee for their assessment service, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc.

Information events and bookable appointments

People interested in adoption are able to attend an information event or bookable private appointment to find out more. Information events are delivered online where the enquirer(s) can take part from the comfort of their own home. Information events provide an opportunity for enquirers to hear from adopters and experienced adoption social workers with opportunities to ask questions. Details of both of these opportunities are available on the Cumbria Adoption website.

Initial home visit

Enquirers wishing to progress will be offered a home visit to find out more. The home visit is undertaken by an adoption social worker who will provide more information about adoption. The personal circumstances of adopters will be discussed in detail to help them consider if adoption is the right choice for them at this time. The social worker will also start discussions about practical considerations.

A detailed summary of the home visit will be completed and passed to an adoption manager before the Registration of Interest form is provided. The adoption manager will make a decision within 5 days of receipt of the completed Registration of Interest form about whether it should be accepted.

If accepted, the enquirer becomes known as a prospective adopter(s). A letter will be sent to the prospective adopter(s) confirming that their application is proceeding or detailing the reasons why their Registration of Interest cannot be accepted.

Stage 1 of the assessment process

Stage One begins on the day that Cumbria Adoption accepts the Registration of Interest from the prospective adopter(s), and should normally take 2 months to complete.

The stage one process will include the following:

- All the statutory references/checks will be completed including the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check;
- The prospective adopter(s) will complete an adoption medical as soon as possible. This will be considered by the adoption agency medical adviser, who will provide advice about any concerning medical issues;
- The prospective adopter(s) will be required to attend training/preparation sessions. This will give prospective adopter(s) more detailed information and will allow them to meet experienced adopters who can help answer questions that they have;
- The prospective adopter(s) will complete a stage 1 workbook;
- A social worker will be allocated to support prospective adopters in completing the Stage One process and a workbook and an agreement will be drawn up with prospective adopters detailing expectations.

Preparation sessions

Prospective adopters will be invited to attend in Stage One 3-day training. The process will be delayed if applicants are unable to attend initial preparation, and a clear indication of their availability will be ascertained. They will also be encouraged to access e-learning components on the First4Adoption and other websites.

Preparation groups for first time adopters usually run 6 times per year, based on need. Experienced adopter training is provided at regular intervals as required, and foster carers applying to adopt will be encouraged to attend the training offered to all prospective adopters. Additional training sessions are provided to adopters considering Early Permanence.

Stage 2 of the assessment process

The Stage Two assessment process cannot begin until Stage One has successfully been completed (apart from second time and foster carer adoptions, see next page).

Stage Two begins when prospective adopters notify the agency of their wish to continue with the process. The prospective adopter(s) have 6 months from the completion of Stage One to provide this notification. From the date of receipt of this notification, the Stage Two process is a 4-month long period during which a detailed assessment is undertaken. This leads to a panel recommendation and an Agency Decision about suitability to adopt.

The prospective adopter(s) will be allocated an adoption social worker to complete their assessment. A Stage Two plan will be drawn up between the social worker and the prospective adopter(s) agreeing arrangements for the assessment process and a provisional Adoption Panel date.

The assessment will involve a series of home visits utilising a variety of assessment tools and will include updated checks from stage one such as finances and health and safety. Personal referees will also be visited. Mandatory training on therapeutic parenting is also part of Stage Two assessment.

On the basis of the assessment the adoption social worker will write a Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR). This is a very detailed report providing information about the prospective adopter(s) and their background. The report will analyse the information and reach a conclusion about the prospective adopters(s) suitability to adopt, and the applicants will have up to 5 working days to comment on their completed assessment before it is submitted to the Adoption Panel.

If the agency reaches a decision during the Stage Two process that they cannot recommend approval and/or if the agency decision maker decides not to agree the approval, the prospective adopter(s) will be able to request a review by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The IRM is an independent body that can scrutinise the decisions of adoption agencies.

Adoption by existing foster carers

Foster carers should notify the service in writing of their wish to be considered as adopters for a child or children in their care. If the child/children's plan is for adoption, this will be acknowledged and a meeting held between workers from the adoption and fostering teams, and the child's social worker, to consider how this should be progressed. It will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights. The child's team will complete an initial viability report.

A fast-track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents. Stages one and two of the adoption processes will take place concurrently to avoid delay.

Second time or subsequent adopters

Families who have previously been assessed as adopters can apply to adopt again as long as there is a year's gap following their child's adoption order being made and a two-year age gap between their child and a potential new child. In this case, they would express an interest in adopting again and be offered an initial visit to discuss their circumstances. They would then complete the Registration of Interest form and, if accepted, start the process. Stages one and two of the process will usually run concurrently and training will be provided.

If their interest is in respect of a subsequent sibling or half-sibling of a child they have already adopted, the timescales and age gap would not necessarily apply. This assessment would be given high priority and the initial visit would involve the child's social worker too. In these cases, stages one and two would run concurrently.

Adoption Panel

The main purpose of the Adoption Panel is to consider and make recommendations to the adoption agency on the following:

- People to be approved as adoptive parents;
- Reviews of adopter approval where there has been a significant change;
- Whether an assessment to approve adopters should continue following a brief report to panel;
- Approval of the match between children and adopters;
- The placement of children for adoption where their birth parents request adoption to be the plan;

Cumbria Adoption has a joint panel across the two local authorities, holding two Adoption Panels per month, with additional panels arranged if needed. The panels are led by one of the two Independent Chairs, both of whom have significant experience of adoption work.

Membership of the panels meets the statutory regulations and takes its members from a central list. Members include those who have personal experience of adoption and others with relevant skills and experience, and aim to reflect the diversity of the population of the area.

All applicants are invited to attend the Adoption Panel. The panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who will make their decision following careful consideration of the recommendations and all the information presented at panel. The Decision Maker must make their decision within seven working days of receipt of the finalised minutes of the panel. They may make a decision different to that recommended by the panel.

Cumbria Adoption has an Agency Decision Maker employed by both councils who considers the approval of prospective adopters and also makes decisions relating to the children's plan of adoption and the matching of children with adopters.

Decisions are notified to a child's parent(s), guardian(s) and prospective adopter(s). Social workers will be informed of the agency decision within two working days. The decision will be confirmed in writing to applicants within five working days.

Beyond approval: matching and support

Following panel, adopters are supported by an experience adoption social worker, usually from the Adoption Support Team. Arrangements relating to any outstanding identified need for training and development work will be agreed to help them prepare for a child coming into their family. Adoption social workers ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist national organisations.

There is a one-day training course available for friends or relatives who are supporting the adopter/s and wish to have more in-depth information regarding adoption, called Related by Adoption. This is in addition to family network meetings in assessment and when a match is being considered.

The adopter/s' social worker will work with Family Finders to respond to requests and explore identify suitable matches for a child/children, and will provide support and guidance to adopters throughout the whole process. All prospective adopters are provided with access to Link Maker to explore possible matches when they choose to take this route. Each child where adoption is the plan will have an allocated worker from the family finding team. The family finder works closely with the child's social worker to consider matches for that child.

Each child where adoption is the plan will have an allocated worker from the Family Finding Team. The family finder works closely with the child's social worker to consider matches for that child.

When a match is being considered adopters are given the Child Permanence Report and all appropriate written information about the child, their background and assessed needs. The report will include details of any proposal for contact, or exchange of information through the Letterbox system with the birth family that will operate once the child is adopted.

Adopters meet with the child's social worker and other professionals relevant for that child; medical advisors; child's foster carers; teachers etc. to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their ability to meet the needs of the child. A Child Appreciation Day will be arranged, depending on the child's age and circumstances, to help build as full a picture as possible of the child's experiences. A 'chemistry meeting' with the child will be arranged where agreed as needed.

Details of the level of parental responsibility that will be delegated to the prospective adopters will be outlined and any adoption support, including any financial arrangements, will also be discussed. The proposals for the placement will then be set out in the Adoption Placement Report, which will be seen by the prospective adopters, along with the support plan, before panel. The adopters' comments and observations will be included in the panel documentation.

Process for the matching of a child

The child's social worker, the prospective adopters and their social worker will attend the Adoption Panel. The process for panel is the same as for approval, with recommendations being made to the Agency Decision Maker, who will make the decision on whether the adopters are suitable for a particular child.

If a match is agreed an introductions planning meeting is arranged to plan for the introduction and placement of the child. Cumbria Adoption use the guiding principles of the UEA "Moving to Adoption" model which focuses on an individual plan tailored for each child which recognises the importance of maintaining connections. This meeting will involve the foster carer for the child, the prospective adopters, and the relevant social workers.

The meeting will establish that the adoptive family has all the information available about the child and will confirm the draft timetable and process for the introductions, monitoring and support. There will be a review meeting before the date of placement is confirmed.

There are some variations to this process if prospective adoptive parent/s are taking the Early Permanency route to adoption, are second-time adopters or foster carers adopting the child they have been fostering. These differences will be carefully explained to prospective adoptive parents from the beginning of their adoption process with us.

Annual reviews of prospective adopters

In the event that it is not possible to move to a match within 12 months from approval, the adoption social worker and their manager will conduct a review of the plans and checks and references may need to be updated. If no placement has been made within two years of approval, or if there is any significant change in circumstances, an updated report will go to adoption panel for consideration.

Meeting birth parents

It is our expectation that adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to or after placement, or both. They will be supported by their social workers in a suitable venue.

The benefit of meeting birth parents is so adoptive parents can talk to their child about their birth family and aid future contact arrangements. Adopters may also meet with the child's brothers or sisters and their carers.

After placement

Visits will be made by both the child's social worker and the family's adoption social worker. These are based on both statutory requirements and the individual needs of the child and prospective adopter(s).

The child remains a 'looked after' child until an Adoption Order is made. The child has to be visited in the first week of placement, followed by weekly visits up to the child's first statutory review up to 4 weeks post placement, when the pattern of visiting will be discussed and agreed but will be not less than six-weekly. The child's review will determine when an application to adopt may be made and advice will be given by the worker for the prospective adopters. The Annex A report for court will be prepared by both the family's and child's social workers and include an update from the Agency Medical Advisor.

A Life Story book will be provided for the child by the child's social work team and given to the adopters for ongoing open discussion and safe keeping for the child in the future. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring that a later life letter is completed before the Adoption Order is made, which will give an account of the circumstances of the adoption for the child when they are approaching teenage years.

Contact and the Letterbox service

Support with contact arrangements between adopted children and their birth families is provided by the agency. All contact arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child and will be specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed, although contact needs may change over time and original agreements can be re-visited. Contact

may include Letterbox contact, face-to-face meetings between the child and members of his/her family, including parents, siblings, or extended family members or other individual arrangements.

A Letterbox service may be set up between the adoptive parents on behalf of the child and a birth parent or any other relative or with any other person the agency considers relevant. Support and supervision of direct contact may be arranged where necessary and agreed.

8. Adoption support services

Cumbria Adoption has a comprehensive adoption support service for all those affected by adoption. This service is provided by staff in the service, as well as specialist commissioned services.

The adopters' social worker will ensure that adopters have access to local support networks and specialist organisations, e.g., Adoption UK, New Family Social and other services and are on the mailing list for any events organised through the adoption service.

The agency has a specialist adoption support team who offer a range of adoption support services. They also signpost to other services for those affected by adoption:

- Adoptive parents
- Adopted children and young people
- Birth relatives
- Adopted adults

The adoption support service provides adoption support services in line with the 'Adoption Passport' according to individual circumstances.

For adoptive families:

The adoption support team offers a range of services including training and support events, groupwork and bookable consultations. The team will also undertake an assessment of need with the family and will agree a support package based on the family's request and identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption Support Fund. Outcome-based measures will be used with the family.

The support offer includes:

- Duty service and newsletter;
- Calendar of events;
- Support groups including stay and play groups;
- Training and workshops including Openness in Adoption, Teenage Years PACE and Non-Violent Resistance;
- Therapeutic Parenting groups and access to Theraplay trained workers;
- Links with mental health and educational services including the virtual school;

- Assistance with and review of contact arrangements between adopters and birth relatives;
- Tri-annual social events for adoptive families.

Adopted children and young people:

- Groups and activities;
- Offering training and advice for schools to help teachers understand adopted children's needs;
- Working with children in their adoptive families around understanding their life stories;
- Signposting to other organisations designed to help adopted children;
- Information about accessing records from the age of 18 years.

Birth relatives:

- Access to a confidential and independent advice and counselling service;
- Support regarding Letterbox and contact arrangements;
- Enabling parents to record on their child's file whether or not they wish to have contact with their child from the age of 18.

For adopted adults:

- Discussion and advice about wishes around contact with and from birth relatives.

Information about our adoption services can be accessed via our telephone number **0303 333 1216** or duty mail box Adoption Support Team:
AdoptionSupportTeam@cumberland.gov.uk

9. Monitoring and evaluation of the adoption service

Adoption staff participate in regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance. Training needs are identified and met through in-house training or through externally commissioned trainers.

A management information system and government scorecard is in place which ensures reporting of accurate information about adoption.

Adoption Agencies are monitored by external inspections carried out by Ofsted.

There is regular Adoption Panel training to ensure that panel members keep up to date with current issues. Panel members also have annual appraisals.

Regular feedback is received from the Adoption Panels and twice-yearly meetings are held between the management team, Panel Chairs and Agency Decision Maker.

The Service Manager submits the annual and bi-annual report to both local authorities, in addition to quarterly and other performance reports as required.

A robust quality assurance framework is in place with regular auditing of records, plus evaluation of feedback from children, adoptive parents and other service users. This is held centrally and is undertaken at key points in the adoption process.

10. Concerns and complaints

All prospective adopters engaging with the agency, and all birth parents of a child with a plan of adoption, are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details for the Complaints Officer. All children, for whom there is an adoption plan, and who are of an appropriate age and understanding, are likewise informed of the complaints procedures and also informed of the role of the Children's Rights Service.

A copy of our complaints leaflet is available on our website: cumberland.gov.uk

Email: complaints.cumberland@cumberland.gov.uk

Details of the Registration Authority

OFSTED CONTACT DETAILS

Ofsted National Business Unit Piccadilly Gate Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone: **0300 123 1231** Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk