



Foster for Lancashire

Fostering Statement of Purpose

2023 - 2026



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1. Introduction

Lancashire County Council Fostering Service's Statement of Purpose is prepared in accordance with the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The regulations and guidance set out the requirement that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, which includes its aims and objectives, a description of the service it delivers and the facilities that are offered and provided.

The Statement of Purpose also links with the A – Z Children's Guide for being Looked After which is provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding at the point they move in with Lancashire County Council Fostering Families.

This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and is publicly available on our fostering website. A copy of this statement is also lodged with Ofsted.

This Statement of Purpose is approved by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.

This Statement of Purpose should be read in conjunction with Lancashire County Council's Children, Young People and Families Partnership Vision and Practice Statement.

The Statement of Purpose, Children and Parent's Guides are available on Lancashire County Council's website.

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2. Welcome by Councillor Cosima Towneley, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.

As Cabinet Member for Children and Families at Lancashire County Council, I am very proud of our fostering service. Our team was recognised by Ofsted, as part of our Children's Social Care inspection, for its continued commitment to improving and developing the Lancashire offer to fostering families and fostered children across Lancashire.



Our fostering service ensures children, who cannot remain safely living within their families, can have stable, loving homes with our foster families. The service has an excellent package of support available for our foster families and continues to participate in important research programmes to inform and extend the support we offer to foster families and children in our care.

Lancashire County Council's foster carer mentoring academy has been extremely successful in ensuring first time fosterers are supported by their peers. Our Fostering Communities programme has provided valuable support to our fostering families and the service continues to support children who grow up in a family who fosters.

We continue to expand our commitment to our foster carers through practical measures, including the implementation of an annual increase in foster fees and the emotional and therapeutic support for children in their care.

We value our fostering community and we know that Lancashire children who live within fostering families are more likely to grow up to achieve their potential.

In my role as Cabinet Member, I remain committed to the development of this special service and I look forward to seeing how we can build on our successes, continue to learn and adapt so we offer foster carers and fostered children to reach their potential in homes in Lancashire.

3. Principle aims and objectives.

Aims

Lancashire County Council is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children within Lancashire. The Fostering Service is committed to achieving continuous improvements and delivering the best possible outcomes for the children in our care by providing a range of high-quality foster families for our children to help them achieve and meet their potential within a safe and loving environment.

Lancashire's Fostering Service has developed a comprehensive service plan that incorporates key priorities and objectives for 2023 to 2027.

Our main aim is to provide an outstanding fostering service that not only supports and values our foster carers but ensures that our children feel safe and cared for within loving fostering families. Whilst we are a large Fostering Service, we aim to provide local support to our fostering families and our children that is personalised to their aspirations, identity, and individual needs.

Our values and core principles

The core principles that underpin our work include:

- Making sure the child or young person is at the absolute centre of every decision we make and action we take



- Involving our children, young people and their families in decisions that affect them - small ones and big ones
- Working with our children, young people, their families and social work teams to build on and continue to improve the menu of services we offer to meet ever changing need
- Develop purposeful and meaningful relationships with others to promote effective partnerships between services
- Breaking down barriers and supporting our children and young people to overcome barriers that prevent accessing the support and opportunities they need to thrive, both now and in their preparation for adulthood
- Work towards becoming a fully trauma informed Fostering Service so that children and young people are helped to overcome adversity

As a Fostering Service we have adopted an ethos and culture in which the core County Council Values are fully embedded:

Supportive - we support each other to enable our foster carers to feel supported and to be able to support our children.

Innovative - we pride ourselves on continuously seeking out new initiatives, pioneering projects and aspirational pilots that we can embrace and implement to ensure that our fostering service is the best it can be.

Respectful – we treat our children, foster carers, partners, and staff with respect. We take time to listen to their views, valuing and celebrating diversity. The Fostering Service practice approach is one that promotes; inclusivity, listening and valuing the diverse needs of our children, foster carers and workforce.

Collaborative - we welcome opportunities to work with our children, foster carers, staff and colleagues within the wider Council and partner agencies to ensure that we are developing and delivering services that meets need and demand.

We are embarking on our journey to delivering 'Outstanding' services to children and young people. The journey is underpinned by promoting openness and transparency of our work and valuing everyone we meet along our journey, whether that be colleagues, foster carers, staff, or our children.

Our core principles and values are the foundations upon which we have built and set our expectations for the service. The relationship between each is significant and one which is fundamental to our approach, and which has enabled us to develop our four key priority areas.



Our key priorities as a service:

- Priority One: Providing the right homes for our children at the right time in the right place (sufficiency).
- Priority Two: Supporting staff and carers to provide the best possible care to our children (workforce development).
- Priority Three: Providing services quickly and in the best way possible (processes and systems).
- Priority Four: Working with others to make sure we get it right (partnership and participation).

Our Objectives as a Fostering Service:

- Where children cannot remain within their families, we aim to ensure that we recruit each year as many suitable alternative fostering families to meet the needs of the children in our care. Our priority for 2023-2025 is to further increase the number of fostering families who can care for brothers and sisters together, children who need to step-down from residential care, older children and young people, children who have additional needs and foster carers who can help support birth parents to care for their children within a family environment.
- We seek to support all our fostering families to help improve the outcomes for the children they are caring for through individual, high quality, and local support. We listen to the voices of our children in care, our foster carers, and their families to continually improve our support to them. We have a dedicated team of emotional health practitioners who work with our staff and foster carers to understand and use therapeutic parenting approaches that support our children and fostering families to feel safe and secure.
- We strive to ensure that our fostering families feel supported and valued so that they continue to foster with us and ensure stability and security for our children. We will discuss further some of our new initiatives to support this objective below.
- We work with our fostering families to co-produce, co-design our service. Engagement and consultation are vitally important to us as a service to ensure that we are listening and amplifying the voices of our experts by experience to inform service developments.
- The development of the Fostering, Adoption and Residential Service, "Support For You" was a consultative piece of work completed with our children to demonstrate our commitment to our children and their fostering families.



Children, young people, foster carers and members of our staff team have worked together to produce the following support guide to underpin our practice:

Fostering, Adoption & Residential Support for You

We will support you so you have an excellent fostering, adoption and residential service.

We will find a home where you can feel safe, happy, and well cared for.

- If you are not able to live with your family, we try to find you a home with someone you know
- We will try to find you a home with your brothers and sisters
- We will try to find a home for you near to your family, friends and school
- We will try to find you a lasting home

We will listen to you, people who you involve you live with and people important to you, so we can help make sure you are happy.

- We will help support your family, and people important to you so you can spend time with them and keep in touch where possible.
- We will keep in touch with your social worker.
- We will keep your views at the heart of what we do.

We will support all who care for you, so they can help you feel happy, safe and you can reach your goals.

- To be healthy
- To have hobbies and interests
- To help you enjoy school
- To follow your dreams
- To join in with LINX our children in care group when you are ready.

To help us support you we need to meet the Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards. Adoption Lancashire & Blackpool is committed to working in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and regulations for Adoption. The Residential Service works within the Children's Homes Regulations 2015 (England and Wales).

4. Fostering activity

To meet our aims and key priorities we ensure our Fostering Service meets Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards and appropriate guidance whilst continuing to strive to be a forward thinking and intuitive Fostering Service that endeavours to improve outcomes for our children.

A key focus of the Fostering Service priorities is to ensure that wherever possible children can remain within their extended families or with adults who know them and can provide



continuity of care. We aim to work with families, listen to children's voices and consider what support both in the interim and longer term is needed to make such family arrangements successful.

We aim to support children to live in their lasting home at the earliest opportunity. Where children require lasting homes outside of their family, we aim to ensure stability and happiness until children are ready for independence in adulthood.

5. Providing services quickly and in the best way possible - Organisational structure - Structure of the Fostering Service & Services provided

Lancashire County Council's Fostering Service is part of the Fostering, Adoption Lancashire Blackpool (ALB) and Residential Service which has one dedicated Head of Service. Within the Fostering Service are three service areas of delivery:

Recruitment and Assessment & Supporting Children and Young People Together (SCAYT+)

Our Recruitment and Assessment Team and SCAYT+ team has one Senior Manager responsible for both individual team functions.

Our Recruitment and Assessment Team consists of 3 Team Managers, 12 Social Workers and 2 Support Workers. The function of the team is to recruit, prepare and assess prospective mainstream foster carers. The team works closely with our communications team to produce promotional campaigns that seek to not only recruit more fostering families but fostering families who can care for the children in our care in Lancashire. The team undertakes training and preparation throughout the assessment process and is inclusive and non-judgemental of all applicants considering the strengths and life experiences that they have to equip them to care for our children. There is a specific focus on recruitment of fostering families to care for our children who we find it harder to identify families for such as brothers and sisters, teenagers and older children, children and their parents, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and children with additional needs.

Our SCAYT+ (Supporting Children and Young People Together) Team consists of 1 Team Manager, 10 Emotional Health Practitioners and 2 part time Children's Psychologists. This team provides therapeutic support to staff and foster carers through training and targeted intervention that promotes a nurturing attachment approach to help carers to support children to overcome early adverse childhood experiences. This team also offers support to Special Guardians where children have been looked after and adoptive families within Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool.

Assessment with Family and Friends

Our Assessment with Family and Friends team consists of 1 Senior Manager, 5 Team Managers, 27 Social Workers and 4 Support Workers. The team works collaboratively with families to support them in considering whether they can care for children who may be a relative or friend either in an emergency or to provide lasting homes when children cannot return to birth parent's care. The team undertakes specialist kinship training and preparation throughout the assessment process and is inclusive and non-judgemental of all applicants considering the strengths and life experiences that they have to equip them



to care for our children. The team also offers an inclusive approach to assessments to make sure the voice of the children is heard so realistic and informed decisions are made for children's short term and long-term needs. The team works closely with colleagues in Lancashire's Children's Teams, Legal and the Courts in conjunction with appropriate legislation to support timely decisions for our children to identify lasting homes.

Support to Permanence and Family Finding Teams

Our Support to Permanence teams and the Family Finding team consist of 1 Senior Manager and 6 Team Managers. 5 Team Managers are responsible for a local Support to Permanence teams (North Lancashire, Central Lancashire, South and West Lancashire, Hyndburn, Rossendale and Ribble Valley and Burnley and Pendle). These teams have 29 Social Workers and 9 ½ Support Workers in total who are split across the local areas to provide local support to local fostering families. These teams provide the supervision and support to approved fostering families as well as local targeted support groups. The teams work closely with colleagues in Lancashire's Children's Teams, Health services, Education, and other partner agencies to support our children to achieve their potential. When children are ready to move towards independence, they work with Leaving Care services to support transitions and where appropriate enable Staying Put arrangements. The teams also work closely with Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool to, where appropriate, support children moving on to adoptive families.

Our Family Finding team consists of 1 Team Manager and 1 Support Worker supported by the Support to Permanence teams on a duty rota basis for each locality. The team is responsible for matching fostering families to our children. This includes emergency arrangements, short term planned moves and lasting homes for our children. To effectively match our children to foster carers, the Family Finding team works closely with both our Recruitment and Assessment team and Support to Permanence.

All social work staff are required to have a Diploma in Social Work or equivalent and have current registration with Social Work England, this is inclusive of our management team.

Facilities

Our teams work in a hybrid way, at home and within designated offices. Our Recruitment and Assessment team, Assessment with Family and Friends team and Family Finding team are County wide teams who are based at County Hall in Preston. They cover the whole of Lancashire and our surrounding borders including further afield where appropriate and required. All our team members can access office bases across Lancashire as required.

Our five Support to Permanence teams are based locally across the county, Central Support to Permanence are also based at County Hall. There are four other locality Support to Permanence Teams based at Accrington, Clayton-Le-Woods, Burnley, and Lancaster. Our social workers can also access office bases in other areas of Lancashire as required. The teams are geographically based to meet the needs of their local foster carer communities.



Together the teams undertake the statutory functions of assessment, approval, supervision, support, training, and development, safeguarding and review of foster carers.

SCAYT+ covers the entire county and has bases in Burnley and Preston, our SCAYT+ workers can also access other bases throughout the county as required to provide a localised hybrid model of service delivery.

We also value participation, collaboration and learning across the Northwest with our Local Authority partners.

6. Our Services: Providing the right homes for our children at the right time in the right place.

We provide an assessment service for connected carers, so where possible when children are not able to live with their birth parents they can live with a friend or family member.

We provide a recruitment and assessment service for mainstream foster carers which enables us to find the right home for our children when they are not able to live with their birth family or connected carers.

We provide a support service to our approved foster carers, which enables them to feel valued and supported, so they can provide safe, stable and loving care for our children.

We have a comprehensive training and support offer for our staff and foster carers, so they have the right knowledge and skills to care for our children.

We have a dedicated Family Finding team so we can match children and foster carers, this enables children to, in the main live within the Lancashire community.

We provide our own in-house therapeutic service, Supporting Children and Youth People Together (SCAYT+) which supports our foster carers and children, based on the principals of the Secure Base Model, PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and using DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy).

We provide the following types of foster families for our children.

- **Connected** – these carers are part of a child's extended family or friendship network and as such can provide continuity of care and promote positive identity and self-esteem.
- **Short Term** - this type of fostering family looks after our child(ren) or young people until the time is right for them to move on to their lasting home.
- **Lasting Homes** - this type of fostering arrangement is offered where children live with their fostering family on a long-term basis throughout their childhood and continue to have close relationships with their birth family.



- **Emergency Homes** – children sometimes need to come and live with a fostering family at short notice where a crisis has occurred.
- **Short breaks** - we provide our children with disabilities short breaks with respite foster carers, we also provide short breaks to support families with the care of their children at times of need, where this meets the short break regulations.
- **Respite** – we provide respite services to birth families to enable families staying together and to fostering families to enable stability and continuity of the fostering arrangements.
- **Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE)** – we provide families to ensure that all young people received into Custody that require detention overnight are given due consideration in relation to PACE provision in line with the Concordat Guidance in relation to children in custody.
- **Step Down** – these arrangements are provided to support children stepping down from residential care to live in a fostering family, where a high level of support is needed.
- **Parent and Child** – we support children and parents together in a fostering family, to allow parents and children to remain together whilst receiving support and to ensure parents can fully meet the needs of the child(ren) whilst living in a family environment.
- **Early Permanence** - we provide children who are likely to have or have a plan of adoption to move to live with their prospective adopters as early as possible as Early Permanence Foster Carers.
- **Staying Put** - “Staying Put” is the term used to describe a situation in which the Local Authority support young people to remain living with their foster family after they are 18, until they are fully able to live independently. This can be of great benefit to young people leaving care enabling them to transition to adulthood with the safety net of a family which other young people benefit from.



7. Supporting staff and carers to provide the best possible care to our children (workforce development) - Support, supervision, and training of foster carers

Our Fostering Support Offer

Lancashire County Council's Fostering Service highly values our fostering families and our children. We strive to be excellent in terms of the support and services we provide to our foster carers, children, their families, and agencies who we work in partnership with. To further support our retention of fostering families and improve security and stability for our children we continue to innovate and develop our support offer for our fostering families. We aim to provide our children and fostering families with outstanding support through our established service offer as follows:-

- **Fostering Academy:** As a Fostering Service we understand the importance of support and training to our fostering families recognising the initial days, weeks, and months of becoming a foster carer can be incredibly daunting. Our Fostering Academy is a specialist training and mentoring programme that supports applicants in assessment and throughout their first year of their fostering journey. This includes an excellent package of training that builds upon their preparation in assessment as well as a dedicated mentor who is an experienced foster carer who is buddied to each new fostering family to offer mentoring and informal support throughout their first year. Each mentor is local to the fostering family and ideally will be matched to support with individual needs such as, if the new fostering family have their own children, they are connected carers, or they may be specifically seeking to care for children and their birth parents.
- **Fostering Communities:** Our Fostering Communities pilot is a programme based on the principles of the Mockingbird Project. Lancashire is now progressing this pilot into year two. A Senior Social Worker and two Support Workers are leads on this project, supporting our fostering Community Co-ordinators. Each fostering Community Co-ordinator is an experienced foster carer, they usually support up to 4 fostering families each who have met the criteria for the pilot. The aim of the project is to assess the success of the communities in developing support networks for fostering families and the children in their care. The Community Co-ordinator offers, advice and guidance, informal babysitting and facilitates building friendship groups for fostering families who need this. If the pilot continues to be successful, we aim to implement this on a wider scale to offer increased support to our fostering families and children.
- **LIFT (Lancashire Intervention for Families Team):** Our LIFT carers offer support to both birth families and foster carers where they need specific time limited support in meeting children's needs. The aim is to reduce the number of children entering care by offering support and guidance to birth families and to prevent instability in fostering families. Our LIFT programme is established and offered across the whole county.
- **Support Groups:** We offer regular virtual and face to face groups that focus on networking, support as well as offering informal learning opportunities. Face to face support groups are local to the fostering communities. We also offer



dedicated support groups to newly approved carers, connected carers and parent and child carers.

- **Sons and Daughters Support and Training:** The Recruitment and Assessment team have developed a specialist training package for the children of foster carer applicants, which can be delivered individually or as group work. The direct work with sons and daughters is adding to the overall quality of assessments and improving our retention of new carers. Our Support to Permanence Teams offer activities specifically designed for sons and daughters, they are available each school holiday. These groups are valued by our foster carers and support children who foster to share their experiences with others in the same position.
- **Lifelong Links:** The aim of Lifelong Links is to build positive lasting support networks for children in the care system. The Lifelong Links approach draws upon a combination of a family finding model, which originated in the United States and the family group conference (FGC) model, which originated in New Zealand. Lifelong Links aims to identify and engage relatives and other supportive adults connected to a child in care who are willing to make a lifelong commitment to that child. Research shows that the continuity and permanence of these relationships can offer young people ongoing support, provide an explanation of historical events, and reinforce their identity and sense of belonging.
- **Family Fun Days:** We host an annual family fun day for all our fostering families. This offers an opportunity to come together with staff to make happy memories and celebrate family life.
- **EAP:** Provided by Wellbeing Solutions is now accessible to our fostering families as well as our workforce, providing a range of confidential support from counselling to advise on personal and family issues.
- **Anniversary visits and recognition:** We celebrate foster carers that choose to foster with Lancashire in different ways. Staff, including managers visit families to celebrate milestone achievements with a certificate and a gift or recognition reward. Foster carers that have achieved significant milestones in fostering for Lancashire County Council are invited to an annual celebratory event with Lancashire's County Council's Chairperson. Foster Carers who are employed by Lancashire County Council are offered an additional 5 days special leave to complete their fostering assessment, attend training and attend meetings related to the fostering role .*
- **Foster carer enrichment:** Foster carers are supported to contribute to service development and improvements. As part of this we have Foster Carer Forum Representatives that meet regularly on a local level and countywide to support and share themes and information from their local areas. Foster Carers also take part in staff recruitment and there are also a variety of lead roles available, for example focusing on but not limited to, wellbeing, training, stay and play as well as marketing.



- **Monthly Newsflash:** A monthly newsletter is published to all foster carers. This has a therapeutic focus, sharing good news stories as well as guidance, top tips, and new developments. Carers are invited to contribute alongside our staff team.
- **Out of hours support:** Our fostering families have access to a dedicated out of hours service, known as Advice Line. This includes access to a social worker outside of working hours, including evenings, weekends, and bank holidays. This is alongside Lancashire's Emergency Duty Team that offers support outside all normal working hours.
- **Consultation and visibility:** Lancashire's Fostering Service welcomes contribution from our foster carers. This takes the form of themed surveys, access to a Senior Management 'Question Time', focus groups, consultation, staff attendance at support groups and representatives who attend Fostering Forums.
- **Innovation:** Lancashire's Fostering Service is currently taking part in the Reflective Fostering Programme research study which has been developed by specialists at the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (AFNCCF). The project aims to help foster carers and connected carers in providing the best possible care for the children they look after by improving the quality of carer-child relationships and, therefore, improving the wellbeing of these children. The Programme is aimed at helping carers of children between 4-13 in developing their care of the children they look after by focusing on their relationships with these children. Lancashire is committed to continually contributing to this research study until September 2024.

Supporting connected carers

Once approved either via Regulation 24, of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 or at fostering panel. Our connected carers are allocated their own social worker. Connected carers can access the same support and services as our mainstream carers. Their social worker will visit regularly and be accessible via telephone or email to offer advice, support, supervision, and training which is tailored to meet the needs of our children and foster families.

Foster carer supervision and reviews

All our registered foster carers are allocated a Supervising Social Worker, who is there to support our foster carers so they can provide our children with safe and loving care. All foster carers have regular supervision offered at least quarterly; an unannounced visit is also undertaken to the foster family. Foster carers are formally reviewed annually, however if a complaint or serious allegation is made against a foster carer then an early review will be held in line with Lancashire's procedures.

Learning and development

We recognise that fostering is an extremely specialised and demanding role. We aim to support all our foster carers with a comprehensive package of learning and development



to meet their needs throughout their fostering career which we deliver in our Fostering Academy.

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/practitioners/fostering-mentoring-academy/>.

Our foster carers can also access relevant training available for our social work teams. Our training is delivered flexibly to our carers around school hours, holidays and online. We work closely with our learning and development team and in consultation with our foster carers to ensure that our training remains relevant, proportionate and up to date.

We are committed to being a trauma informed service and we provide a therapeutically based model of support and training to our foster carers. We support our foster carers development from pre-approval stage by offering a specialist Kinship Carer training and face to face Skills to Foster pre-approval training. We also offer training to foster carers to help with our children's specific needs which is not covered by our broad training offer, i.e. special training in Makaton for children with communication needs and Moving and Handling.

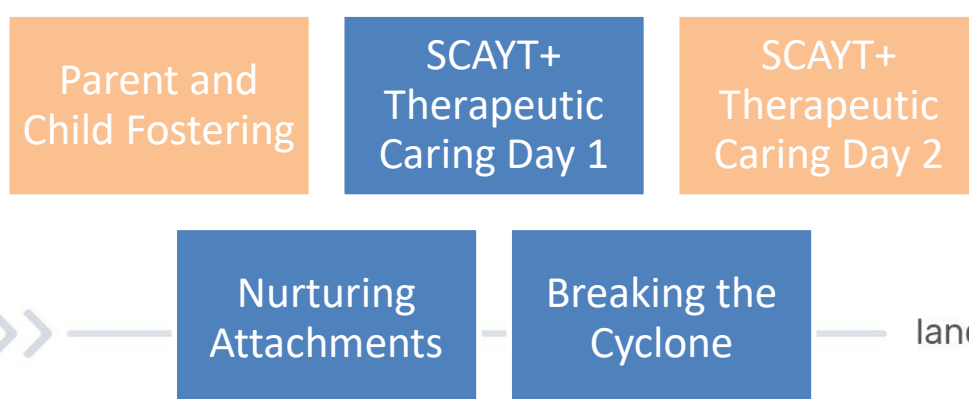
All newly approved foster carers are supported to complete the required Training, Support and Development, Standards for foster carers:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/training-support-and-development-standards-for-foster-care-evidence-workbook>

We offer a broad mandatory training package to all our carers to ensure they can meet our children's needs as follows:



In addition, further training is available to promote foster carer development, to hold a deeper understanding of the impact of childhood trauma and to enable foster carers to take on specialist roles:



8. Working with others to make sure we get it right - partnership and participation.

We work closely with our colleagues in Children's Social Care to ensure our children are safe and happy. We work together to make sure we meet the needs of our children and support them achieve positive outcomes in health and education. We ensure our children have lasting homes and are supported to reach independence.

We encourage our children to participate in decision making about their lives, we make sure children are supported to attend their child looked after reviews and we use the Mind Of My Own app to listen to the voice of our children. We work closely with the Children's Participation Board, LINX (Listen, Inform, Negotiate and Xpress) - Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum. We gather the voice of the child and reflect these in our foster carer reviews.

The Fostering Service values co-production with our fostering families, we work closely to co-produce our service offer, this includes our quarterly Fostering Forums, representatives attending our Corporate Parenting Board, regular senior management 'Question Time', regular consultation surveys, joint working groups, interviewing staff for the service, newly approved foster carer focus groups and foster carers contribute to service development, marketing, and consultation events. Foster Carers are an integral part of our recruitment, training, innovation, and support processes.

9. Marketing, Recruitment & Assessment

The fostering service works closely with our in-house communications team to produce regular fostering campaigns to recruit new foster carers. There has been significant work completed to date on our 'Foster for Lancashire' branding, website design and materials. The aim is to improve our number of approved foster carers and provide sufficient homes for our children. The campaigns run on a variety of platforms and mediums and are co-produced with our foster carers, sons and daughters of foster carers and with input from our children and care leavers. We also host a variety of community events where prospective foster cares can meet with staff and foster carers to learn more about the fostering role.

All prospective foster carers are subject to statutory checks such as Disclose and Barring (DBS), medicals, local authority, personal and employment references. Appropriate checks are also completed for anyone else in the household depending on their age.



All new applicants to attend a 3-day preparation course called Skills to Foster. Our Skills to Foster course is delivered jointly by our social workers and approved foster carers, some of our care experienced children have helped us to ensure the course reflects their life experiences and what makes a good foster carer.

All applicants are assessed by social workers using the Fostering Network framework for assessment. Once an assessment commences in Lancashire we aim to complete these within 4 months. When the assessment is complete the fostering assessment report is presented to our fostering panel.

10. Fostering Panel & Agency Decision Maker

In Lancashire, our fostering panel is made up of people who have an interest in fostering, who have experienced care themselves, who are foster carers for a different fostering agency or who have worked with children in a variety of different roles. We try to represent the diversity of the wider community in our fostering panels. The fostering panel is led by a panel chair who is usually someone with a lot of experience in fostering or in social work. All applicants and connected carers are invited to attend fostering panel when their assessment report is being discussed. The fostering panel will make their recommendation about whether applicants are suitable to be foster carers.

The 1989 Children Act sets the 'usual fostering limit' to three children unless the children are siblings to each other. In certain circumstances, the Fostering Service may consider matching children outside the usual fostering limit on exemption. With the foster carer's agreement, whenever this applies, the exemption will be formally recorded and presented to panel. Consideration will also be given to what additional support the fostering family may require. Any other variations of approval are risk assessed to ensure the needs of all the children in the household are met. A return to panel will be actioned to ensure there is independent scrutiny and oversight. The panel hears all cases where there have been significant concerns in terms of safeguarding, quality of care or allegations made. An Independent Reviewing Officer review will be completed and presented to Panel.

Approved foster carers will also be party to a review following a change of circumstances or an updated assessment where there has been a significant change in their lives or household, this may also be referred to the Fostering Panel. They will also recommend as appropriate, the termination of an approval. Panel will also consider appeals to recommendations. All Fostering Panel minutes are recorded, and minutes and decisions are confirmed in writing to the carer(s). Once panel have made their recommendation our Agency Decision Maker (an experienced social worker) will decide whether fostering applications, assessments of connected carers, reviews after allegations and continued fostering approval can be approved.

11. Recording and Access to Records

The Fostering Service has a responsibility to maintain accurate records on all foster carers and ensure that information is shared with the carer wherever possible. There is a statutory requirement to retain files for 10 years following closure. Carers have a right to have access to their records and are able to approach Lancashire's Information



Governance Team for advice and guidance. Full information can be found here: <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/transparency/access-to-information/service-and-project-specific-privacy-notice/lancashire-county-council-fostering-service/>

12. Monitoring and evaluation of the service

We continually strive to improve our fostering service and we evaluate the effectiveness of our services from a range of information, feedback and review mechanisms, this includes:-

- Mind of My Own application
- Direct work with children in our fostering families
- Consultation sessions with our children
- Newly approved foster carer focus groups
- Foster Care 'Question Time' with Senior Management
- Foster Carer Forums feedback to the service at local and county level
- Supervision of foster carers
- Surveys and consultations with our foster carers
- Foster carer reviews including feedback from foster carers, their children, children in our care, independent reviewing officers and children's social workers.
- Feedback from the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer
- Feedback from Agency decision makers, agency advisor and fostering panel.
- Unannounced visits to fostering families.
- Regular audits which include feedback from children, foster carers and other professionals.
- Staff voice group
- Feedback and evaluation of training
- Staff feedback from development days
- Feedback from other professionals
- Feedback from partnership working with Northwest fostering leads.
- Learning from Safeguarding practice reviews, disruption meetings, resignation and withdrawal from assessments, reflective learning circles,
- Learning from compliments and complaints.

13. Whistle Blowing

The Fostering Service is committed to providing an open and accountable service. We expect our foster carers, employees, and partners, who have any serious concerns about the work of the Fostering Service to come forward and voice those concerns.

Lancashire County Council have a Whistleblowing Policy where those concerned about victimisation, subsequent discrimination, or disadvantage, can raise a concern via the Whistleblowing procedure. The employee who raises a concern is protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, part of which was updated by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013. This Whistleblowing Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the council rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.



To make a confidential telephone call please ring the dedicated whistleblowing number 01772 532500 or email WhistleblowingComplaints@lancashire.gov.uk. If the concern is in regard to financial matters the email address is; internalauditinvestigations@lancashire.gov.uk

The Whistle Blowing process is intended to be used by employees; members of the public can raise concerns via the councils' complaints procedure (See below).

14. Compliments, Comments, Complaints and Allegations:

The Fostering Service is a continuously learning organisation. Compliments, comments, complaints and allegations can provide opportunities to review service delivery and promote service development. We reflect on compliments, complaints, and comments to develop our practice. We regularly share compliments. Any allegations or complaints regarding care provided are dealt with in accordance with Lancashire Safeguarding Partnership procedures.

It is the role of the Child's Social Worker to ensure that children receive relevant literature about being a Child in Our Care. Children and young people can make their views known through their Social Worker or via their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), foster carer or independent advocates.

Lancashire County Council Children's Social Work Service operates a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service. If dissatisfaction arises in any way with our services, we will do all we can to sort the problem out quickly, to investigate fairly and to explain fully the outcome of our enquiries.

Most problems can be dealt with by the person you normally deal with in Children's Social Care Services, so talk to them first if you can. If they can't help, or you would rather speak to someone else, ask to speak to their manager.

If your problem can't be dealt with by talking to a member of staff, then you may wish to make a complaint.

You can share a compliment or make a complaint in one of the following ways:

By using the [customer feedback form](#), In writing to:

Compliments and Complaints team
Legal and democratic services
Christ Church Precinct
County Hall
Preston
PR1 8XJ

Please note: You should make your complaint as soon as possible but no longer than twelve months.



15. Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion:

Lancashire's Fostering Service operates within Lancashire County Council's equality, diversity and cohesion policy, full information can be found here:

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/strategies-policies-plans/equality-diversity-and-community-cohesion/>. We are opposed to both direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and marriage and civil partnership status. We aim to provide culturally sensitive services and ensure that all people are treated with equal respect and receive equal access to services.

All training offered and delivered by the Fostering Service will reflect anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice and any expressed discrimination will be challenged. Anti-discriminatory practice features in preparation, assessment, training and in the ongoing support offered to all members of our fostering families and for our staff. Foster Carers will be expected to develop the skills to identify and challenge discriminatory practice where it exists.

16. Inspection:

The Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted as part of their Inspecting Local Authorities Children's Service framework (ILACS). Lancashire County Council Children's Services were Ofsted rated as **Good** in our last inspection in December 2022.

Significant Incidents are reported to Ofsted under Schedule 7 of the Care Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

Ofsted Contact details; Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD Ofsted Information Helpline: 0300 123 1231 enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

