



Northumberland
County Council

Statement of Purpose



Family Placement Service

Fostering Arrangements



Northumberland
County Council

www.northumberland.gov.uk

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1. **Introduction**

The Statement of Purpose provides information about Northumberland County Council (NCC) Family Placement Service fostering arrangements. The Statement of Purpose is made available to the public via our website and upon request to:

- Any person working for the purposes of the Family Placement Service.
- Any foster carer or prospective foster carer of the Family Placement Service.
- Any child/young person placed with a foster carer by the Family Placement Service.
- The parent of any such child/young person.

A young person's guide to fostering is provided to all looked after children and young people, which provides information about the service as is our young person's Statement of Purpose. It is also available on the County Council website.

The production of a Statement of Purpose is required by the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) and Regulations 2011.

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed annually and updated and modified whenever necessary.

2. **Overall Aim**

Northumberland Fostering Service is relevant to the Living priority of the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2022 and Children in Care and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2022 – 24. The focus the service will deliver on is:

- A journey to independence
- Bringing our communities together and tackling child poverty
- Developing ambition, enjoying life and doing as well as possible
- Being there to help and support when it will have most impact
- Promoting safeguarding and how to live safely

The Northumberland Residential & Family Placement Service aims:

- To safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children through the provision of high quality care and services.
- To fulfil our corporate parenting responsibilities.
- For each looked after child to be enabled to achieve his/her full potential and to work to narrow the gap in attainment for Looked After Children.
- To meet and exceed the National Minimum Standards.
- To recruit a sufficient number of foster carers to meet the needs of looked after children in Northumberland.

To meet these overall aims the Family Placement Service will work in partnership with foster carers, young people and their families, other professionals, agencies and elected members to offer a range of flexible placement options. This is to ensure the best possible alternative family care is provided to meet the individual needs and wishes of children.

The needs of individual children are at the centre of our practice, meeting those needs is of paramount importance.

Our service will be informed by the active participation of young people and carers. Children and young people's wishes and feelings will inform decisions that affect their lives.

Our service will respect, reflect and value the diversity of the community we serve. Our practice will take into account the child's individuality, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, religious persuasion, gender, sexuality and personal qualities.

3. **Our Values**

In discharging our responsibilities the values of the Fostering National Minimum Standards will underpin and inform our practice.

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of our care.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education; have access to a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to develop in a caring environment that can meet their developmental and emotional needs.
- Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.

- Children and young people should actively participate in planning for their future and in developing the Family Placement Service.
- The particular needs of children with disabilities and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- The significance of contact for looked after children, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible, without unnecessary restrictions.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team around the child.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child.
- It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities in order to provide the best care for children.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential to deliver the best outcomes for children.

Foster Carers Charter

We are committed to ensure that the content and spirit of the Foster Carers Charter is embedded in service delivery across the council. We will ensure our foster carers are engaged, supported and fully consulted at every stage of a child's placement with them so they can do their best for each and every child in their care.

Continual Performance Improvement

We are committed to a process of continuous performance improvement. We learn from experience to continue to improve and develop the Residential & Family Placement Service, developing processes for measuring the difference we make to children's outcomes.

We seek to incorporate new ideas and research into our work in a way that enhances our performance and brings about demonstrable outcomes for children.

We actively seek to develop the skills base of our managers and practitioners and encourage active participation in the shaping of the Residential & Family Placement Service.

We actively strive to ensure that there are sufficient placements suitable to meet individual children's needs.

Objectives

Our aims will be met through the following objectives:

- (i) To continue to recruit and retain a sufficient number and range of foster carers to meet the current and projected demands of the looked after population to ensure placements that are well matched to children's individual needs.
- (ii) The effective matching of the child to the foster carer's skills and experience to enable the full range of the child's needs to be met, as follows:
 - Emotional & Behavioural Development
 - Identity
 - Family and Social Relationships
 - Social Presentation
 - Self Care Skills
 - Education and Educational Attainment
 - Health
 - Physical Development
- (iii) To promote positive outcomes for young people so they can achieve their potential and to continue to achieve as independent adults.
- (iv) To be supported to enjoy sustained family life as a permanent family member, either with their birth family, extended family and friend network or through adoption or long term fostering as appropriate to their circumstances and needs.
- (v) To involve and take into account foster carers views in relation to ongoing developments to Children's Services provision.
- (vi) Actively promote anti-discriminatory practices with foster carers, children and families and other professionals.
- (vii) To have the systems to gain the participation of children & young people and their families, to inform quality assurance and future development.
- (viii) To provide young people and carers with the information they need about foster care.
- (ix) Adhere to the principles of GDPR and continue the sound practice in managing confidential information.

4. Services and Facilities Provided

The following types of foster placement are provided and supported:

Time limited placements - These are provided for children and young people who need to be looked after by the local authority for a short or an indeterminate period of time. The placement may last only one night or may continue for months or even years; however, it will never be a permanent placement and the child or young person will move on from the placement at some point – either to return home or to move to a

permanent placement. All Northumberland's time-limited foster carers are paid a weekly (retainer style) fee regardless of placement, along with a fostering allowance per child in placement.

Teenage task-centred foster placements - These are time-limited foster placements for older young people who cannot return home and for whom more permanent arrangements are not appropriate. The foster carer's task is to provide a stable base for the young person until they are ready to move on to independent living. All young people entering a teenage-task-centred placement will be at least 12 years of age. The foster carers receive a personal fostering allowance in addition to the core child allowance.

Emergency Foster Carers – The service benefits from a small number of emergency foster carers. This provision may be used in an emergency for up to 14 days, until the young person can move to a matched time-limited placement. The placement may be extended for example, if this will enable the young person to return home. We also have a 24/7 emergency fostering scheme that supports children in a placement for up to 6 weeks whilst the permanence planning for the child is undertaken. This placement may also be extended if it will enable the young person to return home.

Emergency care is also provided by other foster carers who are available out of hours; they do not receive any additional personal allowances.

Long term foster carers - These care for a child/ren or young people who cannot return home. The child's care plan will have established that the child needs a permanent substitute family. Most children entering long term foster care will be between eight and twelve years of age but may be older.

Shared care - These are placements where the care of the child is shared between the parent/birth family and the foster carer. The placement is usually made to support a child in need while work is ongoing to support the family, and the need for a foster placement exceeds the limits of the Short Break regulations. The foster carers receive a personal allowance as well as core child allowances.

Respite foster carers - Short break care is also provided for children in need living with their birth family, to prevent family breakdown and to support social work involvement with families. Short break foster carers are linked with a child or sibling group, and the level and frequency of short breaks are agreed as part of the care plan for the child. The continued need for the short break placement will be kept under review. As with short break care for disabled children, placements will not exceed 75 days in one year and personal allowances and core child allowances are paid to the Foster Carer on a pro rata basis. These carers may also support other foster carers and children already looked after if this is in the child's care plan or in an emergency for example the identified foster carer has a medical emergency.

Short break foster carers - These are placements to offer support to the families of children with disabilities and to provide a range of social and other opportunities for the children whilst in placement. The child and foster carers are matched, and links may last for many years. The package of short breaks must not exceed 75 days per year, however, may vary in frequency and regularity according to the needs of the child or young person. Short break foster carers receive the allowance and a personal

allowance and core child allowances paid pro rata for the days when the child is in placement.

Connected Persons or Family and Friend Foster Carers - This can be an extended family member such as a grandparent, family friend or a person connected to the child for example a health or education professional. Their approval is for specific children. These foster carers receive allowances appropriate to the child's age.

Post 18 Placements (Staying Put) - When a young person who is Looked After by the Local Authority approaches the age of 18 years, foster carers are encouraged and supported to continue with the placement as long as the young person wants to continue to stay and this meets their needs.

5. Supervision and Support Services for Foster Carers and Children

Foster carer and core child allowances

All foster carers receive weekly allowances for the children and young people in their care. These allowances are deemed appropriate for the everyday expense of looking after a child or young person.

Connected Persons or Friend and Family Foster Carers receive the same weekly allowances as other foster carers.

The financial support available to all foster carers is contained in one document and all carers will have a copy within the Foster Carers Handbook.

Breaks from Caring for a child

All foster carers (except for those approved for named children including long term foster carers) are entitled to take up to 28 days' holiday per year, where they will not have a child in placement. If a foster carer does not wish to take holidays they will be paid for the 28 days holiday entitlement.

Where the needs of the child placed require it, other breaks from caring can be arranged based on assessed need. Long term foster carers may be able to take respite breaks if agreed as part of the placement plan and the length of these breaks will be determined in accordance with the needs of the child and the placement.

Supervision and Support

Each foster carer is allocated a named supervising social worker from the fostering team. The frequency of supervision visits is monthly, however it can be at a greater or lesser level depending on agreed need.

The supervising social worker supervises and supports the foster carer to ensure that the National Minimum Standards are met and exceeded.

Child's Social Worker

Each child in a foster placement has an allocated Social Worker.

Northumberland Adolescent Service (NAS)

NAS social workers become involved with looked after young people when they reach 14 years of age. The role of the 14+ worker is to support the young person through the transition to adulthood and independent living. The team supports young people to identify and maintain suitable and safe accommodation into adulthood.

Northumberland Family First Team

The Family First Team works with birth families to prevent children needing to be looked after or with foster carers when a placement is at risk of breaking down. Family First Workers are able to provide a planned intensive short-term programme with the aim of sustaining the placement by being available 365 days of the year from 08:30 – 22:00.

Education

Specialist education support is available through the Education Support Team for Looked After Children (ESLAC). This includes teaching staff and other support services including a mentor for looked after children who are taking GCSE's.

In addition, foster carers can discuss relevant matters with an education psychologist. There are two part time educational psychologists dedicated to Looked After Children. They will provide training to foster carers and staff.

The team works closely with Designated Teachers within schools where looked after children are placed.

Health

The Designated Nurse is responsible for the health of all looked after children and their regular health assessments. This service also provides training, advice and support to foster carers.

The agency medical adviser is an experienced Consultant Community Paediatrician. She has oversight of health assessments for looked after children, manages the system for obtaining medical assessments for foster carers and acts as medical adviser to the Fostering Panel. She is available to Supervising Social Workers for consultation over medical issues relating to foster care.

Northumberland Young People's Service provides mental health services for looked after children over ten years of age as well as support and advice to foster carers.

Participation

The participation of children and young people is supported through the participation team.

The participation officers support young people looked after with Northumberland's Children in Council, known as Voices Making Choices. It is regularly consulted by managers and councillors about the views of young people in the looked after system. The team continues to develop the involvement of looked-after young people in the organisation and enables them to have a say in as many areas as is possible and appropriate. Looked after Children were involved in the development of Our Promise, Northumberland's Pledge to Looked after Children, and determine the annual priorities for Our Promise.

The participation officers also provide an advocacy service for young people.

The Directorate is committed to young people's participation in service design and delivery.

Out of Hours Support Service

Northumberland provides a generic out of hours Emergency Duty Team.

Foster Carer Support Groups

The fostering team run a number of support groups at locations around the county and also via Teams virtual meetings. These generally meet bi-monthly and all foster carers are invited to attend.

The children of foster carers (Children who Foster Group) meet up throughout the year to participate in activities together and to support one another on fostering issues that may impact on them.

Various activities and events are planned for children in care foster carers and their families throughout the year.

Respite

Foster carers are provided with regular or one-off periods of respite care if their placement is assessed to need this.

Day Care

Foster carers are able to access day care from fostering team for purposes such as training. Task-centred day care is also available. This is a type of day care which may be used to support either birth families or foster families. The children must be over 5 years of age and the service is usually provided when a more focused level of supervision is required; the degree of challenging behaviour and/or associated risk factors is above the norm. The work undertaken with the child/young person is planned and specific to achieve the agreed outcomes.

The Residential & Family Placement Service also provides activities for children during the school holidays from which both children and foster carers can benefit.

Independent Visitors

Some children identified by their social worker or the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) as benefiting from an Independent Visitor who regularly visits them, for example in their placement and supports them in activities.

The Foster Carer Portal

The portal provides a secure professional email, calendar and cloud document storage account for Northumberland foster carers. To enable foster carers to support children and young people in their care, the website holds information and resources on training, policy, procedures and other aspects of fostering. It is also used a key communication tool for service and council wide information for foster carers and children in their care.

6. Recruiting Foster Carers

A Marketing and Recruitment Strategy is in place to ensure we attract sufficient quality foster carers to meet local demands who are capable, with their families, of meeting the complex needs of vulnerable children and young people.

The marketing programme involves broad and targeted advertising, including social media, online directories, web search advertising, community venues, local publications, and outdoor advertising. Free and low cost opportunities are constantly added to the schedule.

The service holds monthly Information Sessions throughout the year, targeting different communities across the county. A hybrid model is applied with some sessions being face to face and other being on-line. This programme of events is aligned with the pre-approval training course to facilitate shorter recruitment timescales.

We continually work to develop “word of mouth” recruitment by encouraging advocates and partners to consider fostering and to share our promotional messages. Children, young people and foster carers and their families increasingly participate within the recruitment efforts for example via social media, live radio interviews, sharing their real life family stories for web and press articles, and events.

We always participate in the annual National Foster Care Fortnight, where we work with both national and regional efforts to maximise local opportunities.

Northumberland is part of the national Facebook foster care recruitment forum and hub to share good practice and develop joint recruitment opportunities.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS FLOW



7. Organisational Structure

The Residential and Family Placement Service has responsibility for, fostering, family and friends and special guardianship assessments, permanence team and responsibility for the children's homes and secure estate. NCC are part of a regional adoption agency, Adopt North East.

The Council's function as a fostering agency has been exercised through the Policy Board with overview and scrutiny of the function by the Corporate Parenting Advisory Group.

Responsible Individual and Registered Manager

Responsible Individual:

Cath McEvoy-Carr
Executive Director of Adult & Children's Services
Northumberland County Council
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

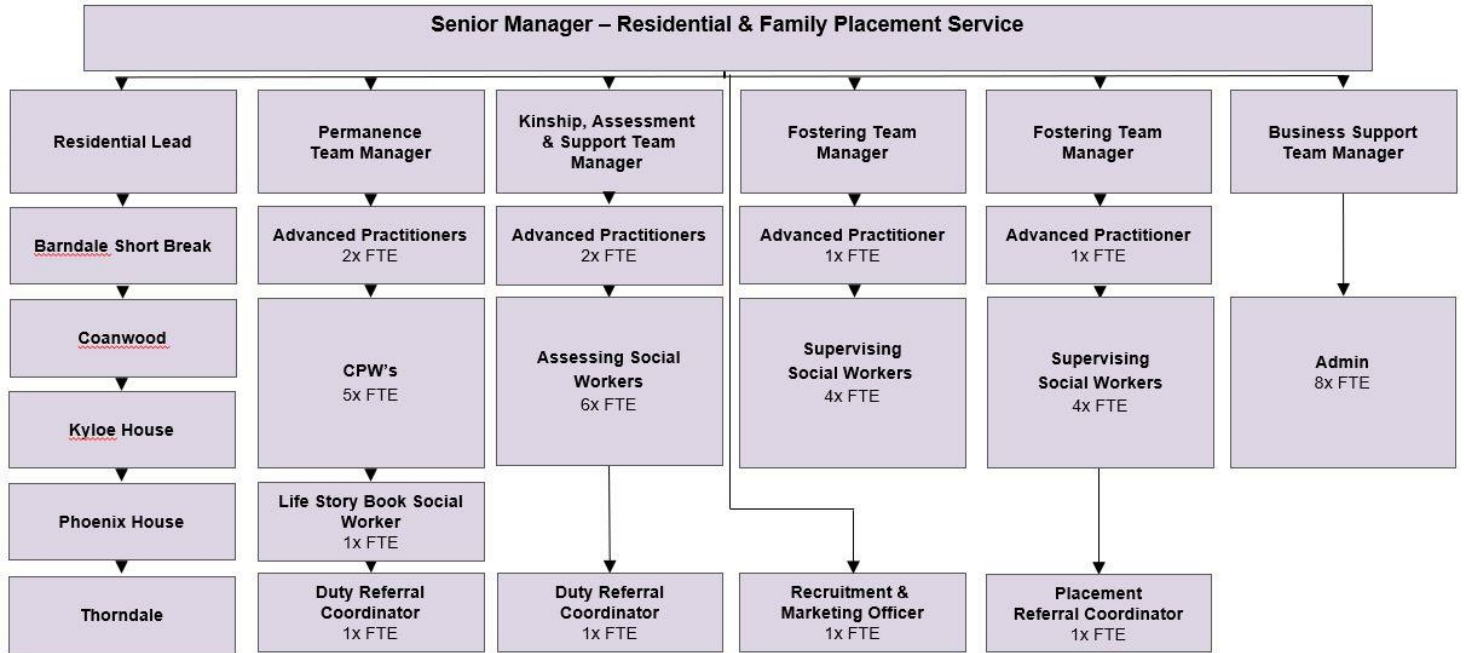
Phone: 01670 622682

Registered Manager:

Liz Spaven
Senior Manager – Residential and Family Placement Service
3 Esther Court
Wansbeck Business Park
Ashington
Northumberland
NE63 8AP

Phone: 01670 626262

Residential & Family Placement Service Structure



8. Foster Carer Training

An extensive training programme is provided to all foster carers. A number of courses are specifically designed to be completed pre-approval to ensure all newly approved foster carers have a range of skills and a significant knowledge base to support them in their new role. Mandatory Core Courses are to be completed in the first year of approval and refresher courses are provided in addition to courses of specific interest to the foster carers.

The Training Programme is accessed electronically through the School 360 website. Foster carers can also access training commissioned locally and are encouraged to undertake the Certificate for the Children and Young people’s Workforce Level 2. We also have other Level 2 courses that are commissioned which are for carers own personal development.

An example of courses available are:

Core Courses	Specialist Courses
Safeguarding	Bullying
Record Keeping	Moving Children On
First Aid	Attachment Specialist
Safer Caring	Drug Awareness
Attachment	Education and Looked After Children
Food Safety Awareness	Neo-Natal
Contact	Speakeasy
Safe Handling of Medicines	Delegated Authority
Health & Wellbeing	Life Story Work
Equality & Diversity	Men Who Foster
Fostering Changes	Autism
E-Safety	Responding to Sexual Abuse

Foster carers also have access to Level 2 Qualification Courses and Distance Learning Courses. A significant range of E-Learning is also available as well as the LSCB multi-agency training programme.

Foster carers are regarded as a key professional group whose developmental needs are identified in Northumberland's Children's Workforce Strategy.

A detailed programme of training is established each financial year. This includes internal and external trainers. In addition, the service provides online and home working packs for foster carers who have difficulty attending training courses for reasons of geography or child care.

Personal Development plans are completed for all foster carers.

9. Fostering Panel

Northumberland County Council Fostering Panel meets monthly to consider each application for approval, the long-term needs of children, and the matching to long term foster carers. The Panel also addresses issues arising through the Review process and the operation of the Residential & Family Placement Services. The Panel's role in advising on fostering matters and assisting the Residential & Family Placement Service in quality assurance of assessments, development issues and reviewing the conduct of the Family Placement Services are all important areas for the Fostering Panel. The Fostering Panel has an annual training day.

10. Foster Carer Reviews

Foster Carers are reviewed within 12 months of initial approval, and thereafter, annually. All first Foster Carer Reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel for consideration of full approval. A rolling programme ensures all subsequent Reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel on a three yearly basis.

11. Process for Reviewing Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually or earlier if changes are needed to the document.

In reviewing, we will take note of our development in the previous year, our service plans and self-assessment of what we have done well and areas for improvement; research; the views of service users, foster carers, staff and other professionals. We will, through this process, endeavour to anticipate how the Residential and Family Placement Service can best meet the needs of children and develop, modify and deliver change to our service accordingly.

12. Some Useful Links

- NCC Corporate Plan
<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/About/Policy/Corporate-plan.aspx#corporateplan-introduction>
- NCC Children's and Young People Plan
<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Children/Northumberland-Children-and-Young-People-s-Plan.aspx#northumberland children and young people's plan>
- NCC Foster Care webpage
www.northumberland.gov.uk/foster
- Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations
www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-services-national-minimum-standards
- NCC Virtual School for Looked After Children webpage
<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Children/Looked-after/Virtual.aspx#virtuelschoolforlookedafterandpreviouslylookedafterchildren>
- Staying Put Guidance
www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leavers-aged-18-years-and-above
- Foster Talk
www.fostertalk.org
- Fostering Network
www.fostering.net

The above list is not exhaustive.

13. Complaints and Advocacy

We seek to resolve young people's questions and concerns informally within 2 days, through their carers and Social Workers. We have a four staged complaints policy.

Complaints can be directed to:
The Client Relations Officer
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF
Telephone: 0800373615
client.relations@northumberland.gov.uk

Children and Young People can contact the Complaints Officer at

Children's Services
Freepost NEA15580
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 1BR
client.relations@northumberland.gov.uk
Text: 07766631
Free phone: 0800373615

Children and Young people also have access to an advocacy service.
advocacy@northumberland.gov.uk
NCC Participation and Advocacy Officer who is available for looked after young people who need advice, support or information. Young people can also express their views about the services they receive.

- Address: Freepost RTRH-RREY-GSKE
Northumberland County Council
Participation & Positive Activities Team
Northumbria House, Manor Walks Shopping Centre
Cramlington, Northumberland, NE23 6UR

If young people would prefer to speak to an independent advocate Action for Children can be contacted by:

- Phone 0191 2619212
- Email necrs@actionforchildren.org.uk

14. **Contacting Ofsted**

Concerns or complaints about the Residential & Family Placement Service can also be directed to Ofsted.

03001231231 or email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Ofsted
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