



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

June 2026

Table of Contents

1. Introductions	3
2. Principles and Values.....	4
3. The Aim and objectives of the Agency	6
4. Organisational Structure of the Agency	9
5. The Work of the Adoption Service- Key Functions.....	11
6. Qualifications, Experience and numbers of staff.....	14
7. Support to care planning for adoption for children	16
8. Early Permanence for Children	17
9. The Service for Prospective Adopters.....	19
10. Staying In Touch Services for Children and families	29
11. Adoption Support Services	30
12. Children's Guide to Adoption	34
13. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Adoption Service.....	34
14. Concerns and Complaints.....	35

1. Introduction

Adoption Cumbria is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for the Local Authorities of Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness and is responsible for delivering the adoption functions on behalf of both Local Authorities. Adoption Cumbria was launched as a new RAA in September 2025, following the disaggregation of the former Cumbria County Council in 2023.

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.

Adoption Cumbria is a shared adoption service working across the two local authorities and 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 Regional Adoption Agency.

The Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with:

- Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
- Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 (amended 2011).
- Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations
- Adoption Agencies & Independent Review of Determinations

(Amendment) Regulations 2011.

- Adoption Agencies (Panel & Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012.
- Fostering Services Regulations (2011)
- Children and Families Act (2014)
- Adoption and Children Act (2002).
- Care Standards Act (2000).

2. Principles & Values

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

Staff and Adoptive parents have also contributed to the values of the RAA.

Principles & Values:

- Relationships at the heart of all we do.
- Whole family approach when supporting children's needs
- Child focused
- Inclusive practice
- Honesty and transparency
- Collaboration with others across the wider system, and with adoptive parents, children, and birth families
- Children 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 emotional health and development of children. Timely permanence planning will be a priority.
- 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 there will be lifelong commitment to adoption support.
- Birth/First parents and families have access to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and offered a support service.

Inclusive Practice – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The RAA values diversity and promotes equality in all of its work.

The RAA operates within equalities legislation and the policies of Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils. The service works inclusively, positively and respectfully with all service users 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.

Enquiries and applications to adopt are welcomed from all members of the public over the age of 21 years, regardless of ethnicity, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, disability.

Applications are welcomed from people across economic backgrounds, and not owning your own home, or not having savings are not barriers to adopting.

3. The 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 and timely adoption service which promotes:
 - timely permanence planning for children who may require adoption;
 - the best possible standards of care for children;

- supports family life for children and adoptive families;
 - access to a service which supports children's and family needs throughout childhood and into adulthood.
2. Ensuring that all those whose lives have been affected by adoption are helped to identify and receive appropriate services which help and support them, in relation to their lived experience of adoption
 3. Working together in partnership with adoptive families and other involved agencies to ensure the service is based on national standards of good practice, the legislative framework, and is continuously developed to promote best outcomes for children.

Objectives of the agency:

1. That children who require adoption are provided with safe, stable and loving families who are suitable to meet their needs, in a timely way.
2. That adopted children achieve stability and permanence throughout their childhoods, into adulthood, and have good outcomes in life.
3. To recruit, assess and prepare sufficient numbers of prospective adopters to meet the needs of children requiring adoption within the local community.
4. To provide information on the process to applicants interested in becoming adopters and on the children requiring adoption.
5. 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.
6. To support prospective adoptive parents in consideration for, and

preparation for early permanence fostering.

7. To provide a timely family finding service for children who are being considered for adoption, from the earliest point possible in care planning, including those being considered for early permanence, pre-proceedings.
8. To provide information on the services available to all those affected by adoption recognising that adoption has lifelong implications for all those involved and that their needs will change over time.
9. To provide a range of adoption support services, which makes a “core offer” to adopted children and their adoptive families, including access to universal events, peer led support, assessments of adoption support needs, and access to therapeutic services.
10. To provide an opportunity for adopted children and young people to meet together, and to shape services through their direct input and experience.
11. To provide an adopter forum open to all adoptive parents, to enable adopters to shape services, and have regular and open dialogues with the RAA.
12. To provide a range of adoption support services to birth relatives from the time of the adoption plan. To support birth relatives with maintaining relationships with the adopted child, through indirect and direct means of staying in touch.
13. To support adopted adults to access adoption records and to provide support around the meaning of these for the individual.
14. 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.
15. That concerns about the service are addressed and that information about the complaints procedure is made available. Where concerns

are raised these are addressed in a timely way, with the person raising the concern.

16. 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.

Adoption Cumbria provides an adoption service to:

- Children in need of an adoptive family, including children who are currently in care planning through legal proceedings.
- Birth / First families
- Members of the public wishing to adopt.
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Children and adoptive parents who need adoption support services
- Adopted adults

4. Organisational Structure of the agency

Service Manager			
Vicky Davidson Boyd (0.6) & Emily Christmas (0.4)			

Recruitment & Assessment Team	Adoption Support Team	Permanence & Panels	Children's Adoption Team
Team Manager Zoe Chambers 1.0 FTE	Team Manager Jane Gray 0.6 FTE	Team Manager Yvonne Eardley 0.8 FTE	Ann Peerless 0.5 FTE Sharon Slack 0.5 FTE

	Vacancy 0.4 FTE		
Social Workers Rhonna Serrano 1.0 FTE Penny Hindle 0.6 FTE Ali Beattie 0,6 FTE Verity Coppard 1.0 FTE Vacancy 0.6 FTE Support Workers Debbie Jackson 1.0 FTE Louise Davies 1.0 FTE Marketing and Recruitment Jodie Thanner Wilde 0.8 FTE	Advanced Practitioner Louise McConochie 1.0 FTE Kat Bonney 1.0 FTE Social Workers Claire Colvan 0.6FTE Liz Agar 1.0 FTE Zoe Boullier 0.5 FTE Karyn Brand 1.0 FTE Ruth Wilkinson 1.0 FTE Lynne Westgarth 1.0 FTE Margaret Murphy 0.65 FTE	Social Workers Laura Parker 1.0 FTE Lyndsey Mayne 0.5 FTE Debbi Lees 0.5 FTE	Advanced Practitioner Kim Conyers 1.0 FTE Social Workers Liz Comber 1.0 FTE Ganesh Prasad 1.0 FTE Georgia Bell 1.0 FTE Michaela McDonald 1.0 FTE Jo Ford 0.5 FTE Angela Balmer 1.0 FTE Support Workers Liz Burns 1.0 FTE Kayleigh Ward 1.0 FTE

5. Adoption Service Delivery – Key Functions

Recruitment and Assessment Team

- Marketing the agency to enquirers in the public living within the community, and providing information about adoption and the needs of children who require adoption.
- Assessment and preparation of prospective adoptive families, including visits to the home, meeting with the family network, taking up references and statutory checks and running preparation training.
- Prepare the Prospective adopter report (PAR)
- Present the PAR to the Adoption panel, for consideration of suitability to adopt.

Childrens Adoption Team

- Oversight of all children with a possible adoption outcome, from pre proceedings/Legal panel.
- Support to the Safeguarding SW responsible for care planning for adoption.
- Responsibility for early permanence planning where appropriate.
- Preparation of the Child Permanence Report (CPR) for children where adoption is their plan.
- Preparation of the Life Story Book and Later Life Letter
- Case responsibility from Placement Order
- Support to Family finding for children with a PO
- Preparation for Matching with Adoptive Family
- Introductions of the child to the family
- Statutory visits to children in their new family, until the Adoption order

Family Finding Team

- Responsibility for finding families for children from the earliest point possible, including all activity locally and nationally
- Tracking all children in permanency planning for adoption
- Support to Matching
- Adoption Panel Advisor role is held by the Team Manager
- Should be Placed for Adoption (SHOPA) advisor to the Agency Decision Maker

Adoption Support Team

- Case responsibility for the Adoptive family from approval onwards. Support for families waiting for a child to be placed with them.
- Supporting adopters in early permanence where appropriate.
- Advice, guidance and support to adoptive families during the matching process and after placement. This includes workshops and training and support groups.
- Responsibility for therapeutic parenting courses and support, engagement events and activities, assessment of adoption support needs, commissioning specialist assessments, and therapeutic services, enabling access to consultation with the commissioned family therapy and psychological advice.
- Direct social work support to children and families, where this identified as part of the assessment
- Liaison with wider pan regional adoption support services, for access by adopted children and families.
- Provision of the Facilitator role for Peer led buddying. Team manager attends the Adopter Forum.
- Provision of activities for young adopted people.
- Facilitation of the Adoption Youth Group- the Voice and Influence

group for young adopted people.

- Co-ordination of the newsletter for adoptive families
- Responsible for the Staying In Touch arrangements, including exchange of indirect contacts, and support to direct contact where possible and planned.
- Reviews of Staying In Touch arrangements
- Support to Birth/First families around adoption, including support to maintain direct contact, and write letters
- Direct service to adopted adults seeking access to adoption records.
- Those wishing to adopt from abroad are referred to another agency that provide a service under contract for Adoption Cumbria (ICA) .

Information about all aspects of the adoption service can be accessed via the Adoption Cumbria website. www.adoptioncumbria.org.uk

Adoption Cumbria 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, 111 Botchergate, Carlisle. CA1 1RD

The enquiry contact number is: 0303 333 1216

The duty contact number is: 0303 333 1216

Staff are also based in offices in West Cumbria House, Kendal County Hall and Voreda House, Penrith.

6. Qualifications, Experience and numbers of staff

Vicky Davidson Boyd is the joint Service Manager for Cumbria Adoption.
(0.6 FTE)

Qualifications: BSc (hons) Degree in Psychology; Diploma in Social Work and Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) 1990; Masters in Business Administration (MBA) (2016); Institute of Leadership and Management (ILMS) Certificate in Management (2001) ; NVQ Level 3 in Adult Teaching; Vicky is an experienced and qualified social worker and manager in Children's Services, including Fostering Services, IRO, RAA leadership. Vicky has 8 years' experience as an RAA leader in a previous RAA, and in Adoption Cumbria since 2025.

Emily Christmas is the joint Service Manager for Cumbria Adoption. (0.4 FTE)

Qualifications: BSc (hons) Degree in Psychology; MSc Psychological Research Methods, MA Social Work. Emily's working history spans across different sectors from care and forensic psychological services to social care in varied roles including fostering and adoption. Emily is an experienced leader with a passion for supporting children in their permanence planning to enable children to have stable, long-term futures.

The agency has four Team Managers:

Zoe Chambers manages the Recruitment and Assessment team and leads on recruitment & assessment of adopters. Zoe holds a BSc Hons Degree in Criminology and an MA in Applied Social Science and 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 and 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.

Sharon Slack

Sharon manages the Children's Adoption Team, and is an experienced manager, IRO, and practitioner in adoption services. Sharon qualified with a masters degree in social work in 2006, and has experience in the voluntary adoption sector, and in child protection services also.

7. Support to Care Planning for Adoption for Children

The Children's Adoption Team (CAT) have oversight of children who may have a care plan of adoption, from the earliest time possible in the child's life, which is in the pre proceedings stage of Local Authority assessment and legal planning. The CAT team is represented on the Legal panels of each Local Authority, to begin an understanding of children who may come to be cared for and where adoption is one possible outcome.

The CAT team monitors children's early planning and attends relevant children's Permanency planning meetings to maintain a timely commencement of Child Permanence Report (CPR) preparation, and assessment of the child's long term needs.

The CAT team social worker works alongside the allocated Safeguarding caseholding social worker, providing advice and guidance on key actions required for adoption planning, including ensuring that medical reports are obtained from the Agency Medical Advisor, and assessments are progressed according to children's needs. The CAT social worker is responsible for preparing the CPR, including ensuring that Staying in Touch (SIT) arrangements have been assessed and discussed, and that Together or Apart assessments are undertaken where brothers and sisters require adoption. The CAT social worker and safeguarding social worker work together to progress all assessments, and work with birth parents and family to progress life story work, and contribution to the child's assessment and plan.

The child is booked for the Agency Decision Makers "Should be Placed for Adoption" (SHOPA) decision, following the Local Authority agreement that

adoption is the LA plan for the child, overseen by the IRO, to be presented to Court.

The adoption team manager, permanency and panels, provides SHOPA advice to the ADM, and the ADM makes the decision based on the reports provided in the CPR, which includes the Adoption Agency Medical Advisor report, including AAR 15; AAR 17 statements. The CPR contains a detailed overview of the SIT plan proposed, and the proposals around whether children are placed together with brothers/sisters or apart, with reasons.

The Safeguarding social worker holds case responsibility for care proceedings and placement application in Court.

Once the Placement Order is made, case responsibility transfers to the Children's Adoption team and the matching process outlined below progresses in full.

Family Finding is undertaken at an earlier stage than the point of Placement Order, and the agency will start looking at suitable families for a child from the point of ADM SHOPA decision, or earlier if appropriate, allowing forward planning for matching post Placement Order.

8. Early Permanence for Children

The Regional Adoption Agency supports early permanence planning and placement for children where applicable. It is known that this reduces moves in foster care for children, and contributes to later life better mental wellbeing, and resilience.

The RAA has one Advanced Practitioner who is appointed to lead on early permanence planning and arrangements, supporting social workers across all services in working together when this arrangement takes place.

Where it is identified for a child pre-birth, or during pre proceedings that adoption is a likely or possible outcome for the child, the CAT team will discuss with the Safeguarding social worker the option to progress an early permanence arrangement (EP). In these cases, the CAT social worker will liaise with the Advanced Practitioner and Recruitment team to identify if there are available approved EP carers.

A matching process takes place, to consider available EP carers as a suitable long term potential adoption match, and whether carers are able to meet the child's known long term needs.

The Adopters social worker and CAT social worker will provide information on the child to the EP carers/prospective adopters, and determine if they wish to progress with the link. Where it is agreed that this is a suitable match, and the child's plan is to become cared for, with a possible adoption outcome, the social workers together prepare the Regulation 25 a) (CPPCR Regs) report, for consideration by the ADM, and temporary approval by the Local Authority as foster carers (early permanence) for the child.

Birth parents are always consulted and informed about the fostering arrangement being an early permanence arrangement. The child is then able to move to the EP carers from the commencement of their cared for period, who will be foster carers while care planning progresses, to final hearing.

The fostering service is notified and has a designated role in support and supervision of carers, under fostering regulations.

Under an early permanence arrangement the carers will facilitate family time for the child, and meet with birth parents, and act in all ways as would a regular foster carer. EP carers are trained and prepared to understand that a child may return to family at the final hearing, if this is the outcome of the care proceedings as decided by the Judge.

Where a Placement Order goes on to be granted, the child and family will proceed to a formal adoption match, under the arrangements set out below.

9. The Service for Prospective Adopters

Enquiries and first contact

Enquirers can access information on adopting with Adoption Cumbria 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.

Information events and bookable appointments

Information events are delivered online where the enquirer(s) can take part from the comfort of their own home, and are delivered by a Support Worker and an adoptive parent. 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 Adoption Cumbria website.

Initial home visit

Enquirers wishing to progress will be offered an initial 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 considered by the Recruitment manager before the registration of interest form is provided. All enquirers are entitled to submit a registration of interest. 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.

An information pack on the application and assessment process can be accessed through this link [Adoption Information Pack_1.pdf](#)

Stage 1 of the assessment process

Stage One begins on the day that Adoption Cumbria 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 advisor, 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 1 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 preparation sessions in Stage One 3 day training. They will also be encouraged to access e-learning components on the First4Adoption and other websites.

Preparation groups for first time adopters run approximately 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. 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 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 2 assessment.

Where prospective adopters wish to be considered for early permanence fostering, for a specific child, prior to adopting the child, the assessment will also cover elements of the fostering role, and the applicants' preparation and readiness for this.

On the basis of the assessment the adoption social worker will write a Prospective Adopters' Report (PAR). This is a detailed report providing information about the prospective adopter(s) and their background. The report will include an analysis of the information and make a recommendation 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 2 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 scrutinize the decisions of adoption agencies, and make recommendations back to the agency around their original decision, however, it cannot overturn the original decision.

Adoption by existing foster carers

In some cases, foster carers who are caring for a particular child who has an adoption plan may wish to be assessed to adopt that child. 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 and will be discussed with the foster carers, who will also be informed of their legal rights. The children's adoption team social worker will complete an initial viability report. Where it is not felt that the child's best interests would be met through adoption by the foster carers, the agency will be open and transparent with the foster carers as to why.

A fast-track process will be provided for approved foster carers who want to be assessed as adoptive parents, and who's registration of interest is accepted. Stage one and two of the adoption processes will take place concurrently to avoid delay.

The full Fast Track assessment should be completed within 4 months of ROI.

Second time or subsequent adopters

Families who have previously been assessed and approved as adopters can apply to adopt again. If the application takes place before the Adoption order is granted in respect of the first child, the assessment can be updated, to consider and include a second child, usually a brother or sister of the first child who also becomes subject to adoption planning. If the first child has an Adoption Order made through the Court, the adoptive parents are no longer classed as approved adopters, and must undertake a further assessment. 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.

This is also known as a Fast Track assessment and avoids duplication of information gathering that remains unchanged between first and subsequent assessments.

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 matter, or where the Agency no longer considers adopters as suitable to adopt.
- 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- consensual adoption.

Adoption Cumbria holds 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, and are former senior leaders in Children's Services.

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 local 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 Agency 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.

Adoption Cumbria 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 inform applicants verbally of the agency decision immediately. The decision will be confirmed in writing to applicants within five working days.

Matching and support

Following Panel, adopters are supported by an experienced Adoption Social Worker, 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.

A new service from 2026 is allocation of a peer buddy for newly approved adoptive parents. The peer buddy will be an already approved and experienced adoptive parent who will have a role in guiding and helping new adoptive parents to navigate support services, and the next steps of the journey, from an adopter perspective.

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.

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 Staying In Touch (SIT) with birth relatives, or exchange of information through the SIT 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 "meet before match" 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 (APR), which will be shared with the prospective adopters, along with the adoption support plan (ASP) , before panel.

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. Adoption Cumbria use the guiding principles of the UEA Moving to Adoption model which focuses on an individual plan tailored for each child. 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 undertake an annual review with the prospective adoptive parents, to consider reasons why a match has not been possible within the first 12 months. A review of the plans, prospective adopters matching preferences, and training, alongside checks and references may need to be updated.

The agency may decide to refer the case back to Panel if there is a significant event, circumstance change or if it proposes that the prospective adopters are no longer suitable to adopt.

In all cases other than a proposal for de-registration, the Service manager will sign off the review.

Meeting birth parents

Most adopters will meet the child's birth parents either prior to or after the child moves in with them, 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 arrangements for staying in touch. In many cases, and increasing numbers, there are direct Staying In Touch plans for children with birth family members, including parents. Adopters may also meet with the child's brothers or sisters and their carers.

After the child moves in to live with their adoptive family

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 'cared for' child until an Adoption Order is made. The social worker must visit the child within the first week after they move in,

followed by weekly visits up to the child's first statutory review at 4 weeks, 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.

Life story content and book will be provided for the child by the child's social worker, supported by an Adoption Support Worker, who may also do direct work with children, to prepare them for moving to a new family. The Life Story Book is 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, and family, for the child when they are approaching teenage years.

10. Staying in Touch (SIT) Services for Children and Families

Support with staying in touch arrangements between adopted children and their birth families is provided by the agency. All SIT arrangements will be reached having taken account of what is in the best interests of the child, and will be assessed and discussed with birth family during care proceedings, and specified in the Adoption Support Plan before a child is placed. Arrangements for maintaining relationships may change over time and original agreements can be re-visited and reviewed. The Adoption Support service will undertake a review of SIT upon request of any party. SIT may include indirect exchange of correspondence (formerly letterbox), face-to-face meetings between the child and members of their family, including

parents, brothers and sisters, or extended family members or other individual arrangements.

A SIT arrangement 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

11. Adoption Support Services

Adoption Cumbria 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.

The Adoption Support Team is developing a “Core Offer” of adoption support services, which detail all services available, and how to access them. This new brochure (2026) will also detail adoption support services which are being commissioned through the North West pan regional RAA group, under funding from Adoption England.

For adoptive families:

The adoption support team offers a range of services including training and support events, groupwork and bookable consultations with specialist professional including a commissioned psychologist; commissioned family therapists; commissioned educational psychologist. The team will also undertake an assessment of need with the family and will agree a support plan based on the family’s request and identified needs, including consideration of making an application to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic support. Outcome-based measures will be used with the family.

An Adopter Forum is set up, and takes place half termly, to listen to adopters, and provide an opportunity for engagement and co-design of services. Through the Adopter Forum feedback, the RAA has set up a peer Buddying service, and a proposes a peer led support group.

The core 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 SIT arrangements between adopters and birth relatives;
- Social activities and events for adoptive families.

Adopted children & young people:

- Groups and activities, promoting friendship and shared experience.
Adoption Youth Group which is the forum for young people to give the voice of the adopted child, and shape services.
- Offering training and advice for schools to help teachers understand adopted children's needs,

Therapeutic services commissioned by the RAA to deliver therapy, as determined through the assessment, or through commissioned specialist assessment.
- 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 Staying in Touch, support to write letters, and support around adoption issues for the birth parent.
- 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.

Support to access birth and adoption records, and counselling around these services.

Information about our Adoption Services can be accessed via Telephone number

0303 333 1216

or duty mail box Adoption Support Team:

AdoptionSupportTeam@cumberland.gov.uk

Applications for adoptions from overseas

Inter-country adoption is a specialist area of work, as each country has its own legislation and regulations regarding adoption. Adoption Cumbria has a contract with a specialist provider, the Inter Country Adoption Centre, to provide this work. Applicants pay a fee for their assessment service, including the home study and then further fees for safeguarding checks etc. Access is through an initial enquiry to Adoption Cumbria.

12. Children's Guide to Adoption

There is a children's guide to adoption support services for all children who are adopted. The Adoption Youth Group are reviewing this guide in 2026.

13. 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.

Quarterly data is provided on adoption pathways and timescales for children and families to the ASGLB, which is published and monitored.

Each Local Authority monitors adoption performance through data reports, annual reporting and attendance at Corporate Parenting Meetings.

An adopter survey is provided to all adopters at all stages of the pathway, for feedback on how the agency is doing and where improvements could be made.

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 files, 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.

14. Concerns and Complaints

All prospective adopters engaging with the Agency and all birth parents of child for whom the Agency is planning adoption are provided with written information about Complaints Procedures, including contact details for the Complaints Officer. All young people, 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:

<https://www.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