

Agenda Item	<b>5</b>
Report No	<b>HCW/08/26</b>

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

**Date:** 27 May 2026

**Report Title:** Fostering Update - (CAN Digital)

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - People

## **1 Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report proposes to provide Members with assurance on the effectiveness, governance and value for money of the Highland Council's Fostering Service's evolving approach to the recruitment and retention of foster carers, at a time of sustained national and local foster care recruitment and retention challenges.
- 1.2 The report sets out the national and local context for foster care, including trends in demand, service resilience and the availability of foster carers. It explains the actions being taken by the Service in response to a recent review by CAN Digital Solutions. This includes significant improvement actions around planned recruitment and retention and associated costs, as well as process change and promotional activity. It describes the governance, oversight and quality assurance arrangements in place to ensure the service remains effective, compliant and focused on improving outcomes for children and young people, supporting the Council's aspiration for reducing dependency on costly commissioned placements.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the national and local context for foster care recruitment and retention, including the sustained challenges facing the fostering service;
  - ii. Note the additional resources being directed towards the Fostering Service;
  - iii. Note the range of improvement actions being undertaken to improve performance.

## **3 Implications**

- 3.1 **Resource** – The CAN Digital Review identified that the Council's Fostering Service is under-resourced to properly fulfil all of its functions and this is impacting on overall performance. Consequently, the intention is to redirect resources to the team by a combination of utilising a vacant post from elsewhere in the service and drawing down

from the Transformation reserve which has been earmarked to assist with budget recovery and shifting the balance of care.

Two new roles of Recruitment and Retention Officer are being created to focus specifically on the onboarding and support of prospective and existing foster carers. The anticipated grade is expected to be no higher than a HC07 which at mid point in the scale costs @ £38,675 p/a plus on costs. More detail about the role is set out in sections 6 and 7. It is important to stress that these are not intended to take the place of qualified social workers, who play a different and critical role in ensuring placements are safe, nurturing and support children to thrive.

Through the launch of a digital marketing campaign the Service will be placing greater emphasis on attracting new Council foster carers to enable a shift away from reliance on more expensive Independent Fostering Agency placements. The Recruitment and Retention Officer posts will be an essential resource to maximise the number of enquiries being converted into Council foster carers. The cost of the Digital Marketing campaign is budgeted at £30,000.

The total additional cost to the Service is £138k in year one, reducing to c£107k annually thereafter. £65,700 will be provided on a recurring basis through the deletion of an existing vacant HC09 post, with the remainder coming from the transformation reserve in the short term. It is expected that savings made through the recruitment of new Council foster carers in place of expensive independent placements will provide the funding required to run the service on a sustainable basis over the longer term.

- 3.2 **Legal** - Foster care is a highly regulated discipline which sits within a statutory framework. The assessment, registration and review of foster carers is prescribed by legislation and the service itself is formally scrutinised by the Care Inspectorate on an on-going basis.
- 3.3 **Risk** – The risk is that if the service does not introduce new and innovative approaches to recruitment and retention, then the number of THC foster carers will continue to decline, directly impacting on budget recovery and shifting the balance of care. In addition to this, there is a risk that, without having a sufficiency of resources readily at hand, the service is unable to respond to foster care enquiries timeously, resulting in prospective carers withdrawing their interest or taking their interest elsewhere.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – n/a
- 3.5 **Gaelic** – n/a
- 4. Impacts**
- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 An Integrated Assessment Screening has been completed and a summary of the conclusions is outlined below:

<b>Impact Assessment Area</b>	<b>Conclusion of Screening</b>
Equality	Positive
Socio-economic	No Impact
Human Rights	Positive
Children’s Rights and Well-being	Positive
Island and Mainland Rural	No Impact
Climate Change	No Impact
Data Rights	No Impact

Where potential impacts have been noted, they have been identified as positive and so a Full Impact Assessment is not required.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1 Foster care offers children a safe, nurturing and family-based environment that helps them grow, thrive and achieve positive outcomes, often making it the most suitable alternative care option when they cannot live at home or in a kinship placement. Foster carers provide stability, empathy and consistent relationships that support healthy development and help children reach their potential. As well as providing positive outcomes for children and young people, foster care is a cost-effective way to provide care for children who cannot be looked after by their parents or extended family.
- 5.2 However, there is currently a national shortage of foster carers. Available evidence tells us that there are more people leaving foster care than there are becoming foster carers. Scotland’s annual social work statistics show a decrease in the number of foster carers in Scotland year on year. The recent Scottish Government Future of Foster Care: consultation analysis – updated final report (October 2025) reported a current shortfall of around 400 foster carers across Scotland. In addition, children's needs are increasingly diverse, with an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and those who have more complex needs and trauma. This situation is reflected in THC Fostering Service with a noticeable decline in recruitment of foster carers (FC) and prospective adoptive carers (PAP) over recent years.

## **6. CAN Digital Review**

- 6.1 CAN Digital is a widely used digital platform that supports a significant number of UK local authorities in promoting initiatives and to run targeted campaigns online. Their tools, including AI-driven audience profiling, are used to serve ads safely on council websites. From research undertaken by Children’s Services prior to engaging CAN Digital, it is evident that CAN Digital has a proven track record for increasing fostering recruitment activity in those local authority areas that have commissioned them.

- 6.2 CAN Digital was commissioned by Highland Council to conduct an audit of fostering enquiry and application processes and procedures (**Appendix 1**). The objective of the audit was to advise and make recommendations which deliver ongoing improvements to the fostering recruitment journey. This should ultimately result in attracting and recruiting more foster carers.
- 6.3 The review has identified a number of areas for improvement, accompanied by 5 specific recommendations. This includes comprehensive review and associated improvements to the procedures, processes and mechanisms used during the enquiry and assessment process. From these recommendations, the most important changes to make are at the very start of the journey, particularly when it comes to making it easier for a visitor to the Highland Council website to make an enquiry via a simple online contact form. The content and appearance of the website should be improved to fully engage with potential carers and provide a similar browsing experience to an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) website. In particular, the web pages should 'sell' the Highland Council fostering brand, especially when highlighting the benefits of fostering for Highland Council instead of an IFA.
- 6.4 The CAN Digital audit has also identified that, due to being under resourced over a number of years, the Highland Council fostering team is often unable to do the right things in the right way at the right time, and this impacts on the length of time taken to complete fostering assessments. The role of the social worker has also become more complex with additional tasks attached to it, alongside increased pressures and work generated because of staff vacancy rates in Care and Protection teams.
- 6.5 CAN Digital report that the consequence of having a depleted workforce within the fostering service has been low levels of recruitment activity and low numbers of enquiries and fostering approvals. There can be 'drift' and a lack of target deadlines for the various key points of an assessment, particularly for preparation training and the fostering panel. Overall, there is a lot of scope to reduce the length of time an assessment takes from the point of application.
- 6.6 It is noteworthy that significant improvement activity has taken place since the new Service Manager came into post. The Service has managed to work through the backlog of assessments and are currently in the position of reviewing wider performance standards. The service now tracks delays so that it can easily differentiate between when it is a service performance issue or an unavoidable issue in the applicants' circumstances. The Service is hopeful that it will see further improvements resulting from internal changes alongside upskilling the teams and having a resource to outsource assessments when existing staffing resources cannot manage additional the demand.
- 6.7 Having accepted the CAN Digital recommendations, the fostering service needs to assess what additional resources and approaches are necessary in order to respond to potential, additional demands on the service. Important lessons can be learned from Scottish Borders Council, who, having commissioned CAN Digital to support them with fostering recruitment in October 2025, experienced a significant increase in the number of fostering enquiries. Scottish Borders Council had 79 enquiries between October 2025 and March 2026 compared with only 27 enquiries between 1st October 2024 and 30 September 2025. THC needs to have the requisite resources in place to respond to a similar level of increased activity as seen in Scottish Borders.

## 7. Next Steps

- 7.1 There are currently 82 registered foster carer households in Highland. There was one newly approved fostering household in March 2026 and two de-registered households. There are currently two active fostering assessments, with one additional assessment expected to commence in the coming weeks. This assessment will be outsourced as per CAN Digital recommendations to ensure a timely process.
- 7.2 The decision to outsource assessments on an interim basis will allow the service to implement improvements to processes and increase capacity and capability in the team whilst ensuring targets are met for shifting the balance of care away from commissioned foster placements. The intention is to move assessments back in-house once these changes have been made.
- 7.3 Creating the new Recruitment and Retention Officers will be a key aspect of increasing capacity in the team. The role will cover carer recruitment and retention, working to develop localised activities and initiatives with the support of the area teams. The Recruitment & Retention Officers will act as the primary link between the Service and the public, focusing on attracting, screening, and supporting prospective and approved foster carers. They will lead on the non-regulatory elements of carer support by managing the training lifecycle and implementing retention initiatives. The goal is to ensure all carers meet training and development standards whilst promoting participation to ensure carers feel valued, thereby reducing placement breakdown and carer turnover.
- 7.4 The Retention and Recruitment Officers, unlike social workers within the service will be able to offer consistent communications and support to prospective foster carers, building relationships and ensuring that momentum is built and traction gained in terms of progressing expressions of interest towards the assessment process and onwards towards approval.
- 7.5 In addition to this, the service has commissioned CAN Digital to support THC with raising awareness surrounding fostering in Highland and in running a digital marketing recruitment campaign. The cost of this initiative is circa £30,000. CAN Digital will use a large range of channels to ensure our service is visible to potential carers wherever they are online. They continually optimise campaigns when it's live – putting resources into the ads and channels that work best. As CAN Digital work with dozens of council fostering services, they continually compare outcomes from each, learning what works and transferring this knowledge to their campaigns.
- 7.6 Senior staff within the service have accepted that the service has underperformed in this aspect of the process for a number of years and are examining the best practice of other fostering services in Scotland.

Other priority areas for service improvement are:

- Expedite completion of Form F assessments (this is the assessment framework for assessing prospective foster carers) by outsourcing where necessary to ensure prompt onboarding of new carers.
- Focussed recruitment & retention activity within the service – advertisements for foster carers, consideration of digital marketing campaigns, nurture existing enquiries, convene local information events, hold carer life appreciation days, listening circles and creating a carer ambassador group.

7.7 Further developments underway to help support the strategic aim of shifting the balance of care are:

- Foster carer recruitment communication now live on Education hub page;
- Recruitment comms to be included in quarterly school newsletters, THC payslips and vacancy emails and NHS Highland pages;
- Corporate Communications team supporting the development of merchandise for planned recruitment events, including flag banners and pop ups;
- Online enquiry form removed and replaced with simple 'contact us' details, webpage updated with improved language;
- New enquiry process and tracking implemented via fostering duty team to include 'nurturing' approach and face to face contact;
- Website being developed to mimic Independent Fostering Agencies;
- Fostering finances and information booklets being developed, then to be uploaded to website;
- Form F trainer identified to deliver to larger cohort of staff;
- Enhanced training plan developed;
- Relief staff advert planned to create pool of staff, including recent retirees who can complete Form F assessments as and when required.

Designation:	Assistant Chief Executive - People
Date:	13 May 2026
Author:	Jack Libby – Transition Head of Children and Justice
Background Papers:	N/A
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – CAN Digital Report

Highland Council

# Audit of Fostering Enquiry, Application and Assessment Journey

November 2025

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## **2. Objectives**

CAN was commissioned by Highland Council to conduct an audit of their fostering enquiry and application processes and procedures.

The objective of the audit is to advise and make recommendations which deliver ongoing improvements to the fostering recruitment journey. This will ultimately result in Highland Council attracting and recruiting more foster carers.

The audit was carried out with the experience of enquirers and applicants at the heart. Putting ourselves into the shoes of potential foster carers was the most effective way to evaluate the quality of Highland Council's communication, service level, and overall approach to the process of recruiting new foster carers, many of whom will be brand new to the world of fostering.

Our work comes at a critical time for Highland Council. Demand for fostering placements has been growing for some time, and all indicators point to even higher demand over the coming years. This is compounded by strong competition from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) recruiting fostering households in the area. It is vital that Highland Council's fostering service performs as well as it can in attracting the maximum number of enquiries from potential carers in the area, and ensuring the journey to approval is a smooth one for applicants.

We were delighted to have the opportunity to conduct an audit of Highland Council's fostering recruitment journey. It was a pleasure to engage with staff, and conduct interviews with recently approved foster carers.

The commitment, passion and dedication displayed by Highland Council staff was very refreshing. The appetite within the fostering team for making the required changes to practice and processes is highly evident, and this positive attitude is essential for success.

We anticipate that this audit and the recommendations contained within will play a significant role in Highland Council fostering team's continued improvement.

### **3. About CAN Digital**

CAN work with public sector organisations on a wide variety of campaigns, including behaviour change and awareness raising. They have worked with a significant number of local authority fostering services across the UK for many years, and set up the Fostering Recruitment Hub in 2021 to share knowledge and expertise between services throughout the country.

### **4. About the report author**

John Cooper has many years of experience recruiting foster carers for local authorities, having worked for Leicestershire County Council, Nottingham City Council, and Birmingham Children's Trust. He has headed up the Fostering Recruitment Hub since 2021, which involves working with local authority fostering services around the UK to increase their in-house fostering provision.

## **5. Methodology**

The audit took place over a period of several weeks during the autumn of 2025. Activities included:

- Review of all the mechanisms by which someone interested in fostering could make contact with Highland fostering service.
- 'Testing' all of these mechanisms to evaluate their ease of use and quality of response.
- Interviews with fostering team staff who are involved in the enquiry, application and assessment stages.
- Interviews with households that have recent experience of the fostering enquiry and/or assessment process.
- Review the forms an enquirer/applicant is required to complete.
- Review of Highland Council fostering service online presence.
- Discussions with members of Highland Council communications team.

We would like to thank all those who gave their time willingly to provide information for this audit.

## 6. Executive summary

The audit revealed that Highland Council fostering team suffer from a distinct lack of resources. This significantly hinders the ability to do the right things in the right way at the right time. The consequence over recent years has been low numbers of enquiries from potential foster carers and subsequent approvals.

The knock-on effect of this is increasing numbers of children and young people needing to be placed with IFA carers or in residential provision, sometimes at great distance from their communities, and at significant cost to the local authority.

Where we have identified areas for improvement, these are highlighted with specific recommendations. They include comprehensive reviews and changes to the procedures, processes and mechanisms used during the enquiry and assessment process.

We recommend that the most important changes to make are at the very start of the journey, particularly when it comes to making it easier for a visitor to the Highland Council website to make an enquiry via a simple online contact form. The content and appearance of the website should be improved too, in order to fully engage with potential carers and provide a similar browsing experience to an IFA website. In particular the web pages should 'sell' the Highland Council fostering brand, especially when highlighting the benefits of fostering for Highland Council instead of an IFA.

The system currently used by potential foster carers to make an enquiry is not fit for purpose, either by those enquiring, or the staff members who handle enquiries which are made through it. The system is not adequately supported, and therefore appropriate changes cannot be made to the way it functions. We recommend that the system is no longer used and an alternative method of handling enquiries is employed.

When an enquirer requests information to be sent to them, there is much room for improvement. To this end we recommend the development of a new 'introduction to fostering' information pack.

A very important thing to note is the excessive length of time recent assessments have taken. There is 'drift' and lack of target deadlines for the various key points of an assessment, particularly for preparation training and the fostering panel.

Overall, there is a lot of scope to reduce the length of time an assessment takes from the point of application. This can be modelled from examining the best practice of other LAs.

Two distinct roles have been identified which will significantly improve the entire fostering recruitment journey and beyond – Fostering Recruitment Officer and Fostering Training & Retention Officer. These roles should have a degree of overlap, which enables them to cover each other in times of absence.

Highland Council fostering team are in a position of significantly unrealised potential - by making the right improvements they will increase their chances of increasing numbers of foster carers. By commissioning this audit, Highland Council has shown that the appetite for improvements is present within the organisation. Making the necessary changes will ensure that the service attracts more enquiries, a higher proportion of the enquiries turn into applications, and more of the applicants will go on to become approved foster carers.

## 7. Background

Since 2020, the number of fostering enquiries and approvals has been very low for a local authority with the population size of Highland Council.

Number of fostering enquiries by year:

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Fostering	47	46	24	36	26	33
Joint Fostering & Adoption Enquiry	18	12	14	9	10	6

Number of fostering households approved by year:

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 up to Oct 2025
Approved Foster Carers	9	4	2	2	3	3

There are severe implications if this trend does not change.

Children and young people in care are less likely to be able to remain within their communities, and may need to be placed at some distance with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers, or in residential provision.

The cost of placing children with external providers is a significant drain on the overall budget.

Increasing the number of fostering enquiries and making improvements to the journey through application and assessment will in turn increase the number of approved fostering households. This will allow more children and young people to remain within their communities, in line with Highland Council's Family First policy and also the national commitment to 'The Promise'.

More approved fostering households will also reduce the reliance on external providers, and generate significant savings.

## **8. The journey to becoming a foster carer with Highland Council**

The vast majority of potential foster carers that approach Highland Council have not been approved to foster previously. This means that they need to be educated and nurtured through the various processes and stages, at a pace which is comfortable for them.

### **8.1 Information gathering/engaging with the fostering service**

The consideration period for those who go on to foster is typically several years. Becoming a foster carer is a life-changing decision, not something which is entered into lightly.

Many potential foster carers will start gathering information very early on during their consideration period, making contact with a fostering service some time before they know their circumstances will be suitable. Others will wait to make contact when they are 'ready to go' and make an application.

A fostering service needs to cater for the needs of everyone within this range, providing relevant information at the right time for each individual, so that no potential carers are deterred by a 'one size fits all' approach. Highland Council currently have a small number of ways in which an enquirer can find more information and/or speak with fostering team staff:

- Fostering pages of the Highland Council website
- Phone
- Email
- Enquiry form on Highland Council website
- Download information document from Highland Council website
- Download fostering allowances document from Highland Council website

### **8.2 Screening call**

A key part of the early journey is the screening call. This is arranged with a fostering team member, who will gather information about them and their circumstances, and answer any questions they may have. A screening call must take place before the initial home visit.

### **8.3 Initial Visit**

If the enquirer's circumstances are conducive to fostering, an initial home visit will be arranged with a social worker. This is to ensure that the property and spare bedroom(s) proposed for fostering are suitable, and also find out more about the enquirer.

### **8.4 Pre-approval training**

If the social worker who has carried out the initial visit feels that the enquirer meets the standards to become a foster carer, they will recommend attending pre-approval training.

## **8.5 Application**

After pre-approval training has successfully been completed, the enquirer will then need to make the formal application to foster.

## **8.6 Assessment**

Once the application has been accepted, and preparation training completed, the assessment will start, and an assessing social worker will be allocated. This will consist of several home visits by the social worker who will write the assessment report which is taken to fostering panel.

## **8.7 Background checks/references**

During the assessment Highland Council staff will perform all the necessary background checks (eg PVG) and follow up references. All applicants also need to have undertaken a fostering medical with their GP prior to attending panel.

## **8.8 Fostering panel**

All applicants need to attend fostering panel, along with their assessing social worker. Applicants will have been given a copy of their assessment to read and check for accuracy before it is submitted to the panel.

## **8.9 Agency Decision Maker (ADM)**

The ADM will usually follow the recommendation of the panel – approve, defer or decline the application to foster. This is when the assessment concludes, and approved carers are handed over to be supervised by the fostering team.

Each stage of the process requires very specific communication from Highland Council staff to the enquirer/applicant. This audit report evaluates the communication around each stage, highlighting recommendations for improvement where they are identified.

## 9. Different ways of engaging with Highland Council fostering service

A potential foster carer has a few ways in which to make contact with or learn more about the fostering service.

### 9.1 Highland Council website fostering pages

The importance of the appearance and content of the Highland Council website fostering pages cannot be understated. In 2022, the DfE in England published a research report into the behaviour of those considering fostering (and/or adoption):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-behavioural-insights-to-fostering-and-adoption-in-england>

The report reveals that those seriously considering fostering will spend a lot of time researching the subject, much of this carried out online. This was confirmed during the conversations with those who had experience of a Highland Council fostering assessment.

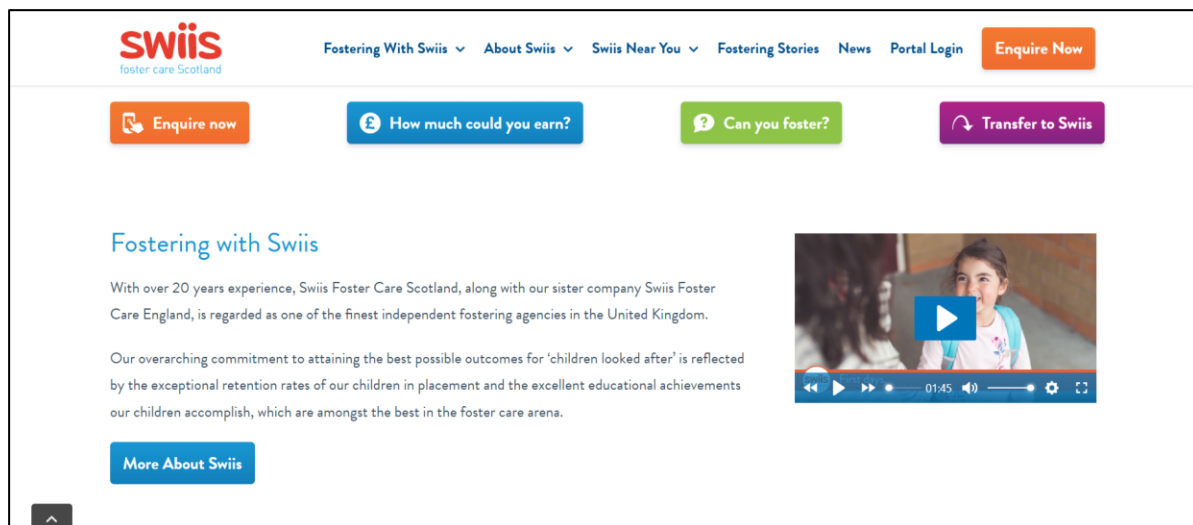
The fostering pages of the Highland Council website do not currently provide the same quality experience to a potential foster carer as those of IFAs that operate in the area.

Highland Council's website architecture does not currently allow much variation in design, resulting in constraints on the way content can be displayed. This is something which requires immediate attention.

### Recommendation 1 – Make changes to Highland Council website fostering pages

IFA websites are characterised by plenty of colour, imagery, video content, graphics, simple contact forms and easy navigation. They are design-led, performance marketing websites, which evolve according to the behaviour of potential foster carers (ie different pages and content are reviewed continually, to result in maximum engagement).

There follows some examples of fostering web pages that Highland Council should emulate:



The screenshot displays the Swiis Foster Care Scotland website. At the top left is the Swiis logo with the tagline 'foster care Scotland'. The navigation menu includes 'Fostering With Swiis', 'About Swiis', 'Swiis Near You', 'Fostering Stories', 'News', 'Portal Login', and an orange 'Enquire Now' button. Below the navigation are four prominent call-to-action buttons: 'Enquire now' (orange), 'How much could you earn?' (blue), 'Can you foster?' (green), and 'Transfer to Swiis' (purple). The main content area features the heading 'Fostering with Swiis' followed by text: 'With over 20 years experience, Swiis Foster Care Scotland, along with our sister company Swiis Foster Care England, is regarded as one of the finest independent fostering agencies in the United Kingdom.' Below this is another paragraph: 'Our overarching commitment to attaining the best possible outcomes for 'children looked after' is reflected by the exceptional retention rates of our children in placement and the excellent educational achievements our children accomplish, which are amongst the best in the foster care arena.' A blue 'More About Swiis' button is positioned at the bottom left. On the right side, there is a video player showing a young girl smiling, with a play button overlay and a progress bar indicating 01:45.

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# CAN I FOSTER IN SCOTLAND?

The first step is to check that you fulfil the basic general fostering requirements:

- Are you at least 21 years old?
- Do you have at least one spare bedroom in your home?
- Are you a full-time resident of the UK, or do you have indefinite leave to remain?

If you have answered 'yes' to all three questions, you have fulfilled the initial criteria. We would now like to talk to you further about why you would like to become a foster carer, & answer any questions you have.

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Welcome back! Is there anything I can help you with?

Write a message...

To increase the chances of potential foster carers viewing more content on the Highland Council fostering pages, spending more time on the site, and ultimately making an enquiry, the fostering pages need to look and operate in precisely the same way as an IFA website.

If the Highland Council web team do not have the skills and resources in-house to produce fostering web pages that put the fostering service on an equal footing with IFAs, Highland Council should appoint a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to create these pages.

Several councils in Scotland and other parts of the UK have seen enquiry numbers increase significantly, after the introduction of content-designed 'landing pages'. These pages are designed and optimised to generate the maximum number of enquiries from online searches for particular fostering topics (allowances/pay, the criteria to foster, types of fostering, support/training, transferring etc). Examples:

<https://fosterwithyourcouncil.uk/scottish-borders-fostering-become-a-foster-carer/>

<https://fosterwithyourcouncil.uk/foster-with-north-lanarkshire-who-can-foster/>

<https://fosterwithyourcouncil.uk/foster-with-stoke-transfer-to-us/>

<https://fosterwithyourcouncil.uk/falkirk-support-and-training/>

<https://fosterwithyourcouncil.uk/brighton-fostering-allowances-and-payments/>

## **9.2 Telephone**

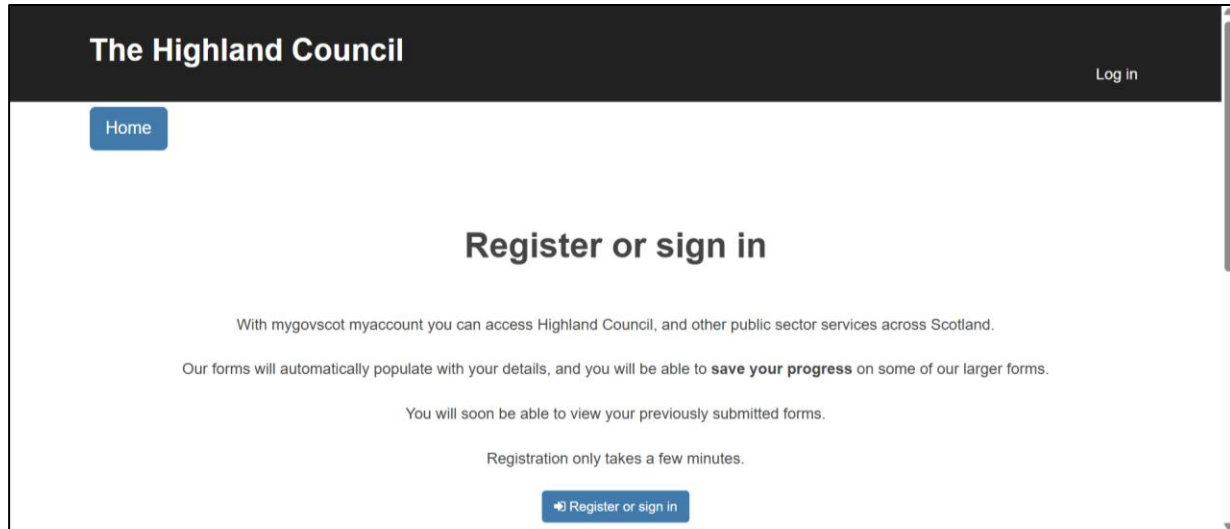
The phone line is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. The number can be found on the main page in the fostering/adoption section of the Highland Council website. This line is usually answered by a member of admin staff, who will take the details and forward to a fostering team member to call the enquirer back. The phone is usually answered immediately, as calls are diverted to their mobiles. If a call is missed for any reason, a voicemail facility allows a message to be left by an enquirer so that fostering team staff can call them back.

## **9.3 Email**

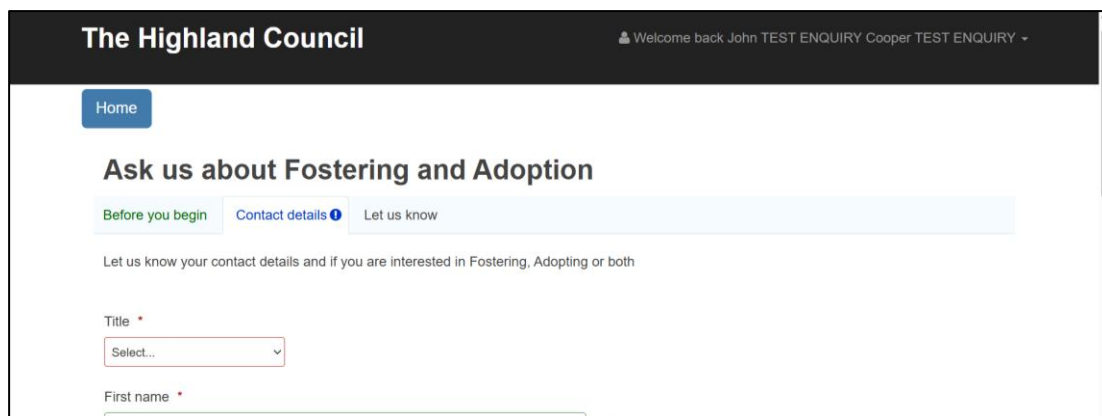
Enquirers can send an email to [fostering@highland.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@highland.gov.uk). The address is displayed on the footer of the main fostering & adoption home page. A test email sent to this inbox was replied to within 1 working day.

## **9.4 Enquiry form on the Highland council website**

Within the fostering pages of the Highland Council website, is a link to 'Ask Us About Fostering'. This clicks through to a page which informs the viewer about the need to log in with or set up a MyScotGov account:



When logged in, this will take the viewer to the enquiry form itself:



After several pages of fields to complete, the form can be submitted. The fostering team get an email notification of the enquiry, and the enquiry information automatically creates a record within the enquiry system.

## **Recommendation 2 – Replace online contact form**

The existing contact form is not fit for purpose. See Appendix Item 15.3 on page 41 for all the screenprints of the entire process. When compared to those enquiry forms which potential foster carers will experience on IFA and other local authority websites, far too much information is required too early - it is akin to a full-blown enquiry form. It is also very cumbersome and contains bugs. See the appendix for screenprints of the full process.

Since the current contact form was installed, Highland Council have seen very low numbers of potential foster carers completing the form.

A well-designed contact form as part of wider changes to the web pages will increase the number of enquiries made. To create the maximum opportunity for submissions, the form

should be located at the bottom of every fostering page on the website, as part of a redesign of all foster pages. The following pages contains some examples of IFA contact forms, which are designed in a way that is likely to elicit large numbers of enquiries.

**fca scotland**  
 Interested in fostering? Call: 0141 646 4805  
 Events News & Blogs Current foster parents Being in Care Hub

Become a foster carer About Fostering About Us Transfer to us Allowances FIND YOUR LOCAL TEAM ENQUIRE NOW

### Speak to our team

Whether you're ready to start your journey or just want to chat to an expert, we're here to help.

First Name:  Last Name:

Phone Number:  Email Address:

Postcode:  How can we help you?:

Comments:

Are you happy to receive regular fostering news from us?  
 Yes  No

SUBMIT ENQUIRY

0330 123 2250 News Blogs Events Knowledge Centre

TACT Fostering Start Fostering Why TACT Transfer to Us About TACT Careers Events Find your local team Make an enquiry

### ENQUIRE TODAY

Name (Required)  
 First:  Last:

Phone Number (Required):  Email Address (Required):

Postcode (Required):  Do you have a spare bedroom? (Required)  
 Yes  No

How can we help you? (Required):  How did you hear about us? (Required):

Consent (Required)  
 I consent to my data being collected and used as outlined in the Privacy Policy (https://tactfostering.org.uk/privacy-notice).

Submit

**swiis**  
 foster care Scotland

Fostering With Swiis About Swiis Swiis Near You Fostering Stories News Portal Login Enquire Now

Complete the form below and we'll be in touch as fast as we can.

Full Name\*  
 First Name:  Last Name:

Email\*:

Phone Number\*:

Postcode\*:

I'm not a robot

SUBMIT ENQUIRY

0333 240 9049  
 calls charged at a local rate

Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm

hello@swiisfostercareScotland.co.uk

SwiisFosterCareScotland

SwiisScotland

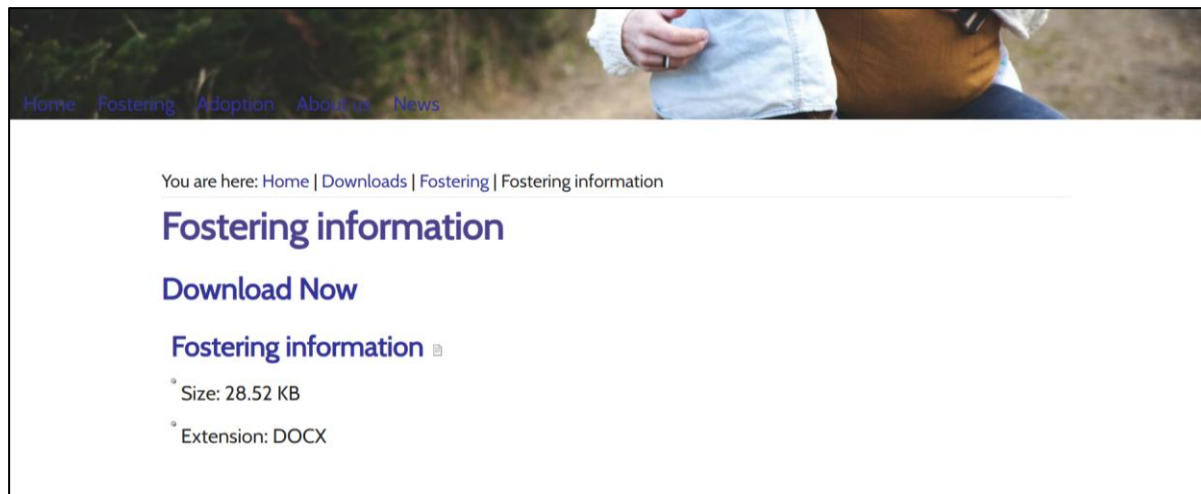
24 November 2025  
 Mon 14:10 (Local time)

## 9.5 Download information document from website

On some of the Highland Council web pages there is a link button to 'Download Information' – clicking on this takes you to the download page:

[https://www.highland.gov.uk/fosteringandadoption/downloads/file/9/information\\_pack\\_about\\_fostering](https://www.highland.gov.uk/fosteringandadoption/downloads/file/9/information_pack_about_fostering)

There are two links on this page, which both point to the same document – 'Download Now' and 'Fostering information'.



The file is a 6 page long Word document. It does not contain any images, illustrations, colour, or other features that are likely to create engagement, something which is typically found in IFA documents. See Appendix Item 15.1 on page 32 to see the full document.

## Recommendation 3 – Create fresh introduction to fostering brochure

A new welcome/introduction to fostering brochure should be created, in both printed and digital formats. In order to fully engage the audience and encourage them to take the next step, it should be designed with the following in mind:

- It needs to be colourful and content-designed so that it isn't too text heavy.
- Use realistic and relatable photos of people that look as if they are in the Highland area.
- Include the 'voice of the child' – quotes and case studies of children/young people in care will help to emphasise the value of fostering first hand.
- Is well written, not using jargon or complicated language.
- Contains case studies of carers and the birth child of foster carers.
- Sells fostering with Highland Council to newcomers to fostering, and those thinking of transferring.
- Contains plenty of reference to the support and training on offer.
- Emphasises ruling in rather than out, addressing myths and FAQs well.
- Strongly encourages the reader to take the next step, with clear calls to action.

We recommend that Highland Council offer a printed version of the welcome pack brochure in addition to a digital version. Whilst there are small costs associated with this, the benefits it will bring will be well worth the investment.

Printed copies are more likely to be read more than once by the potential foster carer, and it is physically easier to share and read together with family and friends than a digital document. IFAs still provide printed welcome packs to enquirers, which indicates that they are still a valuable part of their marketing collateral.

Example of well-designed local authority fostering information booklet: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/Fostering%20booklet%2029.07.25.pdf>

## 9.6 Download fostering allowances document from website

On the 'Allowances and fostering fees' page of the Highland Council website, there is a link to download a PDF document containing information about fostering allowances:



The document is not fit for purpose. See Appendix Item 15.2 on page 39 to see the full document. The layout is confusing, and the information is not presented in a digestible way. A potential foster carer is highly unlikely to be able to understand exactly what they are likely to receive for looking after a child or children:

HIGHLAND COUNCIL FOSTERING & ADOPTION ALLOWANCES 2025/2026							
FOSTERING							
APPROVED FOSTER CARER ALLOWANCES - 52 WEEK YEAR (BASED ON NIGHTS)							
- Payment stops on 18th Birthday **							
AGE	3 Nights (minimum payment)	4 Nights	5 Nights	6 Nights	WEEKLY PAYMENT	FORTNIGHTLY PAYMENT	
0 - 4	£ 72.13	£ 96.18	£ 120.22	£ 144.27	£ 168.31	£ 336.62	
5 - 10	£ 83.92	£ 111.89	£ 139.86	£ 167.84	£ 195.81	£ 391.62	
11 - 15	£ 85.71	£ 114.29	£ 142.86	£ 171.43	£ 200.00	£ 400.00	
16 - 18	£ 115.03	£ 153.38	£ 191.72	£ 230.07	£ 268.41	£ 536.82	

<b>Birthday payment</b>	1 weeks allowance	per child	Paid in the payment run prior to the birthday
<b>Summer payment</b>	£ 215.00	per child	Paid in the last payment run in June/1st week of July
<b>Christmas payment</b>	£ 107.00	per child	Paid in the last payment run in November
<b>Mileage Rate</b>	£ 0.45	per mile	
<b>Short Term Car Hire mileage rate</b>	£ 0.13	per mile	

Children Placed from 01/04/15 with a View to Adoption receive the Foster Carer Allowance only

FOSTER CARER FEE:	HALF WEEK (3 nights or less)	From 01/01/2020 Fee paid per child			WEEKLY PAYMENT	FORTNIGHTLY PAYMENT
Fee <13 year old	£ 80.50				£ 160.99	£ 321.98
Fee >13 year old	£ 107.33				£ 214.66	£ 429.32
*Community Care Fee:	£ 107.33				£ 214.66	£ 429.32

\*Pay Four Weeks after Last Child Discharged

FEE:	PER WEEK	PER FORTNIGHT
Positive Partners #	£ 309.50	£ 619.00
Specialist Carers	£ 514.68	£ 1,029.36
Specialist Carer Half Week	£ 257.34	n/a
Intensive Foster Carers	£ 794.15	£ 1,588.30

# Based on being matched to 4 children (or pro rata thereof)  
Eldest child in placement receives Specialist Carer Fee

This information forms a sharp contrast to how IFAs (and many other local authorities) present 'headline' financial information. Examples below:

The screenshot shows the Swiis website header with navigation links: 'Fostering With Swiis', 'About Swiis', 'Swiis Near You', 'Fostering Stories', 'News', 'Portal Login', and an 'Enquire Now' button. Below the header, there are two main sections:

- One Child:** Up to **£540** /week. Swiis pays generous fostering allowances. Coupled with outstanding support for our carers, this allows us to play our part in transforming futures. Equivalent of £28,080. All of which is TAX FREE.
- One Child (Additional Needs):** Up to **£710** /week. You will be paid this fee if Swiis are able to place only one child who, due to additional needs, is required to be placed on their own with no other children. Equivalent of £36,920. All of which is TAX FREE.

The screenshot shows the FCA Scotland website header with navigation links: 'Become a foster carer', 'About Fostering', 'About Us', 'Transfer to us', 'Allowances', 'FIND YOUR LOCAL TEAM', and 'ENQUIRE NOW'. Below the header, there are three main sections:

- Competitive fostering allowances:** Alongside our full training and ongoing support, we offer a competitive fostering allowance. Our weekly allowances range from **£440 – £652**. Our standard rate for a child over the age of 11 years is **£486 per week, per child (£1,952 per month)**. Additionally, in most cases, foster carers pay no tax on their fostering allowance.
- Our average family fostering income:** At FCA Scotland, many of our foster carers foster more than one child. This can be siblings or non-related children depending on bedroom availability. The average allowance our foster families receive is **£48,519 per year (£4,043 per month) tax-free**.
- Our average allowance per child:** The average annual allowance we pay per child is **£28,540 (£2,378 per month) tax-free**.

The screenshot shows the Fosterplus website header with navigation links: 'Thinking of fostering? 0800 369 8512', 'Transfer To Us', 'Start Fostering', 'News & Blogs', 'Events', 'Current Foster Parents', 'About Fostering', 'Become a foster parent', 'About us', and 'Allowances'. Below the header, there is a section titled 'Foster care pay examples' with four categories:

- One child:** Jodie lives in England and has been fostering for more than 1 year. She cares for a young boy, aged five. She receives **£453.81 per week (£1,966.51 per month)**.
- Siblings:** Raifa is an experienced foster parent who lives in England and cares for two siblings, aged nine and fourteen. She receives **£935.81 per week (£4,055.17 per month)**.
- Specialist placements:** James and Duncan live in Scotland and care for a twelve-year-old child with complex needs. They receive **£591.71 per week (£2,564.08 per month)**.
- Parent & Child:** Fiona is a foster parent in England, caring for a young parent with their baby. She receives **£753.48 per week (£3,265.08 per month)**.

#### **Recommendation 4 – Create new fostering finances booklet**

When it comes to the finances – as the allowances/fees are likely to change at least annually, it is worth creating a separate finances booklet which can be updated independently of the main information booklet. This will allow for the inclusion of further detail around expenses and other additional benefits, as well as more worked examples.

A hard copy printed version should be produced, as well as a digital specific version which is formatted to be viewed easily on a mobile phone.

#### **Recommendation 5 – Hold regular fostering information events**

Local authorities that hold regular information events tend to attract more enquiries (and convert them into approved foster carers) than those local authorities that don't.

The vast geographical size of the Highland Council area means that it would be difficult to reach all communities with in-person events. Online information events are therefore the next best option.

We recommend that events are held at least monthly, at times that will be convenient to potential foster carers (ie early evening, weekend mornings/afternoons). They should feature contributions from foster carers and people with care experience, to highlight the rewards and positive differences fostering makes.

Events that are well publicised, easy to register for, and are easy to join are likely to result in higher numbers of potential foster carers to take the next step. Appropriate marketing materials will be required to promote events, and the content of presentations should be carefully considered.

## **10. Conclusions drawn from examining different ways of engaging with the fostering service**

At present, the fostering service is not as easy to engage with as it could be, and there is a lot of room for improvement when compared with IFAs and other local authorities.

The current fostering pages on the Highland Council website form a poor contrast with the websites of IFAs that recruit in the area.

If a potential foster carer wants more information about fostering with Highland Council beyond what it is available on the website, the options are quite limited. Particularly if the potential carer doesn't want to/is unable to call the service during office hours.

The document which can be downloaded from the fostering pages of the website lacks colour, imagery, and other elements which make it appealing and doesn't do the subject matter justice.

The finances document needs to be redesigned in order to present the information in an understandable and digestible way.

The enquiry form is not fit for purpose, and is probably the main reason why enquiry numbers are so low.

Holding regular information events will increase the chances of potential foster carers engaging with the service and going on to start assessment.

These fundamental parts of the early journey to fostering can be improved very easily, by emulating what is put in place by IFAs and successful local authorities.

## **11. Raising awareness of fostering and capturing interest**

Highland Council currently do very little to raise awareness of fostering in the area. In recent years there hasn't been a particularly strong relationship between the fostering team and the communications team.

However, a new Chief Officer for HR and Communications, plus a new Strategic Lead for Corporate Communications have recently taken up posts. Conversations with them proved to be very positive, and they are very keen to help improve the number of fostering enquiries and approvals.

The only marketing activity running at present is adverts on Moray Firth Radio.

Radio advertising is broadly untargeted, and it is very difficult to accurately measure the outcomes of it. It is not a tactic we recommend for fostering recruitment.

Effective fostering recruitment is done online in 2025, and has been for many years. As many traditional industries and organisations have shifted their focus to digital, so have the 'winners' in fostering – namely IFAs and many local authorities.

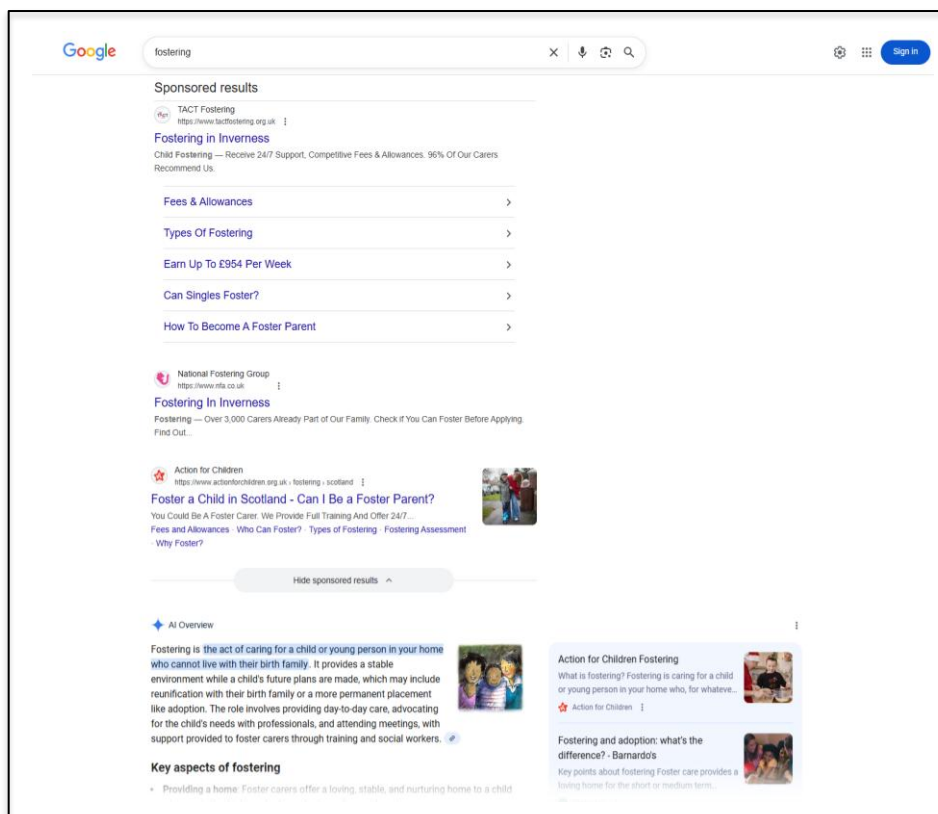
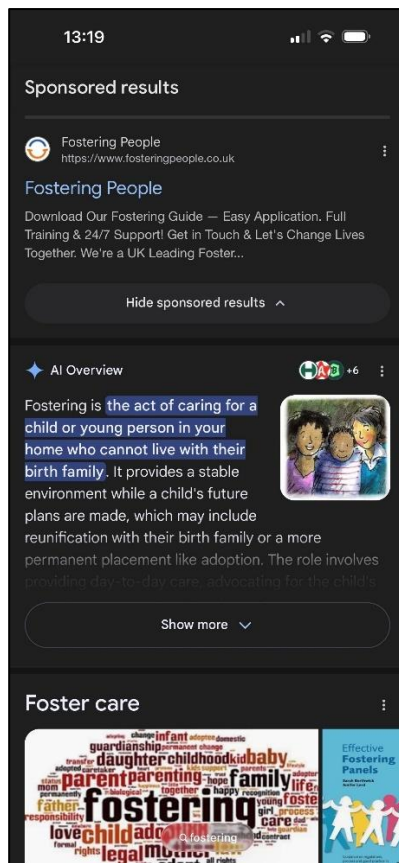
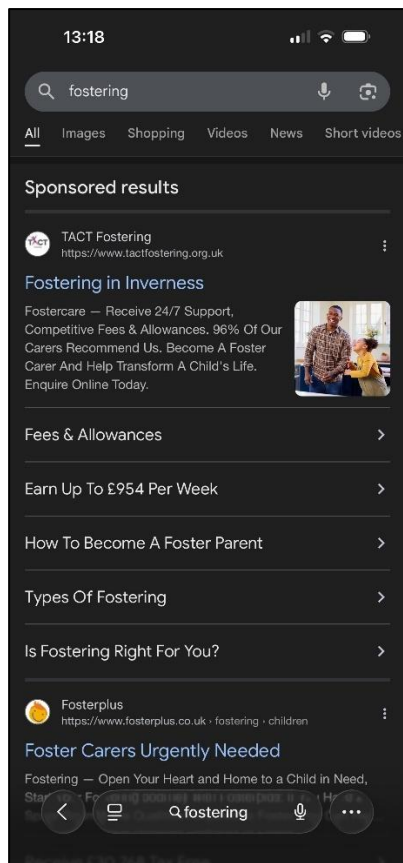
There are a number of different ways to target suitable audiences of potential foster carers online. Social media and display advertising on website and apps allows the placing of ads in front of people according to where they live, their age, their interests, what websites they visit etc.

These audiences can be targeted with a range of messages such as the benefits and rewards of fostering, busting myths around who can foster, and also videos from foster carers and people with care experience. This is the most effective way to raise awareness of fostering, educating and encouraging people to come forward and find out more.

The foundation of online marketing is to have a constant presence within Google search ads. These ads appear at the top of the page of search results, and are the best way for a fostering service to get potential foster carers to visit their web pages.

Across the UK, IFAs spend a significant proportion of their marketing budgets on Google search ads, as it is the most effective way to generate enquiries that convert into approvals. Many local authorities have been able to emulate this approach successfully, with many reporting that it is responsible for the majority of their approvals.

In the Highland Council area, a number of IFAs run Google search ads. These include TACT, National Fostering Group (NFA), Action For Children, Barnardos, Fosterplus, Fostering People, Foster Care Associates (FCA) and Swiis. Examples of how their ads appear on a phone and also a laptop/desktop follows:



### **Recommendation 6 – Run digital marketing campaigns**

Digital marketing will reach the vast majority of the people living in the Highland Council area who have the potential to become a foster carer. A range of creative assets (photos, videos, illustrations etc) will be required to required in order to achieve maximum reach across all available online platforms. 3<sup>rd</sup> party specialists are able to assist with the building and running of campaigns where required.

### **Recommendation 7 – Run Google search ads campaign**

Google search ads will deliver a significant number of clicks to Highland Council fostering pages. Those actively searching for more information about fostering are much more likely to be “ready to go” and make an application in the near future.

By sending clicks to relevant fostering pages, the chance of converting the click into an enquiry is increased dramatically.

Because of the niche nature of this kind of marketing. 3<sup>rd</sup> party specialists are available to set up and run campaigns.

## **12. Interviews with those who have recent experience of a Highland Council fostering assessment**

Highland Council provided us with details of 2 households who were happy to speak with us at length about their experience of the fostering enquiry and assessment process. They were both approved within the last 12 months.

What we learned from these in-depth conversations is that the enquiry, application and assessment process was broadly positive but still has plenty of scope for improvement. The main observations to be drawn are as follows:

### **12.1 Background research**

Both households had done extensive research into fostering before they made contact. They also had a good knowledge of fostering through family and friends – both had immediate family members that foster for Highland Council.

Each household had considered fostering for a long time before deciding the time was right to make an approach to Highland Council. The length of time for both was several years.

Both of those spoken with had visited the Highland Council website and used the enquiry form to make contact.

### **12.2 Initial response to first contact**

The response to all of the initial contacts by the Highland Council fostering team was relatively quick.

The conversations they had with the fostering team were useful, informative and reassuring. Households reported that they were asked plenty of questions about themselves and their situation, which helped them to decide that it was the right time to proceed.

The response to the initial phone call was deemed by both households to be good enough to encourage the next step.

### **12.3 Initial visit**

Both households spoken to felt that the initial home visits were positive.

The visits were reported as a mixture of Highland Council obtaining information about the enquirers, and the enquirers being able to ask questions of the staff member carrying out the visit. Next steps were clearly explained, and enquirers felt encouraged to apply.

All of the households felt at ease with the visit, and none of them could think of any ways in which they could be improved.

### **12.4 Preparation training**

Both households spoken to attended preparation training. Feedback on this was mostly

positive, in relation to the content of the course and how it was delivered. One of the

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households commented on the wait for training, and the need to reschedule due to lack of other households booked on to it. Both households commented that a choice of timings of the training sessions eg evenings and/or weekends would have been welcome.

They understood that the part of the reason for this is because of the low numbers of households in assessment – as more households apply the chances of cancellation will be reduced, and more frequently run sessions will provide more choice. The service has also committed to running training even when numbers are low.

## **12.5 Relationship with assessing social worker**

Both of the households interviewed spoke very positively about their assessing social workers.

Both households reported that they were able to form a relationship with their assessing worker very quickly. The workers were described in positive terms as being easy to trust, professional, supportive and down to earth.

One of the households described how their worker would check back in after “tricky conversations” that may have been upsetting, which was seen as really positive.

## **12.6 Fostering panel and beyond**

Both households were not given panel dates until very late on during their assessment process. One household was given several dates for panel that were cancelled. They described having to “get quite assertive” with the service to secure a panel date that wouldn’t be cancelled.

The other household were given less than 2 weeks notice for the panel they attended.

Preparation for panel by their assessing workers was described by both households as good – they knew what to expect and didn’t find the process too daunting. The panel members were seen as friendly, not overly formal, and professional.

Both households reported that confirmation of their approval from the Agency Decision Maker followed fairly quickly. In one of the cases, this was done within a couple of days as a suitable match had been identified and the children needed to be placed quickly.

## **12.7 Observations about the assessment process**

Both households described the assessment process as having taken longer than it should have. One of the households reported that it took 18 months from first contact to panel, which is well outside of the guidelines.

The initial enquiry process through the online form was seen as harder than it ought to have been. One household described it as “footery at best”, and impossible to complete on a smartphone.

One of the households described a significant gap at the start of the process – they were told that their assessment would be starting “soon” but were left for at least a month with no

communication from the service. They understood this to be caused by a lack of assessing

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social worker availability.

One household described delays during the assessment process as quite arduous, and seriously considering withdrawing on several occasions.

There appears to be inconsistencies in how the assessments are carried out – one household reported that during assessment visits their assessor would write up their discussions, whereas the other household reported that they were asked to write questions to answers by their assessor. This household said that they weren't always 100% sure exactly what was being asked of them, and how to articulate their answers.

When asked what improvements could be made to the assessment, both households said that it could have been carried out in far less time. There was continual uncertainty over timescales, what would happen in what order and when, and "felt like there was no end in sight at times, like never getting to see the top of the mountain".

One of the households suggested that it would have been really helpful to have some very clear information at the very start of the assessment, which explaining exactly what would be required, how long it was likely to take etc.

The other household said it would have been helpful to have been given a panel date right at the start of the assessment, firstly as a target for the service to work to, and also so that they could organise work commitments around it.

It is clear that there is significant room for improvement in how the assessment process is carried out. Whilst the relationships with the assessors was positive, the chaotic and shifting nature of the assessment from the point of view of the applicants means that considerable attention needs to be paid to the whole process.

Where applicants have a good experience of the assessment, they are much more likely to recommend a service to family and friends who may also be considering becoming foster carers. Applicants are also much less likely to withdraw if they feel well informed, know what is going to happen when, and move at a pace that they are comfortable with.

Many local authorities have refined their assessment processes to provide a very positive experience for applicants. Highland Council will need to make these refinements to emulate their success.

### **Recommendation 8 – Ensure that fostering panel dates are provided early on in the assessment**

In order for assessments to run to an appropriate timeframe, a target panel date should be booked in at the start of the assessment. This will provide the applicants with a date to arrange other commitments around. It will also motivate everyone in the service involved to ensure that assessment task deadlines are met.

### **Recommendation 9 – Provide information about what the fostering assessment entails at the outset**

In order to alleviate any anxieties and frustrations in applicants, they should be provided with

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clear and comprehensive information about what their assessment will entail at the very start. This should include timelines, responsibilities, and details about every element of the process. As well as decreasing the chances of applicant withdrawals, it will reinforce positive and accurate word of mouth communication from applicants.

### **Recommendation 10 – Implement Form F training to ensure consistent approach to way assessments are carried out**

The two households interviewed described quite contrasting approaches as to how their assessments were conducted. Whilst some flexibility within assessment style is desirable to accommodate the needs of applicants, the service should nonetheless have a uniform approach.

To this end, the service should invest in Form F training for all relevant workers. A potential positive side effect of this training is that the quality and speed of assessments overall will improve.

### **13. Discussions with Highland Council fostering team members**

A number of individual discussions were held with Fostering & Adoption staff, which included Team Managers, the Children's Service Manager for Family Based Care, and the Strategic Lead for Care & Support.

All those that participated were refreshingly honest about the challenges the service faces, and the improvements that are needed.

There was candid acknowledgement about the "drift" that occurs during the assessment process, the chaotic nature of the assessment for applicants, the collective "lack of urgency", disjointed communication and fragmented oversight. There is full acceptance that the low numbers of approvals are linked to the current dysfunctional recruitment and assessment practice.

What shone through was the commitment of all the staff to children and their foster carers, the understanding that changes are required, and the willingness and desire to make the changes.

The main obstacle that was frequently and consistently cited was the enquiry system. This was implemented several years ago, but is not supported to make any changes to it that are needed. It is directly linked to the public-facing enquiry form which is available on the website as described in Section 9.4 on page 13.

The system is not user-friendly, is inflexible, and ultimately not fit for purpose. Many workarounds are required in order to operate it in a way that meets the needs of enquirers and fostering team members. For example, the screening call template is prescriptive, and doesn't reflect how conversations with enquirers aren't linear, or always require such vast levels of often highly personal detail.

Many automated processes exist in the enquiry system, which team members are unable to bypass where they aren't appropriate. For example, a template email is sent to enquirers when their record is 'closed' on the system. It is not possible to tailor the content of this email appropriately, therefore enquiries are not closed in order to avoid any inappropriate automated communication.

Given that the enquirer-facing side of the system is not fit for purpose either, we recommend that it is replaced with an appropriate system (see Recommendation 2 on Page 14). In the meantime, a simple spreadsheet should be used in order to track enquirers and applicants. Whilst not a suitable long-term solution, it will allow the team to operate in a more efficient way and avoid enquiries "falling through the cracks".

Another key element which requires attention is the general 'administration' of the assessments. Staff reported that there is an inconsistent approach as to how background checks are currently being carried out and communicated to the assessing social workers. In some cases the social worker has "doubled up" by sending reference checks themselves.

This is described to occur partly as a result of the regional segmentation of the service into different geographical areas, meaning there is no central oversight and tracking. This is

something which can be remedied with the creation of appropriate roles with the team, to monitor and ensure assessment tasks are carried out properly and in a timely manner.

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The way in which the fostering and adoption team currently operates means that social workers are “pulled in many different directions” – supervising caseloads as well as carrying assessments. The knock-on effect of this is that fostering assessments may be deprioritised when pressing incidents occur with placement disruptions etc.

This can feed into the overall experience of “drift” and lack of focus on meeting assessment deadlines, creating a “firefighting” culture instead of a more strategic one which plans ahead and strives to hit targets on time.

Many local authorities that achieve high numbers of fostering approvals usually have ringfenced assessors ie they only carry out assessments and no supervision work. These are either based within the service or are freelance social workers who are allocated assessments as they arise.

None of these issues reported by the team are insurmountable, but they do require resource and changes to practice.

### **Recommendation 11 – Creation of new roles for enquiry, assessment and beyond: Fostering Recruitment Officer and Fostering Training & Retention Officer**

Local authorities that recruit high numbers of carers almost always have at least one individual who handles initial enquires and also has oversight of the entire fostering recruitment journey for the individuals that have enquired/applied/are in assessment. They are able to see what is out of timescales, outstanding tasks, who needs to do what and by when, and ensure that there are as few hurdles for potential foster carers as possible.

Highland Council would benefit from a Fostering Recruitment Officer in post to achieve this.

Whilst retention of foster carers is not within the scope of this particular audit, a second role of Fostering Training & Retention Officer should also be created. They will be responsible for organising and co-ordinating all preparation training and post-approval training, plus retention activities for foster carers and their families. Part of the role can involve responsibility for ensuring policies and the service Fostering Handbook are kept up to date, communicating any changes to carers.

The two roles will have a degree of overlap, and will complement each other, allowing for the adequate covering of the role during leave etc.

Significant savings on placements can be made with the creation of these two roles, as they will be key to the recruitment and retention of more foster carers.

### **Recommendation 12 – Allocating fostering assessments to freelance social workers**

Those local authorities that are able to adapt and scale up fostering assessment numbers quickly usually see higher numbers of approvals than those that don't.

Delays to allocating fostering assessments because of other service demands often leads to applicants withdrawing from the process and gravitating to IFAs.

29

Where services cannot allocate assessments effectively within the team, a straightforward and efficient approach is to allocate to freelance social workers.

Many councils have successfully used freelance assessors in this way, with a number of benefits. Freelance assessors are paid per assessment, so have the motivation to complete them in a timely manner. Also they will not have to juggle the competing demands from other areas of the service.

We recommend that Highland Council begins to put out feelers to make contact with freelance social workers, in preparation for an increase in assessments.

## 14. Conclusion

This audit of the journey to fostering provided by Highland Council has revealed that the fostering service could do things much better, and needs the resource to be able to do this. One of the most important positives is the attitude and behaviours of Highland Council staff that interact enquirers and applicants. They are responsive, encouraging, recognise the need for changes, and are willing to make them.

All the changes recommended in this report are achievable. Many other local authorities are already operating at the standards which the changes seek to achieve.

Highland Council fostering service has the potential to become a recruitment model which other councils can emulate, from the point a potential foster carer begins to gather information about fostering, right through to the point of first placement. We are confident that the fostering team has the right attitude to succeed, which can be achieved with adequate resources.

Looking to the future, resources will need to be scaled up as demand permits, to ensure applications turn into approvals in a timely manner. Specific points in the journey that are likely to cause delays are pre-approval training and fostering panel.

Pre-approval training courses will need to be run more frequently, and therefore more staff should be trained to deliver these.

Fostering panels will also need to run more frequently at times - this will need to be fortnightly or weekly as demand dictates. This increase will require extra staff resource for administrating them, as well as ensuring enough panel members are available to allow the panels to be quorate.

As more fostering households are approved, this will inevitably lead to increased caseloads for the fostering team members. An acceptable maximum number of households per worker should be decided upon, and as this is approached, triggers the process to recruit another worker. Failure to time this correctly may result in poor retention of foster carers and workers alike. Thankfully the timescales of a fostering assessment (including those that go to panel in a timely manner) allow plenty of warning time to put plans in place.

Whilst not exclusively restricted to the recruitment of foster carers, it is worth considering that the structure of the fostering and adoption service is examined. Many councils have successfully created distinct teams with specific responsibilities (fostering, adoption and kinship/connected persons). This allows workers to concentrate on specific fields of work, and avoids competing demands that can, for example, cause the 'drift' that occurs with fostering assessments outlined in section 12.

Based on population size and density, and when compared with other local authority services in Scotland that we work with, we estimate that Highland Council has the potential to recruit a minimum of 10 fostering households per year (provided all the recommendations contained within this report are followed).

## **15. Appendix**

### **15.1 Information document downloaded from website**

#### **ABOUT FOSTERING**

**Change children's lives for the better and join the growing community of Highland Foster Carers.**

Here is some basic information about fostering and a brief outline of the assessment process itself. The information is intended to allow you to think about the implications for yourself and your family of becoming a Foster Carer.

#### **WHY ARE CHILDREN and TEENAGERS LOOKED AFTER BY FOSTER CARERS?**

Children of all ages and a variety of backgrounds find themselves being looked after by the Local Authority and placed with Foster Carers. There are many reasons why children and young people are unable to live with their own families, these may include:

- Abuse of alcohol or drugs by a parent
- Domestic Violence
- Neglect
- Emotional, sexual or physical abuse
- Poor mental or physical health of a parent.

The reality is that the children and young people who live with Foster Carers will have had a lot to cope with and experienced trauma in their young lives. Foster Carers will see these experiences reflected in the child's emotions and behaviour and are there to help them to recover and heal.

What we do know is that with care, stability and hard work, most children and young people will thrive in Foster Care.

#### **TEMPORARY CARERS (provide Emergency, Short Breaks & Interim Placements)**

Some carers are asked to look after children and young people on a temporary basis. The length of the placement could be from an overnight, a weekend, a month or longer. The children who go to live with temporary carers normally come from their parents' home at a time of an emergency or crisis. Whatever the reason for them leaving their parents, children are themselves upset, distressed and confused. Initially the carers may have little background information if the family was not known to the Children & Families Team previously. Most children in temporary care return home to the care of their parents or move to stay with

relatives. Foster Carers are crucial in making this possible. It is important that the children have as much safe contact with their parents in order for this to happen. These visits may not always be easy but it is vital that they happen if the family is to be reunited once their problems have been resolved.

For a small number of children it is not safe for them to return to the care of their parents and in these situations temporary carers look after the children until permanence plans are made for the remainder of their childhood. Relatives will be considered to care for the child permanently and if no one suitable is identified then depending on the child or young person's age permanent foster care or adoption will be the plan for the child. In these situations temporary carers can play an important role in helping the child prepare for a new family.

You will need many skills as temporary foster carers some of which include:

- An ability to care for an unhappy distressed child
- An ability to be involved with the child's parents
- An ability to help them get the best out of education
- An ability to make sure they are well and healthy.
- An ability to help the child move on, back to their parents, Kinship care or to permanent carers

Temporary fostering can be rewarding for carers. They can see the child become more settled and begin to grow and develop. Fostering is a vital and valued service to children and their families.

## **PERMANENT FOSTER CARERS**

Permanent carers are asked to look after children and teenagers who cannot live with their parents. Prior to moving to permanent carers the child will have been living with temporary carers or a relative. They will have had difficulties in their early life and may have involved emotional, physical neglect or abuse.

Attempts to reunite the children with their parents will have been made and will have failed. Many of the children and young people may have had several periods of being looked after during their childhood either by Foster Carers or by relatives. All this means that they may not be easy to look after. They may have feelings of confusion, anger and hurt which is shown through difficult behaviour and a lack of trust in adults.

For many of these children and teenagers it is very important that they remain in contact with their family even though they cannot live with them.

Permanent carers provide a home for children and young people who are unable to live with their families for the rest of their childhood until they reach the age of independence or as long as they are needed.

Occasionally, some young people have been successfully returned to their parents after several years of support from Foster Carers.

As Permanent carers you need many skills, some of which involve:

- An ability to provide a stable home for as long as the child needs to be looked after
- An ability to accept the child's past
- An ability to include the child's parents in their future
- An ability to cope with unhappy children

- An ability to keep going even when things are difficult
- An ability to get the best out of education
- An ability to make sure they are well and healthy.

The rewards for permanent fostering are many but the main one is knowing that you have provided a secure home for a child to grow and develop and help them overcome the effects of their past.

## **PAYMENT**

Foster Carers receive payments on a sliding scale according to the age of the child to cover the cost of looking after the child. In addition they receive a fee which is also according to the age of the child. Extra payments are made for birthdays, holidays and for the festive seasons. These are detailed in the [\(link to Fees & Allowances\)](#).

## **WORKING WITH SOCIAL WORK, HEALTH & EDUCATION**

If you are approved as a Foster Carer you will have a Social Worker who specialises in Fostering and Adoption work. Their job is to support you and help you be a good foster carer. They are there to give advice, ideas, and make sure you are coping. As Foster Carers you will be expected to share information about the child, attend meetings on a regular basis so that good plans can be made about how best to help them. Many children in foster care need help to settle and do well at school. An active interest in their learning is essential. Working with health is also important, as some children/teenagers will have missed out on basic health provision.

## **WHO CAN APPLY TO BE A FOSTER CARER?**

All carers must have a genuine concern for children and young people. Those children and young people who find themselves in foster care come from different backgrounds and have a variety of needs. To meet these needs different family settings are required, therefore there is no such thing as a typical foster family. You do need to have a spare room, and if you have children yourself you will have spoken to them about your interest in helping another child or teenager.

In Highland there are carers living in urban and rural areas. We accept applications from people who are single, married, living together or in a civil partnership; have different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds; employed or unemployed; have children of their own or have no children or have children who are now grown up and still live at home or live independently. You must be at least 21 years of age to apply.

## **SMOKING**

If anyone in your household smokes you will not be approved to care for children under 5 years, who have complex health needs or breathing problems as they cannot be placed with you due to the potential impact on their health and development.

## **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

### **PREPARATION & ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS**

The first step is to attend a preparation course. You will learn more about fostering and if it is right for you and your family. They are usually held over 2 days, or may be held on several evening sessions, if there are two applicants both must attend all the sessions.

Following your attendance at the Preparation Course you should complete the online application form if you wish to proceed to the next stage.

Once the service has received your application your assessment will be allocated to a Fostering & Adoption social worker to complete. The purpose of the assessment process is to identify your skills, competencies and experience of parenting and how you can use these to help children reach their potential. The assessment process is very thorough and as an agency, we must ensure that there is no reason why you cannot be entrusted with the care of someone else's child.

We carry out assessments in a variety of ways and normally they should be completed within a 6 month period.

## **THE ASSESSMENT MUST INCLUDE:**

### PVG Membership & Enhanced Disclosure

An application for membership to the PVG (Protection of Vulnerable Groups) Scheme will be carried out for all applicants. If you have a criminal record it does not necessarily mean that you cannot foster a child, it depends on the offence and when it happened. There are some types of offence which would prevent you from being approved as a foster carer.

All other adults in the household age 16+ years will require to have an Enhanced Disclosure. This will be updated every two years.

### Local Authority Checks

In your application form you will be asked to give a list of your previous addresses. Checks will be made with the Local Authorities where you have lived since the age of 16 years. These checks are carried out to find out if you have had any previous contact with Social Work Services, which might suggest you should not foster a child.

### Medical Reports

Your GP will be required to give you a medical examination to determine if you are medically fit to have the full-time care of a child. Disability or illness does not necessarily mean that you cannot be a foster carer. However, your ability to look after a child will be assessed by the Medical Adviser to the Fostering Panel.

### References

You will be asked to give the names of 3 people who can give you a personal reference. One of them should be a member of your own family and the other 2 should know you in your personal life rather than professionally in the way a Doctor or Minister might do. Your Social Worker will also be asked to interview two of your referees. Referees who can comment on your skills with children are particularly welcomed.

We will also be in contact, where appropriate, with previous partners and any children of your own or from previous relationships, to seek their views.

### Employers References

We will request a reference from your current or last employer. We may also ask a previous employer for a reference where your job has involved caring for or working with children.

### Health Visitors Report

A Health Visitor's report will be requested if you have recently cared for a child under the age of 5 years.

### Educational Reference

We will contact the school of any child under the age of 18 years who was or is in your care, for a reference of your involvement with the school or nursery.

### Other Adults

Other adults living in your household will be asked to consent to Police and medical reports. An enhanced disclosure will be required.

We will also ask for consent to contact previous partners of the applicants, where appropriate and/or adult children, for references or information.

### Documentation

You will be asked to produce your birth certificate, marriage certificate and any other relevant certificates, e.g. Extract Decrees of Divorce, gun licence.

## **HOME STUDY/ASSESSMENT**

You and your allocated Social Worker will work together to provide evidence of your skills and abilities. You must show that you are competent to care for children in the following ways:

### Understanding the role of a foster carer

- 1.1 *Child care experience and skills*
- 1.2 *Support networks*
- 1.3 *Involving a fostered child's family*
- 1.4 *Confidentiality*
- 1.5 *Working as part of a team*
- 1.6 *Organised, reliable, dependable*
- 1.7 *Promotion of equality and diversity*
- 1.8 *Communication skills*
- 1.9 *Literacy skills*

### Understanding health, safety and health care

- 2.1 *Providing a suitable environment*
- 2.2 *Fire safety*
- 2.3 *Health care*
- 2.4 *Medical treatment*
- 2.5 *Safer caring*
- 2.6 *Additional safety concerns e.g. animals, guns, ponds and B&B etc.*

### Understanding children and young people

- 3.1 *Understanding development*
- 3.2 *Play and activities*
- 3.3 *Attachment and Resilience*
- 3.4 *Understanding and managing behaviour*

*3.5 Supporting Education*

*3.6 An ability to provide long term care and support to a young person until adulthood*

*Develop yourself*

*4.1 Understanding the impact of fostering*

*4.2 Providing a positive role model*

*4.3 Dealing with stress*

*4.4 Professional development*

## **FOSTERING PANEL**

All the information gathered during your assessment is presented to the Highland Council's Fostering Panel. The Panel is made up of representatives from the Highland Council's Health, Social Work, Education and Legal Services as well as a lay member with experience of fostering. You will be asked to attend part of the meeting, to discuss your application and assessment. Your Social Worker will be there. The Panel makes a recommendation about your suitability.

## **DECISION**

You will receive a letter within 28 days from attending the Fostering Panel to tell you whether your application to become an approved foster carer has been successful. This decision is made by the Agency Decision Maker and will be based on the information provided and the recommendation of the Fostering Panel.

If you disagree with the decision, you can appeal within 28 days to the Director of Care & Learning, who will arrange for an alternative panel out with Highland Council to reconsider the decision. If this meeting endorses the original decision there is no further appeals process within the Agency.

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PROCEEDING PLEASE COMPLETE THE ONLINE ENQUIRY FORM.**

## 15.2 Fostering allowances document downloaded from website

### HIGHLAND COUNCIL FOSTERING & ADOPTION ALLOWANCES 2025/2026

#### FOSTERING

APPROVED FOSTER CARER ALLOWANCES - 52 WEEK YEAR (BASED ON NIGHTS)  
- Payment stops on 18th Birthday \*\*

AGE	3 Nights (minimum payment)	4 Nights	5 Nights	6 Nights	WEEKLY PAYMENT	FORTNIGHTLY PAYMENT
0 - 4	£ 72.13	£ 96.18	£ 120.22	£ 144.27	£ 168.31	£ 336.62
5 - 10	£ 83.92	£ 111.89	£ 139.86	£ 167.84	£ 195.81	£ 391.62
11 - 15	£ 85.71	£ 114.29	£ 142.86	£ 171.43	£ 200.00	£ 400.00
16 - 18	£ 115.03	£ 153.38	£ 191.72	£ 230.07	£ 268.41	£ 536.82

Birthday payment	1 weeks allowance	per child	Paid in the payment run prior to the birthday
Summer payment	£ 215.00	per child	Paid in the last payment run in June/1st week of July
Christmas payment	£ 107.00	per child	Paid in the last payment run in November

Mileage Rate	£ 0.45	per mile
Short Term Car Hire mileage rate	£ 0.13	per mile

Children Placed from 01/04/15 with a View to Adoption receive the Foster Carer Allowance only

FOSTER CARER FEE:	HALF WEEK (3 nights or less)	From 01/01/2020 Fee paid per child	WEEKLY PAYMENT	FORTNIGHTLY PAYMENT
Fee <13 year old	£ 80.50		£ 160.99	£ 321.98
Fee >13 year old	£ 107.33		£ 214.66	£ 429.32
*Community Carer Fee:	£ 107.33		£ 214.66	£ 429.32

\*Pay Four Weeks after Last Child Discharged

FEES:	PER WEEK	PER FORTNIGHT
Positive Partners #	£ 309.50	£ 619.00
Specialist Carers	£ 514.68	£ 1,029.36
Specialist Carer Half Week	£ 257.34	n/a
Intensive Foster Carers	£ 794.15	£ 1,588.30

# Based on being matched to 4 children (or pro rata thereof)  
Eldest child in placement receives Specialist Carer Fee

#### ADOPTION

APPROVED FOSTER CARER ALLOWANCES - 52 WEEK YEAR (BASED ON NIGHTS)  
- Payment stops on 18th Birthday \*\*

Based on Fostering Allowance Less Weekly Child Benefit of: First Child £ 26.05 Subsequent Child(ren) £ 17.25

AGE	WEEKLY (Higher CB Entitlement)	FORTNIGHTLY (Higher CB Entitlement)	WEEKLY (Lower CB Entitlement)	FORTNIGHTLY (Lower CB Entitlement)
0 - 4	£ 142.26	£ 284.52	£ 151.06	£ 302.12
5 - 10	£ 169.76	£ 339.52	£ 178.56	£ 357.12
11 - 15	£ 173.95	£ 347.90	£ 182.75	£ 365.50
16 - 18	£ 242.36	£ 484.72	£ 251.16	£ 502.32

Please note that no BIRTHDAY, CHRISTMAS or SUMMER PAYMENTS are made for ADOPTION

\*\* Allowances stops on 18th birthday, unless otherwise notified.

### F&A PAYROLL FOR 2025/2026

Approved Expenses Claim Forms, etc REQUIRED BY FINANCE BY:		FOR INCLUSION IN PAYRUN			Paid into Bank a/c	
Wednesday	Run No:				Thursday	
26-March	450	27/03/2025	-	09/04/2025	03/04/2025	
09-April	451	10/04/2025	-	23/04/2025	17/04/2025	
23-April	452	24/04/2025	-	07/05/2025	01/05/2025	
07-May	453	08/05/2025	-	21/05/2025	15/05/2025	
21-May	454	22/05/2025	-	04/06/2025	29/05/2025	
04-June	455	05/06/2025	-	18/06/2025	12/06/2025	
18-June	Annual Holiday Payment Run *	456	19/06/2025	-	02/07/2025	26/06/2025
02-July	457	03/07/2025	-	16/07/2025	10/07/2025	
16-July	458	17/07/2025	-	30/07/2025	24/07/2025	
30-July	459	31/07/2025	-	13/08/2025	07/08/2025	
13-August	460	14/08/2025	-	27/08/2025	21/08/2025	
27-August	461	28/08/2025	-	10/09/2025	04/09/2025	
10-September	462	11/09/2025	-	24/09/2025	18/09/2025	
24-September	463	25/09/2025	-	08/10/2025	02/10/2025	
08-October	464	09/10/2025	-	22/10/2025	16/10/2025	
22-October	465	23/10/2025	-	05/11/2025	30/10/2025	
05-November	466	06/11/2025	-	19/11/2025	13/11/2025	
19-November	Christmas Payment Run **	467	20/11/2025	-	03/12/2025	27/11/2025
03-December	468	04/12/2025	-	17/12/2025	11/12/2025	
<b>Monday</b>						
15-December	(Double Run)	469	18/12/2025	-	14/01/2026	22/12/2025
<b>Wednesday</b>						
14-January	470	15/01/2026	-	28/01/2026	22/01/2026	
28-January	471	29/01/2026	-	11/02/2026	05/02/2026	
11-February	472	12/02/2026	-	25/02/2026	19/02/2026	
25-February	473	26/02/2026	-	11/03/2026	05/03/2026	
11-March	474	12/03/2026	-	25/03/2026	19/03/2026	
25-March	475	26/03/2026	-	08/04/2026	02/04/2026	

\* Annual Payment is £215.00

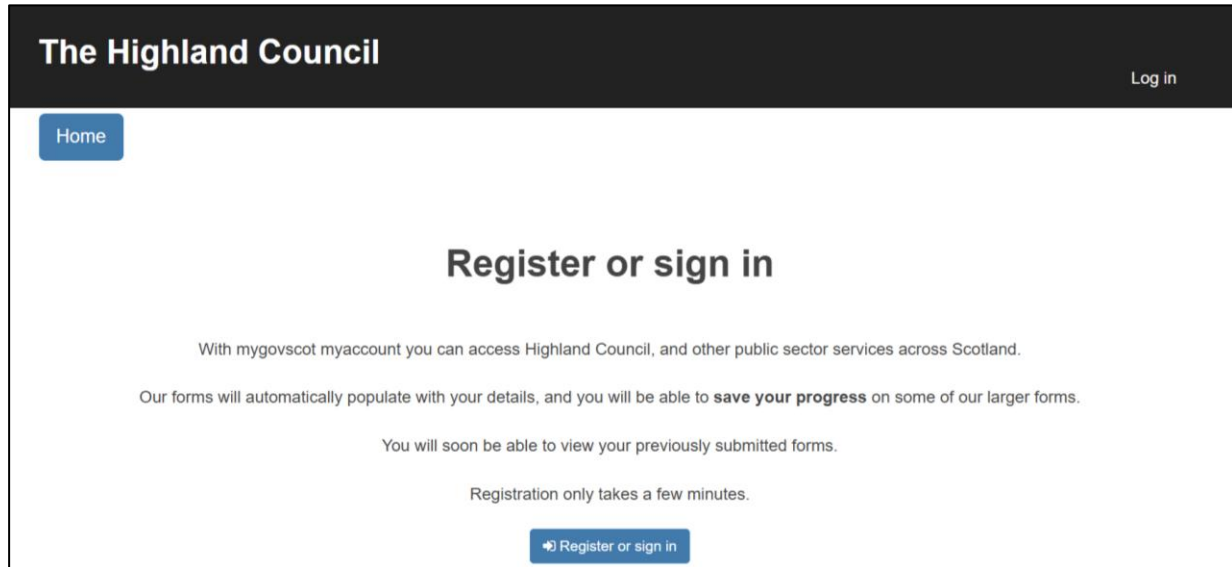
Payment is not applicable to Adoption/VTA or Residence placements.

\*\* Annual Payment is £107.00 (paid in last payment run in November)

Payment is not applicable to Adoption/VTA or Residence placements.

## 15.3 Screenprints showing all the steps to filling in online enquiry form

1) First step is to the requirement to register for a mygovscot account as the form can't be accessed without having an account:



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Highland Council website with the title "The Highland Council" and a "Log in" link. Below the navigation bar is a "Home" button. The main content area is titled "Register or sign in" and contains the following text:

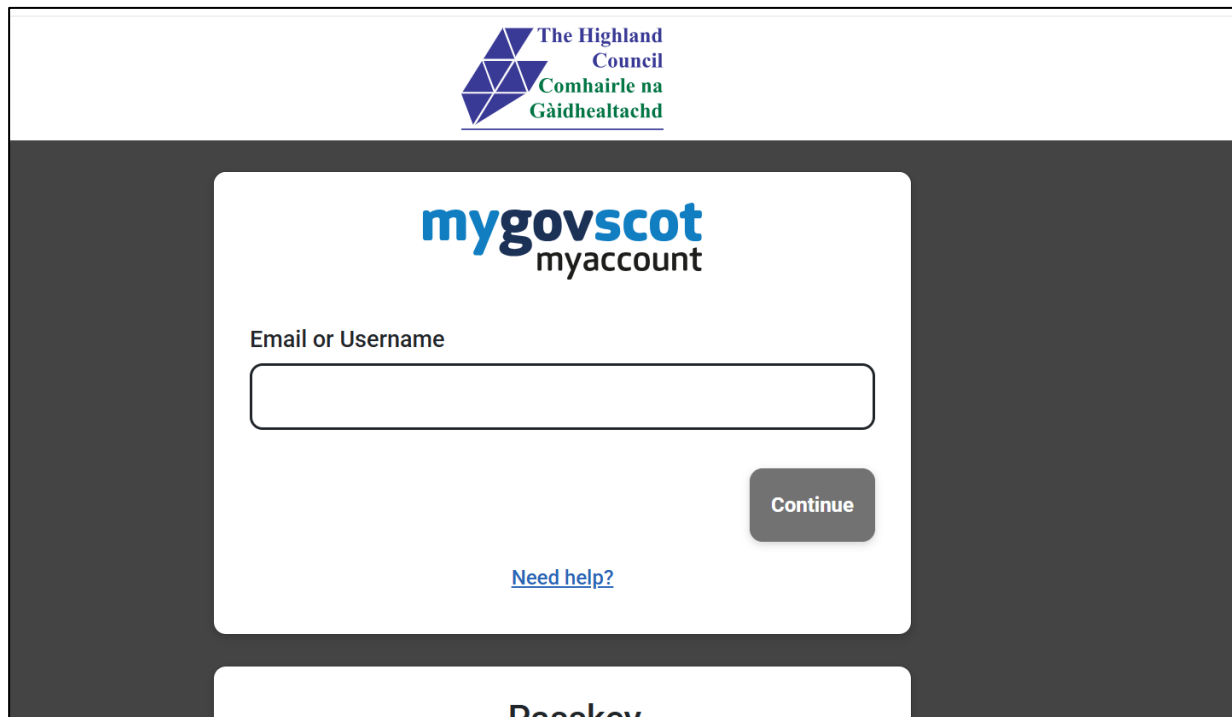
With mygovscot myaccount you can access Highland Council, and other public sector services across Scotland.

Our forms will automatically populate with your details, and you will be able to **save your progress** on some of our larger forms.

You will soon be able to view your previously submitted forms.

Registration only takes a few minutes.

At the bottom of the content area is a blue button with a right-pointing arrow and the text "Register or sign in".



The screenshot shows the mygovscot myaccount login page. At the top, there is the Highland Council logo with the text "The Highland Council" and "Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd". Below the logo is the mygovscot myaccount logo. The main content area is a white box on a dark background. It contains the following elements:

Email or Username

Continue

[Need help?](#)

Below the white box, the word "Passkey" is partially visible.

## mygovscot myaccount

### Email or Username

Account does not exist. Please try a different email or click Register to create a new account.

Register

Continue

[Need help?](#)

## mygovscot myaccount

The easy way to access Scottish Public Services online

### Email

john.cooper@can-digital.net

[Change](#)

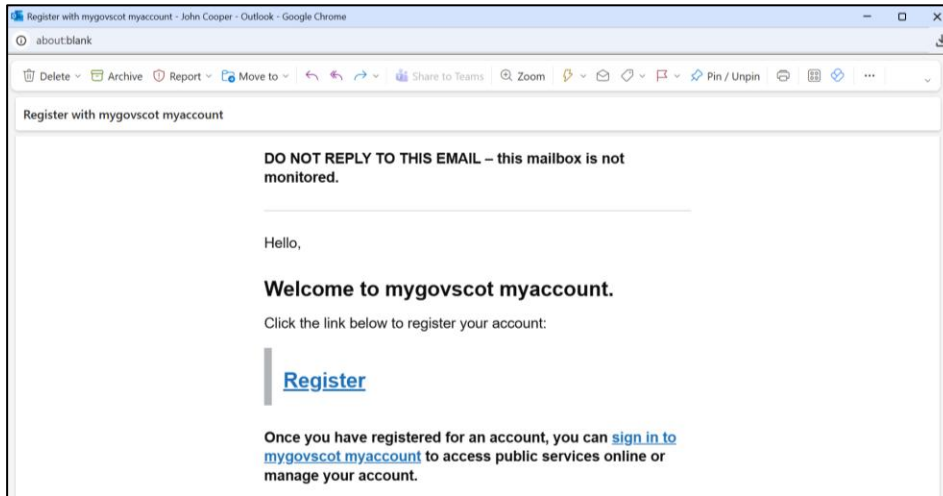
### Let's get started!

We need to verify your email address by sending you an email.

Click the **send verification email** button below and follow the link in the email to continue with registration.

Send verification email

2) Before proceeding, an enquirer is required to log into their email to verify:



3) Next step is to click on the email link back to myscotgov site to register to provide more information:

**mygovscot**  
myaccount  
The easy way to access Scottish Public Services online

Email [Change](#)  
john.cooper@can-digital.net

---

**We just need to know 3 things**


1 **Name**  
First Name  
(Do NOT include middle name & title)

John

Last Name  
Cooper

2 **Date of birth**  
For example, 31 3 1980

Day Month Year




3 **Address**  
Postcode

Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

**2 Date of birth**  
For example, 31 3 1980

Day Month Year

06 11 1975 

**3 Address**  
Search for Scottish Address?  
[Search for Address](#)

Address line  
Enter the address lines of your address

**mygovscot**  
**myaccount**  
The easy way to access Scottish Public Services online

**Set a password**

[Show](#)

- ✗ 12 characters or more
- ✗ 1 uppercase letter (A-Z)
- ✗ 1 lowercase letter (a-z)
- ✗ 1 number (0-9)
- ✗ 1 special character / symbol

Mobile number (optional)

UK(+44)

- ✓ 12 characters or more
- ✓ 1 uppercase letter (A-Z)
- ✓ 1 lowercase letter (a-z)
- ✓ 1 number (0-9)
- ✓ 1 special character / symbol

Mobile number (optional)

UK(+44)

I agree to the [Terms & Conditions](#)

This form is protected by reCAPTCHA.  
The [Google Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

[Back](#) [Complete Registration](#)

# Thank you!

Your mygovscot myaccount has been created.

## What happens next?

You can now use your mygovscot myaccount to access Scottish public services online.

The details you used to register will be shared with the services you access using mygovscot myaccount (as long as you provide consent).

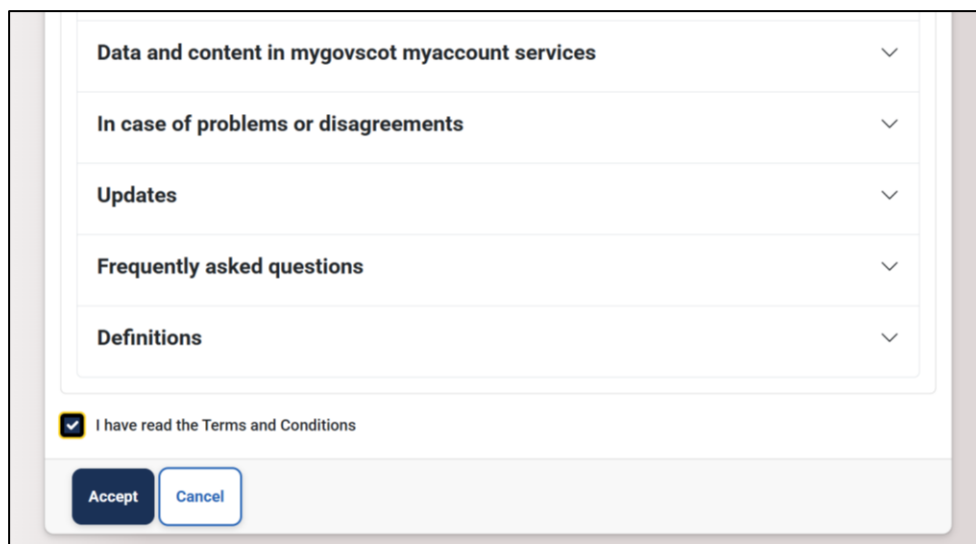
You can update your details at anytime. Simply login to mygovscot myaccount and change your details in the 'Account' section.

[Sign in to The Highland Council](#)

4) Registration with mygovscot is now complete, next step is to sign into Highland Council website:



The screenshot shows the Highland Council logo at the top, followed by the mygovscot myaccount logo. The main heading is "Terms and Conditions for myaccount". Below this is a section titled "Mygovscot myaccount Terms of Service" with a sub-heading "Effective 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024. [Download PDF](#)". A paragraph of text explains the update: "We've updated our Terms of Service on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024. For more detail we have provided a [summary of the key changes](#). If you don't agree to our Terms of Service, you can find out more information about your options in our [Frequently Asked Questions](#)." Below the text is a dropdown menu with the text "What's covered in these terms" and a downward arrow.



This screenshot shows a dropdown menu with five items, each with a downward arrow on the right: "Data and content in mygovscot myaccount services", "In case of problems or disagreements", "Updates", "Frequently asked questions", and "Definitions". Below the dropdown is a checkbox that is checked, with the text "I have read the Terms and Conditions". At the bottom are two buttons: "Accept" (dark blue) and "Cancel" (light blue).

**Email Address**

[Change](#)

john.cooper@can-digital.net

**Address**

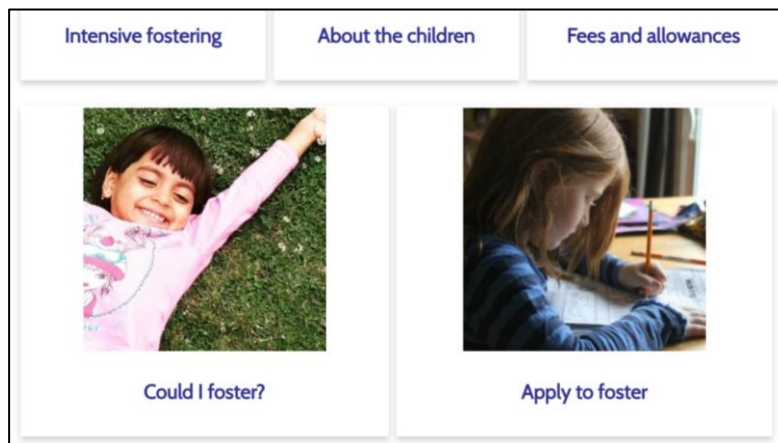
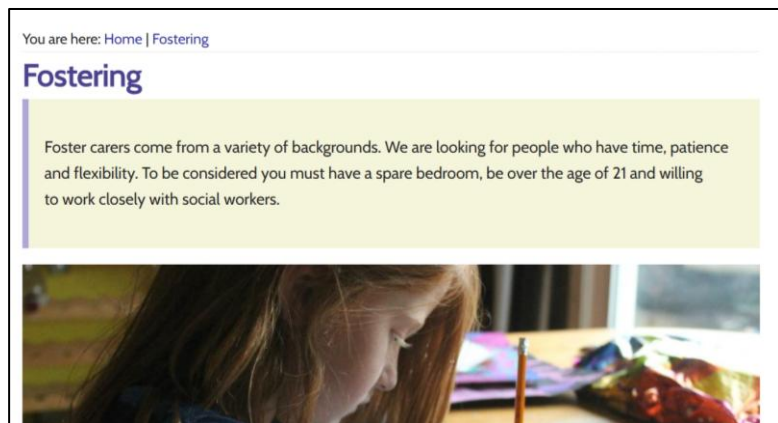
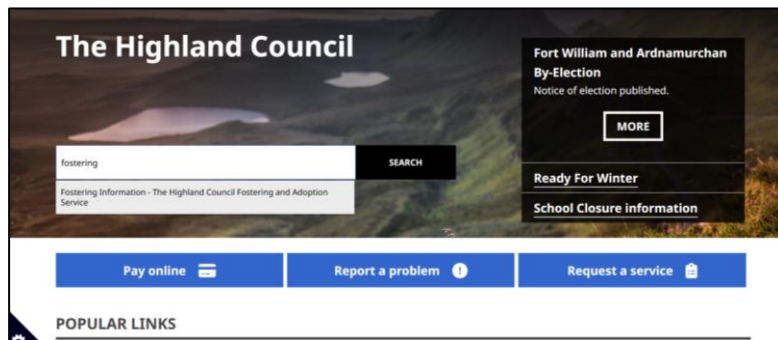
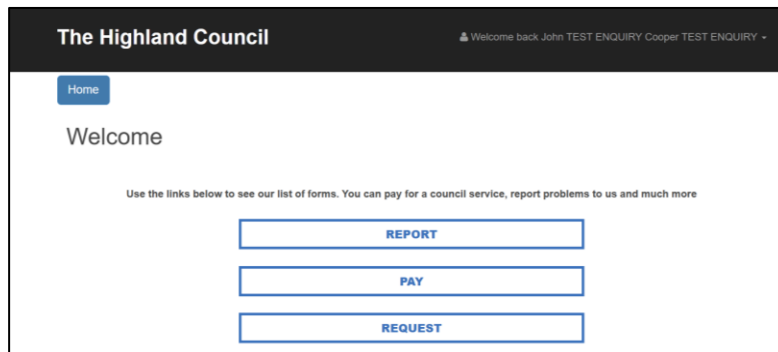
[Change](#)

7 Solway Close  
Nottingham  
NG9 4EE

**Yes, share these details.**

**No, log me out**

5) Logging into the Highland Council website takes an enquirer away from the fostering enquiry form, so the enquirer then has to search or navigate back to the fostering pages, and find the link to 'Apply to foster':



6) Clicking on the 'Apply to foster' link takes an enquirer to the original page:

You are here: [Home](#) | [Fostering](#) | [Apply to be a foster carer](#)

## Apply to be a foster carer

Children needing foster care come from different backgrounds and have a variety of needs. We are always pleased when people come forward and express an interest in fostering.

To meet these needs we are looking for people with the following qualities so we can offer the best experience to a child.

- Commitment and enthusiasm for looking after children
- A desire to make a child's life better
- Being able to deal with challenging and difficult behaviour

If you decide fostering is right for you and your family, you can make a full application.

The assessment process from enquiry to approval does need a huge commitment and at any stage you can decide whether it is right for you or not to continue with the process.

Once the assessment is complete it is presented to the Fostering Panel and the final decision regarding your approval is made by the Agency Decision Maker.

If you look after a child of a relative or friend, this is called [kinship care](#).

[ASK US ABOUT FOSTERING](#) →

[DOWNLOAD INFORMATION](#) →

7) After clicking on the 'Ask us about fostering' link, more clicks are required before reaching the form itself:

**The Highland Council** Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

Home

In order to provide this service, the Council needs to collect and process your personal data as described [in this privacy notice](#).

By proceeding you are confirming that you have read and understood this notice.

**The Highland Council** Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

Home

## Ask us about Fostering and Adoption

[Before you begin](#) [Contact details](#) [Let us know](#)

You must read our information pack before you make an enquiry.  
You can download it from our [website](#)

8) The form now can be completed, the first section requiring some basic details:

# The Highland Council

Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

Home

## Ask us about Fostering and Adoption

Before you begin | Contact details | Let us know

You must read our information pack before you make an enquiry.  
You can download it from our [website](#)

✓

Last name \*  
 ✓

Email address \*  
 ✓

I do not have an email address

Phone number \*

I am interested in: \*  Fostering  Adoption

## 9) The next section asks for some preliminary info

# The Highland Council

Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

Home

## Ask us about Fostering and Adoption

[Before you begin](#) [Contact details](#) [Let us know](#)

It is useful for us to know how you found out about Fostering and Adoption. If you do not wish to supply this information tick the box below

I do not wish to complete survey

What steps have you taken to find out about fostering or adoption? \*

Online research

Discussion with a social worker

Speaking to other carers

Discussion with friends or family

Attending talks on fostering and adoption

Attending talks on fostering and adoption

Other

How did you find out about us? \*

Friends

Family

Highland Council Web

Facebook

Publications

Newspaper

Other

[← Previous](#) [Submit](#)

10) After clicking the 'submit' button, the enquirer is then informed that they will receive an email within 24 hours before they can proceed any further, followed by a 'rating' request. After the rating has been submitted the enquirer is redirected back to the fostering home page:

**The Highland Council** Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

[Home](#)

Thank you for submitting your enquiry.

Your reference number is FS-Case-760697953.


You will receive an email from The Highland Council within 24 hours. Please check your mailbox.

[Continue »](#)

**The Highland Council** Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

[Home](#)

How would you rate your experience today?



Comment

[Skip this step](#) [Submit](#)

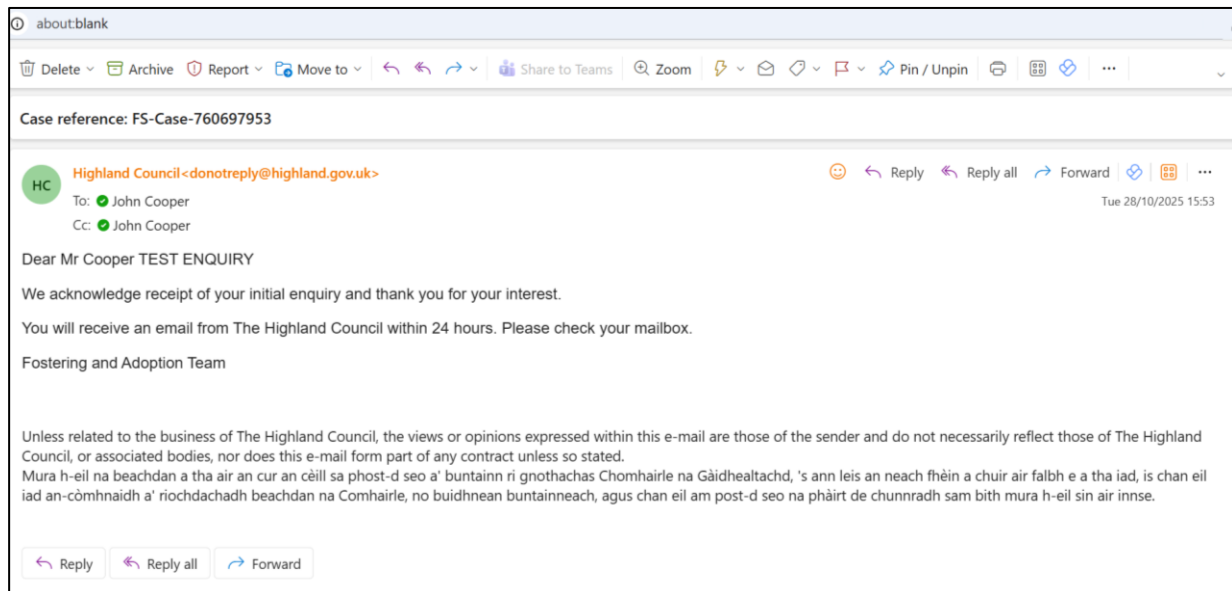
This site uses Cookies. [Read more here](#)

**The Highland Council Fostering and Adoption Service**

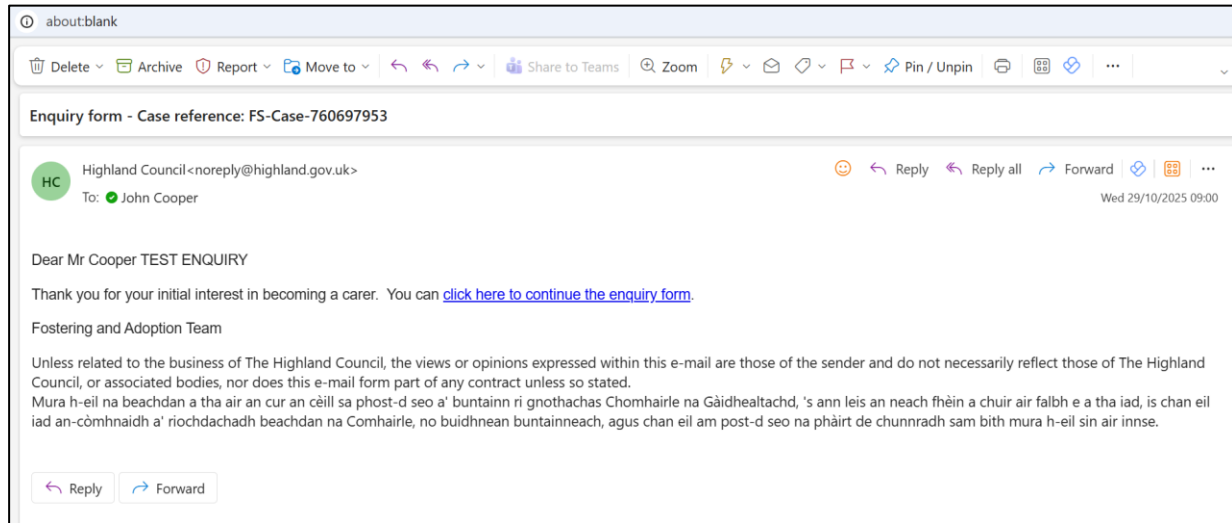


[Home](#) [Fostering](#) [Adoption](#) [About us](#) [News](#)

11) An automatically generated email is sent to the enquirer's inbox as soon as the initial part of the form is submitted, informing them that they will be able to continue with their enquiry when they receive another email within 24 hours:



12) The day after the enquiry process was started, the enquirer is sent an email containing a link to the form to continue:



13) The link from the email goes to the log in page of the Highland Council website:

The Highland Council Log in

[Home](#)

### Register or sign in


With mygovscot myaccount you can access Highland Council, and other public sector services across Scotland.


Our forms will automatically populate with your details, and you will be able to **save your progress** on some of our larger forms.

You will soon be able to view your previously submitted forms.

Registration only takes a few minutes.

[Register or sign in](#)

  
The Highland Council  
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd


  
**mygovscot**  
myaccount


Email or Username

[Continue](#)

[Need help?](#)

**Passkey**

  
The Highland Council  
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

  
**mygovscot**  
myaccount

Email or Username

Password [Forgot password](#)

[Show](#)

[Sign in](#)

14) After logging in, the enquirer is asked if they would like to 'Revert':

The screenshot shows a web interface for 'The Hi'. At the top, a yellow notification bar contains the text: 'This task was previously started by: User: Pamela Bell Email: pamela.bell@highland.gov.uk Started At: 29/10/2025 09:25:37 Would you like to revert?'. Below this bar are two buttons: a red 'No' button and a green 'Yes' button. The main content area has a dark header with 'The Hi' logo and a 'Home' button. The title of the page is 'Fostering and adoption enquiry'. Below the title is a 'Let us know' button. The form contains the following text: 'You previously told us you were interested in:', 'Fostering', and 'Do you have a spare room? \*'. There are two radio buttons for 'Yes' and 'No'. At the bottom of the form are two buttons: 'Cancel' and 'Submit'.

**The Hi** This task was previously started by: User: Pamela Bell Email: pamela.bell@highland.gov.uk Started At: 29/10/2025 09:25:37 Would you like to revert?

[Home](#)

## Fostering and adoption enquiry

[Let us know](#)

You previously told us you were interested in:

Fostering

Do you have a spare room? \*

Yes  No

15) Clicking on 'No' to the question about reverting navigates away from the form:

The screenshot shows a web interface for 'The Highland Council'. At the top, a yellow confirmation dialog box asks 'Would you like to revert?' with 'No' and 'Yes' buttons. Below this, a 'Home' button is visible. The main heading is 'Fostering and adoption enquiry'. A 'Let us know' button is present. The text 'You previously told us you were interested in:' is followed by 'Fostering'. A question 'Do you have a spare room? \*' has radio buttons for 'Yes' and 'No'. At the bottom, there are 'Cancel' and 'Submit' buttons.

The Hi

This task was previously started by: User: Pamela Bell Email: pamela.bell@highland.gov.uk Started At: 29/10/2025 09:25:37 Would you like to revert?

No Yes

Home

## Fostering and adoption enquiry

Let us know

You previously told us you were interested in:

Fostering

Do you have a spare room? \*

Yes  No

Cancel Submit

16) Clicking on 'yes' to the question about reverting allows the enquirer to proceed:

**The Highland Council** Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

[Home](#)

## Fostering and adoption enquiry

[Let us know](#)

You previously told us you were interested in:

Fostering

Do you have a spare room? \*

Yes  No

Fostering

Do you have a spare room? \*

Yes  No ✓

Are you or your family expecting any changes which may affect how available you are in the future? \*

Yes  No ✓

Do you smoke? \*

Yes  No ✓

Do you use e-cigarettes, also known as vaping? \*

Yes  No ✓

Have you tried nicotine replacement therapy or medication to stop smoking? \*

Yes  No ✓

What therapy or medication have you tried \*

What therapy or medication have you tried \*

 ✓

For how long? \*

Enter amount of months or years

 ✓

If you smoke, we will not place a child under 5 years or with breathing difficulties with you.

Have you discussed your plans with people living in your house? \*

Yes  No

How many children under the age of 16 live with you? \*

Enter amount of months or years

 ✓

If you smoke, we will not place a child under 5 years or with breathing difficulties with you.

Have you discussed your plans with people living in your house? \*

Yes  No ✓

How many children under the age of 16 live with you? \*

Change to 0 if there are no children

 ✓

17) If the enquirer does not currently have a spare room, they are not allowed to proceed any further. There is no option to state that they will have a spare room in the future:

[Home](#)

## Fostering and adoption enquiry

[Let us know](#)

You previously told us you were interested in:

Fostering

Do you have a spare room? \*

Yes  No ✓

To foster or adopt you must have a spare room available. Unfortunately you will not be able to continue with this enquiry but, if your circumstances change, we would love to hear from you again.

[✕ Cancel](#)

18) Where the enquirer indicates that any people under the age of 16 are living in the house, they are required to provide details:

How many children under the age of 16 live with you? \*

Change to 0 if there are no children

✓

Please complete the following details for each child

Child's date of birth \*

How many people over the age of 16 live with you? This includes your spouse or partner. \*

Change to 0 if there are no other householder

19) If the enquirer indicates that anyone else over the age of 16 lives in the household, they are required to provide details about them:

[Click to confirm and save details](#)

How many people over the age of 16 live with you? This includes your spouse or partner. \*

Change to 0 if there are no other householders

✓

Please complete the following details for each household member.

Title \*

First name \*

Last name \*

Date of birth \*

First name \*

✓

Last name \*

✓

Date of birth \*

✓

Relationship \*

Does this person smoke? \*

Yes  No

Does this person smoke? \*

Yes  No ✓

Do they use e-cigarettes, which is also known as vaping? \*

Yes  No ✓

Have they ever smoked? \*

Yes  No ✓

When did they stop smoking? \*

If exact date is not known, enter the first day of the month

✓

[Click to confirm and save details](#)

20) The enquirer is required to provide more information about themselves:

Home

## Fostering and adoption enquiry

Let us know **1** About You **1** Your Address Pets Health What happens next

Have you previously enquired to be a foster carer or adoptive parent with the Highland Council? \*

Yes  No

Title \*

Mr ✓

First name \*

John TEST ENQUIRY ✓

Middle names

Cooper TEST ENQUIRY ✓

Date of birth \*

Day Month Year

DD MM YYYY

Place of birth \*

Nationality \*

British ✓

Email address \*

john.cooper@can-digital.net ✓

Phone number \*

07815068936 ✓

Place of birth \*

Hartlepool ✓

Nationality \*

British ✓

Email address \*

john.cooper@can-digital.net ✓

Phone number \*

07815068936 ✓

Are you a UK citizen? \*

Yes  No

Are you subject to immigration control? \*

Yes  No

Are you subject to immigration control? \*

Yes  No

Are there any conditions or limits to your permission to stay in the UK? \*

Yes  No

Ethnic origin

Select... ▾

Your preferred language spoken at home

English ▾ ✓

Religion

Select... ▾

Are you subject to immigration control? \*

Yes  No

Are there any conditions or limits to your permission to stay in the UK? \*

Yes  No

Ethnic origin

Other ▾ ✓

Select...  
 Arab  
 Asian  
 Black  
 Mixed  
 Traveller  
 White  
 Other

en at home

Religion

Select... ▾

NB the above list to describe ethnic origin appears to be very old and out of date.

Current address

Enter a postcode to search for the address \*

Choose address \*

Select... ▾

Did you find the address on the list above? \*

Yes  No

Mr John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY - When did you move to this address? \*

If you are unable to provide the exact date within the month, please use the 1st of the month

Is your property: \*

Rented  Owned  Mortgaged

◀ Previous Next ▶

Town \*

Nottingham ▾ ✓

Postcode \*

NG9 4EE ▾ ✓

Mr John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY - When did you move to this address? \*

If you are unable to provide the exact date within the month, please use the 1st of the month

01/01/2010 ▾ ✓

Is your property: \*

Rented  Owned  Mortgaged ✓

You will need to supply a copy of the landlords permission to foster or adopt

◀ Previous Next ▶

21) The enquirer is required to provide information about pets:

**The Highland Council** Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

[Home](#)

## Fostering and adoption enquiry

[Let us know](#) [About You](#) [Your Address](#) [Pets](#) [Health](#) [What happens next](#)

Do you have any pets? \*

Yes  No

[← Previous](#) [Next →](#)

## Fostering and adoption enquiry

[Let us know](#) [About You](#) [Your Address](#) [Pets](#) [Health](#) [What happens next](#)

Do you have any pets? \*

Yes  No ✓

How many pets do you have? \*

✓

Please complete the following details for each pet



What type of pet do you have? \*

✓

[✓ Click to confirm and save details](#)

## 22) The enquirer is then required to provide health information:

### Fostering and adoption enquiry

Let us know  About You Your Address Pets **Health ** What happens next

It is important we learn at an early stage if an applicant has any health issues, but it is only rarely that these may cause an application to be halted. We may in some cases ask for an early medical assesment so that our Medical Advisor can give guidance.

Prospective carers and prospective adoptive parents have a responsibility to inform the Fostering and Adoption service of any health issues that may arise.

Do you consider yourself to be in good heath? \*

Yes  No

Do you attend your GP and or practice nurse on a regular basis for monitoring of a health issue? \*

Yes  No

Have you suffered from any condition requiring attention in hospital? \*

Yes  No

Have you suffered from any condition requiring attention in hospital? \*

Yes  No ✓

Provide details \*

Currently do you have a condition which requires attendance at hospital clinics? \*

Yes  No

In the past have you had a condition which required attendance at hospital clinics? \*

Yes  No

Do you consider you have a long term health condition or disability? \*

Yes  No

[< Previous](#) [Next >](#)

23) The next step is to complete the section for booking a call:

### Fostering and adoption enquiry

Let us know About You Your Address Pets Health What happens next

We will phone you to discuss your enquiry in more detail.

Please provide 3 options of dates between Monday and Friday, along with a time choice suitable for a member of the team to contact you. The date can only be chosen 7 days from today's date.

Date \*

Time \*

Between 09:00 to 13:00  Between 13:00 to 17:00  Between 17:00 to 20:00

We will phone you to discuss your enquiry in more detail.

Please provide 3 options of dates between Monday and Friday, along with a time choice suitable for a member of the team to contact you. The date can only be chosen 7 days from today's date.

Date \*

 ✓

Time \*

Between 09:00 to 13:00  Between 13:00 to 17:00  Between 17:00 to 20:00 ✓

The booking system caused a glitch as it needs to be repeated 3 times:

We will phone you to discuss your enquiry in more detail.

Please provide 3 options of dates between Monday and Friday, along with a time choice suitable for a member of the team to contact you. The date can only be chosen 7 days from today's date.

Date \*

 ✓





Time \*

Between 09:00 to 13:00  Between 13:00 to 17:00  Between 17:00 to 20:00 ✓

**Not enough dates and times added**

24) When three call times have been booked, the form can be submitted:

We will phone you to discuss your enquiry in more detail.

 Date	Time
 05/11/2025	Between 09:00 to 13:00
 05/11/2025	Between 13:00 to 17:00
 14/11/2025	Between 17:00 to 20:00

[< Previous](#) [✔ Submit](#)

25) On submitting the form, a glitch occurred, which was because the details of only one pet could be entered, when two pets were stated:

We will phone you to discuss your enquiry in more detail.

Let us know has invalid data. Return to this section?

Yes & Stop Warnings

Date	Time
05/11/2025	Between 09:00 to 13:00
05/11/2025	Between 13:00 to 17:00
14/11/2025	Between 17:00 to 20:00

The only way to proceed was to delete the information about pets:

Let us know ! About You Your Address **Pets** ! Health What happens next

Do you have any pets? \*  
 Yes  No ✓

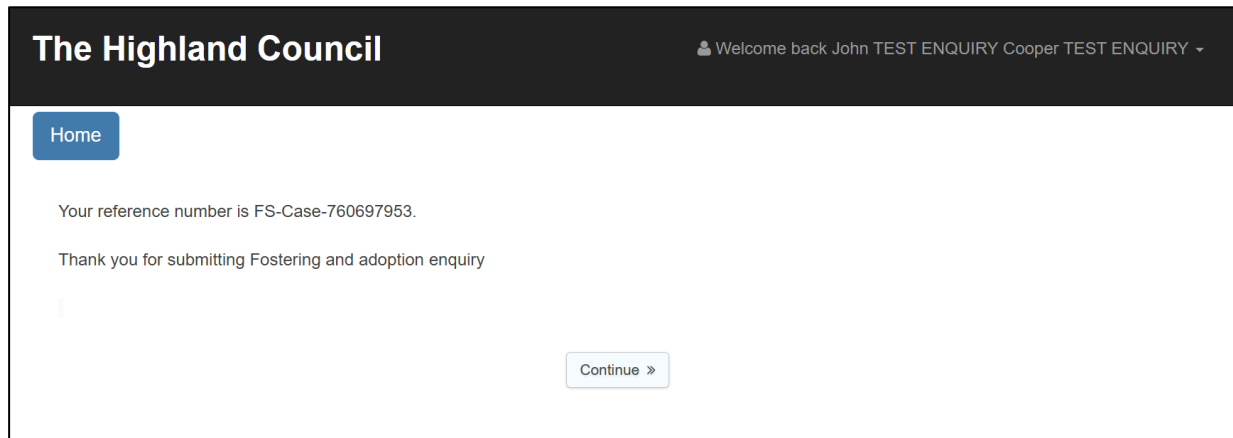
How many pets do you have? \*  
 ✓

Please complete the following details for each pet

What type of pet do you have? \*  
 ✓

Breed of dog \*

26) The form is then able to be submitted, and provides a case ID number:






The screenshot shows a web page for The Highland Council. At the top left, the text "The Highland Council" is displayed in white on a dark background. To the right, a user is logged in, with the text "Welcome back John TEST ENQUIRY Cooper TEST ENQUIRY" and a dropdown arrow. Below the header, there is a blue button labeled "Home". The main content area contains the following text: "Your reference number is FS-Case-760697953." followed by "Thank you for submitting Fostering and adoption enquiry". At the bottom center of the content area, there is a light blue button labeled "Continue »".

27) An automatically generated email is sent to the enquirer's inbox when the form is submitted:

Case reference: FS-Case-760697953

---

 **Highland Council** <donotreply@highland.gov.uk> 😊 Reply Reply all Forward 📧 ⋮

To:  John Cooper Wed 29/10/2025 11:27  
Cc:  John Cooper

Dear Mr Cooper TEST ENQUIRY



Thank you for your interest to become a carer.  
You will shortly receive an email to confirm the date and time when you will be contacted to discuss your enquiry further.

Fostering and Adoption Team  
Unless related to the business of The Highland Council, the views or opinions expressed within this e-mail are those of the sender and do not necessarily reflect those of The Highland Council, or associated bodies, nor does this e-mail form part of any contract unless so stated.  
Mura h-eil na beachdan a tha air an cur an cèill sa phost-d seo a' buntainn ri gnothachas Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd, 's ann leis an neach fhèin a chuir air falbh e a tha iad, is chan eil iad an-còmhnaidh a' riochdachadh beachdan na Comhairle, no buidhnean buntainneach, agus chan eil am post-d seo na phàirt de chunradh sam bith mura h-eil sin air innse.

Reply Reply all Forward

28) A further email is sent to the enquirer shortly afterwards, which specifies the date and time a call is booked:

Telephone Interview Confirmation - Case reference: FS-Case-760697953

 Highland Council <donotreply@highland.gov.uk>  
To:  John Cooper

Reply Reply all Forward

Wed 29/10/2025 11:30

Dear Mr Cooper TEST ENQUIRY

Thank you for your enquiry to become a carer.

A member from the Fostering and Adoption team will be contacting you on:  
Wednesday 05th November 2025 11:30 AM

This is an opportunity to discuss the process in more detail, so please be prepared with any questions or information you think may be important to disclose.

If this date and time is no longer suitable, please contact the team manager:

- Name: Pamela Bell
- Phone: 07933373545

**As part of the discussion you will be asked if you or any other householder has a firearm which requires a Licence. If this is so, please ensure you know the expiry date of the licence.**

Please ensure you have read the [information pack](#) before we contact you.