



# Fostering social media and internet checks

**Make every memory count**





# Introduction

At Lancashire County Council we acknowledge that the world is changing and so is the way that we communicate. The internet and various forms of social media have become an integral part of gathering and sharing information. Internet checks can reveal important information about prospective and existing foster carer's suitability to care for children. As a Local Authority we therefore have a responsibility to undertake such checks routinely. This ensures carers are suitable to work with children and young people and are setting a good example as role models for the children and young people in their care. We also want to make sure that as a Lancashire carer, your use of social media and the internet reflects our standards for professional behaviour.

## Process

When you apply to Lancashire's Fostering Service to become a carer you will be asked to complete a registration of interest (ROI) pack. Within this pack there is a consent form which we will ask you to sign to allow us to complete statutory checks. We also ask for your consent to complete social media checks and we will complete searches on the internet and social media platforms, this will be done by your assessing social worker. For existing foster carers, checks will be completed as part of the review process, and these will be conducted by your supervising social worker.

To complete the checks your social worker will search for your name, and any other person in your household who may have access to a child or children in your care via an internet search engine such as Google or Bing, and they will view any websites that link to this name. Your social worker may also complete further searches on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube for example. This is not

an exhaustive list of social media platforms due to the developing nature of social media, where the popularity and use of such platforms may change over time.

Searches of the internet and social media will take part in assessments for new applicants to the Fostering Service and prior to a review for existing carers. The checks will be completed using a corporate login for Lancashire County Council, our staff are not permitted to complete searches using their personal social media accounts. Your social worker will discuss with you how the checks will be completed and how this information will be used in your assessment and reviews.

Whilst we ask for your consent as good practice, if information can be readily accessed in a public domain, then you will not be able to withhold this information. The internet and social media checks will only reveal information which is available within the public domain and can be viewed by others, this would include profiles, photos, videos, and comments that are available publicly and can be



viewed where privacy and security settings allow. We will not seek to complete checks where information is not publicly available unless there is a specific need to do so as part of an assessment or review. We will not normally therefore ask you to provide any passwords or to allow access personal areas of the social networks. If your social worker is of the view the information stored within a restricted area of a social network is required as part of your assessment, then this decision will be escalated to a Senior Manager prior to these checks being completed.

We will make sure we discuss with you the implications of internet use and appropriate privacy settings when we assess new foster carers.

## **What information do we consider?**

Lancashire County Council Fostering Service expects foster carers and members of their households to adhere to standards of behaviour which allow them to safely care for children. If there is any information which causes a concern, we may need to take further steps to ensure our children are kept safe.

## **Working with you**

If your social worker has concerns about information in online checks, we will discuss this with you at the earliest opportunity. The only exception to this where we need to follow safeguarding procedures to keep a child safe.

