Regional Foster Placements
“Sharing the Caring”

Panel Member’s Guide
INTRODUCTION

Fostering Panels must be organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about approval, termination and review of Foster Carers.

The Panel must promote, monitor and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

The membership requirements, terms of reference and functions of fostering panels are set out in Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011. Further details about the membership and functions of the fostering panels appear in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services issued under Standard 14 and related Fostering services Regulations 23 and relevant subsections.

The Panel provides a quality assurance function, monitoring and reviewing the work undertaken by the assessing social worker, ensuring that there is consistency of approach established throughout the service, that it is fair to all applicants and that the assessment has been carried out in a thorough and vigorous manner.

THE PURPOSE OF THE FOSTERING PANEL

The panel is the forum in which Regional Foster Placements will make recommendations about approval, termination and revision of approvals in relation to foster carers.

The panel must state the terms of approval and give reasons for its recommendations.

THE DUTIES OF THE FOSTERING PANEL

The functions of the fostering Panel in respect of cases referred to it by the Agency are:

- To consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a foster carer.
- To recommend the terms on which the approval is given, for example, as to the numbers and ages of the children, whether the approval relates to any particular named child, or to any particular type of placement.
- The Panel shall also advise on the procedures under which reviews are carried out by the Agency and periodically monitor their effectiveness.
- To oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the Agency.
- To give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or individual cases as the Agency may refer to it.
Other matters that could be referred to the fostering panel:

- Revisions of approval
- Resignation of foster carers
- Termination of foster carers
- All foster carers following child protection concerns or allegations made about standards of care.

**Central List of Panel Members**

The Fostering Panel is made up of a diverse number of suitably qualified individuals from a multidisciplinary professional or experiential background.

Each Panel member will have experience/expertise which will enhance the decision making process.

There will be representatives on the Panel from the following backgrounds:

- Someone who has recent experience in the child care field, e.g. a social worker with experience of working with children who are Looked After away from their family; experience of child protection issues, the appropriate legislation and contact issues
- Someone who has experience of working with foster carers
- An independent Foster Carer
- An independent person with direct experience of foster care
- An independent person with, as far as possible, experience in Health
- An independent person with, as far as possible, experience in Education
- A representative of the community.

The panel is chaired by the Regional Foster Placements Fostering Panel Chair. In the absence of the Chair the vice chair should deputise.

**Chair**

“The Chair must have knowledge and ability to chair a complex meeting where a wide variety of views may be expressed. He or she should be able to lead a meeting with diplomacy and authority.

He or she must have sensitive regard to a fair and transparent process for foster carers whilst ensuring that the Panel keeps children’s welfare paramount.

It is advisable that the chair has responsibility for:

- Deciding who will attend the Panel, in addition to Panel members
- Ensuring that all Panel members participate fully and that, if possible, a consensus is reached
- Involvement when a Penal member appears to be unfit, unwilling or unable to continue
- Involvement when a panel member declares an interest in a case; and
- Involvement in deciding when a matter is urgent and when an additional Panel may need to be convened.

The Chair also has a responsibility to ensure that the Panel is clear about the reasons for its recommendations and that these have been accurately recorded.

*(BAAF Effective Fostering Panels 2011)*

**Vice Chair**

“A Vice Chair will need to be appointed from the rest of the Panel membership. His or her role is clearly to deputise for the Chair when the latter is unavailable. The Vice Chair therefore needs to have the ability to chair a complex meeting, and have knowledge about fostering issues”

*(BAAF Effective Fostering Panels 2011)*

**Independent Members**

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 recognise the benefit of independence to encourage a fair, open and equitable process.

**Social work representatives**

Social Work representative should have 3 years post qualifying experience and knowledge of fostering services and child care services.

**Medical Advice**

The medical adviser provides a medical opinion on each new applicant and is available to attend the Panel when necessary.

**Legal Advice**

The Panel has access to legal advice as and when required.

**Panel Administrator**

The Panel Administrator ensures the smooth running of the Panel, takes minutes, liaises closely with the Panel Chair regarding the agenda and other matters and ensures the Panel will be quorate.
Observers

“Occasionally other social workers, new Panel Members and allied professionals may attend to observe the Panel. A maximum of two observers should attend at any one time and the Chair should be consulted. Observers should sign a confidentiality bond and the agreement of foster carers whose cases are being heard by the Panel should be sought. Furthermore, there may be occasions where the issues being considered are so sensitive that observers should not attend (eg where a termination of approval is being considered in a case of serious child protection concerns in respect of the foster carer).”

(BAAF Effective Fostering Panels 2011)

QUORUM

The Panel must be quorate in order to meet.

The minimum is:

- Independent Panel Chair or Vice Chair
- 2 Independent Persons
- A relevantly qualified social worker
- 1 other Panel Member

As the regulations are so prescriptive about who must be in attendance for a Panel to be quorate, it is essential that the Panel Members be committed to attending meetings. In particular there must be good liaison between the chairperson and vice chair regarding their availability to attend meetings—if both are absent then the panel cannot proceed.

APPOINTMENT TO PANEL

Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks and other authority checks must be completed on each Panel member before they are allowed to begin work.

FOSTERING PANEL MEMBER—PERSON SPECIFICATION

- Must have a good understanding of child care issues
- Must be articulate
- Must demonstrate insight into family dynamics—both functional and dysfunctional
- Must be able to work in a non-discriminatory way and have an understanding of Great Britain as a multi-cultural/ethnic country
- Must be able to demonstrate objectivity in decision making
Must be committed to the work of the Panel
Must be aware of the legislation and regulations that carers and the Agency are governed by—The National Minimum Standards, The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Children Act 1989 in particular and any other relevant legislation.
Must be committed to participating in occasional Panel Training and Development days and recognise their own developmental needs around the work of the Panel. In line with the appraisal system laid out in the national Minimum standards for Fostering 2011 (see appendix A)
Must have an awareness of how carer assessments are made and the various techniques used in the assessment process
Must understand and accept the confidential nature of the work of the Panel.
Must have knowledge of child protection and safeguarding issues, and will attend LSCB approved training.

TERMS & CONDITIONS FOR PANEL MEMBERS

“A Fostering Panel Member may have continual membership for an unspecified period of time dependent upon changes in legislation and the needs of fostering panel to maintain an independent, diverse group of members.

Any Panel Member may resign office at any time by giving one month’s notice in writing to the Fostering Panel Chairperson.

Regulation 23 (9) states that where the fostering service provider is of the opinion that any member of the fostering panel is unsuitable or unable to remain in office, it may terminate membership at any time by giving notice in writing.

On appointment, Panel Members will be required to sign an agreement with the Agency. This will set out the requirements for maintaining confidentiality, for preparation and attendance at Panel meetings and the expectation of participation in training for Panel Members.

(BAAF Effective Fostering Panels 2011)

PRE-PANEL

Panel Members should receive the assessment reports for foster carers seeking approval at least 10 days prior to the date of the Panel meeting.

These forms are confidential and the information within them is subject to the Data Protection Act 1998
It is expected that Panel Members will have read these reports before the Panel meeting and noted any questions that they wish to ask or any points that they would like clarified.

PANEL MEMBERS RESPONSIBILITIES

“The Panel’s role is to examine the assessment report and to consider whether there is evidence of an applicant’s abilities and suitability to foster. Before making recommendations to the fostering service provider, essential questions for Panel members should include the following:

- Have the statutory checks been undertaken and are these satisfactory?
- Have at least two personal referees been interviewed and written reports of interviews provided? Do the referees adequately cover both applicants, if a couple? Have they known the family over a number of years? Should more referees be taken up, including from a family member?
- If the applicant was previously married or in a long-term significant relationship, has a reference been taken up from the ex-partner? If not, why not?
- Have the applicant’s own children by birth and any other children permanently in the household been interviewed? If not, why not?
- Has a chronology of the applicant’s life been provided? Is there sufficient independent verification of the applicant’s chronology and any self-reported information?
- Does the report include an analysis of the information provided by the assessing social worker with clear recommendations of the range and terms of approval?
- Has sufficient evidence of all the necessary competences been provided?
- Have areas for future development and support been identified?
- Does the applicant provide evidence of anti-discriminatory and anti-racist approaches to parenting?
- For an application to foster a disabled child, have the particular issues in relation to caring for a disabled child been addressed?
- Do the terms of approval appear appropriate given the assessed abilities of the prospective foster carer(s), the suitability of the household and the needs of the children in the age group recommended?”

(BAAF Effective Fostering Panels 2011)

THE PANEL MEETING

Panel Members will have an opportunity to discuss the reports, and agree on the information they require, before meeting with the assessing social worker and the foster carers.

The information sought will relate to seeking support for the social workers recommendation and will be relevant to ensuring that the applicant is fully able to
provide all the necessary support and care for a child placed with them.

**The primary task is to ensure that the child’s safety, health, and welfare is paramount when the decision to approve the applicant is made.**

Once the questions have been answered the assessing social worker and foster carers will leave the meeting room giving Panel Members an opportunity to discuss their recommendations for approval and the terms of approval.

The Panel can do one of three things:

- It can make a positive recommendation
- It can make a negative recommendation
- It can defer making a recommendation in order for further information to be made available.

In reaching recommendations, during the Panel meeting, Panel Members will need to discuss the strengths and concerns, if any, of the matters put before them. Good practice would suggest that Panel members try to reach a consensus on the recommendation. All Panel Members should be asked for their views. No one view should carry more weight than others. The recommendations should then be clearly recorded with given reasons for the recommendation. It is good practice for the Chair to summarise the reasons for the recommendation during the Panel meeting. Panel Members should be asked to contribute to this too.

However, where there is disagreement or dissent within the group this should be clearly recorded in the minutes. Where the Panel is evenly balanced with half the members agreeing to recommend approval and half not, it would not be possible for the Panel to reach a positive recommendation. It may then be necessary to defer the Panel’s final recommendation for further information to be made available. The Chair should not have the casting vote.

The recommendations of the Panel must be added to the assessment reports and signed by the Panel Chair.

**POST-PANEL**

Following the Panel meeting the Panel Administrator will draft the minutes of the Panel including the recommendations of the meeting and the reasons given.

Draft minutes will be sent to the Panel Chair within 5 working days of the Panel meeting.

All recommendations will be sent to the Agency Decision Maker within 5 days of the Panel meeting. The Decision Maker will either confirm the recommendation or make a
different decision within 48 hours of receiving the information.

**PANEL MEMBER ALLOWANCE**

Panel Chair - £200-£300 per panel meeting  
All other - £180 - £200 per panel meeting