

Fostering Panel Induction Programme

Aim:

For Panel Members to explore and identify their roles and responsibilities in relation to Panel

Objectives:

- Consider the legislation, guidance and standards that underpin the work of fostering panels
- Consider the tasks and responsibilities of members of the fostering panel
- Acknowledge and value the skills and abilities that panel members may bring to a panel
- Develop confidence in carrying out their role as effective panel members

Select FosterCare – An introduction

What is Fostering?

- Fostering is a way of providing stable family life for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents. This allows them the chance to thrive in a safe, secure, loving and caring home environment. Fostering is challenging but rewarding and takes time, patience and commitment.
- The children and young people placed with foster carers are from a diverse range of backgrounds and will display different behaviour depending upon their various experiences.
- All children and young people are different, making it difficult to define a "typical child". However, what you can expect is that, as with any child or young person, they need security, stability and the chance to develop and thrive.
- Fostering differs from adoption, in that an adoption order ends a child's legal relationship with their natural family, whereas looked after children remain the legal responsibility of the local authority and/or their birth parents.
- Foster care placement can last for days, months or even years. Many children return home to their families but others may receive long-term support; either through continued fostering, adoption, residential care or by being helped to live independently.

Types of Fostering

Emergency Placements

This type of fostering involves caring for children who need somewhere safe to stay immediately, usually for a few days. This can often happen at very short notice.

Short Term (Temporary) Placements

Short-term foster carers provide a temporary place to stay until the child can return home to their own family, move into a longer-term fostering placement or an adoptive family is found.

Long Term (Permanent) Placements

These placements are where adoption is not an option, and the foster carer care for a child/young person up to and into adult independence.

Respite Placements

Respite placements are provided to give parents a break, or offer additional support if they do not have their own support network. In addition, respite is also offered to our own foster carers and is available in order to support placement demands and needs.

Bridging Placements

We can provide bridging placements for child or young people while permanency plans are being formulated. In such placements foster carers work with children/young people and their families toward reunification, or prepare children/young people for joining adoptive or long term/permanent fostering families or for moving to a semi-independent or an independent living arrangement.

Parent and Child Placements

This type of placement is provided to a mother and/or father and their child/ren, where foster carers can provide support and guidance to the parent(s) and help them develop parenting skills.

Disability placements

This type of fostering needs experience and skills in caring for children and young people who are disabled and / or require specialist medical care.

Remand Placements

Remand placements are for young people who have been remanded by a court to the care of an experienced foster carer.

What is the role of a fostering panel?

The role of the Fostering Panel is to ensure the provision and approval of high quality Foster Homes for children who are placed with **Select Fostercare Services** that safeguards and promotes their welfare.

The Panel is committed to promoting diversity and reflect the community it serves; it will not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, sexuality, religion, age or disability, or any other reason.

The welfare of children is paramount in all matters considered by the panel.

Key tasks:

- Approval of prospective foster carers
- Reviewing foster carer's approval
- Termination (Deregistration) of foster carer's approval
- Change of approval
- Complaints and allegations
- Quality assurance

Statutory Function of the Fostering Panel:

The Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulation:

- To consider and recommend whether or not an eligible person is suitable for approval as a Foster Carer, to look after children and young people up to the age of 18 years, and the terms of that approval
- To recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to act as a Foster Carer and whether or not the terms of approval remain appropriate,

Recommendations for approval or reapproval will include specifying the age, gender and number of children who will normally be fostered and the evaluation of the Carer's future training needs.

The Panel will also consider and make recommendations on:

- The standard and quality of assessments and reports presented to it and give feedback to the Agency
- Request additional information including legal or medical advice it requires to make a recommendation
- Consulted on significant changes to the Agency's policies and procedures in relation to fostering
- Contribute to the Agency's Annual Review process through, the Panel Chair, and be provided with the annual report to help maintain high quality of services and development of good practice
- Monitor and review the functioning of the Panel and provide the Agency Decision Maker with an annual report

- To provide thorough and critical consideration of all cases presented before it and be transparent in the process of how it arrives at its recommendations which will be reflected in the Minutes of the Panel
- To consider and make recommendations on all cases referred to the Independent Reviewing mechanism as a result of an appeal against the Agency's decision

Legislation and Guidance

Fostering Services Regulations (England) 2011:

Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services Regulations: Membership of the Fostering Panel

- Establishment of a 'Central List': the fostering service provider must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel (Central List).
- The central list to include one or more Social workers who have at least three years' relevant post – qualifying experience.
- The central list will also include an independent chair and a vice chair who need not be independent.

Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services Regulations: Meetings of the Fostering Panel

- No business to be conducted by a fostering panel unless at least the following meet as the panel –
 - i. Either the person appointed to chair the panel or one of the vice chairs.
 - ii. One member who is a social worker who has at least three years' relevant post – qualifying experience and
 - iii. Three or four other members
- And where the chair is not present and the vice chair who is present is not independent of the fostering service provider, at least one of the other panel members must be independent of the fostering service provider.
- A fostering panel must make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations.

Regulation 25 of the Fostering Services Regulations: Functions of the Fostering panel

- To consider each application for approval and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent

- Where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given
- To recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parents and whether or not the terms of their approval remain appropriate:
 - i. On the first review carried out in accordance with regulation 28 (2)
 - ii. On the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering services provider in accordance with regulation 28(5)
- To consider any case referred to it under regulation 27(9) or 28(10)

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011

Standard 14 – Fostering Panels and the Fostering Service’s decision maker

- The fostering service implements clear written policies and procedures on recruitment to, maintenance of, the central list of persons considered them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel and on the constitution of fostering panels.
- Panels provide a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel.
- All necessary information is provided to panel members at least five working days in advance of the panel meeting to enable full and proper consideration.
- The fostering panel makes its recommendation on the suitability of a prospective foster carer within eight months of receipt of the prospective foster carer’s application to be assessed.
- Foster carers and prospective foster carers are given the opportunity to attend and be heard at all panel meetings at which their approval is being discussed and to bring a supported to the panel if they wish.
- Fostering panels have access to medical expertise and legal advice as required.
- The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation.
- The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for.

- The fostering service provider's decision – maker makes considered decision that takes account of all the information available to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel and, where applicable, the independent review panel, within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes.
- The foster carer or prospective foster carer is informed orally of the decision maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days.

Standard 19 – Suitability to work with children

- All people working in or for the fostering service, and the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a fostering panel, are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities. Telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references.
- The fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. This includes DBS checks. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate these good practices.
- **Care planning, planning and case review (England 2010) regulations and guidance**
- **Fostering Services Statutory Guidance – Volume 4 2011**
- **Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance 2011**

IRM: Independent Review Mechanism

Since April 1st 2009, the remit of the IRM has included an independent review of fostering suitability applications from potential and current foster carers whose fostering service provider has decided not to approve them as a foster carer, or to terminate or change the terms of their approval. It gives prospective and existing foster carers a choice on who reviews the recommendation and is perceived as being more independent by applicants. The IRM however, does not have the power to deal with complaints against the fostering service provider.

In some recent cases presented to the IRM the following were noticed:

- Paperwork included factual errors, ambiguities, discrepancies and sometimes missing chronologies, genograms and outcomes of statutory checks. This led to panel to question agency quality control.
- The IRM was concerned that in some cases there was insufficient exploration and

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analysis of how fostering might impact on children in the family; and some assessment reports indicated little understanding of how birth children felt when their parents went back to fostering.

- The IRM panel commented in a number of cases that fostering assessments were superficial, insufficiently analytical and contained little information to evidence the statements made.
- Some carers had been approved without results of DBS checks, and others had not been subject to full health assessments, even where issues have been identified by the applicants.
- Where decision makers are proposing approval for respite placements only, the same standards of care should be required from the applicant as in full time placements.

Quality Assurance:

Panel provides quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports presented to the panel.

How will panel carry out this function?

How will any difference of opinions and conflicts be managed?

Panel Chairperson/Vice Chair:

The Chair of **Select FosterCare's** Independent Fostering Panel is appointed by the Decision Maker, who also conducts an annual review of the Chair's performance, and is not connected with its management or business operation. The Vice Chairperson can be an employee or director of the Agency but cannot have line management responsibilities for the agency's Social Workers.

The Chairperson's responsibilities include:

- Participating in the recruitment and annual review of Panel members
- Ensuring that all Panel members contribute fully to the discussions and recommendations of the Panel.
- Liaising with the Panel Adviser about who will attend the Panel in addition to Panel members.
- Ensuring that minutes of Panel meetings are comprehensive, clear and accurate including dissenting reservations on Panel recommendations.
- Managing the conduct of Panel members in promoting good practice and fairness in

their deliberations.

- Producing the Annual Report of the Panel's work for **Select FosterCare Services**.

Protocol for Members of the Panel:

Panel members and Chairperson/Vice Chairperson must fulfil the relevant Job Descriptions and Person Specification for their role.

- All Panel members are required to sign a Panel Membership Agreement with **Select FosterCare Services**.
- All Panel members will have a current enhanced DBS disclosure which will be updated every three years. Panel members must inform **Select FosterCare Services** without delay if they are convicted or cautioned for any criminal offence.
- Two written references (confirmed by verbal verification) will be required for Panel members.
- Each Panel member will have a file held by **Select FosterCare Services** containing details of their recruitment, references, personal details, photograph, 2 x proof of identity (of which, one must be a current passport or photocard driving licence), qualifications and experience and details of any complaints and allegations made against the Panel member, including details of the outcomes.
- New Panel members will be expected to observe at least one Panel meeting prior to ratification of full membership.
- New Panel members will receive an induction pack and receive support from the Panel Adviser.
- Panel members will receive regular periodicals concerning fostering and kept informed of developments, practice issues and legislation that relate to fostering by the Panel Adviser
- Panel members are expected to attend at least one of two Annual Training events and are consulted on the content and format of all Fostering Panel Training events.
- The performance of each Panel member will be reviewed annually by the Chair and Panel Adviser

Panel Adviser/Administrator:

Select FosterCare Services has a Panel Adviser who is not a Panel member, but, whose role is to facilitate the operation and functions of the Panel including:

- Advising the Chair and Panel members as required on **Select FosterCare's** policies

and procedures.

- Organising specialist advice to the Panel on medical and legal matters as required.
- Ensuring that comprehensive and appropriate papers are sent to Panel members at least one week before the Panel meeting and giving feedback to the Head of Service of any concerns or issues raised. The Panel Adviser does not have line management responsibility for Supervising Social Workers or the Foster Carer Assessors.
- Assisting in the recruitment, induction, training, termination and review of Panel members and overall Panel administration.
- Organising at least two agreed relevant training courses for Panel members and the Agency Decision Maker.
- Ensuring that invitations are sent out in a timely manner to Panel members, prospective Foster Carers/Approved Foster Carers, social workers and others.
- Responsible for ensuring that accurate minutes are produced and that written notifications of decisions, (from the Agency Decision Maker) on the Panel's recommendations are forwarded to Panel members within the agreed timescales.
- Forwarding the written recommendations of the Panel to the Agency Decision Maker

Panel Meetings:

The Panel will usually meet once every 6 weeks or more frequently if needed and comprise of at least 5 members to discuss:

- Approval of prospective Foster Carers.
- Review/re-approval of Foster Carers.
- Complaints/ Allegations and Disruption reports.
- Termination of approval and resignations
- Quality Assurance
- The annual Foster Panel Report.
- **Select Fostercare's** annual report

Panel members have an equal role in the panel's recommendations and should therefore come prepared to contribute to the case discussions by reading all panel papers in advance of the meeting.

Panel members will discuss and agree on the issues they wish to explore with the applicant

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and Social Worker before they are invited to join the meeting. It is the Chairperson's responsibility to coordinate the meeting and affords the applicant and Social Worker the opportunity to present additional information.

All Panel members must record a view about whether or not they support the recommendation. There is no Chair's casting vote. The recommendation will be that of the majority but the views of those who do not support the recommendations will be recorded. Abstentions' are not acceptable.

The Chairperson will summarise the discussions on each case, the recommendation and the reasons for it. The Chair will also advise all attendees of the Panels' recommendations and its reasons.

The Panel Adviser will convey (usually via the Assessor/Supervising Social Worker), the Panel's recommendations to all those involved (who were not at the meeting) within 24 hours and in writing within 5 working days.

Conflict of Interest:

Panel members must always declare prior knowledge or interest in any case to be considered by the Panel. This declaration should be made to the Panel Adviser who will discuss the matter with the Panel chairperson/Vice Chairperson to determine whether the knowledge or interest is such as to warrant debarring the Panel member from participation in the case before the Panel.

Administration/Minutes:

The Panel Adviser is responsible for coordinating and producing the minutes of Panel meetings which must include:

- Date and time of Panel.
- Attendance including non-Panel members.
- Apologies for absences.
- Confirmation of accuracy and content of minutes from previous Panel meeting and any matters arising from it.
- Applicant/Foster Carer/child's details.
- Purpose of presentation before the Panel.
- Issues raised by Panel members.
- Issues discussed with Social workers and applicants/Foster Carers/children.
- Positives and difficulties/risk factors identified.

- All legal, medical and other specialist advice given.
- Recommendations and reasons, with reference to the report before the Panel.
- Advice from the Panel to the Decision Maker including reports from the Chairperson in respect of any deferment of recommendations.
- Details of whether the recommendations were unanimous and reasons given by those not able to support the recommendation.
- Any request from the Panel for additional information.
- Any other business for discussed.

The Panel members must agree the accuracy and content of minutes which must be checked at each Panel meeting for the previous Panel and signed by the Chairperson.

The minutes and recommendations relating to approval and review of Foster Carers will be placed on the Foster Carer's file. Foster Carers do not have the right to see Panel minutes but in conveying **Select Fostercare's** decisions they should be advised of positive and/or risk factors raised by the Panel and detailed in the minutes.

Deferments:

On the rare occasions that there is insufficient information available to the Panel they will defer their recommendations pending receipt of the additional information.

Due to the distress caused by deferments to applicants, children and their families the Chairperson must present a separate report to the Decision Maker on deferments on a case by case basis with comments and observations. The Decision Maker must respond to the Chairperson and address any quality issues resulting in the reasons for deferment.

Recommendations/Notifications/Decision Making:

At **Select Fostercare Services** we expect that the process of assessment and the Panel's recommendations are completed within 6 months of receipt of fostering applications. For other matters put before the Panel the timescale will be decided by the Agency Decision Maker and the Panel Adviser.

The Panel is restricted on recommendations it can make regarding the approval or reapproval of a Foster Carer whose status is under review:

- Recommendation to approve
- Terms of approval
- Recommendation to re-approve
- Recommendation to change terms of re-approval

- Recommendation to exceed or not to exceed the usual foster home limit of 3 foster children
- Recommendation to terminate approval

The foster carer will receive oral feedback on the Panel's recommendation at the time of the Panel meeting, and the Decision Maker's decision orally within 2 working days of the Panel meeting, and then, in writing within 5 working days. The Decision Maker is required by regulations to take due account of the recommendations of the Panel.

Complaints and Representations:

Any complaints about the Fostering Panel should be directed to the Panel Adviser or the Panel Chairperson in the first instance, to assist an informal resolution. If the matter is not resolved at this stage one, then the matter can move to stage 2 of **Select FosterCare's** complaints policies and procedures.

Tenure and Review of Fostering Panel Memberships:

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 removed time restrictions of tenure -ship on membership of Independent Fostering Panels.

Each Panel member will have an annual appraisal to consider and address issues of their performance and their continued membership and changes.

Select Foster Care

- What is the Ethos Of Select FosterCare
- What will be the strengths of the agency in working with the Local Authority
- What will be some of the challenges

Fit To Foster:

Which of the following circumstances would?

- a. Disqualify
- b. Seriously Affect
- c. Minimally affect
- d. Not affect at all

An application from prospective foster carers?

1. Falsify his or her age

- a b c d

2. Female applicant, 35, is on long term renal dialysis – her partner, 55, is healthy

- a b c d

3. Female applicant, 40, has suffered from recurrent depression. She had in-patient treatment for depression following failed IVF treatment. Her GP is very supportive of the application.

- a b c d

4. Applicants' 21 year old son (living away) has a caution for indecent exposure.

- a b c d

5. A couple both aged 42, weigh 112 kgs (20 stones) and 129 kgs (23 stones) respectively. A previous agency medical advisor has turned them down. They were subject of a lot of publicity after this decision.

- a b c d

6. The applicants' both have a Facebook account and met through this. Their children (14 and 17) also have facebook accounts.

a b c d

7. A white applicant expressed a preference for caring for white children only.

a b c d

8. Male applicants are 'adrenalin junkies' enjoying adventure holidays.

a b c d

9. A Pakistani couple and the female applicant does not speak English.

a b c d

10. Couple owe £20,000 on their credit cards.

a b c d

(Including Schedule 6 & 7 Reports – matters to be monitored, events and notifications)

The Fostering Service Regulations require that certain matters are **monitored** (Schedule 6) and that certain events are **notified** to the relevant agencies (Schedule 7).

In order to comply with these requirements the fostering worker concerned must complete and forward this form to the Registered Manager immediately any such events occurs. Where applicable the Incident Report form completed by the foster carer should be attached.

This process does not replace reporting and recording processes for foster carers and social workers/support workers, it is a specific addendum in relation to events that must be monitored or



notified by the Fostering Service. There may be circumstances where this process also works in tandem with complaints and allegations procedures or child protection procedures.

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