

# Wirral Fostering Service

## Fostering Panel

IT TAKES A BIG **HEART** TO FOSTER



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## 1. Purpose and Function

The Fostering Panel monitors the range and type of Foster Carers available to the Local Authority in comparison with the needs of children, and plays a key role in the improvement of standards within the Fostering Service.

As part of this function, the Panel oversees the conduct of assessments and annual reviews of approved Foster Carers, advises on any relevant matters in relation to the Fostering Service and makes recommendations to Children's Services about quality issues and performance standards.

In particular, the Panel makes recommendations as to the following:

- a. The suitability of applicants to act as Foster Carers and terms of their approval (including Connected Persons);
- b. Exemptions from the limit to the number of children placed with Foster Carers;
- c. The continued suitability of the Foster Carers and whether the terms of approval remain appropriate (after the first annual review of Foster Carers and any other review where significant changes or termination of approval is recommended – see [Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Procedure](#));
- d. Any other special matters relevant to a Foster Carer which the Chair of the Panel considers appropriate to be referred;
- e. Referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism – see [Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers Procedure](#).

The Panel will also receive and consider any representations challenging a decision not to approve an applicant as suitable, or to terminate or revise the terms of a Foster Carer's approval – See [Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers Procedure](#).

The Panel will receive the Fostering Service Annual Report on the Panel's business, including statistical information about approvals, reviews, terminations of approvals, the number of children in placement and complaints received about Foster Carers during the preceding year.

The Chair will communicate any issues of concern to the Fostering Head of Service and take part in quarterly meetings with him or her and the Vice Chair to review the Panel's functioning and report on the quality of work being presented to Panel, to ensure good standards are maintained.

At the quarterly meetings, the Panel Administrator will provide statistical information in relation to the Panel business, together with information on the numbers of Foster Carers used by the Local Authority and the number of children looked after by the Local Authority. This will enable an appraisal of the extent to which the Fostering Service is meeting the demand for placements.

## 2. Membership

There is no fixed panel membership or maximum number of members or maximum tenure of office, although membership should be subject to a 3 year review in line with the business needs of the Panel.

Where it is considered that someone is unsuitable to be on the Central List, they must be given one month's notice in writing and reasons for the decision to end their inclusion on the list. The Chair will be a senior manager with responsibility for the Fostering Service or an independent person from the Designated Manager (Fostering Panel Appointments).

The Designated Manager must also appoint up to two Vice Chairs, whose role is to chair the Panel when the Chair is unavailable.

Reasonable expenses relating to attendance can be met, including travelling expenses and childcare; there is an allowance for attending training sessions plus travel expenses.

All Panel members must have been the subjects of a satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service check before taking up their appointment. These Disclosure and Barring Service checks should be kept up to date and recorded, including the date when the checks were made. Personal and work references will also be obtained in writing and must be satisfactory.

Each member must be provided with written information on appointment of their performance objectives, including their participation in induction and other training and safeguarding the confidentiality of records and information submitted to Panel. They will be asked to sign an agreement with the Fostering Service, in relation to his or her membership, covering the service expectations (including the requirement to report any involvement in criminal proceedings), confidentiality issues and commitment to anti-discriminatory practice.

All Panel members will also be required to attend at least one Panel meeting as an observer before taking up their membership. Panel members should complete induction training within 10 weeks of joining the Central List, have access to appropriate training and skills development and have the opportunity to attend joint training with fostering staff at least annually.

The quorum is 5 provided that the following are present:

- Either the Chair or one of the Vice Chairs (in the absence of the Chair). If the meeting is conducted by the Vice Chair who is not independent, there must be at least one other member of the panel who is independent;
- One of the Social Worker representatives with at least three years post qualifying experience;
- Three (or in the case of a joint panel, four) other members.

Panel members may request any relevant information or assistance they require, including medical or legal advice, from the Fostering Service and, if so requested, this must be provided by the Fostering Service.

There must be a process for review of the performance of Panel members (including of the Panel chair by the Agency Decision Maker) and for the performance management of members. Where necessary the termination of the appointment must be considered.

Where there are concerns about a Panel member's behaviour either inside or outside the meetings, and this cannot be dealt with by advice, training and/or information, this will be raised by the Chair with the Designated Manager (Fostering Panel Appointments).

The Designated Manager will decide whether someone is unsuitable to be on the Central List and therefore to end the appointment and if so, will advise the member in writing giving one month's notice and clear reasons for the decision.

Panel members may resign by giving one month's notice to the Designated Manager (Fostering Panel Appointments).

### 3. Meetings

The Panel Administrator, with the Chair's authority, will arrange additional special meetings as necessary.

The Panel Administrator will arrange for the Legal Adviser to attend the Panel if required by the Chair or by the worker presenting a report.

The Panel's Medical Adviser will provide medical advice on matters to be brought to the Panel, by attendance at Panel meetings or where this is not possible by telephone or an exchange of correspondence on individual cases in advance of the meeting as considered appropriate.

The Panel Administrator may arrange for observers to attend meetings, in consultation with the Chair, but no more than 2 observers may attend at any one time.

The Panel welcomes the attendance of prospective Foster Carers at meetings during consideration of their applications for approval. Applicants can attend with a supporter and 'be heard' at fostering panel meetings that consider their approval - for the assessment and approval process in more detail – see [Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers Procedure](#)

The Panel Administrator, in consultation with the Chair, prepares the agenda for each meeting and sends out the agenda to Panel members five working days before the meeting.

Those presenting reports to the Panel must send their reports to the Panel Administrator at least 10 working days before the date of the Panel. The Panel Administrator will arrange for the documentation to be distributed to Panel members.

The Chair's role is to ensure that all members participate fully in the meetings (unless an interest has been declared - see below) and that each member has an opportunity to raise questions or offer comments on each matter considered, that sensitive regard is paid to Foster Carers while keeping the child's welfare paramount, that consensus is achieved wherever possible and that the Panel has clear reasons for its recommendations.

Where there is a serious difference of opinion among members, the Chair may ask for more information to be made available to the Panel before a recommendation is made. Serious reservations expressed by individual Panel members about a particular recommendation must be recorded in the Panel minutes for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering).

At the end of meetings, the Panel Administrator will collect all reports and agenda from members (for shredding). Panel members who are unable to attend meetings will be asked to return papers to the Panel Administrator (for shredding) as soon as practicable.

The Panel Administrator will prepare the minutes in which reasons for recommendations and any disagreements or dissent will be fully recorded.

S/he will send the minutes to the Chair for approval of their accuracy, and then submit them to the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) for approval of the recommendations made.

The Supervising Social Worker will also ensure that applicants, Foster Carers and Social Workers are notified of Panel recommendations within one working day of the Panel. The Panel

Administrator will provide Supervising Social Workers with a copy of the relevant minute after a decision has been made by the Agency Decision Maker.

#### **4. Conflicts of Interest**

Panel members should consider any conflicts of interest in relation to Panel agenda items. A potential conflict arises if an interest may be seen to adversely affect a Panel member's capacity to act without prejudice or preference in a matter.

It is anticipated that in many circumstances there may be professional knowledge of a case which should be notified to the Chair but which will not affect a member's capacity to participate in the Panel. In other circumstances there may be a personal interest or connection which would require the Panel member to refrain from participation. It may be less clear in some cases when advice should be sought.

In the case of a potential conflict of interest where advice is required, Panel members should consult the Chair or Legal Adviser, giving as much advance notice as possible particularly having regard to the implications for the quorum.