

LONDON BOROUGH OF ENFIELD

FOSTERING PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2017 - MARCH 2018

1. Introduction

This is the 13th Annual Report of the Fostering Panel, covering the period from the 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018, in compliance with the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 2011. It covers the 12 months of the Financial Year to coincide with other Annual Reports.

In this period 17 Fostering Panel meetings have been held and none cancelled due to inquoracy. Panel meets monthly. Additional meetings can be scheduled when the volume of cases required this. Meetings are held at the Civic Centre in Enfield, with a separate waiting room; the rooms used are suitable for these purposes.

Panel has produced a 'Guide to the Fostering Panel and its Procedures' and a 'Guide to Panel Members', with profiles of members of the Central List and their photographs, for applicants coming to Panel. These are designed to help people attending Panel to understand its function and what happens in Panel.

2. Overview of Work carried out by the Panel

1. Applications from prospective foster carers for a range of tasks
2. Applications relating to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) foster carers for children already or about to be placed with them
3. Regulation 25 cases - forming a view on Connected Persons assessments where an additional 8 week extension to temporary approval is proposed in order for assessments to be completed
4. Brief reports where, at Stage 2, the Fostering Service have concerns that an applicant may be unsuitable
5. First Annual Reviews of Foster Carers
6. Other Reviews which consider continuation of approval, extension of approval or Standards of Care concerns as the local authority sees fit
7. Consultation on a range of different situations where the advice of Panel is sought
8. Quality assurance of work presented
9. Review and up-date of relevant policies and procedures in partnership with the Fostering Service

Previously termination of approvals were presented to Panel. That is no longer the case. In January 2018 the Cheviots Short Breaks Service ceased to run due to changes in the profile of children needing such a service. Over the past year 72 applicants/carers have attended Panel.

3. The Central List

There are 12 members on the Central List. Membership has remained consistent over the past 12 months. All new Panel members have received

an induction and an opportunity to observe Panel prior to joining. Monica Bunbury and Kerry Stanton are the two Vice Chairs.

Panel members always receive their papers 7 days in advance of the meeting. Reading the papers supplied in preparation for discussion is a considerable undertaking as, for many meetings, the papers may involve several hours of close reading. All members devote a great deal of time and personal commitment to the work of the Panel and invariably come well prepared. The Fostering Service is working with Panel to move to 'paperless Panels'; those members who also work for LBE and one of the elected members now receive electronic Panel packs.

Panel members keep up-to-date with fostering matters: all are members of *Fostering Network* and receive the *Foster Care* periodical. Once registered with *Fostering Network*, members have access to a considerable online resource. All members are provided with a copy of *Effective Fostering Panels, CoramBAAF*, to enhance their understanding of the Panel Process. The Chair attends the London and SE Panel Chairs' Group, hosted by the Fostering Network, and regularly shares information gained there.

Panel members are aware of what constitutes a conflict/declaration of interest and declare this at the beginning of a case slot; this is then recorded in the minutes. Each Panel member has a Policy Folder that contains key national regulations and local policies and procedures. A copy of Enfield's Whistle Blowing Policy, as required in Standard 19.6, is included.

The appraisal of all members has takes place annually. All involved find this process useful. See Appendix 2 for further details of membership.

4. Panel Business

a. Approvals

18 new mainstream Foster Carers were approved over the last year, an increase of 6 on last year. All prospective Carers are invited to attend Panel, and are strongly encouraged to do so. Members and carers find this valuable and believe that attendance establishes a relationship between them that engenders a sense of working together from the start. It also gives members a first-hand impression of the applicant/s and adds another dimension alongside the assessment paperwork. Panel are mindful to work with the Fostering Service to ensure that the recruited pool of carers reflects the ethnicity of the looked after population and covers the age range and gender of children in need of placements.

Panel cannot consider those cases where information required under the Fostering Service Regulations is incomplete, unless there are good reasons that explain the shortfall. Most cases are thoroughly prepared and Panel is generally satisfied with the standard of

approval paperwork. Where there are gaps Panel will defer and await the additional documents. It is noted that Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are now received more promptly with the advent of the electronic service and appointment system offered by the Fostering Service.

Reports that offer balanced, critical appraisal of the application, supported with evidence and analysis, are preferred over those that are overly narrative. Panel appreciates the continuing work of the Fostering Service to improve the standards of reports.

Family and Friends (Connected Persons) applications provoke much thought and debate because of the complex issues they throw up and the need to balance the pre-existing relationship alongside the borderline life styles and risks associated with some families. Panel gives due consideration to whether the placement is for the short, medium or long term and the nature and quality of any pre-existing relationship.

Over the past year, 2 Family and Friends foster families have been approved, connected with the child as follows:

- young person's sister and her husband
- maternal great aunt and uncle

This compares with 4 approvals last year.

b. Regulation 25 – extension of temporary approval

Over the last 12 months, 4 Regulation 25 cases have been considered where it has been necessary to extend the assessment period for temporary Family and Friends Carers beyond 16 weeks. This is the same number as last year.

c. Reviews

All first reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel. The decision was made by the Service Manager that, from December 2016, reviews would no longer routinely be presented to Panel every third year. However, if there were significant issues, changes of approval or changes in circumstance they would be. 13 first household reviews presented in this period and 11 other household reviews.

Following a serious complaint or allegation against a Foster Carer a review is presented to Panel to consider the new information. Even when an investigation is in process there is an expectation that the Annual Review will still take place, alerting Panel to the outstanding concerns. An up-dated report can then be presented at a later date. Enfield's LADO is available for consultation and to co-ordinate reviews/investigations of a Child Protection nature.

There is still a need for improvement in presenting the views and feedback of children: both children looked after and those within the carers' family. This is a vital area where full information supports members in their deliberations. Panel always look for the views of the children, ideally in their own words by consultation work carried out with them, or through someone who knows them well (and is independent of the fostering household) speaking for them. Kratos has developed excellent forms for this purpose.

The consistency and quality of feedback from the social workers of children in placement on the quality of care is variable. Panel maintain that it must be part of the review. Members view this information as important as Social Workers have the opportunity to observe how the child has responded to the care given over a series of statutory visits. For younger children this is perhaps the only 'voice' representing their views.

A significant improvement has been the expectation that IROs will give feedback on the quality of foster care provided for the children for whom they have responsibility. This is a beneficial development.

d) Matching

All cases where the child is under 13 and will remain long term with a carer are heard by Panel. There have been 4 such cases in the past year, this compares with 8 in 2016 - 2017. These cases are greatly assisted by the information provided by the child's social worker and by their attendance at Panel to answer any further questions.

e) Quality Assurance

Panel fulfils this function in the following ways:

- Working with the service on policy changes
- Annual meeting between the Chair, Agency Decision Maker (ADM) and the Service Manager for Looked after Children
- Twice yearly Business Meetings provide an opportunity to discuss on-going work between Members and the Fostering Service.
- Evaluation Forms for feedback from applicants and social workers.

f) Observers

Panel welcomes social workers, and others, observing at meetings. It is an excellent way for them to see how Panel works and helps to demystify the process. A confidentiality form has been designed to protect the information read and discussed.

5. Panel Administration

Panel administration is carried out by the Operational Support Officer, Operational Support Hub – Meetings Panels and Events SCS. Panel has benefitted from the consistency of the same administrator over the past 12 months. Draft minutes are prepared within 3 or 4 working days of the Panel meeting and are of a consistently high standard.

6. Agency Decision Maker

The ADM makes qualifying determinations/decisions on all Panel recommendations after she has read the minutes of Panel. She is the Assistant Director of Children's Services. On occasions she visits Panel as an observer. Over the past 12 months, she has not decided against any of Panel's recommendations.

No cases have gone to the IRM in that period.

7. Panel Business Meetings

These meetings are held twice a year. They are attended by Panel members, Fostering Managers and chaired by the Head of Service. Topics covered include: new national developments, matters of concern that have arisen and working out agreed protocols etc.

8. Panel Training

Over the last 12 months there have been two training events:

- The Health of looked after Children, July 17
- Managing Allegations and Learning from Serious Case Reviews, December 2017

Both were with the Fostering Service.

Objective for 2018 - 2019

- a. Consolidation of the move to 'paperless Panel' for all members on the Central List.
- b. Flexibility when scheduling mainstream applications to ensure they reach Panel within the statutory timescale of eight months and note timeliness in Panel minutes.
- c. Review of the paperwork for allegations/standard of care cases to make sure that it allows for the perspectives of the different parties and analysis of the key points.

Wendy Gill on behalf of the Fostering Panel

APPENDIX ONE

Panel Statistics 2017 - 2018

	This year 17-18	Last year 16 - 17
New In-house Approvals	18	12
New Family & Friends Approvals	2	5
New Cheviots Carers¹	0	2
Reviews		
a) First reviews	13	8
b) Other reviews	11	37
Extension of Temporary Approvals (Reg 25)	4	6
Long term matches	4	8
De-registrations²:		
a) In-house	0	19
b) Family & Friends		2
c) Cheviots		0

¹ In January 2018 the Cheviots Short Breaks Service ceased to run due to changes in the profile of children needing such a service.

² Previously termination of approvals were presented to Panel. That is no longer the case.

APPENDIX TWO

CENTRAL LIST

Wendy Gill	Independent Panel Chair
Monica Bunbury	Current Vice Chair, independent member
Kerry Stanton	Current Vice Chair, manager within LBE
Melissa Halls	Agency Social Work Representative
Lydia Bartlett	Agency Social Work Representative
Roseanne Lee	Agency Social Work Representative
Councillor Glynis Vince	Elected Member
Councillor Bernie Lapage	Elected Member
Richard Reynolds	Independent Member
Anne Whitehorn	Independent Member
Catherine Fleming	Independent Member
Mary Murrill	Additional Panel Member

Others Attending

Renee Powell/ Siew Tan/Reina Fraser	Panel Advisors
Dave Woodger or another from the Operational Support Hub – Meetings Panels and Events SCS	Panel Co-ordinator

Others advising

Gill Wells	Legal Advisor
Dr Oyetoro Enaigbe	Medical Advisor

