

LONDON BOROUGH OF ENFIELD

FOSTERING PANEL

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2019 - MARCH 2020

1. Introduction

This is the 15th Annual Report of the Fostering Panel, covering the period from the 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, 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 16 Fostering Panel meetings have been held and none cancelled due to inquoracy. Panel meets approximately monthly. Additional meetings can be scheduled when the volume of cases requires 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. Matches of children under the age of 13 in long term placements
5. Brief reports where, at Stage 2, the Fostering Service have concerns that an applicant may be unsuitable
6. First Annual Reviews of foster carers
7. Other Reviews which consider continuation of approval, extension of approval or Standards of Care concerns as the local authority sees fit
8. Consultation on a range of different situations where the advice of Panel is sought
9. Quality assurance of work presented
10. Review and up-date of relevant policies and procedures in partnership with the Fostering Service
11. Nomination of foster carers for alternative housing

3. The Central List

There are 13 members on the Central List. Membership has remained consistent over the past 12 months. The one new Panel member has received an induction and the opportunity to observe Panel prior to joining.

Panel members generally receive their papers 7 days in advance of the meeting. Reading the papers 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 and Panel has successfully moved to 'paperless Panels'; this cuts down on printing costs and is more secure.

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 4 times a year, hosted by the Fostering Network, and regularly shares information gained there.

Panel members are aware of what constitutes a conflict/declaration of interest and, where necessary, 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 of the Central List.

4. Panel Business

a. Approvals

24 new mainstream foster carers were approved over the last year. This represents 15 fostering households, an increase of 1 on last year. All prospective carers are invited to attend Panel and are strongly encouraged to do so. Members and carers find this valuable because it 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. In addition, consideration is given to terms of approval that cover the age range and number where there is demand for foster placements. Over the past 12 months several carers been recruited thanks to 'word of mouth' recommendations from an established and enthusiastic foster carer, drawing on her own network. This, in part, explains the high number of Algerian carers recruited in the past 12 months.

The breakdown of ethnic origin of new mainstream foster carers is:

Jamaican	3	13%
Dominican/Jamaican	1	4%
White UK	3	13%
Algerian	4	17%
Turkish Cypriot	3	13%
Greek Cypriot	2	8%
Bangladeshi	2	8%
Moroccan	2	8%
Indian	1	4%
Sri Lankan	1	4%
Portuguese	1	4%
Brazilian	1	4%

This compares with the ethnic make-up of the borough.

Jamaican	Black Caribbean	5.29%
Dominican/Jamaican	Black Caribbean	5.29%
White UK	White British	35.18%
Algerian	Other Ethnic Group	3.99%
Turkish Cypriot	Turkish Cypriot	1.92%
Greek Cypriot	Greek Cypriot	4.85%
Bangladeshi	Bangladeshi	1.92%
Moroccan	Other Ethnic Group	3.99%
Indian	Indian	3.55%
Sri Lankan	Other Asian	3.84%
Portuguese	Other Ethnic Group	3.99%
Brazilian	Other Ethnic Group	3.99%

The Fostering Service recognise that there is a disproportionately low number of white UK applicants coming forward and are considering targeting recruiting in predominately white areas to redress this.

What is striking about the carers recruited in the past 12 months is how many of them had employment in education or working with children more broadly. At least 3 were qualified teachers and many others had worked in nurseries or other child-care settings. They see fostering as a natural progression from the fulfilment they have derived from working with children and wish to extend the role to this different setting. They bring the significant advantage of having already received training on child development, safeguarding etc and with a well-developed skills for working with a wide range of children.

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. On rare occasions 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.

Reports that offer a 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, 9 Family and Friends foster families have been considered for approval compared with none last year. Panel note that Children's Services in Enfield have carried out practice development work on the approval of connected persons cases and improvements have been achieved in terms of the quality of assessments and meeting of timescales.

b. Regulation 25 – extension of temporary approval

Over the last 12 months, 20 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. In the previous year there were 8. Again, this increase is attributable to the improvement drive last year.

c. Reviews

All first reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel. Where there have been significant practice issues, changes of approval or changes in circumstance these cases are presented to Panel. 12 first household reviews presented in this period and 1 other household review. Of these 12 were mainstream and 1 Family and Friends foster carer.

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 provides consultation and co-ordinates 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.

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.

Importantly IROs will give feedback on the quality of foster care provided for the children for whom they have responsibility.

First annual reviews are essential in tracking the carers' development. The Training, Support and Development Standards require all new mainstream foster carers to complete the Standards in their first year of approval, connected person's foster carers are required to complete them within 18 months of approval. In addition, defined mandatory training such as Safeguarding and First Aid is required. The Personal Development Plan (PDP) for each foster is key to ensuring they are receiving targeted training based on their knowledge, experience and skills set.

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 3 such cases in the past year, last year there were 4. These cases are greatly assisted by the information provided by the child's social worker and by their attendance at Panel to answer 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 (Anne Stoker) makes qualifying determinations/decisions on all Panel recommendations after she has read the minutes/papers of Panel. She is the Director of Children's Services. On occasions Anne 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 and are well attended. Present are Panel members, Fostering Managers and chaired by the Head of Service. Topics covered: new national developments, matters of concern that have arisen and working out agreed protocols etc.

8. Panel Training

Over the last 12 months there has been one training event: Special Guardianship Training on 15/11/2019. This was held with the Fostering Service.

We continue to circulate Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (formerly known as Serious Case Reviews) to panel members where relevant to panel work. Discussions are held at panel with all

members invited where we highlight learning points for both panel and the wider fostering service.

Ofsted Feedback

In March 2019 Ofsted inspected LBE and the following comments were made in their summary report:

'Enfield has effective fostering and adoption services, which are overseen by highly experienced, long-standing, child-focused leaders and managers' and,

'there are effective recruitment, assessment, support and training arrangements for adopters and foster carers in Enfield, with strong panel arrangements to ensure that decision-making promotes the best outcomes for children'.

Objectives for 2019 - 2020

- a. Introduction of newly designed Regulation 25 forms, **up-date:** this has been successfully implemented
- b. Full compliance with the recently introduced GDPR as summarised in CoramBAAF's good practice guide.
Up-date: there is increased awareness of this and the need for further training in the coming year
- c. Liaison with the Fostering Service to ensure the Training Programme is published by the end of the financial year so that carers and their SSWs can plan targeted training for the year ahead. **Up-date:** some evidence that Training Programme was issued earlier as fewer carers have said they were unable to plan their training dates ahead

Objectives for 2020 – 2021

- a. Evaluation of holding virtual Panels in response to the Covid 19 pandemic
- b. Evaluation of Covid 19 on aspects of child-care practice presented to Panel
- c. Recruitment of more males and another member with care experience to the Central List
- d. 2 training events for members, ideally with colleagues from the Fostering Service. One to cover GDPR

Wendy Gill and the Team Managers on behalf of the Fostering Panel

APPENDIX ONE

Panel Statistics 2019 - 2020

	Last year 18-19	This year 19-20
New In-house Approvals	14	15
New Family & Friends Approvals	0	9
Reviews		
a) First reviews	13	12
b) Other reviews	3	1
Extension of Temporary Approvals (Reg 25)	8	20
Long term matches	4	3
Carers de-registered as no longer suitable (D2.5).	2	3
Notifications to Panel on Intention to De-register	2	4

APPENDIX TWO

CENTRAL LIST

Wendy Gill	Independent Panel Chair, social work background
Monica Bunbury	Current Vice Chair, independent member
Kerry Stanton	Current Vice Chair, Service Manager, Joint Service for Disabled Children
Melissa Halls	Agency Social Work Representative, Team Manager Adolescent and Leaving Care Team
Lydia Bartlett	Agency Social Work Representative, Deputy Team Manager Parent Support Service
Roseanne Lee	Agency Social Work Representative, Team Manager Child Protection & Family Support
Nita Patel	Agency Social Work Representative, social worker in the Special Guardianship Team
Councillor Glynis Vince	Elected Member
Councillor Christine Hamilton	Elected Member
Richard Reynolds	Independent Member, background in health and safety and children with disabilities
Anne Whitehorn	Independent Member, legal background
Erina Kouyate	Independent Member, care experience
Mary Murrill	Additional Panel Member, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children

Others Attending

Renee Powell/Siew Tan/ Reina Brown	Panel Advisors, Team managers within the Fostering Service
Dave Woodger or another from the Operational Support Hub – Meetings Panels and Events	Panel Co-ordinator

Others advising

Gill Wells	Legal Advisor
Dr Martin Bellman	Medical Advisor