

# Fostering Panel Guide

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**FosterCare**<sup>UK</sup>  
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# Introduction

**This booklet is designed to help foster carers and fostering applicants through the process of attending a Fostering Panel at FosterCare UK.**

We hope it will give you an insight into the purpose and role of the panel and how panel members make recommendations.

As well as assessing your suitability as a foster carer, the panel gives recommendations on our foster carers annual review status, they listen and respond to children and young people's observations and they make recommendations on any other matters relating to regulations.

You may be both apprehensive and excited about attending the Fostering Panel for assessment or annual review. Our role is to reassure and support you throughout your entire journey from initial enquiry through to becoming a foster carer and beyond. We hope that our guide will familiarise you with the panel, their role and the process involved so you know what to expect.

Your assessing social worker will accompany you at panel and will support you in representing yourself and it is your right to bring along a supporter, such as a family member, friend or colleague.

Please always remember that we are available 24/7 if you need advice, help or support through the assessment process and your time with us as a foster carer



# What is the purpose of a Fostering Panel?

**Every fostering service must set up at least one Fostering Panel to carry out functions listed within the legal remit of fostering.**

We are responsible for some of society's most vulnerable children and young people. We are therefore totally committed to ensuring that the very best people are fostering with us.

The Fostering Panel plays a very important quality assurance role in assessing the suitability of people to become foster carers, first annual review and all subsequent reviews thereafter as necessary.

## **The overall remit of FosterCare UK's Fostering Panel**

- 1. To consider applications for approval and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a foster carer, and if so the terms on which they should be approved – e.g. number and age of children to be placed**
- 2. To consider the first review of newly-approved foster carers, and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the fostering service, and recommend whether or not they remain suitable to act as foster carers, and if the terms of the approval remain appropriate**
- 3. To oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service**
- 4. To monitor and advise on the procedures for undertaking reviews of foster carers**
- 5. To give advice and make recommendations on any other matters or cases referred to the Panel by the fostering service**

They also provide objectivity and challenge practice that falls short of the fostering regulations, National Minimum Standards or is not in the interests of children and young people. They bring independence from the fostering service.

**“All FosterCare UK staff have been very kind and friendly throughout, and this really makes the whole process much easier. The communication and information they provided were outstanding, as was how they responded to my needs during the assessment process.”**

# Who sits on the panel?

A fostering panel is made up of at least five members. Of these five one must include the Chair or Vice Chair; one social worker employed by FosterCare UK, and at least three independent members.

Fostering Panel's may only hold formal meetings if at least five members are present, forming a quorum.

**Members of our Fostering Panel's includes individuals with knowledge and experience of:**

- **Fostering for a Local Authority or other fostering service**
- **Living in foster care**
- **Assessing and supporting foster carers**
- **Care planning for looked after children**
- **Education of looked after children**
- **Being a son or daughter of a foster carer**
- **Health and wellbeing of looked after children**
- **Being a child in foster care**
- **Psychological and therapeutic services**

**In addition, there are four non-voting members:**

- **Panel Advisor**
- **Panel Administrator**
- **Panel Medical Advisor**
- **Panel Legal Advisor**

*FosterCare UK Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policies have ensured that membership of any of its panel's is gender, ethnically and culturally balanced.*

FosterCare UK has a number of outstanding individuals who are considered suitable to be members of a Fostering Panel. The official term for this is the "Central List". Panel members who are drawn from the "Central List" can be appointed for any period of time the fostering service feels is appropriate and the people on our central list is kept under regular review.

In order that a high degree of professionalism is maintained, payments to members of the Fostering Panel are reasonable, and include expenses incurred when attending Panel meetings.



## The role of Chair and Vice Chairs

All roles are independent to the fostering service to ensure objectivity at all times. The role of the Panel Chair is central to the effective operation of the Fostering Panel – this individual is responsible for ensuring all members of the Panel are able to contribute to discussion and that recommendations are appropriate and focus on the needs and best interests of children and young people.

The Panel Chair is also responsible for ensuring that full and accurate minutes are recorded, which explain clearly what was discussed and why particular recommendations are made.

The Panel Chair completes quarterly, six monthly and annual reports to the Board of Directors.

## Performance of all our Panel members

To ensure we remain a leading fostering service, panel members' performance against objectives is reviewed annually.

All persons appointed to the "Central List" of panel members are informed in writing of their performance objectives, including participation in induction and training, and safeguarding the confidentiality of records and information. The Panel Chair conducts their annual performance review and makes recommendations to FosterCare UK's Agency Decision Makers (ADM) about their performance, improvements and suitability to continue as a member.

FosterCare UK's Agency Decision Makers (ADM) will review the performance of the Panel Chair. Views about the chair's performance are sought from other Panel members and from those who attend Panel meetings, such as fostering applicants and independent social workers who present reports.



**We both found the experience quite stress-free. The Panel members were all very friendly – this would have calmed our nerves if we'd had any!**



# Preparing for the Fostering Panel

You are supported every step of the way and can speak to us anytime if you are uncertain about any part of the fostering assessment process and the Panel.

You will be notified at least four weeks in advance of your Panel time and date. For prospective foster carers, a BAAF Form F Report and accompanying documents are prepared and submitted in advance of the assessment date. These include H&S, medicals, chronology, family tree and references.

Your social worker will discuss the draft Form F Report with you, and once agreed both parties will sign the final report and if you wish, submit any written comments.

Once complete, your Form F Assessment will be uploaded onto FosterCare UK's secure Cloud at least ten working days in advance of the meeting for panel members to review.

To ensure confidentiality of highly sensitive information, all panel documents are uploaded using a highly secure password protected login process.

Panel members will then access the agenda, previous minutes and the documents to be presented and they will read everything thoroughly prior to the fostering panel meeting.

Panel members are given the opportunity to request any further information, including legal or medical advice, which they feel may help them to make an informed recommendation and they can obtain any additional information from FosterCare UK that they feel necessary, and request any other assistance so far as is reasonably practicable. Satisfied they have all the necessary information, the Panel is able to convene.



# Attending the Fostering Panel

On arrival you will be shown to a waiting area and your Assessing Social Worker or agency representative will meet you. There may be other people waiting as well and it is your right to bring a supporter with you, such as a family member, friend or colleague.

Every effort is made to keep to the agenda and timings, but given the nature of the discussions and recommendations that need to be made, panel meetings may inevitably overrun. Around 60 – 90 minutes is usually allocated per assessment in respect of making a recommendation on the approval of prospective foster carers.

Initially, the Panel Chair will talk to both you and your Assessing Social worker to briefly explain the areas that will be discussed by the Panel. The Chair will then invite you into the meeting.

Panel members are asked to introduce themselves and their role; they also have name cards for easy identification. The Panel Chair and members will then ask you and your Assessing Social Worker to clarify areas that they may have highlighted whilst reading your assessment and accompanying documents.

In some cases panel members may need to ask the social worker questions on their own. They will do this prior to you joining the fostering panel meeting.

Fostering Panel's takes formal minutes of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations.

## The Final Decision

FosterCare UK Panel can only make recommendations. It is for the "Responsible Individual" at FosterCare UK to make the formal and final decisions about all matters dealt with by Panel. The Agency Responsible Individual is a Director of FosterCare UK.

In most cases you will be informed of the Panel's recommendation on the day of the Fostering Panel meeting.

You will then be informed in writing within twenty-one days of the Panel meeting of the final decision by FosterCare UK.

**We were nervous and excited when we arrived. Panel was welcoming and friendly – not an unpleasant experience in any way. The process was robust, and we got the opportunity to ask questions. We also had the full support of our social worker at the meeting.**

Foster carers,  
Ashford, Kent



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