

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 18 JANUARY 2021

Title of paper:	Fostering Panel Chair's Report	
Director:	Helen Blackman – Director, Children's Integrated Services	Wards affected: All
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Other colleagues who have provided input:	Phil Rogers – Chair, Foster Panel Two Dagoberto Rojas – Chair, Foster Panel Three Tom Elvidge – Vice Chair Kady Stimson - Vice Chair Vivien Slyfield - Panel Advisor Ian Crompton - Panel Manager –Consultant	
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:		
Nottingham People		X
Living in Nottingham		
Growing Nottingham		
Respect for Nottingham		
Serving Nottingham Better		
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):		
<p>The Panel's primary responsibility is to safeguard children and young people, placed in foster care / families by Nottingham City and beyond. The Panel takes its responsibility to protect children very seriously and is vigorous in its scrutiny of reports and assessments.</p>		
Recommendation		
1	To note the activity of the fostering Panels.	

1 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Good practice as suggested by the Coram - British Association for Adoption and Fostering Effective Fostering Panels (CoramBAAF 2019) states that an annual report should be prepared detailing the work of the Fostering Panel. The report should detail the following:
- the numbers and profiles of foster carers and children;
 - strengths and achievements of the service;
 - performance targets and measurements and further areas for development.
- 1.2 The report should be made available to elected members.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of members of the Board with information pertaining to the activity of the fostering Panel.

2 BACKGROUND (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

Function of Fostering Panel

2.1 The primary functions of the fostering Panel are to:

- Recommend the approval of prospective foster carers including the terms of their approval, i.e. the type of foster care they can provide.
- Recommend the approval of foster carers after the foster carer's first annual review or after a review following concerns having been expressed, or allegations made, about the quality of care provided by the foster carers.

Fostering Panel

2.2 As with all services this has been a challenging year for the Fostering Panel. From the middle of March all the Panels were run virtually rather than in person. This has involved a significant change in the way the Panels operate and are supported. All the attendees are offered a 'test run' to ensure they can connect to Team and access the Panel. When internet connection has not been possible they connect via a phone. Despite the impact of Covid 19 the Panels continue to operate at a minimum of two Panels per month. It is a very different experience for all those involved and Panel members. The feedback received from attendees has been positive and some reflected their appreciation of being made welcome and feeling involved in the virtual Panels. Most importantly Panels have continued to make recommendations about the suitability of foster carers with an increase in the number of approvals on those made last year.

2.3 The virtual Panels have maintained the attendance of applicants and review carers throughout the Panel process including during recommendations by Panel members. If Panel need time to consider their recommendation attendees leave the meeting and the Chair and Panel Advisor then privately informed them of the outcome of Panel immediately following their case being heard. There is a strong commitment to maintaining and enhancing the transparency of the Panel process by continuing this process.

2.4 The quality assurance of the reports and booking into Panel has remained unchanged. There was a significant change in Fostering Regulations between April 2020 and 25th September 2020, which allowed variations on; Panel quoracy, matters presented to Panel, medicals and the timescales for assessments. NCC decided that during this period Connected Persons Extensions of temporary approvals and first reviews where no concerns or issues were identified would be considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) without first going to Panel. This assisted the process while allowing Panel consideration of full assessments.

2.5 Panel continue to give full scrutiny to the reports presented. They continued use of the Children in Care Council (CICC) questions that the children felt should be asked of prospective foster carers has been maintained. These questions provide a clear focus on the child's view and are very much valued by the Panel members. Applicants appreciate the opportunity to think into the child's perspective and how they see their role developing as carers. This allows the voice of the child to be clear within the Panel process. Involvement with our looked after children will be further strengthened through plans to have direct virtual engagement with the CICC.

2.6 The following is statistical information detailing the activity of the Panel, according to the types of cases that have been presented.

Fostering and Adoption Panel Activity April – September 2020 with comparative data for the previous 4 years

Table 1 – Fostering Statistics

	April – Sept 2016	April – Sept 2017	April – Sept 2018	April – Sept 2019	April - Sept 2020
Mainstream Applications	9	6	18	12	17
Mainstream Deferral	0	0	4	0	3
Connected Persons	8	10	6	15	19
Connected Persons Extensions	7	3	8	19	6
1 st Annual Reviews	18	11	6	19	4
Reviews following concerns	1	0	0	0	2
Termination of Approval	3	0	0	2	3

Summary of Foster Panel Activity April 2020 - Sept 2020:

54 cases presented to Panel April – September, comprising mainstream fostering and Connected Person applications, Connected Person Extensions, terminations of approval and foster carer reviews. (14 Panels held).

Summary of Foster Panel Activity April 2020 - Sept 2020:

During this period of unprecedented disruption due to Covid 19 the recruitment of mainstream foster carers has been maintained and actually led to an increase in the number of mainstream foster carers approved. Similarly there was an increase in the number of Connected Person assessments presented to Panel. There has been an increase in the number of matters considered by Panel from 67 last year to 90 in the current year. This is the case even with a period of three months when first reviews and Extension of Connected Persons assessments were not presented.

- 2.7 The Panel activity highlights the most significant issues for the Panel as the lack of Panel space. The impact of this pressure is that concerns reviews are delayed and currently assessments of new foster carers and to support our children are waiting six months for a space at Panel. The delay in concerns reviews is one of the issues highlighted by the Chairs' report.
- 2.8 Panel membership has been strengthened with three new members, which has added to the diversity of the membership. Panel members are committed, knowledgeable and child focused in their work. There are challenges for Panel in

consideration of Connected Person applications in considering the potential of family members as carers, with the stresses and complexity this brings. Valuable training has been completed by Panel on Connected Persons placements and has been referenced by members in making their recommendations.

- 2.9 Panel members' appraisals have taken place with the majority commenting on the effectiveness of the virtual Panels and the way this system has been established.
- 2.10 The Fostering Panel will continue to evolve to accommodate changes in policy, procedure, guidance and legislation. Panel members are provided with regular updates and briefings by the Panel Advisor and a minimum annual Panel specific training. This year the training focused on Unconscious Bias to support Panel in awareness as they consider their recommendations.

Quality of Reports

- 2.11 The Panel as a whole have the opportunity, in addition to the direct feedback to the Agency on the quality of reports presented, to highlight any issues, concerns, themes and acknowledgments of outstanding practice that are then addressed via the Panel Advisor. Their report highlights the issues and have been raised appropriately with the agency.
- 2.12 During this year, the standard of the reports was scored by Panel members as assessor's presentation at the Panel. During this period reports were rated;

Outstanding 24%
Good 62%
Needs improvement 14%
Inadequate .37%

Summary of Panel Chair's reports

- 2.13 As mentioned earlier the Panel Chairs are required to produce a report. The reports of all the Panel chairs have highlighted the following:

Strengths

- The attendance of applicants and reviewed carers throughout the Panel process including recommendations by Panel members has been maintained with virtual Panels to enhance the transparency of the application and Panel process.
- The majority of Fostering reports are of a good standard.
- Agency Decision Maker timescales are being met.
- Child centred services to children and carers.
- Panel Steering Group has met twice this year, and the Panel Chairs and Vice chair are invited to this meeting along with team managers and senior managers across children's integrated services and the Agency Decision Maker.
- Meetings of the Panel chairs, vice chairs and the Panel Advisor have continued to address issues and consistency Panel practices is established.

Areas for further development

- Address the delay in reviews with concerns coming to Panel.
- Increase in the membership and representation of younger people with care experiences sitting on Panels.
- Increasing the representation of diversity of Panel membership.
- Address the shortfall in resource for Panel spaces.

2.14 During this difficult year the function and operation of the Fostering Panel has continued to work well. The Fostering Service is working towards ensuring continuous improvements to the Panel and the processes of Panel, including the issues related to resources. Issues raised will continue to be addressed with commitment from all those involved with the Panel to provide safe, stable and secure families for children.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 None.

4 FINANCE COMMENTS

4.1 None.

5 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT COMMENTS

5.1 None.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COMMENTS

6.1 None.

7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 Not required as the report does not contain proposals or financial decisions.

8 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION

8.1 None.

9 PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

9.1 BAAF, Effective Fostering Panels: Guidance on Regulations, Process and Good Practice in fostering Panels in England (updated Fifth Edition) (2019).