

Corporate Parenting Board – 18 July 2022

Title of paper:	Fostering Panel Chair's Report	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Ailsa Barr – Director, Children's Integrated Services	Wards affected: All
Report author(s) and contact details:	Audrey Taylor – Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption Audrey.Taylor@nottinghamcity.gov.uk 01158764526	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Phil Rogers – Chair, Foster Panel One Dagoberto Rojas – Chair, Foster Panel Two Tom Elvidge – Vice Chair Kady Stimson - Vice Chair Alice Robotham – Vice Chair Vivien Slyfield - Panel Advisor Ian Crompton - Panel Advisor	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)		
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:		
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users): 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.		
Recommendation(s):		
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 is 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.

2.2 Again this year all the Fostering Panels have run virtually. This compares favourably with other local authorities where they have reported disruption to their Panels. In Nottingham City the Panels continue to work effectively but does involved additional Panel Administration time. All the attendees are offered a 'test run' to ensure they can connect to Teams and access the Panel. When internet connection has not been possible they connect via a phone. Although the experience for all those involved is different from being face-to-face the feedback received from attendees has been positive. Many reflected their appreciation of being made welcome and feeling respected and 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 in the previous year.

Some examples of feedback from those attending Panel;

"A positive experience today, a transfer from IFA is often tricky and panel went well and addressed those areas with care and robustness in equal measure, thanks"

"Panel chair was excellent today and managed the applicants well, some areas were sensitive and were covered with empathy and care. I really liked how you gave time to J to speak..."

"Everyone was warm and welcoming, instructions were clear and the whole meeting was far less daunting than expected."

"No comments about improving panel process, it was smooth from emails, Teams and how it was managed."

2.3 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 – March 2022 with comparative data for the previous 4 years.

Table 1 – Fostering Statistics

	April 2016 – March 2017	April 2017 – March 2018	April 2018– March 2019	April 2019- March 2020	April 2020 – March 2021	April 2021 – March 2022
Mainstream Applications	13	30	42	24	30	22
Mainstream Deferrals	0	1	5	0	1	1
Connected Persons (CP)	17	18	12	36	40	38
Connected Persons Extensions	12	11	17	36	17	35
1 st Annual Reviews	24	12	19	45	16	45
Reviews following concerns	5	1	0	2	6	9
Termination of Approval	5	1	3	2	2	2

Summary of Foster Panel Activity April 2021- September 2021:

- 2.4 152 cases (compared with 112 for the same period 2020) were presented to Panel: April – March, comprising mainstream fostering and Connected Person applications, Connected Person Extensions, terminations of approval and foster carer reviews, including concerns reviews. (33 Panels held).
- 2.5 The recruitment of mainstream foster carers has continued if at a lower level than the previous year – this is consistent with experience across the sector. Similarly, the Connected Person applications continued at a slightly lower level than the previous year. There have been very significant increases in connected person extensions and first annual reviews and reviews following concerns. There has therefore been an increase in the number of matters considered by Panel 152 compared with 112 for the period April to March 2020.

- 2.6 Panel activity highlights that the most significant issue for the Panel has been capacity in light of business need. The impact of this pressure, for example, is that reviews at one point were delayed. The need for greater flexibility and capacity at Panel has been addressed by the introduction from September of a further 10 additional Panels. With us now consistently running 3 Panels per month until June 2022 when the agreement to fund the additional Panel expires. The increase in Panels enabled cases to be heard within a suitable timescale, with delay kept to a minimum. We retain some capacity to enable urgent cases to be heard with each Panel reserving time for urgent cases. The plan is to reduce to two Panels per month with additional Panels when there is a business need. The aim is to offer flexibility enabling cases to be heard in a timely and regulatory compliant manner.
- 2.7 Panel membership was strengthened in the last financial year with three new members, which has added to the diversity and representation of care experience in the membership. Panel members are committed, knowledgeable and child focused in their work. The challenges for Panel in consideration of Connected Person applications continues, in particular the appropriate consideration of minimum standards. Dedicated and inter authority training has been provided to Panel including on the Review of Serious Case Reviews Safeguarding and a Place to Call Home: carers for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Each Panel has the opportunity for discussion and reflection at the end of the meeting with action taken to develop and improve practice.
- 2.8 Panel members' appraisals took place at the end of last year and once again the majority of Panel members commented positively on the effectiveness of virtual Panels. The feedback from applicants and carers on attending virtual Panels has also been extremely positive with them valuing the greater inclusiveness and flexibility it affords.
- 2.9 The voice of the child at Panel has been enhanced by a Panel member being Panel's link and representative with the Children in Care Council and the continued use of the Children in Care Council Questions for applicants. There has also been an increase in the number of care experienced Panel members during this year.
- 2.10 The Fostering Panel will continue to evolve to accommodate changes in policy, procedure, guidance and legislation. The Panel Advisers and annual Panel specific training provide Panel members with regular updates and briefings. This year there have been two training topics, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, relating to the Place to Call Home project and the findings of Serious Case Reviews involving foster carers.

2.11 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 feedback received from Panel attendees is overwhelmingly positive.
- The majority of Fostering reports are of a good standard.
- Agency Decision Maker timescales are being met.
- Child centred services to children and carers, with a direct link with the Children in Care Council.
- Panel Steering Group meetings have taken place on four occasions this year. It provides a forum for Panel Advisers, team managers and senior managers across children's integrated services, as well as the Chairs and Vice Chair and the Agency Decision Maker to meet and raise issues for the service.

- Quarterly meetings of the Panel Chairs, Vice Chair and the Panel Adviser have continued to address issues and maintain consistency in Panel practices.

2.12 Areas for further development

- Address the delay in reviews with concerns and first reviews coming to Panel.
- Continue to address the membership and representation of younger people with care experiences sitting on Panels.
- Increasing the representation of diversity of Panel membership and Chairs.
- Review the resource for Panel and the required spaces on a permanent basis.
- Ensure there is appropriate and adequate Business Support for the Panel functioning.

3 Other Options Considered In Making Recommendations

3.1 None.

4 Finance Comments (Including Implications And Value For Money/VAT)

4.1 None.

5 Legal And Procurement Comments (Including Risk Management Issues, And Legal, Crime And Disorder Act And Procurement Implications)

5.1 None.

6 Strategic Assets & Property Comments (For Decision Relating To All Property Assets And Associated Infrastructure) (Area Committee Reports Only)

6.1 None.

7 Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 Has the equality impact of the proposals in this report been assessed?

No



An EIA is not required because:

(Please explain why an EIA is not necessary)

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).