

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 20 JANUARY 2020

Title of paper:	Fostering Panel Chair's Report		
Director:	Helen Blackman Director, Children's Integrated Services	Wards affected: All	
Report author and contact details:	Audrey Taylor Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption Audrey.Taylor@nottinghamcity.gov.uk		
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			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Living in Nottingham			<input type="checkbox"/>
Growing Nottingham			<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect for Nottingham			<input type="checkbox"/>
Serving Nottingham Better			<input type="checkbox"/>
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.
- 1.4 In addition, the Panel Chairs are required to provide six monthly performance reports. This report contains a summary of these six monthly reports (see section 2.11).

2 BACKGROUND

Function of Fostering Panel

- 2.1 The Fostering Panels continue to make positive progress. On 1st April 2019 the regional adoption agency: East Midlands Adoption came into effect and Nottingham City ceased to operate an Adoption Panel. It now runs a minimum of two fostering Panels a month. Is also able, if the need arises, to run further Panels within any single month. This has enabled Panel to meet, as demand requires, affording flexibility and responsiveness to need in a cost efficient manner.
- 2.2 In 2018 the Panel Chair's checklist was revised to ensure Panel confirmed the timeliness of applications and reports on any concerns regarding delay. Panel also continue to provide considered and detailed feedback to the Agency on the quality of every report and assessment presented to Panel. The Panel Advisor then confirms this feedback to presenting social workers and their manager. There has continued to be noted the maintenance of improvements in the quality of reports presented to Panel - see section 2.12.
- 2.3 The use of the Children in Care Council (CICC) questions that the children felt should be asked of prospective foster carers has now been in practice for three years. The feedback from applicants continues to be overwhelmingly positive with prospective foster carers describing how the questions powerfully bring the role of becoming a carer to life in Panel.
- 2.4 The presentation of a report on Panel to the CICC, which was introduced in April 2018, took place through an interactive workshop. This needs to become established practice to ensure the CICC offers a layer of accountability and engagement for NCC Panels with young people in care, thereby embedding their voice and presence in Panel processes.
- 2.5 A significant new development was introduced in April 2019, with the attendance of applicants and review carers throughout the Panel process including recommendations by Panel members. Previously they only attended to answer questions from Panel members and have the opportunity to ask a question of Panel; the Chair and Panel Advisor then privately informed them of the outcome of Panel immediately following their case being heard by Panel. This development has enhanced the transparency of the application and Panel process.
- 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 2019 (included this year is comparative data for the previous 3 years).

Table 1 – Fostering Statistics

	April 2019 – Sept 2019	April 2018 – Sept 2018	April 2017 – Sept 2017	April 2016 – Sept 2016
Mainstream Applications	12	18	6	9
Mainstream Deferral	0	4	0	0
Connected Persons	15	6	10	8

Connected Persons Extensions	19	8	3	7
1 st Annual Reviews	19	6	11	18
Reviews following concerns	0	0	0	1
Termination of Approval	2	0	0	3

Summary of Foster Panel Activity April 2019 - Sept 2019:

- 76 cases presented to Panel April, comprising; mainstream fostering and Connected Person applications, Connected Person Extensions, terminations of approval and foster carer reviews.–September 2019 (14 Panels held).

Quality of Reports

- 2.7 The period April 2019 - September 2019 has been a busy period for Panel, with 76 cases being heard at Panel. Panel membership has a strong balance of skill and experience representing diverse sectors of the community. The Panel displays a high degree of commitment and enthusiasm to the work, and ensure that high levels of scrutiny are applied to assessments with the focus always being on meeting the needs of children and safeguarding their welfare. The Panel further recognises the responsibility it has in balancing this with a need to ensure that applicants and staff feel welcome and respected by the Fostering Panel. The distribution of Panel specific introduction booklets and welcome packs to Panel attendees, including photos of Panel members and brief biographies, continues to consistently receive very positive feedback from Panel attendees, both social workers and applicants.
- 2.8 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 from the Panel Advisor and a minimum annual Panel specific training. This year the training focused on the issues related to Connected Person assessments.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 The good quality of reports presented to Fostering Panel has been maintained. The quality assurance role of managers prior to the reports being submitted to Panel has been enhanced with the introduction, within the last year, of a Declaration of Compliance document that has to be completed and signed by the relevant manager. The Panel Advisor provides Panels with the consistent quality assurance and advice that Panels require in order to make recommendations. The Panel Chairs and Panel members in their annual appraisals, completed winter 2019 reported maintenance of the improvements in the quality of reports presented to the Fostering Panels. The feedback to the agency on the quality of reports by individual cases enables the Panel Advisor to produce quantitative and qualitative analysis of these reports. Qualitative feedback identifies reports, in accordance with Ofsted outcomes, as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate.
- 2.11 It is pleasing to be able to report that the number of reports considered outstanding or good has largely been sustained i.e. 84% of reports presented to Panel April–September 2019 were considered Outstanding or Good compared with 88% for the same period for 2018.

However, there are still a small number of assessment reports that fall below the expected standard. This continues to be addressed and monitored by the Fostering Service and raised directly with the relevant team manager and senior managers.

Summary of Panel Chair's reports

2.12 As mentioned earlier the Panel Chairs are required to produce a six monthly performance report. The reports of all the Panel chairs have highlighted the following:

Strengths

- Panel members were well prepared for the disaggregation of Panels in the lead up to the regionalisation adoption services and Panels in April 2019.
- The attendance of applicants and reviewed carers throughout the Panel process including recommendations by Panel members has enhanced the transparency of the application and Panel process.
- The vast majority of Fostering reports are of a good or outstanding standard.
- Agency Decision Maker timescales are being met.
- Child centred services to children and carers.
- Significant increase in the number of connected carers balanced against the reduction in approved foster carers.
- Panel Steering Group meet quarterly, and the Panel chairs and vice chairs are invited to this meeting along with team managers and senior managers across children's integrated services. It is noted that this is a useful group to drive continued improvements in the service.
- Quarterly meetings of the Panel chairs, vice chairs and the Panel Advisor have enabled continued improvement in, and consistency of, Panel practices.

Areas for further development

- Increase in the membership and representation of younger people with care experiences sitting on Panels.
- Increasing the representation of diversity of Panel membership.
- Continued improvements in the timescales for fostering assessments has been challenging to maintain due to the pressure on Panel time.

Overall, the Fostering Panel is working well and the Fostering Service is working towards ensuring continuous improvements to the Panel and the processes of Panel. Issues raised will continue to be addressed in a timely manner.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 None.

4 FINANCE COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

4.1 None.

5 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

5.1 None.

6 STRATEGIC ASSETS & PROPERTY COLLEAGUE COMMENTS

6.1 None.

7 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 An EIA is not required because 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).