



**The Brighton & Hove
and Barnardo's Link Plus
Joint Fostering Panel**

Information for applicants and foster carers attending panel for the first time

January 2019



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	2
<u>Who are the Fostering Panel members?</u>	3
<u>What is the role of the Fostering Panel ?</u>	4
<u>Where and when does the Fostering Panel meet?</u>	5
<u>Do I have to attend?</u>	5
<u>What happens when I attend?</u>	6
<u>When will I know the outcome?</u>	8
<u>What can I do if I disagree?</u>	9
<u>Fostering Panel evaluatio</u>	10
<u>Contact details</u>	11
<u>Comments, compliments and complaints</u>	12

Introduction

The Brighton & Hove Fostering Panel is a joint panel between Brighton & Hove Families, Children and Learning Services and the Barnardo's Brighton and Hove Link Plus Service. The aim of the panel is to oversee the provision of quality family-based care to children and young people looked after by the local authority. This includes Barnardo's fostering and overnight short-breaks for disabled children and young people.



The guidance and regulations of the Children Act 1989 vol. 4 (2011), 5.29 states: *'no-one has a right to be a foster carer, and fostering decisions must focus on the interests of the child'*.

Fostering service providers have been legally required to have Fostering Panels since 2001. Brighton & Hove has had a Panel since 1999.

This booklet provides information for prospective foster carers, and foster carers attending panel for the first time, and tries to answer the most commonly asked questions. However, if you have further queries please speak to your supervising social worker.

Who are the panel members?

The Brighton & Hove Joint Fostering Panel is drawn from a central list of members, some of whom will be social workers, plus independent members with experience of fostering or substitute family care. There is an independent chairperson.

An agency adviser and panel administrator are also present in support roles.

The adviser provides professional advice on foster care. Legal and medical advice can also be given to the panel as necessary.

The administrator minutes the panel meeting and gives administrative support.

What is the role of the Fostering Panel?

The Fostering Panel is responsible for making recommendations to the relevant agency decision maker about:

- The approval of applicants as foster carers. Should the panel feel that there is insufficient information on which to make a recommendation, they can request further information.
- Brief reports on suitability.
- The extension of temporary foster carer approvals (Regulation 25) in family and friends cases.
- The re-approval of foster carers after first annual reviews or significant changes in circumstances.
- Terminations of carers' approvals.
- Developments in the fostering service.
- Monitoring the quality of work carried out with children and foster carers.
- Promoting good practice.

The panel makes recommendations to the relevant agency decision maker who makes the final decision. The agency decision maker for Brighton & Hove is a senior manager in the directorate of Brighton & Hove Families, Children and Learning Services.

The agency decision maker for Barnardo's is the Director, (Children's Services), Barnardo's South East and Anglia Region.



Where and when does the panel meet?

The panel meets every three weeks, on a Wednesday, at various locations in Brighton and Hove. Your supervising social worker will tell you when a date has been allocated for your application or consideration of re-approval or related matters. You will receive a letter from the panel administrator detailing the time that your application will be considered, about a week before the panel takes place.

A panel recommendation on a new carer is to be made within eight months of the receipt of application to be assessed as a foster carer (NMS 14.4).

Do I have to attend?

Your attendance at panel when your full assessment as a prospective foster carer is being considered is very much welcomed, although you are under no absolute obligation to attend. Most applicants do decide to attend and panel members endeavour to ensure that applicants are made to feel welcome and involved in

the process, although it is acknowledged that the panel is a formal meeting.

However, only in exceptional circumstances will the panel make a recommendation regarding the suitability of applicants who do not attend. Normally both partners of a couple application will be expected to attend.

Your attendance at panel to consider reviews and re-approval provides opportunities for two-way communication about progress made with children placed, clarification of issues of concern and ideas for service development. Foster carers are invited to attend panel for their first annual review and encouraged to attend subsequent panel discussions of annual reviews that may be presented to panel.

Approved foster carers are also encouraged to attend the panel when any other relevant information regarding the care they provide is being considered. You can bring a representative or friend if you wish.

What happens when I attend?

On arrival at the venue, you should meet with your supervising social worker at reception. You will then be directed to a waiting room. The panel members will have read your assessment or review report, which you will have had the opportunity to see and comment on, before the meeting.

Panel members will consider each case and identify issues for discussion before inviting you and your supervising social worker to join the meeting. If your supervising social worker or another practitioner has any information that needs to be shared with the panel confidentially, s/he will normally inform the agency adviser before the meeting. When necessary, time will be allocated for your supervising social worker or another practitioner to address the panel without you being present. Normally you should be part of panel discussions about your application or review and the necessity for discussion without you being present should be rare.

Information is strictly confidential

The chairperson will ask panel members to introduce themselves to you and will explain that all information presented to the panel is strictly confidential. Facilitated by the chairperson, a discussion follows in which panel members will try to clarify queries or issues that may have arisen from their reading of reports presented to the meeting, which could involve questions to you and your supervising social worker. At the end of the discussion you will be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have. You will then be asked to return to the waiting room whilst the panel considers your case.

The panel will then decide whether it can make a recommendation on your application to become a foster carer or your re-approval as a foster carer.

Panel will identify the positive aspects of your application or your review and any potential areas of difficulty and decide whether to make a positive recommendation.

The chairperson will usually invite you back into the meeting to inform you of the recommendation, the positive aspects of your application or review of your approval and areas where you may need further support.

On occasions it may be more practical for the panel chair and the agency adviser to give you the panel's recommendation in the waiting room.

You will also be told when you can expect to be notified of the final decision by the agency decision maker.

The panel carries out its role and functions by making recommendations on the basis of the agreement of members present. Confidential written minutes of the meeting will clarify whether a recommendation was unanimous or not. Any dissenting views will be clearly detailed in the minutes and the relevant agency decision maker will be informed. The panel chairperson has the power to defer making a recommendation if, in his or her view, the panel is not in a position to make a proper judgement on the information presented to the panel. The panel may alternatively make a negative recommendation.



When will I know if my application to become a foster carer has been successful or my re-approval is agreed?

Providing that the panel has all the necessary information, you will be told about the panel's recommendation immediately, at panel. You should remember that the panel can only make a recommendation and the final decision rests with the relevant agency decision maker.

The agency decision maker is required to make his/her decision within seven working days of receipt of the panel's recommendation and the final set of the panel's minutes. Once the agency decision maker has considered the panel's recommendation and reached a decision, your supervising social worker will notify you orally of this decision within two working days.

The agency decision maker will write to you within five working days of making his/her decision, confirming his/her decision.

You will also be sent a copy of the summary of the positive aspects of your application or review and any areas of where you may need further support, as shared with you verbally at panel.

Occasionally, further advice or information may be required before a final decision is made. Your supervising worker will be able to tell you why a decision cannot be made immediately and advise you of the time-scale within which a decision should be reached.



What can I do if I disagree with the decision and / or feel that the assessment has not been properly conducted?

Although no one has the 'right' to be a foster carer, you do have the right to a fair, properly conducted and documented assessment or review. If you have had a full assessment completed, and following panel, the agency decision maker does not propose to approve you as suitable to be a foster carer, or varies your approval, he/she will write to you advising you of this fact. This is referred to as a 'qualifying determination'.

You have 28 days from the date of the letter to accept the decision.

If you disagree with the agency decision maker's 'qualifying determination' you can either:

- Make further representations to the agency decision maker directly (in which case the agency decision maker must refer the matter back to the Fostering Panel)
- or
- Make an application direct to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). CoramBAAF operate independent review panels.

(You cannot do both).

The IRM Panel will take a fresh look at your application and make a recommendation to the agency decision maker. The final decision is made by the Brighton & Hove City Council or Barnardo's Link Plus agency decision maker who must take account of the recommendations of both the IRM and the Brighton & Hove Fostering Panel.



Full details about these processes would be contained in the letter advising you of the qualifying determination. You can also obtain further information from your supervising social worker. If you are unhappy with the manner in which you have been treated at any point in the assessment you may also pursue the matter through the complaints procedure.

Normally you should receive a copy of the complaints procedure during your assessment to become a carer but if you have not received it yet or have mislaid it please ask your supervising social worker to give you another copy.

Fostering Panel evaluation

The panel constantly strives to make attendance at Fostering Panel a positive experience for prospective foster carers and approved carers. The comments of applicants and carers who have attended panel are sought, via a short confidential questionnaire, to help us in considering what we do well and how we could do things differently and better.

Your views give us valuable information about the performance of the panel, the panel chair and the wider fostering service. Previous helpful comments by applicants and carers attending panel have led to improvements in how meetings have been conducted.

Please do help us by completing the questionnaire sent to you.



Contact Details

If you have any further questions regarding the Fostering Panel please do not hesitate to speak to your supervising social worker. Panel members look forward to meeting you.

The Brighton & Hove panel administrator and agency adviser can be contacted at:

Brighton & Hove City Council
Fostering & Adoption Service,
Moulsecoomb Hub South,
Hodshrove Lane, Brighton, BN2 4SE

Tel: 01273 295390

Email:

fostering-adoption@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Website:

www.fosteringinbrightonandhove.org.uk

www.adoptioninbrightonandhove.org.uk



Comments, compliments & complaints

Please let us know if you have found our services to be useful, or if we could improve them. If you are unhappy with something that we have done, you can ask to speak with a Pod Manager or the Team Manager of the relevant fostering team, depending on which team you have applied to or are supported by.

If we cannot sort the problem out locally, then we do have a complaints procedure. Leaflets about this are available at Families, Children and Learning Services' offices.

Alternatively, you can...

visit: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/council-and-democracy/compliment-or-complain/childrens-services-complaints-0>

email: customerfeedback@brighton-hove.gov.uk

call us on: 01273 291229

write to: Customer Feedback Team, Hove Town Hall, Norton Road, Hove, BN3 3BQ

Or, if concerning Barnardo's Link Plus Scheme please contact:
Children's Services Manager Brighton and Hove Link Plus,
Unit P2, Knoll Business Centre, Old Shoreham Road,
Hove, BN3 7GS

tel: 01273 411767

email: brightonandhovelinkplus@barnardos.org.uk

