



Fostering in Bradford

Attending the Fostering Panel

A guide for prospective and current foster carers





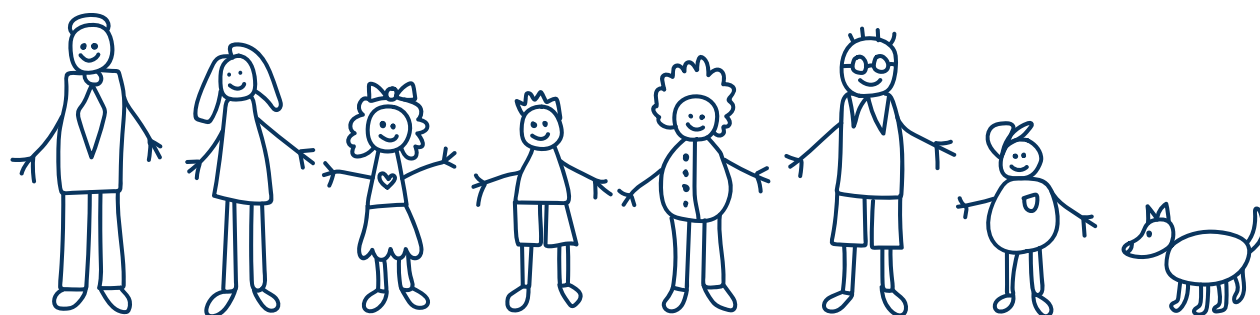
Introduction

As a prospective foster carer your social worker has compiled all the information they have gathered during your assessment into a report that will be presented to the Fostering Panel. If you are attending for a review, the report following your review meeting with a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer will be considered at the panel.

We understand you may be both excited and possibly a bit worried about this so we hope that this booklet will help you understand what you can expect to happen at Panel; why Fostering Panels are needed; what happens afterwards and to explain your options within the approval / review process.

Contents:

Introduction.....	3
What is a Fostering Panel?	4
Who is on the Fostering Panel?	5
Where and when does the Fostering Panel meet?	6
Why should I attend?	6
What happens at Fostering Panel?	7
When will I know the outcome?	8
What can I do if I disagree with the decision?	9
Your views matter	9
Contact details.....	10
Comments, compliments and complaints	10



What is a Fostering Panel?

Fostering Panels are regular meetings of between 5 and 10 people who consider and make recommendations about the people who want to become or continue to be foster carers. It is a legal requirement and the panels are responsible for making recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker about:

- the approval of potential foster carers. Sometimes, the panel feel that there is not enough information to be able to make the recommendation, so they can request further information
- extending temporary foster carer approvals (Regulation 25) in family and friends' cases
- re-approval of foster carers after their first annual reviews, then every 3 years of continued fostering (so 4th, 7th, 10th, 13th year and so on) as well as if there are any significant changes in the fostering household's circumstances
- terminations of carers' approvals following an allegation or other concerns.



Who is on the Fostering Panel?

There are between 5 and 10 people who sit on the Fostering Panels. They include:

- an independent chairperson
- a vice chair
- a social worker
- independent members
- a local councillor
- a foster carer from another council's fostering service
- a professional adviser to the panel, who is a non-voting member

The independent Chairperson, who is not employed by Bradford Council or Fostering in Bradford, leads the Fostering Panel meeting. The chairperson has the skills, fostering knowledge and experience to lead informed discussions with the other panel members who will be considering your assessment / review and will make recommendations to the agency decision maker.

The Vice-Chair will act as chairperson in the Chair's absence.

The fostering panel adviser advises the panel members of fostering guidance and regulations, fostering policies and practice issues. The fostering panel adviser is not a panel member and is not a voting member of the panel.

The other fostering panel members have personal experience of fostering or professional experience working with children in social care, health, education or legal settings.

The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is employed by Bradford Council to perform this role. The ADM makes the final decision about your approval, or continued approval, taking account of the views and recommendations of the Panel.

Where and when does the Fostering Panel meet?

In Bradford, we run 3 / 4 panels every month. The panel currently meets virtually online via Zoom.

Your 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 business support officer detailing the time that your application / review will be considered about a week before the panel takes place with all the details you will need to join the online panel meeting.

Why should I attend?

We will invite you to attend the fostering panel when they consider your application to foster or for your review. Most applicants and foster carers do decide to attend and panel members try hard to make sure you are made to feel welcome and involved in the process.

Attending fostering panel gives you the opportunity to meet with the panel members, speak directly to them and, if you wish, make comments or ask questions.

It also gives panel members the chance to clarify information directly with you, ask you questions that will help them understand your motivation to foster or to discuss any other matters raised in the report presented to panel about you.

If you are attending panel that is considering your review and re-approval, your attendance provides opportunities for a two-way communication about progress made with the children who are living in your fostering family, clarification of issues of concern (if there are any) and ideas for service development.

But you do not have to attend. If you choose not to attend, this will never be considered as a reason for recommending you are unsuitable to become carers.



What happens at Fostering Panel?

Your assessment / review report will be sent to the Fostering Panel members before the panel meeting, which gives the panel members time and opportunity to read your report before the meeting.

The information in your report is strictly confidential.

At the Fostering Panel, members will discuss your report and will come up with a list of questions that they wish to ask you. Your social worker may be asked join the meeting before you, to present the report.

When you join your social worker at the panel, the members will introduce themselves and will ask the questions as directed by the Chair. Your social worker can help you answer.

Then you will be asked to leave the meeting while 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 review and any potential areas of difficulty and decide whether to make a positive recommendation to the agency decision maker.

You will then be asked to re-join the meeting and the chairperson will inform you of the recommendation they are going to make, the positive elements of your application or review and areas where you may need further support.

You will also be told when you can expect to be notified of the final decision made 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 at the meeting. Confidential written minutes will clarify whether a recommendation was unanimous or not. Any dissenting views will be clearly detailed in the minutes and the agency decision maker will be informed of these.

The panel members, in agreement with the chair, are allowed to defer making a recommendation if, in their view, the panel is not in a position to make a proper judgement on the information presented to panel. The panel may alternatively make a negative recommendation.



When will I know the outcome?

Providing that panel receives all the necessary information, you will be told the panel's recommendation immediately. Remember that the panel can only make a recommendation and the final decision is made by the agency decision maker (ADM).

The ADM is required to make their decision within seven working days of receipt of the panel's recommendation and the final set of the panel's minutes.

Once the ADM has considered the panel's recommendation and reached a decision, your assessing or supervising social worker will phone you with this decision within two working days.

The ADM will write to you within five working days of making their decision, to confirm the decision in writing.

You will also be sent a copy of the summary of the positive aspects of your application or review and any areas where you may need further support.

Occasionally, further advice or information may be required before a final decision can be made. Your supervising or assessing social worker will explain to you why the decision could not be made immediately and advise you when the decision will be made.



What can I do if I disagree with the decision?

If you are not happy or disagree with the decision that the panel recommends and the ADM makes, you have the right to appeal.

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 your assessment was completed, and following panel, the agency decision maker does not agree to approve you as a foster carer, or changes your approval, the ADM will write to you advising you of this. This is called a 'qualifying determination'.

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

If you disagree with the ADM's qualifying determination, you can either:

- **write to the ADM to ask for an independent review of your case by one of the alternate independent panels at Fostering in Bradford**

or

- **make an application to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).**

You cannot do both.

The IRM panel will take a fresh look at your application or review and make a recommendation to the agency decision maker. The final decision is made by Bradford Council's agency decision maker, who must take account of the recommendations of both the IRM and the Bradford 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 social worker. If you are unhappy with the manner in which you have been treated at any point in your assessment or review, you may also pursue the matter through the complaints procedure.

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

Your views matter

We want to make going to panel a positive experience for prospective and approved foster carers. We ask everyone who attends panel to tell us, confidentially, about how they found the experience, via a very short confidential online questionnaire. This helps us to look at what we do well and how we could do things differently or 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 are conducted.

Please do help us continue to improve by completing the short anonymous questionnaire after you have been to panel. You can find the questionnaire by scanning the QR code below on your mobile device or by visiting

<https://online1.snapsurveys.com/FosteringPanelFeedback>



Contact details

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

The Fostering in Bradford Fostering Panel business support officers can be contacted at:

Fostering in Bradford
Sir Henry Mitchell House
4 Manchester Road
Bradford BD5 0QL
Tel: 01274 434444

Email: fostering.panel@bradford.gov.uk

Web: www.fosteringbradford.com

Comments, compliments and complaints

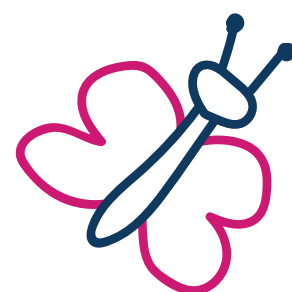
Please let us know if you have found our services to be useful, or if we could improve them.

If you are unhappy with something that we have done, you can ask to speak to the relevant fostering team manager. If we cannot sort out the problem at this level, then you can email or write to the fostering service managers to look into it

Email: fostering.complaints@bradford.gov.uk

Or send via post to:

Fostering Complaints
Level 4, Sir Henry Mitchell House
4 Manchester Road
Bradford BD5 0QL





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Please call 01274 434750.