



**Children's Safeguarding and
Social Work**

Camden Fostering Service

Approval and registration of foster carers

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1 Process of approval

1.1 The Fostering and Permanence Panel

Regulation 27 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 states that all applications for approval as a Camden foster carer must be presented to Camden's Fostering and Permanence Panel ("the Panel"). This is to ensure independent scrutiny of assessment of prospective foster carers and is a major safeguarding mechanism for LAC.

The Panel makes recommendations to Camden regarding the suitability of applicants to foster, but the final decision is taken by the Director of CSSW as Agency Decision-maker. Full details of the role and responsibilities of the Panel can be found in the Panel policy.

[Fostering and Permanence Panel Policy.doc](#)

The Panel meets every month and considers applications presented by the Fostering Service. Dates are set in advance and distributed to all staff in the Fostering Service.

It is the responsibility of the senior practitioner authorising the Form F assessment report to ensure that notification is given to the Panel administrator that formal approval will be sought for a particular applicant at the next available Panel meeting.

The senior practitioner should also ensure that the entire assessment process has been completed and responses have been received for all checks. The senior practitioner should also ensure that the Form F report meets a high standard and contains all required information, and seek advice from the agency advisor if in any doubt as to whether to refer the applicant to the Panel.

It is Camden's aim that applications are considered by the Panel within 8 months of the formal application being received.

1.2 Documents for Panel

The senior practitioner should ensure that the following documents are forwarded to the Panel administrator for consideration at the next Panel meeting at least 1 month before the Panel meets:

- application form
- references
- details of responses to statutory checks
- medical report
- initial home visit report
- written assessment following preparation group
- Form F report
- any other relevant documents.

1.3 Attendance at Panel

Once the senior practitioner has notified the Panel administrator of the intention to apply for approval, the Panel administrator should send out a letter of invitation to the applicant enclosing a leaflet about the Panel at least 10 days before the panel meets.

Invitation letters to applicants should make it clear that they may attend the Panel to make any representations and clarify facts, but they are under no obligation to do so and non-attendance will not affect their application. All applicants are encouraged to attend panel along with the assessing social worker.

The Panel administrator should also notify the assessing social worker and senior practitioner, and the child's allocated social worker where approval of a family and friends foster carer is being considered.

The assessing social worker and responsible senior practitioner must attend the Panel meeting to support the applicant, provide any further information and to advocate for the applicant where required.

If the Panel are being asked to approve an applicant as a family and friends foster carer for a specific child, the child's allocated social worker should also attend the Panel to provide information on the child's needs and how the applicant can meet these.

1.4 Panel recommendations

The Panel must be satisfied from the documentation provided that the applicant has been thoroughly assessed and all necessary checks have been carried out by the Fostering Service before a recommendation can be made on approval.

The Panel may consider convening the matter to the following Panel meeting if it is thought that it is not possible to make recommendation on the information provided, and may request the assessing social worker to obtain further information.

The Panel should look at any areas of weakness in the application and what further training and support the Fostering Service will need to provide to ensure the applicant meets required standards.

The Panel may then make one of the following recommendations:

- the applicant is suitable to foster for Camden
- the applicant is not suitable to foster for Camden
- the application should be deferred to the next Panel meeting pending further information.

The Panel may also make recommendations regarding the terms of approval for fostering, such as the age, gender and number of children that the foster carer can have placed with them at any time. The Panel may also approve a foster carer to look after a specific child as a family and friends foster carer.

When making its recommendations, the Panel must consider all information that is presented and ask for further information where it is felt there are issues that need clarification.

1.5 After the Panel meeting

After the Panel meeting, the Panel administrator should write up the minutes of the Panel's discussion, complete a decision sheet for each application and prepare standard letters from the Agency Decision Maker to the applicants.

When the paperwork has been signed by the Panel chair, the Panel administrator should upload all documents onto the Fostering Panel episode on MOSAIC so that they are available for the Agency Decision Maker to refer to and pass on standard letters for signature.

The responsible senior practitioner should record details of the Panel meeting for each applicant in the Fostering Panel episode on MOSAIC and send a task to the Agency Decision Maker for a final decision.

2 The Agency Decision Maker

The Agency Decision Maker is responsible for approving Panel recommendations; in Camden this role is carried out by the Director for Children's Safeguarding and Social Work (CSSW). Decisions on Panel recommendations should be made within 7 days of the date of the Panel meeting.

On receiving the paperwork and standard letters, the Agency Decision Maker should read through all documentation before deciding whether or not to accept the Panel's recommendations.

Decisions should be recorded on MOSAIC, together with reasons for the decision, and should cover the following points:

- documents referred to when making the decision
- key arguments raised
- whether it is thought the panel process has been carried out fairly and thoroughly
- whether any new information not available to panel has affected decision-making
- reasons for adopting or not adopting the recommendation of the panel.

The paperwork should then be returned to the senior practitioner. The Agency Decision Maker should also sign the standard letters and return them to the Panel administrator.

Where an applicant is approved as a foster carer, their assessing social worker should notify them verbally within 2 days of the decision being made by the Agency Decision Maker, who should confirm the decision in writing. This letter should contain the terms of the approval regarding the age, gender and number of children that the approved carer may foster.

3 Appeals

Information on how to appeal against decisions made by the Panel is contained in the panel booklet, but assessing social workers should discuss the procedure with applicants beforehand.

Where an applicant is not approved as a foster carer, the Agency Decision Maker should write to them within 5 days of the decision being made stating that it is proposed that the applicant will not be approved, giving the reasons for non-approval.

The applicant should also be informed that Camden will keep a record of the non-approval decision and that it may be disclosed to other Fostering agencies in the event that the applicant applies to become a foster carer elsewhere.

The letter should inform them of their options regarding appeal either to the Agency Decision Maker or via the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

If the applicant chooses to appeal to the Agency Decision Maker they should be asked to write in within 28 days stating why they feel their application should be approved.

If the applicant chooses to appeal via the IRM, social workers should provide contact details and all relevant documents relating to the decision so that the applicant can make written representations within 28 days. It is the responsibility of the Fostering Service to ensure that any evidence in relation to the appeal within 10 days of notification of referral.

If the applicant does not respond or make any representations under either option within the 28 days, the Agency Decision Maker may go ahead with the decision not to approve the applicant as a Camden foster carer, and this decision should be recorded on MOSAIC.

If the applicant makes written representations to the Agency Decision Maker, this should be passed to the Panel administrator to include on the agenda for the next Panel meeting so that the Panel may reconsider the application.

Applicants may also use Camden's complaints system if they are unhappy about any aspect of the service they have received from the Fostering Service, and assessing social workers should ensure that applicants are provided with information on how to make a complaint.

4 Terms of approval and exemptions

4.1 Policy framework

All foster carers will be approved to look after a certain number of or age range of children depending on their assessed strengths and weaknesses. Family and friends foster carers will be approved to look after the child or children for whom they have been identified as a carer.

Many foster carers will be approved for “the usual fostering limit” which is 3 children. However, the usual fostering limit does not apply where **either**:

- a sibling group is being placed together (in which case there is no upper limit)

or

- the Fostering Service has agreed an exemption to the foster carer’s usual terms of approval.

Children may be placed with any foster carer outside of their usual terms of approval in an emergency but must be moved on to a more suitable long term placement within 6 days unless an exemption is sought from the Care Provision Service manager.

4.2 Procedure for exemptions

Although a foster carer’s terms of approval sets limits on the number, age and gender of the children who can be placed with them, it is possible to place a child outside of the approval terms where circumstances justify this, and an exemption can be agreed.

Generally, exemptions should be used where there is an exceptionally good match between a child requiring a foster placement and a particular foster carer, but the foster carer’s terms of approval mean that normally the child would not be placed with them.

In these circumstances, social workers may wish to apply to the Care Provision service manager for an exemption to the foster carer’s terms of approval in order to place the child with them.

When deciding on exemptions, the service manager should take into account:

- the number of children currently living with the foster carer
- the proposed arrangements for the safe care and accommodation of the child
- the intended and likely relationship between the foster carer and the child
- the period of time the child is likely to stay with the foster carer
- the impact on the safety and welfare of other children in the household (including the foster carer's own children).

Exemptions may only operate for up to 6 weeks; if they are to continue, there must be an application to the Fostering and Permanence Panel for a decision on how long the exemption may last.

On agreeing an exemption, the service manager should write to the foster carer stating:

- that they are exempt
- the name/s of the child/ren who may be placed with them
- any conditions that may apply to the exemption.

It is the responsibility of the placing social worker to ensure that exemptions are recorded on MOSAIC as soon as they have been agreed by the service manager, and to make any changes to this record following discussion of an exemption at the Panel.

4.3 Exemptions for Camden foster carers

Exemptions should be discussed with the foster carer in the first instance. The manager or senior should also be consulted and a case made for placing the child with that particular foster carer. The foster carer's supervising social worker should also be informed and their views sought. It is recommended that a repeat health and safety check is carried out using the health and safety checklist (appended to the Assessment of Foster Carers policy) for all exemptions.

If the exemption is agreed with the foster carer and is authorised by the manager or senior, the social worker should complete the exemption form and pass this to the service manager for approval. Once signed, this will allow the child to remain with the foster carer for up to 6 weeks.

If the manager and social worker decide that the child should remain in the placement for more than 6 weeks, and this is agreed to by the foster carer, the social worker should notify the Panel administrator and ensure that the matter is scheduled to be discussed at the next available Panel meeting.

Panel should consider the matter and hear representations from the Fostering manager before making a recommendation as to how long the exemption can continue.

4.4 Exemptions for non-Camden foster carers

Camden is unable to vary the terms of approval of another agency's foster carer. Therefore, if the child is placed with a foster carer from another fostering service provider, the Fostering manager or senior should write to the provider to request their authorisation to place the child with the foster carer.

The manager or senior should inform the foster carer's agency why the exemption is needed and detail any proposed support that Camden's Fostering Service can offer the foster carer in order to manage the exemption.

5 Post-approval

Once a foster carer has been approved by the Agency Decision Maker, the Fostering manager should ensure that the newly-approved carer is visited by a social worker so that the foster carer receives the following documents:

5.1 Registration

Under regulation 31 of the Fostering Regulations 2011, the Fostering Service must keep a register of all approved foster carers. This register is kept on MOSAIC and is updated by the Business Support Service (BSS) Officer.

Once the Agency Decision Maker has accepted a Panel recommendation for approval, the BSS Officer will receive a task via MOSAIC to add the approved foster carer's name to the Foster Carer register.

The register should contain the following information:

- the foster carer's name, date of birth and gender
- the date of their approval and each review of their approval
- the current terms of their approval.

When a child has been placed with a **Regulation 24 carer**, the register should be updated to include the following information:

- the name and address of the person the child has been placed with
- the date the placement took effect
- details of any agreement regarding the placement (this will be contained in the Regulation 24 placement agreement).

5.2 Foster care agreement

Regulation 27 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 states that all approved foster carers must have a written foster care agreement that covers the matters listed in Schedule 5 of the regulations.

This document should cover the foster carer's terms of approval and set out the role and responsibilities of Camden foster carers and the expectations that Camden has of approved foster carers. Equally, the agreement also details the Fostering Service's role and responsibilities and what foster carers can expect of the service.

It is important that foster carers have a full understanding of the terms contained in the agreement, and that they have an opportunity to discuss the agreement with a social worker. The document must be signed by the foster carer and the social worker and uploaded onto MOSAIC in the Panel episode.

The agreement must be changed to reflect any changes in legislation that affect the role and relationship and expectations of foster carers and the Fostering Service, and any new agreement signed by the foster carer.

5.3 Foster carer's handbook and other documents

The social worker should also ensure that the foster carer is provided with the following:

- a copy of the foster carer's handbook and copies of any other relevant Camden policies that are binding on foster carers
- details of support groups that foster carers may wish to join
- information on financial payments that will be made to the carer
- some form of identification that verifies their role as a Camden foster carer
- files and equipment for keeping records on LAC.