



**Children's Safeguarding and Family  
Help**

Camden's Fostering and Permanence  
Panel local procedures

# Procedures for the Fostering and Permanence Panel

## 1 Introduction

- The Fostering and Permanence Panel is an independent panel that has been set up to oversee Camden's fostering and permanence service as set out in the Children Act 1989, the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children and Families Act 2014.
- The constitution and terms of reference for the Panel can be found in the *Fostering and Permanence Panel policy* which must be read together with these procedures. [Fostering Panel](#)
- This document sets out the local operational procedures and the principles that guide the Panel when making recommendations on the cases referred to the Panel.

## 2 Core values

### **Where permanent placements are being considered:**

- The panel will ensure that when making decisions regarding a child, the paramount consideration will be to promote the child's welfare until they are 18 and throughout their life.
- The panel will actively promote the placement of children in the most appropriate family setting that meets their needs.
- The panel will actively ensure that siblings are placed together with the same family, unless there are sound reasons for them to be cared for separately.
- The panel will ensure that plans and decisions regarding children are made within a timescale that is right for the individual child and at all times bear in mind that any delay in coming to the decision is likely to prejudice the child's welfare.
- The panel will at all times promote the Council's policies on equality and valuing diversity and ensure their decision-making process is fair and transparent.

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- Panel members will be aware of the implications of the various permanency options and will be prepared to consider each case on its merits without any pre-conceived ideas.

### **Where fostering is being considered:**

- The panel will ensure that when making any recommendations, the overriding consideration will be ensuring the welfare and safety of Looked After children.
- The panel will actively promote the placement of children in the most appropriate family setting or fostering setting that meets their needs and where they can thrive
- The panel will give due consideration to the needs of the foster carers and their household, including birth children and other dependents
- The panel will give due consideration to all applications from prospective foster carers regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, disability or religious persuasion and support the Council's policies on equality and diversity to ensure fairness and transparency

## 3 Roles and responsibilities

### **The panel chair is responsible for:**

- ensuring that panel meetings are conducted in a professional and proper manner and that all items of business are covered
- co-ordinating panel discussions and time –keeping
- ensuring all applicants, social workers and managers attending panel are treated with respect and courtesy
- ensuring all panel members participate fully in the meetings and that members are aware of their role and responsibilities and contribute to the decision making process
- discussion with panel members where there are concerns about their behaviour or conduct in panel meetings or their ability to attend panel
- carrying out an annual appraisal of panel members with the agency adviser.

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- The Panel Chair should be consulted about urgent matters, including when an additional panel meeting may need to be convened or when action outside of a panel meeting may need to be taken.
- The panel should appoint a vice chair from within the panel membership, who will act in the absence of the chair.

### **The agency adviser to the panel is responsible for:**

- assisting the agency with the appointment, termination and review of panel members
  - acting as a link between Camden and the panel
  - monitoring the performance of panel members
  - general administration of the panel
  - giving advice to the panel as requested, either on specific cases or in general
  - providing the panel with information and figures on a range of matters including recruitment of foster carers, children in foster care and family and friends placements, placement disruptions and training and support matters
  - overseeing the training and induction of panel members.
- The agency adviser must attend every panel hearing in an advisory capacity and contribute to panel meetings by raising issues and providing advice on such matters as Camden's policy and procedure on fostering and permanence. However, they will not take part in reaching any recommendations.
  - The agency adviser should also oversee the quality of reports that are submitted to panel and where there are concerns about reports, **the adviser should, in consultation with the panel chair, decide whether the report is adequate for submission.**
  - The agency adviser is responsible for seeking the views of all applicants and social workers presenting to the panel through the use of feedback forms which will be used to monitor practice and ensure a high quality of service delivery.
  - The agency adviser also has a role in monitoring the quality of social work practice and assessments and taking up issues with the respective managers.

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### Medical advisor

- The medical advisor should be consulted and provide reports or guidance on a number of issues including:
  - a summary health report on the child's health for the child's permanence report
  - a summary on the health of prospective foster carers and renewed reports for foster carers at agreed intervals.
- The medical advisor is responsible for informing the panel of any contra-indications which would either need to be heeded or which may render an applicant/existing carer unsuitable to foster.

### Legal advisor

- The legal advisor is not a member of the panel and will not take part in reaching a recommendation.
- The legal advisor is responsible for:
  - giving specific legal advice to members on each individual case presented to panel
  - giving general advice to panel members on the legal functions and duties of the panel.

## 4 Making recommendations on permanence

The following cases should be presented to the panel:

- children for whom permanent fostering is the permanence plan for the child
- approval of long term foster carers
- permanent fostering matches
- rescinding any decision made about a child's permanence plan;

### Long term foster care

The panel should consider all arrangements for the long term foster care of children including:

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- deciding whether a long-term placement with foster carers or the current family and friends carer is in the best interests of a child
- approving people who wish to become long-term foster carers
- approving the long term placement of a particular child with particular long term foster carers
- approving a child's current family and friends carer as their long-term foster carer
- providing advice on the level of autonomy to be delegated to the foster carer in terms of making day to day decisions for the child's care.

In all cases, the panel will consider arrangements for the child to have contact with their birth family or other significant people in their lives and the support services that will be required by the prospective carers.

### **Support packages**

The panel should consider any assistance that may be required so that long term carers can be supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the child placed with them. Support may include:

- financial assistance
- support for contact arrangements between children and their birth relatives or with other people with whom they share significant relationship
- therapeutic services
- services to ensure the success of the placement e.g. respite care, special training or equipment to meet the special needs of the child.

### **Disruptions**

Following the breakdown of any long term foster placement, social workers are responsible for convening a placement disruption meeting to consider what contributed to the breakdown, and make further plans for the child.

### 5 Making recommendations on fostering

The following cases should be presented to the panel:

- approval of prospective foster carers and the terms of their approval
- annual reviews of specialist foster carers and three yearly review of mainstream foster carers
- extensions of time for the assessment of family and friends carers under Regulation 24
- approval of temporarily approved Regulation 24 carers
- any written representations made by applicants who are appealing against an earlier recommendation by the Panel
- de-registrations and terminations of a foster carer's approval
- exemptions and changes to a foster carer's terms of approval
- cases where there have been care standards and child protection proceedings.

#### **Approval of foster carers**

- The panel's role is to consider all information provided and make a recommendation on the suitability of applicants and their household to foster for Camden.
- As part of their recommendations, the panel should ensure that the assessment process, including preparatory training and the taking out of references and relevant checks, has been completed satisfactorily.
- The panel must be satisfied that prospective foster carers either meet or have demonstrated an ability to meet core fostering competencies, and that this is clearly evidenced in the assessment.
- The panel must also take into consideration the National Minimum Standards and the Training, Support and Development Standards and should make recommendations regarding the foster carer's terms of approval.

#### **Review of foster carers**

The panel should carry out the foster carer's first annual review and every subsequent third review, or as requested by the Family, Friends and Fostering Service where:

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- re-approval/recommendation is a consideration
- there are concerns about care standards
- there have been significant changes in the household, including criminal convictions.

The role of the panel is to make recommendations as to whether:

- the foster carer and their household remain suitable for the purposes of safeguarding Looked After Children
- the foster carer continues to meet fostering competencies and provide high standards of care
- the foster carer continues to meet the National Minimum Standards and the requirements expected of Camden
- the terms of the foster carer's approval remain appropriate and make recommendations on any new terms where necessary.

The panel should also ensure that the review process has been carried out in accordance with the Family, Friends and Fostering Service policy and that relevant stakeholders have been consulted and their views included and considered.

### **Exemptions**

- All exemptions to a foster carer's terms of approval that have been agreed by the Family, Friends and Fostering Service Manager must be presented to the panel within 6 weeks for consideration so that they are able to scrutinise the decision and make recommendations on the continuation of the exemption.
- It is an expectation that the supervising social worker attends the panel to explain the circumstances in which the exemption was agreed and to put forward the case for its continuation.

### **Terminations of Approval**

- It is important that Camden's register of foster carers is kept as up to date as possible, and that terminations of approval are formally dealt with via the panel. This will help the panel to monitor care and service standards and plan for service provision.

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- Where a foster carer notifies the Family, Friends and Fostering service that they intend to resign, the panel must confirm their termination and make a note of the reasons for this as part of their quality assurance role.
- As part of the service commitment to good practice, exit interviews will be conducted by the Family, Friends and Fostering Service for all foster carers leaving Camden and this information will be periodically shared with the Panel to ensure continuous learning and development.
- Foster carers who wish to take a career break should discuss this with their supervising social worker and decide whether or not they should be de-registered in the meantime; normally, career breaks lasting more than 12 months will require de-registration and re-assessment.
- Where the Family, Friends and Fostering service decides to terminate a carer's registration because it is felt that the carer and/or their household are no longer suitable, an assessment must be completed in the same way as would an annual foster carer review and this should be presented to the panel. The panel will formally make a recommendation which will then be presented to the Agency Decision Maker.
- If the Agency Decision Maker decides that a foster carer's approval or application is to be terminated, they will be given a qualifying determination. This will be conveyed in a formal letter which will also explain the rights they would have to appeal or make representation.

### **Appeals and written representations**

- Any applicant or foster carer who wishes to appeal against the qualifying determination, will need to contact the Agency Decision Maker within 28 days of the receipt of the formal letter.
- The applicant or foster carer may request a representation to the Secretary of State for a review of the qualifying determination by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) to reconsider the qualifying determination or they may wish to be re-heard by the panel again. They cannot do both.

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### Family and friends care arrangements

- The Fostering Panel may extend a Regulation 24 care arrangement for 8 weeks beyond the statutory 16 weeks duration if the fostering assessment has not been completed or the Regulation 24 carer wishes to appeal a decision not to approve them as a Camden foster carer. The panel should consider all Regulation 24 assessments **before** the 16 weeks has expired.
- The panel must utilise and exercise a range of skills and knowledge when considering family and friends care assessments to ensure ultimately recommendations made are in the best interest of the child, taking due notice of the relationship between the carer and the child particularly in the light of other factors which otherwise may not fully comply with regulations and standards.

## 6 Quality Assurance role

The panel plays an active role in maintaining the quality and standards in relation to long and short-term fostering. The panel chair should report to the agency decision maker through the agency adviser on any cases involving poor practice, so that these can be addressed through the line management system.

Good practice and consistency of approach and fairness by panel members should be promoted through:

- training
- legal advice
- professional advice and guidance from the agency adviser
- regular discussions between the panel chair and the agency decision maker.

## 7 Panel procedures

### Applications to panel

- All applications to be heard by the panel must be made to the panel coordinator at least 2 weeks before the scheduled panel date. Reports can only be submitted late if the case is urgent, and must be submitted to the agency adviser, who will decide whether or not to accept the report after consultation with the chair.

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- When a booking has been made, the panel co-ordinator should send the practitioner a detailed confirmation e-mail stating what paperwork is to be submitted and the deadline for submission, normally 3 weeks in advance of the panel date.
- The panel co-ordinator should send an email to the practitioner four weeks in advance of the panel date, to ascertain if the application will go ahead. If the practitioner needs to cancel the application, or transfer to another panel date, the panel co-ordinator should be informed of the reason, as this information must be monitored.
- Applications must be supported by the relevant documents and information. Please see Appendix 1 for details of reports and the worker responsible for providing them.

### **Notifications to attendees**

Panel invitation letters and a leaflet explaining the role of the panel are sent out to applicants and representing social workers attending the panel a week in advance of the panel hearing when the agenda has been finalised.

### **The panel agenda**

Once the panel co-ordinator has established whether applications are going ahead, the panel agenda is set. The agenda should have 6 cases listed, with each case allocated about one hour.

For permanence cases, priority is given in the following order:

- Approval for Regulation 24 carers including 8 week extensions
- Approval for plans of permanent fostering for children
- Permanent fostering matches
- Approval of long term foster carers.

The agenda should also contain a standing item at the beginning of every panel meeting to enable panel members to declare any interest in any case that is to be considered, and for the chair to decide whether the panel member should withdraw from discussion on that particular case.

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### Reports for panel

- It is essential that all reports to the panel are of a good standard and contain all relevant information to enable the panel to consider applications in full. Reports must be submitted within 3 weeks of the panel date, and late reports can only be accepted with the agreement of the agency adviser and the chair.
- Reports must be completed by suitably qualified staff, or by staff who are supervised by a manager who has the requisite qualification.
- All reports that are submitted to panel should be checked by the agency advisor and may be returned to the social worker if they are considered to be unsatisfactory. Reports should contain a recommendation from the social work practitioner.

### Brief reports

- Where CSFH is not minded to continue with the assessment of approval for a prospective foster carer and these applicants do not wish to withdraw their application, a brief report prepared by the assessing social worker may be submitted to the panel for consideration.
- The panel should either:
  - request further information;
  - ask that the assessment is completed **or**;
  - be satisfied that the brief report provides sufficient information to enable it to make a recommendation about suitability.
- The panel cannot make a recommendation that someone is suitable on the basis of a brief report, as this recommendation may only be made on the basis of a full report.
- The process of decision making and notifying the applicant is the same as for full approvals. If the decision is that Camden is not minded to continue with the assessment, the applicant may then make representations through Camden's procedures or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism.

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### **Attendance by social work staff**

Children's social work staff and staff from the Family, Friends and Fostering service, together with their manager, should attend any hearings where they are involved in an application to panel. This is to provide the panel with clarification of information contained in their report, and to support applicants during the hearing.

### **Discussion and recommendation**

The panel should discuss each application listed in the panel agenda and make a final recommendation. Where there is a disagreement between panel members, the chair should decide whether further information is required to make a recommendation or whether a majority decision should be sought. The minutes should clearly reflect any dissensions and a note made of any case where the chair used their casting vote.

### **Panel recommendations**

- Each application for which the panel makes a recommendation should be written up as a decision sheet by the panel co-ordinator. The panel co-ordinator is also responsible for preparing letters of notification which should be signed by the agency decision maker.
- The panel co-ordinator should pass all documents, including the panel minutes, to the agency decision maker as soon as possible but not later than 7 working days. The panel co-ordinator/panel advisor will be responsible for any follow up notifications or other matters following panel.

### **Panel minutes**

- Panel minutes for each application heard should record the following points;
  - reports received
  - who attended and for which part of the discussion
  - medical advice
  - legal advice where appropriate
  - the main points of the panel's discussion
  - panel's recommendations, the reasons for this and any dissensions
  - any advice given by the chair.

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- If the panel is unable to reach an agreement regarding a particular application, this should be recorded in the minutes, and the reasons for this noted.
- The panel co-ordinator is responsible for writing up panel minutes. The minutes should be approved by the panel chair and sent to the agency decision maker within 7 working days of the panel meeting so that the agency decision maker will meet the timescales for making the decision as set out in the relevant procedures.
- Minutes relating to individual cases should be kept on the relevant case file, and the panel co-ordinator should also keep a central record of all panel minutes.

### Timescales

- **The panel:** Camden should ensure that sufficient panels are arranged to avoid any unnecessary delays to the business of the fostering, adoption and permanence teams.
- The panel should receive all necessary reports and information no later than 6 weeks from the completion of the assessment report.
- The child and birth parents should be informed of the panel's recommendation by the child's social worker, and prospective adopters by the APT social worker, within 24 hours.
- **The Agency Decision Maker:** The agency decision maker should make a decision on all panel recommendations as soon as getting the final set of minutes and recommendations but not later than 7 working days.
- Decisions should be conveyed both orally and in writing to the applicants (by the social worker) and the child and the birth parents (by the child's social worker) within 48 hours and confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

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### Appendix 1 Presentation of cases to the Adoption and Permanence Panel

PRESENTATION	PAPERWORK	TO ATTEND
Approval of children's permanence plan for long term fostering, kinship fostering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form E(Fostering)</li> <li>• Genogram/eco-map</li> <li>• Medical Reports –</li> <li>• School report</li> <li>• Carers report</li> <li>• Assessment of needs form</li> <li>• Sibling checklist</li> <li>• Expert assessments- agreed summaries and conclusions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child's social worker or manager</li> </ul>
Approval of prospective long term foster carers/kinship foster carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form F</li> <li>• ECO map</li> <li>• Genograms</li> <li>• References – written and interviews</li> <li>• Financial statement</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion report</li> <li>• Preparation Group write up.</li> <li>• Employment references</li> <li>• References from ex-partner, school, health visitor (children in placement)</li> <li>• Any child care observations</li> <li>• Checks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanence Team/Fostering social workers</li> <li>• applicants</li> </ul>
Matching of child/ren to adopters, long term foster carers/kinship foster carers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• /Matching report (LTF)</li> <li>• Previous panel minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child's social worker or manager</li> <li>• Permanence</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated child's paperwork (see 1<sup>st</sup> section)</li> <li>Updated LTF carers paperwork (see 2<sup>nd</sup> section)</li> </ul>	<p>Team/Fostering social workers (including family finder)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent agency social workers where applicable.</li> </ul>
Review of prospective LTF carers	Annual Review Form	Permanence and Fostering Team social worker and manager/supervisor
Termination of approval	Termination of approval report	Permanence and Fostering Team social worker and manager/supervisor

### Attendance of applicants

It is the London Borough of Camden's policy that all applicants who wish to become long term carers will be invited to attend the panel when their case is being discussed at approval.

All applicants will be encouraged to attend the meeting so that they are involved as much as possible but this is not compulsory. If they feel unable to attend, this will not affect the panel's recommendation. The main source of information for panel members is the BAAF Form E and this will be the main factor when reaching a recommendation.

### Changes to policy and procedures

With the agreement of the Panel and Camden, the policy and procedural instructions for the Fostering and Permanence Panel can be reviewed and changed at any time as long as these changes fall within the Fostering Regulations 2013 and any subsequent legislation.

### Annual Report

The panel chair will produce an annual report in April of each year. This report will record the work of the Fostering and Permanence Panel for the year. This report will be presented to the panel and will be incorporated into the Fostering Service and the Permanence Service's annual report that is presented to the elected members.