



Brent Fostering Panel

A guide for prospective foster carers

What is the purpose of the Panel?

Every fostering agency must have a fostering panel. The Panel has some independence from the agency and plays an important role in assisting in the decision making process by making clear recommendations to the Agency (Brent Council) about the following:

- Whether a person is suitable to be a foster carer and if so what the 'terms of the approval' should be; for example the number of children they can care for.
- Consider the first review for approved foster carers
- Consider any other reviews referred by the fostering agency and recommend whether foster carers remain suitable and if the terms of their approval are still appropriate
- Long term fostering matches for children under the age of 12 years

These recommendations are then considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who makes the ultimate decision on behalf of the council.

The Panel meets at least once a month at Brent Civic Centre on a Friday

Who is on the Panel?

The panel consists of a group of people, drawn from a pool known as 'The Central List'. These people have the necessary qualifications and experience to be panel members. They have personal and/or professional experience of fostering and are representative of the community that we serve for example in terms of gender, ethnicity and so on.

The Central List includes the following people:

The Chairperson - is independent of Brent Council. Their job is to make sure the panel considers and understands all the information and stays focused on the main issues so that they can make a recommendation to the ADM.

Vice Chairperson(s) - who chair the Panel when the chairperson is not there.

A medical advisor - who participates in the panel, as a full member, but also provides specialist advice on medical issues.

Social Workers - who have experience in fostering.

Other persons - such as specialists (for example in education) and also those who have personal experience of being foster carers or of being fostered.

There is also a minute taker - who makes sure there is an accurate record of what the panel discusses.

The panel also has access to legal advice from a council solicitor.

Occasionally a new panel member or new social worker attends to observe Panel as part of their training. Everyone who is in attendance will have signed a confidentiality agreement. If you recognise someone on the Panel or they are aware that they know you, it is important that the chairperson is informed.

Can I attend the Fostering Panel meeting?

The panel welcomes the opportunity to meet applicants and you will be invited to attend any panel that makes recommendations that concern you (for example approval and reviews). We understand that it can feel daunting to attend a meeting of this kind and that you are likely to feel nervous. We will do our best to make you feel at ease.

It is your choice whether you wish to attend or not and if you choose not to come this will not affect the outcome of your application.

If you do attend it gives you the chance to make comments or ask questions of the Panel and to meet the people who are making recommendations about your application. It also enables panel members to meet you and to talk to you in person. Panel feels it is important to give you the opportunity to be as fully involved as possible in the process. If you would like to bring someone along for moral support, just let us know in advance who you are bringing.

In all cases your assessing social worker will attend.

What happens at the Panel?

Before your application is considered by panel you will have already attended preparation training sessions and been assessed by your social worker. At the end of the assessment your social worker will complete a 'Form F' report.

This report should be presented to panel within eight months of your application having been accepted by the agency.

You will have the opportunity to read the report and make comments upon it before panel meets. The panel members will read the report prior to the day of the meeting, so they can consider any issues they need to clarify within the panel meeting.

You will be invited to attend the panel alongside your assessing social worker and their manager. The social worker and manager will be asked to go into panel first to clarify any points. Before you join the panel, the Chairperson will come out to introduce themselves and explain what will happen.

When you join the panel, panel members will introduce themselves and the panel will then ask you some questions. You will also have a chance to ask the panel questions of you wish.

Whilst the panel considers their recommendation you will be asked to leave the meeting, following which you will be informed of the recommendation by the Chairperson.



What recommendations can the panel make in relation to an application to be a foster carer?

In most instances, the panel will reach a recommendation either to approve you or not approve you as a foster carer for Brent. In some cases the panel may choose to defer a recommendation, for example, if it does not have all the relevant information on which to make a recommendation, or if the panel feels further work needs to be done by the social worker and/or yourselves. In this case, the panel will outline what needs to be done before the application can be re-presented to the panel and also, usually, state a time-scale within which that work should be completed.



The “Agency Decision Maker” (ADM)

The law requires that the final decision is made by someone who is not a member of the Panel. This person is known as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

In Brent there are two ADM’s who are both senior managers within the department.

The panel will record reasons for its recommendation and once a final set of the minutes is ready, these will be sent to the ADM so that a decision can be made within 7 working days of receipt of the paperwork. You will be informed verbally of the decision within 2 working days and this will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days.

What will happen if your application is successful?

If the panel recommends that you are approved and the ADM agrees you will be informed of this.

What will happen if your application is not successful?

If the panel recommends that you are not approved as a foster carer, that your approval is terminated or that the terms of your approval should change and the ADM agrees with this recommendation, you will receive a letter notifying you (called a 'Qualifying Determination').

This letter tells you the decision that the agency is intending to make and gives you the reasons for this. You will have some time (28 calendar days) to think about whether you agree or wish to challenge the proposed decision.

If you are in this situation you will be sent more information about this process and your options at the time. Your social worker will also give you a full explanation of why you are not considered suitable to foster and offer support.



If I am approved will I have to go back to Panel again?

All foster carers are required to have an annual review of their approval to make sure that you are still suitable to foster. The first annual review for each foster carer needs to go back to panel. There may also be other occasions following your annual review that your approval is returned to panel for example if your circumstances have changed, there is a need to change your terms of approval, or an allegation has been made against you. In these circumstances your social worker can advise you what the process will be and you will be invited to make representations and attend panel if you wish.



Feedback

We value your views about your experience of attending panel and the way we do things in Brent and in order for us to gather these you will be asked to fill in a feedback form following your attendance at panel. This feedback helps inform the panel of how it is performing and any helpful changes that can be made if necessary. For further information, please contact your Fostering Social Worker, or the Team Manager at:

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