



One minute guide

Fostering Panel



Date: December 2024

Version: 1

What is fostering panel?

- Fostering panel is a meeting to consider whether applicants are suitable to become foster carers, current carers can continue fostering, or whether carers need to stop fostering.
- Their recommendations will also consider the 'terms of approval' – including how many children a carer could look after, and the age range of children they could look after.
- Panel members will make their recommendations using information from a report written by the supervising social worker, and answers to questions they ask during the panel meeting.
- The panel's focus is on how children can be safely cared for and have their needs well met by carers.
- The role of fostering panel is set out in the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards (NMS).

Who is at fostering panel?

The panel is independent of the local authority and panel members are chosen to reflect different people who are impacted by the panel. This includes:

- people with a professional background in social work, health services or education,
- people who have experience of fostering,
- people who have experience of being fostered,
- people who have adopted.

When applicants/carers arrive at panel they will be given some information about the different people sitting on their panel that day. Two panel members take the roles of Chair and Vice Chair.

The panel meeting will also have a minute taker and a panel adviser, who advises panel on Nottinghamshire County Council's policies, the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards. They are both employees of the local authority.

Applicants or carers will come to panel with their supervising or assessing social worker, and the fostering team manager. Sometimes the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer, and social workers of children being fostered also join panel to share their experiences of working with the carers, or the child's views.

What happens before fostering panel?

- Applicants or carers will receive a letter inviting them to their panel with information about where to go on the day.
- A report is written and shared by the supervising social worker before panel. For reviews, other involved professionals would also share reports. Panel members, and applicants/carers, will have read these before the panel meeting.
- Panel members will meet on the day of panel to talk about what the positives of the report are, and any questions or concerns they have. They will agree the questions they plan to ask during the panel meeting. One or two of the questions are always from a list prepared by No Labels, the children in care council. These questions focus on what children think makes a good carer.

What happens at fostering panel?

- Applicants/carers and their supervising social worker will meet the chair or vice chair and the panel advisor, who will introduce themselves, and share what questions panel plan to ask.
- These questions might be for the applicant/carer, or the professionals. They are shared before joining panel so that people can think about how they want to answer.
- When applicants/carers and supervising social workers join the panel meeting everyone will introduce themselves.
- Panel members will share what they think the strengths of the application or review are. They will then ask the agreed questions. Occasionally, panel may ask a follow up question.
- After listening to the answers, panel members will agree whether they recommend the applicant/carer is suitable to foster, not suitable to foster, or whether they need to defer (delay) their decision.

What happens after fostering panel?

The reports from panel, recommendations, and minutes of panel are passed to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who makes the final decision about the applicants/carers. The Agency Decision Maker is a senior member of staff with relevant social work experience. Their decision can be different from panel's recommendation, but a clear reason must be given.

They will make this decision within seven working days of the panel meeting. Applicants/carers will be told what the decision is by their supervising social worker within 9 working days of the panel meeting and will receive an email from panel within 12 working days of the panel meeting.

If the recommendation at panel is to defer a decision, then more work will need to be done before a further panel date is arranged. This might include gathering more references or assessment work.

Key contacts

Name and email: Fostering Panel Manager Nicola Hardy: Nicola.Hardy@nottscg.gov.uk

Fostering Panel Coordinators - FosteringPanel.Coordinator@nottscg.gov.uk