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**ROCHDALE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES  
PROCEDURE**

**MEMBERSHIP & OPERATION OF THE FOSTERING PANELS**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This Procedure covers all aspects of membership of Children's Social Care Services Fostering Panels.
- 1.2 Every Fostering service is required to have at least one Fostering Panel to carry out the following functions:
- Consider applications for approval and recommend suitability to act as a foster carer and any terms of approval
  - Consider the first review of newly approved carers and subsequent reviews referred by the fostering service or requested by the foster carer to recommend whether or not they remain suitable to act as foster carers and if the terms of approval remain appropriate
  - To oversee conduct of assessments undertaken by the Fostering Service
  - To monitor and advise on the procedures for undertaking Foster Carer reviews
  - Advise and make recommendations on any matters or cases referred to the panel by the fostering service
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- 1.3 Panel membership and the constituencies from which Panel Membership are covered in the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, Regulation 23. Every Fostering Service must keep a list of people who have the appropriate qualifications and experience to serve as panel member, known as the Central List.
- 1.4 The central list gives the flexibility for people with different skills, experiences and qualifications to make decisions regarding the issues being considered. Members of the Central list are chosen to be on particular panels due to their qualities relevant to the issues being considered.
- 1.5 The Fostering Panel must have at least 5 members present, including either the independent Panel Chair or a Vice Chair, and a social worker who has at least three years relevant post-qualifying experience (this means child care social work that includes direct experience of fostering or placing and supervising children in foster care). If the panel chair is not present and vice chair is not independent at least one other panel member must be independent. There is no limit on the maximum size of fostering panels.
- 1.6 Review Panel must have at least 2 members present including either panel Chair or Vice Chair
- 1.7 The Panels has access to -Legal Advisor, from the Corporate Services Department. The Legal Advisors are not Panel Members.

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- 1.8 The Fostering Team Manager acts as the Professional Advisor to the main and review Panels, attending both Panels. Her/his role is advisory and she/he is not a Panel Member. In the absence of the Professional Advisor, the Assistant Team Manager of the Fostering Team substitutes for her/him.
- 1.9 The Panel Chairperson must be independent from the Local Authority. The personal qualities and experience of fostering work of the Chairperson must be such that she/he commands the respect of other Panel members and can chair the Panel's meetings effectively. It is generally preferable for the Panel Chairperson to be a qualified social worker, though this is not specifically required by the Regulations, and is not essential. The recommendations from the Review Panel are ratified by the Agency Decision Maker with any significant issues being referred to the main panel.
- 1.10 A Vice Chairperson, who can act in the absence of the Chair, must be appointed for both panels. He/she must have experience in fostering work, command the respect of panel members and be effective in chairing meetings.  
  
The Vice Chairperson, like the Chair, cannot be involved in the agency's decision making process.
- 1.11 Whatever the constituency from which individual Panel members are drawn, Panel members need to develop knowledge and understanding of Fostering Agency functions and the wider context of Children's Social Care to children and their families. Panel members are required to consider detailed information in relation to children and adults, and to exercise judgement in respect of complex and important decisions. Panel members are expected to exercise their personal and professional skills and judgement when undertaking Panel business. Requirements are placed on Panel members to commit themselves to the important work of the panel and to attend Panel meetings regularly.
- 1.12 The organisation of membership of the Fostering Panels is delegated to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker personally appoints Panel members, following advice and recommendations from the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor. The only exception is in relation to elected councillor representatives who are appointed by the political parties.
- 1.13 The Agency Decision Maker appoints the Panel Chairperson, following successful application, checks and interview process.
- 1.14 Whilst the Central List is kept under regular review, panel members can be appointed for whatever period is felt appropriate by the Fostering Service.
- 1.15 On appointment Panel members will receive some induction training. The precise nature of the induction training will be determined and arranged by the Fostering Team Manger and the Panel Chair. The induction training will be tailored to the existing knowledge, experience and needs of the new Panel member. Panel members are reviewed annually by the Chair and Panel Advisor. Views about the Chair's performance are sought by the Agency Decision maker from Panel members and those who attend panel meetings i.e. social workers presenting reports, prospective foster carers.
- 1.16 An ongoing programme of training for Panel members is provided and Panel members are expected to attend. Panel members will be involved in discussion to determine the ongoing training needs for the Panels, but should take place at

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least annually. The Fostering Team Manger is responsible for organising the Panel Training Programme.

- 1.17 Panel members can resign at any time by giving one month's notice in writing, although they are encouraged to give as much notice as possible. Terminations of membership based on unsuitability must be given in writing. Panel members can resign or have their membership terminated but remain on the Central List. Any issues concerning a panel member's competence to continue in membership will be initially examined by the Panel Chairperson and Vice Chairperson and the Agency Decision Maker.
- 1.18 There is a written Guide for Fostering Panel members, which is issued to all new members on appointment, and is appended to this Procedure for general information.

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PROCEDURE	TASK ALLOCATION
<b>2 RECRUITMENT OF FOSTERING PANEL MEMBERS</b>	
<p><b>NOTE</b> Where reference is made to Chair of Panel, this will apply to Vice Chair where acting in absence of Panel Chair.</p> <p>2.1 Membership of the Central List allows flexibility for the fostering service. Members are recruited based on their skills, knowledge and experience relevant to fostering , is the responsibility of the Agency Decision maker with advice and guidance from the Professional Advisor to the Panels</p> <p>2.2 Recruitment is aimed at maintaining the statutory requirements in respect of the various constituencies of Panel members (see Section 1.3 of this Procedure).</p> <p>2.3 The system used for recruitment is the identification of potential suitable members by existing Panel members, professional staff in Children’s Social Care Services and appropriate others. Nominations for membership to the Central list are only accepted from Panel members and staff who have a detailed knowledge of fostering work and of the role, function and operation of the Fostering Panel. Within Children’s Social Care Services, the Senior Management Team nominates appropriate staff for Panel membership.</p> <p>2.4 Any person nominated for Panel membership is asked to provide two written references from appropriate people. The nominee may be requested to provide written information about their professional and personal qualifications for Panel membership. These are then shared with the Agency Decision Maker.</p> <p>2.5 The Agency Decision maker will inform applicants in writing of the decision about membership to the central list.</p>	<p>Agency Decision Maker Fostering Team Manager</p> <p>Panel Chair SMT</p> <p>Agency Decision maker</p> <p>Agency Decision Maker/ Panel Administrator</p>
<b>3 APPOINTMENT TO THE FOSTERING PANEL</b>	
<p>3.1 Once a decision has been made to appoint someone to join the Central list, the Panel Administrator will send her/him a letter of appointment on behalf of the Agency Decision Maker. The Panel Administrator will also send the new Panel Member a Panel pack comprising of relevant policies and procedures in respect of fostering work, the Guide for Panel members, and a confidentiality undertaking form. The new Panel member is required to respond to the letter of appointment in writing, accepting the appointment and returning the completed and signed confidentiality undertaking.</p>	<p>Panel Administrator Panel Member</p>

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PROCEDURE	TASK ALLOCATION
3.2 The Panel Chair and the Fostering Team Manager will consider with any new Panel Member what her/his induction and initial training needs are, and make appropriate arrangements to meet those needs.	Panel Chair Fostering Team Manager
<b>4 TERMINATION OF PANEL MEMBERSHIP</b>	
4.1 Panel members can resign at any time by giving one month's notice in writing, although they are encouraged to give as much notice as possible. Terminations of membership based on unsuitability must be given in writing. Panel members can resign or have their membership terminated but remain on the Central List. Any issues concerning a panel member's competence to continue in membership will be initially examined by the Panel Chairperson and Vice Chairperson and the Agency Decision Maker.	Panel Member Panel Chair
4.2 There may be circumstances in which a Panel member's fitness to serve on the Panel is raised. Examples of such circumstances would be relevant criminal proceedings or conviction and/or professional misconduct or inability to contribute effectively to the work of the Panel. If any such issues arise, panel members are expected to discuss the matter initially with the Panel Chair. As soon as it becomes known that a Panel member may no longer be considered fit to serve, the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor will discuss the matter in detail, seeking legal advice, if necessary. Any necessary information will be sought from the Panel member and other sources. The Panel Chair will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision maker about continuing panel membership and they will decide. The issues for debate are whether the Panel member can continue to command respect in the important role as Panel Member. Any issues in relation to Child Protection or potential or actual professional misconduct in the area of services for children and families will normally necessitate the removal of Panel membership.	Panel Member / Panel Chair / Agency Decision Maker / Legal Advisor / Panel Advisor
4.3 The Agency Decision Maker can decide to suspend Panel membership while investigations are continuing.	Agency Decision Maker
<b>5 RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT OF THE PANEL CHAIR</b>	
5.1 The Fostering Service is committed to the appointment of an independent person as Chair of the Fostering Panels. Independence means that the Chairperson is not an employee of the Local Authority, or other Borough Departments or Local Agencies which provide fostering services.	

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	<b>TASK ALLOCATION</b>
<p>It is expected that the Panel Chair will have extensive practice and management experience in relation to fostering work.</p> <p>5.2 The Panel Chair is appointed by the Agency Decision Maker, on successful completion of application / checks and interview.</p> <p>5.3 The Agency Decision Maker will negotiate any contractual arrangements in respect of the appointment of the Chair.</p> <p>5.4 There is no timescale on the period for which a Panel Chair can be appointed.</p>	<p>Agency Decision Maker</p> <p>Agency Decision Maker</p> <p>Agency Decision Maker</p>
<b>6 RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE CHAIR</b>	
<p>6.1 The Vice Chair needs to have many of the attributes of the Chair. He or she must have experience in fostering work, be able to command the respect of Panel members, and be effective in chairing meetings. There is not the same requirement of independence, as it applies to the Chair, however the Vice Chair must not be a part of the agency's decision making process in so far as the matters that are dealt with by the Panel.</p> <p>6.2 The Vice Chair is appointed by the Agency Decision Maker (following consultation with the Panel Chair).</p> <p>6.3 There is no timescale on the period for which a vice Panel Chair can be appointed.</p>	<p>Agency Decision Maker</p> <p>Agency Decision Maker</p>
<b>7 THE ROLE OF PANEL MEMBERS</b>	
<p>7.1 Detailed expectations on the role and function of Panel members are contained in the Guide for Fostering Panel members. Please consult the Guide which is contained as an Appendix to this Procedure. The Guide is issued to members of the Central list.</p>	<p>Panel Administrator</p>
<b>8 CONFIDENTIALITY</b>	
<p>8.1 The business of the Fostering Panels is confidential. Panel members are specifically required not to discuss information provided for the Panels or the business discussed in the Panels, except with fellow Panel members or relevant Service staff.</p>	<p>Panel Members</p>

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PROCEDURE	TASK ALLOCATION
<p>8.2 On appointment, each Panel member is requested to sign a confidentiality undertaking and return it to the Panel Administrator. The confidentiality undertakings are kept on the individuals Personnel Fostering Panel file in the Fostering Team.</p>	<p>Panel Administrator Panel Member</p>
<p><b>9 THE ROLE OF THE MEDICAL ADVISOR</b></p>	
<p>9.1 The role of the Medical Advisor to the Panels has specific elements to it, as well as the elements which are common to general Panel membership.</p>	
<p>9.2 A Medical Advisor sits on panel to advise. They are suitably medically qualified with knowledge and experience of working with children.</p>	
<p>9.3 The Medical Advisor is appointed through partnership with the Local Health Services and is normally a Clinical Medical Officer working in the Child Health Services.</p> <p>The Service Director will negotiate with the Health Services for nomination of a Medical Advisor. The Service Director will decide on the appointment</p>	<p>Agency Decision Maker</p>
<p>9.4 The Medical Advisor is required to obtain medical reports in respect of foster carers, and to advise the Panel on the health issues raised in individual reports, and their relevance in respect of fostering.</p>	<p>Medical Advisor</p>
<p>9.5 The Medical Advisor is required to comment on GP Medical Assessments of prospective Foster Carers and to write a written recommendation on the report, which should be made available to Panel Members as part of the decision making process of the suitability of applicants to Foster (either short or long term).</p>	<p>Medical Advisor</p>
<p>9.6 The Medical Advisor is also required to monitor the child's health during placement, to the extent considered necessary.</p>	<p>Medical Advisor</p>
<p>9.7 Children's Social Care Service is required to consult with the Medical Advisor when drawing up its policy and procedural instructions for the disclosure of health information. The Medical Advisor will then only disclose health information in accordance with the agreed policy and procedural instructions.</p> <p>This consultation will be undertaken by the Service Director and the Fostering Team Manager, as necessary.</p>	<p>Medical Advisor Service Director Fostering Team Manager</p>
<p>9.8 In obtaining health information, the Medical Advisor will use the BAAF medical forms.</p>	<p>Medical Advisor</p>
<p><b>10 THE ROLE OF THE LEGAL ADVISOR</b></p>	

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PROCEDURE	TASK ALLOCATION
10.1 Legal Advisors to the Fostering Panel are appointed by the Borough Solicitor from suitably qualified staff within the Legal Services Department.	
10.2 The Panel Legal Advisor will provide advice on all relevant legal matters in respect of fostering, and the specific individual issues considered by the Panel.	Legal Advisor
10.3 In most situations where Children's Social Care Services are seeking orders in relation to children (including those in PLO), the Legal Services Department will have been involved in the ongoing Child Care planning, and any legal proceedings.	
10.4 The Legal Advisor will provide a written report of any advice provided to or for the Fostering Panel. This written advice forms part of the Panel Meeting minutes.	Legal Advisor

## **11 THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR TO THE FOSTERING PANELS**

11.1 The Fostering Team Manager acts as Professional Advisor to the Fostering Panels. She/he is not a Panel member. She/he attends all meetings of both Panels and is represented by the Assistant Team Manager from the Fostering Team in her/his absence.	Fostering Team Manager
11.2 The Professional Advisor provides a wide range of information and guidance to the Panel in respect of professional social work matters relating to fostering work.	Fostering Team Manager
11.3 The Professional Advisor contributes to discussions in relation to individual items on Panel Agendas, but is not involved in decision making.	Fostering Team Manager
11.4 The Professional Advisor is involved in advising on potential Panel membership.	Fostering Team Manager
11.5 The Professional Advisor works closely with the Panel Chair and the Panel Administrator in ensuring that the business of the Panel is well organised and runs smoothly.	Fostering Team Manager
11.6 The Professional Advisor is responsible for Panel Training.	Fostering Team Manager

## **12 TRAINING FOR PANEL MEMBERS**

12.1 There is a commitment to providing regular training for all Panel members. The Panel Chair and the Professional Advisor will consult with Panel members on a regular basis to identify training needs. The Professional Advisor will arrange agreed training, in partnership with the Training Section, as	Panel Chair / Fostering Team Manager / Training
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PROCEDURE	TASK ALLOCATION
appropriate.	Section
<b>13 THE OPERATION OF THE MAIN PANEL</b>	
13.1 All Panel members are required to sign a confidentiality undertaking and return it to the Agency Decision Maker The confidentiality undertakings are kept on the individual's Fostering Panel file in the Fostering Team.	Panel Administrator
13.2 The Fostering Panel is quorate with five members, including one social worker employed by the Service and one independent members	Panel Administrator
13.3 Each Fostering Panel meets twice a month or more frequently if required. Usually on a Tuesday. Dates and times can be obtained by contacting the Fostering Panel Administrator .	Panel Administrator
13.4 Panel members are required to send their apologies if they are unable to attend the Panel meeting.	Panel Administrator
13.5 Training and developmental opportunities are provided for all Panel members from time to time and all members are expected to attend if at all possible. However, there is one required training session per year for members.	Panel Administrator
13.6 Additional Panels can be arranged outside the normal schedule to deal with urgent matters which cannot wait until the next regular meeting. If a responsible worker requires an additional Panel meeting she/he will contact the Panel Administrator who will contact the Panel Chair, agree a date, and arrange for other Panel members to attend.	Panel Administrator
13.7 If Panel members have any knowledge of either applicants or children being discussed on an agenda they must declare an interest to the Chair, and not take part in the discussion and recommendations.	All to note
13.8 The normal expectation is that it is useful and beneficial to the child's current carer to attend and that the current carer will normally be invited, and only not invited if there are specific reasons. If the current carer is unable to attend the Panel she/he should be asked to prepare a written report indicating her/his views and feelings on the proposed match.	All to note
13.9 Fostering Panel members will be consulted on the development of policies, procedures and practice guidance which are relevant to the work of the Panel.	All to note
<b>14 THE OPERATION OF THE REVIEW PANEL</b>	

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	PROCEDURE	TASK ALLOCATION
14.1	Panel Administrator keeps the outlook calendar in relation to reviews due up to date.	Panel Administrator
	-Be reviewed annually or more frequently if required. Any reviews where there are no significant issues go to Review	
14.2	It is the responsibility of Supervising Social Workers to be aware of the review timescales for carers on their caseload. They must also request supporting documentation (child's views, birth parents references, birth children questionnaires, Social Worker Reports, health and education reports at least 6 weeks in advance of the panel date.	
14.3	The Panel Administrator advises the Supervising Social Worker of the review panel slots for each Panels.	
14.4	The Supervising Social Worker completes the review document with the Foster Carer	Supervising Social Worker
14.5	The Supervising Social Worker books a place on the next available Review Panel, with the Review Panel Administrator	
14.6	The Foster Carer is encouraged to attend as it is their Review and the Supervising Social Worker is expected to attend	
14.7	<u>Once a panel date has been booked the Supervising Social Worker cannot cancel the date without first discussing the reasons with the Fostering Manager.</u>	
14.8	The Supervising Social Worker provides the Manager with the completed review documents <u>AND</u> an up to date copy of the Health and Safety checklist, Safer Caring Policy and Training Profile.	
14.9	The Manager signs the review document.	Manager
14.10	The Supervising Social Worker then gets the review signed by the foster carers	Manager / Supervising Social Worker
14.11	Supervising Social Worker invites Foster Carer to Panel.	Supervising Social Worker
14.12	It is the responsibility of the Supervising Social Worker to inform the carers of the time they are to attend Panel on receipt of the Agenda.	Supervising Social Worker
14.13	All paperwork will be sent out to the Review Panel members - one week prior to Panel.	
14.14	Slots for Review Panels will be twice a month, at the beginning or end of the main panel agenda.	

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PROCEDURE	TASK ALLOCATION
14.15 Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers are immediately informed of the Panel's recommendation to re-approve/ defer/ refer to main panel but are made aware that this is subject to the decision by the Agency Decision Maker.	
14.16 Agency Decision Maker will make their decision and sign the Recommendations.	Agency Decision Maker
14.17 The Panel Chair will sign the Minutes of previous meeting.	Panel Chair
14.18 The Panel Administrator will officially inform the Carer of the Panel's decision .	Panel Administrator
14.19 A copy of the Review and supporting documentation is kept on file (ICS) and a copy of the review is sent to the carer for their file.	
14.20 A copy of the Recommendation is filed on the carers file(their item only) (ICS)	
14.21 Panel Administrator retains a copy of the Recommendations and Minutes on the Panel file.	
14.22 Current Foster Carer List is updated with the date the review took place, date of Panel approval and any change of approval.	
14.23 At list of all reviews due are kept on the Panel outlook calendar	
14.24 Reviews due are discussed at each fostering team meeting and also in individual workers supervisions	