

Brighton & Hove City Council

For general release

Meeting: Children, Families & Schools Sub-Committee

Date: Monday 9 June 2003

Report of: Director of Children, Families & Schools

Subject: Fostering Service Annual Report

Ward(s) affected: All

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 The Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2002 govern the conduct of the Fostering Service provided by Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC). The regulations are made under sections 22 and 48 of the Care Standards Act (CSA) 2002 and the national minimum standards are issued under sections 23 and 49 of the Act. The Fostering Service is required by regulation to produce an annual report and inform members of its activity.

1.2 This report seeks member approval of the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose (Appendix one) and the revised Fostering Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference (Appendix two).

1.3 This report will also inform members of:

- National Developments including the implementation of the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards and the Choice Protects review
- Service Developments during the year
- Fostering activity during the year April 2002 – March 2003

1.4 This report should be read in conjunction with the Adoption Agency Annual Report as this includes details of carers who offer children permanence through long-term fostering.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose be approved.

2.2 That the revised Brighton and Hove Fostering Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference be approved and implemented immediately.

- 2.3 That the Committee nominates an elected member to attend the monthly fostering panel meetings as required by regulation 24(3)[c] of the Fostering Service Regulations.

3. National Developments

- 3.1 The Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2002 were implemented on 1st April 2002. These provided the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000(CSA) for the conduct of fostering services. The CSA extended the scope of regulations significantly to other services not previously registered, such as independent fostering agencies (IFA's), and provided for the (annual) inspection of local authority fostering services by the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC).

- 3.2 The national profile on fostering is high. There are 59,700 children in the care of Local Authorities in England (31 March 2002) and 39,200 (66%) of these children are in foster care. In February 2003 there were 451 children looked after by BHCC (including those in receipt of respite care) 76% of whom were being cared for by foster carers (including family and friends carers).

- 3.3 For the period ending March 2003 the Performance Assessment Framework statistics indicated that there were 350 children looked after by BHCC (as this figure excludes respite care and placements with friends and family carers) with 87.7% being cared for by foster carers. These figures demonstrate the critical role foster carers play in looking after some of the most vulnerable children in society.

- 3.4 In March 2002 Jacqui Smith, Health Minister, announced the *Choice Protects* review the aim of which is to help Local Authorities commission and deliver high quality placements for looked after children.

- 3.4.1. The *Choice Protects* review will ensure that the commissioning and provision of placements is seen in the context of the work already being carried out to reform and develop adoption services and the provisions in the Adoption and Children Act. It will sit alongside the work of the Social Exclusion Unit, currently working on the Education of Looked after Children.

- 3.4.2. A £113 million *Choice Protects* grant has been made available over a three-year period: £20 million in 2003-4, £33 million in 2004-5 and £60 million in 2005-6. BHCC will receive a grant of £104K for 2003/4.

4. Service Development

- 4.1 To ensure that the council complied with, and in some cases exceeded, the regulations and national minimum standards a detailed action plan was drawn up and has been almost fully implemented. This represents a significant amount of work for staff within the service with valuable input from carers.
- 4.2 A range of policy statements and practice guidelines have been reviewed or written (20 in total) in preparation for the distribution of a new comprehensive foster carer handbook. These handbooks will be issued to all carers in May 2003.
- 4.3 A Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service was written in consultation with the Departmental Management Team, foster carers, members of both the fostering panel and permanence panel and all staff within the fostering service. The final draft is appended and by regulation requires the approval of members. The Statement of Purpose must be reviewed annually.
- 4.4 The NCSC inspection of BHCC fostering services took place in February 2003. Although the written report is still awaited verbal feedback was positive with the council meeting all but one of the regulations and standards. Foster carers that were interviewed as part of the inspection reported favourably on the support they received.
- 4.5 The outstanding piece of work is a Children's Guide to the fostering service, which should be completed by September 2003.

5 FOSTER CARER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

- 5.1 *Fostering Network* has estimated that there is an 8,000 shortfall of foster carers across the country so the recruitment and retention of foster carers is a major issue facing every Local Authority. Further, the SSI report of Feb 02 'Fostering for the Future' concluded that *unless councils are providing a realistic scheme of support and payments that can stand comparison with other potential providers they will have increasing difficulty generating the quality of enquiries from prospective carers, or holding on to existing and experienced carer.*
- 5.1.1 Brighton and Hove City Council have 121 approved foster care units (i.e. couples or single carers) 69 of which provide short-term care. During February 2003, these (121) carers were caring for 209 children. A further 84 children were in placement with carers from other agencies which includes Barnardo's Link Plus (who provide short term and respite care to children with disabilities) and IFA's. In addition 47 children were living with friends and family carers.

5.1.2. A key objective of the fostering service over the past year has been to reduce the number of high cost agency placements and to develop a radical strategy to recruit more in-house foster carers.

5.2 Recruitment activity

5.2.1. Recruitment activity within the fostering team has continued to receive a high priority with regular advertisement and publicity campaigns.

5.2.2. Information sessions for prospective carers have been held 6 weekly in a variety of venues. Foster carers have continued to play a very active role in these and in the planning of recruitment campaigns.

5.2.3. The team conducted a high profile advertising campaign during National Foster Care Fortnight in June 2002. This did result in an increased number of initial enquiries in the subsequent months.

5.2.4. In February 2003 a marketing consultant was commissioned to design a new range of advertising and recruitment material. A new recruitment drive is planned for May 2003 to coincide with Foster Care Fortnight and the launch of the new foster carer payment structure.

5.2.5. In total the team received 196 fostering enquires, 57 units attended Information Sessions throughout the year, 42 home visits were conducted and 15 units attended Preparation Groups. Between April 2002-March 2003 six new foster care units were approved for short term fostering, one for Supported Lodgings and one for the Remand and Intensive Lodging Scheme.

5.3 Foster Carer payment scheme.

5.3.1. Recently, two important announcements that improve foster carers' financial security have been made.

5.3.2. On 17 March 2003 Work and Pensions Secretary, Andrew Smith, announced that Home Responsibility Protection would be extended to include foster carers. This means that the number of years they need to work to qualify for the state pension will be reduced to take into account their years of caring.

5.3.3. The Treasury announced on 27 March 2003 an income tax exemption for foster carers up to a certain threshold from this April. This change will ensure that all foster carers are taxed in the same way across the UK.

5.3.4. A consultant from Fostering Network, Pat Verity, was appointed to assist with a review of the foster carer payment scheme. On 8th January 2003 TMT and Leadership approved a revised scheme which will be launched at an awards ceremony for carers at the Royal Pavillion on 13th May 2003.

5.3.5. From 28 July 2003, payments to our foster carers will be increased significantly. The new payment scheme will make us competitive with independent fostering agencies and other local authorities, with payments ranging from £240 to £330 a week per child. This major investment in foster care by the council should improve future recruitment and retention of carers.

5.4 Foster care support package

5.4.1. Wide-ranging support services are provided for and with local foster carers to enable them to carry out the crucial task of fostering other people's children.

5.4.2. The new recruitment campaign gives particular emphasis to the support package, which includes a 24-hour on call service, a range of support groups for carers and their children, training and an enhanced service from the Placement Support Team.

5.5 Placement Support Team

5.5.1. Staffing levels in the team have expanded during the last year with plans to develop a weekend service to carers and children in placement.

5.5.2. The team provides services directly to children and young people through planned individual work. A range of group activities has also been provided during each school holiday. For example 100 places for LAC during the Easter 2003 holiday.

5.5.3. The team is developing a range of small group activities that take place after school and also provide a daily programme of support for LAC not in full-time education.

5.5.4. The team recently undertook a survey of carer's support needs. This has helped to inform future developments. For example a programme of support to carer's own children is currently being planned. This will include group discussions and fun activities and will be in place from the summer 2003.

5.5.5. Recent referrals to the team have included a significant group of young people placed in Friends and Family care. This presents a new challenge to the team and specialist training is being commissioned to develop skills in this area of work.

6. The Fostering Panel

Item No. 12 on agenda

- 6.1 The Fostering Panel annual report is attached (appendix three). By regulation the panel is required to share this report with members, foster carers, looked after children and their birth parents.
 - 6.2 The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 determined the composition and quoracy of Fostering Panels. This meant that the Brighton and Hove Fostering Panel (a joint panel between BHCC and Barnardos Link Plus [BLP]) had to adjust its membership to include an elected member and an Assistant Director from BLP. In line with best practice guidelines the panel now has an independent chairperson.
 - 6.2.1. Following the recent elections there is no longer an elected member on the panel; this vacancy needs to be recruited to urgently.
 - 6.2.2. With the departure of the Development Officer for the education of looked after children a vacancy currently exists on the panel. When this vacancy is recruited to the new post-holder will become a panel member.
 - 6.3 The Fostering Panel met twelve times last year and considered 96 items (appendix 4). A total number of 13 new approvals (excluding IFA carers) were given.
 - 6.4 A considerable amount of panel time (41%) has been spent considering those placements made with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). This has been necessary as the local authority has a statutory duty to satisfy itself with the quality of assessment and placement processes used by IFA's. The NCSC advised that it would have completed inspections of all agencies registered by March 2003 and that inspection reports would be available for placing agencies. In light of this has been decided that these matters will no longer be considered by the fostering panel on a routine basis but that an alternative quality assurance mechanism will be adopted with effect from April 2003.
 - 6.5 The Fostering Services Regulations made it a statutory requirement to establish a fostering panel and clearly details the role and function of the panel. The fostering panel Constitution and Terms of Reference has been amended in light of the regulations and standards. The revised Constitution and Terms of Reference (Appendix 2) must by regulation be endorsed by members.
- 7. Friends and Family carers.**
- 7.1 Friends and family carers (also referred to as Kinship carers) are playing an increasingly important role in providing placements for children. BHCC is currently reviewing the assessment process and support services for friends and family carers.

7.2 To assist in the complex tasks of undertaking consistent, speedy and high quality assessments of Friends and Family Carers a (small) designated team is being set up. The assessment of Friends and Family Carers will begin to be considered by the Fostering Panel in the forthcoming year.

8. Use of IFA's and commissioning strategy.

8.1 In March 2003 65 children were placed with IFA carers. There are currently 11 providers used, with one local provider, Families for Children, providing care for 39 children.

8.2 The manager for High Cost Agency Placements was appointed in December 2002 with a remit of reducing agency placement expenditure and developing a procurement strategy in respect of IFA's and residential providers.

8.3 The Directorate currently spot purchases most care provided by IFA's. There is potential to revise arrangements by having cost/volume contracts with providers and achieve Best Value in this area. The council is about to embark upon a process, with dedicated support from the Contracts Unit, to establish framework contracts and a preferred IFA provider list.

9. Training

9.1 Training sessions have been held for fostering service staff and panel members regarding the regulations and national minimum standards and the impact of these on practice.

9.2 A comprehensive training programme for foster carers has been provided. However, attendance at foster carer training has been poor which as resulted in a number of courses having to be cancelled. The revised payment scheme includes financial reward for training and experience and early indications are that this will have a positive effect on the number of carers accessing core training.

10 Complaints and allegations against foster carers.

10.1 A total of four complaints and allegations against foster carers were received for the period April 2002 – March 2003. All of these matters have been dealt with satisfactorily and there are no outstanding issues.

11 Consultation

11.1 The Brighton and Hove Fostering Panel
Representatives from Fostering Network
Foster Carers
Officers within Accommodation Services

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| Meeting/Date | Children Families & Schools 9 th June 2003 |
| Report of | David Hawker |
| Subject | Fostering Service Annual Report 2002 |
| Wards affected | All |

Financial implications

The new foster care payments scheme is being launched on 1st July 2003, at a cost of £578,700 in 2003/2004. The full year cost of the increase in rates is estimated at £771,400. The Policy and Resources Committee agreed additional funding for high cost agency placements of £500k for new placements in 2003/2004. If the number of agency placements remain at the current level, this funding could be used to partially fund the new scheme leaving a further £79k to be identified in 2003/2004 and £271k in 2004/2005. Numbers of children in Agency Placements, however have been increasing for the past three years and it is possible that all of the new resources will be required to finance new placements. Additional funding will also need to be identified to cover the costs of the increase in payments for Residence Orders of £124k in 2003/2004 rising to £165k in 2004/2005.

David Ellis April 2003

Legal implications

The proposals in this report ensure that Brighton and Hove City Council meets all of its obligations under the Children Act 1989 and the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2002

Natasha Watson April 2003

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| Corporate/City-wide implications | Risk assessment |
| Fostering Services are provided citywide and support services do require a corporate Council approach. | None |
| Sustainability implications | Equalities implications |
| None | There is a legal requirement for the local authority to provide foster carers who can reflect a child's religious persuasion, racial origin, and cultural and linguistic background. The council actively encourages foster carer applications from citizens from a wide range of backgrounds |
| Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder | |
| None | |

Background papers

1. Report to TMT/Leadership January 2003 'Foster Care Payments'
2. No other unpublished papers have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report.

Contact Officers

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APPENDIX 1

FOSTERING SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT

FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

**Accommodation Service
253 Preston Road
Brighton**

June 2003

Key aims and principles

- 1.1 A child's welfare is the paramount consideration. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving and caring family, which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond. The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child or young person are at the centre of Brighton and Hove's Fostering Service. Children come from a wide range of cultural, racial, linguistic and religious backgrounds; therefore the Fostering Service will endeavour to recruit carers who reflect this.
- 1.2 Brighton & Hove City Council, with other agencies and community groups, will work to ensure that a comprehensive range of services are provided to support birth families to provide safe and appropriate care for their children. Developing a coherent family support strategy remains a key aim of the Children, Families & Schools department.
- 1.3 Where children or young people are not able to live safely with their birth parents then active consideration will be given to that child being cared for within the wider family or friendship network. The Children, Families and Schools department is working to develop and enhance the service provided to kinship carers.
- 1.4 Where children or young people are not able to remain with their birth family or be placed within the wider family network a family placement with foster carers will be sought. Good childcare planning is essential to prevent children drifting in the care system.
- 1.5 All Looked after Children will have a Care Plan that will be drawn up at a care-planning meeting that must take place either before or within 7 working days of the child becoming looked after. The wishes of the child will be taken into account as appropriate in drawing up the care plan. The birth family should be involved in the care planning process and their views represented.
- 1.6 The Care Plan will be reviewed at every Looked after Child Review and at the 4-month review the plan for permanence will be addressed. This plan will be based on the needs of the individual looked after child and will include consideration of permanence being achieved by return to birth family or through permanent foster care or adoption. Clear timescales will be drawn up to expedite the permanence planning.
- 1.7 Consideration will be given in the care planning and reviewing process of the need to access appropriate specialist services for looked after children and their carers. These services should be provided in a non-stigmatising and enabling manner.
- 1.8 The views and wishes of the child should be sought by a range of age appropriate means. The Children's Rights Service and Advocacy service will continue to play a key role in promoting the wishes and views of looked after children and enabling their voice to be heard.
- 1.9 The Fostering Service will aim to provide a diverse and wide range of safe, caring, stable and nurturing family placements to meet the needs of Brighton

and Hove's looked after children. This will include respite carers, short term and task focused carers and permanent carers. The Fostering and Permanence team will work in collaboration with colleagues in the leaving care team, youth offending team and the Barnardo's Link plus team to ensure that an appropriate range of carers are recruited to meet the range of different placements needed.

- 1.10 Foster carers will be carefully recruited and trained and given access to a range of support services to enable them to provide high quality care to the children placed with them.
- 1.11 Foster carers will be trained and supported to enable them to work sensitively with the child to accept the child for who they are and promote their cultural, racial and religious identity.
- 1.12 Foster carers will be supported to enable them to focus on the individual child's needs and work within the child's care plan to develop the child's full potential. Children in foster care should have access to a wide range of educational resources and facilities to provide the maximum opportunity for them to achieve and develop their skills and fulfil their aspirations.
- 1.13 Foster carers will be trained and supported to enable the child to make full use of educational, health, leisure, creative and sporting activities to develop their skills and self-esteem and work towards overcoming the possible traumas of past experiences.
- 1.14 The care plan for looked after children will always address the plans for contact with family, friends or important individuals from the child's past. Good care planning to promote and sustain appropriate contact arrangements is clearly associated with stability for the child and good outcomes. Foster carers will be trained and supported to enable them to work with the child's birth family as appropriate and deal with this issue sensitively with the child or young person.
- 1.15 Foster carers will work to provide safe, caring and appropriate boundaries for the child. This will help to promote their child's physical and emotional health and educational achievement and to encourage the child to develop independence skills.
- 1.16 The Fostering service will work with others to minimise disruption for looked after children and maximise their opportunity to achieve a permanent and stable family life style. Factors that are significant in achieving this will be the need for good assessment of the child's needs and careful matching with foster carers. Enhanced, specialist and multi-agency services will be provided for carers and looked after children as appropriate in line with the care planning process.
- 1.17 The Fostering service will aim to ensure that full information is provided by the child's social worker about the child's background and family and placement needs, including previous and current health history, to inform the matching process and enable the carers to work to meet the individual needs of the child in placement.

1.18 The Fostering service will aim to work in partnership with foster carers in an open and reliable manner. Foster carers will be involved in planning and developing the service and kept informed about practice and policy developments. They will also be kept informed about the wider departmental developments and encouraged to feel an integral part of the new Children, Families and Schools department.

2. Fostering Service: Specific services and facilities.

2.1 The Fostering Service is an integral part of the Accommodation services and staff within the service have as their primary role the recruitment, assessment, training, support and supervision of carers alongside the provision of a placement and family finding service for social work staff on behalf of looked after children or children needing to be looked after.

2.1.1 Recruitment

2.1.1.1 The Fostering Service will co-ordinate an active and inclusive recruitment campaign to meet the diverse needs of Brighton and Hove's looked after children. Enquiries from prospective carers will be welcomed from a wide range of the population including couples with or without children, single parents, single men or women, lesbians and gay men, unemployed people, people from all ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities, older people including those with grown up children.

2.1.1.2 The Fostering Service will provide a range of recruitment information for prospective carers. This will include the development of Internet based information and a CD-ROM with video clips of carers talking about their experiences of fostering. The recruitment information will describe the whole range of fostering and adoptive placements that are needed. Staff within the service will respond to enquiries promptly and hold regular information sessions for prospective carers. These information and recruitment events will always include input from experienced carers.

2.1.1.3 The Fostering Service will continue to place a high priority on the recruitment of carers and will regularly review the recruitment strategy and initiatives. A wider pool of carers enables the service to provide locally based family placements for children which take a greater account of their specific matching needs.

2.1.2 Assessment and preparation of carers

2.1.2.1 All potential prospective carers will have an initial home assessment visit to discuss their interest in fostering in more detail. The service will run regular 'preparing to foster' training groups. Similar preparation training groups will also be run for prospective permanent and adoptive carers and for concurrent carers. These training events will always include input from a range of experienced carers and prospective carers will also be given the opportunity to link up with individual experienced carers as appropriate.

- 2.1.2.2 The Fostering Service has comprehensive procedures in place for the assessment of prospective carers and all staff receive training and regular supervision on this aspect of the work. The assessment procedures are evidence and competency based and includes specific verification checks that comply with the requirements of Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. A detailed assessment report is presented to either the Fostering or Permanence Panel.
- 2.1.2.3 The Fostering and Permanence Panels are constituted to comply with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and are both chaired by a suitably qualified and experienced independent chairperson. Both Panels have the services of professional advisors that do not have operational management responsibility within the service and play a vital quality assurance role.
- 2.1.2.4 The Fostering Panel meets monthly and the Permanence Panel fortnightly. The Permanence Panel considers the approval of permanent foster carers and the matches of children under the age of 12 with permanent carers as detailed in Brighton and Hove's Permanence and Adoption Policy Statement.
- 2.1.2.5 Both the Fostering and Permanence Panels have written Constitutions and Terms of Reference and practice guidance as appropriate. Both Panels encourage the prospective carers to attend and ensure recommendations and decisions are communicated to the prospective carers both verbally and in writing in line with the legal requirements.
- 2.1.2.6 Both the Fostering and Adoption Service prepare annual reports. The Adoption Agency report is presented annually to members. From 2003 both the Fostering and Adoption services will present annual reports to Children, Families and Schools Committee. These reports will incorporate reports on the activities of both Panels prepared by the independent Chair of Panel.
- 2.1.3 Matching and Placement of Children**
- 2.1.3.1 The Fostering Service provides a daily duty service to social work staff needing an emergency or short term/ task focused placement for a child. Full information is taken about the placement needs of the child and consideration is given of all appropriate in- house placements. As far as possible children will be placed locally to enable them to sustain appropriate contact with family and friends and minimise any disruption to their school and leisure pursuits.
- 2.1.3.2 When an appropriate in- house provision is not available the Fostering service will seek a placement with a local independent fostering provider or on occasions a residential provider. The department has a contract with Barnardos to provide a respite link scheme and some long term fostering provision for children with disabilities. The department is developing procurement and commissioning strategy with the independent sector and considering a joint commissioning strategy with neighbouring authorities.

- 2.1.3.3 The Fostering team runs a weekly Children Awaiting Placement meeting to consider all the children that are waiting for short term or task focused placements. The Permanence team take referrals on children under the age of 12 needing a permanent foster or adoptive placement. Permanency Planning meetings are convened to consider the detailed matching needs and the family finding strategy. Staff in the Permanence team take the lead role in family finding for children on referral to the team.
- 2.1.3.4 Fostering and Permanence team staff will work collaboratively to ensure that fostering resources are fully used to best meet the needs of looked after children. Short term foster carers that are caring for children that require a permanent placement will always be considered as potential permanent carers for that child if that is their wish and it meets the needs of the child. Specific procedures for the re-assessment of short-term carers offering permanency have been drawn up and agreed with Permanence Panel.

2.1.4 Training for carers

- 2.1.4.1 It is essential that all carers are given the opportunity to take up a range of training courses and access training materials to enhance their skills and abilities as carers and give them the opportunity for further development.
- 2.1.4.2 Key training courses will be mandatory following approval and other training courses and events will be planned as appropriate. A dedicated member of the training section will take lead responsibility for foster care training and ensure full information is sent to carers about forthcoming training events. Training will need to be delivered in a variety of ways and formats to allow for maximum participation.
- 2.1.4.3 It is good practice where possible to plan for carers and family placement and fieldwork staff to train together to further develop partnership work and increase the understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.
- 2.1.4.4. The new foster care fee payment scheme will be linked to the take up of post approval training and work will also be undertaken to support and encourage carers to access the appropriate NVQ award.
- 2.1.4.5 Supervising social workers will regularly discuss carers' training needs on their visits to carers and a separate section of the foster carers annual review documentation will address carers training and development needs. This will inform the development of future foster carer training plans.
- 2.1.4.6 Foster carers will also be trained and supported to deliver training themselves to other carers and appropriate professionals.

2.1.5 Support services to carers

- 2.1.5.1 Foster care allowances will be reviewed annually and full guidance on foster care payments and allowances will be provided to all carers. The current allowance scheme was fully reviewed in 2002 with the assistance

of a consultant from Fostering Network. The views of foster carers were canvassed and a group of carers took an active role in drawing up the principles of the new scheme. The new allowance and fee payment scheme will come into operation in July 2003. Full and detailed guidance on the new scheme will be provided for all carers and staff before that date.

- 2.1.5.2. All foster carers will have an allocated supervising social worker that will visit or make contact with the carer at monthly intervals or more frequently as required. They will ensure that they are accessible and available to carers and that carers have the name of their supervisor to contact if they are unavailable for any reason. The supervising social worker will liaise closely with the social worker or workers for the children in placement.
- 2.1.5.3. The supervising social worker will have responsibility for the organisation of the foster carers' annual review and ensure that all the components of the review are completed as appropriate including the reports from the carers, the carers own children and children in placement. The foster care reviews will be taken back to the Fostering Panel as necessary. The first review after approval will always go back to Panel, in addition, Panel will also consider the reviews of foster carers where there have been specific and significant complaints, allegations or standards of care issues or other major changes in circumstances.
- 2.1.5.4 The Placement Support team has a key role in providing a range of enhanced support services to looked after children and carers. They will work with individual children and groups of children to support them in their placement, provide them with an opportunity to access a range of sporting, creative and leisure activities to promote their physical and emotional well being. They will work closely with carers to ensure that children in placement are given the maximum opportunity to reach their potential and build sustainable stable relationships with their carers.
- 2.1.5.5 The Placement Support team will take on responsibility for the distribution of 'listen up' cards to looked after children which are aimed at enabling looked after children to take up use of local leisure facilities.
- 2.1.5.6 Support services provided by the Placement Support team and the Fostering service will be kept under review to ensure that the views of carers, children and social workers and other key professionals are taken into account. The Placement Support team will aim to work with carers and children to enable looked after children to be supported to access local community mainstream provision.
- 2.1.5.7 The Placement Support team will continue to provide a comprehensive holiday activities programme for looked after children and plan to enhance the service so that it can further extend to the carers own children as appropriate and children in placement with kinship carers. The team will also look to recruit staff that can provide activities and support to children in placement and their carers at weekends.
- 2.1.5.8 Staff in the accommodation service will work with carers, parents and the social worker for the child to ensure that the child or young person has full

access to educational provision. The fostering service will continue to work with colleagues from within the Children, Families and Schools department to promote the needs of looked after children within the educational service. This will include close liaison with the Development Officer for LAC and the facilitation of the role she has in working with carers to help them promote and improve the educational opportunities for children in their care.

- 2.1.5.9 The fostering service will also work closely with the Nurse Consultant for Looked after Children to ensure carers are kept informed about health issues and are working actively to promote the health of the child or children in placement.
- 2.1.5.10 The Fostering service will continue to provide an out of hours 'on call' service for carers. This supplements the service provided by the Emergency Duty Team which provided out of hours social services cover across East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. The Fostering Service's out of hours service would be the first port of call for carers needing advice or support.
- 2.1.5.11 The Fostering Service will provide and facilitate a range of support groups for carers. Currently the service runs groups for carers of children under 11 years of age and over 11 years of age and a specific group for lesbian and gay foster carers and adopters. These services will be reviewed regularly with carers and can extend to meet the needs of kinship carers as appropriate.
- 2.1.5.12 The Fostering Service will continue to meet the annual cost of subscribing to the carers' organisation, Fostering Network, for all Brighton and Hove approved carers. This enables carers to use the advice and support services provided by Fostering Network and receive their literature. The Fostering Service will continue to work with the local Fostering Network group and facilitate the group's development and the support it can provide to carers locally. The Fostering Service will ensure local carers are fully consulted on developments in the service and will work with Fostering Network nationally to promote the growth of the local organisation.
- 2.1.5.13 The Fostering Service will work to ensure that carers are kept fully informed about developments in the service. A regular newsletter will continue to be produced for carers and carers will also receive the Children, Families and Schools departmental magazine. The service will continue to look at ways of improving communication with carers including the development of a website for Brighton and Hove carers, www.care4children.org.uk, and the expansion of the use of electronic communication. The website will eventually contain recruitment information as well as training material and information for existing carers.
- 2.1.5.14 Foster carers will be provided with access to a computer for the looked after children in their care. Safe internet use guidelines have been developed for carers and children and software restricting internet access will provided as appropriate.

2.1.5.15 The Fostering Service recognises the significant role played by the carers' own children in the fostering task and the pressures this can bring to the family. The team will endeavour to take account of the needs of carers' own children when planning services and develop specific services for 'children who foster'.

2.1.5.16 The Fostering service employs a community family worker to provide a range of practical support to foster carers including help with transporting children and supporting carers meet the specific needs of children in their care.

2.2 Other services within the Accommodation teams

2.3 The Accommodation service will also provide specialist services to meet the needs of particular groups of looked after children.

2.4 The Special Placement Scheme provides an enhanced package of support to some carers offering permanency to harder to place children. This package includes an intensive support service provided by the social worker managing the scheme, support for regular respite care with carers and sessional work support as appropriate.

2.5 The Concurrency team recruits, assesses, supervises and supports foster-adopters for children 0 – 2 years. Concurrency carers are approved as both foster carers and adopters and care for children on a fostering basis where concurrency has been agreed as the care plan in court. They are prepared and able to adopt the child if the rehabilitation with birth family is not possible.

2.6 The Attachment team is a small multi disciplinary team that provides therapeutic and support services to looked after children and their permanent carers, including adoptive carers, permanent foster carers and kinship carers. The Attachment team also provides consultancy to staff and provide some input into carers preparation and training groups.

2.7 The Fostering service currently has a contract with St Gabriel's Family Project, a local Children's Society resource, to provide individual therapeutic services for a number of looked after children alongside support services for their carers. St Gabriel's staff also provides supervision to staff running support groups for carers.

3 Accommodation service staff

3.1 The teams within the service will work collaboratively to provide an integrated and co-ordinated service to carers, looked after children and fieldwork staff.

3.2 Staff from the various teams will be involved in the review, planning and development of the service. A range of training courses will be provided across the teams to facilitate staff development and aid the ability of staff to keep updated on the changing legal framework, practice guidance and the increasing body of relevant research. All staff are appropriately qualified to carry out their tasks within the service.

- 3.3 The management team, including Service Managers, Practice Managers and Development Officers within the service will meet monthly with the Head of Service to discuss operational and policy matters and ensure the continued integrated development of the service.
- 3.4 Managers within the service are sufficiently experienced social worker practitioners and have access to managerial training courses. The Head of Service is an experienced manager and social work practitioner. There are clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the service.
- 3.5 The Head of Service is Sharon Donnelly and can be contacted at the Fostering and Adoption Service, Brighton and Hove City Council, 253 Preston Road, Brighton BN1 6SE. Telephone number 01273 295444, email sharon.donnelly@brighton-hove.gov.uk

4. Statistical Information relating to activities of the Fostering Service

- 4.1 The Annual Fostering Service report will provide detailed statistics relating to the number of foster carers and recruitment activity within the year.

5. Complaints procedure

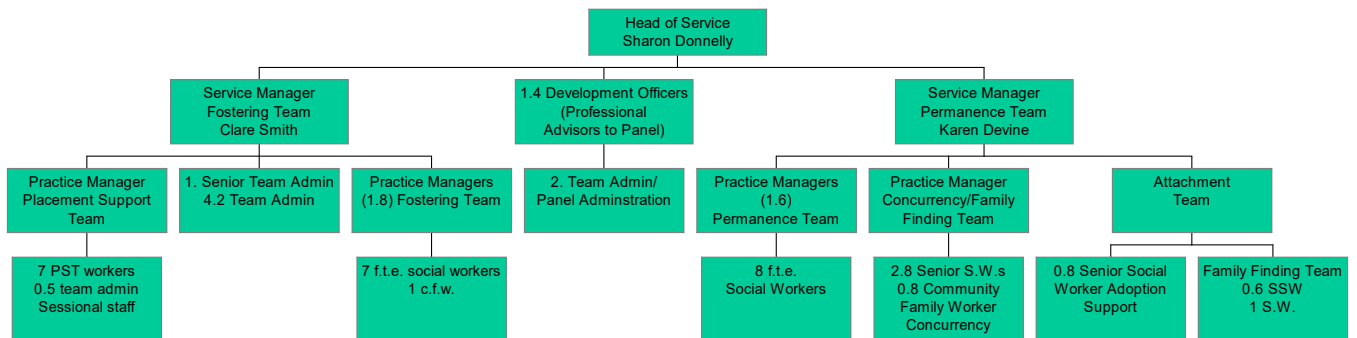
- 5.1 Users of our Adoption Services, including children, birth families, prospective and approved adopters and adopted adults, are provided with copies of the complaints procedure, advised how to access the procedure and encouraged to invoke it if unhappy with services provided. Service users are advised that independent sources of support are available to help them make a complaint and advocate on their behalf if they feel unconfident making a complaint by themselves, including access to the Post Adoption Centre and the Children's Rights Service. Service users are advised that the Customer Services Manager who oversees the complaints procedure can be contacted at:
Royal York Buildings,
Old Steine,
Brighton BN1 1NH
Freephone 0800 072 9960

6. National Care Standards Commission

- 6.1 The Fostering Service will be inspected by the National Care Standards Commission in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations and the National Minimum Standards. These inspections will take place on a yearly basis. Inspection reports are public documents.
- 6.2 The National Care Standards Commission office responsible for inspecting fostering services provided by Brighton and Hove City Council can be contacted at:
East Sussex Area Office,
Ivy House,
3 Ivy Terrace,
Eastbourne,
East Sussex BN21 4QT.

Telephone – 01323 636200

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APPENDIX 2

FOSTERING PANEL CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Brighton & Hove Fostering Panel

CONSTITUTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

1 Aims and Objectives

- 1.1 The aim of the Brighton and Hove Fostering Panel is to oversee the provision of quality Fostering, Supported Lodgings, RAILS and Family Link Services to children and young people looked after by the local authority.
- 1.2 The role of the Panel is to make recommendations regarding the approval, review and termination of approval of Foster Carers, and Supported Lodgings, RAILS and Family Link Carers. All recommendations will be made in accordance with the Children Act 1989, the National Fostering Regulations and Minimum Standards (April 2002) and departmental policy.
- 1.3 The Panel will be rigorous in monitoring quality standards and will contribute to the development of good practice.
- 1.4 The Panel will be committed to anti-discriminatory practice and to ensuring that the welfare of the child is paramount.
- 1.5 The Panel will be transparent in its decision-making processes.

2 Membership of the Fostering Panel

- 2.1 The Brighton and Hove Fostering Panel is a joint panel between Brighton and Hove City Council and Barnardos Brighton and Hove Link Plus. Accordingly the Panel will have no more than 11 members, comprising of:
 - Independent Chair
 - Elected Member of the local authority
 - Qualified Social Worker (Fieldwork – local authority)
 - Qualified Social Worker (Accommodation – local authority)
 - Qualified Social Worker (Fostering) - Barnardo's representative
 - Qualified Social Worker (Fieldwork) – Barnardo's representative
 - Registered provider, or nominated officer, Barnardos Link Plus
 - Foster Carer (From another local authority) *
 - Service User (Young Person/Parent Who has experienced Care system)*
 - Education representative*
 - Health Representative (Nurse Consultant for Looked After Children)*

* These representatives are the nominated independent members.

A Professional Advisor and Panel Administrator will also be in attendance.

- 2.2 The Panel will nominate a Vice Chair from those people listed in 2.1 who will chair meetings in the absence of the Chair.
- 2.3 The Panel will aim to have a balance in terms of gender, race, culture and religion and should reflect the diversity of the community it serves.
- 2.4 The fostering panel shall conduct no business unless at least six of its members are present. The following representatives **must** be present for the panel to be considered quorate:
 - Chair or Vice Chair
 - One social worker from the local authority
 - One social worker from Barnardos
 - Two of the independent members
- 2.5 The Professional Advisor will appoint panel members (in conjunction with the Chair).
- 2.6 All Panel members will be appointed for a three-year term of office and will be asked to sign a contract. Panel members should not hold office for more than two terms. The Chair and/or the Professional Advisor may raise issues about performance or attendance with Panel members. Any concerns will normally be raised in private.
- 2.7 Panel members should always declare an interest where they have direct knowledge of a matter being presented. The Chair will decide whether that interest is such as to debar the Panel member from discussion or decision making in respect of that item.
- 2.8 Independent members who do not attend panel as part of their employment will receive an expenses payment of £10 for each hour of attendance. This will be paid on receipt of an invoice. This payment will cover all transport, parking, childcare and other costs associated with attendance.

3 Advisors to the Fostering Panel

- 3.1 The Fostering Panel will have access to medical advice regarding applicants and carers via the Family Placement Team. The Medical Advisor will see all medical reports and be given the opportunity to comment on these.
- 3.2 Legal advice will be sought from a lawyer within the local authority as necessary. A nominated representative from the Legal Section will link

with the Fostering Panel, and where appropriate will be invited to join specific meetings.

- 3.3 The Professional Advisor will usually be a Development Officer from the Accommodation Service. The Advisor will give advice on protocol and procedure legislation and policy. They will sift through the reports tabled for the Panel meeting and will recommend withdrawal or deferral of cases where there are serious outstanding matters and where appropriate inform the relevant Service Manager and/or the Chair.
- 3.4 Any Advisor to the Panel should not vote or take part in the decision making process.

4 Role and Function of Fostering Panel

- 4.1 The Panel will recommend approval/non approval of applications from prospective Foster Carers, and Supported Lodgings, RAILS and Family Link Carers. These recommendations will be made to the relevant decision-maker for each Fostering Service Provider. The decision-maker for the local authority will be Fiona Johnson (Head of Child Protection, Policy, Development and Quality Assurance) and for Barnardos Link Plus will be Gina Armstrong (Team Leader).
- 4.2 Recommendations regarding the approval of carers must include the terms of approval, which will be specified as follows:-
- Short-term
 - Respite Care
 - Supported Lodgings
 - RAILS
 - Barnardo's Link Plus
- 4.3 The recommendation regarding the terms of approval must also include:-
- - Age Range
 - Gender
 - Number of Placements
- 4.4 The Panel will make recommendations regarding the continued suitability of all Brighton and Hove City Council and Barnardos Link Plus foster carers following their first (six-monthly) review.
- 4.5 The Panel will also make recommendations concerning:-
- i) The continued approval of any Foster Carer where a **significant** complaint, allegation of abuse or standards of care issue has

been raised. Termination of approval will be recommended where necessary.

- ii) Any Foster carer review where there has been a significant change in the carer's circumstances and/or which highlights particularly complex or contentious issues.
 - iii) Any proposed change to the original terms of the Foster Carer's approval.
 - iv) Any case or matter referred to it by the fostering service provider under regulation 26 (2)[c], 28(8), 29(5), and 29(9) of the Fostering Services Regulations.
- 4.6 The Panel will be notified of all resignations of Foster Carers no longer wishing/able to foster for Brighton and Hove City Council or Barnardo's Link Plus.
- 4.7 The Panel will consider and make recommendations regarding exemptions from the usual fostering limit, which exceed six weeks.
- 4.8 The Panel will monitor the quality of assessments and foster care being offered and give feedback where appropriate to the relevant Service Manager and/or Fostering Service Provider decision maker. As part of this quality assurance role the panel will also consider, normally on a random basis, some of the placements made with carers who are registered with Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 4.9 The Panel will monitor the range and type of carers available in comparison with the needs of children.
- 4.10 The Panel will produce a yearly report detailing relevant statistical information, analysis of trends and evaluation of the quality of the Fostering Service being provided to children and young people.

5 Operation of Fostering Panel Meetings

- 5.1 The Fostering Panel will meet on a monthly basis and will normally last for three hours.
- 5.2 The designated Fostering Panel Administrator (Personal Assistant) will minute panel meetings. Minutes must be agreed by Panel members. The Professional Advisor will hold a central record of all minutes of the Fostering Panel and the Panel Administrator will collect the relevant statistical data.
- 5.3 Tabling of reports and agenda items must be agreed between the Fostering Service Provider and the Professional Advisor. Panel members will receive copies of the agenda and all reports/papers at least one week in advance of the meeting.

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- 5.4 Applicants should attend the panel meeting when their assessment is being considered; only in exceptional circumstances will the panel make a recommendation regarding the suitability of applicants who do not attend.
- 5.5 Approved foster carers will be encouraged to attend the panel meeting when their first foster carer review, subsequent review or any other relevant information regarding the care they provide is being considered. Carers are welcome to bring a representative or friend with them if they so wish.
- 5.6 Panel members will consider each case and identify issues for discussion before inviting practitioners and applicants/carers to join the meeting. If a practitioner has any information that needs to be shared with the panel confidentially he/she should inform the Professional Advisor of this prior to the meeting. When necessary, time will be allocated for the practitioner to address the panel without the applicant/carer being present.
- 5.7 The Chair will facilitate the discussion and provide immediate feedback to the applicant/carer of the panel's recommendation.
- 5.8 The Panel will carry out its role and functions by making recommendations on the basis of consensus. Minutes of the meeting will state whether the recommendation was unanimous or not. Any dissenting views will be clearly detailed and communicated to the agency decision-maker for consideration. The Chair has the power to defer a decision if, in his/her view the Panel is not in a position to make a proper judgement on the information before the Panel.
- 5.9 In addition to making recommendations on approvals, reviews and terminations the Panel may make recommendations on practice, procedures, or other matters relevant to the provision of a high quality fostering service.

6 Confidentiality

- 6.1 All information presented to the Panel is confidential and Panel members must respect this.
- 6.2 All documentation and reports should be returned to the Panel Administrator at the end of the meeting.

7 Notification of Panel Decisions

- 7.1 All recommendations made by the Fostering Panel must be notified, via draft panel minutes and a verbal briefing session, to the relevant Fostering Service Provider decision-maker within five working days of

the Panel meeting. The decision-maker will write to the applicants/carers with six working days of the panel meeting confirming his/her decision.

- 7.2 Applicants/carers will be told verbally of the panel's recommendation immediately. However, it should be made very clear that the Panel can only make a recommendation and that the final decision rests with the relevant decision-maker.

8 Representations

- 8.1 Where an applicant/carer is not in agreement with the decision of the fostering service provider, and/or the Fostering Panel's recommendation he/she should write directly to the agency decision-maker. The relevant Fostering Service Provider decision-maker will meet with them to discuss their concerns.

- 8.2 Where the applicant/carer is still dissatisfied, the matter will be referred back to the panel within 28 days of the original written notification of the decision. The panel will re-consider the matter taking into account the applicant's/carer's comments and concerns and will make a further recommendation. This recommendation will be communicated to the relevant Assistant Director who will make the final decision.

- 8.3 Where a practitioner is not in agreement with a recommendation made by the Fostering Panel and wishes to pursue the matter, this should be directed through to their line manager and the Chair of the Fostering Panel informed.

9 Decisions Regarding Approval Outside the Panel

- 9.1 Agreement to extend a Foster Carers approval range (i.e. age range, gender or number of places) may be made by the Fostering Service Provider decision-maker where the circumstances of individual children require this. The Panel Advisor must report these decisions back to the next Panel.

- 9.2 Exemptions to the usual fostering limit not exceeding six weeks may be agreed by the Head of Service (Accommodation) or the Assistant Director, Children's Services, Barnardos respectively and reported back to the next available Panel.

- 9.3 Any interim placements made under Regulation 38.2 must be reported back to the next Panel by the Panel Advisor.

10 Training

- 10.1 The Professional Advisor to the Panel will take responsibility for the co-ordination of training events for Panel members in liaison with the Chair. The training should consider both practice and process issues. When the Panel is first established or a number of new members join, the training will necessarily need to be more frequent than when the Panel becomes mature in its process.

11 Review

- 11.1 The Chair, relevant Assistant Directors and Professional Advisor will monitor the operation of the Fostering Panel and its effectiveness. The Constitution and Terms of Reference will be formally reviewed annually in the yearly report.

APPENDIX 3

FOSTERING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2002 – 2003

BRIGHTON & HOVE FOSTERING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2002 – 2003

Introduction

This report covers the period from 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2003. During this period the panel has had to operate within the new Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards. The panel has also had changes of panel personnel. This report briefly summarises the work of the panel over this period including any policy and practice matters.

Composition of the Panel

From April 2002 to July 2002 the panel was chaired by a Brighton & Hove Service Manager. In June a decision was taken by the Council to move to a system of independent chairs for both its Fostering and Permanence panels and therefore an independent chair, Gill Harris, was appointed in June 2002. Under the new Regulations the panel operates as a joint panel with Barnardo's and therefore this has necessitated some changes in panel personnel to comply with the Regulations. There have also been changes in panel membership for other reasons. Over the course of the year Doris O'Hare (foster carer) and Liz Woolford (Brighton & Hove council officer, education) have left the panel. The current panel membership is:

- Gill Harris, Independent Chair
- Wayne Sampson, Barnardo's officer, Vice-Chair
- Coun Frieda Warman-Brown, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Toni Sullivan, independent member, ex service user
- Susan Clements, independent member, foster carer
- Gordon Oliver, Brighton & Hove council officer, fostering
- Julie Dreher, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare
- Vanessa Wright, independent member, health
- Ivan Sharpe, Barnardo's officer, fostering
- Caroline Down, Barnardo's officer, childcare

There is a vacancy for an education representative; the panel is awaiting clarification as to the future of the LAC Education development officer post before taking any action to recruit to this vacancy.

Brighton & Hove now pay a fee for independent members to attend.

The panel remains imbalanced in respect of gender and particularly race and ethnicity. This has been addressed when looking for new panel members and will continue to be so.

The professional adviser to the panel from June 2002 to January 2003 inclusive was Adrian Briggs. Sue Boiling has now resumed duties as the professional adviser since returning from maternity leave in February 2003. The panel has had three administrators over this period: Sue Beck, Liz Mitchell and Sam Duly who is the current administrator.

Work of the Panel

The panel has met monthly over the year except in August when the panel meeting had to be cancelled. An extra panel meeting had to be organised in October. Therefore the panel met on 12 occasions on the following dates:

April 2002
May 2002
19th June 2002
July 2002
11th September 2002
9th October 2002
23rd October 2002

6th November 2002
11th December 2002
29th January 2003
26th February 2003
26th March 2003

The panel has also met for two half days training: in April 2002 for a briefing on the new Fostering regulations and on 17th March 2003 to discuss applicants attending panel.

The panel usually meets for half a day from 2pm onwards. However, there have been several occasions due to pressure of business that panel has needed to extend this time and one occasion where it has met for a whole day.

During this period the panel dealt with and made recommendations on 96 case presentations. A significant proportion of this work was related to children placed in Independent Fostering Agency placements: 39 cases. Of the remaining cases 15 were presented by Barnardo's Family Link and 42 cases were presented by Brighton & Hove Council.

The panel recommended the new approval of:

- 6 short term foster carers
- 5 Family Link carers
- 1 RAILS carer
- 1 Supported Lodgings carer

The panel recommended the termination of approval of:

- 11 short term foster carers
- 5 Family Link carers
- 1 RAILS carer

For further details of the work presented to the panel over this period please refer to the attached spread-sheet (appendix one).

The agency decision maker has endorsed all of the panel's recommendations.

The panel can also be used to offer consultation and guidance in respect of problematic cases before a formal presentation.

It is envisaged that the work of the panel will significantly change over the coming year. The establishment of the National Care Standards Commission and the initial inspections of all fostering service providers will mean that there is no longer a need for every Independent Fostering Agency placement to be presented to the panel. The panel will retain a role in quality assurance of these placements but this will be done via a sample of placements being presented to the panel which will greatly reduce the amount of panel time needed for this work and therefore panel's workload.

It is planned that the Fostering panel will be responsible from September 2003 for the approval and review of all kinship care placements. This will be a significant new area of work for the panel and members will need training to ensure that the appropriate focus and monitoring of these placements is achieved by the panel.

It is also hoped that the new fostering allowances being introduced by Brighton & Hove council will have an impact on the recruitment of short-term foster carers and that there will be a subsequent increase in the number of new foster care approvals being presented to the panel.

Functioning of the Panel

The panel has been very keen to develop the way that it operates to help it function in a more effective and open manner.

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At the present time applicants and foster carers are invited to attend panel. They are invited in to the meeting at the end of the discussion with the social worker/s and are able to make any comments they wish to the panel or ask questions. The panel also has the opportunity to ask them any questions directly. The panel has recently discussed whether this feels the right balance between transparency for the applicants and sufficient privacy for panel members to reach appropriate and safe recommendations. The panel decided that it would like to move to a model of applicants being in attendance for the whole time the social workers were being questioned. This proposed change has been presented to the Council by the professional adviser and panel is awaiting a response.

The panel has agreed a structure for the discussion of the paperwork which is:

- Areas for clarification
- Positive aspects of the application/match
- Risk factors in the application/match

This is proving very useful in helping panel focus on the relevant issues and therefore be more efficient in the use of panel time. The positive and risk factors are fully shared with the social workers, applicants, and foster carers. There has not been any feedback so far regarding this change.

The following is the current panel process:

1. Panel members receive the reports before the panel meeting
2. At the panel meeting members identify the areas for clarification and that they would like to discuss with the social worker/s
3. The social worker/s join the meeting
4. Panel members ask the social worker/s questions on the areas for clarification
5. Social worker/s have the opportunity to give any further information to the panel
6. The panel identify the risk factors in the application/match and invite the social worker/s to comment
7. The applicants, foster carers join the meeting
8. The chair shares with the applicants, foster carers the positive aspects and risk factors of the application/review as seen by the panel
9. The panel asks the applicants, foster carers any questions it might have
10. The applicants, foster carers have the opportunity to add any further information they wish or to ask the panel questions
11. The applicants, foster carers leave the meeting while the panel reaches its recommendations
12. The panel comes to a recommendation with the social worker/s present and advises the worker/s when the agency decision maker will make the final decision
13. The chair informs the applicants, foster carers of the panel recommendations and when the final decision will be made.

The panel has adapted this process recently in that if it is clear before the applicants, foster carers join the meeting that panel is agreed in making a positive recommendation then they are informed by the chair of this before sharing the positive aspects and risk factors with them.

The process will be adapted if the recommendations regarding the changes in respect of applicants attending the meeting is agreed by the Council.

The process appears to work reasonably well. However, there is often an issue of timing, with panel running over time and therefore keeping social workers, applicants, and foster carers waiting. This is something which the panel is very aware of and will continue to monitor to identify where extra time may need to be allowed or panel processes need to be tighter.

Feedback forms are given to all social workers, applicants, and foster carers attending the panel to ensure that the panel is aware of their experiences and views and any changes that need to be made to the way that panel operates.

Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference

The constitution and terms of reference for the panel has recently been reviewed and updated to ensure that it meets the requirements of the new Fostering Regulations.

Practice

The panel takes its role of quality assurance very seriously, particularly in respect of safe caring for children and young people. In general panel has felt that assessments undertaken by Brighton & Hove social workers are generally of a good quality. Where this has not been the case the panel has highlighted its concerns to the agency decision maker via the professional adviser. Panel has also fed back to social workers when assessments and reviews have been completed well.

The JAS requirements have made a considerable difference to the amount of information prepared and presented to the panel. The Fostering Network (formerly NFCA) competency based assessment format has helped in focusing the panel's attention on the necessary skills and attributes needed to undertake fostering. Panel has noted a significant difference in the assessment reports presented by other agencies, notably in the amount and detail of the information and the lack of an evidence based approach from some agencies.

The panel has felt uncomfortable with its role in respect of Independent Fostering Agency placements as these are always presented for a panel recommendation after a child or young person has been placed - often months after placement – and the panel has struggled to avoid just being seen as a rubber stamping exercise. The panel has given appropriate and thorough consideration of these placements and often asked for further information or work to be done to ensure that they are appropriate to the individual child or young person's needs. The panel welcomes the proposed changes as it feels that the new system will offer more scrutiny at the point of placement and will allow panel to undertake an auditing role which is more appropriate.

The chair will now complete a feed-back form for the Agency Decision Maker on every case presented to the panel. This will alert the agency to issues in respect of reports, social work practice and whether the agency is meeting the National Minimum Standards. It is hoped that this will enable the panel to have a more formal monitoring and feedback process than previously.

Conclusion

The panel is very mindful of the role it plays in ensuring the provision of a quality fostering service to children and its part in making appropriate and safe decisions in respect of foster carers. The panel is aware of the need to routinely review the way in which it operates in order to continue to make an effective, fair and positive contribution to the work of Brighton & Hove council and will continue to do this over the next period.

Gill Harris
Independent Chair
Brighton & Hove Fostering Panel
22nd April 2003

APPENDIX 4

ITEMS CONSIDERED BY FOSTERING PANEL 2002-2003

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ITEMS CONSIDERED BY THE FOSTERING PANEL APRIL 2002 TO MAR 2003

| 2002/2003 | Apr | May | Jun | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Total |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Approvals | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Short Term FT | | 2 | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | | | | 1 | 6 |
| Family Link | | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | | | 5 |
| RAILS | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | 1 |
| LCT | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Supp. Lodgs | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| In-house apprl Total | | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 13 |
| IFA aprl Total | | 3 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | | | | | | | 7 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Terminations | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Short Term FT | 1 | 1 | | | | 3 | 1 | | 1 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 11 |
| Permanence Team | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Family Link | | | | | | 1 | | | 1 | | | | 3 | 5 |
| RAILS | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Supp Lodgs | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Terminations Total | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 17 |
| IFA Terminations Total | | | | | | | | 1 | | 1 | | | | 2 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Variations | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Short Term FT | 1 | | | | | | | | 2 | 2 | | 2 | | 7 |
| Permanence Team | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Family Link | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | 1 |
| RAILS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Supp Lodgs | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Variations Total | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 9 |
| IFA Variations Total | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Placements IFA Only | | | 2 | 2 | | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 24 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Reviews | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Short Term FT | | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | | | 1 | | | | 1 | 5 |
| Family Link | | | 2 | | | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | 4 |
| RAILS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| LCT | 2 | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | 3 |
| Supp Lodgs | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Review Total | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 12 |
| IFA Reviews | | | | | | 2 | | 1 | | | | | 2 | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Exemptions Total | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | 1 | | 1 | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Allegations/Complaints against carers | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Miscellaneous | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 |
| PANEL TOTAL | 5 | 9 | 9 | 6 | 0 | 13 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 12 | 96 |

* Variation in approval would only be considered alongside a review (Feb 26 Panel)

