

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

**For general release**

**Meeting:** Children, Families and Schools Sub Committee

**Date:** Monday 14 June 2004

**Report of:** Director Children, Families and 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 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 activities.
- 1.2 This report seeks Member approval of the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose (Appendix 1) and the revised Fostering Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference (Appendix 2).
- 1.3 This report will also inform Members of:
  - National developments including the consolidation of changes brought about by the introduction of Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards in 2002/3 and the development of the Government's Choice Protects programme;
  - Service developments during the year;
  - Fostering activity during the year April 2003 – March 2004.
- 1.4 This report should be read in conjunction with the BHCC's Adoption Agency Annual Report as this includes details of carers who offer children permanence through long-term fostering.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the report and the progress of the Fostering Service is noted and the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose is endorsed.

- 2.2 That the revised Brighton and Hove Fostering Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference be endorsed.

### **3 National developments**

- 3.1 The Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2002 were implemented on 1 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 (IFAs), 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. On 31 March 2003 [latest available national figures] 60,800 children were being looked after by local authorities in England with 41,100 (68%) fostered. On 31 March 2004 there were 460 children being looked after by BHCC, 333 were fostered (72%). These figures demonstrate the critical role foster carers play in looking after some of the most vulnerable children in society.
- 3.3 In March 2002 the Government announced the *Choice Protects* review, the aim of which was to help local authorities commission and deliver high quality placements for looked after children.
- 3.4 The *Choice Protects* review has continued to ensure that the commissioning and provision of family 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 also links with the work of the Social Exclusion Unit, currently working on the promotion of the education of looked after children.
- 3.5 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 received a grant of £104K for 2003/4.

### **4 Service development**

- 4.1 After consultation a new comprehensive handbook was circulated to all BHCC's foster carers in May 2003. Carers have reported that they find the handbook useful. The handbook will continue to be updated and developed, to ensure it remains a key reference manual for our foster carers.
- 4.2 After consultation with carers, Panel and staff the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose has been revised and requires the endorsement of Members (Appendix 1).

- 4.4 The NCSC inspection of BHCC fostering service took place in January 2004. The service received a very positive report from inspectors, which stated that all the standards were met (except regarding family and friends care) and were exceeded under 12 key standards. Inspectors noted there had been significant progress and development since the 2003 inspection. A copy of the inspection report is in Appendix 3.
- 4.5 Since December 2003 the British Association for Adoption and Fostering's (BAAF) Children's Guide has been given to each child over 5 years entering care and is provided to all foster carers. Local useful information pages have been added to these guides. Children and young people aged 10 plus also receive a filofax from the Children's Rights Service containing information about fostering. Carers have also been given a copy of an appropriate publication to explain fostering to the under 5s in their care.
- 4.6 The Brighton and Hove Foster Care Association has been re-launched with the support of a consultant from Fostering Network. An active association will enable the fostering service to involve carers more fully in future service developments.
- 4.7 The Race Equality Impact Assessment has now been completed for the fostering and adoption service. The service has consulted with key local voluntary organisations and groups. Like other local authorities, the service has had difficulties in recruiting sufficient black and minority ethnic (BME) carers to match the needs of local BME children requiring foster care (currently 10% of BHCC's looked after children). A resource pack and guidance for carers of children trans-racially placed is being developed.
- 4.8 Family and friends carers are playing an increasingly important role in providing placements for children unable to live with their own parents. A small team was established in 2003 to assess potential carers and the Fostering Panel started to consider assessments in December 2003. The team has set up a successful support group for grandparents. A CFS family and friends working party report will be presented to the Departmental Management Team in June with proposals for taking this service forward and linking it to the Family Support Strategy.

## **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.
- 5.1.1 BHCC have 125 approved foster care 'units' (i.e. couples or single carers) of which 64 provide short-term care. On 31 March 2004, these carers

were caring for 178 children. A further 90 children were placed with independent fostering agencies and 33 children with Barnardo's Link Plus Service. 33 children were placed with friends and family carers.

- 5.1.2. A key objective of the fostering service over the past year has been to work towards reducing the number of high cost agency placements by enhancing the capacity of the service to recruit more in-house foster carers. This would also enable our looked after children to have more opportunity to be placed locally and retain important links with family, school and their communities.

## **5.2 Recruitment activity**

- 5.2.1. The Fostering Service has clear recruitment strategy and runs regular high profile publicity campaigns.
- 5.2.2. A new recruitment drive profiling the enhanced foster care allowances began in May 2003, with a highly successful launch event and awards ceremony at the Royal Pavilion for carers and staff. The event was very favourably received by carers and brought with it positive media coverage.
- 5.2.3. The recruitment campaign continued in 2004 with a focus on recruiting carers for older children and encouraging Council staff not directly working with looked after children to apply to foster. The latter has been supported by a unique initiative by the Human Resources department in February 2004. A leaflet went out to all Council staff (apart from schools) detailing the new policy of support for staff who are interested in becoming foster carers. Applicants or existing carers who are employees will be entitled to paid leave to take part in assessment sessions or reviews/meetings concerning looked after children.
- 5.2.4. Between April 2003 - March 2004 the team received 413 fostering enquires, 113 units attended information sessions, 100 follow up home visits were conducted and 29 units attended Preparation Groups resulting in 13 new foster care units being approved for short term fostering. There are a number of other assessments underway with a target of 20 new approvals for 2004/5.
- 5.2.5. The above figures highlight the fall out rate from enquiry to approval, with a significant amount of hidden assessment work as a number of potential carers have to withdraw because of changes in family circumstances or because issues of concern emerge within the assessment.

- 5.2.6. The recruitment work is overseen by a dedicated Practice Manager and priority is given to ensuring all prospective applicants receive a speedy, welcoming and informative response.

### **5.3 Foster Carer payment scheme**

- 5.3.1. From 28 July 2003, payments to our foster carers were increased significantly. The new payment scheme has made us competitive with other agencies. This major investment in foster care by the Council has considerably improved the recruitment and retention of carers.

### **5.4 Placement activity by the fostering service**

- 5.4.1 The full impact of the recruitment campaign in terms of approvals of new carers coming through to Panel, only began to have an effect in early 2004. All of the new carers are used for placements for children as soon as they are approved.

- 5.4.2 Referrals to the fostering duty service for placements has remained very high during the year. The duty service received 403 referrals in 2003/4, with 272 fostering placements made. The continued rise in the numbers of children coming into the care system over the last few months has resulted in there being no impact yet of this new recruitment success on the numbers of children placed within the independent sector.

- 5.4.3 The Fostering Duty service is overseen by a dedicated Practice Manager and strenuous efforts are made to place children with in-house carers able to meet their needs if at all possible. There is still an inevitable mismatch between the profile of children needing placements and the type of placements offered by the new carers. There are few carers coming through wishing to provide teenage placements and new carers have to be allowed to grow in confidence and experience before being asked to care some of the more challenging young people in the care system.

### **5.5 Foster care support**

- 5.5.1. Recruitment campaigns have given particular emphasis to the support package provided by the fostering service, which includes 24-hour on call support, a range of support groups for carers and their children, training and an enhanced service from the Placement Support Team.

- 5.5.2 A website for Brighton and Hove foster carers and adopters is currently being developed. It will contain an open side for prospective foster carers/adopters with recruitment information and a password accessed side for approved carers with a number of different pages on support services and training and a message board for carers to exchange

information and discuss care issues. This exciting initiative will increase support to carers and their involvement in the development of services.

- 5.5.3 Carers have informed managers, staff and NCSC inspectors that they value the support services offered, particularly that provided by their own supervising social worker and the Placement Support Team. The intensive support provided to carers on the Special Placement Scheme was also highlighted within the inspection report.
- 5.5.4 The Placement Support Team has increased in size over the last year and now has the capacity to offer support services to young people at the weekend and has also set up activity events to support carers own children.
- 5.5.5 The Placement Support Team also provides a service for young people temporarily excluded from school or without full time schooling. This is an area for future service development alongside colleagues within the education arm of the department.
- 5.5.6 A full programme of school holiday activities is provided by the Placement Support Team and the summer holiday scheme involved over 80 looked after children.
- 5.5.7 The team also provides individual and group work support to young people and work to enable young people to develop their self esteem and ability to access mainstream services wherever possible.

## **6 The Fostering Panel**

- 6.1 The Fostering Panel Annual Report by Gill Harris, Independent Chair is attached (Appendix 4).
- 6.2 The Fostering Panel Constitution and Terms of Reference have been revised and require endorsement by Members (Appendix 2).

## **7 Use of independent fostering agencies and commissioning strategy**

- 7.1 The High Cost Agency Placement Manager has played a key role in developing a commissioning strategy with the independent fostering sector during the last year.
- 7.2 A Council Preferred Fostering Service Provider List has now been established which should help to ensure quality standards in foster care provided by IFAs for children looked after by Brighton and Hove. It will also serve to streamline and improve partnership working with other agencies and more cost-effective use of IFAs when in-house placements are unavailable.

## **8 Training**

- 8.1 A comprehensive training programme for foster carers has been provided. The revised payment scheme introduced in July 2003 includes financial reward for training and experience. This has had a positive effect on the number of carers accessing core training.
- 8.2 Training of carers is accorded a high priority by the fostering service. Over the last year 97 carer units have attended 16 courses covering the range of needs of looked after children. There are plans to develop the opportunity for carers to be able to study for NVQ Level 3 in 2004.

## **9 Complaints, allegations about foster carers**

- 9.1 During 2003/4 across the Fostering & Permanence Teams there were 4 Child Protection allegations against foster carers that were investigated and were not substantiated. There were 5 Standards of Care investigations and one complaint from a Looked After Child. One carer has had their approval varied as a result of a Standards of Care investigation. The Standards of Care Procedures have been revised during the year.

## **10 Consultation**

The Brighton and Hove Foster Care Association  
The Brighton and Hove Fostering Panel

Representatives from Fostering Network  
Officers within Accommodation Services

<b>Meeting/Date</b>	Children Families & Schools 14 June 2004
<b>Report of</b>	David Hawker
<b>Subject</b>	Fostering Service Annual Report 2003/4
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

#### **Financial implications**

The budget in 2004/2005 for fostering and adoption payments is £4.5m. This includes an investment of £1.2m following the implementation of the new foster care payment scheme in July 2003. In addition BHCC's allocation of the Choice Protects grant in 2004/2005 is £156,000. The current budget is sufficient to fund the present level of in-house fostering activity.

The unit cost for an in-house foster placements is currently £450 per week, which compares favourably with the £740 per week it costs to place a child with an Independent Foster Agency (IFA). A shift between using IFA's to in-house carers has the potential, therefore, to make significant savings. The greater the placement choice available also results in more stable placements and reduces the risk of placement breakdown leading to higher cost placements. It is important to note, however, that the recruitment and retention policy has not only required significant investment into the direct cost of payments to carers (£1.2m), but has resulted in increased spending on publicity and other associated costs of £54k in 2003/2004, with, as yet no reduction in IFA numbers.

*Finance Officer consulted: David Ellis Date May 2004*

#### **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 May 2004

<b>Corporate/City-wide implications</b>	<b>Risk assessment</b>
Fostering Services are provided citywide and support services do require a corporate Council approach.	None
<b>Sustainability implications</b>	<b>Equalities implications</b>
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**

None

**Contact Officers**

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# **Appendices to Brighton & Hove Fostering Service Annual Report**

- 1. Fostering Service Statement of Purpose.**
- 2. Fostering Panel Constitution.**
- 3. National Care Standards Commission Inspection Report, January 2004.**
- 4. Fostering Panel Annual Report by Gill Harris, Independent Chairperson.**
- 5. Items considered by Fostering Panel 2003-2004.**

# **APPENDIX 1**

## **FOSTERING SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**



**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT**

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## **FOSTERING SERVICE**

# **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

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**Fostering & Adoption Service  
253 Preston Road  
Brighton**

**June 2004**

## **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 and 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 and 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 family and friends 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 reviewed regularly. The wishes of the child will be taken into account as appropriate in drawing up the care plan. The birth family should be fully 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 Fostering & Adoption service and staff within the service have as their primary role the recruitment, assessment, training, support and supervision of carers. They also provide a placement and family finding service for social work staff on behalf of looked after children or children needing to be looked after.

## **2.2.1 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 'choosing 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.
- 2.1.2.5 Both the Fostering and Permanence Panels have written Constitutions and Terms of Reference and information booklets for prospective applicants. 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 to present to Children, Families and Schools Committee. These reports 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. A Council Preferred Fostering Service Provider List has now been established which should help to ensure quality standards in foster care provided by IFAs for children looked after by Brighton and Hove. It will also serve to streamline and improve partnership working with other agencies and more cost-effective use of IFAs when in-house placements are unavailable.
- 2.1.3.3 The department has a contract with Barnardos to provide a respite link scheme and some long term fostering provision for children with disabilities.
- 2.1.3.4 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.
- 2.1.3.5 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 work with a Practice Manager within the service to 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 came into operation in July 2003.
- 2.1.5.2 All foster carers are provided with a comprehensive handbook. This handbook will be updated and added to on a regular basis to ensure it remains a key resource and guidance manual for carers.
- 2.1.5.3 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.
- 2.1.5.4 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.

- 2.1.5.5 The Placement Support team has a key role in providing a range of enhanced support services to looked after children, carers and their own children. 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.
- 2.1.5.6 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.
- 2.1.5.7 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.
- 2.1.5.8 The Placement Support team will continue to provide a comprehensive holiday activities programme for looked after children and plan to continue to enhance the service provide to carers own children as appropriate and children in placement with family and friends carers. The team has also recruited staff that can provide activities and support to children in placement and their carers at weekends.
- 2.1.5.9 Staff in the fostering 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.
- 2.1.5.10 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.

- 2.1.5.11 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.
- 2.1.5.12 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.
- 2.1.5.13 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.
- 2.1.5.14 The Fostering Service will support and work in collaboration with the Brighton & Hove Foster Care Association. The Fostering Service will ensure local carers are fully consulted on developments in the service.
- 2.1.5.15 The Fostering Service will continue to work with the Children's Rights Service and endeavour to further develop ways to ensure that young people's views on the service are taken into account and inform future developments within the service.
- 2.1.5.16 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.
- 2.1.5.17 The service will continue to look at ways of improving communication with carers including the development of a website for Brighton and Hove carers and the expansion of the use of electronic communication. The website will contain recruitment information as well as training material and information for existing carers plus a message board facility.
- 2.1.5.18 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 be provided as appropriate.

- 2.1.5.19 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'.
- 2.1.5.20 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 Fostering & Adoption**

- 2.3 The 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 Fostering service also works closely with staff at CAMHS to ensure carers and young people have access to appropriate therapeutic services.

## **3 Fostering & Adoption 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 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](mailto: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 the Fostering Services, including children, birth families, prospective and approved carers, are provided with copies of the complaint 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, the Children's Rights Service. Service users are advised that the Customer Services Manager who oversees the complaint procedure can be contacted at:  
Royal York Buildings,  
Old Steine,  
Brighton BN1 1NH  
Freephone 0800 072 9960

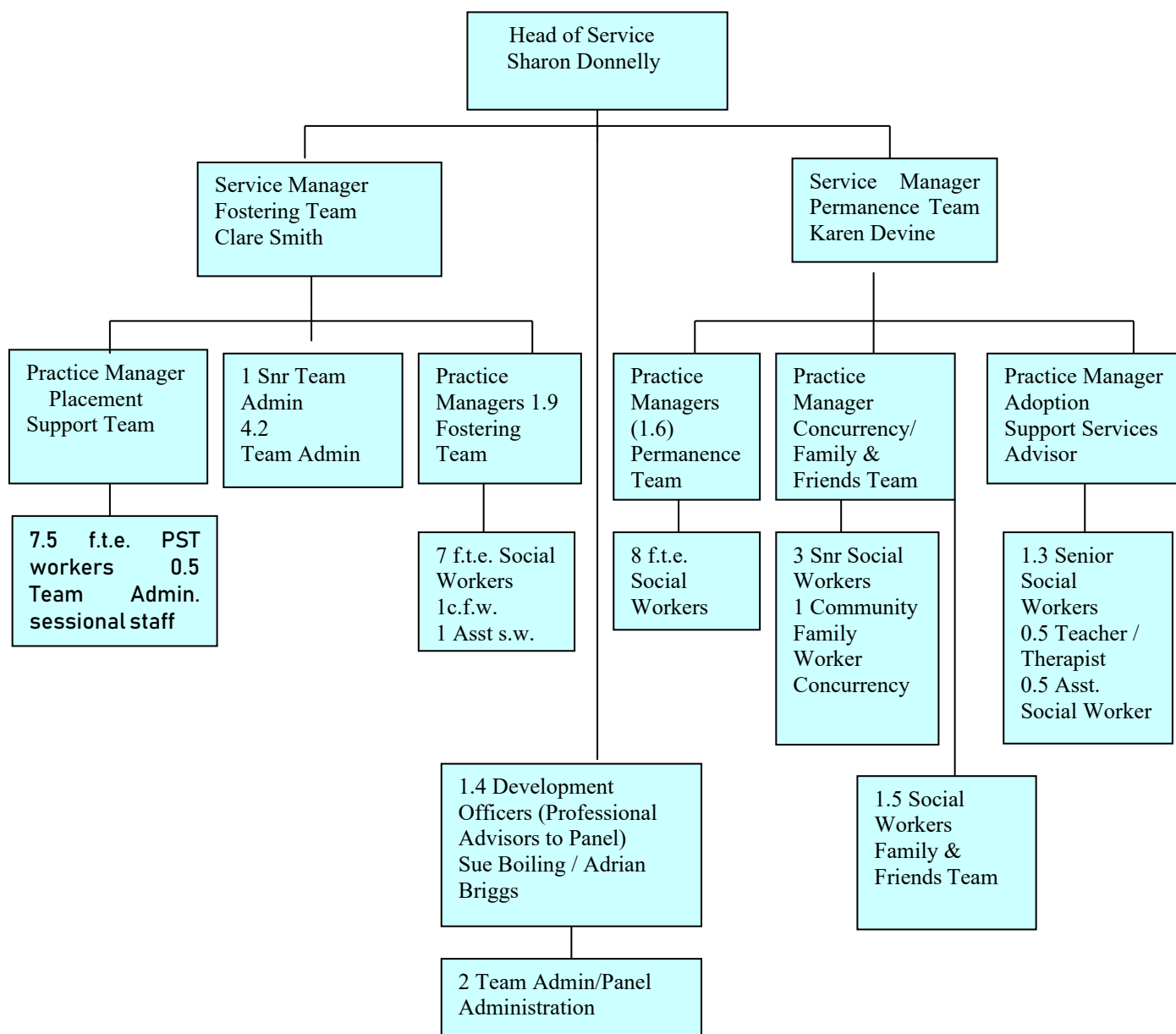
#### **6. Commission for Social Care Inspection**

- 6.1 The Fostering Service will be inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection 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 Commission for Social Care Inspection 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





# **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, Family and Friends Care, 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 Family and Friends, 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 Liz Rugg (Head of Child Protection and Quality Assurance) and for Barnardos Link Plus will be Gina Armstrong (Children's Services Manager).
- 4.2 Recommendations regarding the approval of carers must include the terms of approval, which will be specified as follows:-
- Short-term
  - Respite Care
  - Family and Friends
  - 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.

- 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.

Revised April 2004

# **APPENDIX 3**

**NATIONAL CARE STANDARDS COMMISSION  
INSPECTION REPORT ON BRIGHTON AND HOVE  
CITY COUNCIL'S FOSTERING SERVICE  
JANUARY 2004**

# **APPENDIX 4**

## **FOSTERING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2003 – 2004**

## **BRIGHTON & HOVE FOSTERING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2003 – 2004**

### **Introduction**

This report covers the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004. This report briefly summarises the work of the panel over this period including any policy and practice matters.

### **Composition of the Panel**

The panel operates as a joint panel with Barnardo's and the panel membership reflects this.

There have been changes to the composition of the panel during this period.

The following members have left the panel for a variety of reasons:

Councillor Frieda Warman-Brown, Brighton & Hove elected member  
Julie Dreher, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare

New members to panel during this period are:

Councillor Dee Simpson, Brighton & Hove elected member  
Sarah Daly, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare  
Sue Darby, Brighton & Hove council officer, education

The current panel membership is:

- Gill Harris, Independent Chair
- Wayne Sampson, Barnardo's officer, Vice-Chair
- Cllr Dee Simpson, Brighton & Hove elected member
- Toni Sullivan, independent member, ex service user
- Susan Clements, independent member, foster carer
- Gordon Oliver, Brighton & Hove council officer, fostering
- Sarah Daly, Brighton & Hove council officer, childcare
- Sue Darby, Brighton & Hove council officer, education
- Vanessa Wright, independent member, health
- Ivan Sharpe, Barnardo's officer, fostering
- Caroline Down, Barnardo's officer, childcare

The panel is now at its full membership of eleven and meets the requirements of the Fostering Regulations. The panel unfortunately remains imbalanced in respect of gender and particularly race and ethnicity. It was not possible to address this fully in the recruitment of new panel members

Brighton & Hove continue to pay expenses for independent members to attend.

The professional adviser to the panel from February to June 2003 inclusive was Sue Boiling. In July 2003 on Sue's appointment as professional adviser to the Permanence Panel Adrian Briggs returned on a temporary basis as the professional adviser and continues in post. Sam Duly has been the panel administrator for the whole of this period.

### **Work of the Panel**

The panel has normally met monthly for half a day. However, the meetings in May and August had to be cancelled and therefore the meetings in June and September became full day meetings to accommodate the work from the cancelled panels. From November all the panel meetings have been full days. This is due to a significant increase in work from the recruitment campaign by the Fostering Service and the panel taking on the responsibility in respect of family and friends carer approvals and reviews. Panel has needed to allow extra time to deal with these latter cases until it becomes confident in respect of the different issues involved in making safe recommendations. This increase in the panel's work was fully anticipated in last year's annual panel report. During this period the panel met on 10 occasions on the following dates:

23.4.03  
18.6.03  
30.7.03  
24.9.03  
22.10.03  
19.11.03  
17.12.03  
28.1.04  
25.2.04  
24.3.04

The panel has also met for a half day training on 13.11.03 in relation to family and friends carers. This has been the only training that panel has undertaken during this period.

During this period the panel dealt with and made recommendations on **72** case presentations, a 26% reduction on the work of the panel last year. This may be due to the fact that the panel does not now deal with children placed in Independent Fostering Agency placements. 52 cases were presented by Brighton & Hove Council and 20 cases were presented by Barnardo's Link Plus.

The panel recommended the new approval of:

13 short term foster carers  
3 Family Link carers  
4 family & friends carers

There have been no presentations of new assessments from either the Supported lodgings Scheme or the RAILS scheme. The number of new approved short term foster carers has increased by over a 100% on last year's figures. The Family Link figures for new approvals are down by almost 30%.

The panel recommended the termination of approval of:

1 short term foster carer

This is a significant reduction on last year's figures of 11 short term foster carers, 5 Family Link carers and 1 RAILS carer.

There have been resignations of:

4 short term foster carers

3 Family Link carers

Further details of the work presented to the panel over this period can be found in the attached spread-sheet/chart.

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.

### **Functioning of the Panel**

The panel is a very confident and competent panel and overall operates in an open and effective manner. Over the past year the panel has changed its procedures in respect of applicants/foster carers attending panel meetings to enable it to become more inclusive and to allow them to be as fully involved as possible in the process. The panel feels that its current practice is flexible enough to allow time alone with the social workers to check out any third party information or aspects of the assessment that would not be appropriate to discuss with the applicants/foster carers present, if necessary. However, panel aims to include the applicants/foster carers if not in all the discussion then in the majority of it. The feedback from applicants/foster carers and social workers, despite some apprehension on the part of social workers, has generally been positive about this change. The panel still has time on its own at the beginning of each item for discussion of the issues and also has the opportunity for time on its own at the end of the discussion if it feels it is necessary.

The panel still continues to structure its discussion of the paperwork as follows:

Areas for clarification

Positive aspects of the application/match

## Risk factors in the application/match

The positive and risk factors are fully shared with the social workers, applicants/foster carers. The panel will continue to use this structure as it has proved very effective.

There is now a laminated sheet of photographs and brief profiles of panel members available in the waiting room for applicants/foster carers attending panel. This, along with the up-dated leaflet on the panel, hopefully helps those attending the panel meetings.

The following is the current panel process:

1. Panel members receive the reports before the panel meeting
2. At the panel meeting members discuss areas that they would like to discuss with the social worker/s, applicants/foster carers and to identify positive aspects and risk factors
3. The social worker/s, applicants/foster carers join the meeting
4. Panel members ask the social worker/s, applicants/foster carers questions on the areas for clarification
5. Applicants/foster carers have the opportunity to ask any questions or to give any further information or make a statement to the panel
6. The panel asks the applicants/foster carers to leave the meeting while the panel reaches its recommendations
7. The panel has the opportunity to discuss with the social worker/s any third party information or other issues if necessary before it comes to its recommendations
8. The panel has the opportunity for a further discussion without the social workers if this is thought to be necessary
9. The applicants/foster carers re-join the meeting
10. The chair shares with the applicants/foster carers the panel's recommendations and the positive aspects and risk factors of the application/review as identified by the panel and advises them when the agency decision maker will make the final decision

The process appears to work well. However, there has still been 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 has now agreed extended timings with the Professional Adviser to the panel for certain agenda items. Panel will continue to monitor to identify if this has solved the problem or whether 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. 35 feed-back forms have been received for this period; 13 from applicants/foster carers and 22 from social work staff. The Professional Adviser collates the

information for panel and it is reported back on a monthly basis, allowing panel to look at any changes that need to be made to the way that panel operates. In general the feed – back has been positive.

### **Panel Terms of Reference**

The constitution and terms of reference for the panel continues to meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations and Minimum Fostering Standards.

### **Practice**

The panel continues to take its role of quality assurance very seriously, particularly in respect of safe caring for children and young people. In general panel has felt that the work undertaken by Brighton & Hove social workers is 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.

An ongoing concern of the panel over this period has been the format and content of The Fostering Network (formerly NFCA) competency based assessments used in Brighton & Hove. Panel has found it difficult to get the right information from this format, particularly in respect of the applicants' background history and motivation to foster. This has been taken up by the Professional Adviser and there are now regular agenda slots at panel meetings for the managers of the Fostering Service to discuss this and other issues that arise at panel. Despite discussions and amendments to the content of the assessments this remains an area that panel feels needs to be looked at by the agency.

Panel is still developing its understanding of kinship care and what needs to be presented to it for initial approval. Work is being undertaken within the agency to develop this area of work and this will be fed back into the panel. It is fair to say that this is in the early stages of development and is something that the agency is keen to work on.

The chair continues to complete a feed-back form for the Agency Decision Maker on every case presented to the panel alerting the agency to issues in respect of reports, social work practice and general training areas and whether the agency is meeting the Fostering regulations and National Minimum Standards. This has been adapted to include comments from the Agency Decision Maker. This process has worked well and has been valued by the agency. The Agency Decision Maker will now be invited to all panel training and to meet with the panel annually for two way feed back.

The regular meetings with the managers of the Fostering Service has been successful in ensuring that panel is kept up to date with plans for the service and the impact that these might have in respect of the work of the panel.

## **Conclusion**

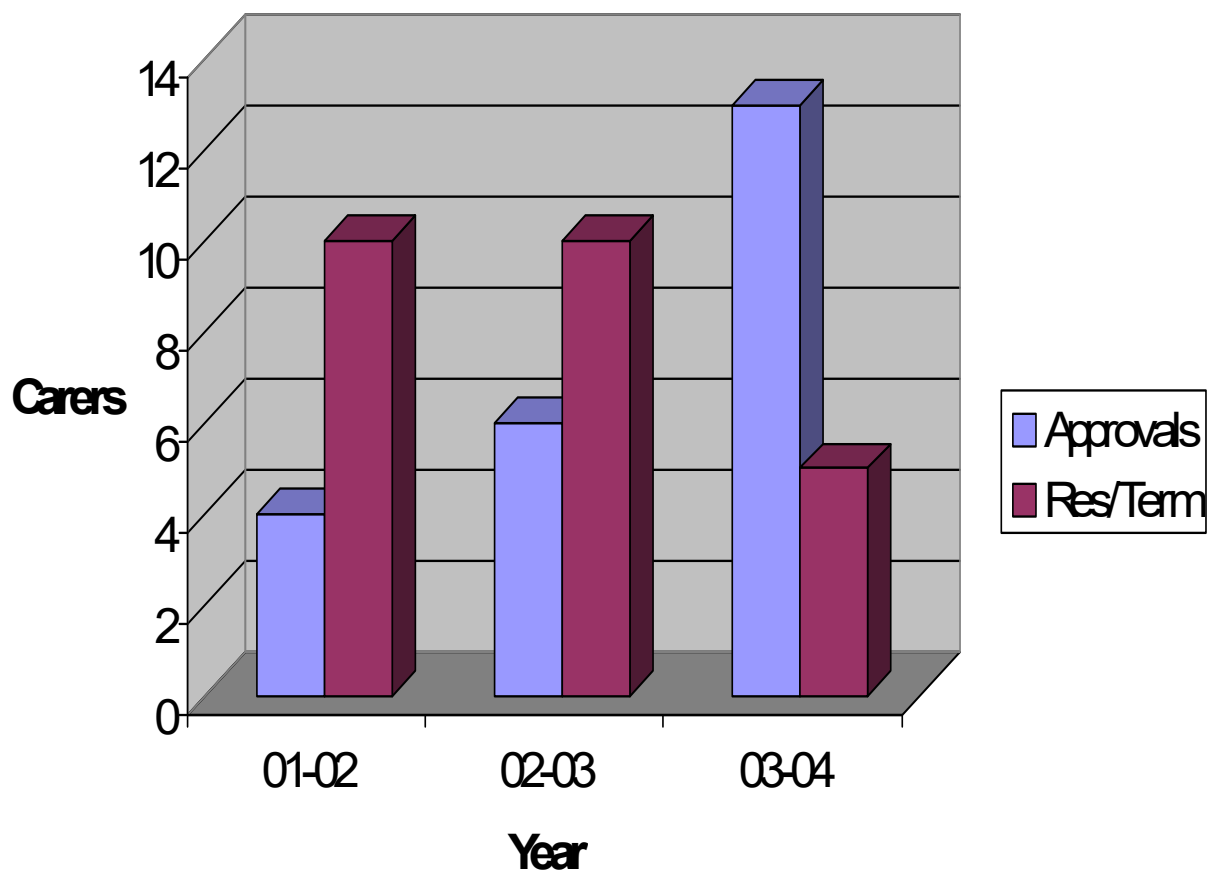
The panel continues to be very mindful of the role it plays in ensuring the provision of a quality fostering service to children and its part in making appropriate and safe decisions in respect of foster carers. The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) during their inspection of Brighton & Hove's Fostering Services observed a panel meeting and fed back that they were impressed by the organisation and functioning of the panel. The authority was awarded by the NCSC a "four" in respect of its panel work, the highest possible mark, which means that the work of the panels exceeds the requirements of the Regulations and Standards. However, the panel is not complacent and 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  
30<sup>th</sup> April 2004



# **APPENDICES TO FOSTERING PANEL REPORT**

## Short-Term Fostering Team Approvals & Resignations/Terminations 2001-2004



# **APPENDIX 5**

## **ITEMS CONSIDERED BY FOSTERING PANEL 2003-2004**

[illegible]

Supported Lodgings												0
<b>Exemptions Total</b>	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Cases Deferred</b>												
Short Term FT					1							1
Permanence Team												0
Link Plus						1						1
Supported Lodgings												0
<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Allegations/Complaints against carers</b>												
Short Term FT				1								1
Permanence Team												0
Link Plus					1							1
Supported Lodgings												0
<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>PANEL TOTAL</b>	7	14	4	11	6	7	6	7	4	6		72
<b>Ethnicity</b>												
White	7	14	4	11	6	7	6	7	4	5		71
Mixed heritage												0
Asian										1		1
Chinese												0
Black												0
<b>Ethnicity Total</b>	7	14	4	11	6	7	6	7	4	6		72

**ITEMS CONSIDERED BY THE FOSTERING PANEL APRIL 2002 TO MAR 2003**

<b>2002/2003</b>	<b>Apr</b>	<b>May</b>	<b>Jun</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug</b>	<b>Sept</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Oct</b>	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>	<b>Jan</b>	<b>Feb</b>	<b>Mar</b>	<b>Total</b>
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 appl Total		2	1	3	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	13
IFA appl 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
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
Placements IFA Only			2	2		2	2	2	3	2	3	5	1	24
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														
Review Total	2	1	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	12
IFA Reviews						2		1					2	5
Exemptions Total	1	1	1				1				1		1	5
														0
Allegations/Complaints														0
against carers														0
														0
Miscellaneous						1								1
														0
<b>PANEL TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>96</b>

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

