

Panel Meetings

Description

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<https://sparksfostering.org/wp-content/uploads/speaker/post-5806.mp3?cb=1704316206.mp3>

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Panel agenda

Panel meetings are held for foster carer **initial approval**, the first foster carer review, for subsequent reviews (**when requested by the reviewing officer**) and for **changes in terms of approval**.

When panel recommends an approval of an application, it also recommends any terms on which the approval is to be given (e.g. number and age of any children to be placed).

Standard review periods are at least every year, and additional reviews are held after significant changes (such as change in household composition, substantial standards of care concerns, or after serious allegations – see also policy on ‘Foster carer reviews’).



Panel also provides **quality assurance feedback** to Sparks Fostering on the quality of reports being presented to panel.

Panel may also be asked to give **advice and make recommendations** on other aspects of the work of Sparks Fostering.

Attending panel

Panel members must take all provided information into consideration when making their recommendation. Panel members may also request additional information if they require it, including **medical or legal advice**.

Significant concerns should be raised **prior to the panel meeting** where possible, so that the assessing social worker can carry out further investigations if necessary.

Panel members should maintain professional uncertainty whilst also being **compassionate in their communication**. Any questions that are put to the prospective foster carers should be asked with professional courtesy and respect.

Foster carers and prospective foster carers are given the opportunity to attend and be heard at all panel meetings at which their approval is being discussed and to bring a supporter to the panel if they wish. Sparks Fostering welcomes **supporters** to provide emotional support to the foster carer and to assist the foster carer to understand the points being made by panel. Panel should only be addressed by foster carers and panel will communicate directly with foster carers (not with supporters). All foster carers are expected to be able to express themselves professionally to panel, as this is a skill that is also required of them during multi-agency professionals meetings. Foster carers must be mindful of not sharing **confidential children's information** with supporters.

Panel recommendation

Panel members each contribute to the panel outcome decision; panel consensus is preferred, but is not a requirement.

Panel recommendations may be:

- Recommendation of approval with proposed/current terms of approval
- Recommendation of approval with adjusted terms of approval
- Recommendation to defer for further enquiries
- Unable to support approval

The panel must keep **written minutes** of its business, including the reasons for recommendations made. It is important that these are full and accurate so that Sparks Fostering is clear about matters discussed and the reasoning behind recommendations, as they will form the basis of decision making by Sparks Fostering.

Panel members are also required to provide **feedback** about the quality of information provided to

them.

Agency Decision Maker

Fostering panel is intended as a multi-disciplinary body with a considerable element of independence from the fostering service. This independence means that panel cannot themselves make decisions, which are the responsibility of Sparks Fostering, but instead make recommendations in relation to the reports presented to them. **Decisions** are made by the Sparks Fostering Agency Decision Maker, after taking into account the panel's recommendations (and any recommendation by the independent review mechanism if appropriate).

The panel must pass its recommendations on to the decision maker for a decision to be made on behalf of Sparks Fostering. Since no member of the fostering panel is permitted to take part in deciding to approve a person as a foster carer, the panel chair will not be in a position to discuss the case with the decision maker and the recommendations should be passed on by way of the written minutes of the panel meeting, setting out the main points of discussion and reasons for the recommendation.

Sparks Fostering staff who are involved in the preparation of the panel report, such as supervising social workers and team managers, also cannot be involved in a decision to approve a foster carer and so must not discuss the application with the agency decision maker.

Sparks Fostering's decision-maker makes a considered decision that takes account of all the written information available to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel and, where applicable, the independent review panel, **within seven working days** of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes.

Notification of outcome

The foster carer or prospective foster carer is informed orally of the decision maker's decision within **two working days** and written confirmation is sent within **five working days**.

Date Created

July 4, 2022

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user