

Essex Adoption and Fostering Panels

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Essex County Council

What We Do



- The term 'Essex Adoption Agency' describes the structure and process by which the Council carries out its duties under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Adoptions Agencies Regulations 2005 and subsequent legislation and statutory guidance.
- The Fostering Panel carries out its duties under the Fostering Regulations 2011, Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 and subsequent legislation and statutory guidance.
- Both Panels are multi-disciplinary bodies independent of the Council. We have highly experienced independent chairs, professional advisers to the Panel, and business support staff to ensure our Panels function well. Each panel has a 'Central list' which includes independent members and social workers. It is expected that this list comprises of a range of people whose experience and expertise are of value to the fostering and adoption panels.

What We Do



- **Members of the Essex Adoption Panel** play a significant part in the process that recommends the approval of prospective adoptive parents; and the matching of Essex children with approved prospective adopters.
- **Members of the Essex Fostering Panel** play a significant part in the process that recommends the approval of Essex foster carers, and the subsequent reviews of their approval and significant changes to their approval.

The Role of Panel

The Council is required to appoint one or more Agency Decision Makers, in respect of adoption and fostering. These are Directors or other senior leaders within Children & Families.

Essex Adoption Panel make recommendations to the Council's Agency Decision Makers on:

- **the suitability of prospective adopters**
- **the suitability of prospective adopters for fostering to adopt**
- **the termination of a prospective adopter's approval following a review**
- **Annual reviews of dually approved prospective adopters**
- **whether adoption is in the best interests of a baby relinquished for adoption**
- **The suitability of a match between an identified child and approved prospective adopters**
- **the Panel may also give advice to the agency on matters such as contact and adoption support**

The Role of Panel



Essex Fostering Panels make recommendations to the Council's Agency Decision Makers on:

- **Suitability of applicants to become foster carers**
- **Suitability of family and/or friends to become connected carers for named child/ren**
- **First annual reviews of foster carers**
- **Standards of Care/deregistration of foster carers**
- **Significant changes in the fostering household**
- **Significant changes to a foster carers approval**

Both panels play an important quality assurance role, providing an objective overview of the Council's fostering and adoption work, and having the ability to challenge any practice that is not in the interests of children or that falls short of legislated regulations and standards.

Being A Panel Member



- This is a voluntary role; it is a demanding and challenging but rewarding experience.
- Panel members are required to consent to a DBS status check (criminal records) and taking up references.
- Panel members are required to participate in an annual appraisal and at least one day of training a year for continuous development.

Being A Panel Member



- Panel members have an awareness of the richness of different kinds of families and their potential for meeting children's needs.
- Panel members work co-operatively as part of a multi-disciplinary team.
- Adoption panel members have a commitment to adoption as a child-centred process, a sympathetic understanding of why children may need to be placed within an adoptive family and recognition of how adoption can be a way of meeting a child's need for emotional and legal security in a permanent family.
- Fostering Panel members will have an acute awareness and commitment to the Council's role as Corporate Parent and ensure our fostering community looks after our children as we would care for our own.

What Skills Do You Need?



- Experience, either professionally or personally or both, of the placement of children in adoptive and foster families or of children being cared for away from their birth family.
- The ability to read, process and analyse large amounts of complex and sometimes distressing information.
- The ability to make an assessment and to form a view, based on the written and verbal information presented to panel, and the confidence to articulate this at panel.
- Good listening and communication skills in order to participate in the Panel discussions, raise issues and offer considered comments.
- Value diversity and demonstrate a commitment to anti-discriminatory behaviour; particularly in relation to ethnicity, religion, gender, disability and sexuality.

What Is the Commitment?



- There are four Adoption Panel meetings per month - 1st & 3rd Monday, 2nd Thursday, 4th Tuesday
- There are four Fostering Panel meetings per month – These take place on 1st & 3rd Tuesday, 2nd Thursday and the 4th can be either on a Tuesday or a Thursday.
- Panels are currently being held virtually. Should a return to face to face panels be possible, the panels are held in Colchester, Basildon and Harlow.
- Elected Members would be allocated a specific panel and would be required to attend at least 6 panels a year. The dates for the panels are confirmed a year in advance.

What Is the Commitment?

- Panels must be quorate for a recommendation to be made so once you've confirmed your availability, your attendance is required.
- The time commitment: the panel papers are circulated 5 working days before panel, you will need approximately 1 – 2 days to read the documentation before panel. The length of panels varies but are a minimum of a half a day. In the week after panel, the draft minutes are sent to panel members for comment.
- Safeguarding the confidentiality of records and information submitted to the Panel.

What Is the Commitment?

- You would commit to coming to Panel prepared to explore any issues with prospective adopters, prospective and approved foster carers and social workers as well as to make a recommendation.
- Panel members are committed to undergoing learning that will increase their understanding not only of the panel process but also of developments in the fostering and adoption service. This includes the trauma informed, therapeutic parenting style being embedded in all children's services.
- Regular appraisals of panel members take place which enable members to recognise the skills they bring and also identify aspects of learning and development they would find helpful.

Our Contribution



- We will provide opportunities for you to observe a number of Panel meetings before joining the central list and becoming a voting Panel member.
- We will provide a mentor to answer any queries and offer you support.
- We will provide an induction pack with relevant information to help you prepare for the role.
- We will facilitate development and training opportunities at least once a year.