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**Somerset Council**

**Fostering Panel Vice Chair**

**Responsibilities of the Independent Panel Vice Chairperson**

1. To read the circulated papers carefully and to undertake preparation work prior to the meeting to ensure a thorough understanding of the case prior to panel
2. To attend the panel meeting prepared to raise issues and to contribute to the panel discussion.
3. To take responsibility for participating in the making of a recommendation, on each case, drawing on both personal and professional knowledge and experience.
4. To be prepared to attend additional panels, if possible, if requested and where mutually agreed.
5. To participate, with other panel members, in advising on fostering policy and procedural matters as required.
6. To address diversity issues and promote anti-discriminatory practice.
7. To safeguard the confidentiality of all panel papers and panel discussions.
8. To participate in panel induction and in panel training, which will be at least one day per year
9. To participate constructively in the annual review of their panel membership.
10. To declare an interest before discussion begins if the panel member has previous knowledge of the case to be presented to panel
11. To inform the Fostering service at once if they have been charged, cautioned, or convicted for any criminal offence or if any criminal proceedings are pending.
12. To record, as part of the panel minutes any serious reservations which Panel members may have, and to check draft minutes before they are sent to the Agency Decision Maker in the absence of the Independent Panel Chairperson.
13. To assist with leading on the development of the Panel and advising and supporting other Panel Members.
14. To assist the Independent Panel Chairperson with data collection and analysis in respect of Fostering Panel business for Council Reports.
15. To assist in planning and delivering panel training, together with fostering managers and the Independent Panel Chairperson.
16. Assist with the preparation of an annual report on the Fostering panels work.
17. **In the absence of the Independent Panel Chairperson**:
    * To chair Panel meetings, ensuring that all items of business are covered and that the Panel operates in accordance with regulations and the policies and procedures of Somerset Fostering service and Childrens services.
    * To prepare for Panel meetings, by reading Panel papers in advance of the meeting; identifying key issues or concerns; seeking any pre-panel clarification; and by alerting the panel advisor as necessary.
    * To encourage active participation of all Panel members in contributing to the Panel's consideration of cases and to the making of clear and well evidenced recommendations.
    * To promote anti discriminatory practice at all times.
    * To ensure that all those attending Panel are treated with respect and courtesy.
    * To address any equality and diversity issues that may arise, and to promote anti discriminatory practice always.
    * To ensure that clear and accurate minutes are written in conjunction with the fostering panel minute taker. These should be accurate, clear and concise.
    * To assist in developing, promoting and monitoring policies and procedures and high standards of work in Somerset fostering service.
    * To ensure, together with the Panel adviser, that the Strategic Operations Manager or/and Head of Service are aware of issues of concern, in relation both to individual situations/cases and to other general matters.
    * To be involved in considerations in respect of any disciplinary or improvement process, or of terminating the appointment of a Panel member.
    * To liaise with the Agency Decision Maker and with other Managers as required
18. **In the absence of the Independent Panel Chairperson, the responsibilities of the Vice Chairperson in partnership with others are**:

* Decide on the attendance of observers at Panel, and seek consent as necessary from other panel members, professionals, foster carers and applicants
* Decide on the participation of a Panel member who declares an interest in a case, applicant or carer
* Decide when an extra Panel may be necessary
* Decide whether a case is adequate for submission to Panel, or if further information or clarification is required.

**Person specification**

**Abilities**

* The authority and competence to chair a panel, ensuring that business is covered, and that panel operates according to regulations, guidance and policies;
* Excellent interpersonal and listening skills;
* The ability to communicate well and clearly, both verbally and in writing;
* The ability to process and analyse large amounts of complex and sometimes distressing information;
* The ability to identify key issues and possible solutions and to communicate these clearly;
* The ability to facilitate the active participation of all panel members;
* The ability to ensure that those attending panel are treated with respect whilst ensuring that panel members remain able to explore concerns;
* The ability to manage strongly held views and conflict;
* The ability to represent the panel in discussions with the Fostering Service;
* The ability in conjunction with others to review panel members’ performances in a way that is constructive and purposeful.

**Experience and qualifications**

* A social work qualification or other professional qualification is desirable.
* Experience in either work with or working alongside professionals and the public.
* Experience in working in social care, or other fields associated with the welfare and care of children and vulnerable people
* Experience of chairing complex meetings.

**Knowledge**

* An appreciation of the effects of separation, loss and developmental trauma on children;
* Awareness of the richness of different kinds of families and their potential for meeting children’s needs;
* Understanding of the purpose and function of the panel and the work of the Fostering Service;
* An understanding of fostering and the looked after experience for children, either professionally or personally;
* An understanding of the fostering process and the related legalisation or the capacity to develop this quickly.

**Attitudes and values**

* A commitment to keeping children within their own family or community where this is possible and to maintaining family time between children living in foster families and their birth families where this appears to be in the child’s best interests;
* A commitment to fostering as a way of meeting a child’s need for permanence, where this appears to be in the child’s best interests;
* A valuing of diversity in relation to issues of ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, and sexuality;
* An understanding of, and commitment to, the need for confidentiality;
* A willingness to increase knowledge and understanding of issues through reading, discussion and training;
* Recognition of the lifelong impact of fostering on all parties.