



■ **FOSTERING**
■ **PANELS**

ANNUAL REVIEW

April 2011 to April 2012

1. INTRODUCTION

This report refers to the sixth year of the functioning of Oxfordshire's two Fostering Panels. The Fostering Panels are constituted under the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 2011.

There are five Fostering Teams working to the Panels, including those of the North, South, City and Family Placement (Disabilities) plus the Multi Treatment Foster Care Programme (MTFC) team. During 2011 it was decided that the Family Placement (Disabilities) team would no longer stand as a specific team and its members have therefore joined the area Fostering teams.

2. ROLES/TASK OF PANEL

The Panel task includes addressing work presented as follows:

- Applications from prospective foster carers for a range of tasks
- Applications relating to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for children already or about to be placed with them
- Taking a view in Connected Persons cases where an additional 8 week extension to temporary approval is proposed in order for assessments to be completed
- First Annual Reviews of foster carers and other Reviews which discuss continuation of approval, extension of approval or Standards of Care
- De-Registration of carers
- Minutes of disruption meetings chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers, where a permanent placement has broken down
- Quality Assurance of work presented

Panel makes a recommendation on whether to approve prospective carers or re-approve approved carers to the Agency Decision Maker who then either ratifies or rejects the recommendation. Applicants have the right of review through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or a return to Panel for the case to be re-heard.

3. OVERVIEW OF WORK PRESENTED TO PANELS

Foster Carer Approvals (unrelated carers) 1st April 2011 – March 31st 2012

Type	New carers
Long Term	3
Long term, Short term & Relief Care	2
Parent & Child & relief	1
Relief Care	5
Short Break Care	4
Short Break & Relief Care	2
Short term	6
Short Term & Long Term	1
Short term & Relief	10
MTFC, Short Term & Relief Care	1
Total	35 (41 previous year)

In addition to new carer approvals the fostering panel approved changes to approval for 21 approved carers, a significant increase on last year's figure (13) providing more in house foster placements.

The total number of unrelated carers has decreased by approximately 15% during the past year. It is important to note that a further 44 applications from prospective foster carers were either ongoing or taken up in 2011/12 but were not approved for a variety of reasons. Please see appendix 2 for further details. This figure is higher than that for 2010/11 when 36 applicants did not achieve approval. These cases often involve many weeks of work before the decision is taken not to proceed to panel. A further factor has been the time taken to developing the MTFC A programme due to the need to recruit and train staff before they were in a position to start recruiting carers.

a) Ethnicity of carers 1st April 2011 – March 31st 2012

Newly Approved Foster Carer Ethnicity (sub category of above)

Ethnicity	No of Households
White British	29
White/Any Other White	2
Black/Black British African	1
White/Irish	1
Asian or Asian British/ Any other Asian Background	1
Mixed	1
TOTAL	35

Efforts continue to recruit families from Black and Minority ethnic backgrounds and this remains an area of focus in the recruitment strategy.

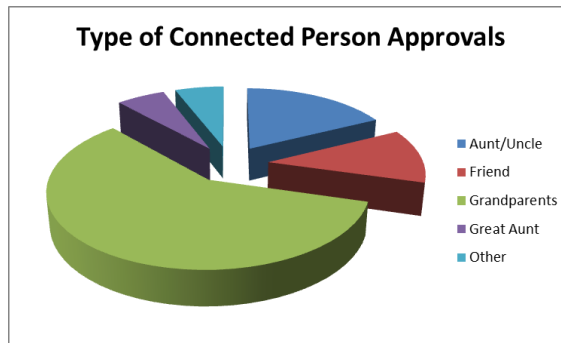
b) Family and Friends (Connected Persons) Approvals

Under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the Fostering Panel considers applications relating to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for specific children who are about to be placed with them or are already placed with them.

A Connected Person can be temporarily approved as a foster carer by the Agency Decision Maker so that an immediate placement can be made. This temporary approval lasts for a period of up to 16 weeks to enable the full assessment to be carried out.

During 2011-12, 17 Connected Persons approvals came to Panel covering 25 children. This represents a decrease of 12 carers when compared with the 29 approvals in the year before. The reduction may relate to the change in legislation and changes in timescales for presentation of assessments to panel and the way in which this was recorded previously.

A breakdown of these carers by their relationship to the child(ren) placed with them continues to show that Grandparents are key carers in these situations.



Connected Persons applications provoke much thought and debate because of the issues they throw up, alongside the significant needs of the children that they will be caring for. Panel has the task of balancing the needs of specific children, the complexities of the family and wider family relationships as well as any risk factors that there may be inherent in the situation. Panel gives due consideration to whether the placement is for the short, medium or long term. Panel also frequently needs to be mindful of any legal proceedings running alongside applications to Panel and on occasions Panel's work is superseded by legal decisions.

4. ANNUAL REVIEWS

35 First Annual Reviews and 8 other annual reviews were presented to Panel during the year representing an increase in first annual reviews of 60%. 81% of all the reviews presented to panel were first annual reviews; for the remaining percentage, the annual reviews were brought to Panel in the context of Standards of Care issues as well as changes of approval. Panel have continued to encourage carers to attend their first annual review and will be tracking this data moving forward.

Annual Reviews are essential in tracking the carers' development, necessary to meet Foster Carer Standards. The Training, Support and Development Standards implemented in April 2008 require all new carers to complete the standards in their first year of approval.

5. DISRUPTION MEETINGS

During 2011-12, one set of disruption meeting minutes have been presented to Panel and this represents a key area for development in 2012-13 so that Panel can review what has occurred in such situations and assist the Fostering Service in learning any lessons from the breakdown of permanent placements.

6. COMPLAINTS

Please see Appendix I.

7. OTHER TRENDS IN RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

- 2011/12 continued to be a period of uncertainty regarding funding for the MTFC programme and this is reflected in the low number of carers approved for this programme. Funding has now been agreed moving forward and Panel are optimistic that the number of carers recruited to this programme will increase in the coming year.
- 95% of new unrelated carers are non-smokers (compared to 85% in 2010/11) demonstrating the success of continuing efforts to recruit to the no smoking policy for the well-being of children.
- Panel have worked to their capacity during the year - including scheduling of extra panels - and are reviewing the membership and frequency of panels in order to ensure that the future needs of the service are met.

8. TERMINATION OF APPROVAL 1ST APRIL 2011 – 31ST MARCH 2012

a) De-registrations

Reasons for Carers Leaving: Apr 2011 - Mar 2012 (DfE Categories)

D2.1 Adoption	2
D2.2 Residence Order	1
D2.3 Special Guardianship Order	4
D2.4 Child (or children) no longer placed with the Family and Friends carer	9
D2.5 Approval terminated – carer unsuitable	1
D2.6 Approval terminated – carer no longer active	7
D2.7 Retirement or resignation (all grounds)	31
D2.7g Resignation to work for another fostering agency (IFA)	0
D2.7h Resignation to work for another Local Authority	0
TOTAL	55

De-registrations have decreased by 13% compared to last year. Family and Friends carers often care for children for short periods only which leads to a higher turnover of carers. Panel have been concerned by the level of resignations and, in their QA role, have imposed additional checks when these notifications are brought to Panel. It is hoped that moving forward this additional information will help qualify de-

registrations and give a greater understanding of the reasons people are ceasing to be Foster Carers with Oxfordshire.

The system to review the Foster Carers Register has been rigorously maintained in order to establish the most accurate version of the Register for effective use by Duty Placement Team especially for emergencies. Development work on this is still on-going in the Framework-i database and it is hoped in future that this additional data will be reported regularly to Panel and the management team.

Similar to 2010-11 13% of leavers have left fostering to take permanent placements under a legal order (adoption, residence orders and SGOs) – a positive outcome for children.

9. CONSULTATION

Where there are contentious factors that arise during assessment cases may be presented to Panel for an early interim view. This allows the Panel to steer the next stage of the assessment or provide a view as to whether to proceed with the assessment.

10. PANEL FUNCTIONING

a) Panel Attendance; frequency and number of meetings

The Service comprises two Panels, each sitting once a month. 29 Panels were held during the year which included a number of extra panels to accommodate the increase in recruitment and applicants attending. This year, quoracy has been sustained by members serving on alternative panels on occasions. Agendas have had to be regularly extended to accommodate work flow and the objective of tighter timescales. A challenge for agenda setting is the need to prioritise Connected Persons work and any Standards of Care issues in order to meet timeframes.

b) Membership

In accordance with the Fostering Regulations, Guidance and National Minimum Standards, a new Central List of Panel members has been drawn up, see Appendix II. New Panel membership agreement documents have been signed by all members and all members have been given a copy of the County Council Whistle-blowing policy in accordance with Standard 19.6.

Recruitment objectives have been met: from October 2011 a temporary Independent Chair was in place, a permanent Independent Chair has been in place since January 2012, following a period of induction. Both Panels have Vice Chairs. A new Panel Advisor started in February 2012, following induction. Panels comprise members with a mix of experience

required by legislation. A priority for the coming year is to review and extend the diversity of panel membership.

Panel members receive their papers 5 working days in advance. Reading the papers supplied in preparation for discussion is a considerable undertaking as the papers may involve up to five hours of close reading. All members devote a great deal of time and personal commitment to the work of the panel and invariably come well prepared.

Panel members keep up-to-date with fostering matters: all are or soon will be members of *Fostering Network* and receive the *Foster Care* periodical. Once registered with *Fostering Network*, members have access to a considerable online resource. All members are provided with a copy of *Effective Fostering Panels, BAAF*, to enhance their understanding of the panel process. They have also received publications providing full details of changes to fostering regulations and NMS 2011.

Panel members are aware of what constitutes a conflict of interest and declare this at the beginning of a case slot; this is then recorded in the minutes.

c) Appraisal of Panel Members

The appraisal of all members takes place annually. All involved valued this opportunity to consider Panel functioning, outside the day to day work of panel.

d) Panel Training

In May 2011, there was a training day specifically for Panel members on aspects of Panel functioning. Panel members attended training on the National Minimum Standards and associated regulatory changes in June 2011. A further training day for panel members and staff took place in October 2011 on the subject of Contact and Permanence: creating a practice framework for the 21st century. The day was led by John Simmonds, Director of Policy, Research and Development at BAAF. Sessions were led by Claire Jerram, County Solicitor, who gave an overview of the legal framework and Bruce Newman, adopter and panel member.

The Panel Chair is a member of the Independent Chairs Group for Fostering associated with the Fostering Network, which meets several times per annum. The Panel adviser attends a monthly management meeting with fostering team managers, fostering service meetings and fostering consortium meetings with a group of other local authorities.

e) Working with the Agency Decision Maker

Shaun Hanks has continued to be the Agency Decision Maker alongside his Safeguarding & Quality Assurance role. Hannah Farncombe, Safeguarding Manager, is responsible for covering the ADM role when Shaun Hanks is unavailable.

There have been a few occasions when the panel recommendations were not supported by the Agency Decision Maker. These have related to complex cases and included a case where the Panel were unable to reach a clear majority decision and the case was referred to the ADM for review.

f) **Transparency and openness**

- Carers attending Panel - Of the 37 unrelated carers approved 78% attended panel (an increase of 12% on 2010/11). Of the 17 Connected Persons applicants, 53% (as compared to 25% in the previous year) have chosen to accept the invitation.
- Observers - Student social workers, members of staff on induction, members of Senior Management and prospective panel members, have all joined panel to observe. Panel welcomes observing at meetings. It is an excellent way to see how Panel works and helps to demystify the process, particularly for those who will present cases to Panel for the first time.
- Panel Evaluation - both applicants and social workers attending panel are asked to complete and return an evaluation form - this information is fed back to Panel and helps to shape panel direction moving forward. Comments from applicants vary:

We found everyone very welcoming & supportive

A bit intimidating with set-up very formal - I was nervous

The panel experience was a good one and we were made to feel at ease.

Many attending social workers have also taken the opportunity to comment on their panel experience:

A very positive experience

Unfortunate use of words when referring to living arrangements, which could be interpreted as prejudicial

Panel were extremely helpful ... particularly when seeking advice

- Panel brochure - This has been re-written to give those attending Panel a greater level of detail about what to expect in advance of panel, it includes details of those who make up the Central List and is attached at Appendix II.

g) **Quality Assurance**

Panel fulfils this function in the following ways:

- Working with the service on policy changes
- Introduction of the Fostering Panel Quarterly Bulletin, providing 'Top Ten' messages back to the Fostering Service

- Chair and Vice Chair meet regularly with the Fostering Manager
- Evaluation Forms for feedback from Applicants and Social workers
- Plans to bring every third Annual Review to Panel
- Providing feedback to presenting social workers and their managers
- Requesting further information on decision-making where necessary.

h) Medical Advisors Liaison

Panel has designated Medical Advisors who do not attend panel but who comment on applicants' medicals. The Panel Chair and Advisor attend quarterly liaison meetings with Oxfordshire's Medical and Legal Advisors. Panel refers to the OCC Smoking Policy which indicates that ideally applicants and carers should be non-smokers. This aim has been achieved in part - 95% of newly approved carers were none smokers this year compared with 85% last year. Panel also draws on new Guidance issued by BAAF regarding weight levels for good health. It is the current policy of the authority to recommend that all approved carers are immunised against Hepatitis B. Full medicals will be required from 1 April 2012 for all prospective carers including short break and relief carers.

i) Panel Administration

Ensuring that Framework-i tasks are completed and that the system provides all the information needed continues to be a challenge. Since December 2011 a new Panel Administrator has been in post and throughout this transition the administration of panel has continued to be of a high standard. Following a positive decision, no placements are made until a foster carer agreement has been completed by the agency and signed by the carer.

j) New Fostering Regulations/National Minimum Standards 2011

The Chair of Panel has assisted panel with their understanding of the New Fostering Regulations/National Minimum Standards 2011. An audit has been carried out of panel's compliance to them and an action plan put in place.

k) Independent Review Mechanism

2 carers did not agree with Panel's recommendations and the ADM's decision and went to the IRM. The IRM endorsed the recommendation of Panel on the first case referred to them. The IRM report was shared with the Panels to consider the learning points that had been identified and action plans were prepared. The other case referred to the IRM has not yet been heard.

l) Budgets

A small budget is available to pay panel members' allowances, travel expenses and meeting refreshments.

m) **Accommodation**

Panel meets at Nash Court on Oxford Business Park. The venue comprises of a large Conference Room and waiting rooms on the ground floor. It provides a welcoming setting, with parking for panel members, applicants and presenting staff.

n) **Fostering Inspection**

Ofsted carried out its long anticipated inspection of Oxfordshire's Fostering Service in the first week of March 2012. The outcome of this inspection was good, with outstanding features in three out of six categories. The report is still awaited at the time of writing.

11. OBJECTIVES FOR 2012/2013

- **Ensure all minutes from disruptions meetings of permanent placement come to panel.**
- **Respond to the objectives of 2010/13 Recruitment Strategy and process 50 applications for unrelated carers within the new timescale of 8 months**
- **All third Foster carer annual reviews to be presented to the fostering panel in addition to first annual reviews to improve quality assurance**
- **Review and extend the diversity of panel membership.**
- **Review of the Evaluation forms to include feedback from prospective and approved carers attending Panel.**
- **Continue work to improve reporting from the Framework-I database.**

Wendy Gill
Independent Chair: Fostering Panels

March 2012

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Complaints received by the Fostering Service

1st April 2011 to 31 March 2012

Complaint made by child/young person: 10 (3 upheld, 5 not upheld, 2 partly upheld).

Complaint made by parent of child/young person: 3(none upheld)

Complaints made by Foster Carer: 4(none upheld).

Complaints made by member of public/MP: 3(2 partly upheld, 3rd ongoing).

Complaints made by other professionals: 8 (6 upheld, 2 not upheld).

Appendix 2

Reasons prospective foster carers who withdrew /were counselled out in 2011/12

Reason	Number
Applicant withdrew due to concerns about the impact of fostering on her own children	1
Applicant withdrew due to medical issues in the wider family	1
Applicant withdrew due to medical reasons	4
Applicant withdrew due to work commitments	1
Applicant withdrew felt not the right time	9
Applicant withdrew not the right time for own children	1
Applicant withdrew to go to other LA: felt distance for contact would be better managed	1
Applicant withdrew: adoption assessment started	1
Applicant withdrew: pregnant	2
Applicants withdrew felt not the right time	4
Applicants withdrew to go to an IFA	1
Applicants withdrew: moving house	1
Counselled out due to issues with references	4
Counselled out due to lack of communication from applicants	6
Counselled out due to medical issues	1
Counselled out health and safety concerns in the home	1
Counselled out: Carers both work full time and want to take on child under 6 years.	1
Counselled out: no longer have spare room for fostering	2
Future of job uncertain. Applicant felt was not the right time to proceed	2
Total	44

APPENDICES

Appendix 3 - Panel Brochure

A Guide to Oxfordshire's Fostering Panels

This guide has been prepared to give you information about Oxfordshire's Fostering Panel. It provides details about what you can expect to happen when you attend the panel, either as a prospective or existing approved foster carer.

About the Panels

All Fostering Panels are required to have at least 5 members, although in practice there may be more, who meet to make recommendations about the approval of prospective carers or their continuation in the service after approval through reviews. The panels are constituted under the Fostering Services Regulations (England) 2011.

Panels meet every two weeks, on a Wednesday, and are chaired by an independent person. Other members of Panel are drawn from a central list and may include a Panel Advisor, Children's Services representatives, an elected Councillor and independent members who have experience of fostering or working with children. Members receive regular training. All members are checked with the Criminal Records Bureau.

Panel Procedure

The Panel does not make decisions: it makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker about the cases it considers. The Agency Decision maker is the Service Manager with responsibility for safeguarding and quality control.

To enable Panel members to carry out their work effectively they receive and read, well in advance of the meeting, detailed reports written by the Social Worker.

Attending Panel

All people who wish to become foster carers and all foster carers who are having a review will be invited to Panel. The Panel believe that it is of central importance that you attend so that you have an opportunity to give feedback and ask questions about any aspect of the fostering service. You will always receive the paperwork in advance and have a chance to read, comment and sign it if you agree with its contents. The Panel will give you feedback about your application or review and by attending we believe that your attendance at Panel symbolises your commitment to the teamwork that is so crucial to make fostering work. We strongly encourage you to come to Panel.

The Day of the Panel

Members will have a discussion about your case, before you join us. This is an opportunity for the Panel to raise issues they want clarified.

The Panel Chair will then come to meet you and bring you into the meeting. Members will introduce themselves and tell you their role. Every effort will be made to put you at your ease and although the Panel is a formal meeting it is hoped that there is an open, friendly atmosphere.

Individual Panel Members will ask you questions. You may feel that some questions are unnecessary or intrusive, however, it is the responsibility of the Panel to satisfy themselves of your suitability and the most important factor in their deliberations is protecting the best interests of the children in Oxfordshire's care. We will always treat Applicants/Carers with respect and consideration.

You will be asked if you wish to make any further comments before being asked to leave the meeting. Your social worker will stay in Panel for any remaining questions. The Panel will have further discussion based on what they have heard and read to reach its recommendation by putting it to a vote.

Your social worker will inform you of Panel's recommendation and a summary of the reasons, either directly after your slot in Panel or shortly afterwards.

The recommendation may be one of the following:

- Agree the recommendation of the Fostering Service
- Not agree the recommendation of the Fostering Service
- Defer a recommendation for more information

All recommendations are passed to the Agency Decision Maker who will write to you within seven working days with the decision.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will the panel last?

The Panel normally meets between 9.45am – 2.30pm and considers several cases during that period. Timescales vary depending on the type of case being presented. If you are attending for an approval of your application as Carers you should allow at least one hour although the Panel may only see you for about 20 minutes of that time. Annual reviews are scheduled for about 30 minutes.

You will be asked to come at a specific time and will be asked to wait in another room whilst Panel discuss your case. If you have a strong preference for a particular time of the day, perhaps for child care reasons, please let your social worker know and the Panel Administrator will do all she can to accommodate this. We do our best to keep to time but due to the complexity of cases we can overrun. Please be patient with us as we need to be sure that we have addressed every case fully and thoroughly.

Where is the Panel held?

The Panel is normally held at Nash Court, 4440 Oxford Business Park, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2RU and there is a reserved car park in front of the building for people attending Panel or further spaces are available to the rear of the building. A map and directions to the office is attached with this brochure. If you are running late the reception phone number is 01865 897670. On arrival you will be advised about the waiting area and refreshments will be available.

What if my application is turned down or my approval discontinued and I don't agree with this?

If your case has not been approved the Chair of Panel will advise you on the day with reasons. This will be followed up by a letter of confirmation. If you are unhappy with the decision or believe that you have been unfairly treated you should discuss this with your Social Worker who will advise you of the review procedure. In summary, you have the right to, either, write to the Agency Decision Maker to make a representation of your case within 28 days. Alternatively, you may apply within 28 days to the Secretary of State for an independent review panel. The Regulations covering this are within the Fostering Services (Amendment) Regulations 2009.

What if I know someone on the Panel or they know me?

All Panel members have signed a confidentiality statement that binds them not to discuss any information they read in the Panel outside of its remit.

Below is some written information about the Panel members on the Central List. If you know a Panel member please let your Social Worker know in advance. Similarly, Panel members are required to declare an interest before a discussion takes place, if they know the applicant. A decision will then be taken by the Chair about whether they should be involved in any discussions or recommendations about your case.

We hope that this booklet has answered some of your questions and given you some idea of what to expect if you decide to attend Panel. Inevitably there will be some questions that we have not covered. Please raise these with your Social Worker. Remember that your attendance at the Panel will give you the opportunity to meet the people who will be making the recommendations about you and your family. It is also the chance to be part of the decision making process.

**If you have any queries about the Fostering Panel please
contact Joy Vincent, Fostering Panel Adviser on
01865 323011 or e-mail: joy.vincent@oxfordshire.gov.uk**

Who are we?

WENDY GILL, Independent Chair of Panel



Wendy has over 30 years' experience as a registered social worker. She has worked in several local authority Children's Services, in practitioner and management roles, and for a voluntary fostering and adoption agency called "Parents for Children". For the past 7 years she has chaired the Fostering Panel for a London Borough. She also works as a consultant for a national organisation in Ireland, putting in place a framework for intervening in the lives of children with school attendance problems. In 2006 she had a paper published in a book called the "Health of Looked after Children and Young People", based on research into the factors that lead to the breakdown of foster placements and adoptions.

JOY VINCENT, Fostering Panel Adviser



Joy, a registered social worker, qualified in 1990 and on moving to Oxfordshire in 1994, specialized in child care and has worked as a practitioner and then as a manager for the Looked After Children team in the south of the county. In recent years she has managed the children's social care training team and latterly the children's social care complaints and resolutions service. In addition she has served on Oxfordshire's adoption panel for five years.

HELEN SMITH, Fostering Panel Administrator



Helen is degree and post graduate qualified and has over 20 years of administrative experience with a wide range of organisations including work for local universities, hospitals and recently for an adoption support charity. For the past two years she has worked for Oxfordshire County Council on the Children's Safeguarding Team and joined the Fostering Panel at the end of 2011.

Oxfordshire's Fostering Panel 2011-12

County Councillor Janet Godden, Elected Member

Janet has recently re-joined panel having originally served from 1998-2005 on one of the County's three Adoption and Fostering panels. From 2000-2004 she served as Chair of the Oxfordshire Learning Disability Partnership Board and was also Chair of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire NHS Mental Health Foundation Trust (2005-2010). She is a member of North Hinksey Parish Council since 2007. Janet is a parent and now enjoys being a grandparent!

County Councillor Anda Fitzgerald O'Connor, Elected Member

Anda is a County Councillor serving on the Children's Panel as well as other committees to do with youth work and children. She is on the executive board of a small charity 'Oxfordshire Play Association' that promotes play for play's sake for children throughout the county.

Deborah Backhaus, Independent Member

Deborah is a retired children's nurse. She has been a Panel member of an Independent Fostering Agency since 2004, and is a governor at a non-maintained special school run by Action for Children. She is a magistrate in Oxfordshire, sitting in both the Adult and Family Courts.

Ron Hart MBE Independent Member

Ron has been a foster carer for another authority, Buckinghamshire, for many years and he and his wife are now permanently committed to raising a child with special needs. He has fostered healthy as well as special needs children and therefore has a good understanding of what is required of foster carers and the issues they will face. Ron is an experienced Panel member.

Maggie Mackenzie, Independent Member

Maggie is the Designated Nurse Looked After Children for Oxfordshire. She is a Registered Nurse, Midwife and Health Visitor.

Julie Marcks, Independent Member

Julie was adopted as a child and therefore has been a service user. Her subsequent career in nursing included extensive management responsibilities at a major Oxfordshire teaching hospital. Following early retirement, Julie has contributed her many skills to panel and has also been able to enjoy her interests including walking. Julie is married and has relished her role parenting her step daughter.

Nigel Pullan, Independent Member

Nigel is developing his career in foster care with Buckinghamshire and loving it! His earlier life included an extensive international career in business following the award of a degree from Oxford. Nigel is married and is a parent himself.

Val Sheldon, Independent Member

Valerie, a Registered Social Worker, has worked as a social worker for over 35 years. She has worked on a busy frontline duty team in a very deprived area in North West London. She then specialized in children & families work and became a Paediatric Social Worker at Great Ormond Street Hospital and then the Paediatric Dept. at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, as a Senior Practitioner. Val is now retired.

Bob Wheeler, Independent Member

Bob is a foster carer with an Independent Fostering Agency and is experienced at fostering teenagers. Previously Bob worked for 4 years at the Mulberry Bush School in Standlake with children who had a high level of need. Bob recently completed his first year on panel and is an enthusiastic member.

Claire Ainsworth, Staff Member

Claire, a well-established member of panel, is a Supervising Social Worker in the Fostering Team South, who has many years of social work experience which includes working with adolescents, family support and family placement (both fostering and adoption). Claire has achieved the Child Care Award, is a Registered Social Worker and has also been a foster carer herself. She also has a degree in the arts field.

Denise Allen, Staff Member

Denise, a Registered Social Worker, has until recently been working in the Fostering Team (Disabilities) and is now in the Fostering Team (North) focusing on carers in the Short Break scheme. She has previously served on a Fostering Panel in the independent sector and is looking forward to contributing to Oxfordshire's panels.

Michele Howe, Staff Member

Michele, a Registered Social Worker, has recently transferred from the City Fostering Team where she was a Senior Practitioner, to the MTFC Team in Nash Court; Michele is a Supervising Social Worker and contributes to the training of Foster Carers in the KEEP programme which offers on-going development after approval. Michele's background lies in journalism.

Annie Stockford, Staff Member

Annie is a Senior Practitioner in the Family Support Team in Witney. She is a Registered Social Worker who qualified in 1990 and contributes her extensive knowledge of the court process and child protection conferences to panel. Annie is undertaking the Child Care Award. Annie has also been a school governor for 4 years!

Wendy Queralt, Staff Member, Vice Chair

Wendy is a Snr Practitioner in the Fostering Team (City). She qualified as a social worker in 2005 at Edinburgh, having previously gained a BA in Psychology at Swansea. She recently did a 6 months stint in the Duty Placement Team and currently works on the foster carers recruitment initiative.

Christine Warriner, Staff Member

Christine, a Registered Social Worker, is a Supervising Social Worker in the Fostering Team (South). Christine has experience on the Practice Assessment Panel of the Social Work Course at Oxford Brookes University in relation to evaluating students' standards. She has an interest in mental health practice as an ASW and undertaken work as a Complaints Officer for Oxfordshire County Council; she is a Trustee of the Mulberry Bush School.

Jenny Wiles, Staff Member, Vice Chair

Jenny has been involved in practice in Fostering and Adoption for 20 years. Her current Senior Practitioner role with Oxfordshire's Children, Young People and Families is based in the Family Placement Team (N) leading in Kinship Care. Jenny has also been a manager with Duty and Assessment Teams for two other Local Authorities, for 7 years. She had achieved the Child Care Award.