**Introduction**

The Independent Fostering Panel plays a vital role in the provision and monitoring of foster care within Orchard Care and has a commitment to accountability and openness. It helps to ensure that Orchard Care makes positive decisions and realistic assessments with regards to every foster family. This is a crucial role ensuring that foster children’s welfare and needs are met appropriately.

 The Fostering Panel is a group of carefully selected appropriately qualified and experienced people.

 Panel meets to collaborate in relation to applications to foster and foster carer reviews. Panel also put forward ideas and suggestions with regard to the quality of foster care and support provided through Orchard Care.

 Everyone at Orchard Care, including Panel Members, fully understand that attending Panel Meetings can be daunting and we all strive to put applicants at ease. We recognise that the decision-making process in respect of assessment, approval and review of foster carers must be fair, transparent, and open to challenge, and the Fostering Panel is clearly a key facilitator of this.

**Panel Process & What Applicants and Carers can Expect.**

· Panel will be held in our Orchard Care – Suite 7. The address for this is Suite 7 Alexander House, Whitfield Court, St John’s Road, Meadowfield, Durham DH7 8XL.

· We ask for your patience regarding attendance as there are many items on the Panel’s agenda. You will be invited into the meeting when Panel Members are ready for you.

· It is usual for the Panel to prepare any questions they have before you attend the meeting.

· The Chairperson, will give a brief introduction and explain the process.

· There may be occasions where your Assessor/ Supervising Social Worker attends the meeting on their own first to examine particular issues that may have arisen from references, assessment, etc.

· You will attend the meeting with your Assessor or Supervising Social Worker who will be there to support you. You will be asked questions by the Chairperson.

· You will then be asked to leave the meeting whilst Panel discussions take place.

· The Panel must reach agreed recommendations, and after the meeting the Chairperson will ring to inform you of the recommendations. The Panel Advisor will ring your Assessor/ Supervising Social Worker.

· Following the Panel we offer an opportunity for you to complete a feedback questionnaire. We hope you will give feedback to help with the continual improvement and development of the Panel.

· **We note the recommendations that the Independent Panel make are given to the Agency Decision Maker.**

**· The Agency Decision Maker makes the final decision/ qualifying determination. This will be put in writing to you with any conditions made. This process can take a number of weeks.**

**Panel Members**

The rest of this brochure contains photographs and a brief description of each Panel Member.

We hope this will be helpful to you and if you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us on 0191 378 4444.

**Christopher Hodge**

Panel Chair

I am a social worker for 10 year and worked in social care for 20 years. Significant experience in youth justice, child protection, child in need and children at risk outside the home (contextual safeguarding). I have managed a contextual safeguarding team and managed a front door assessment team in local authorities. I am currently managing a social work team within a charity who have a cancer diagnosis.

**Nicola Stott**

Vice Chair

I am an independent panel member for Orchard Care. I have been a social worker for 17 years in different Local Authorities. Roles have included managing local authority fostering teams and Children’s Centres. I was a Registered Manger of Independent Fostering Agency. I am now the Designated Social Care Officer for social work/SEND within a local authority. I have 2 children and 2 cats!

**Sarah Jones**

Panel Adviser
I am the Assistant Director at Orchard Care and it’s my role as Panel Adviser to manage the relationship between Orchard Care and the Independent Fostering Panel, quality assuring and feeding back to all involved in Panel work. I have had experience of the Fostering Panel since 2006.

**Tracy Alden**
Independent Member
I am mum to 4 children. My husband and I initially fostered our 2 youngest children with Orchard Care for 3 years before going on to adopt them in 2014.

**Janet Gardner**
Independent Member
I am an independent foster carer member of the Panel and retired from fostering after 12 years. Together with my husband, we have looked after approximately 20 children aged from 8 to 18 years. We also have 2 grown-up children of our own and grandchildren. We live in a small-holding in the countryside with a menagerie of animals.

**Trevor Carter**
Independent Member
I was a math's and I.T. teacher for over twenty years, and I like to think I was a ‘teacher of children’ as I have a good rapport with young people. Currently, I am a retired Education Consultant but kept very busy with various voluntary activities in Durham.

**Kirsty Leach**

Independent Member

****I am a social worker in a Local Authority fostering team. I have specialised in working in fostering for several years; having previously worked in safeguarding, looked after children’s teams, adoption and in disabled children’s teams over the 27 years that I have been a social worker. I love my job and am passionate about supporting children in foster care; being a member of this panel enables me to be a supportive part of fostering family’s journeys.

**Cheryl Adamson**

Social Worker

I started my social care career working in various roles in adult mental health rehabilitation and residential services. I have also worked as a youth worker and children’s residential worker before completing my social work training in 2007. Since then, my focus has been working with cared for children, assessing foster carers and the recruitment, assessment, training and support of adopters. Outside of my work commitments my time is spent with my two daughters. I enjoy cooking and consider myself an expert of eating afternoon tea. I volunteer my time supporting parents of children with heart conditions, raising awareness of organ donation and I also volunteer as a police custody visitor.

**Tom Southworth**

Independent Member

I enjoy being able to make a difference to a child’s life chances and seeing them grow and succeed. Whether that’s academically as a tutor or helping to grow personally in a social context. I believe every child deserves to have a positive influence in their life and I try to be that influence for the children that I work with.