

Supplementary Role Profile for a Councillor Member of the Permanence Panel

This document builds on the general role profile for Suffolk County Councillors.

This document summarises the main features of working as the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Council and for which a Special Responsibility Allowance is paid under SCC Constitution Part 7, Schedule 1 'Rates of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances'.

Main Purpose of the Role of member of the Permanence Panel

1. To undertake the duties of a member of the Council's Permanence Panel as defined in the annexed documents.

Key Relationships:

1. Chair of the Panel.
2. Members of the Panel.
3. Clerk.
4. Legal advisor.
5. Specialist officer.

Main Activities and Responsibilities:

Permanence panels are set up by law to make recommendations about:

- Whether adoption or permanent fostering is the appropriate plan for the child;
- Whether applicants are suitable as adopters and
- Whether particular children should be placed with particular adopters or permanent foster carers, as well as some other subsidiary issues.

Additional Responsibilities:

The panel member will also:

- Need to sign a protocol which sets out what is expected – this includes undertaking to attend 75% of the time.
- Need to read the council's policies and feel comfortable with them to be a panel member.

Estimated average monthly time spent on the role:

There are 3 panels each of which meets 3 weekly (approx. 17 meetings per year). A list of dates is available for the year ahead to help members plan their commitments.

The length of a panel varies between a half day and 2/3rds of a day.

Reading before meetings – roughly the same amount of time as spent in the panel meetings.

Minimum input 8 hours per month, maximum 16 hours per month

Any other comments

The Panels have to make some recommendations of great importance and sensitivity which profoundly affect the lives of children and adopters. The role of panel member requires a lot of thought and care, It is a challenging role both emotionally and mentally.

It requires a good balance of relevant experience, wisdom, sensitivity to particular children's needs and a mix of views from different standpoints.

Further information is included in Annex 1 and Annex 2

Introduction

Under the Adoption Agency and Foster Care Regulations, Permanence Panel members are called on to make recommendations of huge significance in children's lives. They must take part in highly sensitive and confidential discussions and attempt to make appropriate recommendations in situations of great difficulty and complexity. In doing so, they must act with care and integrity.

Recognising this, the Suffolk Adoption Agency requires its panel members to sign their agreement to the following protocol, which reflects some of the main requirements of the role and make clear the Agency's expectations of each panel member.

The protocol is also intended to clarify what panel members can expect from the Agency.

The Protocol

Expectations of panel members

1. Any information of which the panel members become aware in their capacity as a member of the Suffolk Permanence Panel regarding individual children, their natural families and prospective adoptive parents is confidential. Panel members undertake not to disclose any such information to persons who are not members of the Suffolk Permanence Panel or attending the Panel without prior confirmation from the Director for Children and Young People that any such disclosure would be permitted by the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 and the Foster Care Regulations 2001.
2. Panel members will make suitable arrangements to ensure that all confidential written material to which they have access is received, kept and transported securely so that no unauthorised person can access it.
3. Panel members undertake to declare to the Chair of the Panel (at Panel meetings) or otherwise to the Professional Adviser (Permanence) any prior personal knowledge they have regarding individual children, their natural families and prospective adoptive parents due to be discussed by the Panel. This declaration should be made as soon as the Panel Member becomes aware of it to ensure that the Panel will be quorate. The Panel Member agrees, if required to do so, to stand down from the Panel and leave the room when that matter is being discussed.
4. Panel Members will leave all confidential written material concerning Panel business with the Clerk to the Panel at the end of each meeting.
5. Panel Members will be named on the 'central list' of Panel Members for Suffolk Adoption Agency. They will be assigned to one of three Panels, A, B or C. There is an expectation that Panel Members will attend a minimum of 75% of meetings of the Panel they are assigned to. Requests may be made for Panel Members to sit on alternative Panels, as a member of the 'central list' if required to ensure quoracy of Panel meetings.
6. Panel Members should have read the Panel papers carefully and should come

prepared to contribute to the panel discussion and to accept responsibility for taking an equal role in the recommendation process.

7. Panel Members must be able to analyse reports.
8. Panel Members should be committed to anti-discriminatory practice and should be prepared to consider each case on its own merits applying the principle that first consideration being given to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child throughout his childhood. Panel members should be committed to carrying out the Policies of the Suffolk Adoption Agency.
9. Panel Members should attempt, in their participation in panel meetings to achieve a balance between being too passive and unquestioning and being challenging in a disrespectful and unhelpful way.
10. Panel members must behave independently of Agency, family, party etc in carrying out their role.
11. An annual training day will be arranged by the Agency. There is a clear expectation that Panel Members will attend.
12. Panel Members should inform the Professional Adviser (Permanence) or the Chair if they have been convicted or cautioned for any criminal offence or if any criminal proceedings are pending.
13. Panel Members should be willing to sign their agreement to the carrying out of a Criminal Records Bureau check.
14. Panel members should take part in an annual performance review as set out below.
15. An Adoption Panel Member may resign at any time by giving one month's notice in writing to the Adoption Agency.

Review of Panel Membership

16. Membership of the panel will be reviewed with panel members annually. The panel member will be invited to meet with the Chair and the Professional Adviser (Permanence). This provides an opportunity to review the experience to date and make suggestions, which will assist the member to become more involved and effective. Panel members will be given separate written guidance concerning the annual performance review.
17. Exceptionally, it would also provide an opportunity for members who are unhappy with the role to withdraw or for the Chair and the Professional Adviser (Permanence) to suggest that the panel member leaves the panel. The Professional Adviser (Permanence) and Chair should always give reasons, in writing, for such a suggestion. They must then make this recommendation to the Agency. In the case of elected members, any issue of this kind would also need to be addressed with the appropriate group leader.
18. If a decision is made to end the Panel Member's appointment following this review or at any other time, the Chair and Professional Adviser (Permanence) will usually only have made this recommendation to the Agency following an attempt to resolve in private any concerns about a Panel Member's conduct or behaviour. Written reasons will be given

for any decision to end a Panel Member's appointment.¹

What Panel Members can expect from the Agency

- 19. An induction programme negotiated with the Professional Adviser (Permanence) to be agreed with the panel member (for new panel members only).
- 20. Briefing about practice and policy developments in the field of adoption as and when they arise.
- 21. The provision of at least one training day per year. The Panel members should be consulted about the content and format.
- 22. Support and advice as necessary from the Professional Adviser (Permanence) and Panel Chair in any matter to do with panel membership.
- 23. Payment, on application, of necessary travel, mileage, parking and childcare expenses for independent panel members not employed by the Authority or partner agencies.
- 24. For each independent member of the panels, the payment, on application, of a £70 fee for each meeting of the panel attended with an additional £70 if the panel meeting continues past 1.00p.m. This fee includes time spent reading for the meeting in question.

I have read this protocol and agree to its conditions.

.....
Panel Member's name

.....
Panel member's signature

.....
Date

¹ Decisions about the appointment and dismissal of panel members are confirmed by the Adoption Agency which is headed by the Director for Children and Young People.

SUFFOLK ADOPTION AGENCY

Information for prospective members of a permanence panel

Thanks very much for your query about your possible membership of one of Suffolk's permanence panels. This is a vital and valuable role for children.

What are the panels for?

Permanence panels are set up by law to make recommendations about:

- whether adoption or permanent fostering is the appropriate plan for the child;
- whether applicants are suitable as adopters and
- whether particular children should be placed with particular adopters or permanent foster carers. Also some other subsidiary issues

The panels are called permanence panels because they consider permanent fostering as well as adoption.

You can see that the panels have to make some recommendations of great importance and sensitivity, which profoundly affect the lives of children and adopters. The role of panel member requires a lot of thought and care. It is a challenging role both emotionally and mentally.

It requires a good balance of relevant experience, wisdom, sensitivity to particular children's needs and a mix of views from different standpoints.

The panels act as an independent quality check on plans suggested by social workers for children in care who they believe need to be adopted or permanently fostered. The panel has to consider the plan to check whether there are better alternatives for the child, for example, whether a parent or member of the child's wider family could be helped to look after the child. The panel gives advice on matters such as whether the child should be placed with siblings, what contact arrangements there should be with family members after the child is placed and so on. Some birth parents opt to attend the meeting to give their views as part of the panels work

The panel also has to consider recommendations that people should be approved as adopters. Prospective adopters who have undergone a period of training and assessment attend part of these items to answer any panel questions and express their views. The panel also examine proposals to place particular children with particular adopters. In this case, the panel has to consider whether the adopters skills and characteristics match what particular children need.

How the panels run

The length of a panel meeting varies between a half day and 2/3rd of the day. The panels meet in Ipswich at Endeavour House, Russell Rd.

SUFFOLK ADOPTION AGENCY

Information for prospective members of a permanence panel

There is a substantial amount of careful reading to do before each meeting, which roughly equals the amount of time spent in panels. The panel information is very confidential and panel members` have to abide by strict confidentiality rules. Panel members receive this information a week before the panel meeting.

We currently have 3 permanence panels each of which meets 3 weekly. A list of dates is available for the year ahead to help members plan their commitments.

Memberships of the panels.

There are approximately 10 members on each panel not including additional people such as the Clerk, legal adviser and myself. Meetings have to have 5 members present to be quorate so keeping attendance at a good level is important.

The chair is an independent person, Lyndsay Davison. The members of the panel include a mix of social services, education, councilors, a medical adviser and independent members.

We try hard to include people as panel members who have direct experience of adoption in one way or another.

You might be

- an adopted person
- An adopter
- A birth parent of a child who was adopted
- Alternatively you may have experience of working in the field of adoption as a volunteer or professionally or with children in care.

What membership entails

Panel members are asked to sign a protocol which sets out what's expected of you. This includes undertaking to attend 75% of the time. Secondly, panel members need to read our Policies and feel comfortable with them to be a panel member.

More information about Suffolk Adoption Agency

Our Statement of Purpose describes the services we provide in detail and we will happily send this to you on request.

Support for panel members

We pay a flat rate attendance fee to independent panel members of £70 for each session attended (a session is morning until 1.00 p.m. or afternoon, if Panel continues after 1.00 p.m. this then counts as two sessions) plus expenses.

SUFFOLK ADOPTION AGENCY

Information for prospective members of a permanence panel

Prospective members are invited to observe a panel before joining.

There is an annual training day which you are expected to attend and regular briefings for panel members as part of the panel meetings.

There is an annual performance review for panel members to give and receive feedback, check that the panel member's circumstances have not changed significantly, it is still appropriate for them to hold office and that their training needs are met.

The application process

Please come back to me if, following consideration, you feel you want to apply or know more. I would be glad to talk it through with you.

You would then need to:

- complete an application form and
- Criminal Records Bureau form.
- We will need to take up three references, following which we will talk by phone to one of your referees.
- We will also invite you to an interview with the panel chair and me.
- If we all agree to proceed, your appointment will then be formally endorsed by a senior person within Suffolk's Directorate for Children and Young People.