



Josh MacAlister MP
Minister for Children and Families
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

26 March 2026

Dear Minister,

As organisations working to improve the lives of care experienced children and young people, we welcome your ambition to recruit thousands more foster carers and your commitment to strengthening foster care so children in care can receive the stable, loving homes they deserve. We are grateful for the engagement of officials from your department throughout the consultation process.

Having carefully considered the proposals and consulted with our members (both services and foster carers), we are united in one key area: **we believe that panels for approval of foster carers should remain a core part of a reformed and improved fostering process.** We are very concerned that removing panels would take away an important process that safeguards children so that they be cared for safely in another adult's home. Retaining panels would ensure this critical safeguard and quality assurance mechanism remains whilst other, more substantive barriers in the process could be addressed. There are sadly many Serious Case Reviews that attest to what can happen if individuals who seek to cause harm to children are approved.

Fostering panels bring together a diverse group of professionals with knowledge and expertise from across the sector, many of whom are independent of the fostering service. The independent scrutiny that panels provide strengthens the quality and consistency of assessments, offering a level of oversight that cannot be replicated solely

through internal decision-making. They provide a proportionate and essential safeguard in ensuring that assessments are robust, fair, and child-centred and not influenced by external pressures or funding decisions. We heard consistently from the sector that it is essential for panel members with lived experience (care experience, foster carers and kinship carers) to retain an integral role in the approval and decision making process. Many foster carers also shared with us how much they value the role that panels have played as part of the approval process as they make them feel validated.

Panels also play a key function in ensuring adherence with legislation, guidance and local policies.

Removing panels at a time of reform would also place additional pressure on agency decision makers who may not have the time or capacity to provide equivalent scrutiny, and is therefore unlikely to improve timeliness as the reform increases the number of applications.

We welcome reform and change in fostering, but this proposal, is in our view, unlikely to achieve the aims and ambitions that you set out.

There is no doubt that panel processes can be **strengthened and improved**, including by pooling memberships, more effective scheduling and removal of duplication but we propose this is a more appropriate focus than removing a mechanism that is widely valued which provides capacity, scrutiny and is fundamentally an important safeguard. We would suggest focussing on improving and speeding up the DBS and medicals process instead as this is where our members told us delays happen the most, not panels.

We therefore respectfully ask that you reconsider this proposal and we stand ready to work with your officials to make other more substantive improvements to achieve our shared goals to recruit more foster carers in the most effective way.

Yours sincerely,

CoramBAAF, The Fostering Network, FosterTalk, NSPCC, NYAS, CoramVoice, Action for Children and Barnardo's