



Services for Children, Young People and Families

CHILDREN IN CARE

Matching Children with Foster Carers

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Foster Care

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Introduction

The policy of the Children in Care Service is to ensure that each child or young person for whom a placement is requested is matched with a carer who is capable of meeting his/her assessed needs.

The policy recognises that it is not always possible to achieve the perfect match and that as a result some children have been made to wait for too long for a placement. Delay can be harmful and the policy sets out to ensure that all relevant factors are considered and balanced against one another when matching decisions are made.

Matches will be achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and their family, potential carers and their families including other children they have in placement. Relevant professionals may include: the child's social worker, the supervising social worker for the carer, line managers, health and education staff, panel members and the agency decision maker.

Workers should consult as widely as possible and ensure that any dissenting views on the proposed placement are recorded on the child's file.

1. Aims and principles

1.1 This policy is designed to serve as a guide for Supervising Social Workers when matching a child to a foster carer. This is set out in the context of the current legal framework and the other policies implemented by the Children in Care Service.

1.2 In all cases whenever a match is being made the needs of the child in care take precedence over all other considerations.

1.3 Trafford Children in Care Service assumes that in most cases the best place for children to be is with their families and if this is not possible then within a 'family environment' such as foster care. In all cases a placement with family or friends should always be explored before other options when a child needs to be accommodated. (See the Family & Friends Policies)

1.4 The need to protect and care for the foster carer and their family must also be met and balanced with the needs of any children being placed. This means that carers must receive all of the relevant information when they are being asked to take a placement. The more detailed information provided the better the match will be and the better the outcome for the child.

1.5 Foster Carers always have the right to decline a placement and when they are being approached it is important to consider this fact and not to 'push too hard'.

2. Statutory Framework

2.1 National Minimum Standard (NMS) 15.1 makes it clear that a placement should not be proposed unless it can be reasonably expected to meet a child's needs. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010), and Fostering Regulations 9, 11, 17, all refer to the process by which placements are made and the information that must be considered

Standard 15 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering also requires that:

The responsible authority has information and support from the fostering service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child's needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement.

NMS15.1) The fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required.

(NMS)15.2) Prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer him/herself safe.

(NMS15.3) Once placed, a child is not removed from a foster carer who is willing and able to continue caring for the child, unless that is in their best interests, taking the child's current wishes and feelings into account, and decided (other than in an emergency) through the child's care planning process. If a placement move occurs in an emergency the fostering service informs the responsible authority within one working day.

3. Children Who Enter Public Care

3.1 Once a child becomes a 'child in care' the work of previous teams and other related professionals must be built upon to formulate a comprehensive assessment of need before a placement is made. This will include developing the Initial Assessment completed by the Family Assessment and Support Teams for emergency placements and completing the Core Assessment for all planned placements.

3.2 No child should be placed in foster care without the following issues being addressed and the information available:

- Whether the child was previously known

- The legal basis for current work with the child
- The reasons why the child needs to be in care
- The attempts made to arrange for the child to live with a relative or friend
- Who has been consulted about the child's current situation and the plan for the child
- What the immediate plan for the child is
- What the child's wishes and feelings are
- Why this plan has been chosen
- What needs to happen to achieve the immediate plan
- Without the written agreement of the relevant Team Manager or Team Leader

3.3 Children Already in Public Care

There are many reasons why a child may need a new placement. Some will need to move because of a placement breakdown, others to achieve a plan for a permanent placement.

For those experiencing placement breakdowns, matching should take place via the Duty Officer. The previous assessments of why the child came into care and previous matching information should be utilised and re-examined. This will include the placement information record, school reports and Personal Education Plan (PEP), medical assessments, reports from current carers, Assessment and Progress Records, childcare reviews and an updated Core Assessment.

Where a permanent placement is proposed, the plan must be approved by a statutory childcare review. A referral must be made to Family Placement Team. The child's needs must be fully recorded.

4. Issues to be considered when making a match

4.1 Contact

Finding a placement that meets the child's assessed contact needs should be one of the most important considerations in selecting an appropriate placement.

Issues to be considered include:

- the plan for the child (if the plan is for rehabilitation then contact will be crucial; if the plan is permanence then other factors may be more important)
- the frequency of the desired contact
- Who is the child to have contact with?
- The nature of the contact – is it direct or indirect?
- Where the contact will take place?
- Does contact need to be supervised?

4.2 Siblings

Where siblings become looked after, they will normally be expected to be placed together unless there are clear indications that this will not be in the best interests of one or more of the children.

Such a conclusion should only normally be reached after a comprehensive assessment of the needs of all the children concerned. While it may therefore be necessary to seek separate permanent placements for siblings after such an assessment, the assumption at the point children become looked after should be that siblings will be placed together.

If siblings need to be placed separately, either because of their assessed needs or due to the lack of a placement to keep them together, consideration must be given to their need for contact and how this will be met.

4.3 Education

For children of statutory school age, the need to maintain or secure a stable education placement is of vital importance.

Wherever possible, placements should be identified that ensure such continuity unless there are other overriding considerations that outweigh this consideration, such as the child's safety.

For younger children, the carer's ability to take the child to school should be considered and if this is not possible, whether anyone else can transport the child or if the use of taxis is appropriate and safe.

For older children, the child's ability to get to school on their own will need to be assessed. The length and complexity of the journey will need to be considered as will the safety of the child and whether they have a record of non-attendance that could be made worse by a long journey.

4.4 Race, culture and language

We believe that wherever possible, children's needs will be best met by placement with a carer that reflects their racial, cultural and language background.

The child's long-term welfare should be the paramount consideration. Any decision to keep the child in a placement that does not fully meet their racial, cultural or language needs should be made on this basis rather than because not to move might appear the easier short term decision.

Where trans-racial or trans-community placements are made, the carer should be provided with additional training, support and information to enable the child to be provided with the best possible care and to develop a positive understanding of their heritage.

The input of birth family, friends and other carers may help to achieve this.

4.5 Religion

Matching issues with regard to religion are similar to those with regard to race and culture.

Where a child does practice a religion, the carer's own ability to facilitate and promote the child's religious practice will need careful consideration.

Religion does not play a significant role in the lives of many carers and while this may suggest that a proposed placement does not present a conflict for the child's beliefs, the lack of any faith on the part of the carer may in itself present a conflict.

Workers will need to be satisfied that carers are able and willing to respect the child's views. This may mean the carer needs to be willing to transport the child to a place of worship or respect the child's views in terms of diet and dress. These issues can be as difficult for carers who do not have a faith as for carers with a different faith to the child.

4.6 Disability

Children's needs arising from a disability need careful consideration.

Social workers will need to ensure that other support is in place to meet needs arising from the child's disability.

This will include access to required medical care and specialist education where needed. The carer may need practical support by way of equipment or access to specialist advice or training.

The use of respite care may need to be considered.

4.7 Foster Carer's Family

It is important that the household of the foster carer(s) is considered during the matching process. Wherever possible ask how each member of the household including the carers birth children will match with the child to be placed. Check the carer's assessment information during the matching process.

4.8 Bedrooms

The nature of fostering is that many carers do not have spare rooms available for the sole use of foster children and many children therefore have to share a room with either another looked after child or a birth child of the carer.

The matching process should take account of the proposed sleeping arrangements for the child. Where this means sharing a room, the views of the other child should be considered. If that child is looked after, their social worker should also be consulted.

The age and gender of children will need to be considered as will the background of all children who it is proposed will share a bedroom.

Where a child has been abused or has abused another child, then the child's needs and the needs of other children in the household must be assessed before any decision is made to allow the sharing of bedrooms. The outcome of this assessment must be recorded on the child's and carer's files.

4.9 Safer Caring Guidelines

Each foster home must provide safer caring guidelines. These must be cleared with the child's social worker and explained clearly and appropriately to the child. For more information (see the Safer Caring guidance and procedure.)

4.10 Introductions

Children should have the opportunity for a period of introduction wherever possible with a proposed carer, so both child and carer can express an informed view of the placement.

This should always be the case with a permanent placement.

An emergency placement may mean this is impractical but both child and carer should be provided with as much information as possible and their views considered before a match is confirmed. (Refer to Introductions and Placement Policy)

5. Making a Referral

5.1 Where a decision is taken to request a foster placement, this must be discussed with the relevant team manager.

5.2 In all cases the need for a child to be accommodated must be discussed at the resource panel either before the placement is needed or as soon as practicably possible after a placement has been made.

5.3 In all cases when a foster placement is made, a written referral to the family placement team must be made. (See Family Placement request form). This should be completed in detail outlining the needs of the child, the reason for their becoming accommodated and the care plan as understood at that time.

5.4 The referral must also be accompanied by a child specific risk assessment which will form part of the Safer Caring Policy used by the foster carers during the placement.

5.5 Where an emergency placement is required on a child about whom little information is known, then the Social Worker should provide what information is available.

5.6 The referring Social Worker should also consider what other documentation is available, and whether this should be attached to the referral, or a link to the relevant electronic record sent to the family placement team in addition to the placement request.

5.7 Once the request for a family placement has been sent to the Duty Social Worker on the family placement team, the requesting Social Worker should contact the Family Placement Team to ensure that this has been received.

6. Receiving Requests (Referrals) for Family Placements

6.1 The duty social worker must always request a written referral from a social worker requesting a placement as well as a child specific risk assessment. You should also consider requesting other written background information from the requesting Social Worker (e.g. initial assessments, most recent care plan, psychological assessment reports etc). On receipt of a written referral and risk assessment the Duty Social Worker must log this clearly in the log book.

6.2 Any identified gaps in the information (such as School, addresses, behaviours etc.) should be relayed to the requesting Social Worker and the missing information obtained.

6.3 Once the written referral and risk assessment have been received and there is sufficient information, the duty Social Worker (Family Placement Team) should consult the vacancy list to see what possible 'in house' placements are available.

6.4 Where a possible placement that could meet the needs of the specific child can be identified, this should be discussed with the carer's Supervising Social Worker, This discussion should cover the positive aspects as well as the challenges of the placement.

6.5 Where no in-house placements are identified, consideration should be given to whether an 'Exemption' or 'Variation of approval' could be requested that would meet the children's needs. (See Sections **10** and **11**)

6.6 If no in house placement can be identified and no Exemption or Variation of approval made, then the requesting Duty Social Worker should ask the requesting Social Worker to consider making a request for a placement through another Local

Authority or an IFA (Independent Fostering Agency). The latter will require permission from the Joint Director, Children, Young People & Families.

6.7 Where a match can still not be identified and the long term plan for a child is fostering the Family Placement Team Manager will consider allocating the referral to a Supervising Social Worker for 'Family Finding'. (See section 12 and Family Finding Policy).

7. Agreeing the placement

7.1 If it is agreed that a potential match can be made, then the responsibility for over seeing the match and communicating with the requesting Social Worker and the foster carer should at this point transfer if possible to the carer's Supervising Social Worker.

7.2 If the carer's Supervising Social Worker is not available then this responsibility should transfer to them as soon as practicably possible. In the meantime the Duty Social Worker will continue to oversee the matching process.

7.3 Once it has been agreed that a potential match has been identified, the Duty Social Worker or Supervising Social Worker should then contact the identified Foster carer to ask if they can provide a placement. The contacting Social Worker should ensure that they carefully explain what is required and read the referral and risk assessment to the foster carer. When they have done this, this should be documented on the matching checklist.

7.3 Any matching must consider the needs of everyone in the fostering family, including the carer's own birth children. If at all possible, their views should be obtained before a placement is made.

7.4 Where it is identified that there are gaps between the provision that the carers can provide and the needs of the child being placed (such as equipment or transport for example), these must be addressed before a placement is made and this should be clearly documented.

7.5 The social workers (or their managers if this is not possible) for any other Children in Care currently placed with the carers should also be contacted before a further placement is made.

7.6 If a planned placement is being considered then a meeting with the child's social worker should be arranged to in order to discuss the needs of the child being considered. If this is not possible then a placement agreement meeting should be held as set out in section 8.

7.7 Where a placement that meets the need of the referred child cannot be identified, consideration should be given as to whether an exemption or variation of approval should be requested. (See sections **10** and **11**). Where no match can be identified under these sections consideration should be given to identifying placement from an independent fostering agency. (See section 12).

7.8 If a placement is no longer required, the duty worker will complete the checklist and send this back to the Child's social worker.

8. Recording

8.1 All of the discussions with carers and social workers held during the matching process should be recorded on running sheets and the matching checklist completed (see Appendix A). Once the placement has been made these should be placed along with the referral and the child specific risk assessment in the 'child in placement' module on the carers file.

8.2 The vacancy list and electronic record also need to be updated when a placement is made.

8.3 Where a placement cannot be identified, the referral, recording and matching checklist should be sent to the child's social worker for them to place on the child's file once it has been agreed that the referral can be closed.

9. Placement Agreement Meeting

9.1 A placement agreement meeting should be held either before the placement starts or within 72 hours of a placement being made. The agenda and the process by which this meeting is convened, is set out under the guidance on 'Placement Agreement Meetings'. A date for a placement agreement meeting should also be set at the earliest possible date and all of the involved parties informed of this.

9.2 When a placement is agreed, remind social workers and foster carers that copies of key documentation (Essential information Part 1, and Placement Plan Part 1 or Placement Information Record) must be provided to carers at the time of placement - check LAC procedures if necessary for details.

10. Exemptions

10.1. Definition

'Exemption' refers to requests where a proposed placement would exceed the usual limit that no foster carer may foster more than three children (unless they are all siblings) as set out in Schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989.

10.2 Where a placement exceeds a carer's approval but does not exceed the usual limit as defined in **10** such a placement requires a variation of approval and is dealt with in section **11**.

Legal context

Schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989 states that no foster carer may foster more than three children.

- This may only be exceeded if the children concerned are all siblings with respect to each other. This means that all the fostered children in the household must be siblings and would not apply to, for example, two sibling groups of two children.
- The Act specifies the issues the local authority must address when considering whether to exempt a foster carer: -
- the number of children whom the carer proposes to foster
- the arrangements which the person proposes for the care and accommodation of the fostered children
- the intended and likely relationship between the person and the fostered children
- the period of time for which s/he proposes to foster the children
- whether the welfare of the fostered children (and any other children who are, or will be, living in the accommodation) will be safeguarded and promoted
- Where a foster carer exceeds the usual fostering limit without an exemption or where there is an exemption, fosters any child not named in the exemption,

they would be considered to be carrying on a children's home and be subject to the Children's Homes Regulations 2011.

An exemption will not be granted for a placement with a foster carer if they have been approved for less than six months or this is their first placement.

10.3 In all cases where an exemption is made the procedures as set out in this must be followed in terms of identifying a match. Discussions around potential exemptions must consider carers' experience, availability and the reasons given for the carers' approval as recorded on their most recent notice from the agency decision maker. In cases where carers have experienced a relatively high number of disruptions or complaints/allegations, exemptions should not be sought.

10.4 Once the relevant social workers and the foster carers have been spoken to and a placement agreed in principle, written authorisation from the Head of Service (Children in Care) must be obtained before a placement can be obtained.

10.5 The Supervising Social Worker (or Duty Social Worker in their absence) must then complete the Exemption or Variation of approval form and submit this to the next available fostering panel for a recommendation and then subsequent ADM (Agency Decision Maker) decision.

11. Variation of approval

11.1 Definition

'Variation of approval' refers to requests when a proposed placement would be outside the foster carer's current registration categories (*e.g. where the carer is approved for the short term care of two children, either sex, aged 5 – 11 years, but the age of the child for the proposed placement is 12 years old.*)

11.2 All carers have been carefully assessed and approved by the Agency Decision Maker in accordance with what the assessment recognises the carers will be able to manage in terms of placements.

11.3 In all cases a variation will not be made in the first 6 months after a foster carer's approval or when a foster carer is taking their first placement.

11.4 A variation can only be agreed for 6 working days, after which the child placed must move to a more appropriate placement.

Grounds on which a Variation of Approval Can be Requested

- In cases where no suitable vacancy has been identified, a placement could be considered outside of a carer's approval if one or more of the following criteria are met;
- To make such a placement would allow the child to be placed with siblings which would not be allowed otherwise.
- The proposed placement is with carers who have previously cared for the child and it is felt that to place the child with them would be to the child's benefit.
- The proposed placement would allow the child to remain in contact with friends or family, remain in school, which they would not be able to do if the placement was not made.
- The carers, supervising social worker, head of service (children in care) and the social workers of any other children already in placement are all in agreement that the placement should be made.
- The carers have been approved for more than six months and this is not their first placement.
- The variation in approval does not exceed the 'usual limit' as defined in **10.2** and will only last for a maximum of 6 working days

11.5 In all cases, the matching Social worker must consult with the carer's Supervising Social Worker and the Team Manager before the carers can be approached.

11.6 Discussions around potential exemptions or variations of approval must consider carers' experience, availability and the reasons given for the carers' approval as recorded on their most recent notice from the agency decision maker. In cases where carers have experienced a relatively high number of disruptions or complaints/allegations, variations of approval should not be sought.

11.7 As per **10.2** once a placement has been identified which can meet the needs of a referred child but a variation of approval is required, written authorisation must be obtained from the Head of Service (Children in Care) before such a placement can be made.

11.8 The Supervising Social Worker (or Duty Social Worker in their absence) must then complete the 'Exemption or Variation of approval and this to be submitted to the next available panel for recommendation and approval by the ADM (Agency Decision Maker).

11.9 Once the decision has been taken by the team manager (or team leader or senior practitioner in their absence), written agreement report must be sought from the Head of Service (Children in Care). Once this has been given the placement can be made, and the vacancy list updated.

12. Family Finding

12.1 Where no placement has been identified either in-house or through IFAs, the Family Placement Team Manager can take the decision to allocate the referral to a Supervising Social Worker. Where this decision is taken, the designated Family Finder will carry the referral as part of their case load and continue to actively search for a placement and liaise with the referring Social Worker as to the progress with this. For more details see 'Family Finding Policy'

Matching Checklist

Name of child:							
DOB:		Age:		Gender:		Ethnicity:	
Name of child:							
DOB:		Age:		Gender:		Ethnicity:	
Name of child:							
DOB:		Age:		Gender:		Ethnicity:	
Name of child:							
DOB:		Age:		Gender:		Ethnicity:	

Written referral received?	Yes	No
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Child's risk assessment received?	Yes:	No:

Potential in-house carers who match the child's profile

Have any of the above been ruled out, if so for what reasons.

Have any variations of approval or an Exemption been considered?	Yes:	No:
If so, what carers have been considered?		

Please explain why this is/isn't seen as appropriate		
Has agency funding been requested?	Yes:	No:
Has this been approved & by whom?	Yes:	No:

Has the carer been spoken to?	Yes:		No:	
Has the referral been read to the carer?	Yes:		No:	

Will the child/ children need to share a bedroom?
If yes, what are social worker's views about the identified risks regarding this?
What are social worker's plans for managing these risks? Please include these on risk assessment and child specific safe caring policy

Date of the planned placement agreement meeting	
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Are there any additional services required to ensure that the needs of the placed child are met?

Where no placement is identified, is this referral to be allocated for Family Finding?

Duty Social Worker:	
Signed:	
Date:	
Team Manager:	
Signed:	