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1. Purpose

This policy relates to long term fostering. In Trafford this is referred to as Permanent Fostering and means that the care plan for the child is to remain in a specific fostering placement, usually until reaching adulthood and leaving care, and certainly for the foreseeable future.

Where at all possible, children should be afforded the opportunity to secure legal permanence within their wider family, through residency or special guardianship or through adoption. Though Permanent Fostering does not give legal permanence it can afford for some young people the opportunity for security and stability and to enjoy family life. The role Permanent Fostering plays in achieving a degree of permanence is set out in the Council’s Permanence Strategy.

Permanence planning will be informed by an ongoing process of listening and taking account of children’s, families’ and carers’ wishes and feelings. Plan should be formulated and reviews with children, families and carers. The child, their family and their carers must be kept informed on a regular basis of the progress of family finding.

An asset based approach should be taken to identifying strengths and solutions to build support networks around child which are sustainable and resilient.

This policy sets out the process for the long term matching of a child / children to best achieve permanence through Permanent Fostering.

Where placement with a foster carer is assessed as the best way to meet duties to safeguard and promote a child’s welfare, these procedures describe how the service will identify and co-ordinate the matching process when a child comes into care, and any subsequent change of placement to ensure:

* The child is matched with foster carers who have the skills to effectively safeguard and promote a child’s welfare;
* Siblings are kept together where they wish to be together and it is consistent with their needs, and within a locality which helps them keep in touch with friends and family, unless in exceptional circumstances where a sibling assessment identifies the need to place separately;
* Children are in placements which do not disrupt a child’s education or training (a change of school in year 9 will only be agreed with senior management approval);
* Placements are sought that reflect a child’s culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language and religion in order to enhance their sense of identity. However children will not be left waiting for a specific match for a prolonged period of time. If a cultural match cannot be found then the allocated foster carers need be able to support the child /children’s cultural and ethnic needs.

These procedures should be read in conjunction with Care Planning Procedures which detail the procedures to be followed by social workers to prepare, monitor and review a care plan, which includes the placement plan for foster care.

**Matching When Children Become Looked After**

The **‘**[**Placement in Foster Care’**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_place_fost_care.html?zoom_highlight=Placement+in+Foster+Care%E2%80%99) Procedure must be followed when first referring and placing a child in a foster placement.

**Connected Persons (Friends and Family) & Special Guardianship Order**

A Connected Persons assessment of carers who have temporary approval for a specific child will be completed under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. The Connected Person Assessment can progress onto a Special Guardian Assessment if this is deemed the most appropriate care plan for the child.

2. Identifying Permanent Foster Carers

2.1 **Assessment and Matching for Permanent Fostering with Approved Connected Persons (Relatives and Friends) Foster Carers**

Connected Persons foster carers will initially be approved by Fostering Panel as carers for a named child/ren. A decision should be made at the Child’s LAC review about the permanency plan for the child. The foster carers Supervising Social Worker should be included in this review. Once it is established that the Permanence Plan for the child is to remain with the connected persons on a looked after basis (i.e. not on any other legal basis such as Special Guardianship), then the fostering assessment will be updated and the matter referred to Fostering Panel to consider a recommendation to change the foster carers terms of approval to Permanent Foster carers with friends or family.

The re-assessment will consider the suitability of the placement to meet the children’s needs for permanence and needs to be completed by the Supervising Social Worker. It should be completed and considered by Fostering Panel within 4 months of the permanence decision.

2.2 Approval of Permanent Fostering

A Strategic Lead must agree a plan for Permanent Fostering either in a Legal Planning meeting or a Care Planning Meeting. A Looked After Review must take place before any significant change is made to the child's Care Plan. The LAC review must take place 4 weeks prior to the Fostering Panel date. No Permanent fostering arrangement can be brought to Fostering Panel for a match without this decision first being made.

**Where there is a change of plan from Adoption to Permanent Fostering** the ADM will be provided with the original CPR, a Family Finding report (Requested from Adoption Counts) and minutes of the LAC Review and Legal Planning Meeting that recommended a change of plan. The ADM will need to be satisfied that fostering is now the most appropriate route for permanence for the child.

2.3 Permanent Fostering and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Placements

The same process for approval of suitability for Permanent Fostering applies regardless of where a child is placed. (see [**Section 2.2, Approval of a plan for permanence through Permanent fostering**](#_2.2_Approval_of)above)

No plan for permanency with **existing** short term IFA carers as Permanent Foster Carers can be progressed without first having sought agreement via the Strategic Lead. Once this and the associated funding have been agreed the matching process below must be followed:

* Where the child’s existing IFA foster carers cannot provide Permanent Fostering then the usual process as detailed below for Family Finding will be followed;
* Other than for children whose plan it is to remain with existing IFA foster carers, no family finding through IFA’s can take place until the Strategic Lead has approved the funding and search;
* Where a child is placed on a short term basis with IFA foster carers and requires a different permanent placement. Family Finding within Trafford’s in house service must be pursued before approval for family finding from another agency can take place. An internal search for Trafford carers will continue alongside family finding for external agencies until a permanent match is identified. To prevent unnecessary delay, updates on identifying permanent placements are discussed at fortnightly referral meetings with Trafford’s Commissioning Team.

It is the child’s Social Workers responsibility to:

1. Seek Strategic Lead approval to identify and fund a permanent IFA placement;
2. Make a Request for Placement on ICS and send the form to the Family Placement Team.
3. A family finder will be allocated once the child’s Social Worker has completed and returned the referral for a permanent foster placement to the Family Placement Team. The Family Placement Team will send the referral to the Commissioning Team via the LCS system and also update LCS with the family finding updates.

2.4 Family Finding Process

A Social Worker from the Family Placement Team will be allocated to support the family finding process. The Social Worker and Family Finder should collate a child-centred profile which should include a pen picture by the child in their own words if possible. This must be strengths based and must be proportionate and well evidenced when articulating any risks. It should include input from the child, the child’s current carers, family members and others. This profile must be reviewed regularly with regards to the child’s views and changes in circumstances. The worker allocated will depend on the circumstances as set out below:

* **A child’s case is** **being twin tracked while in proceedings.** This is also known as Parallel Planning . As part of Permanence Planning for Looked After Children, Parallel Plans must be drawn up to ensure that alternative plans have been explored and are available without delay if the preferred permanent outcome proves unachievable. In this respect, if the child is unable to return to birth family then Permanent Fostering could be an alternative care plan.
* **A child previously identified as requiring adoption** - Where a child has had a plan for adoption the an allocated worker will be identifiedfrom the Family Placement Team to family find permanent foster carers providing the change of plan has been agreed by ADM. The manager for the relevant Area Team will inform the Permanence Team Manager to arrange a transfer of social worker;
* Where **a child is placed with Trafford Foster Carers** then an allocated worker will be identified from the Family Placement Team to family find. Where an alternative permanent placement is needed it will usually be the Supervising Social Worker for the carers currently looking after the child that will be allocated;
* Where the plan is for the **existing foster carers to change their status to permanent foster carers**, family finding will not be required but the foster carers will require **reassessment via completion of the matching document** (see [**Section 2.5, Matching Process**](#_2.5_Matching_Process));
* Where a **child is placed with short term IFA foster carers,** the child’s Social Worker should advise the Family Placement Team will complete the referral for placement and allocated worker to family find.
* Where a child’s care plan changes from **Residential to Permanent Fostering**.

**Planning Meeting**

A planning meeting needs to be convened in order to plan how a match is to be identified and also whether there is a likely need for IFA placements. This meeting should consider the child’s views and should evidence how these have been taken into account.

A time scale will be set for an initial family finding process within existing approved Trafford foster carers and other in-house foster carers. This meeting will also establish whether there are in house families approved or in the process of assessment. This meeting should be recorded and the minutes placed on the child’s LCS record. The minutes of the meeting should be forwarded to the Strategic Lead responsible for agreed funding of any proposed IFA placement.

Once a potential match has been identified the matching process will be followed. (See [**Section 2.5, Matching Process**](#_2.5_Matching_Process))2.5 Matching Process

**Matching in-house Trafford foster carers**

This procedure will be followed where it’s been decided that it is in the best interest of the child to remain on a permanent basis with their existing in-house Trafford foster carers and the foster carers wish to provide permanency for the child on a fostering basis.

A planning meeting will be convened by the Family Placement Team Leader to identify any key issues for consideration and to arrange allocation / agree timescales to complete the matching document. See link [**Matching Document for Permanent Fostering**](file:///R:\IBU\CYPS\Services%20for%20Children%20and%20Young%20People\Services%20for%20Children%20and%20families\Review%20&%20Improvements\Linked%20Templates\Long%20Term%20Matching%20Report%20New%20Version%201.0.doc). To avoid drift the proposal for the Permanent Fostering Match will be presented to Fostering Panel within 3 months of decision being made.

If the search is unsuccessful for a sibling placement, decisions will be reviewed and consideration given to the priorities of a permanent placement for individual needs of the children. A sibling assessment will be completed before any decision is made to separate siblings who are currently placed together.

A matching meeting will then be held and the procedure followed below (See [**Section 3, Matching Meeting**](#_Matching_Meeting))

**Matching with permanent foster carers where the child cannot be matched with the existing foster carers**.

A planning meeting will be convened by the Family Placement Team to identify any key issues for consideration and to arrange allocation / agree timescales for completing the matching document. See link [**Matching Document for Permanent Fostering**](file:///R:\IBU\CYPS\Services%20for%20Children%20and%20Young%20People\Services%20for%20Children%20and%20families\Review%20&%20Improvements\Linked%20Templates\Long%20Term%20Matching%20Report%20New%20Version%201.0.doc). If it’s decided not to proceed with a potential match at the conclusion of visits, the reasons should be clear and noted on the child’s LCS record by completing and uploading the matching document. This should include detailed information about the child’s wishes and feelings. The process should be repeated until a suitable match is identified. To avoid drift the proposal for the Permanent Fostering Match will be presented to Fostering Panel within 3 months of decision being made.

If a search is unsuccessful for a sibling placement, decisions will be reviewed and consideration given to the priorities of a permanent placement for individual needs of the children. A sibling assessment will be completed before any decision is made to separate siblings who are currently placed together.

A matching meeting will then be held and the procedure followed below (See [**Section 3, Matching Meeting**](#_Matching_Meeting))

**Matching IFA carers**

Where in-house family finding has not been successful within the agreed timescale the child’s Social Worker will be required to seek approval for the finding and funding of an IFA placement. Once this has been agreed, a placement request form will be completed and sent via Family Placement Team to the Commissioning Team on LCS to start the external search.

The Commissioning Team will collate all the potential matches and review these then sending appropriate profiles to the child’s Social Worker for consideration. Where potential matches are identified, the child’s Social Worker and the family finder will make arrangements to meet the potential foster carers, read assessment information and meet with the assessing workers and IFA workers as appropriate.

**Matching existing IFA carers**

This procedure will be followed where it’s been decided that it is in the best interest of the child to remain on a permanent basis with their existing IFA foster carers and the foster carers wish to provide permanency for the child on a fostering basis.

The child’s Social Worker must gain approval from the Strategic Lead to fund any match with an IFA on a long term basis. (See [**Section 2.4, Family Finding Process**](#_Family_Finding_Process)).

If necessary, it will be the IFA’s responsibility to assess the suitability of the match and refer them to their own Fostering Panel to revise their terms of approval to Permanent Fostering if necessary.

3. Matching Meeting

Prior to the case being presented to panel, a Matching Meeting will be held chaired by Family Placement Team Leader. The meeting will be attended by the child’s Social Worker, the Assessing worker, the allocated Supervising Social Worker, the Foster carers and any other relevant person for the child.

The following reports will be available to the meeting:

* The Child’s Social Work Report/the updated Children’s Permanence Report (if adoption was the original care plan);
* Matching Report;

In all cases, the foster carers should have read all the reports submitted for the proposed match in advance of the meeting. If any issues arise from this information that are of concern for the foster carers, the meeting will be postponed or cancelled if necessary, to allow for the opportunity for the foster carers to meet and discuss these concerns with the relevant social workers. A decision will then be reached about whether to continue with the match and reschedule the matching meeting.

The meeting will consider the suitability of the match, including:

* The child’s views, wishes and feelings and how these have been taken into account when making the decision.
* The needs of the child and how these are to be met in a Permanent Fostering placement;
* The prospective permanent carers suitability for this potential matching, including any previous proposed matches and their outcome;
* The strengths and weaknesses within the match including the carers’ support network;
* Identify any factors that may potentially disrupt a placement and how to manage and minimise their impact;
* Develop a support plan for the placement identifying necessary support services, including financial support.

4. Matching at Fostering Panel and Post Match Approval

The match should be presented to the Trafford Fostering Panel with the following reports:

* Updated Child and Family Assessment for recommending Permanent Fostering as the preferred care plan including the child’s views and how these have been taken into account.
* Matching Document including the child’s views and how these have been taken into account;
* Matching Meeting Minutes;
* Previous Panel minutes and recommendations in relation to the approval of the carers;
* Original Foster Carers Assessment (for reference only);

The Fostering Panel will consider the reports and will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker about whether the child/young person should be matched with the carers.

At this point, the role of the Family Finder ends and is taken over by the prospective foster carers Supervising Social Worker unless the match is not approved.

The carer’s Supervising Social Worker should contact the foster carers with the decision from the Agency Decision Maker about whether the proposed placement has been agreed within 2 working days. Carers should receive a confirmation letter from the ADM within 5 days of the decision being made.

The child should be provided with an age appropriate letter to confirm their Permanent Foster Placement within 5 days a decision being made.

Birth parents should also be provided with a letter confirming the placement within 5 days of the decision being made.

The child’s Care Plan should clearly identify their status in a Permanent foster placement and a statement of recognition jointly signed by the Strategic Lead, the Foster Carer(s), Fostering Service Manager, birth parents and the child should be placed on the child’s and carers’ files.

5. Placement Planning

Within one week of the agency decision to match, the Supervising Social Worker should ensure that a multi-agency **Placement Planning Meeting** is held to:

* Share the care plan for Permanent Fostering;
* Complete the Placement Plan, with tasks of agreed for all those involved in the team around the child.
* Agree the preparation and introduction arrangements for the child;
* Identify any equipment needs;
* Agree a date on which it is proposed to place the child;
* Ensure the child has a copy of the ‘Children in Care leaflet - Your Rights’ and refer to Trafford’s Voice of the Child website.
* Detail placement support services to be provided as identified in the matching process, including any health or education services to be provided and the responsibility for their provision;
* Agree birth family contact arrangements;
* Consider contact arrangements for the child with previous foster carers and their families, residential staff or any other people who are important to the child.
* Delegate authority to the foster carers;
* Agree any other arrangements as identified.

A Placement Planning Meeting must be held even if the child remains with existing carers as the status of the placement will have changed significantly including delegated authority.

Where appropriate a **mid-introductions review** should be held during the introduction process involving all the relevant parties. The progress of the introduction should be reviewed and any necessary changes made depending on the needs of the child and the permanent foster carers.

A Placement Support Meeting must be convened at the start of the placement to agree the Placement Support Plan and the frequency of reviews.

Permanent Fostering Matching Process

Child’s care plan agreed in legal care planning meeting, care planning meeting or LAC review

Child’s social worker to complete a request for placement and send to the commissioning team via the Family Placement Team

**No**

Social Worker to seek financial agreement from Strategic Lead

**Yes**

Present Permanent Fostering match to panel (see 4.0)

Hold placement planning meeting within 72 hours and identify the support plan

Child/Carer/Parents to be informed of the match in writing and Statement of Recognition to be signed by all parties.

Arrange matching meeting (see 3.0)

Family Finder to complete matching document

Potential matches identified (see 2.5)

In-house Trafford foster carers Found?

Family Finder starts intense search of Trafford Foster Carers (see 2.5)

Initial family finding planning meeting chaired by family placement team leader