Policy

The 2011 Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering require that:

- the fostering service shall facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and the 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

- Children are to be welcomed into the foster home and leave the foster home in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel loved and valued

- Children should feel part of the family and should not be treated differently to the foster carer’s own children living in the household.

This policy sets out a framework for identifying an appropriate match between the child’s needs and the foster carer’s skills, and goes on to consider whether additional support or resources can be provided in order to strengthen the match, as required.

Good matching is essential if placements are to remain stable. In order for children to be welcomed into the home and treated like any other member of the family, carers will need to feel confident and competent to meet the child’s needs. Key to good matching is good information. Information about the child’s needs is contained within the Placement Finding Referral, the child’s care plan and other records such as the Personal Education Plan. This should be considered in conjunction with information about the carer’s registration, skills and experience and composition of the foster family in order to facilitate an appropriate match.

Matching Criteria

The following should be taken into consideration when matching a child with a carer/foster family:

- **Child’s wishes and feelings**
  Where the child’s wishes cannot be accommodated and/or this would not be in the child’s best interests this should be explained to her/him.

- **Partnership with Birth Family**
  The wishes of the Birth Family should also be respected wherever possible and where this would be in the child’s best interests.
• **Length of Placement**
   It can be difficult to predict the length of time a placement will be needed for, but this should be considered to ensure that carers can provide a placement for as long as it is needed to prevent an unnecessary move for the child.

• **Placement with siblings**
   Wherever possible, siblings should be placed together, unless there is an assessed need for them to be placed apart, in which case clear arrangements for contact should be put in place.

• **Contact**
   Children’s direct and/or indirect contact with extended family, friends (and siblings as detailed above) as required by the care plan will need to be promoted. Consideration must be given to whether or not the foster carer can facilitate the contact plan, including supervising contact if required.

• **Diversity**
   Children’s needs are best met in a placement with carers who reflect their racial, religious, cultural and language background and who are able to respond to the child’s needs relating to dress, hair care, diet, faith and worship, celebrations, for example. Placements for disabled children take account of any special equipment that will be needed and any specific needs relating to communication. In addition, carers should have an understanding of the issues the child is likely to face and be committed to anti-discriminatory practice. Where there is not a cultural match, training and education will need to be provided to bridge the gap.

• **Education**
   Wherever possible, the child should be able to attend the same school in order to promote continuity and a sense of belonging, unless there are other overriding considerations. Thought will need to given to how the child will get to school and be supported to engage in out of school activities. The child’s education needs should also be taken into account.

• **Health**
   The child’s state of health as well as the child’s health history will need to be taken into account, particularly if this has an impact on her/his development. Health needs, including allergies, and whether any specific support/equipment is required should inform matching. Needs relating to the child’s emotional health and well-being and access to services will also need to be considered.

• **Child’s History**
   The child’s history of being parented by the birth family, particularly where s/he has experienced trauma, abuse and neglect, will need careful matching with the carer’s skills and experience. Attention should also be given to:

   - Child’s ability to regulate emotional responses and behaviour
   - Attachment style
   - Levels of anxiety
   - History of bullying or being bullied
   - Sexualised behaviour
   - Drug taking, solvent misuse
   - Levels of aggression towards others

CYPS Safeguarding: Matching foster carers PPG - reviewed Sept 2011
● Criminal history
● Cruelty to animals
● History or running away
● Previous placements, including breakdowns

● Foster Carer’s registration
Number of placements, age and gender the carer is approved for will give clear indication about whether the placement is suitable. In addition, fee-paid carers who have demonstrated their skills and experience in caring for children needing more intensive support are likely to be better matched with those children.

● Foster carer’s skills, experience and parenting style
Foster carers will need to demonstrate competence in caring for children with: additional health and education needs; complex behavioural needs; and a history of trauma, abuse and neglect, as required. In addition, carers will need to be able to respond to children’s needs relating to culture and ethnicity, language, religion and disability, and provide positive adult role models to counter the oppression children are likely to encounter.

● Family composition
This includes the whether it is a single carer or a couple, the foster carer’s own children, any other children placed and wider family, as well as pets. Family Finding practitioners should consult with the social workers of other children placed in order to assess the impact of placing the child with the foster family.

● Location
Children should be placed in or close to Bristol where possible, provided this is in their best interests and in line with the child’s care plan, in order to promote a sense of belonging to family, friends, school and social networks.

● Size of house
The house needs to be able to accommodate all of the people who live there. Children over the age of 3 should have their own bedroom wherever possible. However, if children have to share a bedroom a risk assessment will need to be carried out in respect of age, age gap, gender, history of sexualised behaviour and bullying, for example.

Gaps in Matching
It is unlikely that all of the matching criteria between the child’s needs and the carer’s skills and experience will be achieved. The timescales for placing children will need to be weighed against achieving a “perfect match”. Where there are gaps in matching, family finding practitioners will need to consider whether a match could be strengthened by the provision of additional training, support, resources or information. This may involve forming links with community groups to ensure that children’s needs relating to ethnicity, language and religion are met or undertaking training in methods of communicating with a disabled child for example.

Gaps in matching should be discussed with the Team Manager and agreement reached about which criteria will be prioritised as the individual circumstances of “this child” in “this placement” with “this foster family” will need to be taken into consideration.

Gaps in matching should also be discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting and agreement reached about how the team around the child will work together to support the
child in placement.

**Placement Choice**
All appropriate matches will be presented to the child’s social worker and agreement reached as to which placement will best meet the child’s needs. Social workers are expected to involve children in decision-making about placement choice.

**Carer/Family Profiles**
Foster carers should be supported to put together a profile of the foster family for social workers to share with children. This should include routines, expectations and information about what the family do to relax and have fun, as well as photographs of the family and the home. Profiles should be made available to children prior to moving and introductions to the family prior to the move will increase the likelihood of children feeling welcome as this will provide an opportunity for the child to let the carer know about likes and dislikes.

**Procedure**

4. The procedure for matching foster carers is described, step-by-step, in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Action</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Child's social worker</td>
<td>Makes a request for a foster care placement to the Commissioning Team via PARIS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Service Manager</td>
<td>Authorises requests for emergency placements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Commissioning Team</td>
<td>Forwards referrals to the Fostering Service Family Finding Team following the approval by the Access to Resources Panel, or immediately in the case of requests for Emergency Placements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Finding Team</td>
<td>Searches for all available vacancies and matches the child’s needs with the carer’s skills and experience, according to the matching criteria detailed in the Matching Policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family Finding Team</td>
<td>Weighs timescales for placing children against making a “perfect match” and considers whether gaps in matching can be resolved by the provision of training, support, resources or information to the foster carer/family and other professionals in the team around the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Finding Team</td>
<td>Discusses possible matches with the foster carers identified and their family placement social worker to ascertain their views as to whether the placement can meet the child’s needs. In addition, the Family Finding Team should consult with the social worker(s) of any other children placed with the foster family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Finding Team</td>
<td>Appropriate matches are presented to the child’s social worker along with profiles of the families being considered for discussion with the child, in accordance with age and understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Finding Team</td>
<td>Once the placement is agreed, confirms the placement with the foster carer and/or the family placement social worker. Gaps in matching are identified for discussion at the Placement Planning Meeting so that an action plan can be developed detailing how the match can be</td>
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strengthened and how the team around the child will work together to promote the stability of the placement. The meeting should also discuss the arrangements for a planned move to the foster care placement, including introductions to the foster family.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Finding Team</td>
<td>Updates the Commissioning Team is of progress via contemporaneous recording in Paris casenotes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Finding Team</td>
<td>Completes a Matching Form and saves it to: S:\CPRNTSCS\Teams\721\MATCHING FORM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Finding Senior Practitioner</td>
<td>If a suitable placement cannot be identified, forwards a report to the Commissioning Team detailing the efforts that have been made to identify an in-house foster care placement and why an Independent Fostering Placement is required.</td>
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