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1. **Introduction**

Many children in care live with their foster families for many years, and sometimes for the whole of their childhoods and beyond. However, until 2015 long-term fostering had no legal status. In 2015, regulations and statutory guidance came into force in England which together introduced a legal definition of long-term foster care and the conditions that need to be met and strengthened it as a permanence option for children and young people in care.

Permanence is the long-term plan for the child’s upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption. The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

* A range of options for permanence exist, all of which can deliver good outcomes for individual children:
* For many children, permanence is achieved through a successful return to their birth family, where it has been possible to address the factors in family life which led to the child becoming looked-after.
* For other children routes to permanence outside the care system may include
	+ family and friends care, particularly where such care can be supported by a legal order such as a child arrangement order, special guardianship order or in a few cases, adoption.
	+ adoption, which for many children can offer the best route to a lifelong and legally permanent new family. Twin track or parallel planning, including concurrent planning, may provide a means to securing permanence by adoption at an early stage for some children.
	+ other non-family and friend’s carers supported by a legal order such as a child arrangement order or special guardianship order.

For those children who remain looked-after an important route to permanence is long-term foster care. Where the permanence plan for the child is long-term foster care this may be where the current short-term placement is assessed to meet the long term needs of the child for permanence or where a new placement is identified for the child because of an assessment and matching process.

A long-term foster placement confirms the message that the foster carer(s) are committed to the child throughout the rest of their childhood and into adulthood. It provides the child with a sense of belonging, stability and enables them to build relationships that will endure into adulthood and beyond.

1. **Key Legislation**

The [Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/495/note/made), which came into force on 1 April 2015.

The related statutory guidance has been incorporated into a revision of [The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-care-planning-placement-and-case-review) which was reissued in June 2015.

### **Purpose**

Local authorities are expected to have an agreed process for the long-term fostering matching consideration. To ensure that the requirements have been met, the decision to make a particular long-term foster placement must be discussed and recorded as part of the child’s review process. The same process must be followed for assessing the suitability of all potential long-term placements, whether this involves remaining with an existing foster carer or moving to a new family.

If the child’s permanence plan is long-term foster care and their existing foster carer wishes to be considered to provide this, the child’s responsible authority is expected to consider this in a reasonable timescale taking account of the existing relationship between the child and the foster carer, the length of time in placement, the child’s relationships with the foster carer’s wider family and community, and the progress of the child in placement recorded through the review process. If the authority does not consider it appropriate to assess the ability of the current foster carer to become the long-term foster carer, it should give the carer clear reasons in writing, and communicate the decision to the child as appropriate to their age and understanding.

The 2015 regulations provide a definition of a long-term foster placement, being when all the following conditions are met:

* foster care is the child’s plan for permanence, as recorded in their care plan
* the foster carer has agreed to be the child’s foster carer until they cease to be Children in Care (and the proposed long-term placement is consistent with the foster carer’s terms of approval).
* the child’s responsible authority (for the purpose of this policy, this means South Gloucestershire Council has confirmed the arrangement to the foster carer, the child and their birth parents.
1. **Process for matching children**

Before making a long-term foster placement the child’s social worker and family placement social worker must assess the ability of the foster carer to meet the child’s needs now and, in the future, and identify any support services that will be needed to achieve this.

The child’s wishes and feelings must be taken into consideration alongside birth siblings and any foster carer children and young people under 18 in the household where appropriate. It must be considered that the placement will safeguard and promote the child’s welfare, the IRO must be consulted, the child’s relatives must be consulted where appropriate, and a new placement plan must be prepared and signed by the foster carer.

The foster carers’s terms of approvals must be consistent with the proposed placement as a long-term foster placement. The terms of approval cannot be changed by the long-term matching panel and therefore it is essential that the foster carer’s terms of approval have been agreed by Fostering Panel prior to the case for long term matching being presented to the Long-Term Matching Panel.

The assessment and planning process for long-term foster care should address the child's current needs and likely future needs, and the capacity of the foster carer to meet these needs now and in the future. The length of placement will vary according to the child's age and the long-term plan for the child, including the transition to adulthood. These factors must all be considered in planning for support and services where long - term foster care has been identified as the plan for permanence for a child.

The long-term matching panel consist of 2 parts. **Part 1** will consider the matching of children with foster carer(s) who are able to meet their physical, emotional, educational and social needs throughout their childhood and beyond **Part 2** will be a celebration event where child and foster carers attend where the matching decision is confirmed, and celebration certificate is handed out **(Appendix 9 – matching Certificates)** and a celebration event is agreed. **(Appendix 1 – Terms of reference Long Term Matching Panel).**

The referral for the long-term matching panel should be made by the child’s social worker following the second Children in Care child review if long term fostering is being considered as a permanence option and the preparation work section 6 below has been completed and reviewed and authorised by the service manager.

The long-term foster panel will meetatleast monthly to ensure plans are agreed in a timely manner. The next action step in mosaic “panel referral should be triggered by the child’s social worker who should also complete the panel referral form **(Appendix 2 – Referral form for long-term fostering matching panel)** this formshould be emailed to the long-term panel administrator within the family placement Business Support fosteringbusinesssupport@southglos.gov.uk and should also be attached to the placement planning step on Mosaic.

The panel administrator will log the request on the long-term fostering matching tracker log.

1. **Long-Term Fostering Matching Panel**

The Long-term Fostering Matching Panel considers potential matches with long-term foster carers for children/young people who have a permanence plan of long-term fostering.

The Long-Term Fostering Match Panel will **not** consider:

* Cases that are subject to Care Proceedings, where the final Care Plan is for children to remain with family & friend’s carers under a long-term fostering arrangement, Child Arrangement or Special Guardianship Orders.
* Plans of Adoption – The ‘Should be placed for Adoption Decision’ would be made by the Adoption Agency Decision Maker following a Children in Care Statutory Review where the care plan of Adoption was agreed. Children with a plan of adoption are matched with a proposed adoptive family at Adoption Panel.

**The Long-Term Matching Panel considers:**

* Children with a plan of long-term fostering being potentially matched with their current carers. In this instance, the long-term fostering plan with the child’s current carers should be agreed in a statutory (Children in Care) review.
* Children with a plan of long-term fostering being potentially matched with new carers. When long-term foster carers are identified, children should be matched with **new** carer(s) before they move to the placement. The child should have a care plan of long-term fostering agreed at a statutory (Children in Care) review. The Fostering / Placement service will have identified foster carer(s) who are able to meet the child’s long-term needs. This applies to both Independent Fostering Agencies and in- house placements.
1. **Preparation for Long Term Matching Panel (Mosaic process)**

The decision for permeance should have already been agreed at the permeance panel and the child’s social worker should start the permanence workflow in Mosaic. The Permanence plan (appendix 3) should be completed by the child’s social worker in Mosaic to trigger the step.

The family placement social worker will be responsible for ensuring that the views of the foster carers have been sought in respect of the proposed long-term match and that they have been encouraged to complete the Long term foster carers report located on Mosaic (**Appendix 4 – Long Term Fostering – Foster Carers report)**. This report sets out a pen picture of the child, what is working well, what concerns the foster carer(s) may have and what needs to happen from the foster carer perspective, the report also identifies the foster carer(s) commitment to the child(ren) throughout their childhood and into adulthood including staying put arrangements.

The Child’s Social Worker and the family placement social worker will jointly complete the Long-Term fostering placement and Matching Matrix. **(Appendix 5 – LT Fostering Placement Report & Matching Grid)** together with a long-term fostering support plan **(Appendix 6 – Long Term Fostering – Support Plan.)**

This report and support plan will consider the following:

* The child’s assessed current and future needs as well as the support needs.
* The capacity of the foster carer to meet these needs now and in the future.
* A summary of the main strengths of the match and any areas of vulnerability.
* The views of the child(ren), carer(s) and birth parents, foster carer child(ren) under 18 years living in the household.
* The potential vulnerabilities/risks to placement e.g. geography and how these will be addressed
* The impact of any proposed match upon other Children in Care in placement, including the views of the child’s Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (This will also be evidenced in the Children in Care Statutory Review minutes).
* Any other information the agency considers relevant.
* Any future support needed and who and when it will be delivered.

It should be noted that the child’s social worker will be responsible for ensuring that the views of the child have been sought in respect of the proposed long-term match and that the child has been supported to articulate their views in the child’s matching report.

The social worker will send the following reports to the Long-Term Matching Panel Administrator

* The last Care assessment and plan together chronology of significant events
* Minutes, decisions and actions of the statutory (Children in Care) review that agreed the single-track plan of long-term fostering as the permanence option.
* Most recent Fostering Annual Review Report with the ADM decision following the review.
* The Long-Term Matching Report with Matching Matrix with completed captured views of the child.
* The long-term foster carers support plan.
* The long-term foster carers report

There is a checklist in Mosaic **(Appendix 7– Long-Term Fostering Matching checklist)** which is available to help identify the reports to be presented to panel for recommending the long-term fostering match of a child with foster carers (either in South Glos or IFA).

Panel members should receive copies of the above paperwork from the Panel Administrator **a minimum of** **four days** before the Panel date.

1. **After the matching panel:**

A copy of the panel minutes and ADM decision will be inputted into Mosaic **(Appendix 8 – Long Term Foster Matching Minutes)** by the panel administrator. The panel administrator will also update the long-term fostering matching tracker log.

Where the Panel agrees the match between a child (ren) and their long-term foster carers, the Panel will record this decision in writing. Foster carers and birth parents will be informed at the celebration part of the panel but will also be informed of the outcome in writing (and children will receive written confirmation in an age-appropriate format) within **10 working days** of the decision.

Foster carers will be informed of the outcome by the Fostering Social Worker (for carers). Birth parents will be informed of the outcome and the child’s Social Worker (for parents and child).

Where the Panel does not agree the proposed match between a child(ren) and the foster carers, the child’s Social Worker, Team Manager and Independent Reviewing Officer will be advised **within two working days.**

A letter to the child (ren) will be sent to inform them of the decision.

If there is to be a successful match the social worker will arrange for funding so that a celebration event can take place (for example trip out for a meal / cinema) and a celebration successful match certificate will be sent to the child (ren).



**Please note After a successful match, the social worker will celebrate by:**

1. **Writing to the child(ren) to inform them of the decision.**
2. **Sending the Child (ren) a matching certificate**
3. **Arrange for funding so that a celebration event can take place (for example trip out for a meal / cinema)**

**Attached Appendices**

**Appendix 1 - Terms of Reference Long Term Matching Panel**

**Appendix 2 - Referral for Long-term Fostering Matching Panel**

**Appendix 3 Permanence Plan**

**Appendix 4 - Long Term Fostering - Foster Carer's Report**

**Appendix 5 - LT Fostering Placement Report & Matching Grid**

**Appendix 6 - Long Term Fostering - Support Plan**

**Appendix 7 - Long Term Fostering - Matching Checklist**

**Appendix 8 - Long Term Foster Matching Minutes**

**Appendix 9 - Matching certificates SGC**