**PERMANENCE VIA LONG TERM FOSTERING**

**POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

**Introduction**

Darlington Children’s Services believes that all children have the right to grow up safe and free from harm, with opportunities to maximise their potential to develop and grow and to feel secure. In the first instance, Darlington Children’s Services will provide services to promote and secure the upbringing of children by their birth families or extended family members wherever possible.

It is a fundamental right of every child to belong to a family who can meet their needs during childhood. If no birth family or connected persons are deemed suitable, the preferred option for all children is adoption, especially for under 8’s but if this is not possible, long term fostering would be an alternative option to offer permanence to the child.

The child's welfare, safety and needs is be at the centre of this policy and procedure.

The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and taken into account when considering long term fostering for the child.

Any child with additional needs will have these taken into account when decisions are made about long term fostering.

**Statutory Guidance**

Prior to 2015, long term fostering had no legal status. The key changes in permanence planning arise from:

* The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 and came into force on 1st April 2015.

These regulations provide for the first time a definition of a long term foster placement being when:

* Foster care is the child’s permanence plan, as recorded in their care plan and agreed at a Looked After Child Review
* The Foster Carer has agreed to be the child’s Foster Carer until they cease to be Looked After

The child’s responsible Local Authority has confirmed the arrangement to the Foster Carer, the child and their birth parents.

**Matching Process for Long Term Fostering**

Before making a long term foster placement, the child’s Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker must assess the ability of the Foster Carer to meet the child / young person’s needs now and in the future, and identify any support services that will be needed to achieve this.

For in-house Foster Carers, this will involve the child’s Social Worker and the Family Placement Social Worker working collaboratively. For Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) placements the child’s Social Worker will work with the IFA Supervising Social Worker

**Principles**

* The child / young person’s wishes and feelings must be taken into consideration and evidence of this consultation must be demonstrated in the long-term fostering matching report
* The placement must safeguard and promote the child’s welfare
* The views of those involved in the child’s care plan including the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) should be sought and recorded
* The child’s relatives must be consulted where appropriate

When the individual child’s care team feel that the most appropriate plan is permanence via long term fostering, this plan must be agreed at a LAC Review. If necessary this review will be brought forward to prevent any delay with the permanence planning.

**When a child requires a move to a long term foster placement**

Once the plan of permanence via long term fostering is agreed, the majority of children will be remaining with their current Foster Carer.

In some cases an alternative long term placement will be required, and the following process should be followed:

* Agreement sought from Head of Service
* Presentation of the plan to be presented to Darlington Access to Resource Panel (DARP) if a placement move is required
* Referral made to the Family Placement Service to enable them to commence a search for a long term placement. The child’s Social Worker must provide a referral form, care plan, updated single assessment, PEP, school reports, LAC review recommendations and decisions, and any additional material which provides information about the child
* The Social Worker should arrange a face to face meeting with the Family Placement Team Manager to discuss the needs of the child and the type of placement which would best meet their needs
* The Family Placement Team Placement Officer will provide regular weekly updates to the Social Worker about the family finding activity.
* If a child is moved and placed with an in-house Foster-Carer on a long-term basis, a formal match would not be considered until the child has been in placement for a minimum of six months.
* If a child is moved and placed with an IFA following approval by a Head of Service, the placement will be commissioned as a short-term placement with a view to it becoming a long-term placement following a minimum period of six months when the child would be formally matched at the Family Placement Panel.

**Current short term Foster Carers offering a long term placement to the child / young person**

Some children have been placed with Foster Carers whose approval is for short term placements but the children have been in placement for longer than 6 months.

Where a decision has been made via a permanence planning meeting that the child/young person’s needs are best met by remaining in their current placement on a long term basis, there must be a Foster Carer annual review arranged to consider whether the Foster Carer has the appropriate skills to offer a long term foster placement to meet the child/young person’ needs. An early annual review can be arranged in order to ensure the process is not delayed.

The Supervising Social Worker’s report for the Foster Carer’s annual review must incorporate a robust assessment of each of the following areas:

* The current and assessed future needs of the child / young person and how well the carer is likely to be able to meet the needs, taking into account the Foster Carers’ history, and their health
* The length of the current placement , and how the Foster Carers have invested in meeting the needs of the child/young person
* How well the child/young person is integrated into the immediate fostering family and their wider network
* The strength of attachments already formed between the child/young person and the carer(s)
* The likely support and services that will be needed to ensure that the placement will continue to be stable, secure and meet all the child / young person’s needs to adulthood

**Matching process**

**Permanency planning meeting** should be convened at the point the Social Worker and Team Manager feel the child’s need for permanence can best be met in a long term foster placement.

The meeting should be arranged by the child’s Social Worker and chaired by the Team Manager.

The following persons must be either invited to attend the meeting, or their views must be sought:

* Child/young person if of an age and understanding
* Birth parents
* Child’s Social Worker
* Supervising Social Worker
* Education representative
* LAC Nurse
* The IRO would not attend the meeting, but their views must be sought
* The views of the current Foster Carers must be sought, and it may be appropriate for them to attend the meeting

If the child has a plan of adoption which has not been achieved, the adoption plan must be rescinded by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) before the plan can be formally changed to permanence via long term fostering. In addition, the Placement Order will require discharge within the Court arena.

If the Permanency planning meeting decision is that long term fostering is appropriate the following actions must be taken:

1. The Care Plan for long term fostering must be ratified at a LAC Review. This LAC review should be held within 2 weeks of the suggested permanence plan to prevent any drift and delay in permanence planning. It is the responsibility of the child’s Social Worker to contact the IRO and request a LAC review is arranged.
2. The child’s Social Worker must attend the first available DARP meeting and seek agreement if the proposed long term placement is with an Independent Fostering Agency.
3. The child’s Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker should complete the matching report and book to attend the first available Family Placement Panel.
4. The child’s Social Worker and Fostering Supervising Social Worker will work collaboratively to ensure that all of the necessary documentation listed below is updated and provided to the Panel Administrator in accordance with the deadline for receipt of papers:
* Matching report parts one and two (**SEE APPENDIX ONE**)
* Permanence Plan and Permanence Planning meeting minutes
* LAC Review report ratifying long term fostering plan
* Child’s latest medical report
* Child’s most recent PEP
* Most recent Foster Carer Annual Review report – including reference to a medical report advising there are no barriers to the Foster Carers changing their status to long term Foster Carers
1. Family Placement Panel will make a recommendation about the proposed match to the ADM for their consideration. If approved, the child is considered to be formally matched. The Agency Decision Maker will send a letter to the child / young person confirming the long term placement decision.
2. It is considered good practice for this event to be highlighted in the child / young person’s life for example recording in their chronology as a significant event and a celebration event within the fostering household.
3. A Placement Planning meeting must be held within 10 working days of the ADM’s decision regarding the long term match if the child is going to move to a new placement.
4. The Family Placement Service must inform the allocated Social Worker that the ADM has approved the long term match. The Social Worker must update the Placement Plan which will trigger the Family Placement Service to update the placement coding to U4 as per the Department of Education’s guidelines. The updating of the Placement Plan is required regardless of whether the child remains in placement or moves placement following the match being approved.

**APPENDIX ONE**

**Long Term Fostering Matching Report**

**Family Placement Panel**

Permanence planning meeting minutes, the care plan and a single assessment of the child’s needs should inform the completion of this report

The child’s Social Worker should complete section one ensuring collaboration and consultation with the child, current Foster Carers, other professionals and any individuals close to the child.

The Supervising Social Worker will complete section two and analyse the Foster Carers’ abilities to meet the child’s needs now and in the future, and any support the carer/s will require.

The recommendation should be completed jointly between the Child’s Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker.

**SECTION ONE: CHILD**

**Child’s Basic Information**

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| **First Name and unique case number** | **Last Name** | **DOB** | **Gender** | **Ethnicity** | **Religion** | **Legal Status** |
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**Family Composition**

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| **First Name** | **Last Name** | **DOB** | **Gender** | **Ethnicity** | **Religion** | **Relationship to child** |
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| **Date(s) of Permanency Planning Meeting(s) and agreed plan.** |

**CHILD’S NEEDS:**

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| **Overview of the Child’s Needs** *Child’s Social Worker(s) to provide a brief synopsis of the child’s needs and progress in placement* |
| **Health needs.** *Any identified health needs; how are these being addressed; any future needs?* |
| **Educational progress and learning needs. Include future educational needs.** |
| **Identity needs.** *(including ethnicity; language; religion; culture)* |

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| **Family and Social Relationships** (*including contact*) |
| **What are the child’s wishes and feelings about the proposed match?** |
| **What are the birth family’s views about the proposed match?** |
| **What are the IRO’s views about the proposed match?** |
| **What preparation for long term fostering has taken place with the child?** |

**SECTION TWO: PROPOSED LONG TERM FOSTER CARERS**

**CARERS’ BASIC DETAILS**

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| **First Name** | **Last Name** | **DOB** | **Gender** | **Ethnicity** | **Religion** |
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**Other Members of the Household**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **First Name** | **Last Name** | **DOB** | **Gender** | **Ethnicity** | **Relationship** |
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| **Date of approval and details of current registration. Note Local Authority or IFA details.** |
| **Date of last annual review and any recommendations.** |
| **Overview of proposed carers** *(provide a brief synopsis of the family; their experience of fostering; and family profile).* |
| **Why does the family wish to provide long term fostering for this child and what can they offer to this child.** |
| **What are the strengths and limitations of the carer(s)?** *If there were any unplanned placement endings please provide details of the circumstances and how the ending was managed. Provide details of the carers’ skills i.e. communication with children; working in partnership with families/the department; any training and development needs.* |
| **How will long term fostering impact on the other members of the household including their support networks, both now and in the future?** *Consider the impact on the carers’ own children and/or other children in the placement* |
| **How can this family meet the child’s identified needs, both now and in the future?** *For children remaining with their carer provide details of what they have been doing to meet the child’s needs on a day to day basis and how they have helped achieve the outcomes identified in the child’s care plan. How will they meet these needs in the future? For placement with new carers describe how they can meet the child’s needs now and in the future.* |
| **Ability to meet the child’s health needs.** *How does/will the carer’s promote the child’s health?* |
| **Ability to meet the child’s education and learning needs.** *What do/will the carer/s do to support the child’s learning; do they attend parents’ evenings; help with homework; participate in meetings?*  |

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| **Ability to meet the child’s identity needs.** *How are the child’s needs met or how will they be met by the carers to promote a positive sense of identity including ethnicity, culture, religion, language, sexuality or disability?* |
| **Ability to meet the child’s family and social relationships needs.** *How will they meet the child’s contact needs now and in the future; how is the child supported to develop friendships and leisure interests.* |
| **Ability to meet the child’s behavioural and developmental needs.** *How does the carer promote the child’s emotional wellbeing; what is their understanding of their previous experiences and their impact; how does/will their approach to parenting meet the child’s needs. How is safe care demonstrated?* |
| **What are the potential areas of difficulty in this match and how will they be addressed?** *Include any support needs; is respite required (in exceptional circumstances only)?*  |

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| **Recommendation to Panel (to be completed jointly by the child’s Social Worker and the Fostering Supervising Social Worker).** |

**NAME OF CHILD’S SOCIAL WORKER:**

**SIGNATURE OF CHILD’S SOCIAL WORKER:**

**NAME OF SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER:**

**SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER:**

**DATE:**

**NAMES AND SIGNATURES OF TEAM MANAGERS:**

**DATE:**

**DATE OF FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL:**

**APPENDIX TWO - Flowchart: Process for a Long-Term Fostering Match**