**Practice Guidance: Matching Children for Long-Term Foster Care**

Security, continuity and stability need to be provided for children who have a Care Plan of long-term fostering. When considering how best to provide a sense of permanence for children, plans must take account of the strengths of existing relationships, the young person's sense of identity, their views and their preferences, and how best to provide continuity as well as permanence for and with them.

The assessment and planning process for long-term foster care should address the child's current needs and likely future needs, as well as the capacity of the Foster Carer to meet these needs now and in the future. The length of care 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 taken into account in planning for support and services where long-term foster care has been identified as the plan for permanence for a child.

Following a positive long-term match between a child and a foster family having been identified, the decision process in relation to how this will be formalised needs to be child led and in the best interests of the child to ensure that this serves to support and promote the child’s sense of permanence.

**Routes to achieving a long-term match**

A long-term match should be ratified via the Long-term Matching Panel Process or following discussion at the Child in Care Review. The decision for which route is most appropriate should be in line with the child’s views, and their needs and should not be age specific.

**Decision-making for the most appropriate route**

The decision about which is the most appropriate route for a child must be child led. A holistic and evidenced based view must be formulated as to which route will be most beneficial for the child to support them in the most effective way to achieve and maintain security and stability in establishing their permanence plan.

The decision making process should be evidenced through Permanency Planning Meetings and Matching Meetings.

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

If it is determined that a child should have their long-term match, with an appropriately identified foster family, ratified via the Matching Panel process, this should follow the procedure in place (see NCT Matching flowchart).

1. **LAC Review Process**

Where it is determined that it would not be in a child’s best interests to go through the Matching Panel process, the decision for a child to remain in the long-term care of an appropriately identified long-term foster family should be discussed and recorded as part of the Child in Care Review process, where agreement from all key parties is formally recorded. The matching paperwork then needs to be sent to the ADM to make the final decision relating to long-term fostering match.