

**Swindon Borough Council's
Family Finding and Matching Policy:
Permanent Foster Placements**

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Family Finding and Matching Policy: Permanent Fostering Placements

This policy is supplemental to 'Swindon Borough Council Children in Care Permanence Planning Guidance'. It defines the decision-making processes and procedures for permanent / long-term foster placements, sets out the Family Finding procedure, and clarifies the difference between Permanent Fostering Placements, and Placements until Independence.

1. Background

Department for Education (DfE) guidance on the Children Act 1989 sets out the following definition of what permanence should offer a child:

'A sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity ... a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond'.

Put simply, permanence means an enduring long-term commitment and stable family experience that enables the child to put down roots and creates a foundation for belonging. Permanence can be provided by the child's parents or other relatives, other connected people, foster carers, Special Guardians or adopters.

The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Vol 2: care planning, placement and case review June 2015, states, "for those children who remain looked-after, an important route to permanence is long-term foster care."

2. SBC Definitions

Placement until Independence:

Placement until Independence refers to a placement in which a child may have remained for some time (perhaps due to attempts at rehabilitation or court processes), and where it has been agreed the child will remain for the foreseeable future. However, the child's placement has not been assessed and agreed as permanent through a formal matching process or by recommendation of the Swindon Borough Council's Foster Panel.

This placement status is applicable to young people over the age of 14, who may have entered the care system in adolescence, and who may retain strong links with their birth family and not want to make a formal commitment to their foster family.

Where a child/young person is aged 15 or older his/her placement will be deemed to be a Placement until Independence (usually providing task-centred care focused on preparation for independence), and will not require approval as a long-term fostering arrangement.

Young people whose placement falls into the category of Placement until Independence must have this plan confirmed by a Permanency Planning Meeting, and ratified by the IRO in their Statutory CLA Review. A Management Decision, completed by the child/ carers respective team manager, should be placed on the child and carer's file.

The Management Decisions should record frequency of the young person's Social Worker Statutory visits, CLA Reviews, delegated authority and agreed package of support, if required.

Should the young person wish to remain in placement after their 18th birthday, SBC Staying Put policy will fully apply.

Permanent Fostering placement:

A permanent fostering placement is one which has been assessed and formally agreed as permanent, following a formal matching process, including a recommendation by Swindon Borough Council's Foster Panel, and agreement of this recommendation by Agency Decision Maker.

Such placements are matched, based on the child's needs, as measured against the skills, aptitudes and ability of the carers to meet these. It is expected that the child will remain in that permanent foster placement up to the age of 18; permanent foster carers are expected to have an enduring commitment to the young person into adulthood. This is likely to include a Staying Put arrangement. The carer's commitment is expected to continue after the young person has achieved independent living arrangements, similar to that of a birth child.

Carers identified as suitable to meet the permanent needs of the child may be the current short-term placement, or a new placement identified for the child as the result of a Family Finding exercise.

The process for achieving a permanent placement is summarised in the flow charts for permanent foster care (see Section 3 below).

Family Finder (Fostering):

In situations where the child / young person's current placement is not able or suited to provide permanence, and where the care plan for the child is permanent fostering, the Family Finder (Fostering) will work in partnership with the child/young person's social worker to:

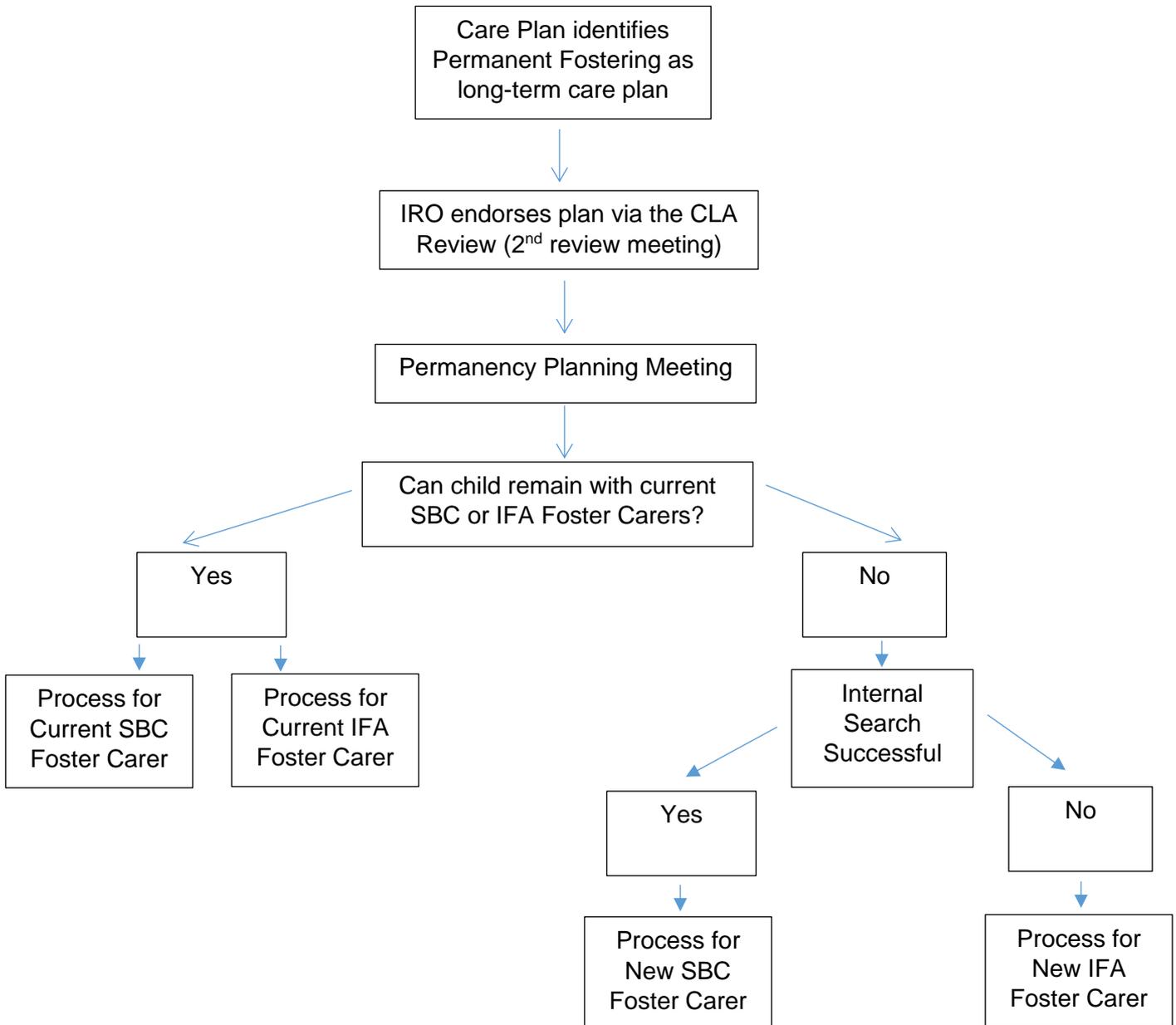
- Identify the child/young person's placement needs and draw up the written matching criteria (consulting other relevant professionals as necessary e.g., Health, Education, CAMHS, Probation etc.); ensuring that separate criteria are drawn up for each child/young person in a sibling group, even if being placed together;
- Assess the child/young person's readiness for family life, in a permanent, substitute family;
- Draw up a profile to be used for family finding;
- Arrange for professional photos to be taken and a DVD produced, where appropriate (suitable to be used for family finding);
- Pursue a wide range of family finding initiatives, aimed at identifying suitable permanent foster carers for the child within a timescale appropriate to the needs of the child.

Specific Family Finding initiatives may include:

- Exploring the availability of suitable carers within SBC's approved carers;
- Initiating a placement search with Independent Fostering Providers, where in-house options are not available or suitable
- Featuring children at national family finding forums and on specific family finding websites where appropriate;
- Specific child-focussed family finding initiatives using the local and/or national press.
- Undertaking preliminary analysis of reports regarding foster carers available for consideration, and discussing possible matching issues with the potential carers' SSW and the child/young person's social worker.

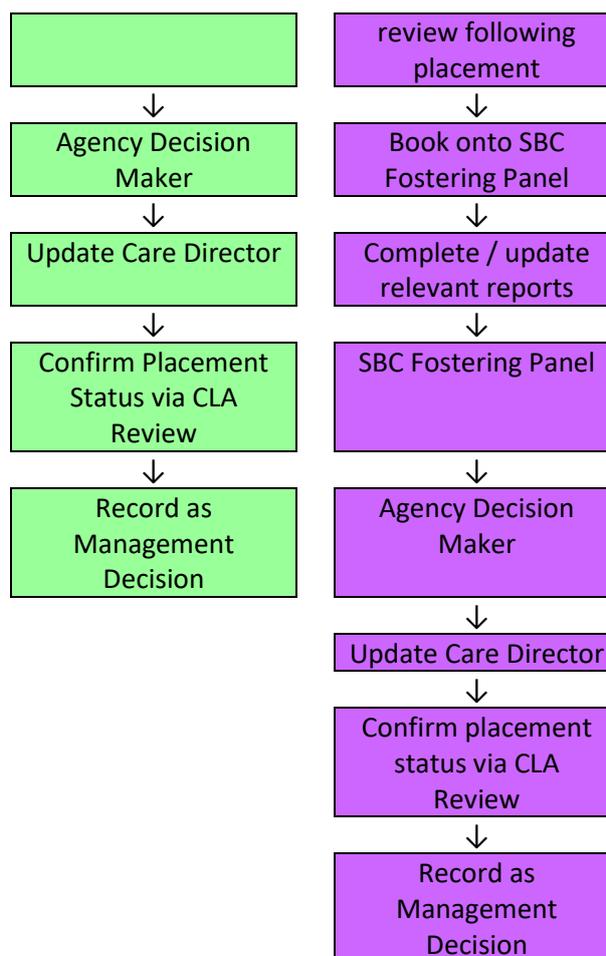
3. Flowcharts for Permanent Foster Care

3.1 Process Selection Flowchart



3.2 Pathways to Permanent Fostering - Flowcharts





4. Family finding Process for Permanent Foster Care

The child’s Social Worker should inform both the Fostering ATM and Advanced Social Worker (Family Finder) that the child’s Permanence Planning meeting has agreed and documented a permanence plan, of permanent foster care. The minutes of the permanency planning meeting should be forwarded to the Family Finder and Fostering ATM, alongside a ‘Family Finding Referral Form – Permanent Fostering’ (Appendix 1).

The Family Finder will then co-ordinate a Profile meeting. The Profile meeting must be chaired, wherever possible, by the Family Finder, or if they are not available a relevant manager. The Child’s Social Worker will provide the Family Finder with a list of meeting invitees.

4.1. Profile Meeting

The Family Finder, Child’s Social Worker, Foster Carer, Supervising Social Worker, Residential Worker, Virtual School Team (VST) and any other professional with considerable knowledge of the child/young person should be invited. Consideration should be given to including the young person/birth family, if this is appropriate.

The child’s Social Worker should complete four actions prior to the Profile Meeting.

1. Provide evidence in writing that they have consulted and advised the birth parents, or anyone who has parental responsibility, of the plan for permanent foster care, and sought their agreement, in writing, if the child or young person is Section 20.

2. Consult with the child or young person, in an age appropriate manner, to ascertain their views for the meeting. If the child or young person is of sufficient age and understanding, consideration should be given to the Family Finder meeting with them directly and/or for them to attend the Profile meeting.
3. Complete all identified sections of the 'Family Finding Referral Form – Permanent Fostering' prior to the Profile meeting.
4. Provide up-to-date photographs of the child.

See Appendix 1 - 'Family Finding Referral Form – Permanent Fostering'

The meeting will draw up a clear and realistic profile of the child's current and future needs, and a list of the qualities and abilities the future carers will ideally have.

It is important to be focused on the outcome wanted for the child and to be able to support any of the requirements e.g. it is not acceptable to assume all children / young people require heterosexual/same heritage carers. In some cases this will be absolutely appropriate, but not in others.

The child's identified needs in relation to their ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality, religion and any additional needs arising from a disability should be made clear in the profile.

The Virtual School will be responsible for co-ordinating the educational needs of the child or young person, identifying a school placement and where this is necessary liaison with Special Educational Needs (SEN) Service. This needs to be achieved ahead of any planned move, to ensure adequate provision is available for the child/young person.

It is important that the child/young person's views are sought, to discover what is important to them. This work is the responsibility of the Social Worker but can be undertaken in conjunction with the current carer, with input, if appropriate, from the Family Finder. It should be part of the life story and preparation work.

Every effort should be made to involve the birth family in this process. Where this is not possible, the issues should be recorded, for the child's later understanding.

At the Profile Meeting, agreement should be reached as to how often key personnel will meet to consider progress and incorporate any new information as part of report's action plan.

The Profile Report will be updated after meeting, with any new information by the Family Finder/ Social Worker. From this point forward, there will be differences in procedure dependent upon whether the child / young person is likely to be matched with an existing SBC / IFA foster carer already caring for the child, or whether family finding is needed for an alternative permanent placement.

5. Family Finding for Approved SBC/IFA Carers already caring for the child

If a match is to be taken forward with an existing SBC or existing agreed IFA carer, regardless of how long the child has been in their care, this will need formalising through the Foster Panel. Some carers may find this intrusive but it is important to explain that this is aimed at ensuring the placement is supported and agreed as permanent.

Funding for a permanent foster placement with IFA Carers needs to be agreed and documented on the child's file via Care Panel, in advance of the matching meeting. This is separate to the approval to undertake the IFA search, which resulted in the child being placed with the carer in the first place.

The IFA funding authorisation for permanence needs to be evidenced in 'Permanency Fostering Matching Report for Carers'.

Although a permanent foster placement with an existing carer may appear as a foregone conclusion to all concerned, particularly for those children who have been in placement for some time, it is crucial to profile the child first before making a final recommendation and presenting the match to the Foster Panel.

After the Profile meeting the Family Finder should coordinate the Matching meeting, to complete Permanency Fostering Matching Report for Carers .

See Appendix 2 - Permanency Fostering Matching Report for Carers

5.1 Matching Meeting

This meeting should always be chaired by the child's social work manager. Attendees should include the Family Finder, Social Worker, Foster Carers, and Supervising Social Worker as a minimum.

The Permanency Fostering Matching Report for Carers forms the Agenda for the Matching meeting, and should be completed jointly by the Child's Social Worker and carers' Supervising Social Worker. Evidence of IRO endorsement of the proposed match should be included in the report. This should normally be detailed in CLA Chair's Recommendations.

The report should clearly explain why the carers are considered a suitable match for a particular child/young person, and if changes to approval are required.

5.2 Foster Carers' approval status

If SBC Carers are currently only approved as Short Term/Respite Carers/Short Breaks Carers, an Annual Review will need to be undertaken to request Change of Approval to include Permanent, and presented to the Fostering Panel alongside the match for Permanent Fostering.

If IFA Carers are currently only approved as Short Term/Respite or Short Breaks Carers a change of approval to long-term needs to be considered by the IFA's own Foster Panel, and should be confirmed by the Agency Decision Maker for the IFA, prior to the Matching meeting taking place.

If carers are already approved as Long-term or Permanent Foster Carers the Supervising Social Worker should provide a copy of the Carers' latest Foster Carer Annual Review, and a copy of the ADM Decision Sheet confirming their approval status, to the Matching meeting. The chair of the Matching meeting should ensure that the Supervising Social Worker for the Foster Carers provides an update to the meeting since the last Annual Review, especially regarding any outstanding matters from the Foster Panel minutes.

The Supervising Social Worker should also confirm their, and if appropriate their IFA's agreement, to the match.

The Matching meeting, chaired by the child's social work manager, should discuss the capacity of the carer(s) to continue to look after and support the child or young person into adulthood. The meeting should also consider current support needs and how these are going to be met.

This support should be documented in Permanency Fostering Matching Report for Carers Section 5 – 'Support Package Identified'.

It is important from a support point of view that carers clearly understand that if permanently matched, they will continue to have a Supervising Social Worker, and any existing meetings such as CLA reviews will continue to ensure the success and stability of the placement.

In cases where the decision to seek permanent foster carers has been arrived at due to an adoptive family not being available, then application should be made to revoke the Placement Order. Good practice would be to revoke the Placement Order as soon as it becomes apparent that adoption will not be achieved, and in all cases prior to the match for permanent fostering being presented to the Foster Panel. Children who remain subject to Placement Orders are not able to be matched permanently to foster carers, as by nature of their order their care plan remains adoption.

If all are in agreement with recommending the Permanent match to Fostering Panel, the Family Finder should book onto the next available Fostering Panel. Where children are being matched to their current SBC or IFA foster carer, family finder involvement will cease at this point.

5.3 Foster Panel Document Checklist: Permanent Fostering

- Permanency Fostering Matching Report for Carers, on the child and carers file.
- Family Finding Referral Form – Permanent Fostering, on child's file.
- Foster Carer's latest Annual Review
- Panel Minutes and ADM Decision Sheet from last Annual Review
- Statutory Assessment for the child / young person

Child's Social Worker, Foster Carer(s) (both if applicable) and Supervising Social Worker are expected to attend Fostering Panel.

The child/young person is encouraged and welcome to attend, depending upon their age and level of understanding. Where a child chooses not to attend Panel, consideration should be given to how they may be involved in the process i.e. provide something in writing/picture.

5.4 Post-Foster Panel Process

When the Permanent Match is recommended by the Fostering Panel and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker, the placement is re-designated as Permanent. Letters will be sent to both the carers and to the child/children advising them of the decision.

Where applicable, business support will update SBC Carer's approval on Care Director to permanent as per date in the Agency Decision Maker's letter.

Business Support will monitor and advise the children's Social Work team to also update the child's placement type on the system, from the date of the Agency Decision Maker's letter.

Following the Agency Decision Maker's approval of the permanent match, an updated Placement Planning Meeting must be held to reflect the change in status of the placement to a permanent placement. The child's Social Worker must also complete a new Delegated Authority, to reflect the placement's permanent status. It should be very carefully considered, to ensure children do not miss out on opportunities, and that children are enabled to experience a fulfilled childhood and feel part of their Foster Carer's family.

The child's Social Worker should complete the following actions:

- Update Care Director to change the designation of the child's placement, from the date of the Agency Decision Maker's letter.

- Advise birth family as appropriate, and anyone who has parental responsibility, in writing of the decision.
- Convene updating Placement Planning Meeting and update the Delegated Authority.

Further actions

Changes of frequency in Child's Social Worker Statutory visits and CLA reviews, and any changes in Delegated Authority should be further discussed and agreed at the next CLA review after the Agency Decision Maker's letter.

Any changes should be dated and electronically documented in Care Director as a Management Decision on both the child and carer's file.

6. Family Finding for New Permanent Foster Placement

If a child cannot remain with the current carer, the Social Worker should contact the Fostering Team Manager for a Family Finder to find a new placement.

6.1 Profile Meeting

The Profile Meeting will be convened and conducted following the procedures outlined under section 4.1. Additionally, the following procedures will apply.

The Family Finder and the child's Social Worker are jointly responsible for ensuring that a proactive and thorough family finding strategy is developed and implemented, to minimise delay.

The Family Finder will ensure that the ATM – Recruitment and Assessment Pod receives a copy of the Profile so that any prospective new applicants can be identified at the earliest opportunity.

The Family Finder will circulate the profile to all Supervising Social Workers in the Fostering Team. Any potential in-house placements will be identified and discussed at the Supervision and Support Pod Meeting.

If it is possible to identify a potential match, the Form F and latest Annual Review and Panel minutes should be read by the Family Finder and Child's Social Worker. The Child's Profile will be considered by the prospective carer's Supervising Social Worker.

If there is more than one possible match identified, a short list will be drawn up. The Social Worker, Family Finder and where appropriate the carer and other workers who attended the Profiling meeting, will take part in this. It is good practice for a short-listing meeting to be chaired by the child's social work manager - to provide a degree of objective oversight to the process, and to fulfil a quality assurance role in ensuring that all relevant information has been provided about the prospective carers and the child.

All internal vacancies should be considered by the Family Finder. The reasons for discounting any potential matches must be clear and available to the Social Worker and Team Managers.

The aim is to match children/young people with foster carers who best meet their needs. Wherever possible this will be with a family which:

- Reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language
- Allows them to live with brothers and sisters unless this is contrary to the care plan
- Meets the child's identified needs and promotes positive outcomes

Where a child or young person cannot be matched with a family which reflects the above, every effort to find an alternative family will be made, to secure a permanent foster placement for the child.

6.2 Family Finding Visits

If an identified placement seems viable, the Social Worker and Family Finder will visit the identified potential family to share more details about the child. It is expected that the carer's Supervising Social Worker would also be present.

If it is decided not to proceed with the possible match at the conclusion of this visit, the process should be repeated until a suitable match is identified.

If this visit is successful and all involved still wish to proceed with the potential match, then a second visit should be undertaken by the Social Worker with the child's Foster Carer.

Following the visits to the prospective carers, if the match is considered appropriate a formal matching meeting will take place, which the Family Finder will coordinate.

In some cases, it may be difficult to identify a family as a good match for the child. In these circumstances a meeting may be arranged, chaired by the child's social work manager and involving the child's Social Worker and the relevant Supervising Social Workers, to look at issues.

If it is agreed there are no suitable in-house Carers, the Family Finder / Social Worker will need to advise Team Managers and widen the search.

Permission for an IFA search must be given in writing from Care Panel.

If specific advertising is required for the young person a Profile/advert should be drawn up. This should be approved by the child's Social Worker and their Manager. If external costs are involved, this needs to be authorised by the child's Social Worker's Team Manager.

The Family Finder / Social Worker will provide full details to the Placements team, who will undertake an IFA search.

Once an external search has been completed and offers are available, the Family Finder and Social Worker will review Form Fs, Annual Reviews, and Panel minutes for prospective carers, draw up a short list and agree which carers to visit, following the guidelines noted above for in-house carers.

Once a potential match has been identified, agreement to fund an IFA permanent match must be gained in writing via Care Panel, and documented on the child's file, prior to the Matching meeting and recommendation to Fostering Panel.

This is separate approval from permission to undertake an IFA search. The IFA Funding authorisation needs to be evidenced in Permanency Fostering Matching Report for Carers.

If IFA Carers are currently only approved as Short Term/Respite or Short Breaks Carers a change of approval to long-term needs to be considered by the IFA's own Foster Panel, and should be confirmed by the IFA Agency Decision Maker prior to the Matching meeting taking place.

6.3 Matching Meeting

The Family Finder should coordinate the Matching meeting, following the guidelines noted in sections 5.1 and 5.2.

As an additional point of consideration, prior to the meeting invitations being issued, consideration should be given to whether both sets of carers will attend all of the meeting. It will usually be more sensitive for existing Carers to attend only part of the meeting, to ensure confidentiality of prospective Carers.

Following the meeting, if all are in agreement with recommending a preliminary long-term match, planning should progress to the next stage.

6.4 Introductions Meeting

Every child or young person has the right to be prepared sensitively and thoroughly for a foster placement. This will include ensuring that a copy of the Children and Young People's Guide to Fostering is given and that they are supported in reading and understanding this. The level of the young person's understanding should be recorded.

The child's Social Worker, current carers and prospective carers and their Supervising Social Workers, Family Finder, VST and other relevant professionals will meet to plan a programme of introductions. The meeting will also consider any contact arrangements, and plan for the new carers to meet birth family members, if appropriate. It is the Child's Social Worker's responsibility to prepare the child for the move.

A date for the Placement Planning Meeting will also be agreed at this stage, before the introductions start.

An introductions plan should be made that looks at the practical arrangements to help the child / young person learn about their new placement and assist the new carers to learn about the child's routines, likes and dislikes and how best to help the child / young person transfer to his / her new placement.

Within the introductions process the following principles will be upheld:

- Child's Social Worker should be present when the child meets their new foster family for the first time. This meeting will normally be held at the current Foster Carer's house.
- When the child/ren visit their new home for the first time they need to be accompanied by their Foster Carers and/or Social Worker.
- The exact length of introductions will vary depending on each child's individual needs.
- Either on the first or second day of the introductions the Supervising Social Worker will contact the Foster Carers to check that they remain confident that the match is right for them and that they are able to meet the immediate and long-term needs of the child/young person.
- The child's Social Worker/Family Finder will remain in regular contact with all to ensure that the introductions are proceeding at a pace that meets the child's needs.

6.5 Mid-point review

Mid-way through the introductions a Mid-Point Review meeting will be held to assess how the introductions are going. This meeting will consider the views of all parties; regular contact will have been maintained with everyone by the Social worker/Family Finder throughout the introductions.

The meeting will:

- review progress
- check whether pace of introductions is appropriate

- assess impact on the child/young person and on the new family

It is essential that any party is able to voice doubts or concerns at this stage.

The Mid-point review will confirm the move date.

6.6 Placement Planning Meeting

A Placement Planning Meeting must be held prior to child moving.

Delegated Authority should be carefully considered to ensure children do not miss out on opportunities that enable them to experience a fulfilled childhood and feel part of their foster Carer's family.

The child's Social Worker must provide all relevant paperwork e.g. CLA forms, including medical consent, to the new carer, before the placement commences.

The Child's Social worker will notify Placements Team of the Move Day, and ensure placement is recorded on Care Director.

The child's Social Worker must visit within 1 week of placement.

A Statutory CLA Review is required within 20 working days of the placement.

The support plan must be reviewed regularly at least as part of the statutory review or more frequently if necessary, and amended as required in order to enhance the stability of the placement.

Once a placement has been made, the role of the Family Finder will cease.

6.7 Settling-in Period

Following the move date, the child(ren) and foster carers will be supported through a settling-in period, during which time they will be in regular contact with the child's social worker and supervising social worker. Any issues or concerns related to placement will be explored via supervision visits to the carers, and statutory visits to the child. If additional support needs are identified, the foster carers, child's social worker, and supervising social worker will meet to explore these and agree a plan.

6.8 Confirmation of Plan for Long-term Match

Following a settling-in period and prior to the 2nd CLA Review following placement, an update Matching Meeting will be convened. This meeting should be chaired by the child's social work manager. Attendees should include the Family Finder, Social Worker, new Foster Carers, and Supervising Social Worker as a minimum.

The purpose of this meeting will be to review the previously-completed matching report, and identify any changes or gaps identified since the time of the children's placement. The matching meeting should review the capacity of the carer(s) to continue to look after and support the child or young person into adulthood. The meeting should also consider whether there have been any changes to the carer(s) or child's support needs since the time of the preliminary matching meeting, and if so a plan should be agreed for how these are going to be met.

Any changes should be documented in Permanency Fostering Matching Report for Carers, including Section 5 – 'Support Package Identified'.

If the update matching meeting agrees that the time is right to proceed with formal long-term matching, the Family Finder will book on to the next available Foster Panel. The plan will be confirmed via the child's 2nd CLA review following placement.

6.9 Foster Panel and Post-Panel Process

The long-term match should be presented and confirmed via the foster panel and post-panel process, following the guidelines outlined under sections 5.3 and 5.4.

Family Finder, Child's Social Worker, Foster Carer(s) (both if applicable) and Supervising Social Worker are all expected to attend Fostering Panel. The child/young person is encouraged and welcome to attend, depending upon their age and level of understanding. Where a child chooses not to attend Panel, consideration should be given to how they may be involved in the process i.e. provide something in writing/picture.

Following the conclusion of panel processes, Family Finder involvement will cease.

7. Connected Persons

The assessment of family and friends/connected persons foster carer contains all information regarding the child, birth family and prospective carers required by the Fostering Panel to approve a permanent match.

The assessing social worker must make prospective carers aware of SBC Staying Put Policy, and the assessment must confirm Carers' understanding of permanent foster care and their commitment to the child into adulthood.

The Fostering Panel will consider the permanent match when considering the approval of the prospective connected person's carer approval.

If the match is recommended to, and approved by the Agency Decision Maker, this will be considered a Permanent Foster Placement, unless otherwise stated e.g. as a short term placement.

When the Permanent Match is agreed by the Agency Decision Maker, Business Support will update Carers records on Care Director, designating the placement as permanent, unless otherwise stated.

The Child's Social worker will ensure the child's record also reflects this change.

A letter will be sent to carers and the child/children to advise them of the change in status of the placement.

Child's Social Worker is to confirm in writing decision to parents and /or person with parental authority.

8. Frequency of Statutory Social Worker Visits

Once formally approved as permanent by the Agency Decision Maker, visits to foster carers can take place every 6 weeks. After the first year of placement the Child's Social Worker can consider a further reduction in visits, provided the placement meets requirements for a reduction in visits.

For long-term / permanent placements, frequency of visits must take into account the permanent nature of the placement, and also consider the support needs of the child and the Carers.

In exceptional circumstances after the first year of a permanent placement, where a placement is very settled, the frequency of visits during the subsequent years could be changed to reflect the

needs of the child. Please refer to Swindon Borough Council Children in Care Permanence Planning Guidance.

The frequency of Supervising Social Worker visits can also be reviewed, dependent on the needs and circumstances of the foster carers.

In either case, if the frequency of visits is reduced, this will be recorded as a Management Decision on the child and / or foster carer's files on Care Director.

There are minimum requirements and the Looked After Review may recommend more frequent visits. The frequency of visits should always be determined by the circumstances of the case and visits should be made whenever reasonably requested by the child or foster carer regardless of the status of the placement.

9. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Family Finding Referral Form – Permanent Fostering

Appendix 2 - Permanency Fostering Matching Report For Carers