

## MEDWAY COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE PLACEMENT MATCHING POLICY

### General duty:

'A responsible authority shall not place a child with a foster parent unless it is satisfied that :-

a placement with a particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all the circumstances.' Fostering Services Regulation 2002 33(b)

'Local authority fostering services ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting his/her needs'

National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 8 (1)

Further requirements stipulated by Standard 8 (2-7) include:-

- The need to take into account the child's Care Plan and recent assessments of the child and their family.
- Matches to be achieved by all relevant parties sharing information
- Placement agreements to identify factors which were taken into account when matching a child with carers, together with additional support needs required to compensate for any gaps in the matching.
- Consideration of the child's assessed racial, religious, cultural and language needs.
- The provision of additional support for transracial or transcommunal placements.
- Where possible, provide opportunity for a period of introduction.

### Assessing a child's needs:

When the need for care or accommodation is being considered, the child's social worker must complete an assessment before a decision is made for them to become looked after. Before a placement is sought, the social worker will get ratification and agreement of the decision from their line manager or service manager.

The nature and depth of the assessment will vary and depend on many factors including:-

- whether the child was previously known
- the urgency of needs for the placement
- the level of co-operation of the child's parents and that of others involved in their life.
- the child's age and understanding.

In some cases a good deal of information will be available, such as Core Assessments completed under the Framework for assessment of Children in Need and their Families.

In other instances, very little information may be available, for example where a child has been abandoned.

Whatever the circumstances, the child's social worker should fully consider the primary elements of a care plan and not seek to make a placement in foster care without first addressing:-

- whether the child was previously known
- the legal basis for the current work with the child
- the reasons why the child needs to be looked after
- investigations made for the child to live with a relative or friend
- necessary agreement for the plan to proceed
- what is the immediate plans for the child
- why this plan has been chosen
- what needs to happen to achieve this plan

### **Children/young people already looked after:**

That a child/young person needs a new placement can be for a number of reasons ranging from an emergency short term placement, a breakdown through to move into a permanent family home.

Whatever the circumstances, the fact that a child is already looked after will mean that their needs should have been assessed and that there is information to assist with the placement matching process. Social workers should make reference to available information from:-

- essential information records
- school reports
- medical assessments
- assessment and action records
- child care reviews
- reports from current carers

### **Persons involved in matching:**

Placement matches will be achieved through information sharing and considerations involving all relevant professionals, the child and their family, perspective carers, their families and other children in placement.

Relevant professionals will include the child's social worker and

- the fostering social workers for the carers involved
- other fostering social workers
- line managers
- health and education workers
- service managers

The extent to which such persons may be involved will be determined by the specific circumstances of the case and the level on urgency for a placement.

The Medway fostering team provides a daily duty service. Managed by qualified fostering social workers, the service accepts and records placement referrals, negotiates placements with carers and other relevant professionals, receives and addresses all carers calls and queries in the absence of their named worker.

The fostering team meet on a weekly basis to:-

- discuss and record the progress on all outstanding placement requests
- receive feedback from the RAG ( Resource Advice Group) and RAP (Resource Advice Panel- CWD) meetings
- share information on children
- share placement options
- suggest options of respite/care packages to address problematic placement situations and the support children in need

### **Areas considered during matching :**

#### Placement location

The safety and welfare of a child relative to the location of any proposed placement must be directed by the placing child's social worker. Based on the social worker's assessment and information, they will agree whether it is appropriate to move a child to foster carers within the proximity of their family or if the placement address should be more distant and with held from parents and/or family.

#### Siblings

Where siblings become looked after, they will normally be expected to be placed together unless there are clear indications that this will not be in the best interests of one or more of the children or it is not initially possible to place them together.

Such conclusions would normally only be reached after the child's social worker has made a comprehensive assessment as to the needs of all the children concerned. It may be necessary to seek separate placements with a view to moving them together at an available point in time.

If siblings need to be place separately, either through assessed needs or lack of placement options, consideration must be given to their need for contact.

#### Child and young person behavior:

It is essential that all information regarding the positive and negative behaviour of a child or young person is recorded at the placement referral stage. These details could include:-

- behaviour at home with parents
- relationship with siblings, peers, male/females, young/older children
- sexualised behaviour
- criminal activity
- attitude to authority

- attitude to animals
- approach to school, clubs, activities, hobbies/interests

This information may be gathered from:-

- the child's social worker
- parents/family
- school/health professionals
- police
- club leaders
- foster carers with whom they have been placed

These details will be taken into consideration in the making of a placement risk assessment on all proposed foster carers to:-

- ensure they have the competencies to manage the child
- ensure the child matches with other children and placements living in the home
- provide full information to enable the carer to understand the risks involved

### Contact

To find a placement to meet the assessed of a child, it is important that the child's social worker provides a clear plan that must include:-

- the plan for the child(if rehabilitation, contact will be crucial; if permanence other factors may be more important)
- the frequency of the desired contact?
- who is the child to have contact with?
- the nature of the contact – direct or indirect?
- where the contact will take place?
- does contact need to be supervised?

### Education

For children of nursery and statutory school age, it is important to maintain them in a familiar, stable and secure educational placement.

Wherever possible, placements will be identified to ensure this continuity unless there are other overriding considerations that preclude this plan.

For young children, the carer's ability to take them to nursery/school will be considered. If not possible, the match will only be agreed if satisfactory alternative arrangements can be made.

For older children, their ability to get to school by themselves will be subject to their social worker's assessment.

## Health

Children who require specific medication/treatment or whose needs arise from a disability will demand careful consideration. Placement decisions will reflect:-

- a risk assessment on child's needs
- implementation of medication agreement and procedures
- assessed competence/medical skills of proposed carers
- carer access to medical care and specialist training where required
- assessment of carer needs for equipment/advice/respite

The medical needs of a child may preclude an opportunity to offer an emergency placement.

The mental health needs of a child together with all past and/or proposed appointments with a CAMHS service will be presented by the child's social worker and included in the matching process.

## Religion

Where a child does practice a religion, the carer's own ability to facilitate and promote the child's religious practices will take a central role in the matching process. The carer must be able and willing to respect the child's faith, dress, diet, celebrations and be prepared to transport to their place of worship.

## Race, culture and language

Medway Council believes that wherever possible, children's needs can best be met by a placement with a carer that reflects their racial, cultural and language background.

Where a placement is made in an emergency and implementation of this policy is not possible, moves should be taken to achieve a new, appropriate placement within six weeks.

If a suitable placement is not found within this period, the situation should be discussed at the child's first review when decisions on further steps can be agreed.

Where an alternative placement is located, consideration should be given as to whether the move would be in the child's best interests based upon current placement stability and impact of placement moves.

A decision to keep a child in a placement that does not fully meet their needs must be made with paramount consideration to the child's long term welfare.

Where transracial or transcommunity placements are made, an assessment of the gaps will be taken and identified additional training, support and supervision given to the carer. The input of the child's family, friends and other carers could make important contributions.

## Bedrooms

The matching process will take into account the proposed sleeping arrangements for the child. Each new placements must have their own room. Subject to the child's social workers assessment, a children could share a room:-

- same gender siblings
- both siblings are under five years
- a baby in a cot sharing carer's room

## Safe caring

National Standard 9(3) requires each foster home to provide safe caring policy.

It is the responsibility of the carer's fostering social worker together with the child's social worker to assess the foster carer's safe care policy before or at the point of placement. They will also ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place and necessary risk assessments have been drawn up to ensure the safety of the carer and their household.

The home safe care policy is subject to carer supervision conducted monthly by their fostering social worker.

## Introductions

Wherever possible, children should have the opportunity for a period of introduction to the proposed carer so that both parties can express an informed view about the proposed placement.

This should be standard practice for all permanent placements.

Where there is an immediate need of a placement making introductions impractical, Both child and carer should be given as much information as possible and their views considered before the placement is confirmed.

## Recording

Upon request for a placement, the fostering service will record information provided by the child's social worker on a 'Foster Placement Matching and Risk Assessment' form. The collated information may be enhanced with supplementary detail from the child's file or foster carer's files.

The referral form will record :-

- placement options considered
- reason for decision
- projected gaps in match
- social workers of existing placements informed
- reasons why unable to match