**Policy and Procedure for Long-Term Matching**

**🔹 Purpose**

The guidance aims to ensure that every Wiltshire child who is looked after is matched with a long-term foster or kinship carer that supports their emotional, physical, and developmental well-being. It promotes a holistic, inclusive, and child-led approach, ensuring that foster placements are safe, stable and nurturing.

**🔹 Core Principles**

**1. Child-Centred & Relational**

* The child’s voice, wishes, and lived experience are central to all decisions.
* Children are seen as experts in their own lives, and their identity, culture, and relationships are respected.
* Emphasis is placed on building strong, trusting relationships between the child, carers, and professionals.

**2. Strengths-Based & Restorative**

* Focuses on what is working well — the child’s resilience, the carer’s capabilities, and existing positive relationships.
* Challenges are addressed through support and resources, not exclusion.
* Encourages a hopeful and empowering approach to overcoming difficulties.

**3. Systemic & Collaborative**

* Recognises that children exist within complex systems (family, school, health, community).
* Decisions are made through multi-agency collaboration, ensuring a well-rounded understanding of the child’s needs.
* Promotes shared responsibility and collective problem-solving.

**4. Inclusive & Accessible**

* Actively removes barriers to ensure equity in foster placement opportunities.
* Considers disability, culture, language, religion, and identity.
* Ensures that information is clear, transparent, and accessible to all involved.

**🔹 Matching Panel**

The panel will ensure decisions are well-informed, balanced and timely. It will include:

* **Chairperson** – Service Manager for Children in care and Placement services.
* **Deputy Chairperson** - Service Manager Quality Outcomes.
* **SASS Service Manager**
* **Fostering Team Manager**
* **Operational Lead for Quality Assurance**
* **Voice of lived experience (voice ambassador)**

Optional members to be invited as required:

* **Health Professional**
* **Education Representative**

Presenters:

* **Child’s Social Worker**
* **Foster Carer’s Supervising Social Worker** (either in-house or IFA)

**🔹 Matching Process Stages**

**1. Preparation**

* **Child’s Profile**: Includes history, strengths, routines, health, education, identity, and risks.
* **Carer’s Profile**: Covers background, skills, home environment, and available supports.

**2. Information Sharing**

* All panel members receive documentation at least 5 working days in advance to allow for informed, thoughtful discussion.

**3. Panel Meeting**

* Structured to foster open, respectful dialogue.
* Focus on compatibility, support needs, and the child’s voice (directly or via advocacy).
* For children with disabilities, accessibility and health management are key considerations.

**4. Decision & Recommendation**

* Panel makes a clear, documented recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
* ADM reviews and makes the final decision, which is then communicated sensitively to all parties.
* Decision will be circulated within 10 working days from the panel date.

**🔹 Placement Planning**

**Support Arrangements**

* Includes therapeutic, educational, and health support.
* Plans for short breaks, peer support, and carer training to encourage placement stability.

**🔹 Ongoing Support**

**Supervisory Visits**

* Regular visits by supervising social workers to supervise, monitor well-being and provide support to everyone in the fostering household: this includes direct engagement with the child looked after.

**Review Meetings**

* Hold regularly with all professionals (including foster carers), to ensure consideration of both the child and birth parents views.
* Focus on progress, challenges, and the child’s evolving needs.

**🔹 Disputes resolution & Record Keeping**

* To ensure quoracy, panel should consist of Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson plus 3 core members.
* All decisions and discussions are accurately recorded and kept confidential.
* Disagreements are addressed through restorative dialogue and, if needed, the reflective practice escalation process.

**🔹 Date of policy:** August, 2025.

**Date of review:** August, 2026.