

Matching in foster care

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1. Introduction

Making a match in foster care refers to the ‘process of selecting a foster family, which is the best fit with a child’ (Zeijlmans et al, 2016, p.257). For Ott et al (2021, p.5) this includes the decision-making process, the providing of information to the child and family, and the process of introductions and moving. Ofsted (2020, p.3) note the importance of getting matching right:

Matching children to the right foster families is critically important for children’s futures. Good matching decisions can help to ensure that fostered children have a secure base, feel loved and can enjoy their lives... When matches do not work, it leads to further distress and instability for children, many of whom will have already experienced significant previous disruption and trauma.

However, it is generally recognised in research and elsewhere, that matching children with foster carers is often not being done well (see chapter 3).

- Practice is characterised by a lack of time and limited resources, and information is not being effectively gathered or shared amongst the various parties that need it.
- The absence of a recognised matching form means that many commissioners are routinely asking fostering services to share a completed ‘Form F’ although the guidance that goes with that form makes clear that it is not designed for that purpose.
- Written records about matching are often inadequate, meaning that when care experienced people look at their records, it is not possible for them to understand how and why decisions were made about their lives (Ofsted, 2020, p.4).

This good practice guide is intended to help practitioners achieve better practice when matching children with foster carers¹. It can be used by practitioners in a number of ways. Individuals may wish to read the text, and will be presented with chapters that set out a summary of the legal framework, and a summary of the research evidence, and specific guidance on the matching process. This knowledge will potentially help them in their practice.

¹ This material does not consider matching for parent and child fostering. Adams and Dibben (2020) consider these issues, and have produced a set of referral and matching forms for this purpose.

The materials also include a number of matching forms that are referenced in the text, and included at the end of the guidance:

- M1 – Child profile (parts one and two)
- M2 – Foster carer profile (parts one and two)
- M3 – Matching Form
- M4 – Other forms

Practitioners and fostering services are welcome to use these forms in their entirety, or selectively in their practice. Or, they may wish to look at these forms and use them to quality assure, and potentially amend, any materials that they are already using.

In 2020 the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers Stability sub-group considered the importance of careful and effective matching, and set out some (unpublished) objectives for practice:

- *The matching process should be characterized by openness and transparency, where all the relevant information about the child and foster carer is shared with commissioners, providers, the foster carers and the child.*
- *The matching process should include information directly from children about how they see themselves and what they think they need from a placement.*
- *The matching process should include information directly from the child's previous foster carer (where applicable) including how they have experienced the child, and what they think the child needs from their next placement.*

This good practice guidance aims to be consistent with those objectives.

It is important to think about terminology, and to acknowledge that certain terms such as 'placement' and 'contact', are sometimes used insensitively with children and young people. However, this practice guidance is designed for professional use, and as such, for the most part, prefers to use terms that are legally correct. This is consistent with the good practice principles set out by Adams (2022).

2. Legal context

There are a number of texts that are relevant when considering the legal framework around matching and making placements, all of which are underpinned by the Children Act 1989:

- *Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (as amended)*
- *Children Act Guidance. Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2021*
- *Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (as amended)*
- *Children Act Guidance Volume 4: Fostering Services (as amended)*
- *Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011*

The needs of the child

Consultation

The Care Planning Guidance (paragraph 2.31) sets out the importance of consultation in relation to matching:

Before making any decision with respect to a child whom they... propose to look after, section 22(4) [of the Children Act] provides that the responsible authority should as far as is reasonably practicable ascertain the wishes and feeling of:

- *the child;*
- *his parents;*
- *any person who is not a parent of his but had parental responsibility for him; and*
- *any other person whose wishes and feelings the authority considers to be relevant; regarding the matters to be decided.*

Assessment of need

Specifically, the Guidance (paragraph 3.9) makes clear that 'placement decisions must be underpinned by an up-to-date assessment of the child's needs and family circumstances', and states (paragraph 3.5) that the responsible authority must:

... ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, the placement:

- *allows the child to live near his/her home*
- *does not disrupt his/her education...*

- *enables the child and his/her sibling to live together...*
- *is within the local authority's area*

Local placement and family contact

The geography of the placement is important in relation to 'the presumption that there should be continued contact between the child and their family while the child is in the care of the local authority... provided that this is consistent with the individual child's welfare' (Care Planning Guidance, paragraph 2.78). This is consistent with National Minimum Standard 9.6 which states that 'When deciding whether to offer a placement, the fostering service works with the responsible authority in giving consideration to how the child's contact with family and significant others will be supported'.

Placement with siblings

The Care Planning Guidance (paragraph 3.23) notes that 'Wherever it is in the best interests of each individual child, siblings should be placed together' which is reinforced by the Fostering Services Guidance (paragraph 3.2).

Education

Section 22(3A) and (3B) of The Children Act 1989 (as amended) considers any decision that will serve to disrupt a child's education. The requirements are spelt out in the Care Planning Guidance (paragraph 3.19) which describes how such a decision must be made at a senior level taking into account the views of the child, their parents (where appropriate), the IRO, and their current designated teacher. Similar processes must be followed where it is proposed the child will be moved out of the local authority area (paragraph 3.33).

Identity

Section 22(5)(c) of The Children Act 1989 (as amended) states that in making any decision a local authority 'shall give due consideration... to the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background', and the Care Planning Guidance (paragraph 1.6) notes that 'All children need to develop their own identity' and makes clear that a looked after child 'will need to have his/her sense of racial and cultural identity not only preserved but positively promoted' (annex 3, paragraph 26).

Identifying suitable foster carers

Terms of approval and ability to meet child's needs

Regulation 22(1)(b) of the Care Planning Regulations which states that the local authority can only place a child with foster carers where the terms of that foster carer's approval are consistent with the proposed placement.² Fostering Services Guidance (paragraph 3.1) goes further and expects 'Children should be placed with an appropriate foster carer capable of meeting their needs', and National Minimum Standard 11.2 requires that 'children are carefully matched to a foster placement'.

The fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. (National Minimum Standard 15.1)

Accommodation

Section 22C(8)(d) of The Children Act 1989 (as amended) requires that accommodation provided to a disabled child is consistent with their needs, and this is reiterated in the Care Planning Guidance (paragraph 3.3). The same guidance (paragraph 2.28) recognises that 'ordinary homes... may not be accessible or suitable for disabled children' and 'the provision of appropriate equipment or adaptations to bathrooms and bedrooms' might be necessary. This is also addressed by National Minimum Standard 6.12 which states that 'Any physical adaptations or equipment needed for the appropriate care of the children are provided to foster carers.'

National Minimum Standard 10.6 specifically addresses the issue of bedroom sharing:

In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

² Information about terms of approval and exemptions is provided by CoramBAAF at:
<https://corambaaf.org.uk/updates/usual-fostering-limit-exemptions-and-terms-approval-foster-carers-england>

‘Placing alongside’

Consent is required from any ‘responsible authority with a child already placed with the foster carer’, and in practice, that means ‘consultation with the social worker of any other child placed in the foster home’ (paragraph 3.2). Adams (2023) provides further guidance on this.

The matching process

The importance of sharing information in advance of any placement being agreed is set out in the Care Planning Statutory Guidance, the Fostering Services Statutory Guidance, and the National Minimum Standards. It is recognised that without proper information the local authority will be unable to match effectively:

The responsible authority has information and support from the fostering service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child’s needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement. (National Minimum Standards for Fostering, Standard 15 outcome)

In relation to foster carers, the consistently stated requirement is that they ‘have full information about the child’ (National Minimum Standard 11.2).

Prior to the placement of each child, the Foster Carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the Foster Carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child’s family, which may hinder the Foster Carer in providing a safe caring environment that meet the child’s needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the Foster Carer him/herself safe. (National Minimum Standard 15.2)

Fostering Services must ensure that the Foster Carer is given all the information they need about the child to enable them to provide appropriate care... This information must always include the child’s up-to-date care plan... and the placement plan... (Fostering Services Guidance, paragraph 3.6)

Care Plan and Placement Plan

Care Planning Regulations require the local authority to produce a Care Plan for each looked after child, and this is the overarching vehicle for bringing together a range of information in relation to their current and future needs. It should be completed before the child is placed, and when that is not possible, within ten days of being placed. It will contain a health plan, a personal education plan, and a permanence plan.

Integral to the Care Plan is the Placement Plan which 'sets out in detail how the placement is intended to contribute to meeting the child's needs' (Care Planning Statutory Guidance, paragraph 3.178). The plan should be developed in partnership with the child, their parents, and the foster carer, and as stipulated in the Care Planning Regulations (regulation 9), it must cover matters including:

- Arrangements for the child's day-to-day care
- Arrangements for contact
- Arrangements for health care
- Arrangements for education and training

The Care Planning Statutory Guidance (paragraph 3.179) notes that an effective plan will also consider 'emotional and behavioural needs... and appropriate strategies for responding to them'.

The local authority is required to draw up the placement plan before the child is placed (Care Planning Statutory Guidance, paragraph 3.178), but where that is not possible, 'a placement plan must be made within five working days' (paragraph 3.182). Even without the full plan, 'essential information for providing safe care to the child must be available to the carer at the start of the placement', and in some circumstances the Placement Plan will need to be drawn up before the Care Plan is finalised (paragraph 3.182).

The legislation is equally clear about the need for children to have information about the foster home, and to be fully involved in the matching process:

Unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the Foster Carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. Wherever possible, children are able to visit the Foster Carer's home and to talk with the Foster Carers in private prior to a placement decision being made. (NMS 11.3)

Placement planning meeting

Dibben (2018) provides guidance for practitioners on 'Devising a Placement Plan' which includes a useful Delegated Authority Decision Making Tool.

Although there is no legal requirement for a placement planning meeting, it is unlikely that a Placement Plan will achieve its goals without a meeting. It is anticipated that where there has been a full discussion between all parties to inform the Placement Plan, this will result in a shared understanding of the Placement Plan, prevent misunderstandings and provide clear written agreements on how the placement will work and be supported. It will therefore help prevent placement disruption and minimise the risk of complaints. (Dibben, 2018, p.3)

The core attendees at the meeting would be the social worker, supervising social worker and the foster carer with every effort being made to include the parents and child/ young person... It is important that the child or young person should be present and enabled to participate with good support and preparation. Where the child does not wish to attend or cannot attend, thought needs to be given to how their views are gathered and reflected during the meeting... (Dibben, 2018, p.5)

Considering permanence

In 2015, amended Care Planning Regulations and Guidance came into force which for the first time recognised long-term foster care as a permanence option. Before making a long-term foster placement the local authority must:

- assess the foster carer's ability to meet the child's needs 'now and in the future'
- identify any support that is needed
- consult with the child and ascertain their wishes and feelings
- consult with the child's relatives (where appropriate)
- consult with the IRO

If having completed the assessment, the local authority decide that the placement will 'safeguard and promote the child's welfare', and the foster carer has 'agreed to foster the child until they cease to be looked after', they can progress to making a long-term placement by:

- amending the care plan to define fostering as the permanence plan
- preparing a new placement plan to be agreed and signed by the foster carer
- confirming the new arrangements with the foster carer, the child and their birth parents

The local authority has a high degree of flexibility, but the matter will need to be considered within the child's review process (Care Planning Guidance, paragraph 3.111). There is also guidance for circumstances where an existing short-term placement is being changed to become a long-term arrangement:

the responsible authority should consider this in a reasonable timescale taking into account the existing relationship between the child and the foster carer, the length of time in placement, the child's relationships with the foster carer's wider family and community. Consideration should also be given to the progress the child has made in the placement, recorded through the case review process. (Care Planning Guidance, paragraph 3.113).

If the authority does 'not consider it appropriate to assess the ability of the current foster carer as the long-term foster carer for the child' it should 'clearly set out the reasons for this decision in writing to the foster carer' and 'communicate the decision to the child where it is appropriate to their age and understanding' (Care Planning Guidance, paragraph 3.114).

Key points

- The child's needs must be assessed, and – subject to being in their best interests – they should be placed close to home, and with their siblings.
- Consideration should be given to the child's behaviour, needs arising from ethnicity and culture including language, contact, and the need to avoid their education being disrupted.
- Children should only be placed with foster carers who can reasonably be expected to meet their needs, and where this is consistent with their terms of approval.
- Foster carers should be provided with full information about children prior to placement; and children should be provided with full information about the carers.
- Children and their relatives should be consulted in relation to their placement needs and in relation to any proposed foster carers.

- The Care Plan and Placement Plan must be completed prior to placement where it is possible to achieve this. A Placement Planning Meeting is not a legal requirement, but will promote good information sharing and effective planning.
- The legislation sets out the actions that are required to achieve permanence through long-term fostering.

3. Messages from research

Research on matching remains scarce [and] there are major gaps in our knowledge.
(Zeijlmans et al, 2016, p.264)

Matching and outcomes

Ott et al (2021, p.3) seeks to explore ‘the effect of matching decisions on outcomes such as foster home stability, the wellbeing of children, and the wellbeing of foster carers.’ In exploring this question, the authors conclude that there were ‘not enough studies to be able to make any strong conclusions’ (Ott et al, 2021, p.4).

Zeijlmans et al (2016, p.263-4) looked at the same question, and concluded that making judgements about matching decisions was challenging. They noted that there were ‘a broad range of factors appeared to influence the matching process’ and a ‘multitude of case factors that might be related to placement success’. In other words, it is impossible to disentangle factors like the characteristics of the child and the quality of the foster carer, from the matching process itself.

Earlier research, and summaries of that research (see Munro and Hardy, 2006, p.7) resulted in claims that ‘crisis-driven and hurried placements increase the likelihood of breakdown.’ Subsequent texts have relied on and referenced that earlier material, with Baginsky et al (2017, p.91) suggesting:

- *Poorly matched placements are more likely to break down and this is often the result of a lack of placement options, and rushed decisions due to strict time restrictions on emergency placements.*
- *Placement breakdowns are more likely where foster carers are provided with insufficient, inaccurate and out-of-date information on children and young people.*

While this might seem like common sense, and has been repeated elsewhere (Narey and Owers, 2018; Cousins, 2011, p.49) it is hard to find good evidence to support these claims, and they run counter to the carefully considered analysis of the research presented by both Ott et al (2021) and Zeijlmans et al (2016). There is evidence (cited in Ott, 2017) that when foster placements disrupt, those involved will attribute this to poor matching and the fact that carers received inadequate information about the child.

It is also important to acknowledge that in many cases where matching activity is minimal, or achieving a good quality match is impossible, outcomes for children can still be positive. This is certainly the case in relation to many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, where even the inability to match according to language does not - in most cases - prevent those young people from settling and thriving in foster carer (see Wade et al, 2012).

The matching process

So, while it is difficult to make authoritative claims about whether good matching impacts positively on placement stability, there is better evidence in relation to the lived experience of matching, and Ott et al (2021, p.3) reached some important findings that are consistently echoed elsewhere.

Matching is often constrained by time and resources

A number of studies show that matching decisions and placements are often constrained by time and resources (Ott et al, 2021). Most obviously this relates to the fact that the majority of matching is undertaken in the context of seeking unplanned or emergency placements that are required immediately or imminently (Ott, 2017). Waterhouse and Brocklesby (2001) suggest that this is the case for about two-thirds of placement requests.

[There is] lots of evidence that matches were often made in a rush or crisis, which meant that there was not a lot of time to make decisions about who the child or young person should live with. This meant that they were often matched with whichever foster carer was available, rather than the carer who might be the best fit for them. When matches were made in a rush, carers and children usually didn't receive much information about each other beforehand, and there was little time to prepare for the child's arrival into the foster home. (Ott et al, 2021 p 3)

Even where time constraints are less of an issue, there is still the problem of resources, primarily the availability of foster carers. Waterhouse and Brocklesby (2001) and Sinclair (2005, p.60) found that in about three-quarters of placement requests, there was only one fostering household offered to the social workers, meaning that there was effectively no choice, and the idea of matching was meaningless. More recent studies have found similarly, and according to Ofsted (2020, p.4):

The serious shortage of carers is one of the most significant challenges in making successful matches for children. This shortage is particularly acute when seeking matches for groups of brothers and sisters, disabled children and teenagers.

In some circumstances, financial considerations mean that the local authority will match with an 'in-house' local authority foster carer, without finding out whether there is a carer available in the independent sector who might more fully meet the child's needs. While this practice was judged to be 'sensible' by Narey and Owers (2018, p.58), it is hard to see how prioritizing financial considerations is consistent with acting in the best interests of a child needing a foster placement.

Important information about the child is often missing

Foster carers and their fostering services commonly report that they are asked to find families for children and young people without having been provided with sufficient information regarding their history and care needs (Ott et al, 2021). It is argued that foster carers need this information in order to decide whether they can keep the children safe, and care for them effectively. According to Ofsted (2020, p.4):

The best referrals for a match gave a full and balanced description of the children and represented their wishes and feelings effectively. Some carers and fostering agencies, however, felt that the information that was shared with them about children, was too often out of date, incomplete or impersonal.

Fostering Network (2022) found that only half (53%) of the foster carers they surveyed felt that they had received sufficient information about a new child or young person coming into their care. The same survey noted that about two-fifths of carers (39%) 'were not given the opportunity to feed into the referral information for the child's next care arrangement' which presumably contributed to the problem of those subsequent carers not having full information.

There are different perspectives on why important information is so often missing. One explanation is considered above, and relates to the need to prioritise timeliness over quality. There are also claims that those seeking placements will deliberately withhold or distort information in an effort to make a child appear more 'attractive' to potential carers. Examples have been provided of children's profiles being amended when they are circulated for a second time to remove certain material about behaviour that would likely be off-putting to carers, and some groups of practitioners have maintained that such practices are not isolated incidents.

Narey and Owers (2018, p.76) however report the opposite:

... we were told repeatedly of a tendency to describe children using deficit-based accounts, apparently drawing on the rationale for the child's original admission into care. It is important to identify critical issues and risks that will need to be managed by a foster carer, but overly negative referrals can lead carers unnecessarily to refuse a placement... Local authorities need to monitor the quality of referral information and ensure that, they do not inadvertently demonise a child by over emphasising the negative aspects of a child's background.

It may be that at different times there has been either overly-positive or overly-negative descriptions of children being referred for a foster placement. Neither of these approaches constitutes good practice, which requires fair, accurate and balanced information about children to be presented to potential foster carers. It serves no one's interests when this is not achieved.

Children and their birth families are often not provided with good information about foster carers, and not sufficiently involved in the matching process

Research shows that children are not provided with good information about foster carers in the course of the matching process (Ott et al, 2021), and that theme has been consistent over a number of years (Sinclair, 2005). Narey and Owers (2018, p.77) offer such evidence:

In our exchanges with children and carers, the lack of information from social workers about new placements was a striking theme, with many young people recounting negative experiences of not knowing what was happening and why... Children must routinely be better prepared for a placement... by being told much more about the carers, their family and the carers' home, day-to-day care and routines before the first meeting (including seeing video messages and scenes of their bedroom and learning about some basic house rules).

Ofsted (2020, p.9) considered the extent to which children were able to contribute to the matching process, and whether their wishes and feelings were sought:

Over two thirds of children currently living in foster care who replied to our survey felt they had not been asked about their wishes and feelings before they moved into their foster home. Of those children who said that they had been consulted, very few felt that their views had made a difference.

While the importance of pre-placement visits is widely acknowledged in the sector (Ott et al, 2021, p.6), these visits do not routinely take place. Fostering Network (2022) found that only about two-fifths (42%) of foster carers in their survey said that children were able to visit their home before moving in.

All of this is important because children state clearly that they want to be involved in the matching process (Ott et al, 2021, p.6) and where they are actively involved, including having pre-placement visits, they experienced the process more positively (Goodyer, 2014). Studies from North America appear to support practices to meaningfully involve the child and their birth family (Ott, 2017).

Good practice in the matching process

Notwithstanding the limitations of the research as identified above, the lived experience of children and foster carers does provide guidance on what good practice might look like in terms of the matching process. For Ofsted (2020, p.3):

Matching was most effective when high-quality, timely information was shared, based on a detailed understanding and analysis of children's individual needs and foster carers' skills and experiences. Children received up-to-date, accessible information about potential foster carers, and their wishes and feelings influenced the decisions about where they were going to live. In turn, foster carers received balanced, thorough information about children. The right people were involved in developing plans that carefully considered children's day-to-day and long-term care needs.

Ott et al (2021, p.6) similarly emphasise the importance of effective information sharing for both children and foster carers:

Information-sharing was highlighted as being important to both foster carers and children and young people prior to arrival in the home. Sharing accurate information allowed foster carers to properly prepare for a young person's arrival and helped to relieve children and young people's anxieties about the transition. Young people also felt more prepared for their move if they were able to meet their carers beforehand.

Recommendations from the Care Inquiry (2013, p.18) continue to serve as reminder of what constitutes good practice in working with children as part of a matching process:

- *Before any placement with carers who are unknown to the child, including in an emergency, children and young people should receive child-friendly information about the family and home to which they are moving, provided by the carers.*
- *Children and young people should be fully involved in decisions about where, and with whom, they live, and their views must be taken into account. For example:*
 - *local authorities should identify more than one suitable placement and should involve the child or young person in identifying which is best for them, and*
 - *other than when they move in an emergency, children and young people should visit or try out a placement before a final decision is made.*

This approach that emphasises information sharing and involving all parties should also be extended to foster carer's birth children, and Hojer et al (2013, p.9) note that '[birth] children and young people were more likely to say they have a good relationship with the foster child if they had received information before they started fostering [them].' Ott et al (2021, p.38) advocate for the involvement of 'established children in the household', and birth parents, noting that 'the involvement of these household members was viewed to allow for better matches and make it easier for children to settle into their new foster families.'

Factors to consider in matching

Location

Geographical location is important for children in so far as being placed 'close to home' can provide continuity in a child's life, allowing for the maintenance of contact with family and friends, and offering educational continuity which is associated with positive outcomes, (Ott et al, 2021, p.38; Ofsted, 2020; Ott, 2017). Remaining close to home can also prevent children from feeling dislocated, and can potentially reduce the risk of them going missing or being groomed and exploited (Ofsted, 2020; Goodyer, 2014).

Ethnicity and diversity

The issues around meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic children are complex and controversial, and it is not possible to do justice to the debate in this short text. At the same time, it is not possible to consider matching without addressing this matter.

The debate has often polarised into either advocating for ‘same race placement’, or opposing this. It is important to recognise that some black children in ‘transracial’ placements have described ‘concerns and difficulties relating to their ethnic identities’ and have questioned ‘the ability of White foster carers to help children develop resilience to cope with racism’ (Baginsky et al, 2017). Others (Selwyn and Wijedasa, 2009) cite research evidence to show that ‘transracially’ placed adoptees as being no more likely to experience significant long-term developmental or psychological difficulties than those in ‘same race placements.’

According to Ott et al (2021, p.38-39):

‘Consideration’ of race, ethnicity, culture, religion and language is important in matching... [recognising that] consideration of these factors did not mean necessarily an exact match, but rather a ‘close’ or ‘culturally appropriate’ match... [and in some cases] oversimplification of a child’s identity or lack of thorough understanding of identity had led to a poor match.

In some cases, it will not be possible to find a ‘close cultural match’ and some white foster carers will be better placed than others to care effectively for black or other minority ethnic children (Cousins, 2011, p.43). Zeijlmans et al (2016, p.261) cite research that emphasises the need for assessments of foster carers to consider their ‘potential to help the child with racial identity development, knowledge and acceptance of cultural heritage, and racial socialization’, and to consider the significance of the composition of neighbourhoods and networks.

Identity is complex, and ethnicity is not the only aspect of a child’s culture. Cheruvallil-Contractor et al (2021) look at the placement needs of Muslim children, and Schofield et al (2019) consider best practice for foster carers in terms of meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ children in foster care. The scope of this text does not allow for a proper consideration of these issues, other than to flag up the need to think carefully about identity, diversity and intersectionality when matching.

Other children in the foster home

Research in relation to matching with other children in the foster home tends to focus primarily on birth children, but the evidence is contradictory. Hojer et al (2013, p.7) notes that some studies link having birth children living in the home with increased risk of disruption; some studies the opposite. Farmer and Pollock (1999) looked specifically at the experience of ‘sexually abused and abusing children’ and identified a propensity for negative outcomes when they were placed alongside other children.

It is possible that age is a factor, and Sinclair (2005, p. 84) notes that when carers received support from their older children, there were fewer disruptions, and some researchers (Baginsky et al, 2017, p.91; Zeijlmans et al, 2016, p.263) have associated placement breakdown with having a birth child close in age to the foster child. Ott (2017) notes that 'the evidence is inconclusive about the effects of age spacing' but on balance 'recommends an age gap with carers' own children', adding that this 'should be considered on a case-by-case basis'. Cousins (2011, p.52) agrees:

While no hard and fast rule exists, one should at least be wary of placing children where there are already children of a similar age.

Siblings

The literature review on sibling placements by Meakings et al (2017, p5) constitutes the best evidence to inform decision-making in terms of whether to place siblings together or apart:

- *In the main, sibling groups placed together experienced greater stability of placement, although not all the studies that considered stability demonstrated this.*
- *Older children separated from siblings, after having been in placement with them, were found to be at particular risk of placement disruption and a poor sense of belonging in the foster family.*
- *For certain children in certain conditions, sibling placements together were associated with more favourable mental health outcomes. However, improved behavioural outcomes for children with high levels of behavioural difficulties on entry into care were seen in those young people separated from siblings in care.*

Ofsted (2020, p.4) found that 'being able to live with their brothers and sisters was very important to children' and for the majority of them this will be in their best interests. However, decisions need to be made carefully and taking account of individual circumstances. Beckett (2021) offers guidance to practitioners in relation to sibling assessments, provides a series of assessment tools, and (2021, p.46) describes circumstances in which it might not be best to place siblings together. These include situations where:

- Rivalry and jealousy are so intense that each child is preoccupied with achieving attention at the expense of another

- One sibling has been exploited or abused by another, or there is evidence of highly sexualised behaviour between them, or their interaction serves to trigger or retraumatise
- A child has been chronically scapegoated, or is stuck in a particular pattern of behaviour, or in an unhelpful role, that is reinforced by living with their sibling

So, although placing siblings together will most often be a desirable outcome, it cannot be assumed that this will always be the case.

Dogs and pets

Although often neglected when considering matching, it is interesting to note that Ofsted (2020, p.13) recently highlighted the significance of pets and particularly dogs in this context, setting out the potential benefits that had earlier been described by Adams (2015).

The importance of pets to children was mentioned with striking frequency, particularly dogs. Several of our case studies highlighted the role of a family pet in getting the child interested in a potential foster home, or in settling them in. ... In cases where children had left pets behind when they moved to their foster home, having another pet to play with and care for in their new home had helped them settle in, and several social workers had taken this into account when matching children with carers.

Key points

- The research evidence on matching is limited, and the messages are sometimes not consistent, and often not straightforward.
- Matching is often undertaken in a context characterised by lack of time and limited resources, and this may impact adversely on children and foster carers.
- Good practice requires effective information sharing, and the meaningful engagement and involvement of foster carers, children, and others. This is not consistently being achieved.
- Research provides some evidence about matching factors that will potentially promote or undermine placement stability, but decisions need to be based on careful consideration of individual circumstances.

4. Child profile

The starting point for getting a match right is to carefully and accurately provide information about the child and their needs.

Whenever we asked social workers to talk to us about individual children, their answers were invariably rich in detail, affection and insight. Their responses gave a vivid view of children's likes and dislikes and what made them 'tick'. This contrasted markedly with what we heard about the variable quality and depth of information about children that was shared with carers at the matching stage. (Ofsted 2020, p.14)

The research literature (see chapter 3) suggests that the sharing of full information about children is not consistently being achieved. Care Planning Guidance (paragraph 3.229) considers this matter:

Some of the information which carers need may be difficult or embarrassing; there is also an obvious temptation to withhold negative information about, for instance, a child's past behaviour for fear that carers may not agree to a placement being made, or a child will be unfairly labelled. However, a placement is much more likely to succeed if carers know in advance about behaviours that have been a cause for concern in the past and how these have been successfully (or unsuccessfully) managed. The local authority should inform carers of past behaviours such as fire setting or sexually abusive incidents which might put their home or their family at risk. Failure to do so may place the authority at risk of legal action.

In providing information about a child or young person, commissioners may want to make use of the headings in Form M1. Part one of that form relates to all referrals of children, and part two is specific to long term matching.

Form M1 – Child profile (part one)

Form M1 – Child profile (part one) sets out the sort of information that needs to be provided when requesting a placement, and consists of the following main sections:

- Key Information
- Care and Placement Information
- Description and Needs
- Risk assessment

Key information

The key information section of the form attempts to provide some important information briefly and succinctly so that the reader can see quickly what is required in terms of a placement, and can discount potential carers easily where they obviously cannot meet that stated requirement, even with support. Issues of location, pet ownership, and having space for sibling groups are quite fixed. This section of the form also highlights aspects of identity that are often important in the early stages of thinking about matching.

The pen picture of the child similarly offers an opportunity to see if there is anything obvious to discount a potential carer, or alternatively to indicate that a match with a particular carer might work well. It might be seen as a summary, or a starting point, with fuller information provided in the main body of the form. A good pen picture will 'bring the child to life' and that will only happen if the person drafting it has a detailed and personal knowledge of the child in question.

Care and placement information

The Care Planning Guidance (paragraph 3.183) stresses the importance of providing this information:

The carer will generally need to know the circumstances leading to the child becoming looked after, and the child's previous experiences both before and during the care episode. In particular, the carer needs to know what the long-term plan is for the child and its timeframe, what the objectives are for the specific placement being offered and how these fit within the care plan.

Information on placement history will need to provide answers to the following questions:

- How many placements has the child had since coming into care?
- What patterns, if any, have emerged?
- What has gone well in previous placements?
- What has gone badly?
- Why have previous placements ended?

This will constitute crucial information for any foster carer or supervising social worker who is looking at a potential match.

Description and needs

Personality and interests

A section about a child's personality and interests presents an opportunity to describe the child in a way that will likely appeal to potential foster carers. It is unhelpful to be too prescriptive, but the writer should aim to highlight and reflect the individuality and uniqueness of the child.

- What adjectives would you use to describe the child?
- What do other people like about this child?
- What hobbies and interests do they have?
- Do they go to any organised activities?
- Is there anything they have shown an interest in trying?
- What foods do they enjoy or particularly dislike?
- What music or sports teams do they like?
- What are their favourite subjects at school?

Behaviour and emotional needs

This section of the form needs to achieve an appropriate balance between being sensitive and empathic, but also setting out matters truthfully and straightforwardly. Any temptation to withhold information because it reflects badly on the child will need to be resisted, but at the same time it must be remembered that context is everything, and behaviour is effectively how a child communicates their feelings when they are unable to use words.

When describing particular behaviours, it is important to do this accurately and carefully, avoiding terminology that is critical or judgemental. Where possible it is helpful to know what triggers the behaviour, and whether it is more likely in particular contexts. It is also useful to note any strategies that have been attempted to help the child to manage difficult behaviour, and the extent to which those have proved successful.

Health

Some children will have complex health needs, and others will be more straightforward. This will influence exactly what is contained within this section, but foster carers will need information about how the child's health impacts on what is expected of them, including in relation any medication taken routinely, the frequency and arrangements for any ongoing medical appointments, and whether the child wets or soils.

It will be helpful to clearly state any allergies, and information about dietary requirements will be helpful, notwithstanding the fact that food choices like vegetarianism or veganism are not necessarily related to specific health needs. Information will also need to be provided about a child's mental health.

Education

Prospective carers will need to know about the child's current school and whether they will be required to stay at that school. In most cases they will, and it is important to be clear about the implications of that for any foster carer, particularly in relation to transport. Where a commissioner is agreeable to a school change the reasons for that will need to be provided as in most cases maintaining educational continuity should be seen as a key driver.

There may be other relevant information about education, and in particular how that will impact on what is expected from the foster carer. If the child is excluded from school, or at risk of being excluded it is important that information is provided, so that matching processes can take this into account.

Identity

It will be necessary to set out the needs arising from the child's identity including in relation to ethnicity, culture, religion, gender and sexuality. Identity and matching bring complex challenges (Cousins, 2011, p, 37-38), and while there is a limit to how much information can be provided at the referral stage, these issues can be crucial to effective matching (Selwyn and Wijedasa 2009; Cheruvallil-Contractor et al, 2021; Schofield et al, 2019). It is not possible to consider the issues in any depth in this text, but the person completing the referral might want to be asking questions like:

- What is important to the child in terms of their identity?
- How do they define their culture and ethnicity and is that consistent with how others see them?
- Are they religious, and if so, what are the day-to-day implications of that?
- To what extent does class need to be considered in matching?
- What is known about the child's sexuality?
- If the child's first language is not English, what language(s) do they speak?

Disability, development, and self-care skills

The commissioner will need to provide good information about any disability or neurodiversity. However, practitioners need to be mindful that disabled children are ‘at grave risk of being stereotyped by their condition and labelled in a way that diminished their individuality’ (Cousins, 2011, p.59). This means that the information provided in a referral needs to be beyond the label, and should identify what the condition actually means in terms of the child’s day-to-day life, and the significance of that for those undertaking a parenting role.

Where a child has physical impairments or specific health needs, the referral will need to make clear how these are managed on a day-to-day basis, in terms of routines, equipment, procedures and the like. Where assessments are ongoing or planned, or where professionals have identified patterns of behaviour consistent with certain conditions, it will be important to discuss those, being careful not to imply that a diagnosis has been made.

Contact/ family time

Information about contact/ family time will be important, and the referral should be specific about this including the frequency, location, transport expectations, and any requirements for supervision. It will be helpful to know how people have behaved in relation to contact previously, and address any risk to foster carers from the birth family or others.

If there is any other relevant information about family members, even if that does not relate to contact/family time, it may be important to include that in the referral. Most obviously that might include circumstances where contact/family time is not planned because of the risk posed by a particular individual, or where contact/family time will be changing or ending because a sibling is moving to adoption.

Friendship networks

Children in care tell us that friendship is vitally important to them, and in some cases the loss of friendship when moving to a new foster carer was the most profound loss of all. (Children’s Society, 2015, p.4)

Children with lived experience of foster carer repeatedly tell researchers that friendships are important, and that these are disrupted by coming into foster care, and moving between foster homes within the care system. Good practice in matching should consider this.

Risk assessment

Ofsted (2022) are clear about what they expect in relation to risk assessment and children in foster care:

Individual up-to-date risk assessments address any known vulnerabilities for each child effectively and set out what action should be taken to address the risks. There are plans in place that are reducing harm or the risk of harm and there is evidence that these risks are being minimised.

Adams (2020) provides detailed guidance for devising and updating such risk assessment and management plans, and has developed Form R which is designed for use with this task. Practitioners should be familiar with good practice in this area, and a good quality referral will include a risk assessment and management plan that covers the spectrum of risks identified in Form R. It is impossible to make a safe and effective placement without this.

Form M4 (a) – Child or Young Person’s perspective

At a time of enormous significance to their lives, the child’s perspective should always be at the heart of matching decisions. (Ofsted 2020, p.3)

Over two thirds of children currently living in foster care who replied to our survey felt they had not been asked about their wishes and feelings before they moved into their foster home. (Ofsted 2020, p.9)

The importance of ensuring that the views of children are central to matching processes cannot be emphasised strongly enough. Form M4(a) has been developed to seek children’s views regarding potential placements, and asks a number of simple questions:

- What does a new foster carer need to know about you?
- What are the best things about you?
- What do you like doing in your spare time?
- If you are living with a foster carer now, why do you need to move?
- What sort of foster carer and foster home do you think will suit you best?
- Where do you want your new foster home to be, and why?
- How would you feel about having a dog or other pet in the foster home?
- Who is it important for you to stay in touch with when you are in foster care?
- Is there anything else that you want to say?

It should be recognised that paper or word documents are an increasingly old-fashioned and limited way to seek information from children, who might prefer to use other methods, such as making a recording of themselves that could be shared with potential foster carers. Such approaches should be actively encouraged wherever possible, in line with the child's wishes and feelings.

Social workers or others may have undertaken exercises as part of a process of 'getting to know' the child at an earlier time, and this may have resulted in information that can helpfully be used in matching, subject to the consent of the child or young person. There are a number of useful resources, including the following:

- All about me - <http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/all-about-me-direct-work-sheets-activities-booklet/>
- Voice of the Child Toolkit - <http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/voice-child-20-sheets-gain-childs-wishes-feelings-views/>
- Child and Youth Participation Toolkit - <http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/child-and-youth-participation-toolkit-wishes-feelings-direct-work-worksheets-activities/>

Form M4(e) - Previous foster carer's views

It is widely recognised that foster carers usually know children better than anyone else who is working with them, but despite that, previous foster carers are routinely excluded from providing information as part of the child's referral:

Information from previous carers was generally important to foster carers. Carers found this kind of first-hand knowledge invaluable. It could help new carers to understand a child better and offer the necessary continuity and consistency... However, some carers reported that local authorities did not readily facilitate this and left it to the initiative of individual carers to speak to previous carers. (Ofsted, 2020, p.15)

Foster carers, who daily (and nightly) live alongside the child/young person, often know them best. However, current foster carers frequently do not contribute to placement referrals or even get to see them before they go off to fostering providers. If the child/young person is in a care placement at the point of referral, each local authority should consider how best to involve the current foster carers... in compiling a placement referral. (NAFP, 2019)

Form M4(b) has been developed to seek the views of foster carers as part of the referral process, and asks the following questions:

- *What information were you given prior to the placement?*
- *How did the child initially settle into your home?*
- *What went well in the time the child lived with you?*
- *What do you/ did you like about the child?*
- *What went badly during the time the child lived with you?*
- *What was challenging or difficult about living with the child?*
- *Why does/ did the placement need to end?*
- *What is important when thinking about future placements for this child?*

NAFP (2019) note that in addition to seeking foster carer's views directly, the carer 'should also be asked to review the completed and entire document for accuracy'.

Form M1 – Child profile (part two)

Form M1- Child profile (part two) is designed to supplement Form M1 – Child profile (part one) as part of a long-term matching process, but how and when it might be used will largely depend on the policy of the local authority responsible for the child. It can be helpful in providing more in-depth information, and in helping all parties, including foster carers, to make decisions about long term matching:

- It can serve a purpose similar to the adoption equivalent in bringing together in one place, information about a child, their background, and their experience in care, with information about why certain decisions were made.
- That information can be utilised when undertaking life story work with children, and will be important if at any time the child decides to access their care records.
- It can help foster carers to support a child to make sense of their past, including how they came to be living in care, and in relation to contact with - and questions about - birth family.

There are three other forms that might be helpful when matching long term:

- M4(c) – Birth family's views
- M4(d) – IRO views
- M4(e) – Proposed foster carer's views

5. Foster carer profile

The foster carer profile is the key tool for sharing information about foster carers with commissioners, and for independent providers in particular, high-quality documentation is essential if they want to maximise the chances of foster carers having children placed with them. Supervising social workers and others involved in this task are well advised to invest time and effort in developing well thought out, and carefully presented profiles of their foster carers.

In putting together a profile, extensive information will be available in the original assessment report, and in any foster carer reviews. There may additionally be comments from fostered children or their social workers that could be quoted anonymously, and most obviously it is crucial that foster carers themselves are closely involved in developing their own profile. This will increase the likelihood that their personality will emerge from the text. In evaluating a draft profile, it might be worth asking the following questions:

- Is the profile presented in a way that makes it accessible and easy to read, using bullet points as appropriate?
- Is the text succinct, evidenced, relevant, and informative?
- Does the 'essence' of the foster carer emerge from the profile and does it showcase the foster carer's strengths?
- Is it honest, and does it include all relevant information even when that might not present the carer in a positive light?

Form M2 can be used as a foster carer profile, that sets out information about a foster carer or fostering household, and is divided into two parts.

Form M2 – Foster carer profile (part one)

Form M2 – Foster carer profile (part one) is a format for a brief profile that might be circulated to alert commissioners that a placement is available, or as an initial response to requests for suitable foster carers in relation to a particular child.

The brief profile begins with factual information about the foster carers(s) that will allow a commissioner to quickly discount a carer for a particular child if they are obviously not suitable:

- Address or area where they live
- Household composition
- Language, ethnicity and religion
- Information about dogs and pets in the home
- Whether the foster carer drives
- Terms of approval

Pen picture

The brief profile also includes a pen picture which should include a brief description of the foster carers, their household (including pets) and any regular visitors. It should describe the home, the bedrooms available to foster children, and the locality including amenities and transport links. Information should also be provided about the carer's personality and lifestyle, and their fostering experience.

It is important to recognise that this is a brief description, and practitioners should avoid the temptation to write at length. In most circumstances a pen picture will not exceed one side of A4 paper, using a standard font and with generous spacing. If the foster carer is deemed to be a potential match for a child, then there will be plenty of opportunity to provide more extensive and detailed information in the full profile. The aim at this stage is to provide information that helps a commissioner decide whether a carer might be suitable, in which case more information will be needed, or whether they are clearly not suitable and can be discounted.

Race and Diversity

In recognition of the fact that for some transracially placed foster children, their cultural and ethnic needs are not being met as fully as they might be (see chapter 3), the form includes the following question:

- *Are these carers well placed to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic children, and other oppressed groups such as those from LGBT+ backgrounds? Do they have a good understanding of oppression including racism, white privilege, and homophobia? How diverse are their networks and neighbourhood? Have they cared for children from diverse backgrounds and have they undertaken relevant training in these areas?*

Cousins (2011, p.43) uses material from the United States Department of Health to set out factors that might indicate carers who are well placed to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic children in foster care:

- *lived in an environment where the child would have positive experiences of their culture, religion and language*
- *could help a child to form relationships with same-race adult and peer role models*
- *could provide experiences which taught survival, problem-solving and coping skills that would give the child a sense of racial and ethnic pride*
- *would comfortably share knowledge and information about the child's racial and cultural ancestry with the child*
- *would have knowledge of special dietary, skin, hair and health needs*

Other key information

A final section in part one of the form provides the opportunity to flag up matters that might be important in helping a commissioner to decide whether it is worth pursuing further information about the carers in relation to a particular child. There may be factors that might be an obstacle to progressing a match in certain circumstances, such as:

- Anything about the carers that makes them a potentially poor match for some children
- Information about the needs of others in the household that will be important in matching
- If the carer does not drive, the impact of that in relation to meeting the needs of a foster child
- If a single carer is working outside the home, or both carers in a couple work outside the home, the significance of that for fostering
- Details of any pending commitments like planned holidays or weekends away

Form M2 – Foster carer profile (part two)

Form M2 - Foster carer profile (part two) is designed to supplement Form M2 – Foster carer profile (part one), and together they make up the whole foster carer profile. This should mean that it is no longer necessary to share Form F as part of the matching process.

A full foster carer profile should include information about the carer's identity and culture, health, personality and lifestyle. It should set out who lives in the home, including pets, and have information about the accommodation and neighbourhood. There should be additional consideration of fostering history and capacity.

If the foster carer has been recently approved then much of the information for the profile will come from their Form F assessment report. If they are more experienced foster carers then there will be more information from foster carer reviews and other documents.

Identity and culture

Inevitably, race and ethnicity will be central to considerations in matching, and in many - arguably most - cases black children will be best placed with carers from a similar ethnic and cultural background. In reality that will not always be possible, but before any family is considered for a trans-racial placement, the commissioner and the provider must be satisfied that the family have the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the cultural and racial identity needs of that child. The suitability or otherwise of a white carer for a transracial placement, must be addressed within the foster carer profile.

Similarly, it must be remembered that other groups like Muslim and LGBT+ children have not always had good experiences in foster care (Cheruvallil-Contractor et al, 2021; Schofield et al, 2019). The foster carer profile must consider identity in its widest sense, and set out that foster carer's underlying attitudes to diversity, difference, and power.

Health

Medical information about an individual is recognised in data protection legislation (see Adams and Jordan, 2019) as one of the 'special categories' of personal data that require 'greater sensitivity' when considering how it is shared. Anecdotally, foster carers have often reported that this information is not treated with the care required, including by the use of fostering assessment reports for the purposes of matching.

It is important that practitioners provide only that information about health that is relevant to fostering currently, and specifically that is needed for matching. It is difficult to be too prescriptive, but in addition to the date of the most recent fostering medical, it is anticipated that information will likely be provided about any significant ongoing ailments, any issues around smoking, and matters that medical professionals have identified as concerning. This will need careful thought and consideration in each individual case.

People in the foster home and network

For those who are living in the foster home it is important to identify their significance for the fostering task, and for adults in particular, how they might offer support to the foster carers. It is important to include information about anyone who may be returning from university or college for holiday periods. The profile should also include information about the foster carers support network, and the role that each person plays in the fostering task.

Personality and lifestyle

In relation to personality and lifestyle, the questions developed by Chapman (2021, p.32) for use in assessment might usefully be revisited:

- *Describe a typical weekend in your household*
- *Describe your routine during the week*
- *What are the written or unwritten 'rules' that exist in your household?*
- *What leisure activities do family members enjoy individually and as a family?*
- *What role do religious practices play in your household?*
- *What kind of holidays do you enjoy?*

This sort of information is crucial for getting a sense of how the family function, and will be invaluable for children in considering whether this sounds like the sort of family where they might feel comfortable.

Where a single carer is also working outside the home, or where a couple both work outside the home, it will be important to consider the significance of this for fostering, and for identifying the sort of child who might be best placed in that foster home.

Accommodation and neighbourhood

In relation to the foster home, it will be necessary to describe the type of property including the rooms and their usage, the garden and whether that is secure and child-friendly, and the bedroom or bedrooms that will be used by foster children. Consideration should be given to noting whether the property might be accessible for a child with mobility issues and/or uses a wheelchair.

In describing the neighbourhood, it will be important to ensure that the following questions are answered:

- Is the home best described as urban, suburban, or rural?
- What public transport is available and where does that connect to?
- What are the arrangements for accessing services and shops?
- Are there places of worship in the area and what denominations are catered for?
- What leisure facilities are available such as youth clubs and leisure centres?
- Are organisations like Brownies and Scouts easily accessible?
- What schools and early year's provision are available in the area?
- How ethnically diverse is the area, and what groups are represented?

Dogs and pets

It is important to recognise the significance of dogs or pets to effective matching (see Adams, 2015). Information about an animal in a foster carer's home should be readily accessible from a dog or pet assessment and it is important to confirm such assessments have been undertaken, and to set out the outcomes from this process.

Fostering history

It might be argued that information about fostering history is the most significant section of the foster carer profile, and for experienced carers it will be important to evidence that they have fostered successfully. A good profile will:

- Note how many children the carer has looked after, and describe the sort of challenges that were presented
- Give examples of successful outcomes and ensure that the strengths of the foster carer are highlighted
- Give examples where things have gone less well, and note what has been learned from those experiences

With less experienced or new foster carers it will be harder to provide detailed evidence of their proven skills in fostering, and it will be necessary to refer to the material that was considered as part of the assessment such as:

- Experience of parenting their own children, particularly where there were challenges
- Work or volunteering with children or vulnerable adults in other settings, potentially with children
- Other transferrable skills and experience including working with others in stressful environments

All foster carers will be inexperienced at the start of their careers, and a commissioner would be unwise to assume that longevity always correlates with quality. Some newly approved carers bring an optimism, energy and enthusiasm that cannot be maintained by all of those who have been fostering for a long time, and are less likely to have been impacted by 'secondary trauma'.

Training

The list of key training completed will also be important in helping the commissioner to consider matching. Where carers have been provided with in-depth training on therapeutic parenting approaches that might leave them better equipped than some others to manage some more challenging behaviour (although research usually struggles to identify a clear link between training with successful long-term outcomes). Similarly, training on caring for black children might be seen as essential before a white carer is deemed suited for transracial fostering. Some children will come with particular challenges, or from particular circumstances, meaning that training in matters such as sexual exploitation, county lines, gangs, or eating disorders could be very relevant to finding a good match.

Fostering capacity

This section of the foster carer profile is an opportunity to summarise and analyse the information that has been presented. Where patterns have been identified that suggest particular strengths or vulnerabilities these should be set out here. While it is understandable that carers might not like having their vulnerabilities identified, it is important to remember that effective matching benefits everyone. It is no one's interest for a placement to be made where a disruption is likely.

Terms of approval

Legislation requires fostering services to 'identify the ages, number or needs of the children to whom the foster carer is most likely to offer the best care' and to set terms of approval accordingly.³ Making placements outside of these approval terms is both unlawful, and means children are at risk of being placed with foster carers who are unable to effectively meet their needs.

³ The law on setting terms of approval is summarised by CoramBAAF at <https://corambaaf.org.uk/updates/usual-fostering-limit-exemptions-and-terms-approval-foster-carers-england>

Research evidence consistently shows that placements outside the terms of approval are significantly more likely to result in placement breakdown, often if there is a foster child already in the household. (Care Planning Guidance, paragraph 3.96).

Despite this, research suggests that many fostering services are failing to set appropriate approval terms, and failing to adhere to these terms when matching children (Lawton and Cann, 2019; and Baginsky, 2017).

Information for children and young people

Ofsted (2020, p.10) identified the existence and benefits of good foster carer profiles for children:

We heard and saw many examples of good written information about the carers and their home. This information helped children to settle, especially when it included pictures. This could reassure children, empower them to ask questions, and help them to begin seeing themselves as part of the foster family.

However, they noted that for many children this did not happen, and the Fostering Network (2021) describe a similar picture where children are not provided with information, or otherwise engaged in the matching process. Narey and Owers (2018, pp.77-78) reported on this issue:

In our exchanges with children and carers, the lack of information from social workers about new placements was a striking theme, with many young people recounting negative experiences of not knowing what was happening and why... Children must routinely be better prepared for a placement... by being told much more about the carers, their family and the carers' home, day-to-day care and routines before the first meeting (including seeing video messages and scenes of their bedroom and learning about some basic house rules).

NAFP (2022) describe what needs to be covered in a foster carer profile for children:

- a. *A child friendly carer biography (name(s) of carers, ages, ethnicity, religion, personality, hobbies, interests)*
- b. *The area in which the carers live*
- c. *Description of the home [including fostering bedrooms] and surrounding area*
- d. *Other members of the fostering household (including pets) and any regular visitors to the home*
- e. *A child friendly version of the carer's fostering journey*

Additionally, the profile might also usefully cover household routines, the ‘values’ of the family, any ‘house rules’ (formal or informal), sanctions used and not used in relation to behaviour, and any specific leisure opportunities that might be available.

There may need to be more than one version of the child-friendly profile for use with different children and young people according to age and understanding. Being creative and child-centred is important, and Adams (2015, p39) describes how an adoptive couple use their pet dog Simba as the ‘author’ of their profile.

Simba

One adoptive couple developed a family book for children they were hoping to adopt, using one of the family dogs as the author. The text, with photographs, ran as follows:

‘Hello, my name is Simba and I want to tell you about your forever family. This is mum and dad but other people call them Sarah and Paul. I have lived with them since I was a small puppy and they have looked after me very well and loved me lots. Look at how small I was when I first came to live with mum and dad! Now I am two and half years old and much bigger.

This is my sister Bluebell, but everyone calls her Bluey or Blue Dog. Bluey is three years old and has been living with us for nearly two years. Before that she lived with different families and some of them did not look after her nicely. When she first came to us she was worried that she might need to move again, but now she knows she is part of our family. Also, Bluey is blind and so she does bump into people sometimes! Sometimes we are naughty (Picture of Simba with muddy face) but mum and dad aren’t cross with us for long and they always love us...’

The book goes on to describe, in words and pictures, the house and garden including dog sleeping areas, local walks, schools, and local shops. Simba uses this opportunity to offer further reassurances to the children:

‘And this is my favourite shop... the butchers! Me and Bluey’s favourite food is meat, sometimes with a nice big bone... We have lots of nice food in our house... Sometimes we have treats. Me and Bluey have dog biscuits, and mum and dad like ice cream best. If you tell them your favourite food and treats I’m sure they will get them for you.’

The book then had pictures of extended family and friends before Simba finishes with:

‘We’re all looking forward to meeting you – are you good at throwing a ball?’

6. Making a match

It is generally accepted in the fostering sector that matching is important, but it is challenging. It is clear from research over a number of years, that practice is variable, and the lived experience of both children and foster carers is not consistently good. There are specific challenges in relation to information sharing, and meaningfully involving children in the process.

Good matching will require looking at the needs of the child, and assessing whether a foster carer can meet those needs, with support where necessary. In short, it means bringing together the child's profile (M1) and the foster carer's profile (M2), and analysing the information within these to see if they are a good fit.

Form M3 – Matching form

Form M3 has been developed as a matching form that can be used by fostering services for short term and long-term matching.

Short term matching

In the majority of cases, Form M3 will be used for short term matches, and a robust short-term match will require completion of:

- M1 - Child profile (part one)
- M2 - Foster carer profile (parts one and two)
- M3 - Matching form

Ideally, the following forms will also be completed:

- M4(a) – Child or young person's views
- M4(b) – Previous foster carer's views

M3 serves as a checklist in relation to the information that should have been sought and provided, and seeks confirmation that a risk assessment has been completed and considered. More information about risk assessment is contained in Adams (2021).

The form also encourages practitioners to consider specific issues that might be relevant for some children. If a child is being placed alongside a sibling, then a sibling assessment should have been considered and ideally completed (see Beckett, 2021). In other circumstances it might be necessary to complete a 'placing alongside' or bedroom sharing risk assessment (see Adams, 2023).

The main section of Form M3 looks at the child's identified needs, and how these can be met by the foster carer, with or without additional support. There is also a section that considers how the child has been, or is being, involved in the process, and space for a summary and analysis. The form should be signed-off, usually by more than one person.

Long-term matching

If a placement simply drifts into permanence, there is a risk that children's long-term support needs, at different stages of their childhood, will not be properly considered. (Ofsted, 2022, p.23)

Achieving permanence through fostering is not always straightforward, and the process will be experienced differently depending on the age and circumstances of the child. This makes it challenging for local authorities who will want to emphasise the importance of permanence for all children, but will need to recognise that this will not always take the same pathway. Practices will need to be determined by local policies and procedures.

For younger children the idea of a 'forever family' will likely be experienced in a similar way to adoption, requiring careful preparation and involvement of children, and with high levels of scrutiny and oversight within the process. That will likely mean formal matching meetings, the involvement of a 'permanency panel', and a 'decision-maker' with some level of seniority in the local authority. It is reported anecdotally that for some younger children in particular, processes that include an associated celebration and certificate can bring great joy to them, and serves to recognise the significance of the event.

However, for some older children, especially those who feel closely connected to their birth family, the very idea of permanence with another family can feel like disloyalty, and something they do not wish to engage with, even if they are quite settled and happy in that foster family. The process itself can serve to remind them of their loss. A number of practitioners have reported that attempts to 'formalise' existing arrangements as permanent have in fact unsettled young people, and placements that were previously felt to be well-established, have sometimes disrupted. Discussion in relation to permanence must therefore be sensitive to these issues, and will need to allow for sufficient flexibility so as to meet the needs of different children effectively.

Where Form M3 is used for long term matches, and will require completion of:

- M1 - Child profile (parts one and two)
- M2 - Foster carer profile (parts one and two)
- M3 - Matching form

Ideally, there will also be:

- 4(a) - Child or young person's views
- 4(b) - Previous foster carer's views
- 4(c) - Birth family's views
- 4(d) - IRO's views
- 4(e) - Proposed foster carer's views

Conclusion

While Form M might be useful to practitioners, the quality of matching practice will not ultimately be determined by a particular set of forms. This text sets out what is known about matching, encourages and advocates for best practice, but at the same time recognises that fostering services need to use what works for them. In terms of matching it will be for practitioners to decide what is reasonable and achievable in the circumstances of each individual case.

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Access and citation

This good practice guide is made freely available with the intention of supporting good practice in the fostering sector.

It should be cited as Adams P (2025), *Matching in foster care*, available at www.pauladamsfostering.uk

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Form M1 – Child profile (part one)

Date (completed/ updated)	
----------------------------------	--

KEY INFORMATION

Child's first name/ initials	
Date of birth (and age)	
Gender	
Ethnicity	
Religion	
Language(s)	
Nationality	

Child's social worker	
Local authority	
Case identifying number	
Email	
Telephone	

Person completing form	
Position/ job title	
Email	
Telephone	

Date placement needed	
Type of placement needed	

Required location of placement

Placement with dogs/ pets potentially agreeable?	YES/ NO
<i>Comments:</i> 	

Placement needed with siblings?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, provide first names or initials of each sibling, with age and gender. State whether a sibling assessment has been completed. If so, this should be shared before a match is agreed. State whether bedroom sharing is acceptable, and whether a risk assessment has been completed. This is required before a match is agreed.</i> 	

Pen picture of the child and their placement needs
<i>This should include their strengths and achievements, and highlight the positives that they will bring to a foster family. It is equally important to openly and honestly set out any difficulties or challenges.</i>

CARE AND PLACEMENT INFORMATION

History

When and why did the child first become looked after?
Briefly summarise the child's experience since being in care

Current placement

Initials of carer	
Relationship to child	
Location <i>State area and postcode</i>	
Why is this placement ending?	

Legal status

Is the child accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989?	YES/ NO
Is there a legal order in force?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, give name of court, date on which order was made and type of order</i>	
Have any orders been applied for but not yet granted?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, give the name of the court, the orders applied for, the date of application, and the date of the final hearing (if known)</i>	
What is the care plan for this child?	
<i>The referrer may prefer to attach the full care plan if that is available.</i>	

DESCRIPTION AND NEEDS

Personality and interests
<i>Describe the child's personality, interests, likes and dislikes</i>

Behaviour and emotional needs
<i>Describe the child's behaviour and needs arising from this. This section should include reference to relevant matters considered within the risk assessment (see below).</i>

Health	
Does the child have any allergies?	YES/ NO/ NOT KNOWN
Does the child have specific dietary requirements?	YES/ NO/ NOT KNOWN

Does the child smoke?	YES/ NO/ NOT KNOWN
Does the child wet and/or soil?	YES/ NO/ NOT KNOWN
Describe the child's health and associated needs, including any mental health needs. If the answer is 'yes' to any of the specific questions above provide details, including the associated expectations of the foster carer.	

Education	
Name of current school/ nursery	
Address	
Is the child expected to remain in this school/ nursery?	YES/ NO
If yes, provide information about the implications regarding the location of the placement, and/or expectations regarding transport to school. If no, explain why.	
Does the child have a statement of needs under the Children and Families Act 2014?	YES/ NO
If yes, provide brief information about this	
Other educational needs	
Set out any expectations of foster carers in relation to supporting the child's education. If the child is at risk of exclusion provide details here.	

Identity
Set out the needs arising from the child's identity including in relation to ethnicity, culture, religion, gender and sexuality. Where the child's first language is not English provide details of languages used in daily living.

Disability, development, and self-care skills
State whether the child is disabled, and the significance of that for a potential foster carer. Describe the child's development including self-care skills and any needs arising from this.

Contact/family time and birth family
Set out the contact plan in relation to each of the following, to include frequency of contact/family time, location, any supervision arrangements, and the expectations regarding transport to contact/family time and any supervision required. Note how each person has behaved in relation to contact/family time previously, and address any risk to foster carers from the birth family. Has a risk assessment has been completed or is one required? If there is important information about any family member, even outside of contact/family time plans, it should be stated here.

Birth mother	
Birth father	
Sibling 1	
Sibling 2	
Sibling 3	
Maternal grandmother	
Maternal grandfather	
Paternal grandmother	
Paternal grandfather	
Significant others	

Friendship networks

Identify and set out their friendship network any organised activities the child attends. Comment on the implications of this for the location of the placement.

Other identified needs

Any specific dietary needs should be included in this section if relevant and not considered elsewhere.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Has a comprehensive risk assessment been completed?

YES/ NO

If yes, the risk assessment should be attached. If no, a full risk assessment needs to be completed prior to matching the child with foster carers.

VIEWS

Has Form M4(a) – Child or young person’s views (or equivalent) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, then set out the child’s views on their placement needs including how and when these views were sought, and/or make arrangements to seek these views before deciding on a match. Use this space to make any comments on the child’s views.</i>	

Has Form M4(b) – Previous foster carer’s views (or equivalent) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach the views of the most recent foster carer, and any previous foster carers. If no, then make arrangements to get the form completed by the most recent foster carer, or explain why that information cannot be made available. Use this space to make any comments on previous foster carer’s views.</i>	
Has the most recent foster carer seen this completed referral?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, summarise their comments. If no, explain why not.</i>	

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Summary and analysis of the child’s needs from a placement
<i>Use this space to provide a summary of the child’s needs and the sort of placement that will best meet these. Include any relevant information that has not already been provided. Set out any specified placement objectives, which must be related to desired outcomes for the individual child.</i>

FORM COMPLETED BY:

Name	
Signed	
Dated	

Form M1 – Child profile (part two)

Date (completed/ updated)	
---------------------------	--

KEY INFORMATION

[Insert picture of child – optional]

Child's full name	
Date of birth (and age)	

Child's social worker	
Local authority	
Case identifying number	
Email	
Telephone	

FAMILY AND HISTORY

Genogram
<i>Attach a genogram or insert here</i>

Summary of child's history from their birth (including prenatal experience) to becoming looked after

Was the mother known to be using alcohol or drugs during pregnancy?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, provide details, and note whether the likelihood of FASD has been considered.</i>	

Does the child have any rights/claims under the Fatal Accidents Act 1976 or any other interest in property, or rights/claims for criminal injuries compensation?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, provide details</i>	

Mother

Name			
Any previous names			
Other names used			
Date of birth		Age	
Place of birth			
Ethnicity			
Nationality			
Immigration status			
Religion			
Languages spoken			
Pen picture of the mother			
<i>Describe the mother including her personality</i>			
Summary of mother's health			
<i>Provide information on the mother's physical and mental health, paying particular attention to any conditions with a hereditary element.</i>			
Brief social history			
<i>Provide information on childhood experiences, educational history, employment history, significant losses, major illness, and significant relationships.</i>			
Current circumstances			
<i>Provide information on housing, neighbourhood, employment, partner, and lifestyle.</i>			
Relationship with child			
<i>Describe the nature and history of the relationship between the mother and the child, including the significance of the relationship.</i>			
Contact history			
<i>Describe the history of contact over time and the extent to which this has met the needs of the child.</i>			

Father

Name			
Any previous names			
Other names used			
Date of birth		Age	
Place of birth			
Ethnicity			
Nationality			
Immigration status			
Religion			
Languages spoken			
Pen picture of the father			
<i>Describe the father including his personality</i>			
Summary of father's health			
<i>Provide information on the father's physical and mental health, paying particular attention to any conditions with a hereditary element.</i>			
Brief social history			
<i>Provide information on childhood experiences, educational history, employment history, significant losses, major illness, and significant relationships.</i>			
Current circumstances			
<i>Provide information on housing, neighbourhood, employment, partner, and lifestyle.</i>			
Relationship with child			
<i>Describe the nature and history of the relationship between the father and the child, including the significance of the relationship.</i>			
Contact history			
<i>Describe the history of contact over time and the extent to which this has met the needs of the child.</i>			
Does the father have parental responsibility for the child?			YES/ NO
<i>If yes, provide details of how this was acquired. If no, has the paternity of the child been confirmed? If anyone else is claiming paternity of the child give details.</i>			

Sibling 1

Name			
Date of birth		Age	
Place of birth			
Gender			
Ethnicity			
Nationality			
Name of birth mother			
Name of birth father			
Pen picture of the sibling			
Their current circumstances			
<i>If there is a court order in force, give details of the type of order, the name of the court and the date on which the order was made.</i>			
Sibling relationship			
<i>Describe the nature and history of the relationship between this sibling and the child, including the significance of the relationship.</i>			
Contact history			
<i>Describe the history of contact over time and the extent to which this has met the needs of the both children.</i>			
Sibling assessment and future plans			
<i>Give brief details of the current plan for this sibling. If a sibling assessment has been completed then attach that assessment or insert the relevant text here.</i>			

Child's relationship with grandparents and significant others

Note: the information in this section should be read in conjunction with the corresponding section in Form M1(a). That information must be updated when completing this form.

Name of maternal grandmother	
<i>Describe the relationship and history of contact over time, and the extent to which this has met the needs of the child. Where a connected person assessment was undertaken provide information about this.</i>	

Name of maternal grandfather	
Describe the relationship and history of contact over time, and the extent to which this has met the needs of the child. Where a connected person assessment was undertaken provide information about this.	

Name of paternal grandmother	
Describe the relationship and history of contact over time, and the extent to which this has met the needs of the child. Where a connected person assessment was undertaken provide information about this.	

Name of paternal grandfather	
Describe the relationship and history of contact over time, and the extent to which this has met the needs of the child. Where a connected person assessment was undertaken provide information about this.	

Name of significant other	
Relationship to child	
Describe the relationship and history of contact over time, and the extent to which this has met the needs of the child. Where a connected person assessment was undertaken provide information about this.	

Name of significant other	
Relationship to child	
Describe the relationship and history of contact over time, and the extent to which this has met the needs of the child. Where a connected person assessment was undertaken provide information about this.	

CARE AND PLACEMENT HISTORY

Chronology of the places the child has lived since birth				
Age of child	From	To	Name of parent/ carer	Reason for move

Summary of child's time in care

Chronology of key decisions and actions taken by the local authority	
Date	Key decision or action

Date of the decision that the plan should be long term fostering	
<i>Attach a copy of the looked after review minutes where this decision was made, or insert the relevant text here.</i>	

Has the child or young person completed life story work?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, provide details of where the life story materials are held. If no, or the issue needs to be revisited, set out the arrangements for doing this.</i>	

DESCRIPTION AND NEEDS

Behaviour

Are there any reports from other professionals about the child's emotional or behavioural development	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, these should be listed here, with dates, and attached</i>	

Health

Date of the child's most recent health assessment	
<i>Attach the report, or insert the relevant text here.</i>	

Education

List all school and nursery placements since birth			
Date from	Date to	Provider and address	Educational attainments

Identity

Religion
<i>Provide details of religious practices unless already stated in part one. Give details of any significant religious ceremonies or rituals that have been completed, or that will be required to be completed in the future.</i>
Long-term identity needs
<i>Set out any identity needs that need to be met in a permanent family, other than those already stated in part one.</i>

Disability

Are there any reports from other professionals about the child's disability (if any)	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, these should be listed here, with dates, and attached</i>	

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Summary and analysis of the child's needs from a permanent placement

FORM COMPLETED BY:

Name	
Signed	
Dated	

Form M2 – Foster carer profile (part one)

Date (completed/ updated)	
----------------------------------	--

Fostering service		
Named contact person(s)		
Position/ job title		
Email		
Telephone		

Name of foster carer(s)
Identifying number
Address
Terms of approval

[Insert picture of carer(s) – optional]

Carers language(s)		
Carers ethnicity		
Carers religion		
Do carers drive/ have car?		
Dogs/ pets in household		

Children (fostered) living in the foster home

First name or initials	Age	Gender	Relationship to carer(s)

Children (not fostered) under 18 living in the foster home

Name	Age	Gender	Relationship to carer(s)

Other adults living in the foster home

Name	Age	Gender	Relationship to carer(s)

Pen picture

This should include a brief description of the foster carers, their household (including pets) and any regular visitors. It should describe the home, the bedrooms available to foster children, and the locality including amenities and transport links. Information should also be provided about the carer's personality and lifestyle, and their fostering experience.

Race and Diversity

Are these carers well placed to meet the needs of black and minority ethnic children, and other oppressed groups such as those from LGBT+ backgrounds? Do they have a good understanding of oppression including racism, white privilege, and homophobia? How diverse are their networks and neighbourhood? Have they cared for children from diverse backgrounds and have they undertaken relevant training in these areas?

Other key information

Note any other matching considerations that are not set out in the pen picture, including any restricted availability such as planned holidays etc.

[Insert other pictures – optional]

Information for children and young people
--

<i>State how information about these foster cares will be made available to the child or young person in a child-friendly format, in advance of agreeing or finalising a match.</i>
--

FORM COMPLETED BY:

Name	
Signed	
Dated	

Form M2 – Foster carer profile (part two)

Date (completed/ updated)	
---------------------------	--

KEY INFORMATION

Name (foster carer 1)	
Other 'known as' names	
Date of birth (and age)	
Gender	
Ethnicity	
Primary language	
Other language(s)	
Religion or faith group	

Name (foster carer 2)	
Other 'known as' names	
Date of birth (and age)	
Gender	
Ethnicity	
Primary language	
Other language(s)	
Religion or faith group	

IDENTITY AND CULTURE

How do the foster carer(s) describe their identity and culture?

How is this evident in their day-to-day life and how will it impact on the lived experience of a child in their care?

HEALTH

Name (foster carer 1)	
Date of most recent fostering medical	
Provide information about the foster carer's health to the extent that is relevant to fostering and/ or matching	

Name (foster carer 2)	
Date of most recent fostering medical	
Provide information about the foster carer's health to the extent that is relevant to fostering and/ or matching	

PEOPLE IN THE FOSTER HOME

Children (not fostered) under 18 living in the foster home

First name	Age	Gender	Relationship to carer(s)
Provide brief pen pictures of each child and state the relevance of this for matching			

Children (fostered) living in the foster home

First name	Age	Gender	Relationship to carer(s)
Provide brief pen pictures of each child and state the relevance of this for matching			

Other adults living in the foster home

Name	Age	Gender	Relationship to carer(s)
Provide brief pen pictures of each person including the role they play in fostering			

PEOPLE IN THE FOSTER CARER'S NETWORK

Other adults involved in fostering but not living in the foster home

Name	Age	Gender	Relationship to carer(s)
Provide brief pen pictures of each person, including the role they play in fostering			

PERSONALITY AND LIFESTYLE

Describe the foster carer's personality
Describe the day-to-day lifestyle of the foster carer
If the foster carer is employed outside the home describe the implications of this for fostering

ACCOMMODATION, NEIGHBOURHOOD AND PETS

Describe the home including the number of bedrooms and proposed sleeping arrangements
Briefly describe the neighbourhood, community and access to key services
Provide details of any pets or animals in the household and describe their relevance to fostering

FOSTERING HISTORY

Date of approval to foster	
Summarise the carer's fostering history	
List the key training completed	
Date of most recent fostering review	
Summarise the outcome of that fostering review	
<i>Note: The fostering service should provide a copy of this review to the commissioner on request. It should be redacted as appropriate.</i>	

FOSTERING CAPACITY

Strengths of the foster carer
Vulnerabilities of the foster carer/ areas for development
Key considerations in matching

DBS CHECKS

Enhanced DBS checks: foster carers, adult household members, and adults involved in fostering

Name	Date DBS check completed

OTHER DOCUMENTS ATTACHED

Parent and child assessment report	YES/ NO
Permanent fostering assessment report	YES/ NO
Other reports	YES/ NO
<i>If other reports are attached please specify:</i>	

FORM COMPLETED BY:

Name	
Position/ job title	
Signed	
Dated	

Form M3 – Matching form

Date (completed/ updated)	
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KEY INFORMATION

Child	Name	
	Age	
	Date of birth	
	Case reference	

Foster carer(s)	Name	
	Address	
	Case reference	

Has Child profile - Form M1 (part one) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, make arrangements to get that information before agreeing to a match.</i>	

Has a comprehensive risk assessment been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, the risk assessment should be attached. Without a full risk assessment, it is not possible to make a safe and effective match, and a risk assessment should be completed as a matter of urgency.</i>	

Has Foster Carer Profile – Form M2 (part 1 and part 2) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, make arrangements to get that information before agreeing to a match.</i>	

Is the match consistent with the foster carer's approval terms?	YES/ NO
<i>If no, the match should usually not progress. If the match is appropriate notwithstanding the foster carer's approval terms, set out arrangements for holding a review to change these approval terms.</i>	

Has Child's Views - Form M4(a) (or equivalent) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, make arrangements to get this information, or explain how the child's views have been sought in relation to the proposed match, or explain why they have not been sought.</i>	

Has Previous Foster Carer Views - Form M4(b) been completed?	YES/ NO/ NA
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, either make arrangements to get that information from the most recent foster carer, or explain why that information cannot be provided.</i>	

Has a sibling assessment been completed?	YES/ NO/ NA
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, set out what is known about the sibling relationships, and explain why a placement with siblings is being requested.</i>	

Has a bedroom sharing risk assessment been completed?	YES/ NO/ NA
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, make arrangements to complete this assessment before agreeing a match.</i>	

Has a 'placing alongside' risk assessment been completed?	YES/ NO/ NA
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, make arrangements to complete this assessment before agreeing a match.</i>	

Has the proposed foster carer had full information?	YES/ NO
<i>The proposed foster carer should be provided with all of the available information listed above to help them consider whether they can meet the needs of the child. This should be done before agreeing the match.</i>	

MATCHING CRITERIA

In relation to each of the following matching criteria set out the child's needs as identified in Form M1(part one) and consider the ability of the foster carers to meet those needs. Note any additional support or resources that will be needed and/or provided.

Location

Personality and interests

Behaviour and emotional needs

Health

Education

Identity

Disability, development, and self-care skills

Contact/family time

Friendship networks

Other identified needs

RISK ASSESSMENT

How will the any risks set out in the risk assessment be managed and/or mitigated?
<i>Ensure that consideration has been given to the safety of all children living in the foster home.</i>

INVOLVING THE CHILD

Has a child-friendly foster carer profile been provided to the child?	YES/ NO
Has a visit to the foster home been possible for the child?	YES/ NO
<i>If no, provide reasons. To what extent is the proposed match consistent with the wishes of the child? If the proposed match is not consistent with the child's wishes set out the reasoning for this.</i>	

LONG TERM MATCHING

This section should be completed when making a permanent or long-term match.

Has Child Profile - Form M1 (part two) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, either make arrangements to complete that report before progressing a permanent match, or make clear that the policy of the child's local authority does not require this to be completed.</i>	

Has a permanence planning meeting taken place?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, note the date of that meeting and attach the minutes. Where there are detailed minutes that information does not need to be repeated in this form. Instead, cross reference to those minutes.</i>	

Has Birth Family Views - Form M4(c) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, make arrangements to get that information before deciding on a permanent match, or explain why that information cannot be made available.</i>	

Has IRO Views - Form M4(d) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, make arrangements to get that information before deciding on a permanent match.</i>	

Has Proposed Foster Carer Views - Form M4(e) been completed?	YES/ NO
<i>If yes, then attach. If no, make arrangements to get that information before deciding on a permanent match.</i>	

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

Strengths of the proposed match
Vulnerabilities of the proposed match and how these might be mitigated
Recommendation regarding the match
Actions required to prepare the child for the move
<i>If the child has not received child-friendly information about the foster carer, or visited the foster home, this should be arranged wherever possible.</i>

FORM COMPLETED BY:

Name	
Position/ job title	
Signed	
Dated	

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Name	
Position/ job title	
<i>Comments:</i>	
Signed	
Dated	

Form M4(a) – Child or young person’s views

This form is for you to tell social workers and others what is important to you when they are trying to find you a foster carer.

You don’t have to use this form if you don’t want to, and you might prefer to talk with your social worker, or do a drawing, or make an audio or video recording, or do anything else to make sure people know what you think.

If you wanted to make a recording, then maybe you could use the questions below to help you think what to say.

Your name	
Your age	

What does a new foster carer need to know about you?
What are the best things about you?
What do you like doing in your spare time?
If you are living with a foster carer now, why do you need to move?
What sort of foster carer and foster home do you think will suit you best?
Where do you want your new foster home to be, and why?
How would you feel about having a dog or other pet in the foster home?
Who is it important for you to stay in touch with when you are in foster care?
Is there anything else that you want to say?

Signed	
Dated	

Form M4(b) – Previous foster carer's views

The main part of this form is to be completed by the foster carer when a placement has ended or is due to end, and the local authority are seeking to identify another foster placement for the child. The form is intended to provide information to subsequent foster carers, and their fostering service, when they are considering a match with this child. The current fostering service are invited to comment on what the foster carer has written.

Name of child	
Date placement started	
Date placement is ending/ ended	

What information were you given prior to the placement?
How did the child initially settle into your home?
What went well in the time the child lived with you?
What do you/ did you like about the child?
What went badly during the time the child lived with you?
What was challenging or difficult about living with the child?
Why does/ did the placement need to end?
What is important when thinking about future placements for this child?
Any other comments?

Name of foster carer	
Name of fostering service	
Signed	
Dated	

Fostering service to complete:

Any comments on what the foster carer has written?

Name	
Position	
Signed	
Dated	

Form M4(c) – Birth family's views

This form is for you to tell social workers and others what is important to you when they are trying to find a foster carer for your child.

You don't have to use this form if you don't want to, and you might prefer to talk with your child's social worker, or provide your views in another way.

Child's name	
Date of birth	

What does a new foster carer need to know about your child?
Do they need to know anything specific about their religion or culture?
Who is it important for your child to stay in touch with?
What sort of foster carer do you think will suit your child best?
How do you want to be involved in supporting your child in foster care?
Is there anything else that you want to say?

Your name	
Your relationship to the child	
Signed	
Dated	

Form M4(d) – IRO's views

A local authority cannot lawfully make a long-term foster placement unless and until 'the IRO has been consulted'. This form has been developed for undertaking that consultation. If the IRO does not have sufficient information on the plan, they should contact the child's social worker and request whatever is required.

Child's name	
Date of birth	
Name of foster carer	

Have you been given sufficient information about plan for this child to be long-term fostered by the named foster carer?	YES/ NO
Do you support the plan for this child to be long-term fostered by the named foster carer?	YES/ NO

Comments:

Name	
Signed	
Dated	

Form M4(e) – Proposed foster carer's views

The main part of this form is to be completed by the proposed long term foster carer, when considering a long-term match with this child. The fostering service are invited to comment on what the foster carer has written.

Name of child	
Name of local authority	

Why do you want to be a long-term foster carer to this child?
What makes you think you can effectively meet their needs?
What do your family/ friends think about you long-term fostering this child?
What do you think will be the biggest challenge in fostering this child?
Are you committed and happy to support the contact plans for this child?
What support might you need in fostering this child?
Is there any information about the child that you are missing, but need?
Any other comments?

Name of foster carer	
Name of fostering service	
Signed	
Dated	

Fostering service to complete:

Any comments on what the foster carer has written?

Name	
Position	
Signed	
Dated	