



Department  
for Education

# Supporting long-term foster care placements in the independent sector

**Research report**

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## 1. Executive summary

### Overview of the project

- Match Foster Care (Match) is a small independent fostering provider (IFP) in the West Midlands. Based on their experience of providing long-term placements to various Local Authorities (LAs), Match identified a range of problematic issues relating to the young people and the foster carers who were caring for them.
- The aim of the innovation project was to address these problematic issues by taking on statutory duties for the young people, delegated by the LA, and also providing wrap-around services, including health, education and psychology. The supervising social worker<sup>1</sup> (SSW) from Match took on the role of the LA child and family social worker (CFSW) for the young people, including statutory visits, looked after child (LAC) and personal education plan (PEP) reviews, contact and work with the birth family. Each young person was allocated an independent advocate.
- In the shorter term, the project aimed to achieve:
  - A consistent allocated social worker for each young person (provided by Match)
  - Informed decision making and timely access to services
  - Consistent and increased support for transitions
  - Foster carers empowered to act as ‘parents.’
- In the longer term, it was hoped that these changes would lead to a range of better outcomes for young people, foster carers and professionals.

### Aims and methods of the evaluation

- The aims of the evaluation were to examine the process of implementation and the impact of delegated statutory duties and wrap-around services on young people, carers and professional staff in the innovation project (IP), and to explore the perspectives of the relevant LA professionals.
- The methods used were: measures of development, attachment and carer self-efficacy; file searches; qualitative interviews and focus groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Within the Match agency, these workers are known as ‘social workers’. Within the comparison agency, they are known as ‘placement managers’. To avoid confusion, the term ‘supervising social worker’ (SSW) is used to describe this role throughout this report.

- These methods were applied to a Match sample of children (n= 8) and a comparison IFP sample (n=17). A total of 26 carers, 21 young people and 8 SSWs were interviewed, with a range of other professionals interviewed or in focus groups.

## Findings of the evaluation

### Implementation

- Some LAs who had indicated their willingness to participate in the project withdrew, necessitating further negotiations and causing some delay in implementation.
- One LA which had signed agreements withdrew from the IP at a late stage. Carers of young people from this LA had already been prepared for the IP. A different sample then had to be recruited, with less time available for the preparation of these carers.
- Establishing detailed protocols for the delegation of statutory duties by one of the LAs was important but also took time and delayed implementation for some young people.
- The sample size was smaller than originally planned (8 children in 5 households rather than the 20 young people targeted).
- Appointment and training of staff and implementation of the plan for placement support went ahead smoothly and as planned.

### Extent to which the project achieved its intended outcomes

In view of the reduced sample size and timescale of the full implementation, the longer-term outcomes of the innovation could not be meaningfully assessed. However, the evaluation identified the following indicators of short-term outcomes which may merit consideration and further exploration:

- The IP sample young people had a consistent social worker, the Match SSW, through the project period and this contributed to the aim of providing young people with the opportunity to form relationships with their social workers. In the comparison agency, some young people had consistent CFSWs but others did not.
- Swift access to the wrap around services (funded by the IP) meant that there were examples of timely access to services in the Match sample. Young people and

carers in the comparison sample obtained specialist services but sometimes had to wait longer and the LA CFSWs had to follow more detailed procedures to obtain funding and services.

- Most Match participants reported that the wrap around services improved young people's care journeys and they were highly valued by most foster carers. A minority commented that the number of professionals involved could feel overwhelming at times.
- The IP allowed the Match workers to make some contact-related decisions (e.g. contact venue) directly, according to the young person's needs, and they had ready access to funding from the IP in order to do so. This kind of timely access to services was sometimes possible in the comparison agency but was less likely when LA funding decisions were required.
- An intended outcome of the IP was to achieve a better experience for social workers and foster carers. Across both samples, there was a high level of professional satisfaction amongst the SSWs and foster carers. Match social workers expressed additional satisfaction in working holistically with the whole foster family.
- The advocacy service worked well for most young people and carers. There were some concerns regarding overlap with the social worker role.
- Across both samples, foster carers felt appropriately empowered to act as 'parent' in relation to day-to-day decisions regarding school, health and leisure activities through the existing delegation of authority arrangements.
- Foster carers in the IP reported swifter decision-making when only their Match social worker needed to be involved. However, since the LA remained accountable as the corporate parent under the IP arrangements, key decisions such as changes of school had to be referred to the LA.
- LA managers in the IP sample reported on the value of readily accessible specialist services for young people, indicating progress towards the outcome of a better experience for the local authority. However, LA managers also reported challenges connected to the delegation of statutory duties whilst remaining accountable as the corporate parent of the young people.
- The costs for Match of carrying out delegated statutory duties appeared similar to those estimated for LAs to carry out the same duties (Holmes et al, 2014). However, there were indicators that, compared to LAs, Match was providing some additional services, including advocacy, and spending additional time on some tasks, thus offering value for money.



## Limitations of the evaluation and future evaluation

- The initial expectation of all parties was that the *effectiveness* of the innovation could be formally evaluated during the one-year time frame. In the event, the agency spent a large proportion of the project period working on LA engagement and project development issues. It was necessary, therefore, for the evaluation to focus on the *process* of developing and implementing the innovation, rather than its outcomes.
- The IP sample was small and included some young people who had long-term foster care as a permanence plan alongside other possibilities and 2 who were presenting challenging or risky behaviour. The evaluation, therefore could not address the impact of the IP on a sizeable sample from a more straightforward target group, i.e. less challenging young people in confirmed long-term placements.
- After careful consideration, Match managers have taken the decision not to apply for transitional funding or offer an extension of the IP arrangements to the partner or other LAs beyond the end of March 2016. The managers have noted actual and potential benefits of the IP, and have received some positive feedback from the participating LAs. However, for a range of reasons (see p. 40) related to uncertainty with regard to future LA partnerships and further funding they feel that it is not advisable to take the risk of extending the project.

## Implications and recommendations for policy and practice

The implementation of the innovation raised interesting questions about supporting long-term fostering placements in the independent sector and within LAs. These questions have implications for policy and practice and merit further consideration.

- If the delegation of LA statutory duties in relation to the CFSW role was to be further piloted, care would need to be taken over contracts and protocols so that all aspects of the delegation are covered and there is clarity regarding roles and responsibilities.
- It would also be necessary to consider this arrangement on a case-by-case basis. Not all young people placed through an IFP would necessarily be in the right position to benefit from the delegated model, e.g. where the placement was not fully confirmed as long-term, the placement was unsettled, or where the LA CFSW was positively involved.
- Delegation might also be best seen as a flexible arrangement. It may be possible for an IFP to take on more active responsibilities for the welfare of the young person without formal delegation of statutory duties. This flexibility in relation to long-term foster placements is supported by the revised Statutory Guidance for

permanence and long-term foster placements (DfE, 2015), which would allow for a reduction in the level of involvement of the CFSW and greater reliance on the SSW in stable placements and with the agreement of the LAC review.

- If statutory duties are delegated to an IFA, the availability of an advocacy service can be helpful in ensuring that young people's wishes and feelings are independently represented. Further piloting should take into account the individual needs and preferences of the young person and the existing network of supportive adults around them.
- It would be possible to pilot the delegation of statutory duties as a stand-alone innovation, without the provision of in-house specialist services. This would provide a clearer picture of the particular advantages and drawbacks of this structural change.
- The dual role of the SSW in supporting carers and young people in long-term placements appears to have potential benefits in some cases. This could also be piloted in LAs. There are significant training and supervision implications for fostering staff and also a need in both types of fostering service for safeguards in relation to allegations, placement disruptions and ensuring the child's voice is heard.
- The key advantage of the provision of wrap around services within a small IFA could be swift access to a range of bespoke services for young people and carers. However, the provision of specialist services, such as clinical psychology, by IFPs is not in itself innovative and does have financial implications for LA commissioners. Careful attention would also need to be paid to issues of overlap and communication with wider health, education and CAMHS services.

## Conclusion

The case made by Match for this innovation was based on the aim of improving outcomes for young people in long-term placements by focusing decision-making and services within their own organisation and closer to the young person. In the event, the small sample size and short timescale of the innovation did not allow for these outcomes to be evaluated.

However, the evaluation indicated that there is potential for further piloting of elements of this innovation within the range of commissioned long-term fostering placements in the independent sector. The fact that the comparison agency was also able to provide successful long-term foster care placements under the existing arrangements, with attention paid by SSWs to the well-being of young people in placement, suggests that a range of options should be available.

The revised Statutory Guidance for long-term foster care and permanence (DfE 2015) provides a valuable new framework for allowing flexibility in how support services are delivered to young people who will remain in their foster family through to adulthood. This project suggests that this is a timely opportunity to develop a more effective and well-supported long-term foster care practice model, for placements within both independent fostering agencies and local authorities.

## 2. Overview of the project

### The intended outcomes of the project

Match Foster Care (Match) is a small independent fostering provider (IFP) in the West Midlands. Based on their experience of providing long-term placements to various Local Authorities (LAs), Match identified a range of problematic issues for the young people that they were placing and for the foster carers who were caring for them. The issues are outlined in the Match theory of change (Appendix 1). In the shorter term, the project aimed to achieve:

- A consistent allocated social worker for each young person (provided by Match)
- Informed decision making and timely access to services
- Consistent and increased support for transitions
- Foster carers empowered to act as 'parent'.

In the longer term, it was hoped that these changes would lead to better outcomes for young people, foster carers and professionals. These outcomes included:

- A better journey through care for young people
- Stable placements
- Young people who are better prepared for independence
- Timely access to therapy and support services
- Supporting complex young people to live in family homes rather than residential care
- More young people with complex needs experiencing positive attachments in foster families
- Better health, educational and well-being outcomes
- The opportunity for young people to form strong, long-lasting relationships with their social worker
- Quality foster carer and staff recruitment and retention
- Positive outcomes and cost benefits for the wider community
- A better experience for the Local Authority
- Positive market disruption leading to raised standards for looked after children
- Value for money.

### The project plan

Match intended to pilot an innovation which would change their structural relationship with some of the LAs who currently had young people placed with them in long-term

placements. With each LA they planned to work towards an agreement which covered 2 key areas of service provision. The LA would delegate certain statutory duties and related decision-making to Match. Young people and their foster carers would have one allocated social worker (based within Match). This worker would support and supervise the foster carers, as well as taking on the role of the LA CFSW. This would involve undertaking all statutory visits to the young people, organising and representing young people in LAC and PEP reviews, arranging birth family contact, making appropriate referrals to other services, and leading some (but not all) decisions regarding health and education. In order to achieve this extension of their role, Match social workers would receive additional training, covering all relevant legal procedural and practice-based issues in relation to working with looked after children.

The LA would retain the role of corporate parent, as consistent with legislation regarding looked after children, and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) would retain their role in care planning and reviewing in relation to the young people, also consistent with current regulations and guidance. In addition, the LA CFSW would remain allocated as the joint worker for each IP case and this meant that there remained an allocated worker who would become the primary worker for the child in the event of S47 investigations, placement disruption, local authority designated officer involvement, court work and special guardianship order applications – and anything else beyond the day to day issues.

Match managers were aware that the delegation of statutory duties and the transfer of the role of the CFSW to the SSW would mean that the voice of the young person may not be represented separately from that of the Match foster carer. To address this issue, an advocacy service would be commissioned from Barnardo's. An advocate (trained by Barnardo's but not a qualified social worker) would work with each young person ensuring that their wishes and feelings were independently represented.

It was also planned that all young people in the Innovation Project (IP) sample would be assessed for possible access to the following range of additional services:

- A commissioned, private psychology service, based locally and offering flexible and readily available support to young people and their foster carers.
- An education advisor (employed by Match) who would support young people with their education, liaise with schools, and advise on Special Educational Needs issues.
- A health advisor (employed by Match) who would ensure that routine health needs were met, and also offer preventative services such as work around alcohol and substance misuse, safe sex and mental health.
- Fostering support workers (employed by Match) who would provide practical support to foster placements and direct work with young people.

## Relevant research findings

The role of the SSW emerged during the 1980s, and a major study by Rowe et al (1989) suggested the advantages of having separate workers who could form good working relationships with foster carers and focus on supporting and supervising their caregiving. A review of international research (22 studies) on the role of the SSW (Cosis-Brown et al, 2014) found that foster carers greatly appreciated the emotional and practical support provided, although there was uncertain evidence regarding whether this helped to prevent placement disruption. In general, foster carers' relationships with their SSWs were more positive than those with the CFSWs, also reflected in a study specifically of long-term foster care (Schofield et al., 2000).

Sheldon (2010) explored the relationship between SSWs and CFSWs in a Northern Ireland study of about 60 professionals from both groups. Foster carers were held in high regard by both groups but there were some difficulties in the relationships between the 2 groups, particularly around communication, role demarcation and mutual expectations.

The quality of the relationships between CFSWs and young people was explored in the evaluation of social work practices (Ridley et al, 2013). Interviews with 169 looked after young people and care leavers across 11 LAs found that continuity of relationships was important, but only if the relationship was positive. More time available for direct work increased opportunities for positive relationships to develop, and for some, this could be critical.

Holland (2010) examined case studies from a longitudinal study of looked after young people. Young people underlined the importance of relational aspects of interactions with social workers, despite seldom having an opportunity for this type of interaction. However, when they enjoyed a network of informal supportive relationships, the social worker was less significant. Holland notes that informal networks are important in helping to normalise looked after young people's lives.

Mental health problems are experienced by almost half of looked after children in the UK (Tapsfield and Collier, 2005, Ford et al, 2007), a much higher prevalence than in the general child population (McAuley & Davis, 2009). A survey of 52 UK managers responsible for looked after young people (Holland et al, 2005) found concern regarding the availability of mental health services, with young people's emotional and behavioural difficulties a key reason for placement breakdown. Sinclair's (2005) review of 16 core studies of foster care echoed these concerns. However, when services were provided, there were mixed findings regarding whether they helped to prevent placement breakdown.

Luke *et al.*, (2014) reviewed a large body of evidence regarding effective approaches to poor mental health in looked after children. This review underlined the importance of high-quality caregiving (including warmth, sensitivity and commitment) in effecting positive change in children's well-being, alongside interventions targeted either directly at the child or indirectly (through the carer or team around the child) providing support where necessary.

Overall, there are significant gaps in our knowledge of commissioning and supporting long-term foster care in the delegated model piloted by this IP. However, internationally, for example in Norway, this model of one social worker to support the placement, both carers and children, is accepted and valued, so it is reasonable to explore this model.

## **Changes to the project's activities**

There were some changes to the scope of the IP's intended activities, related to participation in the project. Obtaining LA agreement to take part in the IP was more difficult than anticipated. Three prospective LAs withdrew before final agreements could be reached. One of these LAs had already signed an agreement to take part and the relevant foster carers had been prepared to do so. After an inevitable interval where different LAs had to be approached, 2 LAs (LA1 and LA2) signed agreements with Match, but there was less time available to prepare these foster carers for participation in the IP. A pilot group of 12 young people in 6 households was identified. This was smaller than the anticipated sample of 20 young people. Subsequently, 4 children (in 1 household) were felt by the LA to be inappropriate for the project and they were withdrawn. The final sample consisted of 8 young people in 5 households.

A process of discussion and drafting of protocols for the delegation of statutory duties in LA1 meant that the full IP arrangements were not in place for young people from this LA until 1st September 2015, rather than earlier in the year, as hoped. Further information regarding these issues is provided in Section 4 below.

## **The context of the project**

Match Foster Care was established in 2012 and it provides short and long-term, emergency and respite foster placements for a number of LAs in the West Midlands. Match currently manages up to 38 approved foster carers, fostering up to 50 young people. The agency runs up to 40, well attended outings and events each year. These involve combinations of the full range of staff members and their families, foster families and young people. In 2015, the work of the agency was rated by Ofsted to be 'good' overall, with 'quality of service', 'outcomes and experiences' and 'leadership and management' rated as 'outstanding'. The 2 LAs from which the IP sample young people are drawn are both large, ethnically diverse metropolitan districts.

### 3. Overview of the evaluation

#### The evaluation questions

The evaluation questions were prepared by the UEA evaluation team and agreed by Match. They were as follows:

- How does taking on statutory duties, delegated by the LA, change the way an independent fostering agency delivers long-term foster care?
- How does bringing together the role of the agency SSW and the role of the LA CFSW affect (positively or negatively):
  - Quality of support for the placement – quality of foster carer supervision, quality of work with the young person, quality of work with birth parents and contact, advocacy for the young person.
  - Quality of the placement – secure base caregiving linked to the young person fulfilling their developmental potential; the young person becoming part of the family; foster carers who are skilled professionals and committed parents - with delegated authority from the corporate parent to act as ‘real’ parents.
  - Quality of interagency and systemic support for the young person and the placement e.g. communication, decision-making including involvement of the young person and carers, delegation of authority, wrap-around services, provision of education and therapeutic support services, safeguarding.
- How is this change of structure and practice experienced by social workers, young people, foster carers and birth relatives?
- What are the practical and financial consequences of the structural change in the relationship between the IFP and the LA?
- How will this new structure fit with the revised Statutory Guidance for long-term foster care and permanence (DfE, 2015)?

#### The evaluation methodology

In order to consider the impact and outcomes of the IP, a comparison IFP, Anglia Fostering Agency (AFA) was identified. This agency did not have delegated statutory duties and did not provide wrap around services. AFA is situated in the East of England, and covers this area as well as the East Midlands. It was established in 2009, and is somewhat larger than Match (53 carers, caring for 78 young people). The majority of placements are long-term. In 2015, the work of this IFP was rated by Ofsted to be ‘good’ overall, with ‘outcomes and experiences’ rated as ‘outstanding’.



Two samples were identified: the Match sample and the AFA sample. The Match sample consisted of 8 young people in 5 foster family households. Seven of the young people were the subject of delegated statutory duties and all received some (but not all) of the wrap around services. The AFA sample was selected to be similar in number to the original projected Match sample (20) and so consisted of 17 young people in 9 households, all placed for long-term foster care. These AFA young people came from 4 LAs (2 large, rural counties and 2 large, ethnically diverse metropolitan districts). The comparative ages and length of time in placement of the young people in the two samples are summarised in Figures 1 and 2 (Appendix 2).

- Data were gathered between February 2015 and March 2016.
- The evaluation tracked the implementation process of the IP and the pathways and outcomes for the young people in both samples.
- Foster carer files were accessed in both samples and young people's files in the Match sample.
- Three quantitative measures were used to gather baseline information regarding the young people and their placements. These were:
  - The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), (Goodman, 1997) measuring emotional and behavioural development (completed for all young people).
  - The Quality of Attachment Relationship (QUARQ), (Briskman *et al.*, 2010) assessing the relationship between the foster carer and the young person (missing data for 3 Match young people).
  - The Foster Carer Efficacy scale (Briskman *et al.*, 2010), measuring the extent to which foster carers felt effective and competent in their caregiving roles (missing data for 3 Match young people).
- The Secure Base model caregiving dimensions (Schofield and Beek, 2014) were used as a framework for understanding the caregiving relationships in the foster families.
- Three focus groups with IROs and LAC managers were held: one each in LA1 and LA2 and one in one LA which had young people placed with the comparison IFA.
- Face-to-face interviews (and some telephone interviews with foster fathers) were used to investigate the perspectives of key participants in both samples. Managers (both agencies) and specialist workers (Match) were interviewed twice, once at the beginning and once towards the end of the IP. Interviews were audio recorded, anonymised and transcribed, then coded using NVivo software. Coding followed the structure of the interviews and also identified themes associated with the Match theory of change (Appendix 1). Interview participation is summarised in Table 1 (Appendix 2).

## **Changes to the evaluation methodology**

It was initially planned to administer the quantitative measure twice in each agency – at the beginning of the IP implementation (T1 May 2015) and again 6 months later (T2 October 2015). This might have provided some indication of the impact of the IP, as compared to ‘service as usual’ in the comparison sample. The first round of measures was started in May, but the full Match sample did not receive delegated statutory duties until September, and so it was felt that a second round would not reflect the impact of the IP. A single set of measures was therefore collected in each agency during the evaluation period. This provides a summary of sample characteristics and helps with comparisons between the two samples.

## 4. Key Findings

### Implementation

Some key findings relate to the implementation phase of the IP. Prior to the Innovation Award being made, Match had prepared the ground for the innovation through discussion with senior managers in 5 LAs which had young people placed with them and there was positive feedback from all of them. In 3 of these LAs, however, translating LA intentions to participate into signed contractual agreements did not happen. Significant factors mentioned by Match were senior staff changes and re-organisation of services. This situation may reflect the difficulty of implementing innovation when organisations are undergoing structural changes and budget adjustments. However, Match successfully signed agreements with 2 LAs at this time.

Following the signed agreements, LA1 and LA2 senior managers worked with their staff to introduce the innovation. This was done through discussion with relevant parties in LA2 and this LA entered the IP fully in May 2015. LA1 undertook a more formal consultation process and drafted protocols for the delegation of statutory duties. The final protocol included setting out in detail the Match SSW's role in relation to the young person – but also indicating that there would continue to be an allocated social worker in the LAC team in case difficulties, including allegations, arose. For this LA, the IP was fully implemented on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2015.

Discussion in the LA 1 and 2 focus groups showed that the delegation of statutory duties, specifically the role of the responsible LA CFSW, had far-reaching implications for care planning, review and case management systems. Significantly, the LAs remained accountable for the welfare of their looked after young people and managers who knew the young people in the IP retained a sense of moral as well as legal responsibility for them as corporate parents. Senior managers reported a range of issues associated with the delegation of their corporate parenting duties to an agency that was outside the LA in terms of professional culture, supervision and line management. Different staff groups had different hopes and concerns regarding the IP and managers had to strike a balance between ongoing consultation and moving forward with participation.

The evaluation team noted that the LA senior managers were mindful not only of the organisational changes proposed by the innovation, but also of their impact on the individual young people and birth families concerned. For this reason, and also because of the wishes of the young people, the CFSWs continued to visit the young people in two cases. This was understandable, given the above issues and in view of the possible time limited nature of the IP, but it had the potential to lead to overlap and confusion and was not consistent with the IP plan. However, it suggests the importance of selecting suitable cases for the IP to avoid disrupting relationships where young people do have a close relationship with their current social worker.

## **The Match sample**

The individual care plans and characteristics of the Match sample presented a range of challenges to the IP. Firstly, there was an issue regarding the sample criterion that the young person should be placed for long-term foster care. The Match sample included 2 young people who had a permanence plan for long-term fostering but alongside other possibilities. This meant that there were additional issues and uncertainties to be managed in the interface with the LA.

Secondly, there was an issue concerning the delegation of the CFSWs' statutory visits. Two of the young people had long standing involvement with their CFSW and a third had a shorter but very positive relationship with his worker. A key intended outcome of the IP was for young people to achieve a consistent relationship with a social worker within Match, but since this was already available for these young people within the LA, the LA professionals expressed some uncertainty regarding their participation.

Finally, 2 of the young people were presenting particular challenges to their foster carers during the IP timeframe. This meant that there were several difficult events to be managed and the interface with the LA was particularly complex for these less settled placements. One of these placements disrupted in February, 2016 (with the young person returning to residential care and so leaving the IP) and the LA withdrew the other young person from the IP at a similar time.

In summary, a key issue was that the starting point of the IP was the LA's agreement to participate, rather than as a response to the characteristics of the placement and the needs of the young person. This meant that the innovation was tested in some situations to which it may not have been ideally suited. It is possible that the innovation may be more successful for some young people than for others, although the small sample did not allow this to be explored.

## **Quality of support for the placements**

Support for the placements was considered across 3 main areas: foster carer supervision, work with the young people and work with birth parents and contact. Evidence was gathered from file searches and interviews with professionals, foster carers and young people.

### **Foster carer supervision (both agencies)**

#### **Foster carers' perspectives**

Across both samples, the foster carers spoke of the high quality of support and supervision that they received. The availability of SSWs was especially recognised and valued. Both agencies offered 24-hour telephone cover from the carers' designated worker and foster carers found it highly reassuring to know that advice and 'back up' was always there if needed. If workers were not immediately available in office hours, messages were picked up and responded to promptly. Carers always knew who to contact if their own worker was on leave or unavailable.

Within their supervision session, carers across both samples also valued the focused, thoughtful attention of their SSWs. Supervision could provide a reflective space in which parenting approaches could be debated and the carers' emotional responses to their foster child openly discussed. As one foster father put it 'two heads are always better than one', and SSWs could provide different ideas for parenting approaches, or help carers to take into account the young person's individual history and respond accordingly.

#### **Supervising social workers' perspectives**

Caseloads for SSWs were different in the 2 agencies. Match caseloads generally averaged 5 or 6 families or 10 young people per worker. SSWs with cases in the IP had only slightly reduced caseloads. AFA SSW caseloads averaged 8 – 10 families with up to 15 young people. These caseloads would both be smaller than those held by LA SSWs, where caseloads of 15-20 foster families would be more typical.

Across both samples, the SSWs mirrored the foster carers' accounts when describing the support they provided. They were proud of their capacity to respond promptly and flexibly to foster carers' queries and difficulties. They felt that an important skill was being able to 'read' their carers, to know when they were holding something back, needing to offload and so on. Key to this were consistent relationships and regular contact with carers and the majority of SSWs in both samples had worked with the carers for a year or more, some for much longer.

These close, trusting relationships could form a foundation for working at a more intensive level when necessary. One Match worker was providing daily contact through a particularly difficult time and the foster carers felt that they would have been unable to continue with the placement without this level of support. An AFA worker reported providing a similar level of support (with similar feedback from the foster carers) through a difficult court case.

A difference between the 2 samples was the frequency of routine contact with foster carers. Without taking into account the requirements of the CFSW role, Match policy was for workers to visit foster carers fortnightly and in most cases, visits occurred weekly. AFA policy was a monthly visit and a weekly telephone call. Additional phone calls, e-mails etc. were exchanged as needed in both agencies. In both agencies carers felt extremely well served and would not have wanted any more (or less) contact with their SSW. Foster carers' confidence in the reliable availability of support may have been key to their satisfaction with the support on offer.

Both agencies monitored the well-being of the young people but used different approaches. AFA used an electronic recording system which required foster carers to score the well-being of their young people across key dimensions on a daily basis. Match specifically did not require their foster carers to do any form of routine recording, preferring to monitor the placements through frequent face-to-face contact, telephone, text or e mail.

## **Work with the young people**

### **Match**

In this area of practice, there were clear formal differences between the 2 samples as Match workers were responsible for the statutory duties relating to the young people, whereas AFA workers were not. The Match workers undertook statutory visits to the 7 young people on a monthly basis, and usually saw them much more frequently than this whilst visiting the household or at groups or events. For some young people, this level of involvement was in marked contrast to that of their previous CFSW. For example, one young person had seen her CFSW 3 times between February (the beginning of her placement) and September, compared with weekly contact with her Match worker from September onwards.

All of the young people had the same Match social worker from the beginning of their inclusion in the IP to the end of January, 2016. Most had known the worker (in the role of SSW) for some time previously, allowing for positive relationships to develop. In comparison, Match young people who were not included in the IP had an average of 1.8 CFSWs from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015 to the end of January, 2016. Some had 3 or 4 social workers in that time period.

However, 2 of the 8 IP sample young people had had very consistent CFSWs over several years.

The young people spoke highly of their Match social workers, seeing them as helpful, listening and supportive. For example:

*She takes me on day trips, and she supports me. She comes out to check up how I'm doing and comes to meetings. If I've got problems, I go to her.* (Young person, Match sample)

Match social workers separated their visits to the young person from those to the carers. Young people were always seen alone and visits usually lasted for an hour or more. Match workers stated that their primary purpose in working with the young people was to ascertain their wishes and feelings in the various elements of their lives, and to be sure that they were safe and happy.

They used a range of skills and approaches to form relationships with the young people, and to help them to express their views. For example, crafts, poster making and specific 'wishes and feelings' activities were helpfully used with a younger child. For teenagers, outings or just talking in the bedroom were felt to be more appropriate. Life Story work was planned for 3 of the young people, to be done jointly by the Match social worker and a Match fostering support worker.

## AFA

The AFA SSWs did have a (non-statutory) role for the young people and this merits examination. The agency required that they saw the young people at least every 2 months (greater than the statutory CFSW visiting minimum of 4 times a year) and in practice it could be more frequently. Their role varied widely, according to the young person's needs and personality, but all young people knew and liked the AFA worker.

The majority of young people understood that the AFA workers were there for the foster carers, but they sometimes also identified them as helping people for themselves. These workers were very consistent, with most having been involved with the foster family for a year or more.

Additionally, the AFA young people each had an allocated CFSW and their role was explored in the evaluation. For the established workers, 6 weekly visits were the goal (but not always attained), with the newer ones aiming to have more frequent contact initially. High levels of social worker turnover had occurred in some cases. Of the 17 young people in the sample, only 2 had had their social workers for more than a year, 11 had had their social worker for about 6 months and 4 workers were new to the case.

However, even when there had been high turnover, foster carers described a number of previous and current CFSWs positively. For example, *'a lovely person', 'passionate about the young person', 'you couldn't fault her'*. Only one carer questioned the current CFSW's approach to her and the young people. Several stressed their view that unmanageable workloads were the problem, rather than the quality of the social workers.

Several young people had had a consistent social worker (lasting 2–5 years) in the past and they spoke warmly of these relationships, which had been helpful in a range of ways: building self-esteem, listening, arranging and supporting contact, helping to re-build foster family relationships, explaining the reasons for being in care, obtaining resources and, in one case, being an important confidante for a young person who was unsettled in her previous foster home:

*They make sure I'm happy, they make sure I'm in the right place and that I'm safe. Because I wasn't happy at my previous foster carers' and my social worker took me out of the house and we went to a café place. I felt uncomfortable telling anyone else.* (Young person, AFA sample)

The CFSWs had similar approaches to those of the Match workers. However, a large majority mentioned that high caseloads and increasing bureaucracy meant that they did not have time available to do the more in depth, direct work with young people that was often needed. Life story work, for example, was often delegated to family support workers or commissioned externally.

The CFSWs and the Match SSWs differed slightly in the respective emphasis that they placed on LAC systems and foster family life. The CFSWs, whilst interested in the young person's foster family relationships, made more frequent reference to the LAC systems – to monitoring the placement, reviewing the Care Plan and so on. For example:

*I suppose as the social worker, you look through the case and you gather all of the information and then you analyse it and you come out with a plan bit by bit and you are the person who coordinates the meeting of the needs and any issues that they might have.* (CFSW, AFA sample)

In comparison, the Match social workers were alert to these systems, but they were more immersed in the current placement and focused on the young person's lived experiences. For example, one social worker described her role as:

*To ensure that he's happy. That he's happy with where he's living, that he's happy with the level of contact. Yeah, that if there are any issues, either at school or with his family, you know, that we can talk about those things.* (Match social worker)

The different settings of the workers - a specialist fostering service as opposed to a local authority LAC service - may have led to this slight difference in emphasis. Finding an appropriate balance of attention to both LAC systems and the child's well-being is an important element of supporting young people in long-term foster care.



## **Work with birth parents and contact (both samples)**

The IP arrangements meant that the 2 samples had different responsibilities in this area. Match workers had taken over the arranging and supervising of existing contact arrangements in most of the sample cases. The AFA SSWs had no direct involvement in contact, although they often played an important supportive role to the carers.

In 2 cases within the Match sample the delegation of statutory duties and the availability of financial resources enabled more active work to take place around contact. In both cases, previous contact had been unsatisfactory for the young people. Match social workers were able to effect change quickly by working with the birth relatives and moving the arrangements to more family friendly venues (funded by Match). This, combined with the foster carers' sensitive approaches, resulted in contact being a much more positive experience for the young people. In contrast, a CFSW in the comparison sample spoke of a 3-month process (connected with the availability of resources) when an unsatisfactory contact venue had to be changed.

There were no situations during the evaluation period where wider birth family issues had required direct input from the Match workers, although one worker had commissioned the agency's psychology service to undertake family therapy to help a young person to relate more positively to their birth mother. CFSWs in the comparison sample spoke more broadly of their role for the birth family. For example, one worker for a large sibling group (placed in different families) provided a valued link between them, and had organised a shared holiday.

However, high rates of social worker turnover in the comparison sample could negatively affect the quality of work with birth families. For example, a birth father frequently re-stated his wish for his daughter to return home. This was not felt to be in her best interests, but each new social worker reacted to the father's stated position without taking a longer view which might have helped the father to establish a realistic and more meaningful relationship with his daughter.

## **The role of the advocate (Match sample)**

The advocate attached to the IP planned a flexible level of involvement, according to each young person's circumstances and wishes. Discussions with the young people would remain private unless the young person consented to sharing or there was a safeguarding issue.

The advocate made initial visits to all of the sample foster carers without the young people present. These visits were lengthy and sometimes complicated, as there were differing levels of understanding and acceptance of her role. With hindsight, the advocate felt that a group briefing session, jointly with the agency, might have been helpful, followed by the individual discussions.

The young people were then seen individually and bespoke plans made for further involvement. Consultation for LAC reviews formed a framework for this. Frequency of visits ranged from minimal involvement to frequent, planned sessions when there were specific issues to be considered. Meetings occurred in school, at the foster home or in outside venues such as the park. Young people were always seen alone during all or part of the session.

All young people in the Match sample knew who the advocate was. Some had neutral or mixed, views of her role, others were very positive. There was a general understanding that the advocate was there for them, to listen to their problems and to help them. For example:

*I can talk to her about any problems and she will go and find out about what I wanted. If I wanted to say something she will help me to say it.* (Young person, Match sample)

Some foster carers valued the involvement of the advocate, as a person who could provide an additional element of protection for the young person. There was also a view that the advocate was perhaps an unnecessary addition when there were already a number of professionals involved with the young person. Nevertheless, in one case, the advocate supported a young person, who already had a stable network of professional support, to express an important viewpoint at her LAC review. It is possible that in this situation the independence of the advocate was a key helpful element, but the role would need to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Match social workers felt generally positive about the role of the advocate, seeing it as important that there was an independent person involved with the IP young people.

However, there was also a view that the Match social worker and the advocate were covering some of the same ground, (i.e. ascertaining the young person's wishes and feelings) and some concern about how this might be experienced by the young person.

## **Quality of the placements**

### **Quantitative data**

Overall the Match group of young people had been in their current placement for a shorter period of time than the AFA sample. The majority (6 out of the 8 young people) the Match sample had been in their current placement for a period of 2 years or less.

Only one had been in their current placement for more than 3 years. In contrast only a very small minority of the AFA young people (2 out of 17) had been in their current placement for 2 years or less and over half (9 out of the 17) had been in their current placement for more than 3 years. The age ranges of the 2 samples were similar, with means of 13 yrs. (Match) and 11.9 yrs. (AFA).

Three quantitative measures addressed the quality of the placements (see Section 3, above). The SDQ scores showed that none of the young people in the Match sample fell within the normal range, indicating that this particular set of young people may have been a more challenging group compared to the AFA young people where 65% scored in the normal range (Figure 3, Appendix 2). It could also reflect the fact that AFA children had been in placement for longer and had made progress.

The QUARQ measured the quality of the relationships between foster carers and young people via a score ranging from 0 to 64, a higher score indicating a better quality of attachment. Scores for Match young people tended to be slightly more towards the lower end of the scale, ranging from 39-56 (with a mean of 47), compared with scores ranging from 31-64 (with a mean of 54) in the AFA sample (Figure 4, Appendix 2).

The FC Efficacy measure looked at the extent to which the foster carers felt confident and effective in their caregiving roles. Scores ranged from 0 to 60, a higher score indicating greater confidence and feelings of efficacy. Scores for Match carers tended to be very slightly more towards the lower end of the scale with scores ranging from 36-53 (with a mean of 44) as compared to AFA carers for whom scores ranged from 42-55, with a mean of 51 (Figure 5, Appendix 2).

With small samples it is difficult to comment further on these measures, but it may be that the fact that children in Match were more recently placed and more troubled had an impact on both attachment relationships and foster carer feelings of effectiveness.

## Qualitative data

### Security and trust

Across both agencies, there were numerous examples of foster carers working with great commitment to provide high standards of care for the young people. The 5 dimensions of the Secure Base model (availability, sensitivity, acceptance, co-operation and family membership) (Schofield and Beek, 2014) were used in the social worker and foster carer interviews to build a picture of the caregiving provided. In each case, there was evidence of high quality caregiving in most, or all of these dimensions. For example, key strengths were described as follows:

*The day-to-day parenting...they are relaxed with the young people, they don't have unrealistic expectations of them. I mean they have boundaries, they have*

*routines and everything but they actually let the young people be young people and they are very nurturing. They let the young people know that they are loved, and they are valued. And the carers' own (adult) young people, they absolutely have included them all into their life. (CFSW, AFA sample)*

*I think the clarity in terms of the rules within the family, and in terms of the role between the adults and the young people - who are the adults, who are the decision makers. I think the quality of the emotional warmth and the commitment, he has been embraced into their family, and he's very comfortable there. He has a great relationship with (foster father)...and they've worked very hard with (birth) mum, to facilitate communication, to promote more positive contact, and that's worked for him. (Match SSW)*

The extent to which young people were fulfilling their developmental potential was assessed through interviews with all participants. Across both samples, most young people were making good progress in their education, their emotional and behavioural difficulties were being managed or reducing, and they were enjoying a range of activities and interests.

The length of time that the young people had been in their placements varied from 13 years to less than 1 year and as would be expected, young people in the longer established placements were generally making very good progress. However, this was not always the case. Across both of the samples, some of the young people had taken off in their development after a relatively short time in their family, while others who had had long periods of stability were making less satisfactory progress at this stage in their adolescence.

One of the most troubled young people in the Match sample had previously spent a period in residential care. He received high levels of support (as did his foster carers) through the IP, along with good quality foster caregiving. Although the placement (which lasted 1 year) had some benefits for this young person, the team around him ultimately felt that he could not be kept safe enough within a family setting and he was returned to residential care. This situation reflects the difficulty, for some young people, in relinquishing risk-taking behaviour, despite very high levels of support.

The young people's interviews gave participants the opportunity to talk about their foster family relationships. Almost all responses reflected a sense of security and trust in the foster carers. For example, young people were asked to mention the people who they considered helpful in their lives. For the large majority in both samples, foster carers were the first people they mentioned, or they were mentioned within the first few names.

## Belonging and permanence

The young people's sense of belonging in the foster family was explored across all of the interviews in both samples. There were no situations where fostered young people appeared marginalised or excluded in any way from foster family life. In several cases, the young people had very close relationships with extended foster family members. They gave accounts of their full inclusion in their foster families, often highlighting shared experiences as indicators of this:

*It is, just ordinary things, we don't do anything out of the ordinary, we are normal people, we are a normal family, just because there is the word 'foster' in front of it doesn't mean anything. Yeah you know there is a back story, the foster part of it is the back story, but other than that we are just a normal family. You know I get taken to things like friend's weddings and birthday parties, and it's lovely. (Young person, AFA sample)*

Additionally, in the Match sample, some of the young people gave examples of their sense of belonging extending beyond the foster family, to include a sense of belonging to the Match agency. Match activity days were often highlighted as particularly enjoyable times and the whole Match team could provide a sense of belonging, as this young person describes:

*'Cos as soon as I came in here, as soon as I first started Match everyone has been so welcoming, caring and just been really kind, it has been like a massive home environment. Really Match is, and that is what I love about Match they are just so kind and everything. (Young person, Match sample)*

As an indicator of the young people's aspirations, and also their sense of security, the interview schedule invited them to think of 3 things that they hoped might happen when they were older. In this area, there was no variation across the 2 samples. The majority spoke of hopes connected with further education, a career, and a home and family of their own, reflecting high aspirations, a confident outlook and a sense of a secure pathway into the future. For example:

*Drive a car...if I can afford it. And make sure I get a good job and make sure I get good grades when I am at school in the sixth form. (Young person, Match sample)*

*I would like to go to Bedford or Loughborough University ...and if P.E. teaching didn't turn out which is what I really want to do, I would probably do coaching, because I like coaching in netball or it might be a sport I have never played before, I always like to try out new stuff. (Young person, AFA sample)*

However, although the majority of all participants (in both samples) spoke of the young person being supported by their foster carers through to adulthood and beyond, this understanding of permanence was not shared by all, and a small number of all participants (including social workers) spoke in terms of the young person leaving the family at 16 or 18. Uncertainty about the future is unsettling and potentially harmful to young people and this finding underlines the importance of clear understandings of the meaning of long-term foster care, agreed by all parties.

## **Carers and parents**

The capacity of foster carers to find the satisfaction in the dual roles of professional carer and committed parent and to move flexibly between these roles has been highlighted as important in meeting the needs of long-term fostered young people (Schofield *et al.*, 2013). There were foster carers across the 2 samples who recognised and valued both roles. For example, some described taking a lead role in liaising with LAC education professionals but also saw themselves firmly as ‘Mum’ or ‘Dad’ to their fostered young people.

In the Match sample, the wrap around services provided the capacity for some of the professional carer tasks to be undertaken by the specialist team members. This could be very supportive to some foster carers, creating a sense of shared responsibility and reducing some of the strain associated with caring for young people who were presenting a range of challenges. However, one participant who placed particular value on the committed parent role, expressed a preference for a model in which most issues were managed within the foster family, with additional help available on a ‘menu’ basis, if requested.

Delegated authority can empower foster carers to act as parents to the young person, as well as fulfilling their professional role. In most cases, across the 2 samples foster carers felt confident to make day-to-day decisions regarding school, health and leisure activities. The IP provided the potential for Match (rather than the CFSW) to update the delegated authority agreement flexibly and on a case-by-case basis, and this could be helpful. However, the IP did not allow for more significant decisions (such as a change of school) to be delegated outside the LA. These decisions had to remain the responsibility of the team around the young person – variously, the LA, other professional agencies, the foster carers and birth parents.

## **Quality of systemic and interagency support for the placements**

### **Reviews (Match sample)**

A key consideration for the IP was the way in which the review process would be managed, as the role and responsibilities of the IRO would remain unchanged. In outline,

the arrangements for both LAs was that the statutory process would continue to be chaired by the LA IRO, but the CFSW would not attend the review meeting. The Match social worker would provide the LA report for the young person as well as the agency report, and obtain and circulate other professional reports. In both LAs, the review arrangements required Match to have access to the LA recording systems and there were technical difficulties associated with this, leading to a good deal of frustration for Match staff.

In all cases but one, 2 reviews had occurred in the evaluation time frame and in about half of the reviews, the CFSWs had continued to attend, either as a handover arrangement, or because of a wish to continue to keep in touch with the young person or the progress of the placement. This had the potential either to be supportive or confusing to the young person and it is an issue that would need to be clarified for future reviews.

Partner LA IROs reported good quality review documentation from Match social workers for the most part, although this could vary, as was the case for their in-house placements. One IRO had found a report that linked the foster carer's parenting strategies with the impact they were having on the young person to be particularly helpful and saw it as an outcome of the Match social worker's dual role for the family. IROs considered that the importance of clear role demarcation within the IP arrangements was particularly important, as birth parents attending the review needed to feel secure and confident with the innovation. In one review it was apparent that some key professionals were uncertain of their responsibilities, underlining the importance of such details being discussed and agreed by all, prior to implementation.

Match foster carers generally reported that they felt comfortable that the Match social worker was representing the young person's interests in the review, as well as supporting them as carers. As one put it, '*she's there for all of us as a family*'. The role of the advocate was helpful in ensuring separate representation for the young person if needed.

The LA1 protocol stated that young people should be able to attend their LAC reviews, and the default venue should be the Match office. However, Match was able to be flexible in arranging reviews in a range of locations, including schools and colleges, to suit the needs and preferences of the young people. In the Match sample, the advocate consulted with the young people before their reviews and supported them at the meeting, and this had worked well, as this young person described:

*If I can't get my point across she helps me with that... she went with me [to my review] I wanted to say something and she brought it up and put my view across and now I'm allowed to do it that's why I think she is a really good help. (Match young person)*

## Reviews (AFA sample)

In the comparison sample, review attendance and report writing was managed in the conventional way. SSWs usually attended the review, but with a clear focus on the carers – helping them to articulate what had happened in the review period, to express difficult issues clearly, and to support their perspective and needs if necessary. Foster carers were glad to have this focused support, especially if they were less experienced.

In this group, CFSWs took the consultation, support/feedback role for the young people. However, difficulties arose when there were frequent changes of social worker, sometimes coinciding with a change of IRO. One foster carer reported her own frustration and her sadness on behalf of her young person at having to start from scratch with information sharing, at almost every review. As this young person poignantly put it:

*I feel like a book that everyone has made a start on, but no one can be bothered to put the effort into reading properly.* (AFA young person)

In this sample, as in the Match sample, there was flexibility in terms of venue and attendance of reviews, and this could work well. For example, 2 siblings enjoyed having their reviews at school, after the school day, as their experience of school was very positive and the attendance of 2 particularly supportive teachers was much valued.

## Support services (Match sample)

The IP funding included the provision of specialist wrap-around services in relation to health, education and psychology. Additionally, fostering support workers were available as needed.

For all foster families in the IP, the health and education advisors did introductory visits to the foster carers and then became involved as needed. The health advisor did annual health reviews, leading to these being up to date for all the young people in the sample (this was also the case in the comparison sample). She also provided advice on specific issues (such as smoking and sexual health) to foster carers and young people.

The education advisor provided support with managing the education system, as well as one-to-one education support, both in the classroom and at home. Young people responded positively to these inputs. They regarded the 2 advisors as part of the Match team, with which they already had a positive connection. The majority of the foster carers also welcomed this back-up.



The commissioned psychology service provided an initial consultation for all the foster carers in the IP, followed by an assessment of each young person, with an individualised plan of work following on from this. Most of the ongoing work had been with foster carers only (consultation regarding behaviour difficulties and in one case, personal counselling). Foster carers very much valued this input, and gave examples of better understandings and successful approaches having been recommended. One young person was receiving ongoing one-to-one help.

The majority of foster carers and staff were highly appreciative of the swift response of the psychology team, although in one case, there had been delay in accessing an ongoing service after the initial assessment, due to geographical and venue difficulties. LA managers were also appreciative of these services which might not otherwise have been so readily available. Managers also stated that it was important to have a clear, documented rationale for such services and a definition of the intervention and expected outcomes. This did not always occur, both within the IP cases, and when the LA commissioned services from external agencies.

Some young people were reluctant to engage with the psychology service, and the commissioning of a specialist play therapist for teenagers, felt to be more appropriate and acceptable to these young people, reflects a flexible response from Match.

Fostering support workers were an especially valued resource. All of the Match sample families had had input from a fostering support worker at some stage, and most young people had ongoing support from these workers. They undertook a wide range of tasks, including babysitting, transporting young people to school and groups, and individual sessions of Life Story Work, self-esteem building, and so on. They had close, trusting relationships with the young people and were often able to pick up on difficulties (for example internet safety) at an early stage.

Taken as a whole, the wrap around services provided a comprehensive network of support, readily available and adaptable to a wide range of needs. The large majority of the foster carers and staff valued this element of the IP enormously, feeling that the young people's needs were complex and it was important to have the whole range of input flexibly available.

However, there was also a view that there could be too many professionals involved in the foster family and this could become confusing to the young person and overwhelming to the household. Young people in the Match sample were receiving support from between 3 and 8 professionals, including their Match social workers, with an average of 4.5 for each young person. However, it should be noted that the SDQ scores indicated that the Match sample had a high level of difficulties and these were being addressed through the range of additional services available.

## Support services (AFA sample)

AFA did not provide any additional services directly. In this sample, young people had between 2 and 4 professionals working with them (including the SSW and their CFSW), with an average of 2.5 for each young person. SDQ general difficulties scores were slightly lower in this sample. In all cases where a comparison group participant reported that a specialist service was needed, an appropriate service had either been provided or was planned to be provided

For young people in the AFA sample who needed psychological support, experiences were varied. Some had received helpful input from CAMHS within a reasonable time frame. One foster carer reported an unsatisfactory, stop/start CAMHS service, but felt that high social worker turnover had contributed to this. For some young people who were felt not to meet the CAMHS threshold, private services had been commissioned by the LA, although the process of obtaining funding could sometimes be lengthy. AFA also worked in partnership with a specialist psychology service and they could access this promptly on behalf of the LA, if agreed.

## The experience of the delegation of statutory duties

Interviews with Match participants and interviews and focus groups with staff from partner LAs explored their experiences of the delegation of statutory duties to date. In the AFA comparison agency, there was a hypothetical discussion in interviews with AFA staff and interviews / a focus group with placing LA staff about how this might work and be experienced.

## Match social workers and managers

Match social workers and managers, on the whole, were enthusiastic about their new role for foster carers and young people, feeling that it enhanced the quality of their work and their job satisfaction. There was a view that the IP had enabled them to provide a more reliable service to the foster carers and young people than would previously been available, and also a service that could helpfully address the whole family system:

*It's much more holistic, it's about working with the whole family together and seeing how they all inter-relate, so although they all have their own sessions, we can then look at how that works out in the household. (Match manager)*

The presence of a flexible, coordinated, multi-disciplinary team around the young person was experienced as a real improvement in practice. One worker stated that it enabled the young people and carers to feel truly part of the 'Match family' and so the young people could be more comfortable with the experience of being in care and the inevitable systems around this.

The social workers spoke of the high level of contact they were having with the young people and how well they knew them, and felt this to be a great advantage, both for supporting the placement and for planning for the future. This personal knowledge could be enhanced by full access to the young person's LA file – something which was not readily available for non-IP young people.

One worker felt that implementation difficulties had impeded the proper development of her role and so the experience had been less positive, although there was potential for this to improve.

For all of the social workers, the issue of representing the perspectives of both the young person and the foster carers was felt to be manageable – although they had to be mindful of confidentiality and there were challenges in a particular situation where the foster carers and the young person had differing views on an important education issue. This issue was resolved satisfactorily, and the roles of the advocate and other professionals were important in ensuring that the young person's needs were met and their wishes and feelings were taken into account. Match managers ensured that the foster carers were able to express their views openly, through a focused meeting which addressed their perspective and developed a support plan for them.

### **Match foster carers**

Match foster carers reported mostly positively on their experiences of the delegation of statutory duties. Some (but not all) had previously had difficult experiences of CFSWs who appeared to be over-stretched and finding it hard to do their work effectively, or of high social worker turnover. For these carers, it was reassuring to feel that their trusted, and more readily available SSW would also be working closely with the young person.

When the role was established, most foster carers reported that the Match social worker could work positively with both the young person and themselves, and they did not perceive a conflict of interest. Sometimes the worker could act as a mediator in both directions – helping them to understand the young person's perspective more clearly, and vice versa.

When young people had had consistent, trusted CFSWs, Match foster carers could also see the value of their clear focus on the young person. There was one comment that the ideal would be to have a CFSW for the young person – but only on the condition that they were going to be reasonably consistent. Additionally, there was a view that it could be harder to offload frustrations about caring for the young person to a social worker who was also there for the young person.

## Match young people

The young people's experiences of delegated statutory duties were entirely positive. They all enjoyed the Match ethos of friendliness, approachability, shared activities and experiences and so extending this to having their own Match social worker felt good for them. They also liked having one person to relate to, rather than information having to be passed to someone else. For instance:

*It's like then I know we're all close together... I don't feel annoyed like when there was a different social worker to come round and explain stuff to (foster mother)... Like, if there's inappropriate things been said about me on Facebook or something, then those messages can be sent to the one social worker... so it's just easier to have just the one. (Match young person)*

## AFA SSWs and managers

Managers and SSWs in the AFA sample had mixed views on the idea of delegation of statutory duties. Many felt that taking on these duties could make processes of decision-making, review and delegated authority simpler, more responsive and time effective. Additionally, a holistic approach to the whole family could feel beneficial, especially in long-term placements, where the single worker approach could underline and strengthen the family unit. It could also provide more consistency for young people and this would be welcomed by foster carers.

However, there were also some reservations. SSWs felt that an important part of their role was to help foster carers to offload their complex experiences of troubled young people. This enabled them to work through things and be re-energised. There were concerns that the SSW's dual responsibility for the young person might impede foster carers in this helpful process.

## LAC managers, IROs and social workers (AFA young people)

None of these professionals wholeheartedly supported the idea of delegated statutory duties. There was a general view that looked after young people should have a direct link, through their social worker, with the organisation that holds accountability for them. Professionals from all groups highlighted the potential conflict of interest if the placement ran into difficulties or if the young person made allegations against the foster carers. At these times, it was felt that the importance of the separate CFSW and SSW roles is heightened, with 2 sets of needs, decisions and procedures to be addressed. The CFSW may also have siblings from the same family but in different placements on their caseload, so work with the whole birth family was valuable.

However, some LAC professionals felt that in some long standing and settled placements, there could be merit in the SSW undertaking statutory visits, with the CFSW taking a case management role, whether this be within the LA or in an IFP. This could help to normalise the care experience of the young person and reduce the level of visiting to the household. This approach would be close to that anticipated by the new long-term foster care regulations and guidance (DfE, 2015) for stable, long-term placements.

## **AFA foster carers**

Several of the AFA foster carers supported the idea of delegated statutory duties, feeling that it would reduce the number of professionals visiting the household and overcome the problems associated with high CFSW turnover. However, several mentioned that they valued the dedicated support of their SSW and would not wish this to be compromised. Some also mentioned the importance of the independent position of the CFSW, feeling that independent representation for the young person was very important.

## **AFA young people**

The young people in the comparison sample were divided in their views of delegated statutory duties. Younger children tended to like the idea, feeling that it would save them having to talk to another person and there would be less people visiting the family. Older teenagers shared these views but also highlighted the potential conflict of interest, as this young man explains:

*You wouldn't really trust them, would you if they were also someone else's social worker and that person was the problem why they weren't happy or something. You wouldn't really trust them or you couldn't really tell them why you was unhappy... But also for the long-term families it could be a lot easier, 'cos you get it all over and done with in one day. So there's disadvantages and advantages of it. For someone who maybe wasn't settled and wasn't doing so well, you can see that there could be drawbacks. [Young person, AFA sample]*

One young woman, although happy and secure in her placement, described the additional security that having a social worker had provided for her:

*You may not think about it directly, but sub-consciously you think I have got a social worker, you know and things are going to be alright, somebody is looking out for me, other than the people that I live with. [Young person, AFA sample]*

Overall, there was a shared feeling amongst all participants in the comparison sample that, when the system works well and young people's social workers are fairly consistent, there are advantages in having 2 professionals with different but complementary skills and approaches, providing additional checks and balances to ensure the young person's safety and well-being.

The role of the advocate in the IP was explained to all participants. Some felt that this mitigated some of the above risks. Others felt that this did not reduce the number of professionals involved and there would be limitations as this person would have no statutory responsibilities and would have to refer back to the LA.

## **Extent to which the project achieved its intended outcomes**

In view of the reduced sample size and timescale of the full implementation, the longer-term outcomes of the innovation cannot be meaningfully assessed. However, the evaluation identified the following indicators of short-term outcomes which may merit consideration and further exploration:

- The IP sample young people had a consistent social worker, the Match SSW, through the project period and this contributed to the aim of providing young people with the opportunity to form relationships with their social workers. In the comparison agency, some young people had consistent CFSWs but others did not.
- Swift access to the wrap around services (funded by the IP) meant that there were examples of timely access to services in the Match sample. Young people and carers in the comparison sample sometimes had to wait longer and their CFSWs had to follow more detailed procedures to obtain funding and services.
- Most Match participants reported that the wrap-around services improved young people's care journeys and they were highly valued by most foster carers. A minority commented that the number of professionals involved could feel overwhelming at times.
- The IP allowed the Match workers to make some contact-related decisions (e.g. contact venue) directly, according to the young person's needs, and they had ready access to funding from the IP in order to do so. This kind of timely access to services was sometimes possible in the comparison agency but was less likely when LA funding decisions were required.
- An intended outcome of the IP was to achieve a better experience for social workers and foster carers. Across both samples, there was a high level of professional satisfaction amongst the SSWs and foster carers. Match social workers expressed additional satisfaction in working holistically with the whole foster family.
- The advocacy service worked well for most young people and carers. There were some concerns regarding overlap with the social worker role.
- Across both samples, foster carers felt appropriately empowered to act as 'parent', through the delegation of authority arrangements. Foster carers in the IP reported

swifter decision-making when only their Match social worker needed to be involved. However, since the LA remained the corporate parent under the IP arrangements, certain key decisions (e.g. choice of School) had to be referred to the LA or discussed in a LAC review in both agencies.

- LA managers in the IP sample reported on the value of readily accessible specialist services, indicating progress towards the outcome of a better experience for the local authority. However, LA managers also reported challenges connected to the delegation of statutory duties whilst remaining accountable as the corporate parent of the young people.
- The costs for Match of carrying out delegated statutory duties appeared similar to those estimated for LAs to carry out the same duties. However, there were indicators that, compared to LAs, Match was providing some additional services and spending some additional time on some tasks, thus offering some value for money.

## **Meeting the Innovation Programme's objectives**

The extent to which this innovation met the longer-term objectives of the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme could not be assessed within the evaluation period. However, the innovation (combined with the evaluation process which also gathered data from the comparison site) raised some important issues for delivering support in long-term foster care, which are relevant to some of the Innovation Programme objectives. These issues are as follows:

### **Value for money across young people's social care**

#### **Cost of delegated statutory duties**

Match hoped, in the longer term, to be able to deliver statutory duties at significantly lower cost than the fully allocated unit cost incurred by LAs to deliver the same service, although it was additional expenditure.

The intended savings were assessed as follows:

- Match SSWs were already required (as part of agency policy) to see children monthly. They were considered unlikely to incur extra time to travel to visit the placement and only slightly extended visiting time for more specific work with the child. They would be already familiar with the background, context and dynamics of the foster family through established professional relationships. CFSWs would require time to build or maintain relationships and familiarise themselves with these changing factors.



- Match workers would spend less time on liaison and communication as the majority of the team around the child, i.e. social workers and specialist services, were employed within Match.
- Management and supervision were already in place for each placement and extending this slightly would require few extra resources.
- The key additional cost of the delegation of statutory duties was the provision of the independent advocate. However, the time cost for this person was less than the time cost for a qualified CFSW.

Match calculated delegated statutory duties to be costed at an average of £50.08 per week per child (Table 2, Appendix 2). This includes advocacy provision commissioned at a cost of £8.46 per child per week (with no overhead costs). It is important to note that average cost estimates are problematic as there can be significant variations between individual cases due to factors such as location and placement difficulties. As shown in the quantitative data, the young people in the IP scored toward the more difficult end of the SDQ scale. It might be assumed that with a greater variation of young people and with social worker roles established over time, the average costs would be reduced.

As a comparison, the findings of a calculator of estimated costs for LA social workers and support workers undertaking statutory duties for children in care (Holmes et al., 2014) are shown in Table 3, Appendix 2. This cost does not include advocacy which is likely to be commissioned or provided on a needs-led basis for young people with specific issues rather than proactively for all as provided by Match. It should be noted that the categories used by Match are not directly comparable with this cost calculator: Match includes additional categories and additional time allocated to some tasks. These additions were felt to be necessary during the early stages of the IP.

Overall, costs of the delegation of statutory duties did not show financial savings in the short time span of this project. Costs to Match were similar to those of LAs undertaking the duties, although Match were providing some additional categories including an advocacy service for each young person and additional time allowed for some tasks, thus offering additional value for money.

### **Cost of wrap-around services**

Although for the project children the in-house wrap-around services were funded through the IP at this initial stage, these costs were eventually planned to be absorbed by Match, within their standard placement fee. This cost to the agency was seen both as worthwhile in itself, and also as potentially financially beneficial in the longer term as it could lead to a reduction of problems in placements. However, the actual costs for fostering support work, health and education support (including administration) during the course of the IP were assessed as £22.86 per young person per week (based on an average of around 6 hours of total support per young person per week). The cost of the



commissioned psychology service was an additional £58 per week (based on an average of around 0.58 hours of total support per young person per week), making a total of £80.86 per week per young person for all wrap-around services (Table 4, Appendix 2).

Projected costs have also been calculated for wrap-around service provision over the course of a year for a cohort of 50 young people, assuming that psychology would not be used so consistently or intensely over a longer time period with a larger, more varied group. The total costs for all wrap-around service provision in this scenario were projected to be £32.55 per young person per year. This includes an allowance of around 5 hours of psychology for each young person over the year, and a maximum spend of £25,000 for the year for psychology. (Table 5, Appendix 2).

Similar additional support for looked after children in general may be obtainable through traditional local authority routes. Health and education support such as through school nurses and virtual head teacher roles may be available with costs covered by relevant LA departments. Fostering support workers may be available depending on fostering services department structure. A variety of psychological support may be available at different costs depending on local services and qualifications of the provider. If children are accepted onto a local CAMHS service there will be no cost to the children's services. However, these services are offered with a wide range of thresholds, promptness, intensity and cost. This variation means that it is not possible to accurately assess the costs of providing these services through the LA.

## **Professional practice and methods in social care**

The innovation and evaluation highlighted the importance of the role of SSWs in promoting high quality foster care. They have a dual function of enabling and supporting foster carers to provide therapeutic caregiving, and also monitoring the quality of this caregiving and ensuring that it is compliant with the policies and standards of the care system. Focus groups and interviews highlighted that this is a specialist role, with a distinct knowledge base and skills. Foster carers placed a high value on this service, as a source of both personal and professional support.

Similarly, it was highlighted that the role of the CFSW is specialised and has its own set of knowledge and skills. CFSWs have a dual role for the young person. This is to monitor and manage the young person's journey through the care system and also to form a relationship with the young person that enables them to assess the young person's development and their wishes and feelings in key areas of their life. When CFSWs were reasonably consistent and available, their role was valued by both foster carers and young people.

The IP explored the possibility in an independent fostering provider of combining the 2 roles of SSW and CFSW, with the combined service delivered by the SSW (Match SSWs

recruited for the IP had recent experience of the CFSW role). There were indicators that, in practice terms, joining the roles could work well for some young people and their foster carers, although some misgivings were expressed in both samples. The evaluation examined the nature of the 2 roles in some depth and this feeds into the discussion of how they might be combined or separated in different ways to meet the needs of the range of young people who are growing up in foster care

The combined role raised the question of the independent representation of the young person's wishes and feelings and the IP used an independent advocacy service to manage this issue. This was valued by some participants (professionals, foster carers and young people) but for others (from each of these groups) it felt unnecessary. This suggests that when statutory duties are delegated, it might be advisable for advocacy services to be used flexibly, as part of a support package for some (but not all) young people.

Match managers reported the following additional benefits of the IP:

- The innovation provided the opportunity to develop a model of relationship-based social work in which SSWs were supported and expected to build close, trusting relationships with young people. This has subsequently proved beneficial in supporting several of the young people through periods of more intensive need.
- Close SSW and young person relationships also allowed for young people's needs to be identified alongside the young person and their foster carer, with direct decisions then being made regarding access to services, and more intensive interventions occurring when necessary.
- The IP has raised the profile of long-term foster care and promoted interest, positive conversations and further innovative ideas in this area of practice

The evaluation indicates that there is more to learn about the potential of this innovative model of support for long-term foster care in the independent sector - but also within LAs in relation to the roles of SSWs and CFSWs. In both settings there is scope for further exploration of the different ways in which the roles might be combined, according to the individualised needs and preferences of young people and their foster carers.

## **Organisational and workforce culture in social care**

The organisational cultures of Match and AFA varied a little but both were successful in providing a high quality of service to both the foster carers and the young people. Key features were:

- Manageable caseloads. Although Match caseloads were somewhat lower than those of AFA, workloads in both agencies meant that social workers had time to focus on the needs of each of their foster families. There was no formal or informal

prioritisation and all families received the same level of service, with the potential for this to be enhanced when there were additional needs.

- A responsive service. Foster carers in both agencies placed high value on the availability and responsiveness of their SSWs. In the IP cases, this availability also transferred to the work with the young people. This level of availability was partly due to 2 elements of workforce culture which were strong in both agencies: a sharp focus on supporting foster carers to provide the best possible care for their young people, and the willingness (and availability) of managers and colleagues to assist or cover when there were difficulties in a placement. A responsive service was also facilitated by manageable caseloads.
- A multi-disciplinary team approach. In the Match agency, there was a team approach to supporting foster families and the Match team, including specialist workers, was the primary professional team around the young person. This had the advantage of easy access to services and close communication between professionals. It also carried potential risk if there was overlap or communication difficulties with the wider health, education and other specialist services. In AFA, foster carer support began with the SSW, with AFA positioning itself as part of the wider team around the young person, including CFSW, health, education, CAHMS and private therapeutic services. This did not have the advantage of routinely swift access to specialist services. Both models were experienced as supportive by foster carers.

## **Young people and families' perception of service quality**

Foster carers in both samples perceived that the service they were receiving from their fostering agencies was of extremely high quality. Most Match carers felt that the IP arrangements had enhanced their experience of support. Match young people identified strongly with the Match agency, and the IP arrangements enhanced their sense of inclusion in the 'Match family'. AFA young people did not share this strong identification with the agency, although all had a positive connection with the agency SSW. For young people in long-term foster care it would be hoped that their foster family was the key source of support – and this was reflected in the young peoples' interviews in both samples.

There were mixed views, across both samples, of the service received from CFSWs, with high turnover being the problematic issue for most, rather than the quality of the work done by these workers. Most of the families who received the innovation felt that they and their young people were receiving a better quality of service than had previously been available as they had swift access to a range of specialist services, and the young person was likely to have the consistent involvement of the known and trusted Match social worker. Nevertheless, two of the Match placements were in difficulties at some

point during the implementation period - so it is important to consider the importance of outcomes over a longer period, as well as perceptions of participants, in order to evaluate the innovation.

## **Local leadership and governance**

Although advantageous in many ways, the location of the innovation in the independent sector presented particular challenges for LAs. Although LAs may choose to delegate some of their functions, they must retain accountability, as corporate parent, for each of their looked after young people. The delegation of statutory duties to an IFP, which had not previously had these formal and direct responsibilities for young people, raised appropriate questions which posed challenges for the LAs and for Match, both in the planning stages and as new issues and questions arose over time. The LA staff, especially LAC team managers, expressed a strong sense of concern and moral responsibility for the young people in their care placed with Match under the IP: corporate parenting is not just a bureaucratic concept but a very personal as well as professional commitment by the social workers involved. Any future development of the principles of this innovation in the independent sector would need to take into account the inherent difficulties for LAs of retaining accountability without line management oversight.

## **National systemic conditions**

The innovation has highlighted the relevance of particular elements of the revised Statutory Guidance for permanence and long-term foster placements (DfE 2015). This guidance recommends that appropriate and flexible visiting and review arrangements are made, with a minimum of twice yearly visits, and a twice yearly review process but with the possibility of holding just one annual review meeting. All these arrangements must be 'determined by the circumstances of the case' (p.8), and in particular the wishes and feelings of the young person. The evaluation noted a variety of circumstances in the long-term foster care placements in which a range of visiting and review arrangements might have been appropriate and agreed. But it was not clear whether the possibilities created by the new regulations and guidance were being taken into account. Different combinations of SSW and CFSW involvement might contribute positively to a flexible model of visiting and placement review.

## **Incentives and mechanisms for innovation, experimentation and replication**

This project provided an opportunity to undertake some important preliminary investigation into a genuinely innovative (in the UK) model of social work support for long-term foster care. Such investigation might not have been possible without the structure and funding of the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. It has

provided important information about supporting long-term foster care, as well as a foundation for possible testing out of elements of the innovation in the independent sector or within LA Children's Services.

## **Barriers to the innovation**

There was an initial delay in getting the IP off the ground. There was uncertainty about whether Match would be required to register with Ofsted as a provider of social work services due to the intermittent progress of the de-regulation bill. Consequently, the LAs were unable to enter into agreements and define protocols before April 2015, meaning the IP could not formally start as early as expected. As a consequence, the IP formally started at the end of May 2015.

As discussed elsewhere, the innovation was limited by difficulties with LA participation in the early stages. It was challenging for Match, as a small IFP, to promote partnerships with large LAs and Match managers reflected that they would have valued more official support with this. This barrier resulted in a small, unselected sample and a short period of implementation within the funding period. This situation might have been eased by a developmental first phase of the project. During this phase, important groundwork with LA partners might have been undertaken. This could include the sharing of hopes and concerns of all parties, the discussion and drafting of detailed protocols to cover all aspects of the delegation of statutory duties and the selection of a sample of young people for whom the innovation appeared to be appropriate and helpful.

This phase could also include discussion and documenting of roles and responsibilities with key professionals from the wider team around the young person. The development phase would aim to build trust and mutual understanding, leading to LAs signing agreements to participate on the basis of all parties feeling that this would be in the best interests of the specific young people involved. In addition, even in the context of mutual trust and clear protocols having been established, it would be important to review systemic processes and corporate parenting responsibilities on an ongoing basis as unforeseen circumstances, including staff changes, can arise at any stage of an individual placement.

Match managers have noted actual and potential benefits of the IP, and have received some positive feedback from the participating LAs. However, after careful consideration, in early 2016 they took the decision not to offer an extension of the delegated statutory duties arrangements to the partner or other LAs beyond the end of March 2016. The Match agency does, however, plan to provide wrap-around support services on an ongoing basis, to all of their placements, with no additional charge to LAs.

The key reason for the decision to cease the delegated statutory duties element of the IP was the uncertainty of the existing and any future LA partnerships. Match managers perceived that this uncertainty was due to changes of staff within LAs and varying degrees of commitment to the project within the relevant LA staff members. They also felt that there was ongoing risk of uncertainty with regard to these and any future LA partnerships and that this would be very difficult for their staff, carers and young people to manage. In February 2016, the managers moved into the transition phase of the project and so it was not possible for them to revisit the decision to end the project in the light of the DfE announcement (in March 2016) that bids for further funding could be considered.

LAs gave some positive feedback to the evaluation team but also expressed concerns about how well the implementation had worked for some of their young people. So it seems that there would be agreement that the setting up of the delegation aspects of the model could be improved in a future pilot, including less time pressure on both parties.

## **Facilitators to the innovation**

From the outset, the innovation was facilitated by the approach of the Match managers, including the specially recruited project manager for the innovation, who were committed, energetic, and determined to overcome obstacles. At the same time, they were responsive to the concerns of the partner LAs. For example, they were sensitive to the reasons behind the requirement for CFSWs to maintain an ongoing presence in some of the cases. Match managers also worked hard at communication with LAs, for example, travelling for face-to-face meetings when questions arose, rather than simply using the phone or e-mail.

Match staff were also committed to the innovation from the outset and willing to go the extra mile to ensure a high quality of service to all families, both within and outside the IP. The flat hierarchy and focused agenda of Match, as a small IFP, may have been conducive to a shared positive approach to the innovation within the agency.

A further facilitating factor may have been that the shift to the innovation was in some respects not so very different from much current practice, for example, Match's close involvement with the young people and active interest in their welfare. This was also seen in the comparison agency.

Within the LAs, a key facilitator appeared to be the motivation of specific senior managers, who had pre-existing knowledge of the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme and therefore a more informed position from which to drive things forward. These managers made particular efforts to inform and engage staff and to work towards a signed agreement with Match. The IROs were also willing to manage what was a new

and sometimes complex reviewing process - in some cases with a Match SSW, advocate and CFSW all offering views on the welfare and wishes and feelings of the child.



## 5. Limitations of the evaluation and future evaluation

### Limitations of the evaluation and key findings

A key challenge for the evaluation was the initial expectation of all parties that the effectiveness of the innovation could be formally evaluated during the one-year timeframe. This might have been possible with a programme which had been previously developed and piloted, but the Match project was genuinely innovative and therefore would ideally have had a development phase prior to implementation. In the event, the agency spent a large proportion of the project period working on LA engagement and project development issues.

Within the early stages of the evaluation period, therefore, it became apparent that the evaluation would need to focus on the *process* of developing and implementing the innovation, rather than its impact and outcomes. Nevertheless, this area of enquiry yielded some important lessons for supporting long-term foster care, in both the independent and public sectors.

A further challenge for the evaluation was that when the IP sample was identified, it was small and included some young people who had long-term fostering as a permanence plan alongside other possibilities and 2 who were presenting challenging or risk-taking behaviours. The evaluation, therefore, could not address the impact of delegated statutory duties on a key target group – that is, young people with a confirmed care plan for long-term fostering and who were not presenting more extreme challenges in their placements. However, the data that was available from the IP sample, combined with the data from the comparison group (who were all in confirmed long-term placements) provided some important indicators of the conditions in which the principles of the innovation might be successfully applied in the future.

### The appropriateness of the evaluative approach

The evaluative approach seemed appropriate, within the circumstances outlined above. In particular, having such a similar comparison agency allowed the study to identify good practice across both agencies and also to distinguish some of the key issues raised by the IP.

### Capacity for future evaluation

The Match managers took the decision not to extend the delegation of statutory duties element of the IP beyond the pilot period up to the end of March 2016, for reasons discussed above. One of the 8 placements had ended. Support arrangements for the



remaining 7 young people still placed with Match reverted to a LA CFSW, with the SSWs returning to their previous specific role of supporting carers. There is, therefore, no further opportunity for the agency to evaluate the impact of this element of the IP for this sample of young people and their carers. Match managers plan to continue to provide wrap-around services, as agreed by the responsible LAs, for the sample young people and all other young people in their placements, and to monitor outcomes internally.

## 6. Implications and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

As discussed above, the Match IP will not continue beyond the funding period. The short period of time for which the innovation was in operation (10 months for the children from LA1 and 7 months for those from LA2) and the size of the sample (8 children in 5 households) have meant that it has not been possible to undertake an evaluation of the *outcomes* of the innovation.

However, the implementation of the innovation has raised very interesting questions about practice in supporting long-term fostering placements in the independent sector that have implications for policy and practice and merit further consideration:

- The possibility of the delegation of statutory duties in relation to the CFSW role from the LA to the IFP has implications for the process of commissioning IFP long-term foster care placements. This evaluation suggests that if this were to be further piloted, there would not only need to be care taken over contracts and protocols, but it would also be necessary to consider this arrangement on a case by case basis. Not all children placed by an LA in an IFP would necessarily be in the right position to benefit from the delegated model, e.g. where the placement was not fully confirmed as long-term or where the child's CFSW was positively involved.
- Delegation might also be best seen as a flexible arrangement. It was clear from cases in the comparison agency that it was possible for an IFP to take on active responsibilities for the welfare of the child without formal delegation of statutory duties. This was also, we believed, the case for Match cases not in the IP. This flexibility is supported by the revised statutory guidance on permanence and long-term foster care (DfE 2015). A reduction in statutory visiting by the child's CFSW could be argued, with the SSW being one of the safeguards for the child.
- If statutory duties are delegated to an IFA, an advocacy service can be helpful in ensuring that young people's wishes and feelings are independently represented. However, the addition of the advocate meant that IP children did not have fewer professionals involved in their lives as was an aim of the project. Any further piloting should take into account the individual needs and preferences of the young person and the strength of the existing network of trusted adults around them.
- The key advantage of the provision of wrap-around services within a small IFA could be swift access to a range of services which could be delivered flexibly and tailored to individual needs. The costs involved in providing in-house specialist services in the IFP would need to be considered. Careful attention would also need to be paid to issues of overlap and communication with wider health,

education and CAMHS services. These issues could be addressed through discussion and agreed protocols prior to implementation.

- The IP combined the provision of specialist services and the delegation of statutory duties into a single package. It would be possible to pilot the delegation of statutory duties as a stand-alone innovation, without the provision of in-house specialist services. This would provide a clearer picture of the particular advantages and drawbacks of this structural change. It would also allow for a clearer focus on the advantages and drawbacks of reducing the number or changing the profile of professionals involved in the foster family.
- The dual role of the SSW in supporting carers and children in long-term placements appears to have potential benefits for children and carers in some cases. This could also be piloted in LAs. If statutory visiting to the child were to be undertaken by a fostering team within a LA, the transfer of this duty would be more straightforward than in an IFP. There are significant training and supervision implications for fostering staff, and the need for clear agreement about roles and responsibilities, to ensure a high quality of service to both children and carers. Placements could be put at risk if foster carers or young people were to feel that their own specific support systems were compromised.

## Conclusion

The case made by Match for this innovation was based on the aim of improving outcomes for children in long-term placements by focusing decision making and services within their own organisation and closer to the child. There would seem to be potential for further piloting of elements of this innovation within the range of commissioned long-term fostering placements in the independent sector.

The revised guidance for long-term foster care (DfE 2015) has provided a useful framework for allowing flexibility in how services are delivered to young people who will remain in their foster family through to adulthood. This project suggests that this is a timely opportunity to develop a more effective and well-supported long-term foster care practice model, for placements within both independent fostering agencies and local authorities.

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## Appendix 1 – Theory of Change



# MATCH - Theory of Change



## Appendix 2 – Figures and tables

Figure 1

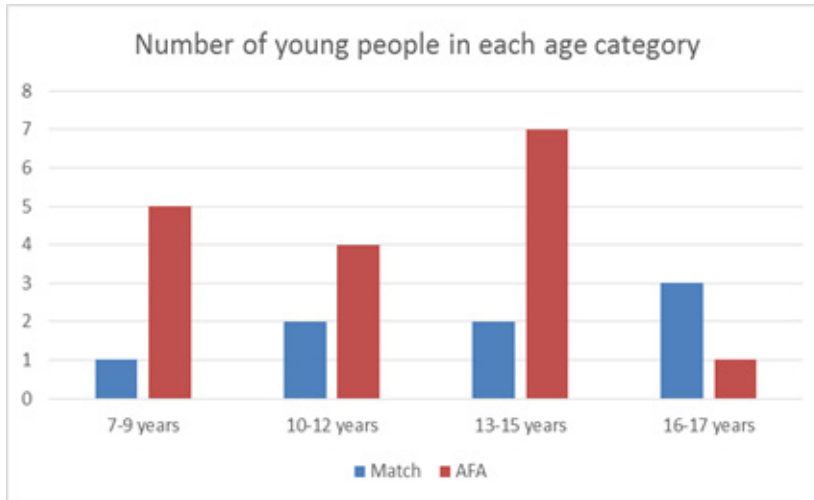


Figure 2

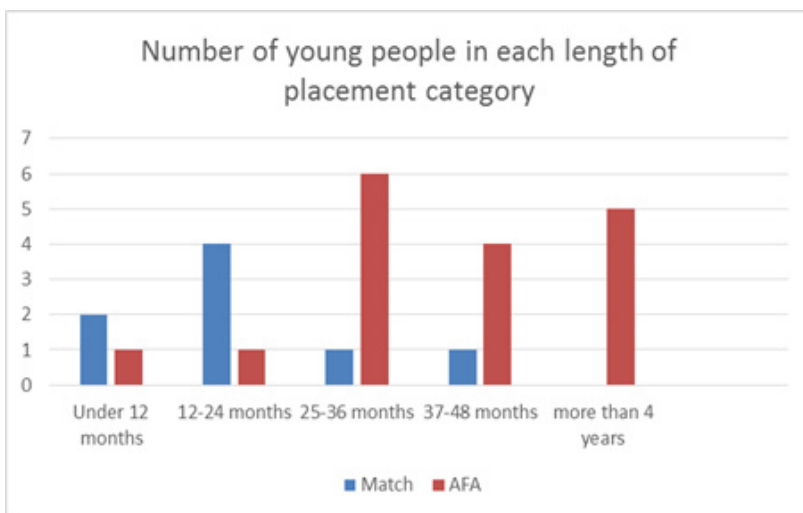
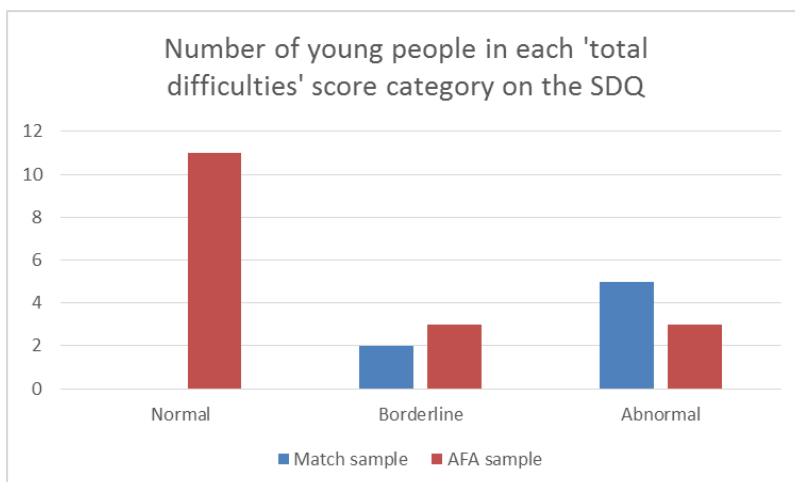
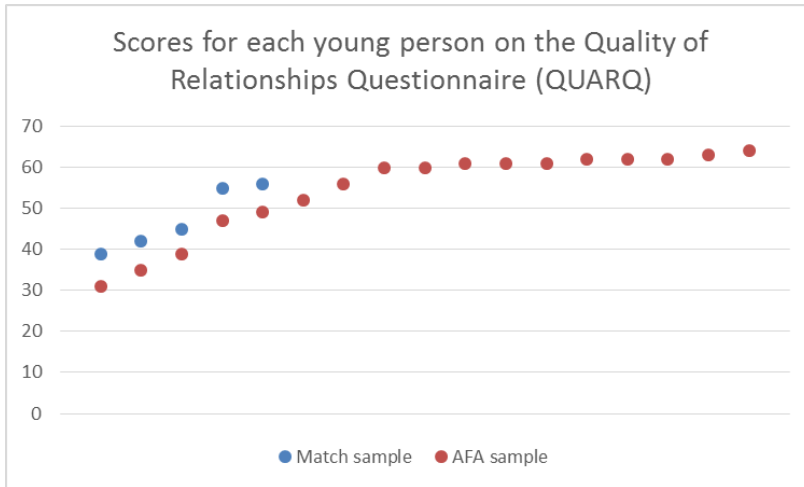


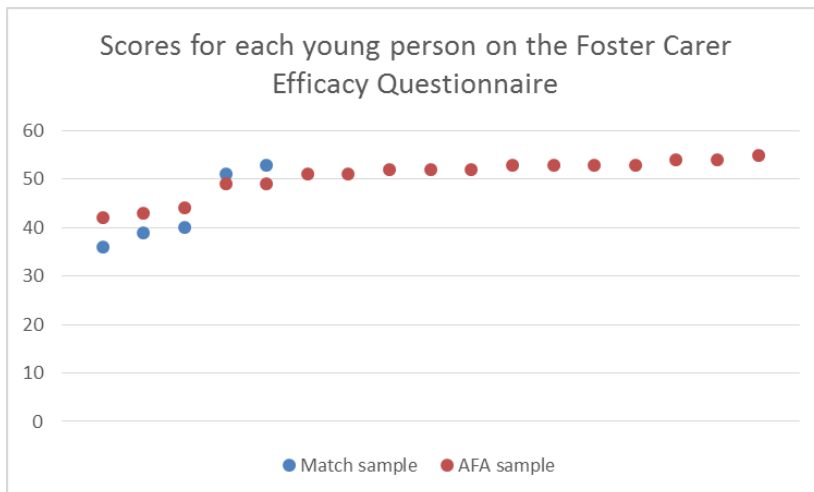
Figure 3



**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**





**Table 1**

Number of people interviewed	Match	AFA
Foster carers	9	17
SSWs	3	5
Young people	5	16
Specialist staff	9 (Time 1) 11 (Time 2)	0
IFA managers	3 (Time 1) 3 (Time 2)	2 (Time 1) 3 (Time 2)

**Table 2**

Costs for Match undertaking statutory duties per child in care in addition to supervision of foster carers

Delegated Authority Statutory Duties	Professional involved	Hours per Month	Hours per Week	Cost per Hour	Cost per Week
Statutory visit ( <i>included in standard IFA placement monthly supervision visit to child</i> )	Social worker	0	0.00	£17.69	£0.00
Care Planning	Social worker	2	0.46	£17.69	£8.16
Child in care report/Pathway plan	Social worker	2	0.46	£17.69	£8.16
Meeting Planning & Management	Social worker	2	0.46	£17.69	£8.16
Supervising Contact	Support worker	2	0.46	£10.62	£4.90
Planning & management of Contact	Social worker	2	0.46	£17.69	£8.16
Training/registrations/DBS checks ( <i>No additional cost included as standard</i> )	Various				£0.00
IT/Upload on to LA systems	Social worker	1	0.23	£17.69	£4.08
Management & Supervision costs ( <i>No additional cost included as standard</i> )	Various	0			£0.00
Advocacy	Commissioned from Barnardo's	2.08	0.48	£17.63	£8.46
<b>Statutory duties total cost per child per week</b>					<b>£50.08</b>

**Table 3**

Estimate of costs for CFSWs and support workers undertaking statutory duties per child in care (based on case load of 15 children) <sup>2</sup>

Delegated Authority Statutory Duties	Professional involved	Hours per Month	Hours per Week	Cost per Hour	Cost per Week
Maintaining the Placement/Statutory visit	Social worker	1.5	0.35	£22.11	£7.65
After the review; Care Planning	Social worker	1.19	0.27	£22.11	£6.07
Child in care report/Pathway plan	Social worker	1.2	0.28	£22.11	£6.12
Supervising Contact	Support worker	2	0.46	£12.97	£5.99
IT/Upload on to LA systems	Admin worker	3	0.69	£11.80	£8.17
Management & Supervision costs	Supervisory roles	2	0.46	£35.57	£16.42
<b>Statutory duties total cost per child per week</b>					<b>£50.42<sup>3</sup></b>

**Table 4**

Costs for Match provision of wrap-around services for young people during the course of the IP

Role	Overall costs	Hours per Month	Hours per Week	Cost per Hour	Cost per Week
Health worker	25K annual salary + 15% on costs average	2	0.46	£14.74	£6.80
Education worker	25K annual salary + 15% on costs average	2	0.46	£14.74	£6.80
Fostering Support Workers	18K annual salary + 15% on costs average	2	0.46	£10.62	£4.90
Psychology Service	Commissioned at £100.00 per hour	2.5	0.58	£100.00	£58
Administration on additional services		2	0.46	£9.44	£4.36
<b>Wrap around total cost per child per week</b>					<b>£80.86</b>

<sup>2</sup> Holmes et al, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> This cost does not include advocacy which is likely to be commissioned or provided on a needs led basis for young people with specific issues rather than proactively for all as provided by Match.

**Table 5**

Match projected costs for wrap-around services provision over the course of a year, assuming 50 young people in receipt of services

<b>Role</b>	<b>Overall costs</b>	<b>Hours per Month</b>	<b>Hours per Week</b>	<b>Cost per Hour</b>	<b>Cost per Week</b>
Health worker	25K annual salary + 15% on costs average	2	0.46	£14.74	£6.80
Education worker	25K annual salary + 15% on costs average	2	0.46	£14.74	£6.80
Fostering Support Workers	18K annual salary + 15% on costs average	2	0.46	£10.62	£4.90
Psychology Service	Assuming max. £25,000 spend per annum	0.42	0.10	£100.00	£9.69
Administration on additional services		2	0.46	£9.44	£4.36
<b>Wrap around total cost per child per week</b>					<b>£32.55</b>



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