



Slough Children First as an Independent Fostering Agency

Statement of Purpose 2022-23

Summary

This Statement of Purpose outlines how Slough Children First functions as an Independent Fostering Agency.

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Date: April 2022

Review Date: April 2023

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Slough be

safe, secure and successful

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Introduction and Context

The Statement of Purpose outlines how Slough Children First (SCF) functions as an Independent Fostering Agency. The Statement of Purpose is underpinned by SCF's Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After and the SCF Vision Statement.

It is intended as a useful source of information for:

- Foster Carers
- Supervising Social Workers
- Childcare Social Workers
- Children and young people as well as birth parents

In accordance with regulations, a copy of the document is available to Ofsted and it can also be viewed on SCF's dedicated website.

Our Statement of Purpose will be kept under review and updated, where appropriate, at least annually.

Slough Children First (SCF) is an independent, not-for-profit company that provides social care and support services to children, young people and families. The fostering service is situated within Placements and Resources in SCF and offers placements to Slough children. The agency is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA).

Slough Children First's Fostering Service Statement of Purpose is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the following legislation:

- Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of Fostering Services
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011
- Care Planning, Placement & Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Care Planning, Placement & Case Review and Fostering Services Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2013.
- The Children Act 1989 - Guidance and Regulations
- Volume 4: fostering services (referred to as statutory guidance) 2011
- The Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Children and Families Act 2014
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Key Service Aims and Objectives

Slough Children First's fundamental purpose is 'Ensuring children in Slough are safe, secure and successful'. To help achieve this, our mission is that we should all be **constantly working together to improve the lives of children and young people by protecting, supporting and enabling them to thrive.**

Our values, which all our staff and partner agencies are expected to work towards, from those in the back office to those on the frontline are:

Child-focussed

Honest and respectful

Improving constantly

Looking ahead

Delivering together

Child-focussed

Committed to outcomes for children and their families which ensure they are safe, secure and successful; putting the voice of the child at the heart of everything we do and delivering customer-driven services, in collaboration with our colleagues and partners; working to improve lives and ensure effective safeguarding; offering the right support needed; working efficiently, so resources can be maximised for our children, young people and families; ensuring clear and appropriate communication.

Honest and respectful

Being honest and respectful, as part of an inclusive culture where our communication is always professional; where everyone counts and knowledge of families and individuals, including cultural identity, along with their feedback and opinions are respected and recognised; a working environment where disrespectful and unprofessional behaviour is challenged; transparency and accountability in all decision-making.

Improving constantly

Aspiring to achieve our vision through our everyday work, strong leadership and management; working to develop as an organisation and as individuals; a learning culture which reviews best practice, learns from mistakes and ensures customers have suitable opportunities to feed back and uses all available insight to measure progress and implement change; working flexibly to deliver the best value-for-money services.

Looking ahead

Moving in the same direction with an ambition to provide excellent services, based on insight and smart working, while keeping the voice of the child at the heart of Slough Children First; benchmarking, horizon-scanning and anticipating challenges; working to identify opportunities to be cost-effective and future proof our organisation; identifying challenges and working towards solutions.

Delivering together

Working as one organisation through solid teamwork to deliver the best services for children and young people; taking ownership and responsibility to ensure individuals, teams and the wider organisation delivers on aims; building strong relationships with all our customers to secure the best outcomes to make our children safe, secure and successful; connecting with other teams and partners to enhance services and improve efficiency.

SCF aims to:

- Deliver the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children and families
- Ensure children and families remain the focus of everything we do and provide the best possible support to staff, enabling families to develop and flourish
- To ensure children are fully supported in terms of their individual care plans with particular emphasis on placement stability, educational achievement, social development, health and wellbeing.
- To maintain a child-centred provision offering children and young people the opportunity to live within a twenty mile radius of their family, community, leisure and educational resources.

The Fostering Service is committed to:

- Providing a range of safe and secure foster placements to meet the assessed needs of children and young people in care and to promote and safeguard their welfare
- Providing placements that promote stability and positive outcomes for children and young people by working in partnership with young people, Carers, birth families, other professionals and the community
- Ensuring Foster Carers and their families receive professional guidance, support and training as appropriate to help them fulfil their roles as effectively as possible
- Continuing to support children with disabilities within their families of origin and is achieved by regular periods of family-based short breaks.

Our objectives for service provision are to:

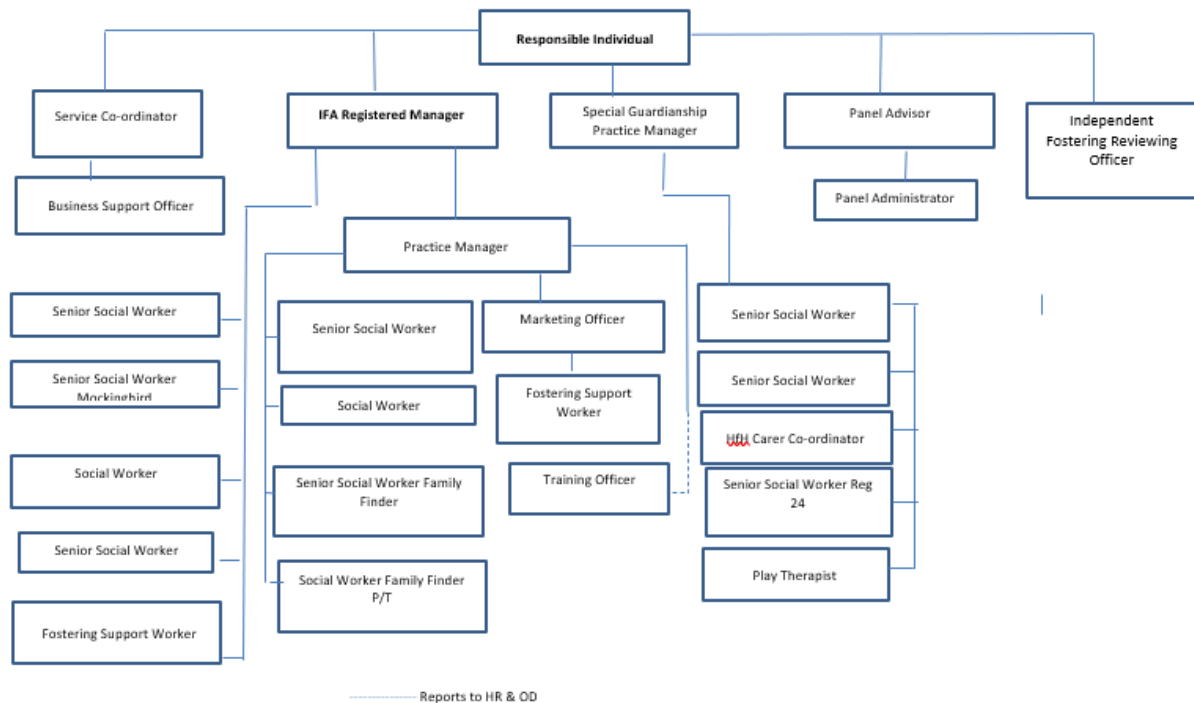
- Ensure the views of children, parents and Carers are sought and are taken into account, having regard for their age and understanding, in the continuous development and improvement of the service
- Recognise the importance of, and support appropriate levels of, contact with the family and community as is consistent with their welfare and care plan

- Recognise and value the diverse nature of the community it serves and proactively engage with the local community to identify potential Carers
- Ensure there is a sufficient range of safe and appropriate placements available for children looked after (CLA) in Slough
- Recruit and assess a range of Foster Carers who can provide a range of safe and secure foster placements to meet the needs of slough children and young people in care
- Promote and safeguard children's welfare
- Offer a prompt and professional timely response to members of the public who enquire about becoming a Foster Carer
- Ensure prospective Foster Carers are well prepared for the fostering task/role through the provision of high quality preparation training and thorough & robust assessment which focuses upon identifying relevant competencies and evidenced ability to meet the needs of children/young people who are looked after
- Actively monitor and supervise all placements to ensure children and young people are safe, their needs are met and that they are making progress to achieve positive outcomes
- Contribute to and ensure effective multi-disciplinary and partnership working to meet the health, educational and social needs of children and young people in placements
- The service operates within the framework of equality of opportunity and non-discriminatory practice. Children and young people will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, disability or social class in terms of service provision. Wherever possible children are matched within their own cultural, racial, linguistic and religious communities, and where this is not possible, plans must be put in place to keep the child's culture alive for them
- Ensure children with disabilities are placed in an environment that understands their disability and supports carers to meet their needs and promote social inclusion.
- Ensure staff and Carers are well trained and competent in delivering a quality fostering service, including opportunities for continued learning and professional development
- Ensure all staff and Carers have completed safer recruiting checks and have a valid DBS
- Provide all staff and Carers support and supervision with clear lines of accountability and management
- Provide each Foster Carer a named allocated supervising Social Worker
- Work in partnership to support the Slough Fostering Association
- Work in collaboration with and provide advice on fostering issues to other colleagues in Slough Children First
- Operate clear administrative records and financial management systems pertinent to the running of the service, including the maintenance of comprehensive and up-to-date records

on all children

- Ensure all complaints and allegations against Carers and staff are investigated under departmental procedures in a timely fashion and lessons learned filter to improvements in future practice
- Facilitate the effective operation of the Fostering Panel, which provides a quality assurance role with regards to the recruitment and review of Foster Carers, Home from Home Carers, family and friends Foster Carers and foster placements. The panel will ensure the welfare and safety of children is paramount in all decision making.

Staffing



The registered provider of the Fostering Service is Slough Children First.

The Head of Regulated Services is the Responsible Individual and the Supplementary Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The Operational Director of Children Services is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The Registered Manager has overall responsibility of running the service and is supported by another Practice Manager. Both are qualified Social Workers, registered by Social Work England, with extensive experience in children and families social work. The managers are responsible for the supervision and professional development of the staff within the fostering teams and the day to day management and growth of the service.

The Fostering Service works alongside the connected person's and special guardianship team that sits outside the service. This way fully approved regulation 24 carers are transferred to the fostering service seamlessly. The connected person's and special guardianship team have therefore been added to the organisational chart above for reference purposes only.

All assessing and supervising social work staff within the teams are similarly professionally qualified and experienced and registered with the Social Work England.

The workers within the service have a range of post qualifying experiences and are supported by SCF to add to their academic and professional qualifications to enhance their practice.

Services to Children and Young People

The primary purpose of the fostering service is to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring foster families for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents and/or immediate birth families. Whenever possible and where it is safe to do so, children and young will be placed with someone in their extended family or a close family friend. These arrangements are recognised in legislation as 'Family and Friend' or 'Connected Persons' foster placements. Where this is not possible, placements will be found with one of our approved Foster Carers or a suitable Foster Carer approved by an independent fostering agency. We aim to clearly identify the particular emotional, physical, cultural and religious needs of a child and to find a foster family who can best meet those needs.

Our aim is always to keep sibling groups together where this meets their identified needs. Other than in emergencies, we plan all placements and promote introductory meetings between the child and the Foster Carer. Each Carer receives a welcome book upon their approval and every child or young person aged 4 years and above placed will be given a copy of the children's guide (called '*A Helping Hand - Answers to questions you may have about being in care*') in an effort to lessen the anxiety for the child or young person when moving to a new family.

Where a child or young person is placed in an emergency, the child's Social Worker or the Foster Carer's Supervising Social Worker will give the child as much information about the Foster Carers and their household as possible.

We expect the supervising Social Worker to see each child on a regular basis, to ascertain their views about their care, we expect the child's Social Worker to visit regularly and spend time with the child/young person independent of the carer. It is our expectation that both the Child's Social Worker and the Supervising Social Worker meet with the child or young person in placement jointly and independently of the Foster Carer (where appropriate) at least once annually.

The views, wishes and feelings of children and young people are vital to the development of services. Consultations take various forms, either through questionnaires, on line surveys, consultation events, activities and feedback forms for Foster Carer's annual reviews and CLA reviews.

We celebrate children and young people's achievements and make sure their voices are heard in the recruitment of staff and approval of Carers at panel by including young people within interview panels for permanent staff.

We provide a range of events and activities for children and young people to be involved with including days out, arts and crafts sessions and our annual Christmas party. Although the running of these events has been restricted in more recent times due to the Covid pandemic and we intend to resume activities once it is safe to do so. We make efforts to recognise the celebrations of other faiths inclusive of EID when we provide children with Eid Boxes (age & gender dependent gifts).

Slough Children First ensures that children and young people have financial security in the form of a personal savings account, where regular weekly amounts are saved centrally and which are then accessible to them when they move to another placement or onto independence.

Slough Children First celebrates the achievements of children and young people with its annual awards ceremony.

The voices of all household members (inclusive of children who are members of fostering families) are included within Foster Carer's annual reviews.

Placement of Children

Our duty worker and duty manager identify those Foster Carers who have vacancies and work with the team to assess if this is a potentially appropriate placement for the child or young person. Wherever possible, profiles of Foster Carers and their households are shared with children and young people as well as their Social Workers. If they agree, the match is proposed to the Foster Carer/s and the child's Social Worker who will further consider the match, involving the child or young person as appropriate, and makes arrangements for a placement if agreed.

We utilise a thorough matching risk assessment process to ensure that the identified needs of children and young people are considered alongside any additional support that might be required by the Foster Carer and or Fostering Household.

SCF adhere to a set of principles/standards when commissioning services from external fostering agencies. These include a requirement that agencies are accredited, provide geographically appropriate placements (i.e. generally within 20 miles of Slough), provide adequate support to Carers, have systems and services in place to ensure that children and young people have access to appropriate education, health and therapeutic provision and that they constitute a cost-effective use of financial resources. Given Slough Children First's commitment towards enhancing the lives of all children and young people in our care those agencies will all need to have achieved an Ofsted rating of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' from their most recent inspections.

Slough Children First operates an Access to Resources Panel which monitors placement activity and authorises financial packages to support placement arrangements.

The children's guide – '*A Children's Guide to Foster Care*'- has been created to answer some of the questions children and young people aged 11 upwards may have about being in foster care. There is also a younger children's guide for children aged 4 -10 to share information about fostering age appropriately.

As well as this guide, children and young people have also created 3 animations that explain the different people who help them and keep them safe, such as their Social Worker. The animations are

available on Slough Children First's website www.sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk Foster Carers and Social Workers are encouraged to view these animations with children. Children and young people who are members of the children in care council (called Reach Out!) have helped to create this guide and the animations.

Services Provided

The fostering service currently provides:

- A duty system supporting requests for internal placements from Slough Children First's Brokerage Service, and/or care planning and transitions teams.
- A general fostering scheme, consisting of a pool of registered Foster Carers, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children, young people and sibling groups of all ages, across the full range of short term, longer term placements. There are 3 tiers to this scheme and it recognises the need for a particular skill set for older and more challenging children
- 'Staying Put' provision for young people in care and care leavers aged 16–25 to remain living with their previous Foster Carers. SCF has a Staying Put Policy, which is applied if it meets the young person's needs and is part of their pathway planning
- A recruitment and assessment service for prospective Foster Carers, which is responsive, professional and customer focused. A dedicated experienced team of recruitment family support workers and qualified assessing Social Workers
- A Fostering Panel constituted and administered in line with regulatory requirements, which considers and makes recommendations about the approval of all prospective new Carers, reviews of Foster Carers and matching children to long-term placements

How SCF Fostering Services Operate

Fostering Recruitment and Assessment

Recruitment

Slough has a widely diverse community; recruitment activity and assessment processes respond positively to the diversity and differences in child rearing practices, family values and attitudes in order to recruit from a wide pool of Carers across the different spectrums of racial, cultural, religious and social classes living in the Borough.

Slough Children First has a 3 year Fostering Recruitment Strategy and a Marketing Plan in place, this supports the recruitment of a sufficient number and approval ranges of local Foster Carers to meet the needs of Slough families and to promote stability and positive outcomes for children/young people. The recruitment strategy and marketing plan is reviewed annually and in response to need and/or changing circumstances. The Service works in partnership with the SCF's Communications

Team to develop a rolling programme of recruitment activity, including on-going publicity, special marketing campaigns (including digital campaigns) and special events during national fostering week. Together with this and as for all fostering services we remain aware of the likelihood that a proportion of new applicants might be as a result of word of mouth from our other approved Foster Carers.

Recruitment Vision Statement

- We will engage with communities in Slough to increase awareness of our need for Foster Carers
- We will be innovative, drawing on the marketing and communications expertise in SCF to drive and successfully implement a recruitment marketing plan which works
- We will ensure we recruit Foster Carers whose backgrounds, ethnic origin, religious denomination and cultural awareness complement the needs of the children and young people in our care
- We will recruit new Foster Carers from Slough and surrounding areas.
- We will ensure all enquirers receive a prompt response and personal service from the team with a friendly approach
- We will communicate frequently with all enquirers and keep them informed, in an effort to reduce any drop-out rates.

The Fostering Recruitment Marketing Plan for Slough Children First is designed to provide a more targeted approach to the recruitment of new in-house Foster Carers, utilising the valuable resources of SCF in a manner that is efficient.

The Recruitment and Assessment

In order to recruit and assess carers effectively, there is:

- 1 x practice manager who takes the lead in recruitment
- 1 x events and marketing worker
- 1 x family support worker (Recruitment Adviser)
- 2 x full time social worker
- 1 x full time family finder
- 1 x part time family finder (3 days per week)

The assessments of foster carers are undertaken by all social workers in the fostering service.

The service undertake robust and thorough assessments of fostering applicants and deliver high quality preparatory training to best equip new Foster Carers and their households for their roles ahead. SCF recruits Foster Carers who can demonstrate and evidence that they have the potential to

meet the needs of children and young people who might be placed with them. The service seeks to support and assess all applicants, some of whom will be encouraged to identify and begin the process of transferring their prior experience of parenting and or childcare. We utilise the assessment process to assist applicants to evidence, at least, an insight into young people that will enable them to develop the necessary skills to care for young people in the care system.

The team operates a duty system, from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, to ensure that any potential applicant is able to have an immediate response to their enquiry and to answer any general queries they may have. Applicants are able to access the service's website and can gain general and local information regarding fostering alongside accessing key information including our statement of purpose and an online initial enquiry form.

We welcome enquiries from applicants who seek to become SCF Foster Carers, regardless of their gender, marital status, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, religion, culture or employment status. This assists our opportunity to be able to provide a broad range of placements to children who present with a broad range of need and who are from a broad range of backgrounds. Any applicants convicted of an offence against a child or a serious offence against an adult will not be able to foster with us. We can only consider applicants who have at least one spare bedroom available to offer for potential fostering placements.

Following receipt of an initial enquiry to become a Foster Carer, an 'Initial Home Visit' will be arranged if the eligibility criteria is met, and this provides an opportunity to have an honest, two-way discussion about fostering and to assist both the service and the applicant to consider whether fostering will be right for the applicant. If both parties are happy to proceed and once a completed application & consent form has been received by the agency, a qualified Social Worker will be allocated to conduct an assessment with the prospective carer and their family.

Assessment Process

All fostering assessments are undertaken in accordance with the National Minimum Standards, based on the BAAF Form F, incorporating the policies, good practice and social care procedures of SCF.

The assessing Social Worker will assist the applicant in completing all relevant statutory check forms including the DBS checks and personal and employer references. Applicants will need to have a medical with their GP prior to approval. The assessing Social Worker will agree a schedule of visits to complete the assessment.

The applicant(s) will be invited to undertake Skills to Foster training which forms part of the assessment. At least one session involves an experienced Foster Carer and another session includes a care leaver sharing their experiences. Our existing skilled & experienced Foster Carers are used as foster care champions who further support and advise prospective applicants.

The comprehensive assessment results in the production of a report that covers past and present relationships/partnerships, support networks, individual profiles of the applicant/s, interviews with birth children and adult members of the household, family & individual lifestyles, parenting capacity and child care experience, valuing diversity, as well as a health & safety check of the home.

As part of the assessment applicants are required to complete, a safe care policy, carer profile and a family portfolio which includes photographs.

This assessment report will be presented to SCF's Fostering Panel by the assessing Social Worker and is quality assured by the management team prior to this being presented to our panel members. The assessing Social Worker will invite the applicants to attend a panel meeting where the application and assessment will be considered by the Panel and will advise the applicants in advance, of how the panel meeting will be conducted and organised in an effort to prepare them and to reduce any anxieties and what might be expected of them within the meeting.

The Panel membership is diverse in terms of ethnicity & culture alongside a breadth of experience and a variety of backgrounds, including youth work, health, social care, fostering and includes members who have experienced the care system, and there is a dedicated panel advisor in post.

Following presentation to the Panel, the applicants will be notified immediately of the Panel's recommendation in respect of their application. However, the final decision as to the applicants' approval will be made by the Agency Decision Maker. The Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker make timely, qualitative and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding statutory objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

If, at any time during the assessment, the assessing Social Worker feels the applicant falls short of the standards required, this will be discussed with her/his Line Manager immediately. Any areas of shortfall will be explored/investigated and where training or support will not bring the applicant up to an acceptable standard, the assessment must cease. If there is any indication in Stage 1 that the applicant is unsuitable to foster, the service will consider whether the assessment can continue or whether it should be terminated, and the reason will be explained to the applicant. If in Stage 2, the applicants will be informed of this decision and the reasons within 48 hours and a brief report will be presented for consideration by the Fostering Panel.

When approved, the Foster Carers receive and sign a Foster Carer Agreement and the Team advised of their availability to receive a placement. Induction Training is offered for newly approved Foster Carers – this is jointly presented by Social Workers from the Fostering Recruitment Team and Fostering Support Team.

Mandatory and ongoing training and development is an expectation within the first year and subsequent years after approval. Our Foster Carers are supported to complete the Training & Development Standards (TDS) within one year of approval; the Carers will develop an understanding of attachment, safeguarding, promoting healthy living and managing challenging behaviour, including de-escalation techniques. Once the TSD workbook is completed, it will form part of the carer's annual review.

Any specialist skills, experiences or training Foster Carers may have, for example in caring for particularly challenging children, or children with a disability, are considered at the matching stage. Specialist parent and child placements are available if appropriately matched. Due considerations are given to recruiting Foster Carers who match the diverse cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic needs of the Slough population.

We provide the following fostering arrangements:

- Short and long term fostering placements, including Connected Persons (once approved)
- Bridging and respite care placements

- Parent and child placements
- Sibling group placements
- Emergency placements
- Unaccompanied minor's placements
- Children with Disability placements
- Staying Put arrangements

Permanent fostering

The service offers advice and support on permanency issues within fostering placements and visit children and Carers to explain the different permanency processes. Permanent fostering placements are sought for children we are family finding for and are matched internally before proceeding to Foster Panel and ADM for approval of this match.

The team has been involved in the CoramBAAF pilot scheme for fostering activity days where all the Slough children who attended the event were successfully matched to IFA Carers. The team is a member of a forum where permanency issues and good practice are shared to help us develop the service. Life appreciation days are considered for all children if appropriate and workers are able to offer training opportunities for Carers.

Support and Supervision

The Fostering service supervises, reviews, trains and supports all SCF approved Foster Carers. All approved Foster Carers will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker that will visit the Foster Carer at least every 4-6 weeks (at maximum 6 weekly) to undertake supervision. Such visits will provide opportunity to discuss the day to day care needs of the children and young people and how the Foster Carer is working to meet those needs and progress the care plan.

Discussions about training needs will also be held at these meetings alongside identifying any further support needs required by the Foster Carer/s and their household membership. Carers are expected to maintain daily logs and provide monthly reports and these are retained for the purpose of care planning, monitoring of child development, and as a method of monitoring the placement and performance of foster carers.

The Registered Manager is responsible for the Regulation 35 report, and any other reports and statutory notifications and any information/data required by the Board and Joint Parenting Panel

The Service will undertake a minimum of one unannounced visit to Foster Carers' homes per year. We however complete two visits per year as part of our internal policy.

The supervising Social Worker will attend all meetings and reviews with the carer, prepare reports for annual reviews and CLA reviews and keep a thorough and accurate record of all fostering activities undertaken by or for the Foster Carer.

The service works closely with SCF's Brokerage Service, Children Looked After and Support Services Teams in identifying appropriate placements for Slough's children looked after. All Foster Carers are allocated a supervising Social Worker once approved. The role of this worker is to monitor the placement and offer/provide Carers with support, advice and guidance.

Children and young people in the care of SCF and their Carers have access to specialist support, including Pathways Education Support; access to clinicians; an IFA play therapist; local CAMHS, which includes the provision of counselling, art therapy and play therapy for children in care.

Slough Children First has made a significant investment in the implementation of an alternative method of delivering foster care with the potential to improve placement stability, safety and permanency for children and young people in care and to improve support for, and retention of, Foster Carers.

The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) was developed by The Mockingbird Society in the USA and is based on the idea of an extended family. It uses the concept of a 'constellation' which is where six to 10 'satellite' families of foster and kinship Carers live in close proximity to a dedicated hub home of specially recruited and trained Carers offering respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities. A MFM co-ordinator, based in the fostering support team has been employed to implement the programme.

Relationships are central to MFM, with hub Carers and Foster Carers providing frontline care and with Social Workers able to concentrate on successful relationship building.

The Fostering Network has taken the lead in the programme to introduce MFM to the UK and piloted the programme with 8 fostering agencies in the UK. The MFM has been running for over 18 months and we are currently reviewing the scheme with the hope to set up a second constellation.

Annual Reviews of Foster Carers

All Foster Carer reviews are undertaken by an independent fostering reviewing officer. Each fostering household has an annual review, unless there are significant changes to their circumstances in which case we will conduct an extraordinary review at that time. These circumstances include:

- After the final strategy meeting of a S47 investigation involving a carer(s)
- Where allegations have been made regarding a carer(s) child care practice and no S47 investigation is pursued
- Where there has been a breakdown in the approved carers' relationship resulting in one carer moving out of the household. In this instance both Carers will be subject to review except where one/or both Carers has given notice of an intention to resign
- Where there have been significant changes to the carer(s) lifestyle or personal circumstance
- Where there has been the death of a carer
- Where a carer has been diagnosed with a serious illness
- When a carer has stopped or started living with a partner – In this case, an updated form F assessment will be required if the new partner wants to foster

- Where a carer is not working in partnership with the agency including a lack of willingness to attend meetings and events.

Reports will be requested from the child's Social Worker, school, senior Social Worker, Carer, the child/young person in placement, the birth family (if appropriate) and any other interested parties.

An independent fostering reviewing officer or a Team Manager will chair the review and it is usually within the carer's home.

Following approval, the Foster Carer's first review report and following this on every third year, the Foster Carer's annual review report will be presented back to the Fostering Panel for their recommendation, consideration & comments and subsequently the Agency Decision Maker for formal approval & ratification. Carers will be invited to attend all panel review meetings where their statuses as SCF Foster Carers will be considered.

The annual household review will address the carer's training and development needs for the next year and suggest, if required, alterations to their approval status.

Training

We continued to offer remote training via SCF's online platform such as Microsoft Teams.

The IFA continued with its learning and development programme of mandatory and supplementary training for carers but some remote courses had to be postponed due to trainer sickness (Covid and/or other illnesses or vaccine administration commitments). All mandatory training (with the exception of paediatric first aid) was provided through online learning courses, which the IFA purchased where necessary.

Mandatory Training for Foster Carers

Carers must complete the seven core mandatory training topics below. The courses are repeated every three years:

1. Paediatric First Aid
2. Safeguarding
3. Safer Foster Care
4. Managing Behaviour
5. Managing Allegations
6. Record Keeping
7. Prevent

As such, we offer a rolling programme of mandatory training so that carers can access any course which must be completed/refreshed, as and when needed throughout the year. Compliance is extremely high for mandatory training.

Supplementary Training for Foster Carers - this type of training is offered in two ways:

General - as part of the annual learning and development programme that carers can pick and choose to attend and

Bespoke - on a needs-led basis identified by the supervising social worker or manager reflecting a placement need or a gap in the carer's knowledge/skillset.

The IFA continued to offer bespoke training wherever and whenever there was a placement need, with issues arising such as caring for a child affected by sexual abuse, ADHD and autism, working with the police, county lines, gangs, guns and knives, online safety, substance abuse. This was usually offered with resource materials that carers can use and discuss within supervision with their supervising social worker.

The learning and development programme is issued and shared with carers annually and whenever amendments are made. Upcoming training events are circulated via email, training WhatsApp groups and phone calls to carers.

Carers continue to have access to remote learning options and dedicated E-Learning courses so that carers could join virtually from their homes. Face to face training will be offered wherever it is deemed safe to do so; this will be in line with the covid 19 guidelines in force at the time of offer.

Brokerage Service

There is a dedicated Brokerage Service within SCF which works closely with the Fostering Team. The Brokerage Service is overseen by a contracts manager and have responsibility for managing all requests for:

- Fostering placements
- Placements for children and young people in residential units
- Semi-accommodation services for 16 plus children or with Independent Fostering Agency Carers (if a suitable Slough alternative cannot be identified) are administrated by this service.

All workers within the fostering service are required to serve as duty workers on a rota during the working week. The staff work closely together to provide a consistent, coherent and flexible service, which benefits from ring-fenced areas of specialist provision and management.

Matching:

Prior to the Fostering Service agreeing to a placement for any child a process of robust matching has been instituted and which will be monitored by the Service's management team on an ongoing basis; our matching process considers the child's needs focussing upon (but not exclusively) the following key areas:

- Safeguarding
- Schooling/education
- Expectations around contact, particularly in relation to the Foster Carer's part in facilitating and/or supervising contact

- The child's identity/race/culture/religion
- The child's history
- The child's behaviour
- The child's health
- The focus of the placement

The matching process will also consider carers' availability and:

- Their experience / knowledge / skills
- Their address and the distance from the foster home to the child's school / local authority
- Any other children in the placement
- The Foster Carer's own children and other family members.

Supporting Services

The Fostering Service operates a duty system during office hours (9am – 5pm) Monday to Friday, providing advice and support to Foster Carers and family and friends Foster Carers when their allocated supervising Social Workers are unavailable.

An out of hours telephone advice service is provided to Carers and is maintained by staff of Slough Children First's Family Placements Service. The advice line is operational from 5pm until 11pm. Monday to Friday, and from 12 noon until 11pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. The aim of the service is to offer Carers an advice line where they can seek advice and guidance from Social Workers. The Social Workers will not be in a position to undertake any house calls during the hours of this service. Should there be a need for a more direct intervention this will be discussed with the Emergency Duty Team as should occur outside of the out of hours operating hours..

Berkshire Emergency Duty Team provides advice and support to children looked after and Foster Carers where there is a situation that requires an immediate response out of normal office hours (5pm – 9am). The Emergency Duty Team also deals with emergency admissions of children to care.

The work of the Fostering Service is well supported by a broad range of internal services including Slough Borough Council Legal Services, SCF Virtual School, SCF Finance and Human Resources, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), SCF Clinicians and CLA health provision. A dedicated wellbeing professional is physically located with the Fostering Service to provide timely support to Foster Carers and family and friends Foster Carers when required.

Support Groups

SCF Fostering Services provide regular support groups, which serve to provide an opportunity for our Foster Carers to meet other Carers in an informal setting to discuss topical issues and receive peer support.

These meetings enable the Carers to share experiences of fostering and to discuss any issues that may be concerning them.

There is also the Kidscare2 support group for birth/adopted children and other children in the fostering household.

Fostering Forum

There are bi-monthly Foster Carer forums in place, providing an opportunity for Foster Carers to gain and benefit from regular support and information. This forum allows the carers to meet the staff team and enable open communication.

Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

The Berkshire Local Safeguarding Children's Board provides the procedural framework for safeguarding children in Slough and the Fostering Service ensures that staff and managers attend child protection training and comply with good practice and guidance. There is a joint annual service and panel training offered which incorporates safeguarding.

Covid-19

Due to the concerns around the pandemic Covid-19, to ensure the safety of foster carers, children and staff, the Fostering Services did not undertake any home visits during both lockdown periods and these were completed via telephone or video link. If there were any significant concerns and a home visit was necessary, then this would be undertaken by adhering to the government advice and the necessary precautions being taken as advised by the current guidance from Government and Public Health England. During this time, the fostering service continued to provide a service to foster carers and children and undertook all supervisory social work visits via phone or some form of video link and kept in touch with our carers on a regular basis to ensure they have all the necessary support they need.

Physical visits have since resumed with lockdown easing and these are being undertaken following government guidelines in relation to social distancing and all staff use PPE. However, where carers, household members or supervising social workers have tested positive to covid, the visits will be virtual to minimise the risk of spreading the disease.

We will continue to have face to face annual review meetings in the carer's home but this will remain subject to a covid risk assessment. Panel continues to be held via video link to ensure we are maintaining effective social distancing and this will also become a hybrid plan of face to face and virtually in the near future.

SCF Fostering Panel

The Fostering Service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (amended 2013). The service maintains a 'central list' of Panel members. The independent Panel chair possesses a wealth of professional experience pertaining to fostering. Two independent vice chairs also have significant experience, with one being an experienced senior manager for a disabilities service and the other being a current foster carer and coming from a professional background of early intervention work. Other panel members on the central list include Social Workers with more than three years relevant post-qualifying experience, a Slough councillor, a health representative and other independent members. The Panel is diverse in its make up, with a good gender mix and panel members from a range of religious and ethnic backgrounds. The panel meet on the second Tuesday of every month. Detailed minutes are kept of all Panel meetings the decisions made and the basis for these.

The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:

- Each application and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a Foster Carer or a family and friends Foster Carer and the terms of their approval
- The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the Fostering Service
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer
- Permanent fostering plans/matches for children.

New applicants and existing Foster Carers are invited to and encouraged to attend Panel when their application or review is presented to Panel.

The Panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and feeds back any issues or concerns to the registered manager. The Panel makes recommendations to the Fostering Service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision.

If the Panel or the Agency Decision Maker is minded not to recommend approval or recommends termination of approval, applicants are advised that they can request that their case is reconsidered by the Panel or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review of their case.

Although not required by the NMS, the Panel Advisor completes a six month report on progress of panel and all reports presented to panel and feeds this information back for service development and quality assurance.

Capacity and Demand

The Fostering Service responds to planned and unplanned admissions. The structure of the Fostering Service recognises that unplanned admissions will occur and seeks to proactively address this need. Carers are specifically recruited and approved on the basis of the service they will provide. During the assessment process and final approval, consideration is given to the impact placements will have upon the carer and the fostering household alongside the capabilities/skills of Carers. Thus,

emergency and unplanned admissions are directed towards Carers with appropriate skills and capabilities.

Where the Fostering Service is unable to meet the placement needs of a child, the commissioning of placements from independent fostering agencies is managed by the Brokerage Service.

Complaints/Allegations

All Foster Carers and children and young people in care using the Fostering Service are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details if they wish to make a complaint. The children's guide - *A Helping Hand - Answers to questions you may have about being in care* - provides additional information and contacts. The practice managers of the Fostering Service will monitor all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service.

All prospective Foster Carers are provided with the complaints leaflet which details the complaints procedure – this is given out at the time when initial home visits are undertaken.

Allegations

Any allegations of abuse will be dealt with in accordance with Slough Children First's Child Protection Policy and Safeguarding Procedures. We will ensure that Ofsted is kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.

We will also carry out an internal investigation of procedures of any area relating to the allegation to establish whether any procedures need to be amended.

The Foster Carer Charter

SCF has a Foster Carer charter – *Getting it Right for Slough's Children and Young People*. SCF's Fostering Service is committed to providing and promoting safe, stable and nurturing placements where the outcomes and life chances are positive for children looked after. In order to achieve this it is important to have working relationships which are based on trust and respect among all children's services that are involved in the care of the child.

The Fostering Service has worked in partnership with Foster Carers to achieve the charter, which was originally launched in 2015. The charter explains what the roles and responsibilities of the Fostering Service and the Carers towards each other and the children we care for.

Foster Carers' Handbook

All approved Foster Carers are provided with a Foster Carer handbook, which contains all the policies and procedures relating to Foster Carers, as well as useful information about child care issues and resources. The handbook is available at <https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/slough/>

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring

A report is written for the Joint Parenting Panel on an annual basis by the Registered Manager for fostering, providing the executives of Slough Children First, and Slough Borough Council with statistical data in relation to the agency's activities. The SCF Board also receives regular reports to consider, including the Statement of Purpose which is updated annually and/or as change is required.

Other monitoring includes staff supervision linked to the appraisal system, monthly recorded visits to Foster Carers, annual reviews, the Fostering Panel and feedback from training sessions and case recording and practice audits. The Practice Manager monitors data about incidents of concern in foster care, including: restraint; allegations; complaints; unauthorised absence. The registered manager monitors the Schedule 6 and 7 requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. The fostering service collects data surrounding the meeting of service requirements alongside KPIs to ensure the monitoring of performance.

Evaluating the Service

The information gathered through quarterly and annual reports, audit, inspections and customer feedback is constantly evaluated by the managers of the Fostering Service, to judge its on-going effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

The Fostering Service is also subject to formal inspection by Ofsted and inspections usually take place every three years. The most recent inspection took place July 2021, and the service was judged as 'Good'. The service continues to work on its improvement plan and journey towards becoming an outstanding service.

Arrangements for the Revision and Circulation of the Statement of Purpose

The Registered Manager overseen by the Responsible Individual is responsible for the annual revision of the Statement of Purpose. Revisions may occur at other times if necessary. Staff, stakeholders and Foster Carers will be consulted on proposed revisions as appropriate.

The revised Statement of Purpose will be presented to the Executive Leadership Team of Slough Children First for their consideration.

The revised Statement of Purpose will be sent to Ofsted annually and when any significant changes have been made, within 28 days of approval by the registered provider.

The Statement of Purpose will be available to all staff via intranet and to members of the public via our website. Paper copies can be provided to children looked after and their parents on request.

Details of Registration

Registered as an Independent Fostering Agency – No: 1183495

Slough Children First Limited – no: 09487106 of 1 Glass Wharf, Bristol, BS2 0ZX

Details of Children’s Rights Commissioner

Dame Rachel de Souza.

Sanctuary Buildings

20 Great Smith Street

London

SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330 <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/about-us/contact-us>