



Foster with Slough

As an Independent Fostering Agency

Statement of Purpose

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This Statement of Purpose outlines the function of 'Foster with Slough', as an Independent Fostering agency for Slough Children First.

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Introduction and Context

The Statement of Purpose outlines the functions of 'Foster with Slough', an Independent Fostering Agency positioned alongside Slough Children First the company commissioned by Slough Borough Council to provide children's social care services in Slough. The Statement of Purpose is influenced by the Slough Children First Business and Improvement Plan 25-27 and the 'Children and Young People's (Placement) Sufficiency Strategy (23-26).

The Statement of Purpose provides information about Foster With Slough, including the services and facilities offered. It is available in the Slough Children First website and can be made available in hard copy on request to:

- Children and young people living with our foster carers
- Birth parents and family
- Foster carers (current or prospective)
- Professionals who work alongside us to support children and young people in our care

In accordance with regulations, a copy of the document is submitted to Ofsted

Our Statement of Purpose will be kept under review and updated annually as a minimum.

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

Although registered as an Independent Fostering Agency, unlike most other IFAs, 'Foster with Slough' is 'not-for-profit', and it is recruiting foster carers to primarily support Slough children with Slough foster families.

The 'Foster with Slough' 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, amended July 2013 and April 2014
- Care Planning, Placement & Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Care Planning, Placement & Case Review and Fostering Services Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2013.
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2015
- 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

- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

Aims and Objectives of our service

As part of the wider Slough family, 'Foster with Slough' shares the vision of Slough Children First that every child in Slough should be **Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving**.

Our mission is that we will work together to improve the lives of children and young people by protecting, supporting, and enabling them to thrive.

Our 'Foster with Slough' vision is outlined below:

'Our Slough Family'

'Grow and Nurture'

'Slough Families for Slough Children'

'Slough children stay in Slough'

'Do what it takes'

Our Slough Family is formed from a collection of dedicated people made up of the children and young people who are cared for and care experienced, foster carers, social workers, education and health professionals. We are a close family with a personal commitment to creating the conditions to improve the lives of our children.

Grow and Nurture

'Foster with Slough' will recruit and support applicants to become the best foster carers that they can be and to provide exceptional care for our children and young people who can't be cared for by their parents. We recognise that the fostering role is professional and specialised, and we want to nurture applicants and equip them with the necessary tools through high quality training and peer support.

Slough children stay in Slough

We will recruit and retain local foster carers, particularly within a 20-mile radius of Slough so that our children can live in their hometown and stay close to their communities. We want our children to live in Slough near to their friends and family, where they will get the help, support, and care from those who know them best.

Do what it takes

We will endeavour to be innovative and creative with our existing foster families so that children can remain in Slough, with local families who are equipped to offer a family environment for some of our most vulnerable children. We will ensure that the arrangements are stable so that our children have a predictable and loving environment where they can flourish.

Our objectives for service provision are linked to the Slough children First Corporate Parenting strategy*:

*Corporate parenting incorporates all the responsibilities that we have as a council to ensure that our cared for and care experienced children and young people are provided with the best possible care and protection.

This is more than just keeping children safe; this is about enhancing every aspect of their lives as far as is possible and ensuring that they are equipped with the right support to achieve their dreams. Corporate parenting is about how we care and show that we love and care for our young people, and how we demonstrate that we champion them, have high shared aspirations with and for them, and how we ensure that they are special and important as individuals and as a group. It is about how we want them to be Happy, Safe & Loved, Thriving.

Good corporate parenting is ensuring that all our young people have all the chances that they need to be the best they can be, to recover from any previous difficulties they have faced so that they can achieve their goals as they grow. It is about positively discriminating and advocating for them in all we do as a council with our partners, so that they feel loved and part of our Slough family. Put simply, this is how we care for children and young people as we would expect any other good parent to care for their child, providing safer and better opportunities in their life than they would have experienced with their natural family.

At 'Foster with Slough', we:

- 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 we serve and proactively engage with the local community to identify potential carers.
- Ensure there is a sufficient range of safe and appropriate placements available for 'cared for' children in Slough.
- Recruit and assess and approve a range of applicant 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 the welfare of children and young people.

- 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 and robust assessment which focuses upon identifying relevant competencies and evidenced ability to meet the needs of children and young people who are in our care.
- 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.
- Ensure 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 are put in place to keep the child's culture alive for them.
- Ensure children with disabilities move to live in an environment where their disability is understood 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 Disclosure and Barring clearance.
- 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 (SFA).
- Work in collaboration with and provide advice on fostering issues to other colleagues in 'Slough Children First' and across Slough Borough Council.
- Operate clear administrative records and financial management systems, pertinent to the running of the service, including the maintenance of comprehensive and contemporary records on all children and young people in the service.

- 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 mechanism regarding the recruitment and review of Foster Carers, family and friends Foster Carers and foster placements. The panel will ensure the welfare and safety of children is paramount in all recommendations.

Staffing

The **Registered Provider** of the Fostering Service is 'Slough Children First'.

The **Director of Operations in Slough Children First** is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

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

The **Registered Manager** is responsible for running the service and is supported by a Fostering Team Manager for Recruitment and a Fostering Team Manager for Supervision and Support. The ADM, RI and the managers are all qualified social workers, registered with Social Work England, with extensive experience in children and families' social work. The Registered Manager post is pending registration. Although we have appointed to this position and the agency manager has commenced the role, she will be applying for registration once her pending DBS has been received.

Operational Staff

The Management Team are responsible for the oversight, supervision, and professional development of the operational staff.

All assessing and supervising social work staff are registered with Social Work England and hold the social work professional qualification as a minimum. Foster with Slough are fortunate to have social workers with a range of qualifications and experience in addition to the minimum requirement and the team is further complimented by two experienced family support practitioners who, as well as supporting the families and children, are instrumental in the maintenance of the recruitment and support strategies.

The workers within the service have a range of post qualifying experience and are supported by Slough Children First, to add to their academic and professional qualifications to enhance their practice.

To keep the momentum of interest of new fostering applicants, Foster with Slough has a specific post for marketing and training.

Through a referral process, our Play Therapist works alongside foster carers and social workers in a consultation capacity and undertakes direct work with children displaying dysregulated behavioural and emotional presentation.

'Foster with Slough' work 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.

Staffing Structure



Fostering Children and Young People

The primary purpose of Foster with Slough 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 people will be placed with someone in their extended family or close family friends. These arrangements are recognised in legislation as 'Family and Friends' 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 external resource if there is no internal resource available. We aim to clearly identify the 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 where possible. 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' and the Foster Family profile 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, Emergency Duty Team or the Foster Carer's Supervising Social Worker will give the child as much information about the Foster Carers and their household as possible through their foster carer profile, which is updated when there is a change in the fostering family.

Supporting the children

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.

Child Participation

The views, wishes and feelings of children and young people are vital to the development of services. Consultations happen in a variety of ways including but not exclusively through questionnaires, online surveys, consultation events, activities and feedback forms for Foster Carer's annual reviews and Cared for Children reviews. The voices of all household members (inclusive of children who are members of fostering families) are included within the Foster Carer's annual review.

Celebrating Diversity

We support the Slough Fostering Association to promote a range of events and activities for children and young people to be involved and make every effort to recognise the celebrations of a range of faiths including Christmas and EID.

Annual Awards ceremony

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

Saving for the future

'Foster with Slough' will ensure that children and young people have financial security in the form of foster carers saving money for children in bank accounts. The savings are then passed on to them through the child social worker when they move to another placement or onto independence.

Finding homes for children

Our duty social worker and duty manager identify 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, the 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 use 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.

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.

Foster with Slough provides the following types of homes:

- Short- and long-term fostering placements, including Connected Persons (once approved)
- Bridging
- Respite care placements
- Parent and child placements
- Sibling group placements
- Emergency placements
- Homes for children seeking asylum
- Children with complex needs and disability
- Staying put arrangements

Services Provided

'Foster with Slough' 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 recruitment and assessment service for prospective Foster Carers, which is responsive, professional and customer focused. A dedicated experienced team of recruitment family support worker 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 carers, reviews of Foster Carers and matching children to long-term placements.
- 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 children that present as more challenging.
- A support system comprising of a comprehensive mandatory and voluntary training and development catalogue and access to clinicians who are qualified to offer a range of therapeutic interventions.

Mockingbird

The Mockingbird Family Model, (MFM), is led by The Fostering Network in the UK. It is an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides.

The MFM involves a group of up to ten fostering families called a 'constellation'. At the centre of the group there is one foster home called the 'hub'. The hub home foster carer offers planned and emergency sleepovers and short breaks. They also give advice, training, and support to up to 10 other foster families. These other foster families are called 'satellite' households.

The programme aims to deliver sustainable positive outcomes and strengthen fostering households. It creates conditions that promote improved placement stability, better health and educational outcomes, enhanced birth familial relationships, and increased foster carer retention. This is achieved through continuous support provided to fostering households and children throughout, and beyond, their journey in care.

'Foster with Slough' has an established constellation of Mockingbird foster carers one Mockingbird hub. A MFM co-ordinator, based in the fostering support team is in post to support the programme. Relationships are central to MFM, and this is promoted by the hub Carers and MFM co-ordinator.

Developments

Alongside the growth of the service, Foster with Slough aims to increase our offer by focussing on specialist areas of fostering to meet the needs of Slough children. Recruitment activities are progressing for the following specialist foster carers:

Resilience Foster carers - a unique fostering opportunity where carers provide long term, family-based home for young people who currently live in residential care. Resilience foster carers foster one young person and support that person to adult life. Specialist therapeutic training and ongoing therapeutic guidance will form part of this specialism.

'Mockingbird 2' Hub Carers and Foster carers – This will be our second constellation of the Mockingbird Family model.

Emergency Foster carers – Emergency Foster carers will be available in an emergency for short term placements in an emergency.

This list is not exhaustive, and we are continuously using innovation and creativity to link the needs of our children to our recruitment strategy.

Recruitment Assessment and Approval

Recruitment

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

'Foster with Slough' has a Fostering Recruitment Strategy in place. This supports the recruitment of a sufficient number, approval ranges and specialisms of local Foster Carers to meet the needs of Slough children and young people.

We welcome enquiries from applicants who seek to become 'Foster with Slough' 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 varying needs and who are from diverse backgrounds.

Any applicants convicted of an offence against a child or a serious offence against an adult will not be able to foster with Slough.

We can consider applicants who have at least one spare bedroom available to offer for potential fostering placements or can accommodate a child in their bedroom for children aged 0 – 2 years.

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 'Slough Children First' Communications Team to develop a rolling programme of recruitment activity, including on-going publicity, specific marketing campaigns (including digital campaigns) and special events throughout the year.

Recruitment Vision Statement

- We will recruit new Foster Carers from Slough and surrounding areas.
- We will engage with communities in Slough to increase awareness of our need for local Foster Carers for local children.
- We will be innovative, drawing on the marketing and communications expertise in Slough Children First to drive and successfully implement an effective and measurable recruitment marketing plan.
- 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 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, to reduce drop-out rates.

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

Local Authority Fostering South East

In March 2024, the Department for Education funded a Regional Recruitment pilot, which aims to increase the recruitment of foster carers. 'Foster with Slough' is one of 18 Local Authority organisation that makes up 'Local Authority Fostering South East'.

'Local Authority Fostering South East' provides a centralised front door for fostering enquiries. The consortium offers a centralised front door for fostering enquiries, resources, support and a collaborative environment necessary to revolutionise foster carer recruitment through a centralised virtual hub. Foster with Slough launched our hub on 8th July 2024.

The objectives of the pilot are to:

- Ensure more South East children are fostered in South East authorities.
- Increase the conversion rate from initial enquiry to approval.
- Reduce our reliance on IFA placements.
- Share and build on best practice.
- Build a nationally funded marketing campaign that can direct people who are interested in fostering.
- Build a shared fostering community in the South East.
- Improve search engine optimisation.

Assessment

To enable us to recruit and assess carers effectively, the following staff are available:

- A Practice Manager who leads in recruitment.
- A Recruitment Family Support worker
- Assessing social workers

The assessments of foster carers are undertaken by qualified social workers who are experienced in producing high quality, evidence-based reports.

Running parallel to the assessment is high quality preparatory training to best equip new Foster Carers and their households for their roles ahead, this is led by practitioners and foster carers.

'Foster with Slough' 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/childcare. We utilise the assessment process to assist applicants to evidence insight into children and young people that will enable them to develop the necessary skills to offer high quality care within their family.

Following receipt of an initial enquiry to become a Foster Carer, an 'Initial Home Visit' is arranged, subject to meeting agreed eligibility criteria. 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 and consent form has been received and agreed by the agency, an assessing social worker will commence the assessment process.

Assessment Process

All fostering assessments are undertaken in accordance with the 'Fostering Services (England) Regulations, 2011' and 'National Minimum standards for fostering', in the format provided by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, which is known as the 'Form F' Assessment, incorporating the policies, good practice and social care procedures of SCF.

The Form F assessment is undertaken in two stages.

Stage 1

The assessing Social Worker will assist the applicant in completing all relevant statutory checks including but not limited to the application for Disclosure and Barring Service clearance and obtaining personal and employer references. Applicants will need to have medical clearance from their GP prior to approval following a medical assessment.

The assessing Social Worker will agree with the applicant, an assessment plan and a schedule of visits to complete the assessment.

Stage 2

The applicant(s) will be invited to undertake Skills to Foster training, which forms part of the assessment. Our existing skilled and experienced Foster Carers are used as foster care champions who further support and advise prospective applicants as a buddy and will be invited to at least one of the 'Skills to Foster' training sessions to share their fostering journey.

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 and individual lifestyles, parenting capacity and experience of caring for children, valuing diversity, as well as a health and safety check of the home.

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

This assessment report will be quality assured by the management team and panel advisor 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 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 and 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 consider 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 is of the view that 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 will 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, and a brief report will be presented for consideration by the Fostering Panel.

When approved, the Foster Carers receive a Foster Carer Agreement to sign, and the Team will be advised of their availability to receive a placement. For some carers, matching will take place alongside the assessment to nurture effective planning for children and young people in proceedings or those who have been placed in short term arrangements outside of the 'Foster with Slough' internal fostering provision.

Induction Training is offered for newly approved Foster Carers to prepare them and support them to develop a carers network.

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, are considered throughout their assessment to inform our matching processes.

Approval

Fostering Panel

'Foster with Slough' has a Fostering Panel, constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

The service maintains a 'central list' of Panel members as follows.

- The fostering panel is chaired by an experienced independent 'Panel Chair', an independent 'Vice Chair'
- Social Workers with more than three years relevant post-qualifying experience,
- Slough councillor
- A health representative and other independent members from a variety of relevant professions.

The Panel is ethnically and culturally diverse, to reflect the demographic of Slough. The panel meet monthly and additional panels are organised where there is a high number of new recruits and reviews.

Detailed minutes are kept of all Panel meetings including panel recommendations and context.

The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:

- Each application and recommend whether 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 and every third annual review thereafter.
- 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 encouraged and supported to attend Panel when their application or review is presented to Panel.

The Panel has a quality assurance role regarding the quality of reports and makes recommendations to support the agency to maintain a standard of excellence. All panel recommendations are shared with the management team and 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 National Minimum Standards, the Panel Advisor completes an annual report on progress of panel and all reports presented to panel and feeds this information back for service development and quality assurance.

To enable 'working together principles', panel members, and senior managers from Foster with Slough and Slough Children First, meet up on a quarterly basis to discuss items of training and development, business matters and governance.

Long term fostering

The service offers advice and support on legal and long-term permanence within fostering placements and visit children and Carers to explain the different options and processes.

A permanence monitoring group sits on a weekly basis which identifies children and young people who require 'permanence' and tracks the matching process.

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Unplanned Admissions

Foster for Slough 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 based on the service that 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 a range of 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.

Support and Supervision

The Fostering Service supervises, reviews, trains and supports all 'Foster for Slough' approved Foster Carers. Approved Foster Carers will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker, who will visit the Foster Carer at a frequency of 4-6 weeks to undertake 'supervision' or more frequently where additional support is required.

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.

The Supervising Social Worker 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. Visits will provide an opportunity to discuss the day-to-day care needs of the children and young people and how the Foster Carer is meeting those needs and progressing their 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 members.

Carers are expected to maintain 'daily logs', which are a record of events that happen throughout the day, to enable the identification of triggered behaviours and document accidents, illnesses, and corresponding treatments. These are currently completed on the Charms system and stored and accessed securely in accordance with the General Data Protection principles.

The foster carer issues their logs to their supervising social worker each week 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 Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, s. 32. directs that case records for approved foster carers (including relatives, friends or connected persons granted temporary approval under regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case

Review (England) Regulations 2010), and any information relating to them contained in the register of foster carers and case records are retained for at least 10 years from the date on which their approval is terminated.

For people who are not approved as a foster parent, or who withdraw their application prior to approval, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, S.32 directs that all information pertaining to the applicants is retained for at least 3 years from the refusal or withdrawal.

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

The service works closely with Slough Children First Placements Team, and the 'Cared For' and Safeguarding teams to identify the best families for our children and young people and where possible plan a move with a period of transition that is child informed.

Children and young people who are cared for by Slough Children First and their carers have access to specialist support, including Pathways Education Support, and internally recruited clinicians.

Annual Reviews of Foster Carers

All Foster Carer reviews are undertaken by a Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (sometimes referred to as the FIRO). Each fostering household has an annual review, unless there are significant changes to their circumstances in which case, an early review will be organised. These circumstances include:

- Where allegations have been made regarding a carer(s) childcare practice or a standard of care issue is raised and investigated
- 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
- 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.

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

Feedback will be requested from the child or young person, the carers, the professional network, and any other relevant parties.

The Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer will chair the review and it is usually within the carer's home.

Following approval, the Foster Carer's first review report (at 12 months) and every third annual review report will be presented at panel for their recommendation, consideration and comments and subsequently the Agency Decision Maker for continued approval and ratification. Carers will be invited to attend all panel review meetings, supported by their supervising social workers.

Training and Development

'Foster with Slough' has produced a training programme of courses that take place across the year.

The programme is detailed in a training catalogue and is a collection of mandatory and voluntary training based upon a training needs analysis of our carers. This is reviewed on an annual basis and lays the foundation of our expectation of high quality practice.

We offer a rolling programme of Mandatory Training for Foster Carers, who must complete the seven core mandatory training topics below. These 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

Supplementary Training for Foster Carers 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/placement led - 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 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 also continue to have access to remote learning options and dedicated E-Learning courses that carers could join virtually from their homes or complete independently.

Where a training need is identified and there is no suitable course available through our in house provision, we will apply our best effort to ensure that specialist training can be identified and funded.

Our training offer is continuously under review and developed through a training needs analysis of our applicants and approved carers. The training offer will develop in line with the implementation of specialist roles and the recruitment of new foster carers.

When children come into care – process

Placement Team

There is a dedicated 'Placements Team' within 'Slough Children First', that works closely with 'Foster with Slough'. The Placements team uses a bespoke Placement Referral tool, which is unique to 'Slough Children First' and known as the 'Find my Home' tool. This tool intentionally places children and young people at its core, it is 'strengths based' and informative with a view to optimise the chances of finding the best possible homes at the right time. Placement finding can be as a result of both planned and emergency referrals.

The Placements Team is overseen by a Commissioning Lead and has responsibility for managing all requests for:

- Fostering placements
- Placements for children and young people in residential units, where appropriate.
- Supported accommodation services for care experienced young people aged 16 plus.
- Accommodation for care experienced young people over the age 18.

Matching

Prior to 'Foster with Slough' agreeing to identify a suitable foster family for any child or young person, a process of robust matching is initiated. This process is routinely monitored by senior managers in the service. Our matching process considers the child's needs focussing upon (but not exclusively) the following key areas:

- Safeguarding
- Family, Social and community network
- Schooling/education

- Family time arrangements, the child / young person's wishes and feelings/ carers ability to promote arrangements
- The child / young person's identity/race/culture/religion
- The child / young person's history
- The child / young person's behaviour
- The child / young person's health
- The focus of the fostering arrangement

The matching process will also consider carers' availability and:

- Experience / knowledge / skills
- Address and the distance from the foster home to the child's school / local authority and connected people where relevant including peer group
- Any other 'cared for' children in the foster family
- The Foster Carer's own children and other family members.

Supporting our carers

'Foster with Slough' 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 also available and 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 Supervising Social Workers will not be able to undertake any home visits as the duty worker for this service.

If direct intervention is needed out of hours, the Emergency Duty service will consider the threshold. All foster carers and supervising social workers have the contact details of the Emergency Duty service.

The work of 'Foster with Slough' is well supported by a broad range of internal services including Slough Borough Council Legal Services, Slough Children First Virtual School, Slough Children First Finance and Human Resources, Slough Children First Clinicians and Cared for Children's health team.

Support Groups

Foster with Slough provide regular coffee morning 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 in recognition of the whole family experience and contribution to fostering, whilst also giving the children and young people an opportunity to share any worries that they might have.

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 management team and enable open communication.

Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

Slough Children First has a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who coordinates the response to concerns that an individual who works with children (e.g. in education or children's services) may have caused them or could cause them harm.

Foster with Slough are committed to safeguarding the welfare of children and young people who live with our foster carers. We work together with 'Slough Safeguarding Partnership' which is made up of:

Slough Borough Council, Slough Children First, Schools/Colleges, Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Frimley Health Foundation Trust, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, Thames Valley Police, Solution 4 Health (Public Health Nursing), South Central Ambulance Service, National Probation Service, and Health Watch.

The policies and procedures are carried out by Pan Berkshire policy and procedures group.

Compliments/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.

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

Foster with Slough has a Foster Carer Charter which pledges our commitment to providing and promoting safe, stable, and nurturing placements where the outcomes and life chances are positive for 'cared for children' and young people.

To achieve this, it is important to have working relationships which are based on trust and respect among all children's services workers that are involved in the care of the child.

The Fostering Service has worked in partnership with Foster Carers to develop and agree 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 the policies and procedures relating to Foster Carers, as well as useful information about childcare issues and resources.

Quality Assurance, Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring

There are many activities undertaken by the service that capture performance data and inform practice improvement, these include but are not limited to, Child and Family participation, foster carer feedback, supervision and visiting frequency, annual review reports and panel feedback.

Fostering Services Regulations (2011) Schedules 6 and 7 require that certain matters are monitored and that certain events are notified to the relevant agencies. The Registered/Service Manager and Practice Managers for 'Foster for Slough', have a duty to monitor and respond effectively to any incidents involving Children and Young People placed with Foster Carers. Foster Carers also have a duty to report and record any incidents detailed under Schedule 6 & 7 to the Fostering Agency without any delay.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations, 2011 and National Minimum Standards (NMS) require all Fostering Services to provide a report of their activities and to

annually review a written Statement of Purpose, which sets out the aims and objectives of the service and the facilities they provide.

The Registered Manager is responsible for the Regulation 35 report, Annual Report, reports and statutory/regulatory notifications under the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) and National Minimum Standards (NMS), and any information/data required by the Board and Corporate Parenting Panel. These written reports are used to evaluate the changes and inform service improvement. These reports are quality assured and agreed/signed off by the Head of Regulated Services and the Director of Operations.

Triangulated feedback and information gathered through annual reports, audit, inspections and carer feedback is continuously evaluated by the managers of the Fostering Service, to judge our on-going effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

The Fostering Service is also formally inspected by Ofsted and inspections usually take place every three years. The most recent inspection took place in July 2024, and the service was judged as 'Good'. The service continues to work on its improvement plan and journey towards becoming Ofsted rated 'Outstanding'.

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 Senior 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>