



Slough Children First Connected Person's Team

Statement of Purpose 2021-22

Summary

This Statement of Purpose outlines how the Connected Person's Team functions as part of Slough Children First.

Owner: Saima Arif, Service Manager

Date: April 2021

Review Date: April 2022

©Slough Children First
Observatory House, 25 Windsor Rd, Slough, SL1 2EL
Registered Company: England and Wales:
9487106



Slough be
safe, secure and successful

Table of Contents

Introduction and Context	3
Key Service Aims and Objectives.....	3
Staffing	7
Services to Children and Young People.....	8
Services Provided	8
Connected Carers.....	8
Home from Home (Short Breaks Scheme) Service.....	9
Non-Agency Adoption Assessments.....	10
Play Therapist.....	10
How SCF Connected Person’s Team Operate	10
Assessment Process for Family and Friends Foster Carers.....	100
Support and Supervision	122
Annual Reviews of Family and Friends Foster Carers.....	1212
Training.....	133
Assessment Process for SGO carers	Error! Bookmark not defined. 4
Supporting Services	116
Support Groups	177
Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare.....	177
Covid-19.....	177
SCF Fostering Panel	188
Capacity and Demand	18
Complaints.....	19
Allegations	19
Foster Carers’ Handbook.....	19
Monitoring and Evaluation.....	19
Monitoring.....	19
Evaluating the Service.....	19
Arrangements for the Revision and Circulation of the Statement of Purpose.....	200
Details of Registration	200
Details of Children’s Rights Commissioner	200

Introduction and Context

The Statement of Purpose outlines how the Connected Person's Team functions as part of Slough Children First (SCF). The Statement of Purpose is underpinned by SCF's Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After (2018 to 2021) and the SCF Vision Statement.

It is intended as a useful source of information for:

- Connected Person's 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 Connected Person's Team is situated within Placements and Resources in SCF and offers family and friends placements to Slough children.

Slough Children First's Connected Person's Team 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 Connected Person's Service is committed to:

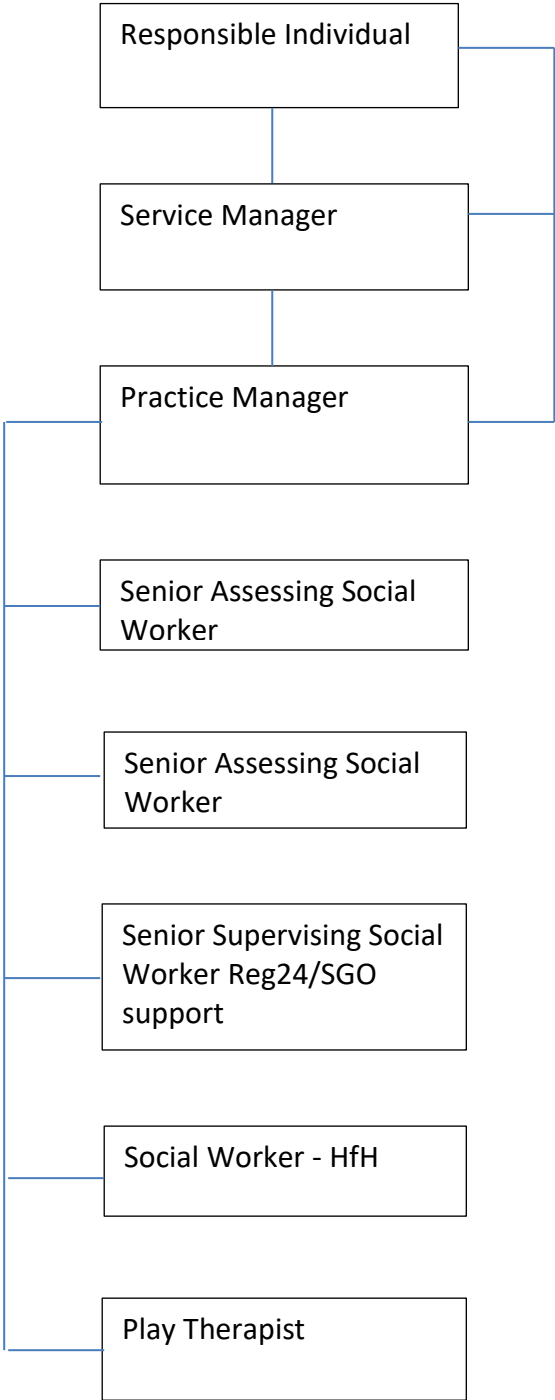
- Providing a safe and secure Connected Carer placement to meet the assessed needs of children and young people in care and to promote and safeguard their welfare
- Providing placements that promote stability and positive outcomes for children and young people by working in partnership with young people, Carers, other professionals and the community
- Ensuring Connected Carers and their families receive professional guidance, support and training as appropriate to help them fulfil their roles as effectively as possible
- Providing children and young people with a safe and secure permanent placement through the completion of non-agency adoption assessments
- Continuing to support children with disabilities within their families of origin and is achieved by regular periods of family-based short breaks through the Home from Home Scheme.

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
- Promote and safeguard children's welfare
- Ensure Connected 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 they are caring for
- 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 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 Connected Carer a named allocated supervising Social Worker
- 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 Connected Person’s Team is Slough Children First.

The Assistant Director – QIPP (Quality, Improvement, Practice and Performance) is the responsible individual for the service and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The Interim Assistant Director for Frontline Practice and Improvement is the Supplementary Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The Service Manager is the Registered Manager.

The practice manager of the service is a qualified Social Worker, registered by Social Work England, with extensive experience in children and families social work. She is responsible for the supervision and professional development of the staff within the Connected Person's Team and the day to day management and growth of the service.

All assessing and supervising social work staff within the team 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 Connected Person's Team is to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring Connected Persons placements for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents. 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.

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 Connected Persons Carer (where appropriate) at least once annually.

We provide a range of events and activities for children and young people to be involved with including days out, for example picnics and fun days. We make efforts to recognise the celebrations of other faiths inclusive of EID when we provide children with Eid Boxes (age & gender dependent gifts).

The voices of all household members (inclusive of children who are members of the Connected Carers' families) are included within assessments and annual reviews.

Services Provided

Connected Carers

The team completes joint viability assessments with the child social worker for Regulation 24 emergency family and friends fostering's assessment and for SGO or CAO's. All assessments are undertaken after referrals are received by the Practice Manager for this service. The team complete robust SGO and CAO assessments regardless of whether they are directed as part of public care proceedings or private applications. The Team works collaboratively with other social work teams within the department and professionals involved in a child's network. Family and Friends and Connected Person assessments are also completed by the team within 24 weeks and they are

presented to foster panel for recommendation and ADM for approval. The Family and Friends/connected foster carers have a dedicated SSW who visits them at least 4-6 weekly. Family and Friends/Connected Person Foster Carers are encouraged to attend the training courses available for all SCF carers.

The team also offer additional specific training which is run on a rolling programme to the SGO and family and friends' foster carers- which includes topics safeguarding, CSE, identity and life story work, contact, education, health, attachment, managing difficult behaviours. A 12 week fostering changes course is also offered to these carers.

The team offer support to the families through transition plans and step down plans for new SGO placements as well as telephone advice and support for post SGO carers which includes signposting to other services. Monthly Forums are held with SGO carers where discussions occur around developing services to meet the needs of the carers and children. The team hold a Funday to get the views of SGO/ CAO children and their carers.

The team send out and monitor all the annual financial reviews for SGO cases where they receive a SGO allowance. The Finance team completes these.

The Connected Person's Team currently provides:

- A duty system supporting requests for joint viability assessments by child social workers
- A dedicated SSW who supports all family and friends foster carers
- Post order support to SGO carers, providing advice and signposting to carers
- Assessment of Connected Persons carers.

A Fostering Panel constituted and administered in line with regulatory requirements, which considers and makes recommendations about the approval of all prospective new family and friends foster carers.

Home from Home (short breaks scheme) Service

This service manages specialist family-based short break arrangements to support children and young people with a range of disabilities and their families, offering breaks during the day/evening and overnight stays.

Referrals for potential links are received by a Practice Manager; the bulk of such referrals originate from SCF's Children With Disabilities (CWD) Service within the Trust.

Carers within this scheme are supported by a supervising social worker who supervises and supports them whilst promoting potential links between Carers and families. The SSW attends meetings with Social Workers and families in order to establish and review links.

Carers within the scheme receive specialist training, but also have access to the general fostering service training programme.

Non-Agency Adoption Assessments

From the 1st April 2021, the Connected Person's Team is also responsible for completing all non-agency adoption assessments such as step-parent adoptions.

The Connected Person's Team provides:

- Information to prospective adopters on the adoption process, as well as other options available to them, such as SGO
- Assessment of prospective adopters whilst guiding them through the application process

Play Therapist

The play therapist's role is to offer support and advice to foster carers, as well as SGO carers. The play therapist also offers regular play therapy sessions to a number of foster and SGO children specific to their identified needs.

How SCF Connected Person's Team Operate

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

- 1 x part time practice manager
- 2 x full time senior social workers
- 1 x full time senior supervising social worker
- 1 x full time social worker (home from home)
- 1 x part time play therapist

The Connected Persons assessments are undertaken by the two assessing social workers in the Connected Person's Team.

The service undertake robust and thorough assessments of Connected Persons carers and deliver high quality preparatory training to best equip new Family and Friends Foster Carers and their households for their roles ahead. We utilise the assessment process to assist applicants to evidence, at least, an insight into young people that they are caring for that will enable them to develop the necessary skills to care for these young people in the long term.

The team operates a duty system, from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, to ensure that any urgent joint viability assessments can receive an immediate response and also to offer advice and support to any Connected Carers to enquiries they may have. Connected Carers are able to access the service's website and can gain general and local information regarding the service alongside accessing key information including our statement of purpose.

Assessment Process for Family and Friends Foster Carers

To enable relatives, friends or other persons who are connected with the child, to care for a Looked After Child, they must be temporarily approved as foster carers under the Care Planning Regulations

2010 to allow an immediate placement. SCF must be satisfied that any placement is the most suitable one available to safeguard and promote the child's welfare, until the full assessment for approval by the fostering panel can be completed under the 2011 Fostering Regulations. 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 connected person will be assessed as a family and friends foster carer within 16 weeks of the child being placed under Regulation 24 of the fostering Regulations. This timeframe can be extended by the fostering panel for a further 8 weeks under Regulation 25 of the 2010 care planning Regulations.

The applicant(s) will be invited to undertake Skills to Foster training which forms part of the assessment.

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.

This assessment report will be presented to SCF's Fostering Panel by the assessing Social Worker and is quality assured by the practice manager prior to this being presented to our panel members. The applicants will be invited to attend a panel meeting where the application and assessment will be considered by the Panel. The SSW 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 and the Connected Carers will not be recommended for approval.

Should the Family and Friends carers be approved as long term foster carers for the child/ren they care for, 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, offering training to the Carers to 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.

Support and Supervision

Whilst under assessment as Regulation 24/25 carers, the Connected Carers have the support of the Supervising Social Worker within the team, 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 Connected 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 Connected 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 the Connected Carers.

The Head of Service is the Registered Manager and 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 a Friends and Family Foster Carers' homes per year. We however endeavour to complete two visits per year wherever possible.

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 Family and Friends Foster Carer.

Children and young people in the care of SCF and their Carers have access to specialist support, including Pathways Education Support; the Wellbeing Service which is now situated within the placement service and local CAMHS, which includes the provision of counselling, art therapy and play therapy for children in care.

Annual Reviews of Family and Friends Foster Carers

All Family and Friends Foster Carer reviews are undertaken by an independent fostering reviewing officer. Each Family and Friends 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

- Where there have been significant changes to the carer(s) lifestyle
- 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
- 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, supervising Social Worker, Carer, the child/young person in placement and any other interested parties.

A Team Manager or Consultant Practitioner will chair the review, usually within the carer's home.

Following approval, the Family and Friends Foster Carer's first review report and following this on every third year, the Family and Friends 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 Family and Friends 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 the Trust's preferred platform of Blue Jeans or through similar platforms (such as Microsoft Teams) if training was run by an external provider.

We continued with our 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 Family and Friends Foster Carers

Carers must complete seven core mandatory training topics:

1. Paediatric First Aid –This has to be done as a face to face training and is repeated every three years.

The following courses must be repeated every two years:

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.

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.

We 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 2021 learning and development programme was issued to carers in December 2020. In response to the uncertainty of Covid and its associated restrictions, all training courses from January – March 2021 were automatically set up either as remote learning options so that carers could dial in from their homes or dedicated E-Learning courses – again, easily accessible from home.

Assessment process for SGO carers

Special Guardianship offers an option for children needing permanent care outside their birth family. It can offer greater security without absolute severance from the birth family as in adoption.

It can meet the needs of a significant group of children, mainly older, who need a sense of stability and security but who do not wish to make the absolute legal break with their birth family that is associated with adoption.

It also provides an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.

A Special Guardianship Order offers greater stability and legal security to a placement than a Child Arrangements Order.

Children subject to a Special Guardianship Order are eligible as previously Looked After Children for additional support with their education (Sections 20(4) and 20A(4) of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008). For further information, please see the [Education of Children Looked After and Previously Looked After Procedure](#).

Special Guardians have Parental Responsibility for the child and, whilst this is shared with the child's parents, the Special Guardian has the ability to exercise this responsibility without seeking permission from the parents.

A Special Guardianship Order made with respect to a child who is the subject of a Care Order or for an order for contact to a child in care discharges those orders.

People thinking about becoming special guardians will be provided with clear, user-friendly information to help them make informed choices. This should include information on support available and how this is reviewed.

All assessing social workers within the Connected Person's Team are suitably qualified and experienced.

In all cases there will need to be:

- An assessment of the current and likely future needs of the child (including any harm the child has suffered and any risk of future harm posed by the child's parents, relatives or any other person the Local Authority/Trust considers relevant);
- An assessment of the prospective Special Guardian's parenting capacity including:
 - i. Their understanding of, and ability to meet, the child's current and likely future needs, particularly any needs the child may have arising from harm that the child has suffered;
 - ii. Their understanding of, and ability to protect the child from any current or future risk of harm posed by the child's parents, relatives or any other person the Local Authority/Trust consider relevant, particularly in relation to contact between any such person and the child;
 - iii. Their ability and suitability to bring up the child until the child reaches the age of eighteen.
- An assessment of the proposed contact arrangements and the support needs (See [Section 11, Assessment for Support](#)) of the child, parents and the prospective special guardian.

The assessment of the applicants should include their medical history, the references received and the Disclosure and Barring Service and other statutory checks undertaken for the assessment.

Where a full assessment is undertaken, it is to be expected that this will usually require a 3-month time scale or by the court ordered date.

Assessments are evidence-based and child-focussed. Before the assessment, the prospective carers are provided with full information about:

- i. What the assessment will involve;
- ii. The time and commitment needed from them;
- iii. A letter is sent explaining the expectations of the carers and what they should think about during the process.

The assessment aims to carefully balance the strengths families may have; any existing relationships they have with the child and the significance for the child of remaining within their family and network, against the carers' capacity to meet the assessed needs and the challenges that a particular child may bring on a long-term basis and until their 18th birthday.

Once completed, the Court Report is submitted by the assessing social worker to their line manager for approval.

The prospective carers are provided with a final copy of the report and allowed time to read the assessment report before it is filed and comment on the report.

Following the filing of the report, the prospective carers are given the opportunity to seek independent advice and legal advice to understand fully the implications of any Orders made and if need be, make applications of their own.

A Special Guardianship Support Plan is provided alongside the filing of the Special Guardianship Order report and its recommendation, detailing the support to be provided to the carers and the child and include contact for the child with their birth parents. The potential applicants should also to seek legal advice about the Support Plan.

Supporting Services

The Connected Person's Team operates a duty system during office hours (9am – 5pm) Monday to Friday, providing advice and support to Family and Friends Foster Carers and SGO carers when their allocated supervising Social Worker is unavailable. Both assessing social workers and the supervising social worker 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.

An out of hours telephone advice service is provided to Carers and is maintained by staff of Slough Children First's Independent Fostering Agency and the supervising social worker from the Connected Persons team. 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 Service should a need occur outside of the out of hours operating hours.

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

The work of the Connected Person's Team is well supported by a broad range of internal services including Joint Legal Team Services, SCF Virtual School, SCF Finance and Human Resources, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), SCF Clinicians and CLA health provision. A dedicated play therapist is physically located within the Connected Persons Team to provide timely support to Foster Carers and family and friends Foster Carers and the children they care for, when required.

Special Guardianship support services are defined as:

- Financial support (see **Section 14, Financial Support**);
- Services to enable groups of children for whom a Special Guardianship Order is in force (or in respect of whom such an Order is being formally considered), special guardians, prospective special guardians, and parents of the child to discuss matters relating to special guardianship;
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to contact between the child and their parents or relatives or any other person with whom the child has a relationship that SCF considers to be beneficial to the welfare of the child;
- Therapeutic services for the child;
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between the child and his/her special guardian or prospective special guardian, including training for the special

- guardian or prospective special guardian to meet any special needs of the child; and mediation in relation to matters relating to Special Guardianship Orders and;
- Counselling, advice and information.

Support Groups

The Connected Person's Team provide regular support groups, called SGO Forum, which serve to provide an opportunity for our SGO 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 Connected Persons caring and to discuss any issues that may be concerning them.

Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

The Berkshire Local Safeguarding Children's Board provides the procedural framework for safeguarding children in Slough and the Connected Person's Team 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 Connected Persons carers, children and staff, the Connected Person's Team 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 Connected Person's Team continued to provide a service to Connected Persons Carers and children and undertook all supervisory social work visits via phone or some form of video link and kept in touch with carers on a regular basis to ensure they have all the necessary support they need.

Physical visits have 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 have been shielding or have anxiety relating to Covid-19, some visits are held in the garden where it is easier to social distance.

We have continued to have annual reviews and panel via video link. Annual reviews are now taking place in the carer's home but panel continues to be held via video link to ensure we are maintaining effective social distancing.

SCF Fostering Panel

The Connected Person's Team accesses the Fostering Service's 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 interventions 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 Adviser 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 Connected Person's Team responds to planned and unplanned admissions. The structure of the Connected Person's Team recognises that unplanned admissions will occur and seeks to proactively address this need.

Complaints

All Connected Persons Carers and children and young people in their care have access to 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 manager of the Connected Person's Team, along with the Head of Service, monitors all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Connected Person's Team.

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.

Foster Carers' Handbook

All approved Family and Friends 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 Head of Service 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 Family and Friends 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.

Evaluating the Service

The information gathered through quarterly and annual reports, audit, inspections and customer feedback is constantly evaluated by the manager of the Connected Person's Team and the service manager, to judge its on-going effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

The Connected Person's Team is also subject to formal inspection by Ofsted and inspections usually take place every three years. The most recent inspection took place April 2019, when the Connected Person's Team still formed part of the IFA, and the service was judged as 'Inadequate'. Extensive work has been undertaken with the support of data provided by SCF to measure performance and to plan for sufficiency needs, alongside service development. Monitoring visits have taken place in June 2019, August 2019, May 2020 and November 2020, with positive outcomes.

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 Fostering Panel annually for their consideration, and will also be considered by the Executive Leadership Team of Slough Children First.

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

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

Details of Children's Rights Commissioner

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>