



# SCF IFA Duty Procedure

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<b>Version:</b>	Final
<b>Date:</b>	April 2024
<b>Review Date:</b>	April 2026

## **Policy Summary:**

This document outlines the SCF IFA duty processes and includes information and guidance on how the duty worker should approach duty tasks. A duty service is required to support our in house foster carers and in searching for in house placements for children. This policy is written to ensure that SCF IFA has an established procedure that must be followed whilst a worker or manager is on duty.

# Contents

<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.Aims and Objectives of Duty .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Duty Hours and Contact Details .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Duty Rota .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4. Duty Worker Roles .....</b>	<b>4</b>
4.1 Key Duty Tasks and Responsibilities.....	4
4.2 Collaborative Work .....	7
4.3 Placement Search .....	7
4.5 Respite Requests .....	8
4.6 Duty Payments/Request to Spend Forms (RTSF) .....	9
4.7 External placements .....	9
4.8 Fostering Duty email .....	10
4.9 Post Placement Support.....	10
4.10 Support/Cover to Colleagues.....	10
<b>5. Roles and Responsibilities of the Fostering Duty Manager .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6. Key Duty Documents.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>7. Out of Hours Support and Rota .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>8. Vacancy List .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>9. FOSTER CARER MATCHING PROCESS .....</b>	<b>13</b>
1. Contact.....	14
2. Siblings .....	14
3. School.....	15
4. Ethnicity, Race, Culture and Language .....	15
5. Religion .....	16
6. Disability.....	16
7. Bedroom Sharing .....	16
8. Impact of proposed placement on any other child in placement and on Foster carer's household members .....	17
9. Foster Carers Circumstance, experience and skills .....	18
11. Children's needs, History and Background.....	18

## 1.Aims and Objectives of Duty

Duty ensures the smooth and efficient running of Slough Children First Independent Fostering Agency (SCF IFA) and acts as a first port of call to those who are seeking advice and support in connection with in house fostering placements. It responds to emergency and planned placement requests to ensure that in house resources are fully used to best meet the needs of children looked after. The objective of duty is:

- To identify placements with SCF IFA carers that can meet the assessed and identified needs of children and young people
- To arrange the most suitable match for the child or young person
- To work closely with the SCF placement team to ensure all placement searches are managed efficiently and there is a smooth handover to this team where in-house fostering resource is not available.
- To support foster carers when their allocated Supervising Social Worker is not available
- To respond to emergency situations affecting children or carers
- To respond to and deal with all enquires that come through the fostering duty line or the fostering duty inbox.
- To complete all allocated duty tasks for the day
- To provide support, advice and guidance to carers and staff

## 2. Duty Hours and Contact Details

- Duty Phone number: 01753 690960
- Duty Email: [Fosteringduty@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk](mailto:Fosteringduty@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk)
- The duty system operates from Monday – Friday between the hours of 9am - 5pm daily. The expectation is that the main duty worker commences the duty tasks for the day at 9am prompt in the office and is assisted by the backup duty worker also based in the office.
- The placements team can be contacted by email: [\\_FamilyPlacementDuty@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk](mailto:_FamilyPlacementDuty@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk)

## 3. Duty Rota

A monthly duty rota is used to manage the work on duty; the rota is created and circulated on a 3 monthly basis and updates and changes will be communicated.

Workers are given the opportunity to put in the required/preferred days of duty when the rota is circulated within a fixed time. Where the workers required/preferred duty dates are not received, the duty rota will be completed, and gaps assigned to fostering workers by the Business Support Officers/Managers. Where duty swaps are made, the duty workers making the swaps must ensure the rota is updated and the Fostering Managers are informed of any changes made. Workers will be expected to find cover by swapping the dates they are not available. Managers will inform the individual workers of how many days of main duty and back up duty are needed for each worker for the smooth running of the service at a given time.

The needs of the service in relation to duty will be prioritised in considering all annual leave requests during the Christmas, Easter and Summer Holidays to ensure there is duty cover during these periods.

## **4. Duty Worker Roles**

### **4.1 Key Duty Tasks and Responsibilities**

These tasks and responsibilities are to be completed by the duty worker and/or the back-up duty worker when they are covering duty. Both the main duty worker and the back-up duty worker are jointly responsible for all duty tasks on any given day.

1. Answer and resolve all calls, queries or enquiries coming through fostering duty number or inbox and resolve or signpost these to relevant team, officer or social worker.
2. Deal with all placement requests received between 9am – 5pm.
3. Liaise with the placement team regarding new placements, requests for placements, profiles or cases that had been carried over from a previous request for placement.
4. Complete placement searches for planned, emergency, day care and respite placements by reviewing the vacancy list on CHARMS.
5. Review the referrals/profile received from the placements team, if there are gaps in the information, an updated placement request form PRF must be requested. All placement request forms must be anonymised.
6. Share placement request forms with Supervising Social Workers (SSW) and discuss the availability/suitability of their carers after a discussion with duty

manager. These discussions should be in line with the child's needs and carer's personal circumstance, skills and experience.

7. Share anonymised PRFs (Placement request form/find my home tool) and profiles with the SSW and the carers identified.
8. Where a placement is to be matched with a carer within the Mockingbird Constellation, the referral must also be discussed with the Hub Carer(s) and the Mockingbird Liaison Worker. This process must also be followed where the placement is made out of hours (OOH). The Hub carer(s) and the OOH duty manager must be contacted if a placement is made OOH.
9. Consult the Fostering Duty Manager to get agreement for any placement match. The Registered Manager must be informed of any placements made as the overall agreement/oversight for placements rests with the RM.
10. Call the carer to discuss the anonymised PRF and get their agreement for any match.
11. Record all SCF PRFs and those external PRFs being considered by SCF IFA carers received on CHARMS database by creating a child profile and a potential link to carer. A progress item of any discussions with carers and emails regarding the placements to be recorded on the child's file and copied across as a progress item onto the potential link carer so that there is a clear audit trail.
12. Where placements are turned down by foster carers, this must be recorded on the potential link so that the carers' file reflects that a placement has been offered and turned down.
13. Where a suitable placement has not been identified by SCF IFA, the duty social worker must evidence that in-house placements have been sought but could not be identified in their recordings. An email should be sent to placement team evidencing what carers were consulted, what was the outcome and/or why they are not a suitable match. The names of the carers must be anonymised in the email. This informs the decision to search for an external IFA placement where an in-house placement cannot be identified. This information must also be recorded in duty handover email at 5pm to the next day duty worker, manager and fostering duty email.
14. Complete the individual risk assessment, safer care plan and matching needs document for each child. This must include all information from the

profile/PRF, historical information received or information verbally shared. The completed draft or finalised forms must be shared and discussed with the carer. All discussions must be recorded on the carers file on CHARMS.

15. Every Monday, the duty worker must review the in-house vacancy list on CHARMS, call carers to ascertain their availability to go on the Emergency Duty Service (EDS) list and send out the compiled list of available carers to the EDS services, placement service, SCF heads of service, OOH duty worker and all managers in the IFA. The EDS list must contain the name, address, phone number, terms of approval and placement restrictions of the foster carer as well as the name and phone numbers of the OOH duty SSW and Manager.
16. Complete an exemption if there is a need for one for a placement.
17. Manage the Fostering duty\_inbox by dealing with all enquiries from foster carers, social workers and SCF in general. Any requests for local authority checks should be re-directed to the front door on Sloughchildren.referrals <[Sloughchildren.referrals@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk](mailto:Sloughchildren.referrals@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk).
18. Provide Post Placement Support to foster carers and children where necessary.
19. Duty workers are not to book visits or meetings on their own case load on the days they are on duty. In cases where an emergency comes up on a duty workers case load that needs to be undertaken on duty, this needs to be discussed and agreed with the duty manager and/or line manager.
20. Duty handover discussions to be held with the OOH duty social workers where there are tasks to be followed up or welfare support calls to be made OOH. This must be recorded as a case note on the IFA's digital recording system - CHARMS.
21. The duty phone and out of hours service duty phone is automatically diverted via a service called 8 x 8 app. Please contact the admin team if there is a change needed.
22. Ensure you are aware of duty tasks on the day you are meant to be on duty, so no task is missed by checking the duty handover email, electronic duty calendar, discussions with the duty manager etc.
23. Complete any tasks or duty allocated by the duty manager or fostering practice manager/Registered Manager.

24. Duty workers must adhere to all public health and safety guidelines whilst undertaking their duty tasks.

## **4.2 Collaborative Work**

Effective matches will only be achieved by means of information sharing involving all relevant professionals, the child and their family, potential carers and their families including any children in placement. Relevant professionals may include: the child's social worker, the supervising social worker, fostering practice manager and Registered manager, placement team, health and education staff, clinicians and/or and heads of service. Any verbal or written information shared by any of these professionals must be considered as part of the matching process.

Liaise with placement team regarding new placements that may have been made overnight, new placement requests or any cases that had been pended. Where a new placement has been made overnight by the Emergency Duty Service; the duty worker will inform the allocated SSW so they can contact the carer to discuss the placement, support needed, placement planning meeting/delegation authority etc. The duty worker will follow up and ensure the necessary documentation (Matching needs form, Individual Risk Assessment and Safer Care Plans) are completed by the allocated SSW.

## **4.3 Placement Search**

This involves searching for planned and emergency placement including day care and respite placement. If the PRF is received on a team or service meeting day, this can be discussed at the supervision and support team meeting where it is a request for a planned placement. The duty worker is responsible for presenting the child's PRF at the meeting. The IFA matching process and matching flow chart should be used as a guide in the search for a placement and identifying suitable matches.

The Duty Worker is responsible for reading the child's profile and any additional documentation sent over by the Social Work Team and additional information on the child's case file on ICS (family assessment report, CP plans, case notes, background information) to have a good sense of a child's needs and care a child may require.

They will liaise with the Child's Social Worker (CSW) where additional information is needed. They will also check the child's PRF to ensure that the language is appropriate and also reflects the positives, strengths and hobbies of the child a placement is being sought for.

Duty will refer to SCF's Vacancy list and discuss the child's PRF with supervising social workers in the team and Duty Manager to explore and identify potential suitable placements. This includes liaising with the CSW that completed the PRF; supervising social worker; CSW to other children already in placement to ascertain their views if the proposed placement were to be made.

Where relevant workers agree about the proposed placement, Duty will contact the proposed foster carer and discuss the child's PRF with that carer, answer questions that carer may have and share the PRF with the carer securely using the CHARMS portal or via egress and any relevant additional anonymised information received.

The foster carer is given an opportunity to think through the information shared with them to ensure that they have made an informed decision about the placement. Foster carers should not be pressured into taking placements.

The Duty worker will further explore the placement plans with the CSW i.e. what time the placement will be made, what preparation the carer needs to undertake before the child is placed etc.

#### **4.5 Respite Requests**

All requests for respite need to be agreed by the Child's Social Worker and/or their manager and emailed to the fostering duty inbox. Foster Carers are not to agree respite care arrangements between themselves without consulting with their SSWs and SCF IFA's agreement. Foster Carers may make suggestions about proposed respite arrangements and agree this with their SSWs.

All respite request/proposal still needs to be agreed; requested through the duty inbox and recorded on the CHARMS placements list if in house. The respite referral



form, individual risk assessment and safer care plan must also be completed by the duty social worker or the SSW.

#### **4.6 Duty Payments/Request to Spend Forms (RTSF)**

The Duty Worker is responsible for communicating placements made to supervising social workers so payments to carers can be initiated. Where the supervising social worker is unavailable, it is the responsibility of the duty worker to follow up on this task.

Where there are identified needs that the foster carer cannot meet upon matching; the duty social worker should explore what support can be offered to the carer to support the placement. Where there is an additional cost element to the support to be offered; this will need to be discussed and agreed with the duty manager and/or relevant CLA team manager dependent on who has responsibility for providing the identified support. Where this is agreed, duty workers must complete a request to spend form (RTSF) for all financial related support to a carer or child.

A discussion of whether a child may meet the child complexity element of payment should be had with the fostering manager and a child complexity assessment completed by the duty worker and sent to the fostering practice manager or Registered manager to be agreed and discussion with child's social worker and their manager. This will need to be agreed at the access to resources panel.

All RTSF's and other financial information document completed must be uploaded to the carers file on the IFA's digital recording system CHARMS, so there is an audit trail of these. A Progress Item about the RTSF/payment/invoice and what it was for must be completed.

#### **4.7 External placements**

If a placement is made with SCFIFA by another fostering agency, the duty worker will be asked to fill out a placement proposal form and this should be quality assured by the fostering duty manager. The agency may ask for the carers' profile which can be found on softbox and on the carers' CHARMS record, a copy of the Form F, latest

OFSTED report and statement of purpose (these are found on CHARMS documents store). The placement costs will depend on the age of the child and should be checked with SCF business partner. For example, in January 2024 the costs are 0-5 years £815, 6-12 years £825, 13-18 years £850. In addition to this cost, add 2 weeks holiday pay, birthday allowance, festival allowance and travel over 100 miles per week at 45p per mile to the final placement cost.

#### **4.8 Fostering Duty email**

[Fosteringduty@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk](mailto:Fosteringduty@sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk)

This is one of the ways foster carers contact the team. The Duty Worker needs to review emails received on duty and respond to these, this many include forwarding emails to relevant SSW or dealing with foster carer enquiry/queries on behalf of the allocated worker.

#### **4.9 Post Placement Support**

All carers who take on a new placement of a child may have a welfare telephone support contact by the Out of Hour social worker where this is assessed as needed. It is the responsibility of the duty worker to inform the OOH social worker that this support is needed.

#### **4.10 Support/Cover to Colleagues**

The duty worker provides cover to colleagues who are on sickness absence or on annual leave, this may include completing duty visits to foster carers' home, attending meetings, or dealing with any arising issues or support foster carers or children in placement may need.

Where the SSW is on leave or away on an emergency, the duty worker will contact the carer the following day to complete a further welfare check and ensure that the carer does not need further support. In cases like this, the duty worker is also responsible for completing and planning the placement planning meeting in the absence of the SSW. The placement planning meeting needs to take placement within 5 working days of the start of the placement.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities of the Fostering Duty Manager

There will be a duty manager overseeing the fostering duty service daily in the office. This will presently be covered by all the managers in SCF IFA. The primary role of the duty manager is to offer support and guidance to the duty social worker and to make management decisions in relation any work generated. The duty social worker will ensure that prior to all placements being matched and made, agreement is sought from the duty manager. The Duty Manager will also have oversight of all PRFs; and matching of children must approve all placements. The Duty manager's decision about any match will be recorded on the matching needs form when it is authorised on CHARMS. The duty manager also authorises and signs off the individual risk assessment and safer care plans completed on CHARMS. This must be sent to the duty manager by the duty worker on the day the placement is made.

The duty manager's red flags may include but not limited to cases that involve the concerns listed below. Extra support will likely be needed and must be explored with the duty worker where these red flags are identified.

- Child Exploitation
- Missing in Care or absence from the placement
- Placement Disruptions/Placement Stability
- Allegations and Standard of care concerns
- Domestic Abuse perpetrated by children
- Offending behaviour

## 6. Key Duty Documents

1. **Anonymised Child's PRF** completed by the CSW to enable Duty to search for a suitable placement. This is sent via email from the placements team. Once this is received, CHARMS is checked to see if this was already created if the child was already known to us or is a repeat referral. If the child is closed on CHARMS, then the status is updated to active referral so that there is a record of repeat referrals. If this is a new child to SCF IFA, then a child's

profile is created, and this will create a notified status. The PRF should be saved under a progress item named Placement request form. Please refer to the CHARMS Referral and Matching Guidance for more detailed advice.

2. **Child Friendly foster Carer profile** must be shared with the CSW at the time of placement request.
3. **SCF IFA Vacancy List** highlights the house foster carer availability. This is on CHARMS and automatically generated so the SSW and duty workers must ensure that this is regularly updated to show current information.
4. **SCF IFA Matching Needs and Risks Form-** to be completed to demonstrate suitability of placement match and management decision about the match.
5. **Individual Risk Assessment** - Assess and address any current and future risks with a robust management plan.
6. **Family & Child Safer Care Plan** – Assess and address any current and future risks with a robust management plan.
7. **Child's Care Plan, Placement Plan and Delegated Authority** - this will have essential information about the plan for child, the plan for the placement and what aspects of parental responsibility is delegated to the carer. The need for this to be started and finalised must be highlighted to the child social worker by the duty worker. There are SCF OFA placement plan and delegated authority templates on CGARMS progress items.
8. **Section 20 Agreement or Care Orders** - where available
9. **Bedroom Risk Assessment** - where the children are sharing a bedroom.
10. **Any other documents relevant to the placement**

## 7. Out of Hours Support and Rota

There is a weekly OOH duty rota for social workers and Managers; the aim is to provide support to carers by providing a wrap around service. All OOH duty calls and actions must be recorded the IFA's digital recording system CHARMS. The managers and the allocated supervising social worker should be kept up to date via email or requesting digital signature on CHARMS.

Where there is a follow up task and the allocated supervising social worker is on annual leave or on sickness absence, the matter must be escalated to the duty

manager and the duty social worker for the next day. It is the expectation of SCFIFA that all social workers and managers should be on the OOH rota from time to time.

## **8. Vacancy List**

A comprehensive review of the Vacancy List should be done during placement searches by duty workers and any discrepancies should be resolved in discussions with the duty manager. Updates to the availability restriction to be considered are:

- Placement move and endings.
- Note foster carers holidays to ensure that the team is aware and implication for placement considered.
- Reflect whether a carer can take emergency placements or not.
- Reflect potential matched placement.
- Reflect the children in respite placement.
- Reflect/indicate children due for adoption/reunification to review resources that are becoming available.
- Reflect children who will be turning 18 and may become subject to a staying put arrangement.
- Reflect foster carers who are blocked or on hold due to personal circumstance, allegations etc.
- Reflect red flags and any potential placement issues that could result in a disruption so a placement stability meeting can be held.

## **9. FOSTER CARER MATCHING PROCESS**

The matching process below is an excerpt from the SCF IFA Matching process and is aimed at supporting duty social workers in the matching decision. Please refer to the SCF matching process which must be read in conjunction with these duty procedures.

Generally, Children should be appropriately matched with carers that can meet their needs to minimise disruptions and placement breakdowns. Please evidence what support the foster carer will need following careful matching. The following areas should be considered by the duty social worker:

## **1. Contact**

As a general principle, contact arrangements should not preclude the decision making on placements, but align with decision making. Finding a placement that meets the child's assessed contact needs should be one of the most important considerations in selecting an appropriate placement. Issues to be considered include:

- Plan for the child (if the plan is for rehabilitation, then contact will be crucial, if the plan is for permanence, then other contributing factors should be considered);
- Frequency of desired contact;
- Who is the child to have contact with;
- Nature of the contact (direct or indirect);
- Where contact will take place;
- Distance from foster carers address to contact venue;
- Is transport needed? Does contact need to be supervised, who supervises the contact.

It is an expectation that foster carers will transport children in contact in line with their care plans and if support is needed, this will need to be highlighted at the matching stage and funding agreement at the access to resources panel needs to be sought by the children's team.

## **2. Siblings**

Where siblings become looked after, they will normally be expected to be placed together unless there are clear indications that this will not be in the best interests of one or more of the children. Such a conclusion should only normally be reached after a comprehensive assessment of the needs of all the children concerned. While it may therefore be necessary to seek separate permanent placements for siblings after such an assessment, the assumption at the point children become looked after should be that siblings will be placed together.

If siblings need to be placed separately, either because of their assessed needs or due to the lack of a placement to keep them together, consideration must be given to their need for contact and how this will be met.

Any decision to place together or separate the children must be received from the Child Social Worker (CSW) and/or their Team Manager.

### **3. School**

Placements should ensure there is continuity in relation to children's education unless there are overriding issues such as the child's safety. For school aged children, the carer's ability to take the child to and from school and the distance from the carers home to the child's school should be considered. For older children, the child's ability to get to school themselves needs to be assessed (with impact of the length of journey assessed).

### **4. Ethnicity, Race, Culture and Language**

We believe that wherever possible, children's needs will be best met by placement with a carer that reflects their ethnic, racial, cultural and language background. This is because continuity of experience can be met, and natural opportunities will be available for the child to participate in. However, these are not the only key factors and must be considered with all other matching information. It is unacceptable for a child to miss out on a placement simply because the carer did not share the same ethnicity, race or culture. It is often possible to identify a carer who understands the issues a child will face and who will find support to meet the child's needs in this area.

The child's long-term welfare should be the paramount consideration. Any decision to keep the child in a placement that does not fully meet their racial, cultural or language needs should be made on this basis rather than because not to move might appear the easier short-term decision.

Where trans-racial or trans-community placements are made, the carer should be provided with additional training, support and information to enable the child to be

provided with the best possible care and to develop a positive understanding of their heritage. The input of birth family, friends and other carers may help to achieve this. The need for this support should be highlighted to the Supervising Social Worker at the point of placement.

## **5. Religion**

Matching issues regarding religion are similar to those about race and culture. Where a child does practice a religion, the carer's own ability to facilitate and promote the child's religious practice will need careful consideration.

Religion may not play a significant role in the lives of many carers and while this may suggest that a proposed placement does not present a conflict for the child's beliefs, the lack of any faith on the part of the carer may present a conflict.

Workers will need to be satisfied that carers are able and willing to respect the child's views. This may mean the carer needs to be willing to transport the child to a place of worship or respect the child's views in terms of diet and dress. These issues can be as difficult for carers who do not have a faith as for carers with a different faith to the child. The duty worker will therefore need to be satisfied that the carers are able and willing to respect/promote the child's religious beliefs.

## **6. Disability**

Children's needs arising from a disability need careful consideration. Social workers will need to ensure that other support is in place to meet needs arising from the child's disability. This will include access to required medical care and specialist education where needed. The carer may need practical support by way of equipment or access to specialist advice or training.

The use of respite care may need to be considered.

## **7. Bedroom Sharing**



(NMS 10.6) states: *'In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed. The outcome of this assessment must be recorded on the child's and carer's files'.*

SCF IFA's initial position is that children should do not share rooms. Carers' own birth children and children looked after should have their own bedrooms. However, on occasions, when other matching factors are met and the child social worker agrees, there might be a need for siblings to share a bedroom as an exception to the rule. In these circumstances a bedroom sharing risk assessment must be completed. In such situations, matching should take account of the sleeping arrangements, if the children have previously shared a bedroom, views of the children and the children's social workers, age, gender and background of all children who it is proposed will share a bedroom. The outcome of this assessment must be recorded on the child's files in the relevant risk assessment format. The exception to this might be where the looked after children are siblings and are of a certain age (under 10) and have shared previously. Regardless an assessment would still need to be made in relation to any proposed placement. Children aged two and above who may have been placed as babies (so sharing carers' bedroom) should be in their own room post the age of two years.

Generally, unrelated children, children of different gender or children who may present a risk to other children should not share a bedroom unless a risk assessment has been carried out and recorded.

## **8. Impact of proposed placement on any other child in placement and on Foster carer's household members**

Due consideration need to be given to any other child in placement, foster carer's household members and any change in the foster carers circumstance as part of the

matching process. Consider things like, views of the other child in placement/CSW, sickness, school run for foster carers own children etc.

The social worker to the other child in placement should be consulted and their views on the proposed new placement sought and recorded.

### **9. Foster Carers Circumstance, experience and skills**

Due consideration should be given to the foster carers previous experience and skills in matching carers against children's assessed needs. Their current and future personal circumstance like health, allegations, standard of care concerns, holiday plans etc. should also be considered.

### **10.Children's needs, History and Background**

Give due consideration to the children's needs, child profile provided, previous background information and ensure this is used in the match with the identified carer.