



Matching Children with Foster Carers

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Policy Summary:

This document outlines Slough Children First's policy for matching children with foster carers. It is designed to serve as a guide for Supervising Social Workers when matching a child to a foster carer. This is set out in the context of the current legal framework and the other policies implemented by Slough Children First. The policy of Slough Children First is to ensure that each child or young person for whom a placement is requested is matched with a carer who can meet their assessed needs.



A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be

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Matching Children with Foster Carers

1. Introduction

The policy of Slough Children First is to ensure that each child or young person for whom a placement is requested is matched with a carer who can meet their assessed needs.

The policy recognises that it is not always possible to achieve the perfect match and that as a result some children have been made to wait for too long for a placement.

Delay can be harmful, and the policy sets out to ensure that all relevant factors are considered and balanced against one another when matching decisions are made. Matches will be achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and their family, potential carers and their families including other children they have in placement. Relevant professionals may include: the child's social worker, the supervising social worker for the carer, line managers, health and education staff, panel members and the heads of service.

Workers should consult as widely as possible and ensure that any dissenting views on the proposed placement are recorded on the child's CHARMS file.

2. Aims and principles

- 2.1 This policy is designed to serve as a guide for Supervising Social Workers when matching a child to a foster carer. This is set out in the context of the current legal framework and the other policies implemented by Slough Children First.
- 2.2 In all cases whenever a match is being made the needs of the child in care take precedence over all other considerations.
- 2.3 Slough Children First assumes that in most cases the best place for children to be is with their families and if this is not possible then within a 'family environment' such as foster care. In all cases a placement with family or friends should always be explored before other options when a child needs to be accommodated. (See the [Friends, Family and Connected Persons Policies](#))
- 2.4 The need to protect and care for the foster carer and their family must also be met and balanced with the needs of any children being placed. This means that carers must receive all the relevant information when they are being asked to take a placement. The more detailed information provided the better the match will be and the better the outcome for the child.
- 2.5 Foster Carers always have the right to decline a placement and when they are being approached it is important to consider this fact and establish if additional support and professional involvement is required.

3. Statutory Framework

- 3.1 National Minimum Standard (NMS) 15.1 makes it clear that a placement should not be proposed unless it can be reasonably expected to meet a child's needs. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010), and Fostering Regulations 9, 11, 17, all refer to the process by which placements are made and the information that must be considered.

Standard 15 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering also requires that: The responsible authority has information and support from the fostering service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child's needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement.

(NMS15.1) The fostering service only suggests foster carers to Slough Children First as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with Slough Children First to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required.

(NMS15.2) Prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer him/herself safe.

(NMS15.3) Once placed, a child is not removed from a foster carer who is willing and able to continue caring for the child, unless that is in their best interests, taking the child's current wishes and feelings into account, and decided (other than in an emergency) through the child's care planning process. If a placement move occurs in an emergency the fostering service informs the responsible authority within one working day.

4. Children who come into care

- 4.1 Once a child becomes a 'child looked after' the work of previous teams and other related professionals must be built upon to formulate a comprehensive assessment of need before a placement is made. This will include completing a child and family assessment for all planned placements. This information will be collated in the placement request form.
- 4.2 No child should be placed in foster care without the following issues being addressed and the information available:
 - Whether the child was previously known.
 - The legal basis for current work with the child.
 - The reasons why the child needs to be in care.
 - The attempts made to arrange for the child to live with a relative or friend.
 - Who has been consulted about the child's current situation and the plan for the child.
 - What the immediate plan for the child is.
 - What the child's wishes and feelings are.
 - Why this plan has been chosen.
 - What needs to happen to achieve the immediate plan.

5. Children Already in Care

There are many reasons why a child may need a placement. Some will need to move because of a placement breakdown, others to achieve a plan for a permanent placement. For those experiencing placement breakdowns, matching should take place via the Fostering Duty Social Worker, child's social worker and commissioning team. A placement stability meeting should be held to try to support the child in the existing placement.

The previous assessments of why the child came into care and previous matching information should be utilised and re-examined. This will include the placement plan and care plan, school reports and Personal Education Plan (PEP), medical assessments, reports from current carers, Assessment and Progress Records and child looked after review reports.

Where a permanent placement is proposed, the plan must be approved by a statutory child looked after review. The professionals around the child should be consulted with a view to capturing the complete picture of the child and identify all needs. A referral must be made to the commissioning team on the placement request form.

4. Issues to be considered when making a match

4.1 Contact

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:

- the plan for the child (if the plan is for rehabilitation, then contact will be crucial; if the plan is permanence, then other factors may be more important)
- the frequency of the desired contact
- Who is the child to have contact with?
- The nature of the contact – is it direct or indirect?
- Where will the contact take place?
- Does contact need to be supervised?

4.2 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 together or apart sibling 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.

4.3 Education

For children of statutory school age, the need to maintain or secure a stable education placement is of vital importance. Wherever possible, placements

should be identified that ensure such continuity unless there are other overriding considerations that outweigh this consideration, such as the child's safety.

For younger children, the carer's ability to take the child to school should be considered and if this is not possible, whether anyone else can transport the child or if the use of taxis is appropriate and safe.

For older children, the child's ability to get to school on their own will need to be assessed. The length and complexity of the journey will need to be considered as will the safety of the child and whether they have a record of non-attendance that could be made worse by a long journey.

4.4 Race, culture, and language

We believe that wherever possible, children's needs will be best met by placement with a carer that reflects their racial, cultural and language background. 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.

4.5 Religion

Matching issues regarding religion are like 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.

4.6 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.

4.7 Foster Carer's Family

It is important that the household of the foster carer(s) is considered during the matching process. Wherever possible ask how each member of the household feel, including the carers' birth children, regarding the match with the child to be placed. It is important to check the carer's Form F assessment information during the matching process.

4.8 Bedrooms

(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 considers 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.

Slough Children First Independent Fostering Agency's initial position is that children do not share rooms in line with NMS 10. Carers' own birth children and children looked after should have their own bedrooms. The exception to this might be where the children looked after are siblings and are of a certain age (under 10) and may have shared previously. Regardless, a bedroom risk assessment would still need to be completed in relation to any proposed placement where children looked after would share a bedroom. 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.

4.9 Introductions

Children should have the opportunity for a period of introduction wherever possible with a proposed carer, so both child and carer can express an informed view of the placement. This should always be the case with a permanent placement.

An emergency placement may mean this is impractical but both child and carer should be provided with as much information as possible and their views considered before a match is confirmed. Carer profiles should be made available as a minimum in an emergency to share with social workers and children and young people.

5. Making a Referral

- 5.1 Where a decision is taken to request a foster placement, this must be discussed with the relevant team manager/head of service. Authorisation should be clear on the placement request form.
- 5.2 In all cases the need for a child to be accommodated must be discussed at the access to resource panel either before the placement is needed or as soon as practicably possible after a placement has been made.
- 5.3 In all cases when a foster placement is requested, a written referral to the commissioning team must be made. This should be completed in detail outlining the needs of the child, the reason for their becoming accommodated and the care plan as understood at that time.
- 5.4 The referral must also be accompanied by a child specific risk assessment which will form part of the Safer Caring Policy used by the foster carers during the placement.

- 5.5 Where an emergency placement is required on a child about whom little information is known, then the Social Worker should provide what information is available.
- 5.6 The referring Social Worker should also consider what other documentation is available, and whether this should be attached to the referral, or a link to the relevant electronic record sent to the commissioning team in addition to the placement request.
- 5.7 Once the request for a placement has been sent to the commission Team the requesting Social Worker should contact the commissioning Team to ensure that this has been received.

6. Receiving Referrals for Foster Placements

- 6.1 The commissioning Team must always request a written referral from a social worker requesting a placement as well as a child specific risk assessment. They should also consider requesting other written background information from the requesting Social Worker.
- 6.2 Any identified gaps in the information (such as School, addresses, behaviour etc.) should be relayed to the requesting Social Worker and the missing information obtained. Where possible, the child's social worker will notify all parties involved with the child to ensure a detailed referral is completed covering all aspects of the young persons present situation.
- 6.3 Once the written referral and risk assessment have been received and there is sufficient information, the commissioning service will consult with SCF IFA fostering duty worker. They duty worker will liaise with the fostering duty manager to consider carers from the 'in house' foster carers vacancy list to see what possible placements are available.
- 6.4 Where a possible placement that could meet the needs of the specific child can be identified, this should be discussed with the carer's Supervising Social Worker. This discussion should cover the positive aspects as well as the challenges of the placement. To enable an in-house placement further support will be considered and then requested to the commissioning team and will need agreement and funding by the children's team at the access to resources panel or at Director level.
- 6.5 If no in-house placement can be identified then the commissioning Team should ask the requesting Social Worker to consider making a request for a placement through another Local Authority or an external IFA (Independent Fostering Agency). The latter will require permission from the appropriate senior manager.

7. Agreeing the placement

- 7.1 Once a potential match has been agreed with the fostering duty manager, the fostering duty worker or supervising social worker should then contact the identified foster carer to ask if they can provide a placement. The fostering duty worker or supervising social worker should ensure that they read the referral and risk assessment and carefully explain what is required to the foster carer. They need to share the written referral with the carer securely.

- 7.3 Any matching must consider the needs of everyone in the fostering family, including the carer's own birth children. If possible, their views should be obtained before a placement is made.
- 7.4 Where it is identified that there are gaps between the provision that the carers can provide and the needs of the child being placed (such as equipment or transport for example), these must be addressed before a placement is made and this should be clearly documented.
- 7.5 The social workers (or their managers if this is not possible) for any other children looked after currently placed with the carers should also be contacted before a further placement is made and their views should be clearly recorded.
- 7.6 If a planned placement is being considered, then a meeting with the child's social worker should be arranged to discuss the needs of the child being considered. If this is not possible then a placement planning meeting should be held as set out in section 8.
- 7.7 If a placement is no longer required, the child's social worker will inform the commissioning team and the fostering duty worker.

8. Recording

- 8.1 All of the discussions with carers and social workers held during the matching process should be recorded on CHARMS. Once the placement has been made these should be placed along with the referral and the child specific risk assessment.
- 8.2 The fostering duty worker should record each referral from SCF on the CHARMS database.

9. Placement Planning Meeting

- 9.1 A placement planning meeting should be held either before the placement starts, or within 3 - 5 working days of a placement being made. The agenda and the process by which this meeting is convened, is set out under the guidance on '[Placement Planning and Disruption Meetings](#)'. A date for a placement planning meeting should also be set as soon as possible and all of the involved parties informed of this.
- 9.2 When a placement is agreed, remind social workers and foster carers that copies of key documentation should be available for the foster carer. This documentation is detailed within the Individual Placement Agreement (IPA) and may include CLA Documents (Care Plan including medical consent), Individual Health Plan/Health Action Plan, Individual Education Plan, Personal Education Plan, Placement Plan, Pathway Plan. This information must be provided to carers at the time of placement.

10. Exemptions

10.1 Legal context

Regardless of the foster carer's terms of approval, if more than three children are placed with a foster carer and the children are not all siblings of each other, this requires an exemption to the usual fostering limit (Sch. 7 CA1989) as above. A local authority cannot grant an exemption to a foster carer living outside the local authority area.

When considering whether to grant an exemption, the local authority in whose area the foster carer lives must have regard to (Sch. 7(4)(2) CA1989):

- a. the number of children whom the person proposes to foster.
- b. the arrangements which the person proposes for the care and accommodation of the fostered children.
- c. the intended and likely relationship between the person and the fostered children.
- d. the period of time for which he proposes to foster the children; and
- e. whether the welfare of the fostered children (and of any other children who are or will be living in the accommodation) will be safeguarded and promoted.

The exemption must be notified in writing, naming each of the children who may be fostered and any conditions to which the exemption is subject. Exemptions may be varied or cancelled by the local authority that has granted the exemption.

10.2 Placements outside foster carer's terms of approval

If the placement of a further child or children with a foster carer would mean making a placement outside a foster carer's terms of approval then:

- The placement may be made in an emergency with any carer outside their terms of approval for a maximum of six working days under [Reg 23\(1\) of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010](#).
- An exemption to the usual fostering will also be required, if the placement means that more than three children will be placed and they are not all siblings of each other.
- After six working days the placement must be terminated unless the terms of approval have been changed.

10.3 Changes to terms of approval

To change a foster carer's terms of approval, the requirement is to carry out a review of the foster carer's approval, and for the Agency Decision Maker to issue a qualifying determination setting out the proposed change – with or without a recommendation from panel (it is good practice to seek a panel recommendation, but not a legal requirement unless this is the first annual review). The decision to change terms of approval would then be implemented at the end of 28 days from the date of the qualifying determination.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 were amended in 2013, so that in cases where the only change at review of approval is to the terms of approval, as well as a determination notifying the foster carer of the proposed change, the fostering provider must also:

- “(i) provide a statement setting out whether the fostering service provider considers that the foster parent or members of the foster parent's household (including any children placed there) may have additional support needs because of the proposed revision and, if so, how those needs will be met, and
- (ii) request the foster parent's agreement in writing to the proposed revision of terms,”

If the foster carer agrees to the change to their terms of approval, it is then possible to 'waive' the 28 days' waiting period and implement the decision immediately, in which case the decision is not a qualifying determination.

This written agreement must be freely given by the foster carer. If the foster carer does not agree to the change to the terms of their approval, the decision cannot be implemented until 28 days from the date of the qualifying determination. The foster carer may make representations to the fostering service or apply for a review of the qualifying determination (by applying to the Independent Review Mechanism) within the 28-day period.

10.4 Exemption Process

In all cases where an exemption is made the procedures as set out in this must be followed in terms of identifying a match. Discussions around potential exemptions must consider carers' experience, availability and the reasons given for the carers' approval as recorded on their most recent notice from the agency decision maker. In cases where carers have experienced a relatively high number of disruptions or complaints/allegations, exemptions should not be sought.

Once the relevant social workers and the foster carers have been spoken to and a placement agreed in principle, authorisation from the Registered Manager or Responsible Individual of SCF IFA must be obtained before a placement where an exemption is sought progresses.

11. Family Finding

When a permanent placement (long-term) is needed, the case will be allocated to a family finder. Where this decision is taken, the designated family finder will carry the referral as part of their case load and continue to actively search for a placement and liaise with the referring social worker as to the progress with this.