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# Slough Children's Services Trust as an Independent Fostering Agency

## Statement of Purpose 2018-19

### Summary

This Statement of Purpose outlines how Slough Children's Services Trust functions as an Independent Fostering Agency.

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A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be

..... Safe, Secure and Successful

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## Introduction and Context

The Statement of Purpose outlines how Slough Children's Services Trust (SCST) functions as an Independent Fostering Agency. The Statement of Purpose is underpinned by the Trust's Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After (2015 to 2018) and the SCST Vision Statement.

It is intended as a useful source of information for:

- Foster carers
- Fostering 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 SCST's dedicated website.

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

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

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

- Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of Fostering Services
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England and Wales)
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011; Care Planning, Case Review and Fostering Services Regulations 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

## Key Service Aims and Objectives

Slough Children's Services Trust's fundamental purpose is 'Ensuring children in Slough are safe, secure and successful'.

SCST aims to:

- Deliver the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children and families
- Ensure children and families remain the focus of everything we do and provide the best possible support to staff, enabling families to develop and flourish
- To ensure children are fully supported in terms of their individual care plans with particular emphasis on placement stability, educational achievement, social development, health and wellbeing.

- To maintain a child-centred provision offering children and young people the opportunity to live within a twenty mile radius of their family, community, leisure and educational resources.

The Fostering Service is committed to:

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

Our objectives for service provision are:

- Ensure the views of children, parents and carers are sought and are taken into account, having regard for their age and understanding, in the continuous development and improvement of the service
- Recognise the importance of, and support appropriate levels of, contact with the family and community as is consistent with their welfare and care plan
- Recognise and value the diverse nature of the community it serves and proactively engage with the local community to identify potential carers
- To ensure there is a sufficient range of safe and appropriate placements available for children looked after (CLA) in Slough
- To recruit and assess a range of foster carers who can provide a range of safe and secure foster placements to meet the needs of slough children/young people in care
- To promote and safeguard their welfare
- To offer a prompt and professional timely response to members of the public who enquire about becoming a Trust foster carer
- Ensures prospective foster carers are well prepared for the fostering task/role by a thorough robust assessment that focuses on relevant competencies and the ability to meet the needs of children/young people who are looked after
- To actively monitor and supervise all placements to ensure children and young people are safe, their needs are met and they are making progress to achieve positive outcomes

- To contribute to and ensure effective multi-disciplinary and partnership working to meet the health, educational and social needs of children and young people in placements
- The service operates within the framework of equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice. Children and young people will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, disability or social class in terms of service provision. Wherever possible children are matched within their own cultural, racial, linguistic and religious communities, and where this is not possible, plans must be put in place to keep the child's culture alive for them
- To ensure children with disabilities are placed in an environment that recognises and caters for their disability and, at the same time, promotes their social inclusion
- 
- To ensure staff and carers are well trained and competent in delivering a quality fostering service, including opportunities for continued learning and professional development
- To ensure all staff and carers have completed safeguarding checks and have a valid DBS
- To provide all staff and carers support and supervision with clear lines of accountability and management
- To provide each foster carer a named allocated supervising social worker
- To work in partnership to support the Slough Fostering Association
- To work in collaboration with and provide advice on fostering issues to other colleagues in Slough Children's Services Trust
- To 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
- To ensure all complaints and allegations against carers/staff are investigated under departmental procedures in a timely fashion and lessons learned filter to improvements in future practice
- To facilitate the effective operation of the Fostering Panel, which provides a quality assurance role with regards to the recruitment and review of foster carers, family and friends foster carers and foster placements. The panel will ensure the welfare and safety of children is paramount in all decision making.

## Staffing

The registered provider of the Fostering Service is Slough Children's Services Trust.

The chief executive of the Trust is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The head of the family placement services is the responsible individual for the service.

The practice manager of the Support and Supervision Team is the registered manager.

The 2 managers within the service are both qualified social workers, registered by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), with extensive experience in children and families social work. They

are responsible for the supervision and professional development of the staff within the fostering teams and the day to day management and growth of the service.

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

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

Any family support workers are supervised by qualified, senior social workers (consultant practitioners).

## Services to Children and Young People

### Children First

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

Our aim is always to keep sibling groups together where it meets their identified needs. Except in emergencies, we plan placements and have introduction meetings between the child and the foster carer. Each carer has a welcome book and every child or young person placed will be given a copy of the children's guide (called '*A Helping Hand - Answers to questions you may have about being in care*') in an effort to lessen the anxiety for the child or young person when moving to a new family.

Where a child or young person is placed in an emergency, the child's social worker or the foster carer's supervising social worker will give the child as much information about the foster carers and their household as possible.

We expect the supervising social worker to see each child on a regular basis, to ascertain their views about their care.

We expect the child's social worker to visit regularly and spend time with the child/young person independent of the carer.

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

We celebrate children and young people's achievements and make sure their voices are heard in the recruitment of staff and approval of carers at panel.

We provide a range of events and activities for children and young people to be involved with days out, making arts and crafts and a Christmas party.

Slough Children's Services Trust ensures that children and young people have financial security in the form of a personal savings account, where a regular weekly amounts are saved centrally, which is then able to move with them to another placement or into independence.

Slough Children's Services Trust celebrates the achievements of children and young people with annual awards ceremony.

The children of foster carers also contribute to their parents' annual review.

## Placement of Children

The placements co-ordinator identifies foster carers who have vacancies and works with the fostering support team to assess if this is a potentially appropriate placement for the child or young person. Wherever possible, profiles of foster carers and their households are shared with children and young people as well as their social workers. If they agree, the match is proposed to the foster carer/s and the child's social worker who will further consider the match, involving the child or young person as appropriate, and makes the arrangements for placement if agreed.

The fostering service has a set of standards for use when commissioning services from external fostering agencies. These include a requirement that agencies are accredited, provide geographically appropriate placements (i.e. generally within 20 miles of Slough), provide adequate support to carers, have systems and services in place to ensure that children and young people have access to appropriate education, health and therapeutic provision and that they constitute a cost-effective use of financial resources. Those agencies all need to have an Ofsted rating of 'Good' or 'Outstanding' from their most recent inspections.

The Trust operates a Placement Panel which monitors placement activity and authorises financial packages to support placement arrangements.

The children's guide – *'A Helping Hand - Answers to questions you may have about being in care'* - has been created to answer some of the questions children and young people may have about being in foster care.

As well as this guide, children and young people have also created 3 animations that explain the different people who help them and keep them safe, such as their social worker. The animations are available on Slough Children's Services Trust's website [www.scstrust.co.uk](http://www.scstrust.co.uk). Carers and social workers are encouraged to view these animations with children.

Children and young people who are members of the children in care council (called Reach Out!) have helped to create this guide and the animations.

The guide is reviewed annually and a copy is sent to Ofsted and all of the Trust's foster carers.

## Services Provided

The fostering service currently provides:

- A duty system for supporting requests for internal placements from Slough Children's Services Trust's Placements and Commissioning Service, and/or care planning and transitions teams.

- A general fostering scheme, consisting of a pool of registered foster carers, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children, young people and sibling groups of all ages, across the full range of short term, longer term placements. There are 3 tiers to this scheme, which recognises the need for a particular skill set for older and more challenging children
- A specialist family-based short break, home from home, scheme to support children and young people with a range of disabilities and their families, offering breaks during the day/evening and overnight stays
- A ‘Staying Put’ provision for young people in care and care leavers aged 16–21 to remain with their previous foster carers
- A recruitment and assessment service for prospective foster carers, which is professional and customer focused. A dedicated experienced team of recruitment family support workers and qualified assessing social workers
- A Fostering Panel constituted and administered in line with regulatory requirements, which considers and makes recommendations about the approval of all prospective new carers, reviews of foster carers and matches children to long-term placements. The development of an Adoption and Permanence Panel to consider the permanent matches of children with assessed and approved long term foster carers.

## How SCST Fostering Services Operate

### Fostering Recruitment and Assessment

#### Recruitment

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

The Trust has a Fostering Recruitment Strategy and a Marketing Plan in place, which support the recruitment of a sufficient number and range of local foster carers to meet the needs of Slough families and promote stability and positive outcomes for children/young people. The Recruitment and Assessment Team works in partnership with the Communications Team to develop a rolling programme of recruitment activity, including on-going publicity, special marketing campaigns (including digital campaigns) and special events during national fostering week as well as word of mouth from other approved foster carers.

#### Recruitment Vision Statement

- We will engage with communities in Slough to increase awareness of our need for foster carers

- We will be innovative, drawing on the marketing and communications expertise in the Trust to drive and successfully implement a recruitment marketing plan which works
- We will ensure we recruit foster carers whose backgrounds, ethnic origin, religious denomination and cultural awareness complement the needs of the children and young people in our care
- We will recruit new foster carers from Slough and surrounding areas. (within 20 mile radius)
- We will ensure all enquirers receive an excellent response of personal service from the team with a prompt and friendly response
- We will communicate frequently with enquirers and keep them informed, to reduce the drop-out rate.

The Fostering Recruitment Marketing Plan for Slough Children’s Services Trust is designed to provide a more targeted approach to the recruitment of new in-house foster carers, using the valuable resources of SCST in a more effective way.

#### Marketing channels:

In order to maximise our audience, SCST uses the full spectrum of the PESO model to formulate its communications.

Paid media are the channels where we pay to place our message and control its distribution – this would include advertising, exhibiting at events (although we are not always charged for these but there are staff costs involved) and promoted social media posts.

Earned media is the published coverage of our message by a credible third party, such as a journalist, blogger or influencer.

Shared media is the pass-along sharing and commenting upon our message by the community through social channels such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube.

Owned media is the editorial and messages we write, publish and control through our own, dedicated channels such as our website or printed collateral.

### The Recruitment and Assessment Team

The Recruitment and Assessment team consists of:

- 1 x practice manager
- 1 x consultant practitioner
- 1 x recruitment & marketing worker –sits across the Recruitment Team and the Communications Team
- 3 x assessing social workers
- 1 x recruitment & assessing social worker specialising in the Home from Home, Short Breaks scheme for children with disabilities
- 1 x recruitment advisor
- 1 x family finder

We conduct a high standard of assessment and deliver good quality training to best equip new foster carers for their role ahead. SCST recruits foster carers who have the potential to meet the needs of children and young people placed with them. Some applicants may have previous experience of fostering or have significant experience of working with children in another setting. Others may have their own family or simply be able to demonstrate an insight into young people that will enable them to develop the necessary skills to care for young people in the care system.

The team operates a duty system, from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, to ensure that any potential applicant is able to have an immediate response to their enquiry and to answer any general queries they may have.

Enquiries to become foster carers are welcomed from people regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, religion, culture or employment status. Any applicant convicted of an offence against a child or a serious offence against an adult will not be able to foster with us. All foster households will need at least one empty bedroom.

Following receipt of an enquiry to become a foster carer, a home visit will be arranged. We refer to this as an 'Initial Home Visit' and it is an opportunity to have an honest, two-way discussion about fostering and whether it is right for the applicant. If both parties are happy to proceed and once a completed application/consent form has been received by the agency, a qualified social worker will be allocated to conduct an assessment with the prospective carer and their family.

### Assessment Process

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

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

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

The assessment is very comprehensive and produces a report that covers past and present relationships and partnerships, support networks, individual profiles, interviews with children and adult members of the household, lifestyle, parenting capacity and experience and valuing diversity, as well as a health & safety check of the home.

The applicants will be required to complete, a safe care policy, working exceptions agreement, carer profile and a family portfolio which includes photographs.

This report will be presented to SCST's Fostering Panel by the assessing social worker. The assessing social worker will invite the applicants to attend the Panel and will advise the applicants in advance, how the Panel presentation meeting will be organised and what might be expected of them within the meeting.

The Panel members experience derives from a variety of backgrounds, including education, health, social care, fostering and includes members who have experienced the care system, and there is a dedicated panel advisor in post.

Following the Panel presentation, 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, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding 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 the team manager immediately. Any areas of shortfall will be investigated and where training or support will not bring the applicant up to acceptable standards, the assessment must cease. If there is any indication in Stage 1 that the applicant is unsuitable to foster, the service will consider whether the assessment can continue or whether it should be terminated and the reason will be explained to the applicant. If in Stage 2, the applicants will be informed of this decision and the reasons within 48 hours and a brief report will be presented for consideration by the Fostering Panel.

When approved, the foster carers receive and sign a Foster Carer Agreement and the Placements Team is advised of their availability to receive a placement. An Induction Training is offered for newly approved foster carers – this is jointly presented by social workers from the Fostering Recruitment Team and Fostering Support Team.

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

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

We provide the following services:

- Short and long term fostering placements
- Bridging and respite care placements
- Parent and child placements
- Sibling group placements
- Emergency placements

- Unaccompanied minors placements
- Disability placements
- Staying Put placements

### Wellbeing Team

The Wellbeing Team consists of:

2 x wellbeing therapists and 1 play therapist (PT)

This team offers therapeutic support to children and their carers. This work is for children looked after in foster placements, SGO placements and adoptive placements. The team works in a holistic manner liaising closely with carers and social workers (if applicable). The team offers a drop in consultation service for all workers within the Trust to discuss a case. It is at this point that the child's social worker would complete a referral if therapeutic work is required by the team. The team offers a range of therapies, including life story work, person/child centred counselling, play therapy, filial therapy, specific work with carers. The team also conducts training for foster carers, adopters and SGO carers to help them in their roles.

### Permanent fostering

Social workers completing this work offer advice and support on permanency issues within fostering placements and visit children and carers to explain the different permanency processes. Permanent fostering placements are sought for children we are family finding for and are matched internally before proceeding to Foster Panel and ADM for approval of this match.

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

### Fostering Support and Supervision Team

The Fostering Support and Supervision Team consists of:

- 1 x practice manager
- 1 x consultant practitioner - 3 x supervising social workers
- 1 x fostering support worker
- 1 x Mockingbird Family Model co-ordinator
- 1 x care co-ordinator for the Home from Home scheme

The main remit of the Fostering Support and Supervision Team is to supervise, review, train and support all SCST approved foster carers. The supervising social worker will visit the foster carer at least every 4-6 weeks to undertake supervision. These times are an opportunity to discuss the day to day care needs of the children and young people and how the foster carer is working to meet those needs and progress the care plan.

Discussions about training needs will also be held at these meetings.

Carers are expected to maintain daily logs and provide monthly reports.

The registered manager provides regular updates to the head of service as well as being responsible for the Regulation 35 report, and any other reports required to the Board and Joint Parenting Panel

The supervising social worker will undertake a minimum of two unannounced visits to foster carers' homes per year. One of these visits will be made by a supervising social worker who is not the regular worker supporting the foster family.

The supervising social worker will attend all meetings and reviews with the carer, prepare reports for annual reviews and keep a thorough and accurate record of all fostering activities.

The team works closely with the Trust's Placement and Commissioning Service, Children Looked After (Care Planning) and Transitions Teams in identifying appropriate placements for Slough's children looked after. All foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker. The role of this worker is to monitor the placement and offer carers support, advice and guidance.

Children and young people in the care of SCST 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.

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

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

Relationships are central to MFM, with hub carers and foster carers providing frontline care and with social workers able to concentrate on successful relationship building.

The Fostering Network has taken the lead in programme to introduce MFM to the UK and piloted the programme with 8 fostering agencies in the UK.

### Annual Reviews of Foster Carers

Each fostering household will have an annual review, unless there are significant changes to their circumstances in which case we will conduct an extraordinary review at that time. These circumstances include:

- After the final strategy meeting of a S47 investigation involving a carer(s)
- Where allegations have been made regarding a carer(s) child care practice and no S47 investigation is pursued

- Where there has been a breakdown in the approved carers' relationship resulting in one carer moving out of the household. In this instance both carers will be subject to review except where one/or both carers has given notice of an intention to resign
- Where there have been significant changes to the carer(s) lifestyle
- 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.

### Training

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.

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

A team manager or consultant practitioner will chair the review, usually within the carer's home.

Following approval the carer's first review report and every third year the annual review will be presented back to the Fostering Panel for their recommendation and comments and subsequently the decision maker for approval. Carers will be invited to attend all panel reviews.

### 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 the fostering team manager. The majority of these originating from the Children With Disabilities (CWD) service in the Trust.

Carers within this scheme are supported by a carer co-ordinator. The co-ordinator promotes potential links between carers and families and 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.

### Placements and Commissioning Service

The Placements and Commissioning Service work closely with the Fostering Team. There is a dedicated Placements and Commissioning Service within SCST overseen by a contracts manager and all requests for:

- Fostering placements
- Placements for children and young people in residential units

- Semi-accommodation services for 16 plus children or with Independent Fostering Agency carers (if a suitable Slough alternative cannot be identified) are administrated by this service.

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

Matching:

The matching process will consider the child's needs especially regarding the following key areas:

- Safeguarding
- Schooling/education
- Expectations around contact, particularly in relation to the foster carer's part in facilitating and/or supervising contact
- The child's identity/race/culture/religion
- The child's history
- The child's behaviour
- The child's health
- The focus of the placement

The matching process will also consider carers' availability and:

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

## Supporting Services

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

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

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

The work of the Fostering Service is well supported by a wide range of internal services such as Slough Borough Council Legal Services, SCST Virtual School, SCST Finance and Human Resources, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and CLA health provision. Dedicated wellbeing professionals are physically located with the Family Placement Service to provide timely support to foster carers and family and friends foster carers when required.

### Support Groups

SCST Fostering Services provide regular support groups, so that our foster carers can meet other carers in an informal setting to discuss topical issues and receive peer support.

These meetings enable the carers to share experiences of fostering and to discuss any issues that may be concerning them. The head of service attends these meetings on a monthly basis.

### Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare

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

### SCST Fostering Panel

The Fostering Service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (amended 2013). The service maintains a ‘central list’ of Panel members. The Panel chair is independent with professional experience of fostering. Other panel members on the central list include a social worker with more than three years relevant post-qualifying experience, a Slough councillor, a health representative and other independent members. The Panel meets on the second Tuesday of every month. Detailed minutes are kept of all Panel meetings.

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, connected person(s) (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 for children.

New applicants and existing foster carers are invited 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.

## Capacity and Demand

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

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

## Complaints/Allegations

All foster carers and children and young people in care using the Fostering Service are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details if they wish to make a complaint. The children's guide - *A Helping Hand - Answers to questions you may have about being in care* - provides additional information and contacts. The practice manager of the Fostering Service, along with the head of service for placements and resources monitors all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service.

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

### Allegations

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

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

## The Foster Carer Charter

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

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

## Foster Carers' Handbook

All approved foster carers are provided with a foster carer handbook, which contains all the policies and procedures relating to foster carers, as well as useful information about child care issues and resources. The handbook is available on the Trust's website.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

### Monitoring

A report is written for the Joint Parenting Panel on an annual basis by the head of service for family placements, providing the executive of the Trust and Slough Borough Council with statistical data in relation to the agency's activity. The SCST Board also receives regular reports to consider, including the annual Statement of Purpose.

Other monitoring includes staff supervision linked to the appraisal system, monthly recorded visits to foster carers, annual reviews, the Fostering Panel and feedback from training sessions and case recording and practice audits. The practice manager monitors data about incidents of concern in foster care, including: restraint; allegations; complaints; unauthorised absence. The registered manager monitors the Schedule 6 and 7 requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

### Evaluating the Service

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

The Fostering Service is also subject to formal inspection by Ofsted and inspections usually take place every three years.

## Arrangements for the Revision and Circulation of the Statement of Purpose

The registered manager overseen by the head of service 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.

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 the Trust's intranet and to members of the public via the Trust's website. Paper copies can be provided to children looked after and their parents on request.

## Details of Registration

Registered as and Independent Fostering Agency – No: 1183495

Slough Children’s Services Trust Limited – no: 09487106 of 1 Glass Wharf, Bristol, BS2 0ZX

## Details of Children’s Rights Commissioner

Anne Longfield

Sanctuary Buildings

20 Great Smith Street

London

SW1P 3BT

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