**Practice Guidance for Emergency Duty Foster Care**

**Date: 02.11.2023**

# About this document

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| **Title** | **Practice Guidance for operation of the Emergency Duty Foster Care provision** |
| **Purpose** | **To outline the principles, guidance and practice expectations operating for the Emergency Duty foster care service (and same-day unplanned foster care)** |
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**Intended Audience**

This document has been issued to the following people for Review (R) Information (I) and Review and Sign off (S). The Child in Need procedure is mandatory and must be shared with all staff and partners working with Children in Need and their families.

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## Introduction

The aim for the fostering service is to have a pool of Foster Carers that can provide a safe home for children of any age who need an immediate place of safety out of office hours. These Emergency Duty foster carers will be available to the Emergency Duty social work team outside normal office hours during evenings, weekends, and bank holidays. The Emergency Duty foster carers provide interim care and accommodation whilst care planning and searches for a more permanent home can be undertaken, which may include support to return to their family.

The council may need to provide this type of care due to a range of circumstances that may include:

• children being made subject to powers of Police Protection.

• a family breakdown and no appropriate matched placement can be identified.

• a sudden ending (temporarily or permanently) of foster care or residential care where the child cannot return to or remain in the home.

• A newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person aged under 18 years old who is supported by the Local Authority

• A young person who has been arrested or has bail conditions which prevent a return to their current home.

There is also a need to have carers who are willing and able to care for children who need care at very short notice on the same day, including when an appropriately matched placement cannot be identified. These carers will provide unplanned, same-day care reflecting that the child may need this type of care due to an urgent need in their circumstances or in the placement finding system. This is different to Emergency Duty care in that the arrangements for children will be made by the Gateway to Resources Team and placement finding will have started during normal office hours.

Both these types of foster care will enable a child / young person to be cared for by a skilled foster carer able to support them at short notice.

## Our principles for children and foster carers

The child ‘s emotional, physical and material needs will be met by the foster carer whilst in their care and foster carers will be expected to meet all requirements as a foster carer as set out in the Fostering National Minimum Standards and the Foster Care Training and Development Standards (TDS)

The Council will provide as much information as is available to enable the foster carer to understand and meet the child’s needs. It is recognised that for some children very little may be known, or the circumstances of them coming to the foster home may mean they arrive with few belongings or scant information about their needs. The Council will ensure that information regarding risk is highlighted so the family can develop their safe care plan. Information provided verbally will be followed up in writing.

It is recognised that Emergency Duty foster carers will be working with uncertainty and complexity and may be caring for children who have vulnerability or risk in their lives. Carers will therefore be supported to ensure they develop their skills and knowledge and have access to regular training, supervision and additional support from fostering support workers as necessary.

So that all children have access to foster care out of hours, Emergency Duty Foster carers will have an approval range of 0 to 18 years. Ideally an EDT carer will be approved to care for more than 1 child though this is not compulsory.

Any information on a child’s needs that is provided verbally should be followed up in writing as soon as possible and within 72 hours at the latest. This may be through provision of documents or additional written information.

2.1 Emergency Duty Carers (EDT carers**)**

The Emergency “Bed” provides a short-term home to a child coming into care outside of normal office hours for up to 14 days (13 nights). This can be extended for a period of an additional 5 nights in exceptional circumstances which might include the child’s identified foster home not being immediately available; to support continued searches for a home, and/or additional work to be completed with families before a reunification home. The 5 nights additional period must be authorised by the Service Manager for the Fostering Service after consultation with the foster carers (via their Supervising Social Worker), Gateway Team and General Fostering Team Manager.

2.2 Same-Day Priority Carers (SDP carers)

It would always be our intention to find a carer during working hours who can offer a child a short-term home to enable the child to settle and see them through their care plan. However, we may, on occasions struggle to do this.

In these circumstances Same-Day Priority Carers will be contactable between the hours of 3pm and 5pm during normal working weekdays and be able to provide an interim provision of up to 14 days (13 nights) whilst care planning and searches for a longer-term home can be undertaken, which may include support to return to their family.

## How the system will operate

There will be a published rota of carers that provide EDT care alongside a rota of Same-Day Priority Carers. Both sets of carers’ approval range and matching preferences must be clearly recorded and the EDT carers’ details shared with the Emergency Duty Team. EDT foster care can be accessed out of normal office hours between 1700 and 0830 Monday – Friday, and at weekends and on Bank Holidays. The decision to access the Emergency Duty foster carer will be with the relevant Manager for the Emergency Duty Team.

It is anticipated that we will usually have four EDT foster carers working on a rota basis to offer out-of-hours support to the service 365 days a year.

Each carer that provides this resource is available, on the rota, to be called by EDT out-of-hours for a period of 7 nights, Thursday to Thursday. If a child moves into the home via EDT during that time the carer will be expected to care for the child for *up to* 13 nights with potential to extend by a further 5 nights in exceptional circumstances with the foster carer’s agreement.

Example: Carer 1 is on rota from Thursday 5 January – Thursday 12 January when carer 2 will take over. If a child moves in with carer 1 on Wednesday 11 January, they may remain with carer 1 until Monday 23 January (potentially extended to Friday 27th January if all parties are in agreement). Carer 2 will cover Thursday 12th – Thursday 19th, Carer 3 will cover Thursday 19th – Thursday 26th. Carer 4 will cover Thursday 26th – Thursday 2 February; carer 1 will then take over again. In this instance carer 1 would have not had a child in their care for 5 days before returning to the rota.

Four Same-Day Priority foster carers will mirror this rota pattern but will only be contacted during office hours on working days. The “up to 13 nights, with potential to extend by a further 5” principles will be the same for Same-Day Priority carers as it is for EDT carers. The decision to access the Same-Day priority Carer will be with the Gateway to Resources team in consultation with the Fostering Service Duty Team Manager after all attempts to find a longer-term home have been exhausted on that day.

It is recognised that foster homes are required out of hours, or late in a working day for EDT and SDP carers, and therefore the opportunity to provide a written referral is limited. If foster care is accessed via EDT, it is expected that EDT workers provide the foster carer with the most recent assessment of need in writing, information about any identified health needs and that they outline any risks to ensure the foster carer has a level of information to adequately meet the need of the child or young person. Anything conveyed verbally should be confirmed via secure email within 4 hours.

If a Same-Day Priority placement is made by the Gateway Team (with approval of the General Fostering Team Manager) late in a working weekday, where a placement request form/ referral is not yet available, a brief overview as to why foster care is required, the needs of the child, including their health care needs, any complicating factors and risks will be submitted via secure email by the children’s social work team or previous SSW to the SDP carer.

In all cases the children’s social work team will provide any relevant information as soon as possible, i.e. most recent looked after review record, health information (including allergies) to support the foster carer to adequately meet the needs of the child / young person. If necessary the Supervising Social Worker can supplement any information provided by checking what is available on the child’s electronic case record.

The child’s Social Worker will complete a Placement Plan on the first working day after the child moves to the foster carer and arrange for a Placement Planning meeting to be held within 5 working days. This is also necessary to enable the link between the child and foster carer on LCS so that the child’s record can be updated, and foster care payments initiated. If not already provided, the Social Worker should ensure that a detailed referral form is completed on LCS as a priority and reassigned to Gateway Team to enable searches for a new home as a matter of urgency. If the Social Worker is not able to complete these tasks, their Team Manager should ensure the tasks are delegated and completed in timescale.

## Expectations and Requirements

### Emergency Duty Foster Carer

EDT foster carers are required to be available all hours of a working day when they are caring for a child, recognising that children may be out of school for the period living with them, or outside school-age. The fostering household should have one adult available full-time for fostering during this period.

The foster carer will be expected to accept the care of all children referred to them unless

there is a factual and current safeguarding risk to members of the household identified in discussion with the Emergency Duty Team which cannot be mitigated or reasonably managed.

Or, the child requires a level of supervision that is not reasonable or realistic in a fostering family setting, such as waking night care or 24 hour supervision that would usually be provided by a team of staff.

The next working day after a child has arrived, the foster carer may wish to double check that their Supervising Social Worker and the Fostering Service are aware that a child has moved into their home so that appropriate support and payments are confirmed in place.

Where a child arriving at the foster home does not have access to appropriate clothing and toiletries to meet their self-care needs, the foster carer will provide/or buy these items to ensure the child or young person’s immediate physical needs are met. This will be reimbursed up to the value of £100.00. Receipts must be kept for purchases.

When on the rota, the foster carer is available to be contacted 24 hours a day in relation to referrals. However, it is understood that carers have appointments and other commitments that mean they may not be immediately able to respond. However, carers should respond to communication within 30 minutes outside of office hours when a child is not in their care, to confirm they are aware they are needed.

### Same-Day Priority (SDP) Foster Carer

Same-Day Priority Foster Carers are required to be available to receive referrals between 3pm and 5pm when they are on rota, and then to care for a child living with them all hours of a working day, recognising that children may be out of school for the period living with them, or outside school-age. The fostering household should have one adult available full-time for fostering during these periods.

The Foster Carer will be expected to accept the care of all children referred to them unless

there is a factual and current\* safeguarding risk to members of the household identified in discussion with the GTR Team which cannot be mitigated or reasonably managed,

or the child requires a level of supervision that is not reasonable or realistic in a fostering family setting, such as waking night care or 24 hour supervision that would usually be provided by a team of staff.

\* this means there is evidence that the child has a current or recent need based on facts or events that will present a risk to the household (or there is significant evidence to suspect there is or will be a risk).

As SDP carers will be utilised during office hours there is an expectation that the foster carer’s allocated SSW, their Team Manager and/or the duty team are aware a child has moved into the home and so appropriate support and payments can be put in place.

Where a child arriving at the foster home does not have access to appropriate clothing and toiletries to meet their immediate needs, the foster carer will provide/or buy these items to ensure the child or young person’s immediate physical needs are met. This will be reimbursed up to the value of £100.00. Receipts must be kept for purchases.

When on the rota, the SDP Foster Carer is available to be contacted during office hours. However, it is understood that carers have appointments and other commitments that mean they may not be immediately able to respond. Carers should respond to communication within 30 minutes (up to 5:30pm) to confirm they are aware they are needed.

### Both EDT Carers and SDP Carers

Both EDT and SDP foster carers will provide all reasonable transport needed by the child or young person. This will include attending school within a 20-mile radius; attending any appointments associated with health needs, attending family time, attending appointments with Youth Justice or police, and attending appointments regarding asylum status etc. Travel expenses will be paid in accordance with the foster carers’ payments procedure after any mileage outside of the 20 mile distance per day has been deducted Wherever possible it is preferrable that carers are able to support with journeys over 20 miles, but if this is not possible then discussion should be held with the fostering service to look at support that can be provided with this if necessary.

Foster carers will keep daily records which should be submitted daily by secure email to the child’s and supervising social workers. Foster carers providing care via the EDT or Same day Priority schemes will be required to keep a current Safer Care Policy.

Where the child will be moving to another foster family/ children’s home/ supported accommodation the foster carer will also provide information that details what their experience has been of caring for the child – ie how they managed the transition, routines, what works in terms of approach, what the child has enjoyed in terms of family life, what they have found difficult, what the carers have found difficult etc.  This is to assist with the identification of the next home for the child and will enable others to get a real sense of what caring for the child has been like. Foster carers will also provide a report at the end of the child or young person’s time with them. This is in the template of an electronic foster carer diary.

The foster carer will assist in supporting the transition of the young person from their care. This could be to their next identified carer, or a return home. This transition will include supporting the child’s social worker to explain plans to the child and supporting with gathering the child’s belongings for the placement move. The foster carer may need to purchase a bag for this purpose; bin-bags will not be used.

The emergency foster carer will ensure that they inform their allocated supervising social worker or the duty social worker immediately of any changes that may impact their capacity to provide an emergency bed provision.

The foster carer will inform their allocated SSW and the General fostering duty team when the child has moved on from their care.

If the foster carer wishes to end or change their offer to the Emergency Duty fostering scheme (including Same-Day Priority Care) they are asked to give a 28-day notice period in writing to their SSW to enable a discussion about the type of fostering they wish to continue with.

Please note it is **not the foster carer’s role** to:

* collect a child at the beginning or end of the emergency period in their care.
* transport a child/young person to their next identified foster home or return to their family.

All children and young people will be supported and settled into the foster carer’s home, at the start of their emergency bed period by a social worker, or a police officer in exceptional circumstances outside of office hours.

### 4.4 Emergency Duty Team or Gateway to Resources service

These teams will act as the point of referral to the foster carer and will provide all available information regarding a child / young person being placed to support the foster carer to establish safe care planning. This will usually consist of a written referral and/or latest assessment (including details of risks or vulnerabilities, health needs) as a minimum. This will initially be shared via telephone, then followed up in writing.

If a placement is made out of working hours the Emergency Duty Team will support with transporting the child and settling them in to the foster home. This may include undertaking or assisting with any checking of belongings to ensure the child and foster carers’ safety. They will ensure there is phone-call support for the carer at least one per day over weekends and bank holidays until the fostering service and child’s social worker are able to support. EDT may delegate this task to the fostering out-of-hours support service. EDT should always inform the fostering out-of-hours support worker that a placement has been made. It is also advisable for the foster carer to contact the out-of-hours fostering support service to ensure they have been made aware that a child has been placed.

EDT will ensure the child’s allocated social worker and the general fostering team are made aware that a child has been placed.

EDT will ensure the foster carer is aware of the legal status of the child, and the arrangements for obtaining consent for medical treatment, who holds parental responsibility and any restrictions on the child’s contact with birth family members.

### 4.5 Child’s Social Work Team

If the child is placed in a Same-Day Priority foster placement the child’s social work team are responsible for taking the child to the home and settling them in.

On the first working day after the child has been placed with either an EDT or SDP carer, the child’s social worker (or a duty worker within the team) should ensure a placement plan is developed and Placement planning meeting arranged to take place within 5 working days. They should update any placement referral form so that the Gateway to Resources Team is able to start a search for a matched placement for the child, or alternatively should plan for the child’s return to their family, whichever is appropriate.

The child’s social worker should visit at least once during the child's stay. They should maintain regular communication with the foster carer and the fostering social worker about plans for the child – this means updating the foster carer and their social worker at least every three days, returning any calls/emails from the foster carer within 24 hours and providing the required written information within agreed timescales.

### 4.6 Supervising Social Worker /General Fostering Duty Team

The fostering service will ensure contact is made with the EDT or SDP carer as soon as possible after a child has moved in. The allocated supervising social worker will usually lead on this. Additional calls and practical support will be provided as necessary, and the SSW will initiate foster carers payments. The child/ren will be placed under a Short-Term arrangement and LCS will need to be updated to reflect this. The fostering service will ensure any support required by the foster carer is identified, including additional support from a fostering support worker.

The supervising social worker will help facilitate the placement planning meeting which will be held within 5 days. The Supervising Social Worker will ensure that a safe care risk assessment is developed as soon as possible after the child arrives in the home.

The supervising social worker will ensure the foster carer is provided with the relevant written information in respect of the child and ensure plans for moving on are being considered. The supervising social worker will ensure there is regular communication to the foster carer at least every other day to ensure they are kept abreast of move-on plans for the child.

In the absence of the allocated supervising social worker the fostering duty team will be available to emergency duty foster carers and same-day priority carers and can be contacted. The out of hours fostering worker can be contacted between 6:00pm and 11:00pm weekdays and 10:00am and 11pm on weekend and bank holidays. Please refer to SharePoint for all the up-to-date relevant contact numbers.

## Payment

It is recognised that the Emergency Duty foster carers are required to work with children who may present with significant complex emotional and behavioural needs. It is also recognised that foster carers are required to be available to be called and welcome a child into their home during antisocial hours when on the rota. This is therefore recognised in the level of payments offered in the scheme to EDT foster carers.

Foster carers who are wholly available as an Emergency Duty Team carer, meaning they are one of the four EDT carers and first point of contact for the Emergency Duty Team who may need to find a home for a child outside of office hours, will be paid the Specialist Skills payment (currently £520 per week) full time in addition to the appropriate child-related allowances when a child(ren) is living with them. These carers will have an approval range of 0-18, will have one carer in the household available full-time for fostering and ideally be approved to care for, and have space to accommodate more than 1 child. These carers may take 28 days paid annual leave per annum. (Payment will be made at £520 per week or pro rata for part weeks) The service asks for at least 4 weeks’ notice of leave to ensure cover is arranged. All annual leave must be used within the calendar year (pro rata for those joining the scheme), any unused annual leave cannot be carried over to the following year.

Same-Day Priority Carers who are wholly available as a Same-Day Priority Carer, (meaning they are one of the four SDP carers and first point of contact for the Gateway to Resources Team during office hours when a child requires a home that day), will be paid a retainer equivalent to the Specific Allowance amount (currently £117.24 per week) full time. This will be in addition to their skills payment and age-related child allowance, for any period when a child is living with them. These carers may take 28 days paid annual leave per annum. The service asks for at least 4 weeks’ notice of leave to ensure cover is arranged. All annual leave must be used within the calendar year (pro rata for those joining the scheme), any unused annual leave cannot be carried over to the following year.

It is advised that carers research any tax implications in regard to their payments and own personal circumstances.

Foster carers who do not wish to be one of the one-in-four carers on rota but provide *ad-hoc* cover for either the Emergency Duty Team, or Same-Day Priority Care Rota and who have an approval range of 0-18 years will be able to receive the relevant payment pro-rata for the week they are available to the rota and when caring for a child placed via these schemes. They need to have no other substantive commitments during their week on the rota, and caring for a child in order that they can fulfil the requirements of the role.

Carers, not on the EDT rota, but who agree to look after a child outside of usual office hours in an emergency will continue to receive a one-off payment of £50 per child.

Carers who agree to care for a child needing a “same day placement” as either a full time “placement” or offering a few days care not part of the Same-Day Priority care rota, do not fall into scope of this policy.

## Training, Development and Support

EDT and SDP Foster carers will ensure that they develop their skills and knowledge in working with children that are experiencing crisis, including potential links to gangs, CSE or criminal exploitation. There is a vast training programme available. The foster carer’s SSW will help signpost the carers to specific courses and suggest training helpful to them in the role. All mandatory training, as detailed in the Learning and Development Pathway, should be attended in addition to any further training identified by the carer and/or service to assist the carers in their role as emergency carers.

A Fostering Support Worker will be available to offer additional support through the week and in a planned manner over weekends if required.

A Senior Social Worker will oversee the EDT and SDP schemes to ensure carers have access to a specialist support group and group communication channels. All carers supporting the two schemes will know who this worker is for a point of contact, as well as their SSW.