

## **EM IFA Pilot – LA Guidance**

### **Purpose**

This document is intended to provide a guide to local authorities on the operation of the regional IFA pilot, based upon the regional IFA pilot process map, so it can be clearly understood how authorities can engage with the pilot and achieve the expected benefits.

### **Introduction**

The regional IFA pilot will run for a period of 9 months, and it is expected that the following benefits will be achieved:

- To decrease the average transfer time for U16 UASC through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).
- To increase the proportion of UASC placed within the region.
- To develop a more strategic relationship between IFA providers and LA's.

The pilot is expected to achieve these benefits by enabling IFA providers to provide vacancies for use with the NTS by proactively informing the East Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (EM SMP) when providers are first aware that they are likely to have an upcoming vacancy.

This will enable either an outstanding transfer to be accommodated or for an out of Rota transfer to be requested from the Home Office, each of these scenarios would deliver a reduction in transfer times.

IFA providers will be asked to only identify carers who reside within the East Midlands for use within the pilot, so that the number of children placed within the region will increase.

If vacancies are offered with carers based outside of the East Midlands region, these will not be accepted for use within the East Midlands IFA pilot.

By working together in the delivery of this pilot we hope to form new relationships between IFA providers and Local Authorities, as we look to further address sufficiency issues going forward. See the Pilot Operation section for an understanding of the pilot mechanics.

Participation in this pilot is voluntary and Local Authorities can withdraw from the pilot at any time, authorities will be encouraged through the use of a pilot participation survey to feedback their experience of the pilot and suggestions for further development towards the end of the 9-month pilot period to inform our learning.

### **Expectations & Clarifications**

In order to support the delivery of the IFA pilot, Local Authorities will be expected to do the following:

1. Local Authorities are expected to respond to EM SMP within 24 hours via email or telephone following being contacted about a vacancy offer, unless the vacancy is due to go live in fewer than 2 weeks in which Local Authorities are expected to respond within 2 hours or by the end of the working day, whichever is sooner.
2. Local Authorities that have existing framework agreements with IFA providers offering placements will be expected to use those frameworks when commissioning the vacancies offered through the pilot. Where Local Authorities do not have an existing framework agreement, they will be expected to use their published spot purchasing terms and conditions to commission vacancies offered through the pilot, making these available to IFA providers upon first contact, Local Authorities will be expected to let EM SMP know which contracting method is being used and to share the agreed weekly cost with EM SMP.
3. Local Authorities are expected to liaise with IFA providers on placement matching and can also enter into negotiations around spot purchasing T&C's if required.

4. Where out of Rota transfers are requested of the Home Office, Local Authorities will be required to make a placement matching decision within 24 hours of a referral being made by the Home Office, and ideally within the same working day.
  - It should be noted that where referrals are not accepted this builds in delay for a child, and as such decisions should be made as quickly as possible.
  - Local Authorities are expected to inform EM SMP when the placement matching process has concluded so that the Home Office can be informed. In the event that a Local Authority does not inform the EM SMP of progress a chasing email will be sent by EM SMP to the Local Authority, if the Local Authority does not respond within the timeframe given by the chasing email, then EM SMP will contact the Home Office and refuse the referral.
5. In the event that placement matching takes longer than the three working day window that IFA providers offer through the pilot free of charge, if a Local Authority has a child currently undergoing the matching process they will need to negotiate an extension to the holding period with the IFA provider. If a Home Office transfer has been refused at the point of the three-day period expiring EM SMP will turn down the offer of the vacancy unless the IFA provider and Local Authority wish to extend the period and request a further transfer, in this case Local Authorities are expected to inform EM SMP.

### **Pilot Operation**

1. The EM SMP will contact UASC leads or a nominated representative (via email) with a vacancy offer giving information about the carers, the type of young person they can care for, a rough indication of when the vacancy will be available, and the IFA provider contact details.
2. The UASC Lead or nominated representative has a maximum of 24 hours to respond to the vacancy offer, if there are more than 2 weeks before the vacancy becomes available. However, if there are fewer than 2 weeks before the vacancy becomes available authorities will have 2 hours to respond to an initial offer, responses can be communicated via email or telephone. If no such response is received this will be classed as a refusal and the local authority concerned will next receive an offer once the other East Midlands authorities have received an offer, this will work as a Rota system.
3. If the UASC lead or nominated representative refuses the offer, they will need to fill out the vacancy offer feedback form and return this to Isobel Westbury at the EM SMP, via email, outlining the reasons for refusing the offer. The local authority concerned will next receive an offer once the other East Midlands authorities have received an offer, at this point no further action will be taken.
4. If the UASC lead or nominated representative accepts the offer, they will need to fill out the vacancy offer feedback form and return this to EM SMP, via email, outlining the reasons for accepting the offer, indicating whether the IFA provider is in a framework agreement with the authority and providing the spot purchasing T&C's if the IFA provider is not within a framework agreement.
5. Following an offer acceptance EM SMP will provide contact details for the IFA provider to the Local Authority and vice versa.
6. IFA providers are then expected to reach out to the Local Authority to start matching conversations and also to discuss any amendments to commissioning arrangements that may be required.
7. In the case that the exact date the vacancy becomes available is not confirmed at the outset (i.e. greater than 2 weeks away from initial notification of the potential vacancy), EM SMP will inform the Local Authority as soon as possible once this date has been confirmed by the IFA provider.
8. From the point that the vacancy becomes ready to accept a child IFA providers will hold the vacancy free of charge for up to three working days to enable the matching process to conclude and the child to transfer. If the process takes longer than this Local Authorities will need to come to an arrangement with the IFA provider to extend this period, but this may come at a cost to the Local Authority.
9. During quiet periods, where fewer children are referred into the NTS, EM SMP may not be able to guarantee a timeframe for receiving an advance referral from the Home Office. We will communicate this to the IFA provider and the relevant Local Authority at the earliest opportunity and seek to move forwards

with the vacancy offer without a retainer being required from the relevant Local Authority, but on the understanding that the IFA provider can continue to find other ways of filling the vacancy with the expectation that they will inform EM SMP if the vacancy becomes filled and is no longer available.

10. If the Local Authority concerned has an outstanding transfer for which they wish to utilise the vacancy, they are expected to contact the IFA provider to finalise the matching process and finalise commissioning arrangements. If a provider is not willing to contract at existing contract rates or spot purchasing rates the Local Authority can refuse the vacancy or choose to negotiate.
11. If the local authority concerned doesn't have an outstanding transfer for which they would wish to utilise the vacancy, the EM SMP will send the IFA carer information to the Home Office with a referral request, once the vacancy availability date has been confirmed. At this point Local Authorities will need to communicate to EM SMP that they are happy with the commissioning arrangements and therefore wish to proceed so that a request can be made to the Home Office.
12. The Home Office will send a child profile to EM SMP who will pass this onto the IFA provider and the local authority to finalise the matching process.
13. The local authority and IFA provider will work together to finalise the matching process and confirm acceptance to EM SMP within 24 hours of receiving the child profile and ideally within the same working day. In the event that a Local Authority is not able to finalise the matching process in this timeframe but still wish to proceed they will need to inform EM SMP otherwise the profile will be refused and a further profile sought if the three-day window has not expired.
14. Isobel Westbury EM SMP will liaise with the Home Office to arrange transport to the placement for the child concerned.
15. The local authority will confirm to Isobel Westbury EM SMP that the child has been successfully transferred into the placement.
16. Through the pilot a maximum of two vacancies will be utilised per Local Authority area, in the event that a provider offers a vacancy where the carer resides in an area which has already accepted two vacancies, EM SMP will offer the vacancy to the Local Authority concerned outside of the formal pilot, if that authority does not wish to accept the vacancy, then the offer will be refused.

## **Risks**

As a voluntary pilot the model has been designed to minimise risks to Local Authorities as far as possible, but there are still a couple of areas of risk associated with this pilot which are highlighted below:

- Where there is a period of fewer than 2 weeks between a vacancy becoming available and as such an accelerated process is run by EM SMP to select a Local Authority partner, Local Authorities may miss out on an offer if they take longer than 2 hours to respond. However, unlike with the standard process, if a Local Authority has not yet accepted an offer, they will not be excluded from further offers within the same cycle.
- If a request is put into the Home Office for a child profile a decision must be made about whether to accept the profile within 24 hours. If a Local Authority is unable to conclude matching in this period but indicates a wish to continue with the process, they will be required to accommodate the child in question even if the matching process with the IFA vacancy offered is unsuccessful.

Based on the design of the pilot the likelihood of these risks occurring is low, but Local Authorities should be aware of these risks when participating.

## High-Level Process Map

