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SWCU

Guidance notes



Hampshire
County Council

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Referral Process

The process outlined below has been created through working closely with the secure homes in England and Wales and, therefore, all the information requested is reflective of what is required for a secure home to make an informed decision on whether they're able to accept a referral.

All referrals should be submitted through the Secure Welfare Coordination Unit's (SWCU) online portal which can be accessed here: [Secure Accommodation Network](#)

For further information and guidance please contact the SWCU directly via email (securewelfare@hants.gov.uk) or call on 01962 846432.

A profile will need to be set up by the referring social worker via the SWCU portal. This requires two-step authentication using Google Authenticator.

Once your profile has been created you can start a new referral. Several points of contact will be required; however, the profile owner will be responsible for completing amendments and updates to the submitted information.

Once the form has been submitted to the SWCU, an acknowledgement receipt will be sent within 30 minutes. If an acknowledgement email has not been received within 30 minutes, please check your junk/spam folder before contacting the SWCU via phone or email.

A member of the SWCU will then screen the referral to outline if any further information is required. If further information is required, you will receive a notification email and amendment requests will appear on your referral form on the online portal. The SWCU has taken learning from the secure children's homes to identify what information they require when considering referrals. Therefore, the quality and the context of the referral form is required to be comprehensive to support the referral process. The SWCU are unable to make a referral live until all the relevant sections have been completed. Supporting documents will be required to be uploaded to the online portal alongside the completed referral form: [Supporting Documents Required](#)

If the child is under 13 years of age, Secretary of State (England)/Welsh Ministerial (Wales) approval is required to place them in a secure welfare home. It will be expected that a secure welfare referral is submitted to the SWCU in parallel to the Secretary of State/Welsh Ministerial application. Once the referral and application have been completed

and agreed, a secure welfare search can be undertaken. The local authority will need to liaise directly with the Department for Education (England)/Welsh Government (Wales) regarding this. A section 25 secure order or Assistant Director's 72-hour placement agreement is still required even once Secretary of State/Welsh Ministerial approval/consent is granted. Further information on applying for Secretary of State/Welsh Ministerial approval can be found on the Secure Accommodation Network (SAN) website and the government website:

[Secure Accommodation Network](#)

[Under 13 Flowchart](#)

[England Government Guidelines U13](#)

[Out of hours – Under 13 Flowchart](#)

[Wales Government Guidelines U13](#)
[\(English\)](#)

[Wales Government Guidelines U13](#)
[\(Welsh\)](#)

Once all the necessary information is present on the referral form, it will become a 'live' referral with the SWCU. It will then be made available to all secure children's homes for their consideration. Local authorities with 'live' referrals will receive an email with the updated available beds each day. The secure children's homes will inform the SWCU of the date and gender of their available beds daily. The identification of the secure children's homes will not be released at this point in the process. The available beds are subject to change, and the local authority will be updated of any changes throughout the working week.

If a secure home feels they can accept a referral, they will contact the SWCU, who will, in turn, call the local authority to inform them which secure home is offering a bed for their child. The SWCU will also send a confirmation email to the local authority; this will include the contact name, number and address of the home. The local authority will be required to accept the bed offer within three working hours, otherwise the bed offer may be rescinded and re-offered to the next suitably matched child?

Once a bed is accepted, it is then the responsibility of the local authority to contact the secure home to discuss costs, admission date/time and the signing of any paperwork. Secure homes will be unable to admit a child until they have received signed copies of all the relevant paperwork.

The SWCU is not part of the decision-making process and are therefore unable to prioritise individual referrals. All live referrals will be made available to all secure homes

with appropriate vacancies. If the local authority believes that the child has an imminent and significant risk to their life and a Threat to Life Notice (TLN) has been issued, then they are advised to call the SWCU and update them of such in the first instance.

Children can only have their liberty restricted in a secure setting if either a section 25 secure order has been granted by the courts or if an Assistant Director has agreed to place the child under a 72-hour placement. If a child has already been placed for 72 hours under this agreement, within a 28-day period, then a secure order will need to be applied for through the court. It will need to be granted before the child can be placed for any further time within the secure welfare estate.

Please see page 13 for the referral process [Flowchart](#).

From the experience gained working with the secure homes in England and Wales, the SWCU has created three mock referrals which can be used as a basis to help with the referral process. The mock referrals are fictitious and have been based on the SWCU's knowledge of the referral process and the expectations required by the secure children's homes, to support them making an informed decision on placements. Links to these documents can be found on the [SAN Website](#).

Supporting Documents

Additional information will be required on certain aspects of a referral. Therefore, through discussions with the secure homes, a list of proposed supplementary documents has been drawn up (please see below). These documents are in addition to the referral and can't be used to replace sections of the referral form being completed. Please note: If the child has an EHCP, this will be required to be uploaded before the referral can be made 'live'.

Documents required:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| ➤ Chronology | ➤ Daily logs from their | i.e. CIN plan, S47 |
| ➤ Mental Health | current residential or | strategy discussions |
| Assessment i.e. | secure placement | etc |
| CAMHS, etc. | ➤ Care Plan | ➤ EHCP |
| ➤ Health Assessments | ➤ Asset Plus | |
| ➤ Offending information | ➤ Recent/previous | |
| | minutes of meetings | |

Spot Purchasing YCS beds

In exceptional circumstances, the SWCU can approach the Youth Custody Service (YCS) to discuss the spot purchasing of a bed from the youth custody estate for the purposes of welfare. These requests can only be processed through the SWCU. Contact should be made with the SWCU in the first instance, to discuss whether this is a viable option for your referral. Requests will need to be made in writing to the SWCU and only apply to current live referrals.

Feedback from Secure Homes

The SWCU requests that contextual feedback from the secure children's homes is provided. When feedback is received, it will be provided to the local authority in a timely manner. The ability for the SCH's to provide contextual feedback is purely dependent on the homes' capacity and there is no obligation for this to be provided.

Referral Acceptance

As the SWCU is not a commissioning unit, the unit has no legal authority to direct a secure home to accept a referral, the decision to accept a referral rests solely with the Registered Manager of the secure home.

Updated referrals

The SWCU will request an updated referral every ten working days to reflect an overview of the child's current situation, if a referral is no longer required, please inform the unit. However, if an updated referral is not received within the given timeframe the search will cease with the unit. Local authorities will be made aware if their secure search has been ceased and their referral closed to the SWCU.

Statement of responsibility:

The Secure Welfare Coordination Unit (SWCU) is a small unit grant funded by the Department for Education (DfE) for the purposes of administering placements and collecting data on secure welfare. It is not a legal entity and therefore does not have a Director. The SWCU provides a transparent, dedicated single point of contact for local authorities in England and Wales, to arrange secure welfare placements and streamline the process of finding the most suitable placement, matching the individual needs of each child needing secure care. The SWCU is committed to ensuring the best outcomes for all children needing secure placements. Data from the Secure Children's Homes is collected by the SWCU daily. Referrals are then made available to homes if an available secure placement is available. The home will then indicate whether they can accept the child.

Neither the Secure Welfare Coordination unit, nor the Secretary of State has a direct role in the commissioning of secure places for individual children on welfare grounds. It is for the local authority to come to a view as to the appropriate placement for an individual child, and for the person with management responsibility for the Secure Children's Home with available places to decide whether to take the child. Under The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015, (Regulation 14 (2) (a)) – the registered person (i.e. the provider of the home) must ensure that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the homes statement of purpose. A secure home will therefore consider the existing cohort of children in their care, their needs, the skills and ability of the staff to manage and meet their needs when considering any new application.

Individual local authorities should have their own placement policy based on the Department for Education's Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. There are currently 13 secure children's homes (SCHs) in England – 12 run directly by the local authorities in which they operate; one run by a charity. The SCHs take referrals from local authorities across the country seeking a secure placement under section 25 of the Children Act 1989 and also provide accommodation for some children who have been remanded by a court, or convicted of a crime and given a custodial sentence. The final decision on making a welfare placement remains with the placing local

authority, whilst the decision to offer a placement rests with the Registered Manager of the receiving secure children's home.

While there is no absolute duty to provide secure accommodation in their area, there are general duties on local authorities to provide accommodation for looked-after children. In particular, section 22G of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on each local authority to take steps that ensure so far as reasonably practicable that they are able to provide accommodation in their area that meets the needs of children who are looked after by that local authority and fall within the section 22G (3) criteria. This is commonly known as the 'sufficiency duty'. In taking steps to secure that outcome, the local authority must have regard to the benefit of having a number and range of accommodation providers that is, in their opinion, sufficient and capable of meeting different needs. Statutory guidance has been issued on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children.

A major benefit of the SWCU is that detailed information from all the Secure Children's Homes in England and Wales and the children placed in them will be held in one place. This has the advantage of ensuring that all options for a child can be considered, enabling informed decisions about the most appropriate placement for them. This much-needed data will prove invaluable in terms of learning what is working and where changes may be needed. We will also be building national profiles for England and Wales on the children referred including their level of complexity and presenting needs.

The Secure Welfare Coordination Unit will maintain up to date availability information across all Secure Children's Homes providing secure welfare care. The centralised unit will also be able to gain a much clearer understanding of the volume, demand and need profile of children needing secure welfare accommodation. The SWCU will collect data on all aspects of referrals for children and the outcomes of those referrals, including where there have been challenges to making placements. This coordinated information will be shared with the sector for its strategic development and will ultimately support Ministers to make decisions on the future of the sector.

FAQs

How do I find out if there are any secure beds available and/or where our referral has been sent?

The SWCU receives welfare occupancy forms from all secure homes with welfare beds, in England and Wales, each weekday morning. The secure children's homes will inform the SWCU of the date and gender of their Current bed availability. The identification of the secure children's homes will not be released at this point in the process. The available beds are subject to change, and the local authority will be updated of any changes throughout the working week.

All 'live' referrals will be made available to the secure homes with appropriate vacancies and the SWCU will email these local authorities, each morning, with an update on the available beds in the estate.

If you do not receive an update, or if you are still unsure as to the status of your referral, please contact the SWCU by phone and an update can be given to you verbally.

Will the SWCU liaise directly with the social worker to discuss a referral?

The SWCU receives referrals from different social care team's dependent on each local authorities' process, therefore there is no standardised process as to who the SWCU will liaise with. The SWCU recommends that a local authority designates one/two points of contact throughout the process, to maintain clear lines of communication; this usually being the social care and placement team. This can be done in Section 1 of the referral form.

What if my referral has not received any feedback when they have been considered?

The SWCU is unable to direct the secure children's homes to provide contextual feedback for all referrals. As standard practice the SWCU requests feedback and, where capacity allows, the secure homes will provide this to the unit. If you have not received any feedback this does not mean that your referral has not been considered.

Can I contact a secure home directly to find out if they have vacancies?

The SWCU is now the single point of contact for all secure welfare placements in England and Wales. If you contact a home directly, regarding available vacancies, the homes will signpost you back to the SWCU.

If there are no available welfare vacancies in England or Wales, are there any other options?

If there are no available welfare beds in the estate, please contact the SWCU in the first instance to discuss your referral or intention to refer, as the unit will be able to provide an overview of sufficiency in the estate at that time.

Can we place a child in a Scottish secure children's home under a section 25 secure order?

Yes, as of April 2017, a section 25 secure order is now recognised by the courts in Scotland. Contact with the SWCU will still be required in the first instance and advice can be given regarding the process of placing in Scotland. Unlike residential cross border placements, in Scotland, a child's permission is not required to place them in a Scottish secure children's home. Scottish secure children's homes will prioritise Scottish referrals in the first instance, therefore there is likely to be limited capacity in the Scottish estate.

Can we make a referral for a child if they are missing?

Yes, you can make a referral for a child who is missing, but a retainer will need to be agreed by your management team before a referral can be made 'live'; preferably, this should be agreed before the referral is submitted. The price of a retainer will typically be of the full cost of a secure home's daily fee. This will need to be discussed with the secure home once the child has been offered a bed.

How do I gain Secretary of State (England)/Welsh Ministerial (Wales) approval to place a child under the age of 13?

You will need to contact the DfE/Welsh Government to discuss secure accommodation for a child under the age of 13. Further information, on how to make an application to DfE/Welsh Government, can be found on the SAN website and the government website:

[Secure Accommodation
Network](#)

[England Government
Guidelines U13](#)

[Wales Government
Guidelines U13 \(English\)](#)

[Under 13 Flowchart](#)

[Out of hours – Under 13
Flowchart](#)

[Wales Government
Guidelines U13 \(Welsh\)](#)

Should a referral be submitted on the day a local authority is in court to gain a section 25 order?

The SWCU recommends you do not submit a referral on the day of a court hearing, with the view of placing the child in secure accommodation on the same day. Though there may be occasions where this is unavoidable. The process of ensuring all the relevant information is present on the referral can be extensive, due to the volume of information and context the secure children's homes require. Also, there may not be any available welfare vacancies on that day.

If a section 25 order is granted before a secure welfare bed has been identified, this will not prioritise the referral.

What if I require a secure welfare bed outside of the unit's working hours, for an urgent referral that is not already 'live' with the unit?

The SWCU's working hours are Monday – Friday (excluding bank holidays) 8.30am – 5.00pm. Outside of the unit's working hours, you will be able to find contact details for each of the secure children's homes on the SAN website, [Secure Accommodation Network](#). It will be a local authority's responsibility to contact the homes directly out of hours. If a placement is made a full referral application to the SWCU will still be required.

However, please bear in mind that if you contact a secure children's home during working hours, then you will be redirected back to the SWCU.

What happens if I no longer require a secure welfare search to be undertaken once a referral is 'live' with the unit?

Please contact the SWCU via email or phone if a search is no longer required due to a change in the child's situation or care planning, a search will then cease by the unit. It is requested that the unit are made aware of any changes in circumstance, to avoid the secure homes looking at referrals unnecessarily. The unit will undertake regular calls to the referring social worker where capacity allows, to ensure the referral is still required and accurately reflects the child's current circumstances, please inform the SWCU during this call if a search is no longer required. The SWCU will request an updated referral every ten working days to provide an overview of the child's current situation, if a referral is no longer required, please inform the unit. However, if an updated referral is not received within the given timeframe the search will cease with the unit.

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Section 25	Secure order granted by the court
SWCU	Secure Welfare Coordination Unit
SCH	Secure Children's Home
YCS	Youth Custody Service
DfE	Department for Education
72-hour placement	When an Appropriate Officer of the Local Authority, often Deputy Director level agrees for a child to be placed in secure accommodation for an initial period of 72 hours and, thereafter, go to court for a secure order.
A retainer	The cost to hold a bed if a child is missing/waiting an admission
Out of Hours (OOH)	Outside of the unit's working hours Monday - Friday 8.30 – 5.00

Contact Details

Secure Welfare Coordination Unit

Hampshire County Council,

The Castle,

Winchester

SO32 8UG

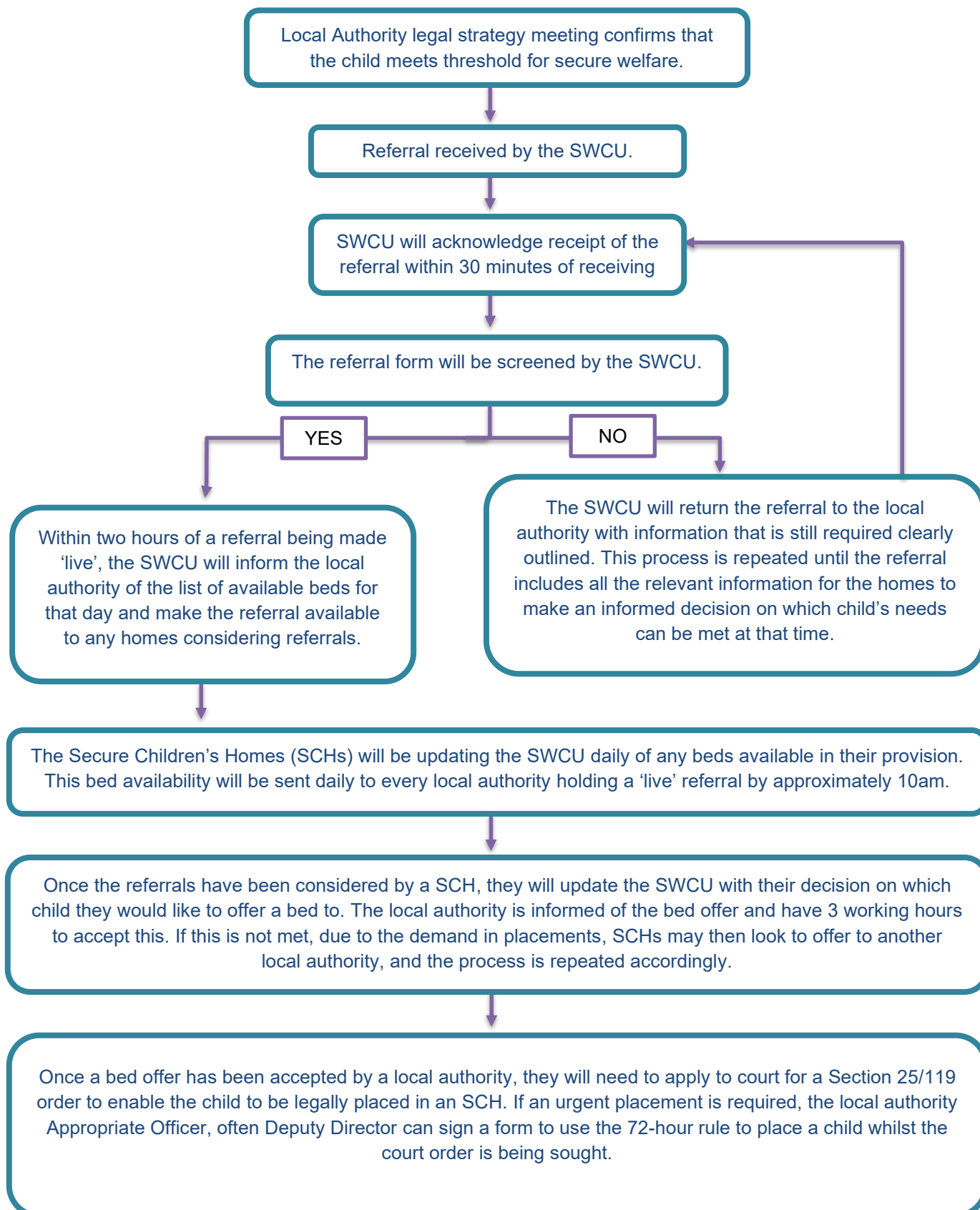
Tel: 01962 846432

Secure Email Address: securewelfare@hants.gov.uk

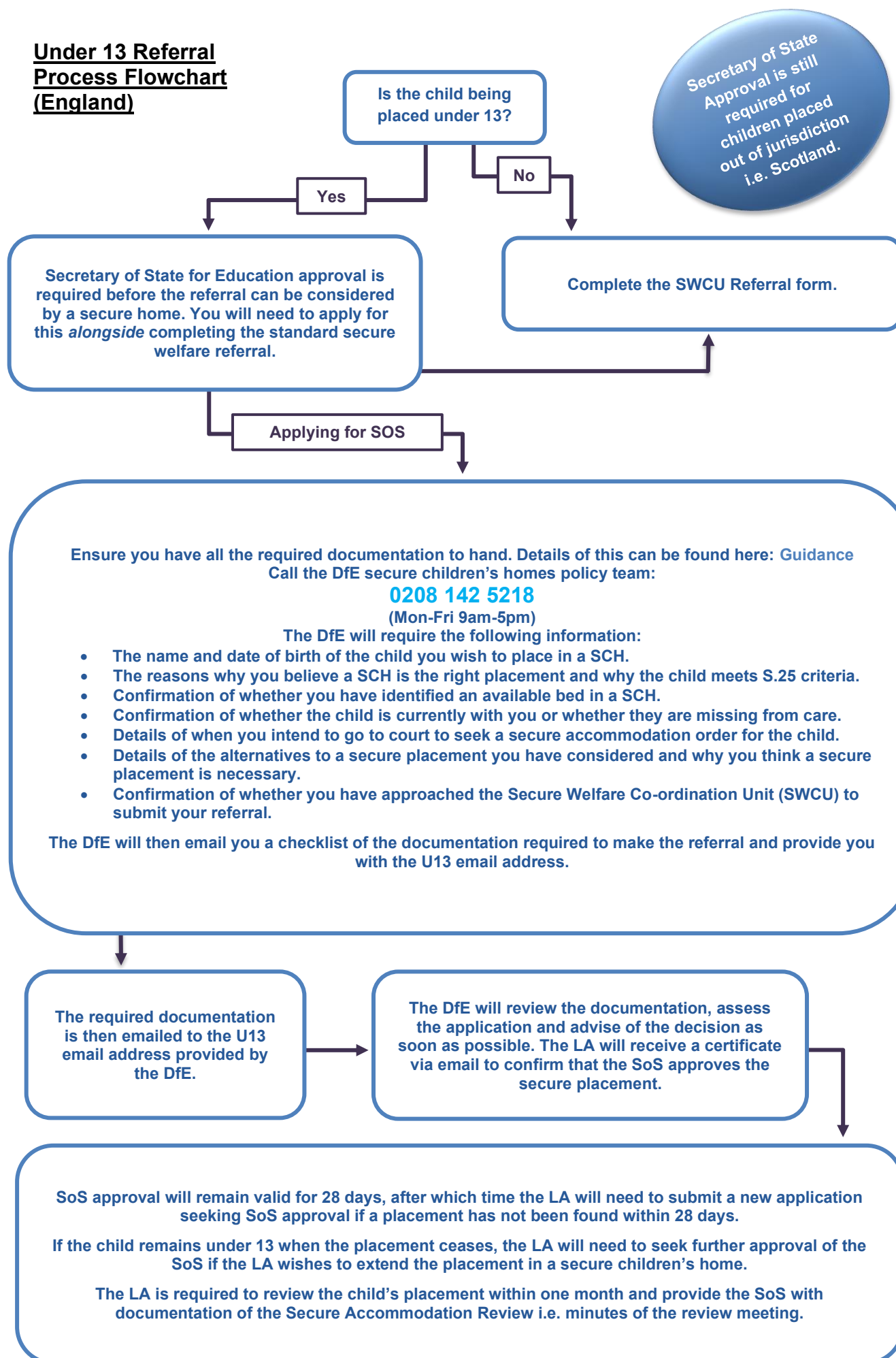
The SWCU team:

- Service Lead Team Manager
- Assistant Team Manager
- Senior Data & Reporting Analyst
- 2 x Senior Admin Officers
- 2 x Placement Officers

Referral Process Flowchart



Under 13 Referral Process Flowchart (England)



Under 13 Referral Process Flowchart (Wales)

Is the child being
placed under 13?

No

Complete the SWCU Referral form.

Yes

In the first instance, please contact the Welsh Government to inform them that you intend to refer for a secure welfare placement. The SWCU will require an email from the Head of Service to confirm agreement has been granted by the Welsh Government for the placement search to be undertaken.

Complete the SWCU Referral form.
Referral goes 'live', and search commences.

Once a bed offer has been received, you will need to apply for Welsh Ministerial approval. Welsh Ministerial approval is required for placing children under 13 years of age in Wales under section 119, in England under Section 25, and under the High Court's inherent jurisdiction together with a mirror order from the Court of Session in Scotland under the "nobile officium" for placements in Scotland.

When applying for ministerial approval, you will be asked to provide the information contained in the code and they will contact Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) for a professional view of the case before an approval letter can be issued. It is likely that CIW will contact the local authority to discuss the circumstances of the case.

Government Contacts (Mon-Fri 8:30am-5:30pm):

Alistair Davey, Deputy Director, Enabling People
Tel: 03000 256319 / 07501 596840 Email: Alistair.Davey@gov.wales
Penny Hall, Improving Outcomes
Tel: 03000 253095 Email: Penny.Hall@gov.wales

The local authority will be asked to provide:

- The name and date of birth of the child concerned.
- A verbal summary of the reasons for the secure placement.
- Confirmation of whether a bed in a secure children's home has been identified and is available.
- Confirmation of whether the child is currently with the local authority or missing from care (having absconded).
- Details of when the local authority is intending to go to court to seek a secure order.
- Details of what alternatives to a placement in a secure children's home have been considered and why these were rejected.

You will also need to submit written paperwork by e-mail:

- A full written history/chronology of the child
- A contemporary care plan that covers the period of the secure placement, including the aims and objectives of the placement and (where possible) the exit strategy from secure accommodation
- Agreement in writing at Assistant Director / Head of Service level or above, seeking the approval of the Welsh Ministers.

The Welsh Government will review the documentation, assess the application and advise of the decision as soon as possible. If the application is successful, the LA will receive a letter via email granting Ministerial approval for a secure application to be made to the Family Court.

**Out of Hours
Under 13 Referral
Process Flowchart
(England)**

Is a secure welfare placement required for an under 13 outside of core working hours?
(Weekends, Bank Holidays and Mon-Fri after 5pm- 9am)

Secretary of State
Approval is still
required for
children placed
out of jurisdiction
i.e. Scotland.

Yes

No

The U13 process for core working hours.

Call the DfE secure children's homes policy team:

0208 142 5218

The 'on call' duty officer will require the following information:

- The name and date of birth of the child you wish to place in a SCH.
- The reasons why you believe a SCH is the right placement and why the child meets S.25 criteria.
- Confirmation of whether you have identified an available bed in a SCH.
- Confirmation of whether the child is currently with you or whether they are missing from care.
- Details of when you intend to go to court to seek a secure accommodation order for the child.
- Details of the alternatives to a secure placement you have considered and why you think a secure placement is necessary.
- Confirmation of whether you have approached the Secure Welfare Co-ordination Unit (SWCU) to submit your referral.

Based on the information received, the 'on call' duty officer will consider whether the criteria is met and if a secure placement would be appropriate for the child.

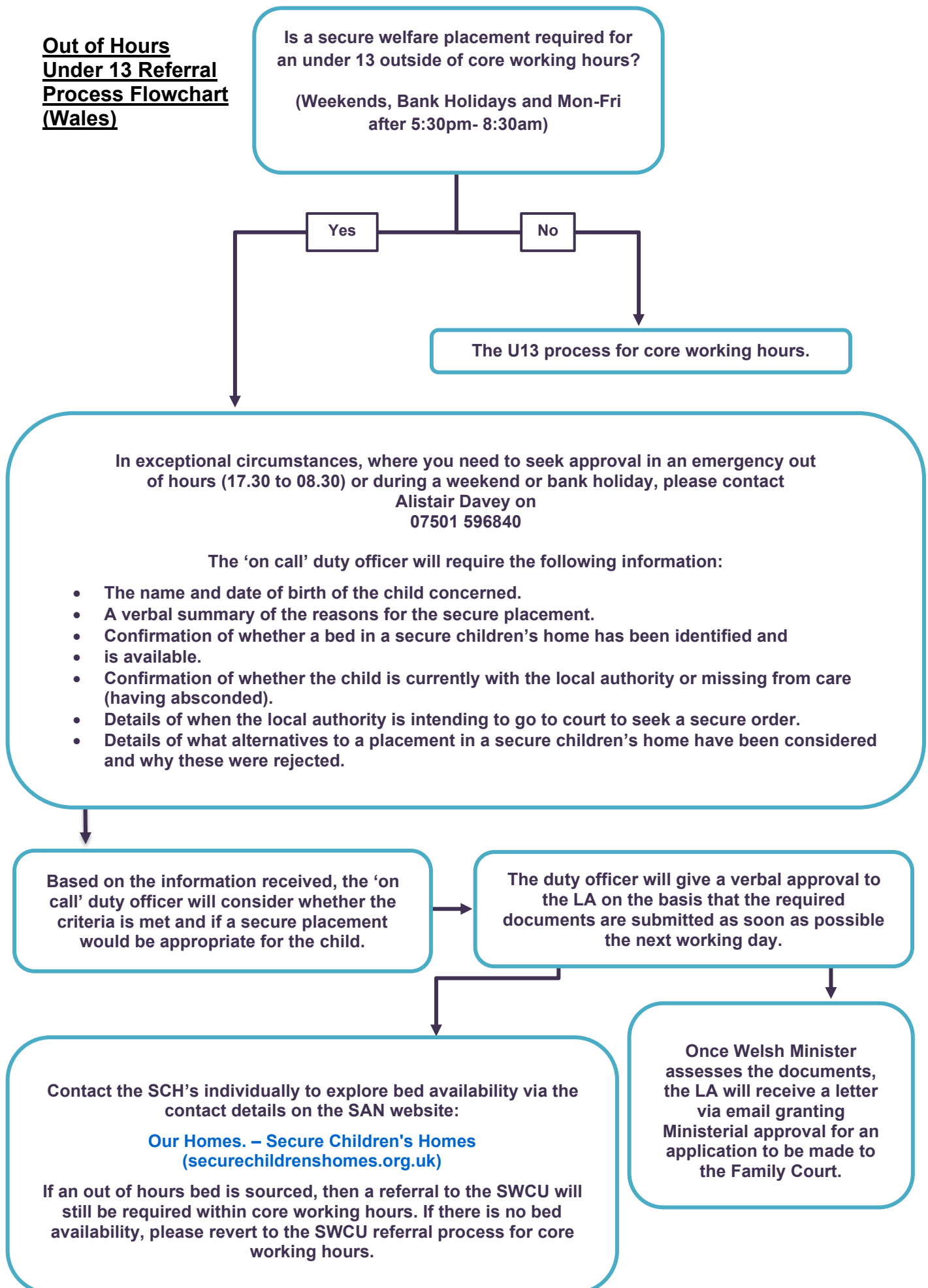
The duty officer will give a verbal approval to the LA on the basis that the required documents are submitted as soon as possible the next working day.

Once DfE assesses the documents, the LA will receive a certificate via email to confirm that the SoS approves the secure placement. Contact the SCH's individually to explore bed availability via the contact details on the SAN website:

Our Homes. – Secure Children's Homes (securechildrenshomes.org.uk)

If an out of hours bed is sourced, then a referral to the SWCU will still be required within core working hours. If there is no bed availability, please revert to the SWCU referral process for core working hours.

**Out of Hours
Under 13 Referral
Process Flowchart
(Wales)**



[]

Version	Author	Date	Changes	Signed off	Date of Sign off
1.0	TQ	17/12/25	Reflect changes to the available beds process change	SLT	17/12/2025