



Achieving for Children Independent Fostering Agency (IFA):

**Annual Report
April 2019- March 2020**

Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames
London Borough of Richmond
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead



Contents

| | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1 | Background | 1 |
| 2 | Introduction | 1 |
| 3 | AfC IFA Provision | 3 |
| 4 | Annual Fostering Reviews, allegations, standards of care and notifications | 5 |
| 5 | The IFA Establishment | 7 |
| 6 | Children & Young People | 8 |
| 7 | Fostering Recruitment | 15 |
| 8 | Support to Approved Carers | 17 |
| 9 | Foster carer file audit themes | 21 |
| 10 | AfC IFA Workstreams | 22 |
| 11 | New Developments for the IFA | 23 |

1 Background

- 1.1. This annual report on the performance of Achieving for Children's IFA complies with Standard 25.7 of the Fostering National Minimum Standards which sets out the condition that the Registered Manager will monitor and report to the IFA Board every three months in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children. This report focuses on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service. It provides details of the AfC IFA activity from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. This Annual Report also sets out plans for future service development until 31st March 2021.
- 1.2 This annual report should be read in conjunction with the Statement of Purpose 2018/19 which sets out the legislative and regulatory context under which AfC carries out the functions of the fostering service; as well as the two Annual Panel Report 2020, prepared by the chairs of the Fostering Panels and the Sufficiency Strategy 2019-2022.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The work of AfC IFA is governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and associated amended regulations and guidance. AfC Fostering Service offers a range of regulated foster placements for looked after children and young people across the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames, the London Borough of Richmond and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The mandate of the service is to provide safe, stable and nurturing family placements that improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people.
- 2.2 AFC became an IFA on 8 August 2018 after Ofsted required that the company register due to being a community interest company. The Richmond and Kingston branch of the IFA was inspected between 9 and 13 September 2019 and received a good rating in all areas, Ofsted have requested that we separately register the RBWM branch of the IFA and a site visit is due in June 2020. AfC have taken the opportunity to use the creation of the IFA to breathe fresh life and direction into the fostering service by aligning policy and procedure across all three authorities, taking the best practices from each area and growing in-house provision.

Impact Example:

I am working with an experienced foster carer who is looking after a young person that regularly goes missing despite being in lockdown. This has had a huge impact on the fostering household staying up very late waiting for the young person to be returned by the Police only for them to go missing again shortly after. Each time the young person returns to placement my foster carers has no idea who they have been with, where they have been or what the young person has been exposed to. However they are always welcomed back into their home. This carer has not given up on the young person but has sought to understand the young person's behavior, what is the pull factor that makes this young person want to place themselves and others at such great risk. This carer has been reflective in their supervision looking past the young person's behavior and has been able to see some of the young person's strengths. When my carer feels challenged they focus on the positives and the fact that their young person does come back. Despite being tired at times physically and emotionally from caring for such a complex young person. This carer has also extended support to another single foster carer who is caring for 2 young children and is not able to get out to go food shopping.

2.3 The vision and value base for the IFA is around becoming AGILE

Achieving: Our IFA will put children at the heart of everything we do. We will work hard to achieve the best outcomes and to realise Achieving for Children's mission to provide children and their families with the support and services they need to live happy, healthy and successful lives.

Growing: The larger our pool of foster carers the broader the range of fostering options and the greater choice we have in matching carers to our children's needs. The numbers of unrelated carers in both Richmond and Kingston has been in decline and we want to use the creation of the IFA as an opportunity to breathe fresh life and vigour into the service and attract that next generation of foster carers as well as retain our existing carers.

Innovative: Achieving for Children is a Partner in Practice and this allows us to discuss with the Department of Education where we might want to adapt some of the current regulations to provide a better service to our children and foster carers. Developing the IFA will provide opportunities to hear from our foster carers areas where the regulations have frustrated rather than supported them in achieving

great outcomes for the children in their care. We can then ask permission to innovate and try out new ways of working.

Local: We still want to be the main recruiter, trainer and supporter of foster carers in Kingston and Richmond. We recognise that many of our carers have longstanding ties to their local communities and want to use the IFA to build and enhance these.

Ethical: We are very aware of recent press scrutiny around IFA's particularly where one company has bought and then sold an IFA for profit. Achieving for Children was set up to ensure that all profits are reinvested in front line services and we will ensure there is financial transparency to demonstrate that the IFA is operated on the same lines.

Impact Example:

One foster carer has looked after 7 babies over the last 8 years, many of them suffering from drug and alcohol withdrawal symptoms from maternal substance misuse. She is so dedicated to making sure each child's needs are known in as much detail as possible and is a strong advocate for them. Where adoption is the care plan she has supported adoptive families to feel confident and is able to contribute to careful transition planning. She also ensures that she does everything within her power to make sure that the children know they are loved and that they have a smooth transition to their forever homes. She is still in touch with most of them. Recently this foster carer has also supported her first transition back to birth families, which have been brilliant outcomes for these two children, one who returned to his parents and one who went to live with her aunt and uncle. She has shown great resilience and strength, focusing on the children's needs and wanting only the best for them.

3 AfC IFA Provision

In 2019-20 AfC's IFA has provided the following services:

3.1 Recruitment, assessment and approval of:

- mainstream foster carers, i.e. unrelated carers
- Connected Persons foster carers – people who are related or have a preexisting connection to a child.

3.2 Placement and Support of approved carers under the following fostering schemes:

- Mainstream fostering – providing both task-centred/short-term and long term placements to children who are accommodated on various care orders.
 - Specialist fostering – providing placements to “looked after” children with more complex needs and challenging behaviours
 - Respite fostering – providing overnight and covering holiday periods to “looked after” children placed with mainstream foster carers
 - Connected Persons foster carers – offering permanent foster placements to children who are looked after on interim or full care orders, from within their network.
- 3.3 **Staying Put:** Provision in the main, by approved foster carers, for care leavers between the ages of 18 – 25 years and still in education, who require ongoing support and are not deemed ready to move onto semi-independent residence.
- 3.4 **Short Breaks:** Assessment, approval and support of Family Link carers (in Richmond and Kingston only) offering respite or overnight care for children with disabilities. Whilst the worker is funded through the Children with Disabilities team, the scheme is governed by Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and therefore jointly managed by the fostering team.
- 3.5 **Private Fostering:** Supervision and monitoring of arrangements where people who are not close family members i.e. Uncles, Aunts, Grandparents, Step Parents and Siblings, but look after children through private family arrangements for more than 28 days.
- 3.6 **The IFA:** delivers all of the above components of fostering, undertaking the functions of assessment, approval, supervision, support, training and development, safeguarding and review of foster carers within all of the above groups. The performance data and outcome measures relating to these areas are outlined below.
- 3.7 **The Fostering Panels:** Please refer to the Annual Fostering Panel Reports 2019-2020 prepared by panel chairs Sara Neville and Chris Mills for full information. As part of our IFA registration process we agreed to greater integration in policy and practice across the two branch areas with the aim of creating a similar experience for prospective and approved foster carers. This has enabled the Panels to be more accessible and responsive to prospective foster carers and for those coming to review.

3.8 To ensure our Panels were operating to the same high standards we:

- Appointed a single Panel Advisor who attends and advises both Panels, providing consistent support and challenge across both areas.
- Developed robust quality assurance mechanisms, which are independent of the team management structure.
- Standardised the majority of the documentation to ensure consistency in meeting format and recording Panel minutes.
- Improved diversity by appointing more panel members from under-represented groups in both areas.
- Held Panel training centrally, having reviewed training requirements with the aim of embedding Signs of Safety in Panel practice.
- Created a single Panel Handbook which sets out the role, responsibilities, expectations, procedures, and the structure/ format of meetings.

3.9 We retained two Agency Decision Makers, being the Directors of Social Care in Richmond and Kingston, and Windsor and Maidenhead. Our Agency Decision Makers work closely together to develop a shared approach and to listen and respond to feedback from the Panel Advisor on arising trends in each area. We retained our Panel Chairs and Vice Chairs, as they had many years' experience and provided much needed continuity. One of the benefits of having two Fostering Panels working together is greater flexibility to deal with peaks in demand, by allowing carers to attend in either area and panel members to sit across the two operational areas

Impact Example:

As their second placement these foster carers have fostered a baby who was born very prematurely to a mother who was using alcohol and drugs and spent several weeks in a special care baby unit. By working closely with the health visitor and other medical professionals and giving this baby considerable 1:1 input and dedicated care he has made significant progress. He is a really happy baby who is now nearly walking, taking great interest in the world around him, clearly loves playing with his toys and feels secure enough to be able to go off exploring - with his foster carers close behind.

4 Annual Fostering Reviews, allegations, standards of care and notifications

4.1 The IFA benefits from having a dedicated Independent Reviewing Officer in Windsor and Maidenhead and a dedicated Reviewing Officer in Richmond and Kingston who chairs all carers' annual reviews and all

reviews following an allegation or standard of care concern. The review is completed with the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) who provides a report for the IRO; Feedback from the child or young person in placement is encouraged. There is also a requirement for feedback from the child's social worker as well as from anyone else living in the home. The IRO completes an audit of all statutory requirements and checks, to ensure overall compliance.

- 4.2 Between April 2019 and March 2020, a total of 38 annual reviews were completed in Richmond, 30 in Kingston and 43 in Windsor and Maidenhead. Out of that number 1 review was out of time scale by 5 days, due to the Covid 19. In Richmond 1 review was out of timescale and the same in Kingston. The reasons included; standards of care concerns for one foster carer needed to be concluded before their AFHR could be completed and the second was because the foster carer initially considered staying put only and then wished to continue with their mainstream fostering approval as they wish to consider other children when the staying put child moves on.
- 4.3 During the period in review, there were 3 allegations of harm or serious concerns made against foster carers in Richmond, and 3 in Kingston and 0 in Windsor and Maidenhead. The outcome was that all 3 allegations made against the Richmond foster carers were unsubstantiated. In Kingston the allegations made against two foster carers was unsubstantiated and 1 was upheld. The outcome for this carer was de registration of their fostering approval.
- 4.4 There were 2 concerns raised by professionals about standards of care in Richmond, 0 in Kingston and 1 in Windsor and Maidenhead. In the case of Richmond these concerns were addressed through a robust fact finding investigation which concluded that the carers acted appropriately to safeguard the children in their care. In Windsor and Maidenhead the concerns triggered a Standards of Care investigation, training was highlighted for the carers involved. The Fostering Services' findings and conclusions were accepted by the social work teams involved. Additional support and training was offered to carers as required to address concerns.
- 4.5 There were no grievances raised against a foster carer or by a foster carer against a child in any of the local authority areas.
- 4.6 Foster Carers can appeal the Agency Decision Makers decision internally within AfC or by declaring that they would wish to consider the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM England). The IRM review the qualifying determinations made by fostering service providers and make a new recommendation having considered all the relevant information

afresh. 1 application was made by a Kingston foster carer to the IRM during this period. This case was scheduled to be presented to the IRM in March 2020 however it was postponed due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The case was heard in May 2020 and will be reported in the next annual fostering report.

- 4.7 During the period April 2019/March 2020 there have been 6 separate notifiable events in Richmond and Kingston which are discussed under allegations. In RBWM there have been 30 notifications which have been sent to Ofsted (under Reg 36 of the Fostering Service Regulations). The outcomes for each of these are recorded on a tracker so that we can follow up on actions and identify any patterns or concerns.

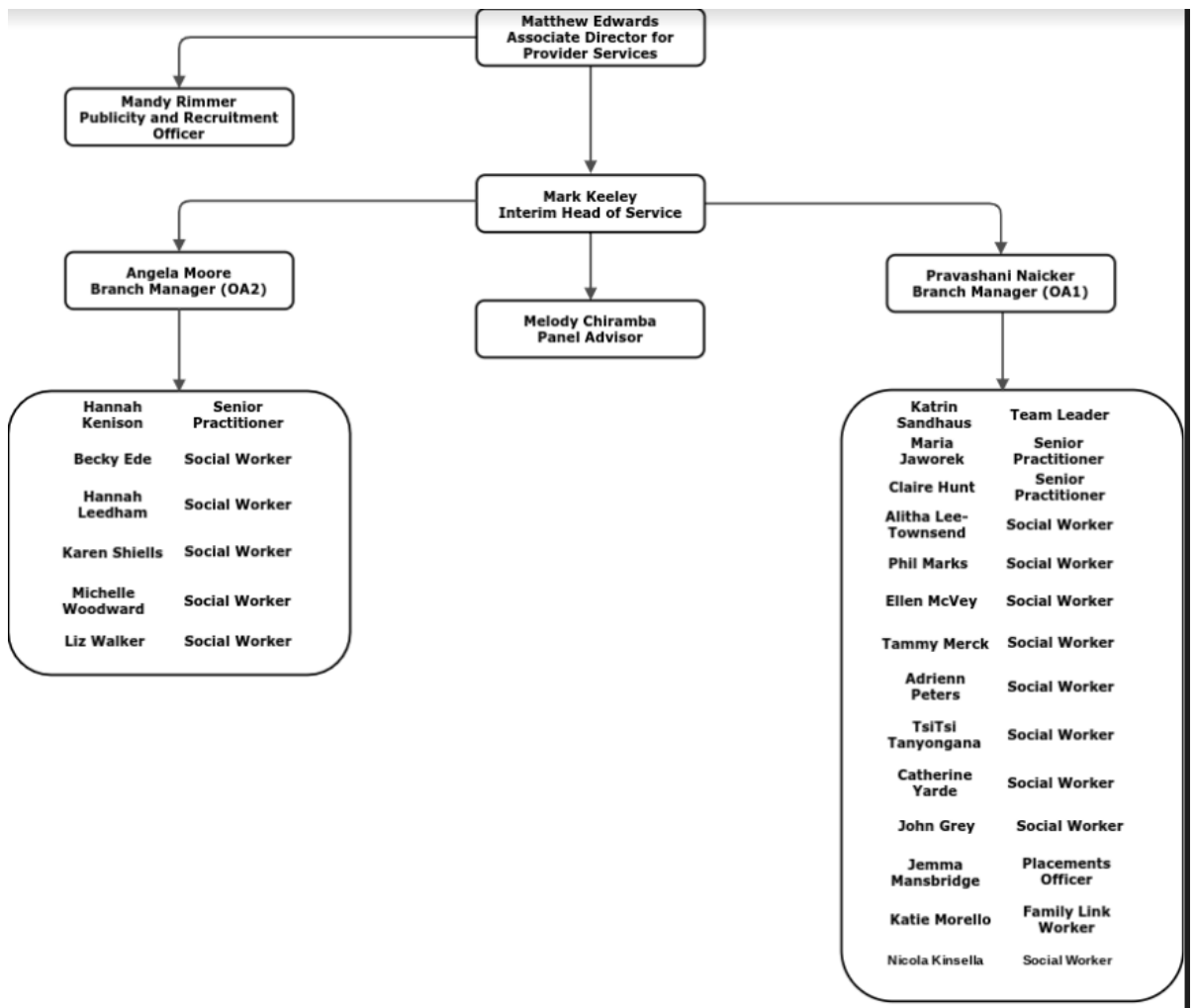
Impact Example:

This foster carer and her partner agreed to foster a young person whose long term foster placement had broken down and as a result clearly felt quite lost and abandoned. Since being in their care she has flourished and clearly feels a part of the family, joining in with family holidays and their many activities. This young person recently turned 18 and her favourite present was to be formally given a front door key (although she had been using one for some time). Despite the significant disruption in her life this young person supported by her foster carers has continued to excel at school and is planning to go onto university in September.

5 The IFA Establishment

- 5.1 AFC's IFA is separated into two branches but with several central roles supporting both areas.

IFA Organisational Chart



5.2 All Supervising Social Workers' have a mixture of assessment and supervision work in their caseload. The expected caseload for a full time worker is set at 15 points with an assessment counting for 3 points and supervision of a carer 1 point. Caseloads for part-time staff are pro rata e.g. 12 points for workers contracted to 4 days per week. All supervising SWs in both branches currently hold full caseloads or are slightly above. We have commissioned out some new Form F, and Form C assessments in the last three months to make sure these are completed within timescales

Impact Example:

This young person clearly felt quite lost and abandoned when the family member caring for him had advised that they couldn't continue. After several months with foster carers who had taken him in on an emergency basis he moved to a longer term foster carer. Both foster families have helped him to come to terms with his loss and worked closely with his birth family to help him stay in regular contact and help him to understand that they still cared about him. He is making great progress

at school (who have been very supportive towards him and worked closely with his foster carer) and he clearly now feels very much part of his new family. He has been supported to continue and develop hobbies and interests and has already been on several trips abroad, both educational and during school holidays. The foster carers children and a young person who is "staying put" have also all played an important role in helping him to feel welcomed into the family, for example finding out what he would like and cooking him a special birthday cake of his own choosing.

6 Children & Young People

6.1 a) Children Looked After (CLA) Population

| Kingston | Mar-17 | Mar-18 | Mar-19 | Mar-20 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| No. of children in care at the end of the month (excluding respite) | 115 | 128 | 129 | 124 |
| Male | 69 | 81 | 83 | 84 |
| Female | 46 | 47 | 46 | 40 |
| Under 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| 1-4 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 10 |
| 5-9 | 15 | 20 | 14 | 16 |
| 10-15 | 50 | 47 | 55 | 42 |
| 16-17 | 39 | 53 | 49 | 50 |
| No of children looked after at the end of the month (including respite) | 118 | 130 | 129 | 125 |
| Below figures are excluding respite cohort | | | | |
| Becoming CLA | 60 | 66 | 59 | 69 |
| No. placed with in-house carers (excluding staying put) | 33 | 38 | 34 | 37 |
| No. placed externally in PV&V sector | 48 | 54 | 56 | 45 |
| Ceasing to be CLA | 55 | 53 | 58 | 66 |

| Richmond | Mar-17 | Mar-18 | Mar-19 | Mar-20 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| No. of children looked after at the end of the month (excluding respite) | 107 | 103 | 118 | 119 |

| | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Male | 70 | 65 | 71 | 63 |
| Female | 37 | 38 | 47 | 55 |
| Indeterminate | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Under 1 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 8 |
| 1-4 | 9 | 10 | 12 | 14 |
| 5-9 | 4 | 7 | 4 | 9 |
| 10-15 | 45 | 38 | 44 | 41 |
| 16-17 | 45 | 42 | 52 | 47 |
| No of children in care at the end of the month (including respite) | 107 | 103 | 118 | 118 |
| Below figures are excluding respite cohort | | | | |
| Becoming CLA | 67 | 58 | 83 | 71 |
| No. placed with in-house carers (excluding staying put) | 45 | 42 | 38 | 47 |
| No. placed externally in PV&V sector | 27 | 28 | 28 | 38 |
| Ceasing to be CLA | 81 | 57 | 55 | 56 |

| Windsor and Maidenhead | Mar-17 | Mar-18 | Mar-19 | Mar-20 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| No. of children looked after at the end of the month (excluding respite) | 109 | 107 | 124 | 119 |
| Male | 60 | 59 | 61 | 62 |
| Female | 49 | 48 | 63 | 57 |
| Under 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| 1-4 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 11 |
| 5-9 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 18 |
| 10-15 | 42 | 45 | 51 | 48 |
| 16-17 | 36 | 33 | 42 | 36 |
| No of children looked after at the end of the month (including respite) | 109 | 107 | 124 | 119 |
| Below figures are excluding respite cohort | | | | |
| Becoming CLA | 55 | 48 | 72 | 57 |
| No. placed with in-house carers (excluding staying put in March 2020 figure only) | 52 | 42 | 55 | 57 |
| No. placed externally in PV&V sector | 27 | 29 | 35 | 33 |
| Ceasing to be CLA | 35 | 50 | 56 | 59 |

6.1 b) Children placed with in house carers by category

| Number of children placed with in-house carers at 31.03.2020 | Kingston | Richmond | RBWM |
|--|----------|----------|------|
| Mainstream carers (not UASC) | 26 | 33 | 38 |
| Mainstream carers with UASC | 0 | 7 | 1 |
| Family and Friends | 9 | 4 | 12 |
| Temporary Family and Friends | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| Staying Put (not counted as a fostering placement) | 3 | 8 | 6 |
| Total fostering (not including staying put) | 37 | 47 | 57 |

Numbers of children looked after across all 3 boroughs have remained stable with a slight decrease recorded in 2 boroughs. The number of children placed with in house carers in fostering placements (not counting staying put) has increased by 3 in Kingston, 9 in Richmond and 8 RBWM since March 2019. In RBWM this is partly due to a number of sibling groups that needed to be placed. During 2019-20 the IFA has used its existing pool of carers more efficiently and reduced the number of carers with vacancies. The recruitment section outlines how since Jan 2020 the IFA has begun to show steady signs of growing its pool of in house carers. At time of writing RBWM now has 72 children and young people placed with in-house carers including those under staying put arrangements.

6.2 Care Plans and meeting Children’s Placement Needs

To ensure foster placements meet children’s needs as identified in the care plan, Placement Agreement Meetings (PAM) are held within five days of a child being placed with a foster carer. These meetings include the child and their SW, the carer/s and their SSW. The child’s needs and how the carer will meet them, including any additional support needed

is addressed; the fostering household's Safe Care Policy and house rules are explored, agreeing curfews, boundaries and activities for children as age appropriate; and which authorities are delegated to carers. We are now moving to merging the placement plan and the placement information record.

CLA Reviews chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer are held to monitor the progress of placements in meeting children's needs. During 2019-20 92% of Children Looked-After (CLA) Reviews were held within expected timescales in Kingston, and 98% in Richmond (Windsor and Maidenhead currently to be confirmed).

Impact example:

Carers I supervise supported the transition of a 5 year old boy to his father this at Christmas. This was the first time they had supported a child's transition to a parent, and given it happened at such a sensitive time they did a brilliant job of preparing the child, and supporting his dad to get their flat ready. They have maintained contact with the child and his father, and have provided excellent life story material to ensure he knows he is valued by them and continues to be thought about by his foster family.

Impact example:

I am working with a single older foster carer who before the impact of Covid19 was reluctant to use smartphones or the internet, as she lacked confidence in her technical abilities. However, to ensure that the children in her care could continue to have contact with their birth families during lockdown, this carer sought advice and support and learnt how to use a smartphone to facilitate video calls using hangouts and WhatsApp. As a result of this and due to her persistence in managing the technical difficulties she has been able to ensure that the children still see their families during this difficult and worrying time.

Impact example:

These Carers have been looking after a sibling pair since they came into care in 2012 from a background of drugs and neglect. Over the years these carers have given consistent care with firm boundaries. They have helped, assisted and 'been there'

for the young people every step of the way and have ensured they have kept communication channels open. The young people have thrived in their care with the elder of the two now moving towards independence with a career mapped out and the younger excelling at school. They have become well balanced young people who have been equipped for life by the nurturing care they have received

Impact example:

These carers have looked after a young man who is an Asylum Seeker and came to them very troubled and traumatised by his life experiences. They have welcomed him into their family, sat and listened to his stories, given time to him and assisted him to further his education, English Language skills and independence skills. The young man has built up a good relationship with the carers and their son, becoming a positive role model for the son. They have supported the young person in his religion, special diet and chosen sport travelling all over the country for competitions. They continue to support this young man with the uncertainty he faces and he knows he can rely on his carers to always be there for him.

6.3 Education

Personal Education Plans (PEP's):

Spring Term PEP completion for AfC Virtual School across Richmond, Kingston and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead were at 100%. Due to COVID-19 PEPs transitioned to being carried out on-line from March 2020 onwards.

During 2019-20 AfC Virtual School has worked with Social Worker and Health colleagues to source a shared Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) approach. Designated Teachers in schools will be carrying out SDQ assessments and data will be triangulated. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to support our children.

Pupil Premium has been used to support our children's progress e.g. through 1:1 tuition and their wellbeing through mentoring and therapeutic provision. We continue to fund Letterbox and research tells us that the parcels not only impact on reading age but on family routines. 51 young people across Richmond, Kingston and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead took part in this year's Summer Activity week. Chessington World of Adventures was offered as a family day and was attended by 117 people. Feedback identifies that

100% of young people enjoyed the Summer School activities and 95% would like to attend similar activities in future.

AfC Virtual School produces reports on a Termly and Annual basis outlining progress across the following areas: Learning and Progress; Attendance and Exclusion; Educational Quality and Stability; PEP completion; Training; Pupil Premium; Communications and Previously Looked After Children. Reports are available on request.

Impact Examples:

Pupil feedback Letterbox:

'Firstly, I would like to say thank you so much, I absolutely love to get the parcels you send me, it keeps me out of the bored zone

Pupil Feedback Summer School:

'I learnt that we are all superheroes and we can all help each other in this life... I did not know Thames River is so polluted... I liked the water testing and finding out the results. I also enjoyed the boat trip and learning how to steer the boat....I liked the view of Windsor castle, learning about the history of the buildings...I enjoyed learning about everyday heroes, we all can be a hero by being kind and brave and helpful... I liked making a new friend'.

Carer

feedback:

'I would like to take the time to give you some feedback from our young person for Thursday 'Band- it' workshop and the theatre on Friday. A big massive thank you to you and the team as it was a huge success. My young person finds it difficult to be in new situations and meet new people and she really enjoyed both days and felt very welcome, and really enjoyed both days. Can you please pass on to the team involved a huge thank you from us.'

"Thank you so much for organising today's trip to Chessington, we all had a fab time, my new in care was able to spend time with me & my daughter in a fun way today"!

6.4 Health and Dental

CLA Medical :

On 31.03.20, there were 99% of children looked after in Kingston with an up to date medical check. This compares to 94% reported in the previous year.

On 31.03.20, there were 72% of children looked after in Richmond with an up to date medical check. This compares to 84% reported in the previous year.

On 31.03.20, there were 85% of children looked after in Windsor and Maidenhead with an up to date medical check. This compares to 93% reported in the previous year.

Dental Checks:

On 31.03.2020 in Kingston 63% of children looked after have an up to date dental check recorded. This compares to 65% reported in the previous year.

On 31.03.2020 in Richmond 51% of children looked after have an up to date dental check recorded. This compares to 56% reported in the previous year.

On 31.03.20 in Windsor and Maidenhead 63% of children looked after have an up to date dental check recorded. This compares to 75% reported in the previous year but the number will rise after further data cleansing.

Note that the medical and dental figures for 2019-2020 are all provisional and we expect them to increase following further data checks and cleansing. Health reports will be coming to Corporate Parenting Panels later in the year

6.5 Emotional and Mental Health

Priority access to CAMHS continues to be available to children looked after and foster carers to support their emotional and mental health. In Richmond and Kingston both the Emotional Health Service and Strengthening Families Plus provide in-house foster carers with a range of support services including building resilience, mentoring, life story work, parenting strategies, and preparing for independence. In Windsor and Maidenhead Cherry Croft offer a matching range of therapeutic services. There is an in house Wellbeing Team who offer therapeutic support to all children who are looked after and the youth service also runs regular 'esteem groups' that they can tap into. One of the priorities of the IFA this year is to develop a consistent therapeutic model of fostering across both branches supported by specialised training for foster carers.

Impact Example:

This is a private fostering case where the family was receiving no financial support. I referred them to a charity that awarded them £300 to spend towards essential items for the young person. The carer was very grateful for this, the young person had been sleeping on the sofa in their living room and they had been struggling financially. Several referrals were made by the fostering service to CAMHS and through that persistence the young person was accepted by CAMHS and was able to access the therapeutic support he needed.

6.5 Supporting Permanency

Both IFA branches have played an active role over the last twelve months in promoting permanency for children in long term fostering arrangements. Guidance has been developed for both branches to make sure that all long term fostering matches for all children under 16 years are presented to fostering panel for recommendations before being sent to the Agency Decision Maker for the final decision.

Impact example:

After a number of years in their care these foster carers have recently adopted their previously fostered son. He has very significant needs and at times his behaviour can still be a real challenge to those caring for him. However his new family, including their own birth children, have greatly adapted their own lives in order to better meet his needs and have shown tremendous commitment to him. He has made significant progress, for example from being non verbal to being able to hold a conversation and is starting to develop empathy and understanding in regards to the impact of his behaviour on others.

1. 7 Fostering Recruitment

7.1 Mainstream Foster Carer Recruitment, Apr 2019 to Mar 2020:

| | Kingston | Richmond | RBWM | Total |
|----------------------------------|----------|----------|------|-------|
| No. of Initial Enquiries | 45 | 47 | 44 | 136 |
| No. of Initial Assessment visits | 13 | 16 | 12 | 41 |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|----|
| No. of Completed Skills To Foster training | 9 | 9 | 6 | 24 |
| No. Form F assessments Started | 8 | 8 | 7 | 23 |
| No. of Approvals of new Mainstream Carers | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Potential mainstream fostering households currently booked for skills to foster or in assessment at 22.05.2020 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 24 |

Over the last 12 months we have delivered key components of the recruitment strategy. We have updated AfC's fostering website emphasising the IFA unique selling points. This definitely increased our enquiries and made it easier for applicants to apply and gain information. We also redesigned all of our recruitment materials to give a clearer sharper message. Our word of mouth reward for our "refer a friend scheme" for foster carers, AfC staff, and wider partners was increased, attracting an increased response. AfC also reviewed the carer assessment process from first enquiry to approval to ensure it is swift, supportive and delivers high quality induction training. Skills to foster courses are now being run by dedicated staff ensuring that delivery is consistent and regular, 6-8 a year, covering both operations. Recently we have moved to delivering this online to cope with the lock down. Some weekend training has been introduced to enable working partners to attend.

7.2 Approvals: Reg 24 Temporary & Connected Persons Carers 2019-2020:

| | Kingston | Richmond | RBWM | Total |
|---|----------|----------|------|-------|
| New approvals of Connected Persons carers | 6 | 1 | 7 | 14 |
| Referrals for connected persons assessments | 15 | 7 | 16 | 38 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reg 24 Temporary Approvals of Connected Persons at 31.03.20 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 9 |
| Connected Persons applicants in assessment at 31.03.2020 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 8 |

Connected Persons Fostering: In the vast majority of these referrals children had already been placed in an emergency with someone from within their family network and the carers temporarily approved under Regulation 24. Where appropriate Connected Persons fostering assessments are undertaken in parallel with Special Guardianship assessments of the same applicant. Depending on individual circumstances, the preferred care plan in most cases is Special Guardianship rather than Connected Persons fostering. Hence at the conclusion of care proceedings, there may be more SGOs granted following approval of Connected Person.

In cases where the proceedings do not end with the granting of a SGO the supervising social workers support carers to a point where they feel able and confident to pursue Special Guardianship. Carers' usually want the support of an SSW to manage complex dynamics with birth parent/s and in some cases they may have specific training needs themselves.

Impact Example:

I work with some excellent connected carers who are incredibly organised, efficient, nurturing and generous. They care for a young person who was a family friend, and since she has been living with them (3 years) she has developed into a confident and aspirational young lady. She took part in the RBWM Girls' Forum and delivered the welcome speech to the then Prime Minister Theresa May who visited the group. Her carers have supported her in everything she wishes to achieve, and they go above and beyond to give her so many amazing opportunities and life experiences. They have also helped to deliver Skills to Foster courses so that they can share their experiences of being connected carers with others.

Impact Example:

AFC are supporting a couple acting as connected carers for the wife's younger sister due to their mother having a terminal illness. The older sister has put her university dreams on hold to care for her younger sister. She is emotionally

intelligent and intuitive to her young sister's triggers and support needs. She is proactive in training and researching further parenting methods to support her sister such as via the national association of therapeutic parenting and also via Adverse Child Experience webinars. The younger sister is nervous of men and yet the supportive male carer has overcome this with love and patience and established a positive relationship where she can engage with him.

8 Support to Approved Carers

8.1 Social Work Support from Supervising Social Workers

Carers all have an allocated Supervising Social worker (SSW) who visits within statutory timescale, every 4- 6 weeks when placements are stable, and more regularly when additional support is needed. SSWs complete annual review reports and complete a Personal Development Plan for each carer, including couples prior to their review, identifying training that is relevant to their development and the presenting issues of children in their care. Carers are assigned a buddy, a level 3 carer to offer support. Over the last 7 months we have been going through the child -focused standards at the foster carer 's forum. For the last three months Supervising Social Workers have been taking carers through one of the twelve child-focused standards in the National Minimum Standards each month. Their advice and consistent support is critical to keeping carers within the service.

Impact Example:

One of our foster carers has been supporting another carer who was having a difficult time managing the boy she was looking after. She offered to look after the boy to give the main carer a break for the weekend. They engaged in some conversations but it was difficult for her to assess how he was finding the situation. The following week the respite carer returned home to find a cardboard box containing fresh tulips on her doorstep. She recalled a conversation with the boy over the weekend whereby he had been puzzled as to why she had a vase of wooden tulips in her house.

Impact Example:

A family fostering a 17 year old young man with severe learning and physical disabilities have been in social isolation for several weeks. Initially they worried about how the young person would manage and also questioned how they were

going to keep him occupied. The foster mother had a broken arm in plaster. Several weeks in they described their foster son as a 'joy to look after'. He is less pressured because he's getting more rest and a morning lie in.. The foster carers are using the opportunity to help him build his independence and learn new skills. He has also developed his caring side through supporting the foster mother with simple tasks she can't perform due to her broken arm.

8.2 Family Link Scheme.

The Family Link Scheme provides short breaks for Children with Disabilities up to the age of 18 years. There are currently 6 Approved Family Link Carer households and collectively they are providing 60 overnight placements per year. There are plans to extend and develop the service in 2019-20 and explore whether the service could also be implemented in Windsor and Maidenhead.

Impact Example:

Our Family Link carers have a wonderful relationship with our son and we are immensely grateful to them and the family link worker for all the support they provide for us as a family. It gives my husband and I much-needed respite on the 'little and often' basis that works for us and provides our son with opportunities to further develop his independence by sleeping away from home. His complex needs are such that he is unable to do sleepovers with friends in the same way that a typical teenager would, so Family Link is essential in supporting him to access what any other teenager would enjoy doing. We trust our Family Link carers completely and are able to benefit fully from an evening, night and morning off the usual routines for providing all the care and support our son needs. We've even been to the cinema!

Impact Example:

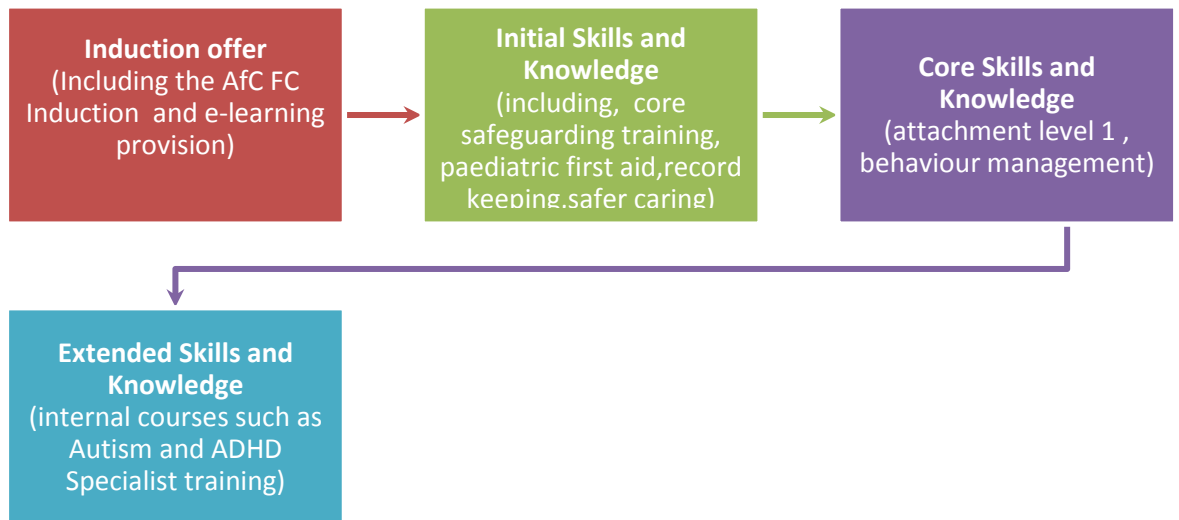
Our Family Link Carer is so trustworthy, dependable and knows our son so well. We know he is safe, happy and stimulated. When he is with her, we can relax, not feel guilty and recharge. She always has ideas about what to do with him, including taking him to play areas, companion cycling and even a light show at Kew. She communicates fantastically with us, chatting face to face and texting while she has him. She communicates with him directly so he knows what is happening. We couldn't love her more, I could fill this whole page with praise.

8.3 Training

Foster carers and Connected persons have access to all of Achieving for Children's Multi agency provision via the online booking portal on CPDOnline. In addition we offer foster care specific provision around Safer caring , online safety ,behaviour management, education support ,managing allegations and child sexual exploitation of foster care friendly times. AfC have recently commissioned its own online platform and are currently producing foster care specific packages around record keeping. All attendance at training is discussed and approved by their Supervising social worker. 70% of foster carers have attended at least one session via AfC in this period. In December 2019 the workforce development team initiated a quarterly review of compliance of both safeguarding and safer caring training. This has seen compliance against safeguarding training increase by 20 %.

In February 2020 AfC delivered the inaugural Foster Care and Connected persons induction programme which had been requested by carers. Unfortunately due to the current Covid 19 situation the Learning and development team in conjunction with the Fostering service are redesigning this to be suitable for virtual delivery.

During this period AfC have introduced the Foster care pathway to ensure that there is a consistent approach and that identified needs are met. The Learning and development pathway for Foster carers has been developed by the Learning and Development Team in collaboration with the Fostering Competency Framework working party and managers. The pathway takes into consideration the provision offered by the two separate operational areas (Kingston and Richmond alongside Windsor and Maidenhead). The programme also reflects the feedback from carers, professional bodies and needs identified through local and national initiatives. Going forward from next year progress against the pathway will be reported quarterly .



8.4 Support Groups

During this reporting period Richmond and Kingston held 3 support groups (a group for connected persons carers, mainstream foster carers and a specialist foster carers group). The latter group will be amalgamated into the mainstream support group in 2020/2021.

In Windsor and Maidenhead a therapeutic group is available for connected carers and mainstream carers. There is also a whatsapp group where carers can get support and advice are currently being canvassed about the best way to support them. Some of the male carers are interested in forming a men's group. Both fostering branches acknowledge the importance of having support groups for all carers where they can get both peer and professional advice in an informal setting. A Facebook group for carers has been set up and the feedback is that all carers find it a very useful source of advice about day to day fostering issues.

8.5 Fostering Forums

AfC Fostering Forums continued to meet at least quarterly in both branches until the lockdown period and we are now reviewing how these sessions can be effectively delivered on-line Attendance has been between 10 and 20 carers at each meeting. These forums remain critical to hearing from carers about what is working well and where the service needs to improve. In the Ofsted inspection in September 2019

most carers stated that “the support they receive is very effective” but some stated that “they did not receive records of their supervisory visits”. This led to the IFA auditing supervision records for all carers across both branches. Learning and Development regularly attend the forum to address issues around improving foster carer training. We have also created a better system for carers receiving and sending secure email this year in response to questions raised at the forum.

8.6 Out of Hours (OOH) Support

Out of Hours support from experienced supervising social workers is provided between 6-11pm every evening and 12 noon to 11pm during weekends and bank holidays. This service compliments the Emergency Duty which is available to carers through the night. During the Covid 19 crisis fostering managers have also been on call to support any potential placement breakdown.

Impact example:

Two foster carers have fostered almost 40 children over the last ten years and they have offered regular respite to one child for 6 years. The carers find creative ways to encourage and support this child educationally by carefully selecting activities at home and in the community to help with Maths, English, hand-eye coordination, gross and fine motor skills and reading. This child enjoys special 1:1 time with these carers and very much regards this like a second home.

2. 9 Foster carer file audit themes

During 2019-20 a range of audit activity has been completed. Building on the audits of mainstream carer files completed in 2019 all Connected Persons foster carer files were audited in both Operational Areas. Audits in both areas were also completed of professional supervision and carer chronologies. A further audit of Placement Planning and First Review activity was completed in Operational Area 1.

In addition to this activity the fostering service is now participating in Achieving for Children’s service wide audit programme.

Themes identified in the audits

Annual foster carer home reviews. Most foster carer annual reviews took place within timescales and outcomes for children were noted to be good. Contributions to review reports from children’s social workers,

the carers themselves and adult members of the household were good. Children's independent reviewing officers were not always able to contribute effectively and this has been discussed with the review service.

Foster carer's valued the support of their supervising social workers however their supervision did not always take place within required timescales i.e. between 4 and 6 weeks, and the supervision records were not regularly completed in a timely way. In some cases the 'lived experience' of the children being looked after was not reflected in supervision recordings. Changes to the supervision recording format and practice have now been put in place and the quality of supervision recording is improving.

The level of carer participation in placement planning has been the subject of regular dissatisfaction for carers and they often have not received appropriate reports and assessments in a timely way. The evidence for this has been seen in carer file auditing in both Operational Areas and in the placement planning and review audit completed in Operational Area 1. All children audited had placement plans however in 40% of cases it was not possible to evidence the provision of placement plans to foster carers. Placement planning meetings regularly took place after a child or young person had been placed and some outside the 5 day timescale. In order to support more timely completion and distribution of placement plans and information about children a new format for the placement plan which combines the information previously held in 2 different plans has been developed and was launched in January 2020.

Management support for supervising social workers is provided in formal and informal supervision. Supervising social workers report being well supported by their managers and Ofsted in both Operational Areas have noted the positive relationships within the fostering teams. Audits of professional supervision have shown that the recording of decisions and the follow up of actions are not always noted in supervision records and in some cases the timeliness of formal supervision has slipped. Improving this will be a focus of future work with both teams and professional supervision is now monitored and reported on every month.

3. 10 AFC IFA Development in 2019-2020

- 10.1 The Ofsted Inspection in September 2019 in Operational Area 1 provided a useful benchmark in terms of how far the IFA has come and critical areas where it needed to further develop. Key strengths were

that “ the outcomes for children are very positive, children receive personalised care that meets their needs including around their identity”. Children and young people feel listened to, are involved in the shaping of the service and know how to complain. Engagement in education and learning outcomes were good and children and young people live healthy lifestyles. A revised matching process was in place but there was not evidence it had been embedded. Children and young people were effectively protected from harm and abuse but not all notifications went to Ofsted in a timely fashion. Safer caring policies were in place but too generalised and a plan needed to be tailored for each individual child. Investigations into allegations and standards of care were “comprehensive and thorough” but “some take a significant amount of time before they are concluded”.

- 10.2 A comprehensive self assessment and action plan was drawn up which regularly maps the IFA against the 31 National Minimum Fostering Standards and identifies the critical areas for service improvement. Progress against the plan is monitored at the IFA Board.

4. 11 New Developments for the IFA in 2020-2021

11.1 Increasing the pool of in house carers and our range of fostering provision:

The IFA has begun to grow but we are focused on increasing our pool of approved foster carers by a net gain of 20 households per year until we have grown from 120 to 220 approved carers and can offer a local in house foster placement to every child that needs one across the 3 local authorities. We are confident that in 2020-21 we are on track to achieve this net increase of 20 carers. We also recognise that we need to diversify and offer different type of placements and provision. This will include developing a Supported Lodgings Scheme for 16+ young people and UASC who may not need the holistic care of a fostering placement but would benefit from a supportive family environment as a transition before moving onto semi-independent living. We also require more Parent and Child foster carers and are looking to train and upskill some of our existing mainstream carers to take on this critical role. The Family Link Scheme needs to be expanded and include RBWM in 2020-2021.

11.2 Engaging with foster carers to find solutions and respond to the Covid 19 crisis.

At the time of writing this report we have not had to move any children due to the pandemic and our carers have done a magnificent job under a highly stressful situation. We have temporarily approved 8 members of AfC staff and their families to act as emergency carers if required. We believe that one of the critical areas coming out of lockdown will be having the respite capacity to support carers who have been under considerable strain. We have been reviewing respite capacity across the IFA and urgently need to recruit additional respite carers as well as encouraging carers to identify those who might be trained up and supported to offer respite from their own support networks. We will also be exploring with carers where the new ways of training, supervising and supporting them online has been effective and where there are gaps. We are looking to return to home visiting at least every 12 weeks so that we can see the children in placement face to face.

11.3 Developing a therapeutic model of fostering

AfC continues to embed Signs of Safety/Success as its overarching practice model but we want to develop a therapeutic model of fostering for the service as a whole which is responsive to those carers who are currently working with children with particularly complex needs. We have qualified staff within the IFA and AfC who could develop therapeutic support groups in both branches and aim to have the model clarified and suitable support in place by September 2020.

11.4 Improving areas of policy and procedure and strengthening practice

We are reviewing that we are consistently using our matching matrix to identify which carers would be most suited to promoting a child's outcomes. We are also monitoring that foster carers are receiving all the required information about a child and that placement planning meetings are being completed within five days of placement. We are currently working on updating our policy around Staying Put to make sure it aligns with other IFAs. We are revising our Standards of Care procedure to bring in a far swifter response to lower level concerns. We are reviewing that all children have individually tailored Safer Care Plans. Despite having to cancel our annual foster care conference due to lockdown we are looking at ways to raise the quality of supervision between the supervising social worker and the foster carer particularly where restorative work needs to be undertaken.

Report Author: Matthew Edwards

Assistant Director Provider Services Achieving for Children

Date completed : 26 May 2020