

Report Title:	Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After, 2020 To 2025
Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	No - Part I
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Carroll, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Children Services, Health and Mental Health
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet - 24 June 2021
Responsible Officer(s):	Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of Children's Services and Matthew Edwards, Associate Director of Provider Services
Wards affected:	All

REPORT SUMMARY

The Sufficiency Strategy outlines how the Royal Borough will ensure that children and young people who need to be in care, can grow up in high quality homes that meet their immediate needs and provide them with permanence at the earliest opportunity. The strategy projects the likely number of children and young people who will require care outside of their families over the next five years alongside their likely support needs. It sets out how the Council will meet the placement and housing needs of these children and young people, including increasing opportunities for children to live in local foster families, developing local residential care provision and supported accommodation, and by commissioning specialist placements where this is required.

1. DETAILS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

RECOMMENDATION: That Cabinet notes the report and:

- i) Approves the publication and implementation of the Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After 2020 to 2025.**

2. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) AND OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Table 1: Options arising from this report

Option	Comments
Approves the publication and implementation of the Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After 2020-2025 This is the recommended option	Implementing the strategy will enable the council to deliver its placement and housing responsibilities for children in care, including increasing opportunities for children to live in local foster

	families, developing local residential care provision and supported accommodation, and by commissioning specialist placements where this is required
Not approve the Strategy	Failure to implement the strategy will not enable the council to plan for its children in care and result in increased financial pressures.

- 2.1 As corporate parents, the Royal Borough is committed to ensuring children and young people in care achieve the best possible outcomes and are well prepared and supported to move confidently into adulthood with the support they need. When children and young people cannot remain living within their birth families, the Council is committed to providing them with permanent homes which provide them with stability throughout their time in care and which meet their developing needs.
- 2.2 There were 130 children in care in the Royal Borough on 31 March 2021. The number of children in care has increased gradually since 2017 when it was 109. This follows a national pattern; however, the growth rate in the Royal Borough is lower than nationally and the rate of children in care remains significantly lower than the national average. The increasing number of children in care has resulted in an increased use of external placements, including independent fostering agencies and residential care placements, which are often at higher cost than in-house and local placements. This continues to place a significant financial pressure on children's social care services. The development of Achieving for Children's independent fostering agency and an in-house residential children's home, Hope House in Teddington, has helped to increase in house provision but further work is required to ensure there are sufficient local housing and care placements for the Royal Borough's children in care.
- 2.3 The Council and its corporate parenting partners have a statutory duty to ensure that, through direct provision or commissioned services, there are a range of care placements available locally, that are sufficient to meet the needs of all children in care, or that there is a plan in place to move towards that position. This requires a strategy that describes how the Council intends to provide sufficient care placements for its children in care.
- 2.4 The Sufficiency Strategy for children in care in the Royal Borough is attached to this report as Annex A, with an Executive Summary at Annex B. The whole strategy relates to the services provided by Achieving for Children in Kingston upon Thames, Richmond upon Thames and Windsor and Maidenhead; however, the strategy sets out the specific needs of children and young people in the Royal Borough and how these will be met locally wherever possible. The benefit of a cross-borough strategy is that it maximises opportunities for securing high-quality and cost effective housing and placements, particularly when commissioning them externally.
- 2.5 The strategy includes an analysis of all the children in care in the Royal Borough. It recognises that children and young people are unique and require specialist

support to help them reach their potential on their journey through care. The analysis sets out the current and projected profile of children in care to help shape the housing and care placements that will be needed in the future. The strategy identifies a number of gaps in provision for the Royal Borough's children. There are insufficient skilled and experienced in-house foster carers available for all children who would benefit from foster care. There is a need for in-house residential care placements in order to reduce reliance on external placements which are often at a significant distance from the borough. There is an increased need for parent and child assessment placements. There is an under-use of block contracts with care providers leading to a reliance on spot-purchasing arrangements which are often outside the borough and are higher cost.

2.6 The Sufficiency Strategy outlines 11 priorities to improve the availability of housing and care placements for the children in care supported by Achieving for Children. Of these, nine priorities are relevant to children in the Royal Borough:

- a. Develop in-house semi-independent accommodation for care leavers in the Royal Borough based on the successful Green Leas model implemented in Kingston.
- b. Develop a business case for "in house" Ofsted Registered children's homes in the Royal Borough based on what has already been achieved by AfC at Hope House in Richmond and the business case being submitted to Kingston Council. This may also strengthen edge of care interventions, particularly for adolescents
- c. Review the current contract at Frogmore and ensure the service specification meets the needs of our population offering, value for money and key performance indicators.
- d. Develop the independent fostering agency in Achieving for Children to increase the number of in-house foster carers so that there is a place available for every Royal Borough child that needs one.
- e. Develop an integrated therapeutic placement offer. Consider the establishment of a service that would provide assessments, treatment and management of children who meet an assessed threshold, particularly for children who have an ECHP. Assessments would cover occupational, speech or language assessments as well as support for children assessed to have significant physical or other developmental difficulties.
- f. Increase the number of training flats for care leavers.
- g. Increase the use of framework contracts to improve the commissioning of regulated placements for children in care.
- h. Implement block contract arrangements with experienced and high-quality local providers to reduce the use of spot-purchasing.
- i. Streamline and strengthen internal processes for assessing, sourcing, commissioning and agreeing placements to ensure children and young people have the placements that they need at the earliest opportunity.

3. KEY IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The key implications are set out in table 2.

Table 2: Key Implications

Outcome	Unmet	Met	Exceeded	Significantly Exceeded	Date of delivery
Placement of all foster children in Achieving for Children with its own fostering agency	<85%	85-87%	87-90%	>90%	31 March 2025

4. FINANCIAL DETAILS / VALUE FOR MONEY

4.1 There are no direct financial implications of approving the Sufficiency Strategy. Where the action plan proposes the development of additional in-house residential provision, this will be subject to the agreement of a financial business case with the Council.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The duty to provide or commission placements for children looked after is set out in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. This is known as the 'sufficiency duty'. Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children (Department for Education, 2010) provides that local authorities must be able to show that at a strategic level they are taking steps to meet the 'sufficiency duty' so far as is reasonably practical.

5.2 The Children Act 1989 defines sufficiency as "a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they do become looked after". For those children who are looked after, local authorities and their partners should seek to secure a number of providers and a range of services, with the aim of meeting the wide-ranging needs of children looked after with their local area.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 The risks are set out in table 3.

Table 3: Impact of risk and mitigation

Risk	Level of uncontrolled risk	Controls	Level of controlled risk
Failure to have sufficient local placements to meet the council's statutory duties	HIGH	Delivery of the Strategy's action plan in order to increase opportunities for children to live in local foster families, develop local residential care provision and supported accommodation, and commissioning specialist placements where this is required	MEDIUM

7. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 7.1 Equalities. The Equality Impact Assessment for this Strategy is published on the council's website [Equality impact assessments](#)
- 7.2 Climate change/sustainability. There are no direct implications of the recommendations in this report on climate change/sustainability. However, increasing the availability of local placement and housing provision will reduce the amount of travelling required for families and professionals which will have a positive impact on the environment.
- 7.3 Data Protection/GDPR. No personal data is being processed and therefore a Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Sufficiency Strategy has been developed with contributions from Kickback (the Children in Care Council) and using feedback provided by partners through the Corporate Parenting Forum.
- 8.2 Kickback and young people will be involved in the development of services outlined in the strategy. Young people will be involved in the development of the housing proposals set out within the strategy through working groups.
- 8.3 Foster carers have been consulted on the development of the fostering agency and will continue to be consulted through the Fostering Forum and other networks.

9. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 9.1 Implementation date if not called in: Immediately. The full implementation stages are set out in table 4.

Table 4: Implementation timetable

Date	Details
July 2021	In house IFA provision
October 2021	Develop an integrated therapeutic placement offer
January 2022	Block contracting arrangements
April 2022	Development of trainee flats for care leavers
June 2022	Develop In-house residential provision

10. APPENDICES

10.1 This report is supported by two appendices:

- Annex A: The Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2025
- Annex B: The Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2025 Executive Summary

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

11.1 The legal requirements around every local authority's "sufficiency duty" are set out in section 22 of The Children Act 1989

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/22G>

12. CONSULTATION (MANDATORY)

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
Cllr Carroll	Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Children Services, Health and Mental Health	25/5/21	27/5/21
Duncan Sharkey	Chief Executive	25/5/21	8/6/21
Adele Taylor	Executive Director of Resources/S151 Officer	25/5/21	8/6/21
Andrew Durrant	Executive Director of Place	25/5/21	08/6/21
Kevin McDaniel	Executive Director of Children's Services	25/5/21	25/5/21
Hilary Hall	Executive Director of Adults, Health and Housing	24/5/21	25/5/21
Andrew Vallance	Head of Finance	25/5/21	09/6/21

Elaine Browne	Head of Law	25/5/21	27/5/21
Emma Duncan	Deputy Director of Law and Strategy / Monitoring Officer	25/5/21	8/6/21
Nikki Craig	Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT	25/5/21	26/5/21
Louisa Dean	Communications	25/5/21	8/6/21
Karen Shepherd	Head of Governance	25/5/21	26/5/21

REPORT HISTORY

Decision type:	Urgency item?	To follow item?
Key decision	No	No

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**achieving
for children**

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY

December 2020 - March 2025

Date published: TBC

Date for review: Quarterly until April 2025

Document authors: Julie Hawdio, Priya Saravanan , Matthew Edwards, Jessica Thom and Andrew Kyei

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1. Introduction

1.1 In 2010, the ‘Statutory Guidance for the Sufficiency Duty’ was issued.¹ This requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority’s area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority’s area (‘the sufficiency duty’).

1.2 The Children Act 2004 defines sufficiency as:

“A whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative work to help support children and their families where possible, as well as providing better services for children if they do become looked after. For those who are looked after, LAs and partners should seek to secure a number of providers and a range of services, with the aim of meeting the wide-ranging needs of looked after children and young people within their local area.”

1.3 Providing the right placement, in the right place, at the right time, is vital for securing stability for each looked after child, and the statutory guidance aims to improve outcomes for this group of children. As effective corporate parents, the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead are working together, through their jointly commissioned children’s services provider, Achieving for Children, to provide sufficient, stable placements for children and young people in their care.

1.4 The aim of this strategy is to outline how Achieving for Children intends to meet the placement needs of and support positive outcomes for current and future children and care leavers.

The strategy is set within the context of national policy, legislation and guidance and addresses the needs of children and young people from birth to the age of 21 (or 25 where children’s services continue to have statutory responsibility). The following primary legislation governs our commissioning in relation to looked after children:

- Children Act 1989 & 2004
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children 2010

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/273812/sufficiency_-_statutory_guidance_on_securing_sufficient_accommodation_for_looked_after_children.pdf

- Guidance on the Provision of Accommodation for 16 & 17 year old young people who be homeless and/or require accommodation 2010
- Care Planning Review and Regulations 2010
- Promoting the Educational Achievements of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010
- The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012
- Children and Family Act 2014

1.5 Locally, this strategy is informed by Achieving for Children’s business plan and priorities, which are:

- Build resilience so that families and communities are better able to help, support and protect children without the need for statutory interventions.
- Create local provision so that children and young people can stay closer to their families and support networks, and benefit from integrated services.
- Develop more inclusive services and opportunities for children and young people with disabilities, complex needs and challenging behaviours.
- Support children and young people to develop their independence and skills for adulthood.
- Continue to develop the skills and resources the company needs to deliver efficient, cost-effective and financially sustainable services.

The strategy is further aligned with priorities set out in:

- Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (Kingston)²
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (Richmond)³
- Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Windsor and Maidenhead)⁴

² <https://data.kingston.gov.uk/jsna/>

³ <https://www.datarich.info/richmond-story/>

⁴

https://www3.rbwm.gov.uk/publichealth/downloads/file/95/joint_health_and_wellbeing_strategy

2. Achieving for Children's vision

- 2.1 Our vision is to ensure that Achieving for Children has sufficient local high quality placements and accommodation options that meet the needs of all looked after children and care leavers, safeguarding them from harm and supporting them in achieving the best possible outcomes through high quality placements and support services whilst ensuring the most effective use of available resources.

Our vision includes children only become looked after when absolutely necessary, supporting families with preventative interventions where it is safe to do so; stepping down care where possible; working with external providers in order to put in place the most effective care plan for children and families; and supporting care leavers in the transition into independence and adulthood. This provision should be local and ensure the best use of available resources, providing the right support for children and young people whilst being cost effective for the Councils.

- 2.2 We continually strive to improve practice in respect of care planning to ensure that it can be said, with confidence, which children need to come into care and identify the arrangements that will best improve children's outcomes if they do enter the care system.

In achieving this vision, we seek to support the resilience of families and reduce the need for children and young people to enter into care. We have a range of family support services and clinical interventions on the edge of care that provide a high quality support offer for families at Achieving for Children, complementing the core social work offer and additionally providing targeted support to families at risk of escalating into statutory services and those stepping down from Children's Social Care.

Children and young people will only become looked after when this is genuinely the best or only option to safeguard or promote their health and wellbeing. Care should provide a safe and positive experience for all children and one that preserves and promotes their identity, culture and religion. We will consistently provide high quality placements and/or support packages which take account of the child or young person's wishes and feelings, are outcome focussed and meet their needs whilst being cost effective.

Wherever possible, we endeavour to find the right placement the first time through robust care planning and matching processes to support placement stability and will, unless the needs of the child are of a highly specialist nature or there are legitimate safeguarding reasons for making a placement at a greater distance, try to accommodate the child as close to home as possible. When a decision is made to place a child or young person outside of Achieving for Children local authority areas, we are committed to giving high priority to meeting any consequential needs arising for the child or young person and, as with all placements, to closely monitor the quality and impact of the care and support they receive.

- 2.3 We will provide placements that can prepare children and young people for their transition to a permanent family environment or adulthood with confidence, a strong sense of self-worth, and the skills and abilities to thrive.

Wherever possible, we will return children to their birth families or support them living with extended family or other people they have an established connection with where this is consistent with the needs and wishes of the child.

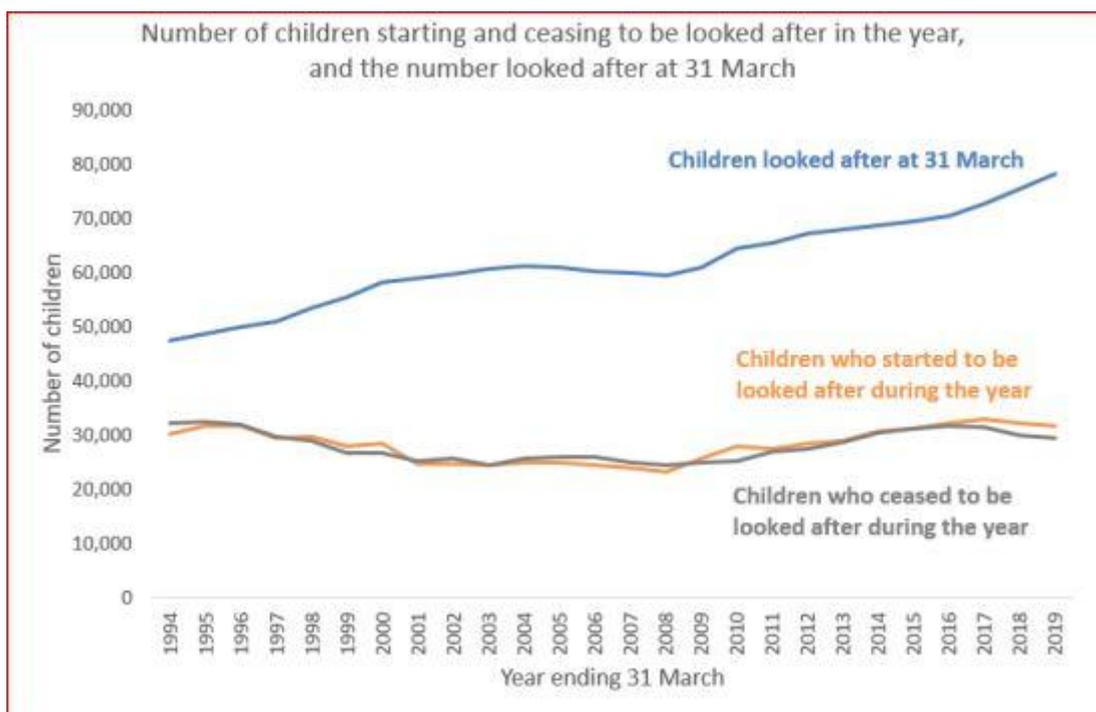
- 2.4 To support Achieving for Children in achieving its vision, the objectives of the strategy are to:

- Safely manage the number of children coming into care, ensuring that the needs of children and young people are met through the continued delivery, review and development of preventative family support services and ensuring that children only come into care where this is in their best interests.
- Ensure that looked after children are progressed through the care system without unnecessary delay and can achieve timely and appropriate reunification with their families, or permanent alternative placements (for example, through adoption, long-term fostering or special guardianship) wherever this is possible.
- Provide and commission the right mix of high quality placements (including through the development of existing partnerships and increased use of in-house provision) to meet identified needs of looked after children and care leavers as locally and as cost effectively as possible.
- Secure placement stability and improve outcomes for children and young people through strengthening: matching processes; placement planning; quality assurance processes; support available for carers (including foster carers, special guardians, adopters); and professional development opportunities for foster carers.
- Support children and young people in care to make a successful transition into adulthood through the provision of high quality leaving care services that support care leavers to find and maintain suitable accommodation arrangements that meet their needs and provide them with independent living skills. This includes possible Staying Put or Staying Close arrangements for young people with education, health and care plans, mental health difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Strengthen the involvement of children, young people, families, carers and professionals in the design, delivery and evaluation of placement provision.

3. Sufficiency - National Context⁵

- 3.1 At 31 March 2019, the number of children looked after (CLA) by local authorities in England increased by 4% since 2018 to 78,150 - continuing increases seen in recent years. This is equivalent to a rate of 65 children per 10,000 - up from 64 per 10,000 in 2018 and 60 per 10,000 in 2015. The number of children starting to be looked after has fallen this year by 2% to 31,680. The number ceasing to be looked after has fallen this year by 2% to 29,460 after a period of gradual increases and a high of 31,860 in 2016.

⁵ Further data from the Department for Education can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>



3.2 The broad characteristics of looked after children have remained similar to previous years. Just over half are male (56%) - 44% are female; similar to 2018. The largest age group (39%) are aged 10-15 years; 24% are aged 16 years and over; 18% are aged 5-9 years, 13% are aged 1-4 years and 5% are aged under 1 year. Over the last 5 years the average age of CLA has been steadily increasing. The majority are of white ethnicity (74%). 10% were of mixed ethnicity and 8% were of Black or Black British ethnicity. Since 2015, the proportion of CLA of white ethnicity has decreased steadily from 77%. It is likely this slight change is due to the broadly non-white make up of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), a group which has recently grown in number.

3.3 When a child is assessed by children’s services their primary need is recorded. There are a range of reasons why a child is looked after:

- as a result of or because they were at risk of abuse or neglect - 49,570 children - the most common reason identified
 - primarily due to living in a family where the parenting capacity is chronically inadequate (family dysfunction) - 11,310
 - due to living in a family that is going through a temporary crisis that diminishes the parental capacity to adequately meet some of the children’s needs (family being in acute stress) - 6,050
 - due to there being no parents available to provide for the child - 5,410
 - due to the child’s or parent’s disability or illness - 4,580
 - due to low income or socially unacceptable behaviour – 1,230
- There are a range of reasons why a child is looked after.

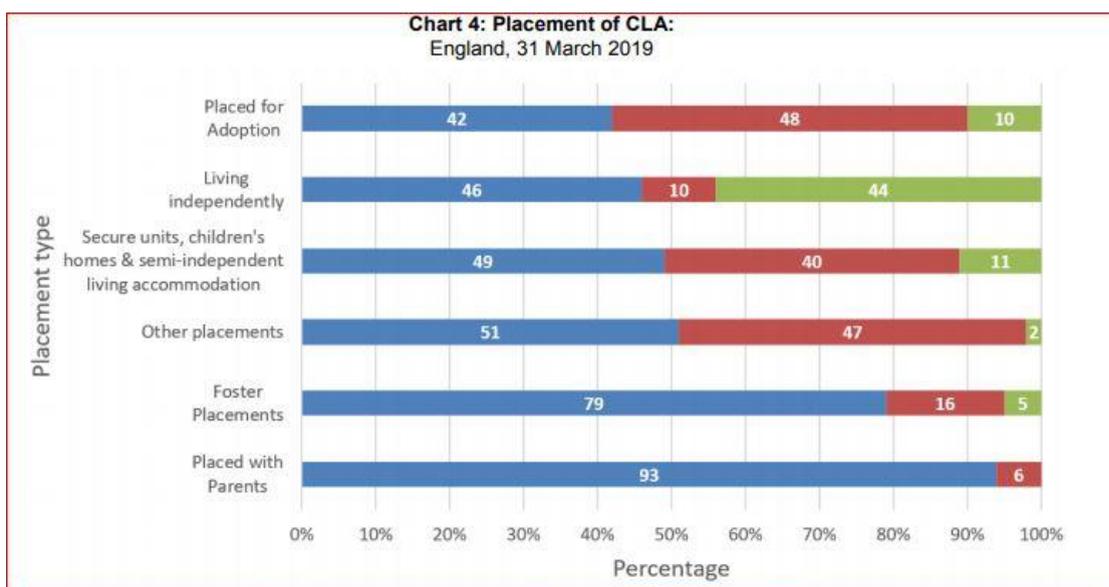
3.4 There are different ways for children to be looked after with different legal statuses although most children are looked after under a care order. At 31 March 2019 75% of children were looked after under a care order, 18% under a voluntary agreement, 7% under a placement order and 0.5% detained for child protection or under youth justice legal status. The number of children looked after under a care order has been rising in recent years, and the number looked after under a voluntary agreement under S20 of the Children Act 1989 has been falling.

3.5 Most CLA are placed in foster placements (72%); 13% of CLA being placed in a foster placement with a relative or friend and 58% being placed with a foster carer who is not a relative or friend. The remaining CLA are placed:

- in secure units, children's homes or semi-independent living accommodation (for example, hostels or flats where staff are employed to provide support and advice) - 12%
- placed with parents - 7%
- living independently or in residential employment - 4%
- placed for adoption – 3%

There has been a continued slight increase in children placed in 'secure units, children's homes and hostels', and children placed with parents, and a corresponding slight decrease in children in foster placements and placed for adoption. Placement stability is also important - most CLA (68%) had one placement in the year but 10% had three or more.

3.6 Local authorities have a general duty to provide accommodation that is within the local area and allows the child to live near their home. Placements inside the council boundary accounted for 58% of all CLA placements, placements outside the council boundary – 41%. Information is not known for 1% of placements – usually this is to protect the whereabouts of the child. The majority of CLA (73%) were placed within 20 miles of home but 20% were not. Information for the remaining 7% was not known or not recorded . As expected, location of placement varies by placement type; children placed for adoption are more likely to be placed over 20 miles from home and children placed with parents or in a foster placement are most likely to be placed 20 miles or less from home.



3.7 UASC are children aged under 18, who have applied for asylum in their own right and are separated from both parents and/or any other responsible adult. Local authorities have a legal duty to provide accommodation for these children. The number of UASC increased by 11% to 5,070 and they represent around 6% of all children looked after in England. Most UASC are male (90%), 85% are aged 16 and over, and 87% have a primary need of absent parenting. UASC are not distributed evenly around the country. Local authorities with points of entry to the country, for example Kent and Croydon, have much larger numbers of UASC than other local authorities. However there is a scheme in place to help redistribute UASC across the country.

3.8 The number of children starting to be looked after has fallen this year by 2% since 2018 - 31,680 children started to be looked after. Changes in the characteristics of children starting to be looked after are consistent with the increase in UASC this year – the proportions who are male, aged 16 and over, with a need due to absent parenting have all increased.

Half of children starting to be looked after did so under a voluntary agreement under S20 of the Children Act 1989; care orders accounted for a further 35%. These proportions are both the same as last year which suggests the recent increase in care orders and corresponding decrease in voluntary agreements may be stabilising. Fewer children starting to be looked after are in a foster placement, 68% down from 78% in 2015. 10% were placed in 'secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation', 7% were placed with parents and 7% placed in other placements in the community.

29,460 children ceased to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2019, which is a fall of 2% from 2018. Reasons for ceasing to be looked after include:

- returning home to live with parents – 30%

- moving into independent living (with or without support) – 16%
- special guardianship orders (a private law order where an individual is appointed as the child's special guardian) – 13%
- being adopted – 12%

3.9 The proportion of children ceasing who were male, and who ceased on their 18th birthday have both been increasing, likely to be influenced by UASC reaching 18 years of age and leaving the care system. 32% of children ceasing to be looked after left on their 18th birthday, up from 23% in 2015.

The average duration of a period of care for children who ceased to be looked after was 808 days (just under 2 years and 3 months). This had been decreasing slightly, in 2017 it was down 25 days from 2015. However, since 2017 the average duration has since increased by 50 days, so children are being looked after for longer.

3.10 The number of CLA who were adopted has fallen by 7% since 2018 to 3,570. Adoptions have been falling, down from 5,360 in 2015. The average time between entry into care and adoption is 1 year and 11 months, the same as 2018 and down from 2 years and 3 months in 2015 and 2016. The reduction has been at two stages as:

- the time to decision to place a child for adoption following entry to care is down from 8 months in 2015 to 6 months in 2019
- the time between the decision to place for adoption and matching of child and adopters is down from 10 months in 2015 to 8 months in 2019

3.11 The average time from entry to care and adoption varies by the age of the child at the start of the period of care with older children tending to wait slightly longer. The average (mean) age at starting the final period of care is 1 year and 2 months; the average (mean) age at adoption is 3 years and 1 month.

The duration of the final period of care for children adopted was less than 2 years for 66% of children, compared to 52% in 2015.

Children ceasing to be looked after through a special guardianship order (SGO)⁶ increased by 11% to 3,830. Most SGOs were to relatives or friends – 90% - the remainder were largely to former foster carers – 9%. The average (mean) age at SGO decreased to 5 years and 7 months, down from 5 years and 10 months in 2018, (but similar to 2017).

3.12 Local authorities are expected to stay in touch with care leavers and provide statutory support to help the care leaver transition to living independently. Local authorities were in touch with 75% of 17-year olds, 93% of 18-year olds and 89% of 19 to 21-year old care leavers.

For 17-year olds, 34% were known to be in education, 15% in training or employment and 27% were not in employment, education or training (NEET). Information was known for 76% of 17-year olds.

For 18-year olds, 46% were known to be in education, 18% in training or employment and 30% were NEET. Information was known for 94% of 19-21-year olds.

For 19 to 21-year olds, 6% were known to be in higher education, 21% were in other education, 25% were in training or employment and 39% were NEET (compared to around 12%⁹ of all young people aged 19 to 21 years). Information was known for 91% of 19-21-year olds.

Information on accommodation of care leavers is broadly similar to last year. The detail is in tables F1 to F4 however:

17-year-old care leavers were accommodated:

- with parents – 43%,
- in custody – 10%
- in semi-independent transitional accommodation – 7%

18-year-old care leavers were accommodated:

- in semi-independent transitional accommodation – 27%,
- with former foster carers – 20%,
- living independently – 13%
- with parents or relatives – 12%.

19 to 21-year-old care leavers were accommodated:

- living independently – 35%
- in semi-independent transitional accommodation – 14%
- with parents or relatives – 11%
- with former foster carers – 8%

3.13 Information on whether care leaver accommodation is suitable can be used to monitor whether they are receiving the support they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. However, there are no hard and fast rules on whether accommodation is deemed 'suitable'; the decision will depend on the circumstances of the individual case.

**Table 1: Percentage of care leavers living in suitable accommodation, by age group
Year ending 31 March 2019**

Age	In suitable ¹⁰ accommodation	In unsuitable ¹¹ accommodation	Not known ¹²
17-year olds	64%	13% ¹³	23%
18-year olds	89%	5%	6%
19-21-year olds	85%	6%	9%

19- and 20-year olds who ceased to be looked after on their 18th birthday, and who were still living with their former foster carers ('Staying Put') stayed at 26%, the same as in 2018. Children who ceased to be looked after in a foster placement aged 18, who remained with their foster carers 3 months after their 18th birthday – 57%, up from 55% in 2018 and 51% in 2017.

Taking into consideration the rise in the looked after children and care leaver population, the availability of sufficient placements remains a national issue,

especially given the significant challenges around the recruitment and retention of foster carers. In June 2015, The Fostering Network estimated that U.K. fostering services needed to recruit a further 7,180 foster families within the year (across the UK (5,900 in England) to meet the rising demand.⁶

3.14 National developments that have informed this strategy include:

- The Southwark Judgement (2011) led to the acceptance of young people aged 16 and 17 with housing needs as being looked after if they chose to be so. This has contributed to a significant increase both nationally and locally in young people aged 16 and 17 entering care since 2010/11.
- Following the implementation of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act which came into force on 3 December 2012, children on remand are now considered to be 'looked after'. In addition to the financial impact on councils, there is a need to ensure there are sufficient placements available for these vulnerable, and often high risk, young people who are eligible for leaving care services.
- In May 2013, the government launched guidance on 'staying put' and a new duty was imposed (in part 5 Welfare of Children (98) of the Children and Families Act 2014) which requires local authorities in England to facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements for fostered young people until they reach the age of 21, where this is what they and their foster carers want, unless the local authority consider that the staying put arrangement is not consistent with the welfare of the young person.
- The Government's focus on care leavers was evidenced by the cross-departmental 'Care Leaver Strategy', published in October 2013. This extended the age of support up to 25 years and provided some additional funding to local authorities to support these increased responsibilities. One of the core aims of the strategy was to ensure that support for care leavers is embedded in all relevant departmental policies. The Government reaffirmed their ongoing commitment to improving the day to day experiences of young people leaving care in a progress review of the strategy in October 2014.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 came into force in April 2014 and covers a range of areas. Its provisions on adoption complement the Family Justice Review and are designed to increase the number of children placed in adoptive families and also the speed within which this is achieved. The Coalition Government outlined a series of measures all intended to transform the current system including: implementing the introduction of a 26 week time limit for care proceedings; a shorter adopters' assessment period; and a concurrent planning requirement. These reforms will require significant service reshaping by all local authorities.
- There has been an increased understanding of the responses necessary to meet the needs of complex vulnerable adolescents including the Government

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<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/news/2017/charity-calls-7000-more-foster-families-p-particularly-teens-and-siblings>

focus on child sexual exploitation and children that go missing from home and care. New statutory guidance on missing children was issued in January 2014 and there were revisions to the Ofsted single inspection framework which now contains more explicit performance measures in relation to children who go missing from home and care.

- Amendments to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 came into effect in January 2014 and introduced a new definition of 'at a distance' – this now covers a placement outside of both the local authority area and any adjoining local authority which poses a challenge to local authorities in terms of ensuring the availability of sufficient placements.
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 were published on 4 March 2015 and came into effect on 1 April 2015. The regulations introduced a definition of long-term fostering as an arrangement made by the responsible authority for the child to be placed with a foster carer where: the child's plan for permanence is foster care; the foster carer has agreed to act as the child's foster parent until the child ceases to be looked after; and the responsible authority has confirmed the nature of the arrangement to the foster carer, parent and child, and any reference to the responsible authority placing the child in such a placement includes, where the child is already placed with the foster carer, leaving the child with the foster carer in a long-term foster placement.
- The National Transfer Scheme was implemented from 1 July 2016, resulting in some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being distributed across other local authorities within the country. The transfer protocol is intended to ensure that unaccompanied children can access the services and support they need. It forms the basis of a voluntary agreement made between local authorities in England to ensure a more even distribution of unaccompanied children across local authorities. The scheme is based on the principle that no local authority should be asked to look after more unaccompanied asylum-seeking children than 0.07% of its total child population. The rise in numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children has had, and may continue to have, a direct impact on the rising number of looked after children both nationally and locally. Ensuring access to sufficient accommodation for this vulnerable group of children needs to be a key consideration moving forwards.

4. Profile of Looked After Children and Care Leavers across Achieving for Children Local Authority areas

4.1 Number of children looked after

At 31 March 2020, Achieving for Children were responsible for looking after 362 children and young people (Kingston: 124; Richmond: 119; Windsor and Maidenhead: 119). This is a 1.6% decrease compared to the same time in 2019 (Kingston: 129; Richmond: 115; Windsor and Maidenhead: 124). The looked after children population in all three local authority areas has remained largely static with slight annual increases since 2013, and since the establishment of Achieving for Children in 2014.

Children looked after population per 10,000 population under 18 years

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1. Kingston	33	32	30	31	33	33	32
SN	36.9	37.1	38.1	40.4	40.9	43.2	TBC
2. Richmond	20	22	26	24	23	25	27
SN	36.3	36.4	37.7	39.5	41.0	44.0	TBC
3. Windsor & Maidenhead	32	30	26	32	31	36	34
SN	38.9	39.7	40.6	43.0	44.9	48.8	TBC
National	60	60	60	62	64	65	TBC

There has been a history in all three AfC authorities of the children looked after per 10,000 population being significantly lower than our statistical neighbours. That variance has actually grown over the last three years as the number of children who are looked after has steadily grown nationally whilst remaining relatively stable across the three LA areas that AfC serves.

4.2 Legal status of children looked after

At March 2020, most of the children looked after by Achieving for Children were on a care order (full or interim), followed by those under a Section 20 (voluntary) arrangement. We have more placements on average across Kingston and Richmond under Section 20 than the national average (39% vs. 18%) but fewer care orders across all three boroughs (48% vs. 75%) and placement orders (4.3% vs. 7%). In Richmond and Kingston frequently families come forward with a family arrangement which then later becomes a Section 20. These cases would then often progress into either Special Guardianship arrangements or a Child Assessment Order. All Section 20 arrangements are now reviewed through Permanency Planning Meetings and the Legal Planning Panel. It may also be that other authorities do not count UASCs in their Section 20 arrangements but Richmond and Kingston do.

	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	National
Accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks, when agreements are recorded (NOT individual episodes of care)	1%	0%	0%	-
Emergency protection order	0%	0%	0%	-
Full care order	44%	34%	65%	75%

Interim care order	13%	19%	16%	
Placement order granted	6%	4%	3%	7%
Single period of accommodation under section 20	36%	42%	17%	18%

4.3 Unaccompanied asylum seekers

The numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers coming into care in Kingston has remained steady at 27 in March 2020 and the number in Richmond has dropped from 31 to 24. The Covid 19 pandemic is likely to have significantly reduced the number of UASCs coming into care in 2020-2021. Numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers in RBWM remain very low. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was introduced on 1st July 2016 and designed to ensure an even distribution of unaccompanied asylum seekers across local authorities nationally. Under the NTS, where an unaccompanied child first presents in a Local Authority which already has over 0.07% unaccompanied asylum seekers in their total child population, the Local Authority is able to arrange for the transfer of the child.

No. UASC	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Kingston	18	20	26	27	28	28	27
<i>Of total CLA</i>	16%	17%	23%	23%	22%	22%	22%
Richmond	25	26	27	23	30	31	24
<i>Of total CLA</i>	30%	27%	23%	21%	29%	27%	20%
Windsor & Maidenhead	<5	9	3	7	7	10	N/a
<i>Of total CLA</i>	<5%	9%	3%	6%	7%	8%	N/a
National	2,060	2,760	4,340	4,690	4,480	5070	TBC
<i>Of total CLA</i>	3%	4%	6%	6%	6%	6	TBC

4.4 **External Placement Matching for UASC**

Cumulatively between Kingston and Richmond we have an average of 25 UASC children requiring external placements. The demand has not seen any significant variance in the last 5 years. There is a high percentage of adolescents and male UASCs. In the female referrals, trafficking has been the contributing factor.

The UASC children have been placed with 24/7 supported accommodation and Foster placements. Supported accommodation provided by specialist Semi Independent providers with wrap around support. Foster placements are matched based on cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Placement stability is our priority and the placement commissioning team is aware that outcomes for our Children in care are likely to be improved if they are in a stable placement.

4.5 **Age range of children looked after**

A high percentage of children entering care in 2019/20 were 16 years of age or over in Kingston and Richmond (Kingston: 41%; Richmond: 39%) This age group is associated with having the most complex needs. This significant factor will be taken into consideration when reviewing Achieving for Children's current placement mix and placement commissioning requirements moving forwards. In Richmond and Kingston these high numbers have led to AfC creating a Rapid Response Team focusing on adolescents on the edge of care due to family breakdown and making sure that an Associate Director has sign-off on any young person who is 16+ becoming looked after. Concerns around contextual safeguarding (criminal gang membership and sexual/drugs exploitation) have also led to some 16+ young people being brought into care for their own protection.

4.6 In Kingston and Richmond, the number of over 16s and the percentage of this age group within the total number of children entering care accounts for a relatively larger proportion of the new admissions to care in the last year. This increase could also be attributable to the acceptance of young people with housing needs as being looked after (as per the Southwark Judgement) and/or the correlation with an increase in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people (following the Government introduction of the National Transfer Scheme in July 2016). The increase in the number of young people over 16 entering care also has an impact on the numbers of care leavers when this cohort turns 18 years old.

31 March 2020 / % (age at 31.03.20)	Kingston / %	Richmond / %	Windsor and Maidenhead / %	National
Under 1	5	6	5	6
1 to 4	8	13	9	13
5 to 9	13	9	15	19
10 to 15	34	34	41	39
16 and over	41	39	30	23

4.7 Time in care, and reasons for leaving

The largest proportion of children looked after are in care for less than 6 months in Kingston and Richmond (Kingston: 50%; Richmond: 56%). In Windsor and Maidenhead the largest proportion of children looked after are in care for between 1 and 2 years (23%). The table below gives the breakdown of those children who ceased being in care during the 2019/20. The rate per 10K of both children starting and ceasing to be looked after during the year has been consistently lower than regional averages since 2015. We have reviewed the numbers of children re-entering care although there are no national figures to benchmark against. In Kingston in 2019/20 of the 70 children becoming looked after 13 had 1 previous period in care. In Richmond of 78 children becoming looked after 10 had 1 previous period in care, 6 had two, 1 had three and 1 had four previous periods in care. It is recommended that a Permanency Planning Meeting should review any child who has three or more periods in care and if legal proceedings are required the case should go to the Legal Planning Panel. All reviews should consider if the lack of a suitable local placement was a factor in the ensuing placement instability.

Length of time in care	Kingston / %	Richmond / %	Windsor and Maidenhead / %	National
< 6 mths	50(29.41%)	56 (56.00%)	19(19.19%)	31(31.31%)
6 mths < 1 yr	36(21.18%)	31(31.00%)	11(11.11%)	18(18.18%)
1 < 2 yrs	80(47.06%)	11(11.00%)	23(23.23%)	19(19.19%)
2 < 3 yrs	1(0.59%)	2(2.00%)	11(11.11%)	10(10.10%)
3 < 5 yrs	1(0.59%)	0(0.00%)	11(11.11%)	8(8.08%)
5 < 10 yrs	1(0.59%)	0(0.00%)	19(19.19%)	9(9.09%)
10+	1(0.59%)	0(0.00%)	5(5.05%)	4(4.04%)

4.8 Diversity of children looked after

The ethnicity breakdown of children looked after in each of Achieving for Children local authority areas at 31 March 2020 is:

31 March 2020 / %	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	National
White	50	61	65	74
Black or Black British	16	11	6	8
Asian or Asian British	9	10	9	4
Mixed	14	14	15	10
Other ethnic groups	10	4	3	4
Traveller	0	0	1	0.7
Other (Refused or Information not yet available)	0	0	1	0

When compared to the percentage ethnicity breakdown of each of Achieving for Children's local authority area populations taken from the 2011 census, there is disproportionality in the ethnic representation of the children looked after population compared to the general population. The census return shows that White ethnicity makes up the highest proportion of all three local authority areas' population (Kingston: 75%; Richmond: 86%; Windsor and Maidenhead: 86%), with Asian or Asian British making up the second highest (Kingston: 10%; Richmond: 7%; Windsor and Maidenhead: 10%). Comparing with the data above, between 36 and 49% of children looked after are of non-White ethnicity, with under-representation of children from White backgrounds. This places particular importance on the need to recruit more foster carers coming from a BAME background, careful placement matching with carers able to value diversity and an emphasis on children having a positive self view and knowledge and understanding of their background.

4.9 **Care leavers**

At 31 March 2019, Achieving for Children were responsible for supporting 230 care leavers (aged 19, 20 and 21 who were looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday including some time after their 16th birthday), an increase of 14% since the previous year.

There is some variation in the provision of suitable accommodation for care leavers across Achieving for Children local authority areas, compared with the national picture. Windsor and Maidenhead compare well with a higher rate of accommodation that is considered suitable for care leavers, whilst Kingston and Richmond compare less well, with both areas having lower rates of accommodation that is considered suitable.

4.10 **Education, employment and training**

Achieving for Children generally compares favourably with the national picture, with the majority of care leavers in education, employment or training, based on those care leavers for whom the local authorities have information. Kingston and Richmond compare particularly favourably with the national picture, with 39% of care leavers in education (compared with the national average of 27%).

31 March 2020	Care leavers now aged 17 to 21	In higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	In education other than higher education	In training or employment	Total number in education, employment or training
Kingston	117	5 (4%)	42 (36%)	22 (19%)	69 (59%)
Richmond	136	5 (4%)	56 (41%)	29 (21%)	90 (66%)
Windsor and Maidenhead	77	6 (8%)	14 (18%)	19 (25%)	39 (51%)
National	41190	2190 (5%)	11020 (27%)	9600 (23%)	22810 (55%)

Leaving Care Comparative NEET & Not Known	NEET/NK Aged 17, 18 (%)			NEET/NK aged 19, 20, 21 (%)		
	DfE (Mar 18)	DfE (Mar 19)	DfE (Mar 20)	DfE (Mar 18)	DfE (Mar 19)	DfE (Mar 20)
England Average	36%	37%	N/A	49%	48%	N/A
Richmond	21%	33%	23%	46%	48%	38%
Kingston	28%	26%	37%	48%	49%	43%
Windsor & Maidenhead	36%	N/a	N/a	31%	32%	45%

5 Current Placement Mix

In 2019/20 there were a total of 793 placements across our total cohort of children looked after. Most of these were foster placements (524, 66%).

Placement	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead
Children's Homes	27 (8%)	26 (7%)	12 (10%)
Family centre or mother and baby unit	3 (1%)	17 (5%)	0
Foster placements	236 (66%)	201 (56%)	87 (75%)

Independent living	2 (1%)	2 (1%)	0
NHS/Health Trust	3 (1%)	4 (1%)	0
Placed for adoption	5 (1%)	2 (1%)	2 (2%)
Placed with parents or other person with parental responsibility	13 (4%)	7 (2%)	4 (3%)
Residential care home	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0
Secure children's homes	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Semi-independent living	61 (17%)	56 (16%)	9 (8%)
Young offender institution (YOI)	5 (1%)	2 (1%)	0
All residential schools	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	1 (1%)
Total Placements	358	319	116

5.1 In-house fostering

Since becoming an IFA in August 2018 AfC have secured a good Ofsted rating and have increased the number of children placed with in house carers in fostering placements by 3 in Kingston (34 to 37) , 14 in Richmond (38 to 52) and 21 RBWM (49 to 70) between March 2019 and June 2020. However at the end of March 2020 we still had 56 children from Kingston placed with external fostering agencies, 28 children from Richmond and 35 children from RBWM. We are still a long way off the 100 new mainstream fostering households we require to match every one of our children who require fostering with a local in house carer across the three authorities. There are some recent encouraging signs of growth with 14 mainstream carers approved since April 2020 (7 Richmond, 5 Kingston, 2 RBWM) and 7 mainstream carers currently in assessment in Richmond, 3 in Kingston and 4 in RBWM . (Figures from end of October 2020).

A separate paper has gone to the AfC Board which maps out the future direction of the IFA and sets the following targets:

- An increasing proportion of local children placed “in house” with a target of 80% by March 2025
- Achieve £1.7m in cost avoidance over the next three years through reduced reliance on external fostering placements and step down from residential to fostering.
- Carer to placement ratio in excess of 1.5 by March 2025. Currently at 1.0

- Avoidable vacancy rate of less than 20%. (including carers on hold as well as those with available places).
- All children who have been placed with their carer for over two years should have had their placement ratified as permanent.

5.2 Key areas that have been identified where we want to develop in-house foster caring of the next twelve months:

- Replicating our Family Link Scheme which offers families caring for a disabled child a respite carer. We have six respite carers in Richmond and Kingston currently but want to develop and expand the scheme to RBWM
- Growing a pool of foster carers that have been trained and approved to take parent and child fostering placements in both operational areas
- Developing foster carers who would be prepared to take a young person who is stepping down from residential care
- Developing a supported lodging scheme in both operational areas

5.3 Children placed with in house carers by category

Number of children placed with in-house carers at 31.03.2020	Kingston	Richmond	RBW M
Mainstream carers (not UASC)	26	33	38
Mainstream carers with UASC	0	7	1
Family and Friends (Connected Persons)	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

5.4 Number of fostering households by category

Number of fostering households	Kingston	Richmond	RBWM
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at 31.03.2020			
Mainstream carers	22	35	37
Approved connected persons carers	7	6	12
Temporarily approved connected person carers	2	1	5
Approved respite carers (only)	6	6	0
Total fostering households	37	48	54
No of mainstream carers on hold	6	8	4
Mainstream households currently in approval process (not including assessments for connected persons and special guardianship).	8	9	4

5.5

External Independent fostering agencies.

AfC has contracts with two placement frameworks for commissioning and procuring residential and independent fostering services; currently, these frameworks do not offer supported accommodation.

London Care Services (LCS) (Kingston & Richmond)

London Care Services provide a regional collaborative arrangement for commissioning Residential and Fostering Services. Both RBK & LBR are part of and do use the approved providers to find quality services for our Children. This service includes providing - management of the London Model contract and robust price negotiations backed up by comprehensive appraisals of each registered service.

Southampton and South Central (Windsor & Maidenhead)

This is a 14 Local Authority collaborative arrangement for commissioning Fostering Services as a consortium of authorities we are able to achieve efficiencies in the purchasing and development of services, while ensuring quality and contract oversight.

5.6

Contracted Providers

Currently AfC has contracted working relationships with over 25 of our preferred supported accommodation providers through block and spot

purchasing arrangements who provide provision within and around our three council areas.

This Framework provides an enlarged scope of access to accredited high quality placement provisions both in and out of borough. It provides a single point for the accreditation of providers as well as monitoring of provisions. Additionally, we benefit from the advantage of our collective leverage as part of a large Local Authority market in securing cost and savings efficiencies as well as value for money for high quality provisions.

Operational Areas 1&2 - RBK/ LBR/RBWM - External IFA Referrals Stats - 2018-2019

2018-2019	External IFA	
Referrals	Received	Placed
RBK	49	22
LBR	64	22
RBWM	N/a	43

Operational Area 1 - RBK & LBR - IFA Referrals Stats - 2019/2020

2019-2020	IFA	
Referrals	Received	Placed
RBK	51	14
LBR	64	23
RBWM	42	33

Based on available data since 2018, on average, +30% or more referrals do not conclude with placements. We know from the referrals for placement in 2019/20 that we struggle to place certain groups within our in-house fostering service. This is due to a lack of capacity, and also the lack of skills required to meet specialist needs. Some repeats where family intervention's override due to the child or young person's race, religion/belief, gender, culture and linguistic backgrounds, disability, and sexual orientation and thus availing alternate recourse are preferred. Wherein there had been episodes

when commissioning have managed to overturn the need for a change of placement. There has been a proportion of referrals which has been revoked without providing compelling reasons. On the contrary, parents change of mind on agreeing to the care plan and their refusal to agree Section-20 contributes to the referral not being placed.

Operational Area 1 - RBK & LBR - IFA Placement - 2018//2019

2018-2019		IFA		2018-2019		IFA	
Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot	Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot
RBK	0-16	9	0	LBR	0-16	5	0
	16-18	8	0		16-18	6	0
	18+	4	1		18+	11	0
Total		21	1	Total		22	0

Operational Area 1 - RBK & LBR - IFA Placement - 2019/2020

2019-2020		IFA		2019-2020		IFA	
Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot	Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot
RBK	0-16	7	0	LBR	0-16	15	1
	16-18	5	0		16-18	6	0
	18+	2	0		18+	1	0
Total		14	0	Total		22	1

5.7 Independent fostering agencies have been used when there is a need to place a child or young person out of borough due to high risks associated with them being placed in-borough; and when in-house provision cannot accommodate emergency requests. Furthermore, the introduction of Staying Put legislation has resulted in a reduction in the number of available placements, and the

increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children has placed further pressures on the service.

6 Residential provision

Residential Referrals - 2018//2019

2018-2019	Residential	
Referrals	Received	Placed
RBK	18	10
LBR	18	13
RBWM	N/a	21

RBK & LBR - Residential Placements 2018//2019 Framework or Spot Purchased

2018-2019		Residential		2018-2019		Residential	
Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot	Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot
RBK	0-16	0	0	LBR	0-16	0	2
	16-18	0	10		16-18	1	7
	18+	0	0		18+	0	3
Total		0	10	Total		1	12

Residential Referrals - 2019//2020

2019-2020	Residential	
Referrals	Received	Placed
RBK	25	14
LBR	18	8
RBWM	16	16

RBK & LBR - Residential Placements 2019//2020 Framework or Spot Purchased

2019-2020		Residential		2019-2020		Residential	
Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot	Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot
RBK	0-16	0	4	LBR	0-16	0	4
	16-18	4	15		16-18	2	2
	18+	0	2		18+	0	0
Total		4	21	Total		2	6

- 6.1 Achieving for Children still has a relatively small number of children living in residential placements (children's homes), with a total of 50 children living in a children's home at any one time in the year. In 2019-20 the figure for the total number of children who at one stage in the year had been placed in a residential placements was 27 in Kingston (8% of total looked after population) 26 in Richmond (7%) and Kingston and 12 in RBWM (10%). The above tables show that there has been a steady move towards developing framework arrangements for commissioning new residential placements rather than being wholly reliant on spot purchasing.

The use of residential placements is partially linked to the number of older young people entering care in the year, some of whom are very vulnerable and struggle to adapt to living in an alternative family environment, and for whom it is very difficult to find the right accommodation. Residential placements are also used for younger children where they have very complex emotional and behavioural needs, and the most prevalent safeguarding concerns for the children and young people in our residential placements are absconding or going missing, sexual exploitation, and mental health difficulties. In Kingston, a small number have also experienced long term fostering placement breakdowns (two children) and adoption breakdown (one child).

- 6.2 Achieving for Children aims to only place children and young people in residential provisions that have been graded as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted. We also aim for most children and young people to live in a family setting and will only make a placement in a children's home or residential school where this is in the child's best interest. Residential placements are made for children and young people who require a consistent structure and routine, emotional containment and planned effective responses to their more complex behaviours and emotions. We aim to place children and young people with the most complex needs in provisions with integrated therapeutic approaches and interventions. Children and young people whose educational

needs cannot be met in a mainstream provision are usually placed in residential schools (1% of the total children looked after population).

Where a residential placement is considered the most suitable care plan for a young person, the service aims to move them on as soon as is viable when it is in the child's interests to do so. Robust and focused plans for children in residential care are done via careful care planning with a long-term ambition for family life (at home or within a foster placement) or supported semi-independent living. These are challenged and tracked through Children's looked reviews.

- 6.3 Kingston and Richmond current framework provider is London Care Councils . This is a large framework with many London councils accessing for IFA placements, the data shows us that despite utilising the framework when searching for a placement the majority of our children are placed in spot purchased placements. Further investigations are taking place to understand this however, the complexity of the child and their needs along with the demand for placements across boroughs are two strong indicators to the increased use of spot purchasing placements.
- 6.4 Achieving for Children have recognised the need to create and run our own in-borough residential provision so that we are not wholly reliant on the market where demand often exceeds supply. In October 2020 we opened an in-borough five-bedroom children's home in Teddington. Kingston Council have also identified £2.5m capital to develop a children's residential provision and a priority now is to work with the Council Housing Services to identify a suitable property to run a three bed children's home which will work alongside the home in Teddington and support either emergency placements or better matching when we need to keep some children separate.
- 6.5 We will review whether there is also a business case for developing residential provision in Windsor and Maidenhead that AfC also runs directly. External residential placement costs in RBWM average over £4500 per week so there are strong drivers to no longer be wholly dependent on the market.

7 Step down and Supported Accommodation

7.1 The previous supported housing strategy (2018-2021) set out the following principles for the pathway:

- Promoting independence and successful transition into adulthood
- Promoting "step down" as a means to achieving this and planning earlier for what skills and support young people will need
- A clear local offer and a broad range of both in-house and commissioned local provision that meets our young people's needs in a proactive way.
- Providing the same quality of care for our in-house, contracted and spot-purchased provision

- More in-house provision for our medium and higher needs young people focusing on their happiness, needs and outcomes, not just containment and risk management.
- A rigorous commitment to employment, education and training recognising that being EET and in stable housing are inextricably linked.
- Making all provision feel nurturing e.g. overnight visitors
- Developing assessment provision which provides all parties with enough time to identify the right longer term placement.
- Ensuring AfC commissioned providers have opportunities to share good practice, develop their skill base and raise any concerns with commissioners

7.2 In House Supported Accommodation Provision

AfC's Young People Supported Accommodation Service (YPSAS) currently run two in-house provisions:

- **Beverley House:** 7 beds (including 1 emergency bed) , 24 hour staffed semi-independent unit in a building owned by Kingston Housing (costing approximately £750 per person per month). It is accessed by mainly Kingston males and females with low to medium needs.
- **Green Leas:** 17 beds (including 1 emergency bed) , 24 hour staffed semi-independent unit in a building owned by Kingston Housing (costing approximately £500 per person per week). Since its set up it has been accessed mainly by male UASCs.
- **Floating Support:** The YPSAS also offers floating support to 12 young parents and their children and 12 vulnerable young people to prevent accommodation breakdown and support them develop their independent living skills.
- **Outreach Service:** The YPSAS has also recruited over 20 sessional staff to offer an Outreach Service to young people aged over 16 years. The Commissioning Team receive requests and referrals from the Leaving Care Service and other teams within AfC to source additional staffing to provide 1-to-1 social & recreational experiences for young people, respite from the young person's family, development of young people's lifeskills and preventative work to keep the young people in EET, at home / in placement and out of the criminal justice system. These young people are not usually in supported residential placements where they will get the support from the accommodation provider. They are predominantly, but not always, looked after children, young people leaving care, young offenders and unaccompanied asylum seekers.

7.3 Commissioned Supported Accommodation Provision

Currently AfC has contracted working relationships with over 25 of our preferred supported accommodation providers through block and spot purchasing arrangements who provide provision within and around our three council areas.

This provides an enlarged scope of access to accredited high quality placement provisions both in and out of borough. It provides a single point for the accreditation of providers as well as monitoring of provisions. Additionally, we benefit from the advantage of our collective leverage as part of a large Local Authority market in securing cost and savings efficiencies as well as value for money for high quality provisions.

24/7 Staffed Unit:

Young people, when stepping down from Residential Home, are transitioned to a 24/7 unit with adequate support to enable them to settle. Usually, this setting is offered for our Very High and High needs young people with enduring mental health, challenging behaviours due to substance misuse. A bespoke support plan will be drawn to ensure stability and stimulate them to settle.

Non 24/7 (Step- Down):

Young people will usually transition to a step-down from a 24/7 supported unit to Non 24/7, i.e. shared accommodation and/ or Standalone with floating support. Our young people are offered with shared living experiences and their key worker to provide support tailored to the young person's needs. This enables them to reach their potential through flexible and personalised key-work sessions. This provision enables more autonomy for our clients especially who are engaged with education/training or work and are gearing up for an independent living.

Trainee Flat:

Research tells us that young people who are seeking to gain life skills and independence, encounter limited options in obtaining the necessary practical life skills, i.e. money management, housing etc. during the course of their placements. Under the Trainee Flat arrangement, young people are encouraged to pay and manage their utility bills. So they experience and understand the real-life expectations. This concept can help shuttle our young people to develop their life skills and increase their ability to secure permanent housing.

Semi Independent Referral Stats - 2018/2019

2018-2019	Semi-Independent	
Referrals	Received	Placed
RBK	102	93

LBR	111	111
RBWM	N/a	41

Operational Area 1 - RBK & LBR - Semi Independent Placement - 2018/2019

2018-2019		Semi-Independent		2018-2019		Semi-Independent	
Placements	Age Range	Block	Spot	Placements	Age Range	Block	Spot
RBK	0-16	N/A	N/A	LBR	0-16	N/A	N/A
	16-18	0	1		16-18	0	3
	18+	8	84		18+	7	101
Total		8	85	Total		7	104

Semi Independent Referral Stats - 2019/2020

2019-2020	Semi-Independent	
Referrals	Received	Placed
RBK	56	56
LBR	77	63
RBWM	27	26

Operational Area 1 - RBK & LBR - Semi Independent Placement - 2019/2020

2019-2020		Semi-Independent		2019-2020		Semi-Independent	
Placements	Age Range	Block	Spot	Placements	Age Range	Block	Spot
RBK	0-16	N/A	N/A	LBR	0-16	N/A	N/A
	16-18	1	9		16-18	1	8
	18+	0	46		18+	14	40

Total	1	55	Total	15	48
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7.4 Semi-Independent placements are fairly distributed in both RBK and LBR. Care Leavers (18+) are the contributing cohort accounting well over +80% of all placements. While, financially Semi-Independent placements will be served better with block purchase however in actual fact Spot purchase supersedes block purchase. The strategy for selecting provider and placement is key to meeting the child's needs without retrospective intervention or more costly solutions later on. Likely, some mixed economy of in-house, block-contracted and spot-purchased placements will always be needed to meet current demands. However, better identification of what needs should be met by which placement is key to making them work. Good quality semi independent placements are required for young people. Needs-led referral processes allow providers to offer more realistic costs which may then be used as a basis for dialogue and negotiation.

7.5 **Commissioning Strategy and Approach**

- Ensure that the same data collection processes and analysis takes place in Operation are 2 (RBWM)} as in Operational area 1 (Richmond and Kingston)
- Review Spot purchasing and move to block contracting arrangements to enable more flexible use of placements that could better support placement stability in a step-down model.
- Scrutinize new models of care and support and will include approaches that transcend between residential and foster care
- Reviewing placements within the local authority area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.
- Examine, understand and ensure accurate cost comparisons between In-House and External Provided services.

8. **Adoption and Permanence**

8.1 National policy changes in 2015, seeking to make improvements to adoption services, required all local authorities to regionalise their adoption services by no later than 2020. This was led by the Department for Education's (DfE) 'Regionalising Adoption' paper (2015), with further provisions made in the Education and Adoption Act (2016).

Implementation of this legislation has led to the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) across the country. The decision to pursue four RAAs in London (Adopt London South; Adopt London East; Adopt London West; and Adopt LondonNorth), was agreed by the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS), with endorsement given in May 2018 for this approach by the DfE. ALDCS delegated decision-making to the Adopt London Executive Board to oversee the development of these four London Regional Adoption Agencies.

Achieving for children (Richmond and Kingston) is now part of Adopt London South which includes the following Local Authorities:

- Croydon
- Lambeth
- Lewisham
- Merton
- Southwark (host authority)
- Sutton
- Wandsworth

8.2 Prior to Adopt London South going live on 01 July 2019, AfC Adoption prepared for this transfer, whilst ensuring our children were still being matched and placed in a timely way. We ensured that our families were still able to access a consistent and supportive post adoption service. There have been regular updates and monthly newsletters, which have been shared with the whole service to ensure that individual teams have been kept abreast of the developments within the adoption service now it no longer sits in house.

A good working relationship has developed with the Head of Service for Adopt London South, there is a clear structure in place and a process that enables concerns to be escalated.

With the agreement of the Head of Service, AfC remained working with some families and children through the transitional period and this ensured that there was consistent service offered at crucial stages without having to introduce new faces.

8.3 Adopt London South has continued to facilitate the three support groups and birth mother's groups previously facilitated by AfC. Experienced post adoption support social work staff from AFC have transferred into the RAA, which has provided adopters with familiarity and consistency. The RAA has continued to offer a high quality post adoption support service. Adopt London South has approved former AFC adopters including early permanence placements for children to enable more stability and better opportunity for our children and young people to be claimed and settled.

8.4 There are experienced letterbox leads in the RAA, and they are also responsible for adoption support fund applications. In addition to the above, a very experienced family finder for AfC, who previously worked for the borough of Kingston, also provided some continuity to progressing plans for our children in a timely way during the transitory period. Family finders from the Regional Adoption Agency attend permanency planning meetings and there continue to be monthly meetings between the family finder and the link AFC adoption link worker and this will ensure family finding cases are tracked appropriately. To also assist with case tracking our AFC adoption link worker continues to chair permanency planning meetings and attend Agency Decision meetings.

9 Placement location

- 9.1 Achieving for Children have a relatively high proportion of children who are placed outside their respective local authority areas but the main focus should be on placing children within 20 miles of their family address so that we can keep them in their local school and ensure they are not separated from vital contacts and support networks.

Placement Location (outside LA) 2019/20	TOTAL CLA	Inside LA	Outside LA
Kingston upon Thames	125	28%	72%
Richmond upon Thames	122	25%	75%
Windsor and Maidenhead	116	40%	60%

Placement Location (outside 20 miles) 2019/20	TOTAL CLA	Placed 20+ miles
Kingston upon Thames	125	37 (30%)
Richmond upon Thames	122	25 (20%)
Windsor and Maidenhead	116	33 (28%)

- 9.2 Children and young people in residential placements across all three local authority areas are sometimes placed over 100 miles away from home in areas as distant as Scotland, Wales, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Norfolk, East Sussex, and Hampshire. The Sufficiency Strategy seeks through providing more in house provision and commissioning arrangements to be able to offer a local placement for every child who needs one, enabling them to maintain their schooling and support networks where this does not create further safeguarding risks.
- 9.3 The placement location profile of our children and young people in residential placements is a key consideration in developing this strategy and future plans regarding commissioning and developing in-borough provisions. There will

sometimes be situations where it is in the best interests of the looked after child or young person to be placed outside of their local area for safeguarding considerations - for example, if they are vulnerable to gang involvement, child sexual exploitation, or risks from family members. The range of placement options available will continue to be developed to ensure that Achieving for Children can best match a child's needs to the most appropriate placement.

Although both Framework contracts provide some placement capacity, placement location highlights the lack of local sufficiency. In 2019/20 for example, 88% of all IFA placements were made outside the geographical boundaries (not 20 mile radius) of the borough. This constituted 88% of all placements. This is significantly higher than the Framework average of 74%.

There are no Framework residential providers within the geographical boundaries of RBWM. This due to both the rather small geographical space of the borough (relatively small local market). There are only 5 service providers within a 20 mile radius, but 9 Framework Authorities nearby. This provides opportunities to explore joint commissioning partnerships to enhance our placement resource capacity.

9.4 Placement stability

In the year to 31 March 2020, 9.7% of children looked after experienced three or more placements (Kingston: 9.6%; Richmond: 6.6%; Windsor and Maidenhead: 13%). The national average is 10% and the higher percentage in Windsor and Maidenhead is predominantly due to the proportion of children who experienced placement breakdown within the year.

10 Recommendations and Priorities

PRIORITY 1. Deliver additional In-house provision

Green Leas (Kingston) has proved a quality cost-effective model for 24-7 staffed semi-independent living. It has achieved a 99% occupancy rate for its 16 beds (there is one additional emergency bed) at a unit cost of £500 p/w. Our analysis shows that we have on average 150 young people across Richmond and Kingston who need similar provision and the average unit cost for purchasing this from external providers is above our local unit cost. Running this provision in-house would both ensure our children are housed locally in quality provision and be value for money.

Kingston and Richmond

Develop a Green Leas 2	We look for a second 12-18 bed unit in Kingston/Richmond and develop a plan for implementation and delivery
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<p>Develop second AfC regulated children's homes in Kingston</p>	<p>The children's commissioner report published on 11.11.2020 https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/the-children-who-no-one-knows-what-to-do-with/ sets out very clearly the need for local authorities to ensure they have sufficient regulated local provision to meet the demand as the market is simply not delivering this and unit costs are soaring. We have just opened our first children's home in Teddington (5 bed) but opening a sister home in Kingston using the £2m capital already identified by the Council is a key priority. In terms of the delivery model, the most appropriate business case to put forward would be to open a 3 bed home in Kingston which could be run with a smaller staff pool but would enable us to sometimes respond to emergencies and sometimes to facilitate the better matching of children across the two provisions. There has been a struggle to find a 6/7 bed provision for a second 5 bed home (to include staff bedrooms), but a suitable 4 to 5 bedroom property should be much more securable.</p>
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Windsor and Maidenhead

<p>Develop Green Leas 3</p>	<p>Investigate and develop business case for an in-house provision in RBWM, similar to the Kingston Green Leas provision.</p>
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PRIORITY 2. Key contracts revisions

Richmond

St Christopher's provides both high-quality support for our young people - Rosslyn Road Project and START project. Rosslyn Road Project is an 8 bedded unit for our Very High & High Needs young people. (the START project is excluded from the decommissioning priority).

Decommissioning of Rosslyn property and returning to Richmond council as a property asset that can be sold, with the agreement of a re-investment for local suitable supported accommodation. AfC is committed to continuing to work with the current care provider (St. Christophers) and will arrange a block contract to deliver appropriate local care for our children.

Windsor and Maidenhead

Review current contract at Frogmore and ensure the service specification meets the needs of our population offering, value for money and key performance indicators.

PRIORITY 3. Further growth of in house IFA provision- Kingston,

Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

A separate paper has been taken to the AfC Board on the future development of our in house IFA and a plan will go back to the Board in January 2021 detailing how we can achieve net growth of 20 fostering households per year across the IFA for the next five years as well as targeting children that could be stepped down from children's homes into fostering.

PRIORITY 4. Develop an integrated therapeutic placement offer

Windsor and Maidenhead

Consider the establishment of a service that would provide assessments, treatment and management of children who meet an assessed threshold, particularly for children who have an ECHP. Assessments would cover occupational, speech or language assessments as well as support for children assessed to have significant physical or other developmental difficulties.

The integrated provision could also encompass internal assessments and support for children and young people with psychological or psychiatric difficulties.

The service would, in addition to assessments, provide training and advice to parents, carers and practitioners.

The points of referral into the service would be schools, nurseries and Children's Centres.

Options for provision are (i) an in-house service with the flexibility to source external business (ii) or the use of a contracted specialist independent provider.

PRIORITY 5. Development of trainee flats for care leavers

Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

The development of trainee flats is intended to provide a practical transition experience for our young people moving on from semi-independence to independent living. The required capacity would be determined by further work through a needs assessment analysis.

The flats would be particularly suited to young people moving on from semi-independent living and considered not to have developed adequate life skills to make an effective transition to independent living.

The flats would have a separate resource centre for training young people in skills such as budgeting, computer literacy, employment searching, tenancy management, personal safety and for holding meetings or hosting practitioners or other guests.

Young people will be supported to move on to independent accommodation such as private rental or social housing when they are assessed to have developed sufficient capacity to live safe, independent and fulfilling lives.

The flats are intended to be fully staffed 24/7 facilities and options for housing management would be: a) In-House RBWM managed b) Contracted to independent Semi-independent housing providers.

Young people will be referred from existing RBK & LBR and RBWM 16+ placements as well as from other Local Authority or independent service providers.

Referrals from RBK & LBR and RBWM would typically be for young people likely to remain in semi-independent accommodation after 2 years and assessed to require additional transition support. Assessment will be through a Single Gateway comprising social workers, housing, health, education, probation/YOS to ensure it is comprehensive and robust and provides a more secured “second pathway” to attaining positive transition outcomes.

We will also review our in house outreach and floating support offer to this group to maximise placement stability across RBK/LBR & RBWM.

PRIORITY 6. Review current Framework contracts for best value and access

Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

AfC is reviewing the usage and efficiency of both framework contracts to seek a broader range of services via frameworks and opportunities to contract with one framework with a three council buying opportunity.

By aligning to one Framework for our Regulated Placements - Fostering and Residential, it brings our expectations as an “AfC approach”. It enables us as a model for diagnosing and correcting our challenges with stakeholders. It assures to build effective working relationships with provider markets as a whole. Having a precise, efficient strategy execution with productive systems of work also improves staff engagement and develops workforce capability.

PRIORITY 7. Agree block contracting arrangements with local quality providers and increase the availability

Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

AfC will review all current spot purchases and work with a range of known providers delivering quality local services to negotiate block contracts to meet our needs.

Block arrangements deliver greater consistency to our young people as the provisions are bespoke and commissioned to meet the needs of our cohort. Equally, the placements are secured within the borough/s, thus proving stability to our clients. Block contract will succour a reduction in spending on semi-independent accommodation and support. The result is a win-win situation, as providers will be able to reduce the unit cost under the block contract due to there being a guaranteed income based on the total number of units provided.

It is essential that all block arrangements have a formal, binding contract in place. This will provide legal standing to the standards of service required, including safeguarding responsibilities and ensure rigour to the delivery of excellent outcomes within core cost specifications.

PRIORITY 8. Commission Parent and Child Assessment provision

Kingston and Richmond

RBK & LBR receive a steady flow of referrals for Parent and Child: 12 weeks Assessment and Parent and Child Supported Accommodation Provision. Given the need, Commissioning is working closely with a provider to deliver a 4-6 bed occupancy provision on a block arrangement for a year's contract. This pilot project enables us to manage the risk of a new idea and identify any deficiencies before substantial resources are committed.

It comprises a spend-to-save proposal, investing in local service provision and taking a new approach to preventing the need for purchased placements under Spot arrangement. The proposition outlines a twin-track process for both 12-week Assessment Placement as well as Step-Down facility will have a specialised programme for parents who have either completed assessments and are moving on. This proposal will be considered alongside a in-house proposal to ensure we deliver a quality and efficient provision.

PRIORITY 9. Review, Revise and Embed the placement process for our looked after children

Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

AfC will use the revised sufficiency strategy as an opportunity to review our current processes for placement of our children to ensure we are providing an integrated, robust and quality pathway that follows our placement process (figure 1). This will include reviewing our structure to deliver a more integrated

placement matching and finding process. We will ensure that new into care accommodation and school provision are sourced together in collaboration with AfC Virtual School managers.

- Fully implement centralised Commissioning via Placement Commissioning Team
- Pathways to exhaust in-house provisions prior to sourcing external placements
- Deliver market engagement programmes to work more closely and innovatively with providers
- Pilot new models of step-down approaches for residential and foster care
- Review contracting options with current spot purchased services
- Deliver a value model for high cost placements by reviewing spend and outcomes.

PRIORITY 10. Strengthen edge of care interventions

Kingston and Richmond

Adolescent Safeguarding Team (AST) and Strengthening Families + merged in September 2020. As a consequence, the plan is for 20% of the highest risk young people, those on edge of care to be ring fenced towards Strengthening Families. This will include a multi-agency intervention, depending on needs including, Social worker as the lead professional, family coach, domestic violence services, adult mental health workers, family therapists, youth workers. We are currently in the process of commissioning a rapid response family coach worker who will lead on the crisis work (whereby a child is unable to stay at home that night) and work with the family. Commissioning and the Family and Youth Resilience Service are in discussions regarding whether a bed space in a commissioned or Achieving for Children provision can be set aside for any emergency response to allow for respite and reintegration back home.

PRIORITY 11. Review and agree Joint special educational needs and disability (SEND) residential school placements

Kingston and Richmond

Via this strategy and our agreed joint SEND commissioning strategy we will work across health, education and social care to ensure we review all our current independent residential school placements to ensure quality and outcomes aligned to the EHCP along with value for money and agreed organisational contributions. We will also strengthen the post 16 and transition pathway and provision for children in residential schools, working closely with adult services to ensure early planning and agreement occurs across partners for a safe and well planned transition for our young people.

Timeline

	Priority	Start	Finish	Lead
1	In-house provision	Jan 2021	June 2022	Associate Director of Provider services for AFC
2	Rosslyn Road	Dec 2020	July 2021	Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 AFC
2	Contract arrangement with Frogmore	Jan 2021	April 2021	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC
3	In house IFA provision	Oct 2020	July 2021	Associate Director of Provider services for AFC
4	Develop an integrated therapeutic placement offer	Jan 2021	Oct 2021	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC
5	Development of trainee flats for care leavers	April 2021	April 2022	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 AFC
6	Review current Framework contracts	Jan 2021	April 2021	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 AFC
7	Block contracting arrangements	Jan 2021	Jan 2022	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 AFC
8	Parent and Child Assessment provision	Nov 2020	Jan 2022	Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 – AFC
9	Review, Revise and Embed the placement process	Jan 2021	April 2021	Director of Commissioning and Partnerships – AFC
10	Strengthen edge of care interventions	Dec 2020	Sep 2021	Associate Director of Provider services for AFC
11	Special educational needs and disability (SEND) residential school placements	Dec 2020	Oct 2021	Director of Commissioning and Partnerships – AFC



**Looked After Sufficiency Strategy
2020-2025**

Executive Summary

Date:	18th November 2020
Date for Review:	30th November 2021
SRO:	Jessica Thom, Director of Commissioning and Partnerships
Leads:	Priya Saravanan, Head of Placement Commissioning, Matthew Edwards, Associate Director provider services and Andrew Kyei, Strategic Placement Commissioning Manager
Subject:	Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy, executive summary
Purpose:	AfC five year sufficiency strategy to provide quality homes to our Children Looked After.
Summary:	<p>This summary is to be read in conjunction with the Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2025 and the associated Sufficiency savings plan 2020.</p> <p>This summary set's out our road map and priorities to be delivered over the next 5 years to meet the needs and requirements of our Children Looked After in Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead.</p>

A. Purpose

Over the next five years Achieving for Children (AfC) want to continue to deliver against our Looked after Children sufficiency strategy and achieve our vision of ensuring that Achieving for Children has good local, high quality placements and accommodation options that meet the needs of all looked after children and care leavers. Safeguarding them from harm and supporting them in achieving the best possible outcomes through high-quality placements and support services whilst ensuring the most effective use of available resources. The demand for placements and the lack of suitable placements to meet the needs of our most vulnerable and complex young people, including the increased need for residential schools for children with complex SEN needs, is of great concern to us and our main priority to improve.

External placement placed = 193

Operational Area 1 - Referrals Stats - 2019/2020

External placement referrals received = 291

2019-2020	IFA		Residential		Semi-Independent	
	Received	Placed	Received	Placed	Received	Placed
RBK	51	14	14	25	56	56

LBR	64	23	18	8	77	63
RBWM	42	33	16	16	27	26

2019-2020		IFA		Residential		Semi-Independent	
Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot	Framework	Spot	Block	Spot
RBK	0-16	7	0	0	4	N/A	N/A
	16-18	5	0	4	15	1	9
	18+	2	0	0	2	0	46
Total		14	0	4	21	1	55

The demand for placements and the lack of suitable placements to meet the needs of our most vulnerable and complex young people, including the increased need for residential schools for children with complex SEN needs, is of great concern to us and our main priority to improve.

B. Profile of our Children Looked After

As of the 31st March 2020, Achieving for Children were responsible for looking after 362 children and young people.

Table 1. Children looked after

	Operational Area 1		Operational Area 2
	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor & Maidenhead
Children & Young people	124	119	116

Table 2. Age range of children looked after by percentage

March 2020 / % (age at 31.03.20)	Kingston %	Richmond %	Windsor and Maidenhead %
Under 1	5	6	5
1 to 4	8	13	9
5 to 9	13	9	15
10 to 15	34	34	41

16 and over	41	39	30
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Table 3. Care Leavers

In March 2020, Achieving for Children were responsible for supporting 330 care leavers

March 2020	Care leavers now aged 17 to 21
Kingston	117
Richmond	136
Windsor and Maidenhead	77

Table 4. Referrals for external placements
Referrals Stats - 2018/2019

External placement referrals received = 362

External placement placed = 271

2018-2019	IFA		Residential		Semi-Independent	
Referrals	Received	Placed	Received	Placed	Received	Placed
RBK	49	22	18	10	102	93
LBR	64	22	18	13	111	111
RBWM	N/a	43	N/a	21	Tbc	41

Framework and Spot Purchasing -Richmond and Kingston only.

2018-2019		IFA		Residential		Semi-Independent	
Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot	Framework	Spot	Block	Spot
RBK	0-16	9	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
	16-18	8	0	0	10	0	1
	18+	4	1	0	0	8	84
Total		21	1	0	10	8	85

2019-2020		IFA		Residential		Semi-Independent	
Placements	Age Range	Framework	Spot	Framework	Spot	Block	Spot

3

LBR	0-16	5	0	0	2	N/A	N/A
	16-18	6	0	1	7	0	3
	18+	11	0	0	3	7	101
Total		22	0	1	12	7	104

Table 5. Where Children are placed

5.a In house fostering breakdown

Number of children placed with in-house carers March 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

5.b Total Placement breakdown as of 31 March 2020:

With Internal AfC provision:

March 2020	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead
In-house (foster carers not including staying put arrangements)	37	47	57
In-house (Registered Children's Home)	0	0	0
In-house (Supported Accommodation)	17	5	0

With External Commissioning:

March 2020	IFA	Residential	Semi-Independent
RBK	39	8	79
LBR	30	14	76
RBWM	33	16	26

RBWM- of the 33 external IFA placements, 26 were made on the Framework and 7 off it. Currently 88% of our IFA placements on the Framework are Out of Borough- ie outside the boundaries of RBWM. This contrasts with the Framework average of 74%.

We have a total of 20 external IFA Fostering Households within our boundary, with an aggregate bed capacity of 42.

There are currently no residential providers on the Framework located within our geographical boundary. There are however 5 providers within our 20 mile radius and 9 Local Authority Framework partners located near RBWM.

These suggest a lack of local placement capacity across both IFA and Residential provisions.

N.B. A reason for the lack of internal resource provision is the small geographic size of the borough relative to high density areas such as Reading and West London which tend to have greater market attraction.

A. Our current provision

AfC has a variety of provisions for housing our children; these consist of both in-house and external places. Children are placed in line with their care plan and availability of suitable placements.

In-House- Independent Fostering Agency

Across AfC there were 139 fostering households (including 12 respite carers) with 158 children placed (including staying put arrangements) as of March 2020.

Table 6. In-house fostering households

Number of in-house fostering households- March 2020	Kingston	Richmond	RBWM
Mainstream carers	22	35	37
Approved connected person carers	7	6	12
Temporarily approved connected person carers	2	1	5
Approved respite carers (only)	6	6	0
Total fostering households	37	48	54
No of mainstream carers on hold	6	8	4
Mainstream households currently in the approval process (not including assessments for connected persons and special guardianship).	8	9	4

Table 7. In-house Residential

	Kingston & Richmond	Windsor & Maidenhead
Registered Children's Home (Hope House)	Capacity: 5	
Supported Accommodation (Beverly House)	Capacity: 7	
Supported Accommodation (Greenleas)	Capacity: 17	

External placement purchasing

AfC has contracts with two placement frameworks for commissioning and procuring residential and independent fostering services; currently, these frameworks do not offer supported accommodation.

London Care Services (LCS) (Kingston & Richmond)

London Care Services provide a regional collaborative arrangement for commissioning Residential and Fostering Services. Both RBK & LBR are part of and do use the approved providers to find quality services for our Children. This service includes providing - management of the London Model contract and robust price negotiations backed up by comprehensive appraisals of each registered service.

Southampton and South Central (Windsor & Maidenhead)

This is a 14 Local Authority collaborative arrangement for commissioning Fostering Services as a consortium of authorities we are able to achieve efficiencies in the purchasing and development of services, while ensuring quality and contract oversight.

Contracted Providers

Currently AfC has contracted working relationships with over 25 of our preferred supported accommodation providers through block and spot purchasing arrangements who provide provision within and around our three council areas.

This Framework provides an enlarged scope of access to accredited high quality placement provisions both in and out of borough. It provides a single point for the accreditation of providers as well as monitoring of provisions. Additionally, we benefit from the advantage of our collective leverage as part of a large Local Authority market in securing cost and savings efficiencies as well as value for money for high quality provisions.

Commissioning Strategy and Approach

- Review Spot purchasing and move to block contracting arrangements to enable more flexible use of placements that could better support placement stability in a step-down model.
- Scrutinize new models of care and support and will include approaches that transcend between residential and foster care
- Reviewing placements within the local authority area, unless that is not reasonably practicable. • Examine, understand and ensure accurate cost comparisons between In-House and External Provided services.

24/7 Staffed Unit:

Young people, when stepping down from Residential Home, are transitioned to a 24/7 unit with adequate support to enable them to settle. Usually, this setting is offered for our Very High and High needs young people with enduring mental health, challenging behaviours due to substance misuse. A bespoke support plan will be drawn to ensure stability and stimulate them to settle.

Non 24/7 (Step- Down):

Young people will usually transition to a step-down from a 24/7 supported unit to Non 24/7, i.e. shared accommodation and/ or Standalone with floating support. Our young people are offered with shared living experiences and their key worker to provide support tailored to the young person's needs. This enables them to reach their potential through flexible and personalised key-work sessions. This provision enables more

autonomy for our clients especially who are engaged with education/training or work and are gearing up for an independent living.

Trainee Flat:

Research tells us that young people who are seeking to gain life skills and independence, encounter limited options in obtaining the necessary practical life skills, i.e. money management, housing etc. during the course of their placements. Under the Trainee Flat arrangement, young people are encouraged to pay and manage their utility bills. So they experience and understand the real-life expectations. This concept can help shuttle our young people to develop their life skills and increase their ability to secure permanent housing.

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	24/7 Semi-Independent	Non 24/7 Semi-Independent	Stand Alone	In-Borough Placements
RBK	21	36	22	15
LBR	28	34	14	22
RBWM	14	13	6	N/a

A. Our current use and demand

As of March 2020 Achieving for Children were responsible for looking after 362 children and young people. While our number of children looked after remains relatively static over the last 3 years, our dependence on external placements has increased.

RBK & LBR

Months (2020)	Referrals for the Month	Spillover from Previous Month/s	Planned	Emergenc y	In-House Placement	External Placements (Commissioning)
April	18	13	61%	39%	20%	80%
May	20	17	45%	55%	23%	76%
June	31	10	61%	39%	13%	87%
July	26	25	65%	35%	12%	88%
August	13	30	62%	38%	18%	82%
September	28	29	68%	32%	25%	75%

RBWM

Although the number of LACs in RBWM has increased by 8.5% between 2018-2020, we have been unable to develop sufficient local placement capacity to accommodate the rise. We have relied on our partnership arrangement with the South Central Framework to source our IFA and residential placements. However as many as 88% of all such IFA placements are secured outside a 20 mile radius of our boundaries. Similarly all residential placements secured from the Framework are located outside the 20 mile radius from RBWM boundaries. A key

reason for this is the specialist nature of our required placements (includes therapeutic and onsite educational support) which are in the main only available in resources located outside our 20 mile boundary. In 2020, 4 out of our 11 residential placements have required either onsite specialist education or therapeutic provision. Two of such provisions are located up to 200 miles away from RBWM and the other 2 up to 30 miles away. There are currently no residential provisions located within RBWM's boundaries.

RBK/LBR/RBWM

Commissioning have been finding it challenging to identify placements for our young people with high complex needs who have a:

- History of violence towards professionals and others
- Mental health needs (particularly those on the cusp of Tier 4 services, who have not met that threshold);
- Additional vulnerabilities associated with exploitation, substance abuse and criminal behaviours; • Frequent “missing from care” episodes and placement breakdown;
- Those subject to Deprivation of Liberty;
- History of fire setting behaviour.

Demand has increased, and providers are in scarcity. Covid has impacted providers who are not willing to risk; there are strict restrictions and protocols to adhere to and it has been difficult to find appropriate placements or to step down and negotiate support packages. Due to the above challenges and especially during Covid evidenced provider’s resilience to consider tricky placements with the existing service users as they are unable to match and meet the needs. There is a widespread perception that Clinical / Therapeutic Models lack transparent and accountable implementation of clinically robust and evidence-based therapeutic models which will benefit our most complex cohort.

Currently, bespoke packages are drawn by bringing specialist services - CSE risks (gang worker's intervention), CQC provisions (able to administer medications), Deprivation of Liberty Services (privacy & restraining risks). One fit size all is not realistic and Commissioning will conduct provider profiling to ensure the gaps are recognised to pave way for near future commissioning arrangements

What are our gaps

The sufficiency strategy highlights our current demands, needs and capacity to house our children looked after. Across the three councils, we have identified some gaps in our provision that need to be addressed to ensure we place our children in suitable homes while achieving efficiencies and creating sustainable provision. Our identified gaps are:

- Lack of available and trained local foster carers (RBK/LBR/RBWM)
- Need for more in-house residential accommodation to reduce external and out-of-area placements (RBK/LBR)
- Lack of available and affordable Parent and Child assessment placements (LBR/RBK) • Lack of Trainee Flats for young people (RBWM)
- Insufficient block contracts with providers (RBK/LBR/RBWM)
- AfC placement process is not streamlined (RBK/LBR/RBWM)

What are we going to do? Our recommendations and priorities

The sufficiency strategy update offers us an opportunity to understand further our Children Looked After housing needs and changes of these needs. We have used the needs analysis within this strategy alongside service reviews and the vision across the three councils to set our priorities over the next five years, these are:

PRIORITY 1. Deliver additional In-house provision

Green Leas (Kingston) has proved a quality cost-effective model for 24-7 staffed semi-independent living. It has achieved a 99% occupancy rate for its 16 beds (there is one additional emergency bed) at a unit cost of £500 p/w. Our analysis shows that we have on average 150 young people across Richmond and Kingston who need similar provision and the average unit cost for purchasing this from external providers is above our local

unit cost. Running this provision in-house would both ensure our children are housed locally in quality provision and be value for money.

Kingston and Richmond

Develop a Green Leas 2	We look for a second 12-18 bed unit in Kingston/Richmond and develop a plan for implementation and delivery
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Develop second AfC regulated children's homes in Kingston	The children's commissioner report published on 11.11.2020 https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/the-children-who-no-one-knows-what-to-do-with/ sets out very clearly the need for local authorities to ensure they have sufficient regulated local provision to meet the demand as the market is simply not delivering this and unit costs are soaring. We have just opened our first children's home in Teddington (5 bed) but opening a sister home in Kingston using the £2m capital already identified by the Council is a key priority. In terms of the delivery model, the most appropriate business case to put forward would be to open a 3 bed home in Kingston which could be run with a smaller staff pool but would enable us to sometimes respond to emergencies and sometimes to facilitate the better matching of children across the two provisions. There has been a struggle to find a 6/7 bed provision for a second 5 bed home (to include staff bedrooms), but a suitable 4 to 5 bedroom property should be much more securable.
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Windsor and Maidenhead

Develop Green Leas 3	Investigate and develop business case for an in-house provision in RBWM, similar to the Kingston Green Leas provision.
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PRIORITY 2. Key contracts revisions

Richmond

St Christopher's provides both high-quality support for our young people - Rosslyn Road Project and START project. Rosslyn Road Project is an **8 bedded unit** for our Very High & High Needs young people. (The START project is excluded from the decommissioning priority).

Decommissioning of Rosslyn property and returning to Richmond council as a property asset that can be sold, with the agreement of a re-investment for local suitable supported accommodation. AfC is committed to continuing to work with the current care provider (St. Christopher's) and will arrange a block contract to deliver appropriate local care for our children.

Windsor and Maidenhead

Review current contract at Frogmore and ensure the service specification meets the needs of our population offering, value for money and key performance indicators.

PRIORITY 3. Further growth of in house IFA provision- Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

A separate paper has been taken to the AfC Board on the future development of our in house IFA and a plan will go back to the Board in January 2021 detailing how we can achieve net growth of 20 fostering households per year across the IFA for the next five years. This will enable us to offer an in house and local fostering placement to every child that needs one. We will also target children that could be stepped down from children's homes into in house fostering.

PRIORITY 4. Develop an integrated therapeutic placement offer

Windsor and Maidenhead

Consider the establishment of a service that would provide assessments, treatment and management of children who meet an assessed threshold, particularly for children who have an ECHP. Assessments would cover occupational, speech or language assessments as well as support for children assessed to have significant physical or other developmental difficulties.

The integrated provision could also encompass internal assessments and support for children and young people with psychological or psychiatric difficulties.

The service would, in addition to assessments, provide training and advice to parents, carers and practitioners.

The points of referral into the service would be schools, nurseries and Children's Centres.

Options for provision are (i) an in-house service with the flexibility to source external business (ii) or the use of a contracted specialist independent provider. A business case detailing the options alongside the savings potential and options will be drafted for consideration, this priority will support the financial improvement plan.

PRIORITY 5. Development of trainee flats for care leavers

Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

The development of trainee flats is intended to provide a practical transition experience for our young people moving on from semi-independence to independent living. *The required capacity would be determined by further work through a needs assessment analysis.*

The flats would be particularly suited to young people moving on from semi-independent living and considered not to have developed adequate life skills to make an effective transition to independent living.

The flats would have a separate resource centre for training young people in skills such as budgeting, computer literacy, employment searching, tenancy management, and personal safety and for holding meetings or hosting practitioners or other guests.

Young people will be supported to move on to independent accommodation such as private rental or social housing when they are assessed to have developed sufficient capacity to live safe, independent and fulfilling lives.

The flats are intended to be fully staffed 24/7 facilities and options for housing management would be: a) In House RBWM managed b) Contracted to independent Semi-independent housing providers.

Young people will be referred from existing RBK & LBR and RBWM 16+ placements as well as from other Local Authority or independent service providers.

Referrals from RBK & LBR and RBWM would typically be for young people likely to remain in semi-independent accommodation after 2 years and assessed to require additional transition support. Assessment will be through a Single Gateway comprising social workers, housing, health, education, probation/YOS to ensure it is comprehensive and robust and provides a more secured "second pathway" to attaining positive transition outcomes.

We will also review our in house outreach and floating support offer to this group to maximise placement stability across RBK/LBR & RBWM.

PRIORITY 6. Review current Framework contracts for best value and access

Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

AfC is reviewing the usage and efficiency of both framework contracts to seek a broader range of services via frameworks and opportunities to contract with one framework with a three council buying opportunity.

By aligning to one Framework for our Regulated Placements - Fostering and Residential, it brings our expectations as an "AfC approach". It enables us as a model for diagnosing and correcting our challenges with stakeholders. It assures to build effective working relationships with provider markets as a whole. Having a precise, efficient strategy execution with productive systems of work also improves staff engagement and develops workforce capability.

PRIORITY 7. Agree block contracting arrangements with local quality providers and increase the availability

Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

AfC will review all current spot purchases and work with a range of known providers delivering quality local services to negotiate block contracts to meet our needs.

Block arrangements deliver greater consistency to our young people as the provisions are bespoke and commissioned to meet the needs of our cohort. Equally, the placements are secured within the borough/s, thus proving stability to our clients. Block contract will succour a reduction in spending on semi-independent accommodation and support. The result is a win-win situation, as providers will be able to reduce the unit cost under the block contract due to there being a guaranteed income based on the total number of units provided.

It is essential that all block arrangements have a formal, binding contract in place. This will provide legal standing to the standards of service required, including safeguarding responsibilities and ensure rigour to the delivery of excellent outcomes within core cost specifications.

PRIORITY 8. Commission Parent and Child Assessment provision

Kingston and Richmond

RBK & LBR receive a steady flow of referrals for Parent and Child: 12 weeks Assessment and Parent and Child Supported Accommodation Provision. Given the need, Commissioning is working closely with a provider to deliver a 4-6 bed occupancy provision on a block arrangement for a year's contract. This pilot project enables us to manage the risk of a new idea and identify any deficiencies before substantial resources are committed.

It comprises a spend-to-save proposal, investing in local service provision and taking a new approach to preventing the need for purchased placements under Spot arrangement. The proposition outlines a twin-track process for both 12-week Assessment Placement as well as Step-Down facility will have a specialised programme for parents who have either completed assessments and are moving on. This proposal will be considered alongside an in-house proposal to ensure we deliver a quality and efficient provision.

PRIORITY 9. Review, Revise and Embed the placement process for our looked after children

Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead

AfC will use the revised sufficiency strategy as an opportunity to review our current processes for placement of our children to ensure we are providing an integrated, robust and quality pathway that follows our placement process (figure 1). This will include reviewing our structure to deliver a more integrated placement matching and finding process. We will ensure that new into care accommodation and school provision are sourced together in collaboration with AfC Virtual School managers.

- Fully implement centralised Commissioning via Placement Commissioning Team •
- Pathways to exhaust in-house provisions prior to sourcing external placements
- Deliver market engagement programmes to work more closely and innovatively with providers •
- Pilot new models of step-down approaches for residential and foster care
- Review contracting options with current spot purchased services
- Deliver a value model for high cost placements by reviewing spend and outcomes

PRIORITY 10. Strengthen edge of care interventions

Kingston and Richmond

Adolescent Safeguarding Team (AST) and Strengthening Families + merged in September 2020. As a consequence, the plan is for 20% of the highest risk young people, those on edge of care to be ring fenced towards Strengthening Families. This will include a multi-agency intervention, depending on needs including, Social worker as the lead professional, family coach, domestic violence services, adult mental health workers, family therapists, youth workers. We are currently in the process of commissioning a rapid response family coach worker who will lead on the crisis work (whereby a child is unable to stay at home that night) and work with the family. Commissioning and the Family and Youth Resilience Service are in discussions regarding whether a bed space in a commissioned or Achieving for Children provision can be set aside for any emergency response to allow for respite and reintegration back home.

PRIORITY 11. Review and agree Joint special educational needs and disability (SEND) residential school placements

Kingston and Richmond

Via this strategy and our agreed joint SEND commissioning strategy we will work across health, education and social care to ensure we review all our current independent residential school placements to ensure quality and outcomes aligned to the EHCP along with value for money and agreed organisational contributions. We will also strengthen the post 16 and transition pathway and provision for children in residential schools, working closely with adult services to ensure early planning and agreement occurs across partners for a safe and well planned transition for our young people.

Timeframe

	Priority	Start	Finish	Lead
1	In-house provision	Jan 2021	June 2022	Associate Director of Provider services AFC
2	Rosslyn Road	Dec 2020	July 2021	Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 AFC
2	Contract arrangement with Frogmore	Jan 2021	April 2021	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC
3	In house IFA provision	Oct 2020	July 2021	Associate Director of Provider services AFC
4	Develop an integrated therapeutic placement offer	Jan 2021	Oct 2021	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC
5	Development of trainee flats for care leavers	April 2021	April 2022	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 AFC
6	Review current Framework contracts	Jan 2021	April 2021	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 AFC
7	Block contracting arrangements	Jan 2021	Jan 2022	Strategic Commissioning Manager Operational area 2 AFC Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 AFC

8	Parent and Child Assessment provision	Nov 2020	Jan 2022	Head of Placement Commissioning Operational area 1 – AFC
9	Review, Revise and Embed the placement process	Jan 2021	April 2021	Director of Commissioning and Partnerships AFC

10	Strengthen edge of care interventions	Dec 2020	Sep 2021	Associate Director of Provider services for AFC
11	special educational needs and disability (SEND) residential school placements	Dec 2020	Oct 2021	Director of Commissioning and Partnerships – AFC

Placement process

- Internal Fostering
- External Fostering
- Internal Residential
- External Residential (Framework or Block)
- External Residential

