Achieving for Children Sufficiency Strategy

AfC

26 November 2015

Achieving for Children
Looked After Children
Placement Sufficiency Strategy

Version: **September 2015**

Contents

1. SUFFICIENCY DUTY

The **statutory guidance** on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children (LAC) requires local authorities to take steps to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of its LAC, whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation ('the sufficiency duty').

Providing the right placement, in the right place, at the right time, is vital for securing stability for each LAC, and the statutory guidance aims to improve outcomes for this very vulnerable group of children. As effective corporate parents, the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and London Borough of Richmond upon Thames 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.

The requirements of the Staying Put agenda have a specific effect on foster and supported accommodation placements, and it is essential that providers and local authorities work together to ensure that, wherever appropriate, children and young people 'Stay Put' in placements beyond their eighteenth birthday. It is recognised that there will be challenges for providers and the local authority in achieving this, as this inevitably will impact upon the availability of foster and supported accommodation placements.

This Sufficiency Strategy considers what is required by the local authority in terms of sufficient provision. Data has been collected and analysed to help understand some of the dynamics which affect sufficiency and local anecdotal evidence has also been reviewed to provide strong intelligence about local accommodation requirements. The complexity of market forces means that it is difficult to fully analyse or predict where the shortfalls are or indeed where they may arise in a rapidly changing environment.

The Sufficiency Strategy should not be viewed in isolation; extensive collaborative dialogue needs to be continued within the local authorities and with Achieving for Children to help realise the requirements of the two boroughs, but that success is more likely to be achieved through two boroughs with similar challenges and strengths working together to achieve success.

2. VISION

The joint LAC Strategy for Kingston and Richmond sets out the ambition that …"*Looked After Children and those who are at risk of care or custody can access support and accommodation that is appropriate to their needs.*" In providing sufficiency care placements, Achieving for Children also aims to take account of the key issues of Permanency and Stability.

Permanency - The objective of planning for permanence is to seek to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood, and which remains meaningful into adulthood. Permanence is achieved when a child belongs legally to the family in which he or she lives. It is therefore essential that seeking to achieve permanence for children is a key consideration in the planning for any child who becomes looked after or when working with children in need in their families.

Where children are looked after by the local authority the following three options for legal permanence must be fully considered:

- Remain with or return to birth parent(s) without a legal order.
- Live with a relative or person close to the child by virtue of a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order.
- Adoption into an alternative family.

Stability - Most children will have their need for stability and nurturing met by their birth parents and will not require support from or come to the attention of local authority Children's Services. Where families do require support, the role of the local authority will be to support families to maintain care of their children wherever it is in the child's best interest.

There will be circumstances in which it may not be possible for some LAC to secure any of the three legal Permanency outcomes listed. In such circumstances, care planning will be driven by the pursuit of achieving enduring stability through one of the following two options:

- Live with permanent foster carers as a LAC.
- Live in a long term placement in residential provision.

3. AIMS

- To ensure that there is sufficient provision within the boroughs to cater for the needs of their LAC and match our recruitment and placement provision to the need.

- To ensure that the Councils continue to support children in their family through partnership with universal, targeted and specialist services.

- To ensure that services are of good quality and are available in adequate quantity to respond to children's and young people's needs.

- To ensure that where it is not reasonable for a child to be placed within their own borough that their needs will be met by placements in other appropriate areas.

- To ensure that the relevant professionals and responsible Council Members have knowledge and information about the supply and quality of placements, both within the boroughs of Kingston and Richmond, and in other appropriate areas

- To increase the number of in-house foster carers available for consideration by placement services, including an enhanced provision, supported through the Better by Design project for those young people facing particular challenges (further information about Better by Design is set out below *).

- To identify and work with private sector and voluntary sector partners within the South West London Commissioning Group to identify gaps in the market; to shape the market; and, where needed, to commission independent fostering, residential and supported accommodation placements.

- To ensure consistent levels of support are given to both in-house and out of borough LAC.

- To comply with the aims and objectives laid out in the LAC Strategy and other relevant strategies.

- Understand the needs of our LAC population, including Children with Disabilities with the vision to increase the share of children being looked after within local, in house provision as approved to Independent and Out of Borough placements.

- Develop short break and respite options to support families at risk of breakdown and children on the edge of care.

- Where external Independent Provision is used, ensure it is subject to Quality Assurance scrutiny in addition to Ofsted Inspection.

- Improve the process of accommodation through a single Placement Officer role and focus the accommodation pathway through a single placement 'front door' to ensure good quality placements are being made.

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*The Better by Design Innovation Programme

Better by Design (BBD) is a Department of Education Innovation Fund programme which works with adolescents on the edge of care and also seeks to find foster families for some of the most troubled children and young people already in care across Kingston and Richmond. The programme targets children and young people placed outside both boroughs and helps them prepare for the challenging task of returning to their home borough to live in a family recruited especially for them. The aims of the programme are:

- Deliver better outcomes for children and young people on the edge of care and custody.
- Support parents to retain care of and responsibility for their children.
- Enable hard to place children and young people living outside their home borough to live in a foster family capable of retaining them and supporting their recovery from experiences of trauma and abuse.

BBD is an innovative programme that adopts a radically different approach to engage with the children and young people through the creation of a New Intervention Framework focusing on collaborative problem solving between the child or young person and the foster carer. The Framework is founded on social learning theory and systematic practice and has been developed with Birmingham University, who lead on the training of new foster carers.

BBD aims to place around nine children and young people in year one, and 18 children and young people in year 2 and then again in year 3. As well as improved outcomes as a result of more effective work with children, young people and families, the programme is expected to deliver significant savings, particularly in relation to residential provision.

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4. COMMISSIONING CYCLE

Commissioning is not a discrete activity which happens at set dates; rather it is about dynamic and continuous improvement. It is a way of working and thinking which delivers our priority outcomes for looked after children in the most effective and efficient way.

To meet the requirements of the sufficiency duty, local authorities are expected to practise a level of commissioning with standards which cover the following six areas:-

- Assessment and care planning decisions which individually and collectively inform commissioning and are the basis of the agreement between the commissioner and provider.

- The commissioning decision should be informed by the strategic assessment, resources analysis, the individual assessment and the views of the child.

- The strategic needs assessment is dependent on a comprehensive aggregate of data about the needs of LAC.

- Market management requires effective relationships with partner commissioners, a range of providers (both internal and external) and may include collaboration with other local authorities to ensure that the right numbers of placements are available, in the right place at the right price.

- Collaboration refers to the extent to which partners and other local/regional commissioners collaborate to take advantage of reduced costs and for example, the provision of specialist placements

- Securing services through a range of options which include in-house provision, spot purchasing, contacts, grants and/or service level agreements on the basis of clear performance management objectives which should be evidenced based.

The requirement is that there is an adequate quantity of placements, which includes a predicted demand for a range of needs including emergency placements and that all placements comply with legal duties and responsibilities, meet regulations and National Minimum Standards as they relate to fostering, adoption services and residential placements.

The placement needs of disabled LAC after need particular consideration. We know that most disabled young people are looked after in residential schools and they tend to remain in placement long term until their adulthood. As a result, a priority when commissioning these placements must be the ability of providers to prepare disabled young people for adulthood.

A small number of disabled children are looked after in foster placements. Given the changing profile of disabled children, both locally and nationally, the need for foster parents who are able to meet the needs of children with social and communication difficulties is a particular area of future development.

Going forward through 2015/16 we will continue to develop relationships with neighbouring boroughs to consider dynamic commissioning frameworks, ensure good, value for money placement provision and further develop the 'Better by Design' intervention framework.

5. ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

Between January 2014 and September 2015, Achieving for Children collated and analysed data and other performance information about placement activity within the two local authority areas during 2013-14 and 2014-15. The information gathered comprehensively describes the current pattern of placement activity and its cost and has been aggregated to reflect cross-borough need.

- **LAC population –** The current LAC population for Kingston as at September 2015 is 130 and for Richmond is 108. Both LAC populations are broadly in line with our statistically comparable local authorities within the region.

- **Age of population –** The majority of children becoming looked after are of secondary school age. The 16-18 cohort accounts for two-fifths of current spend on external placements and the Staying Put requirements are likely to place additional pressure in this area.

- **LAC by placement type -** At the end of September 2015, the majority of LAC were placed with Foster Carers (67%), followed by supported accommodation provision (21%) and (12%) in residential placements. The analysis shows a continuing demand for residential placements such as mainstream, disability and school placements. The demand for foster placements continues to be met by reliance on independent providers.

- **Consultation with young people –** Kingston and Richmond are committed to learning from their looked after children about their experience of placements and providers. We have appointed a full time Participation Officer to undertake individual consultations with looked after children and young people to better understand their requirements and to receive their evaluation of their placement experience.

6. IDENTIFIED SUFFICIENCY AREAS– 2015 TO 2017

This strategy has categorised sufficiency requirements into six areas:

A. Local authority foster placements
B. Independent foster placements
C. Independent residential children's homes
D. Residential school placements
E. Supported accommodation
F. Adoption

A – Local Authority Foster Placements

- In order to meet capacity and demonstrate credible placement choice and matching, Kingston and Richmond utilise a mixed economy of in-house and independent foster carers.

- Our in-house capacity is able to meet a wide selection of needs. Across Achieving for Children there are 86 fostering households (including family and friends) and a further nine family link carers.

- The data analysis demonstrates that there is a concentration of carers in certain areas within the borough; for example, in the Chessington area in Kingston and conversely there are wards within both the boroughs where there is little or no fostering representation.

- Recent data provided from our specified providers to the South West London Commissioning Group illustrates the location of independent fostering activity within the sub-regional boundaries of the consortia (33 active IFA households at the end of April 2015). This includes Richmond, Kingston, Wandsworth, Merton and Sutton.

- *Sibling groups*: there are a number of sibling groups being placed and at present the local authority is recruiting to address the challenge of placing additional siblings with children who are already securely placed. There is additional difficulty in placing sibling groups in Kingston and Richmond due to the high cost of housing and finding foster carers with sufficient space.

- *Black and minority ethnic children and young people*: The composition of placements by ethnicity in both boroughs is made up of 55% children and young people from White British or other white background and 45% Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) children and young people; we commission placements

from the independent sector in order to meet the assessed cultural needs of referred children and young people where in-house provision is not available.

- *Children with disabilities*: the two boroughs are served by one integrated service for children with disabilities, which meets the needs of its LAC disabled children and young people by providing appropriate residential school and foster placements. It purchases 8 foster placements and 5 residential school placements for 12 children. These children are all placed beyond 20 miles from their home address.

Objectives

- Fostering Services are consulted to increasing their capacity through a planned recruitment strategy that takes account of the 2014 key findings from a review conducted by the consultants, Impower, and from the work undertaken to successfully achieve funding for the Innovation Project, 'Better by Design'.
- To extend the range and frequency of training available to foster carers.
- To raise and sustain the quality of purchased provision.
- To align consistent standards and practices across the boroughs.

Intended Outcomes:

- To increase the number of foster carers; specifically for Kingston within the wards of Surbiton and Berrylands, and for Richmond within the wards of Kew, Barnes and East Sheen.
- To increase the capacity of the local authorities fostering households through revision and extension of current approval categories via the annual review process.
- To make provision for the Youth Offending Service's need for remand foster beds.
- To reduce the Councils' reliance on out of borough placements and particularly for those children and young people placed more than twenty miles from their home communities.

Outcome Measures

- The recruitment of an additional 60 fostering households within Kingston and Richmond in the 3 years from 2014 – 2017.
- An increase in the number of fostering households offering placements for two and more siblings.
- A reduction in the proportion of our LAC children who are placed in independent placements.
- A reduction in the number of placement moves that children experience.

B - Independent Foster Placements

- The boroughs rely on a mixed economy of care to meet their capacity needs and to secure a breadth of placement choice. This has helped ensure minority ethnic children have access to culturally matched households, but the financial planning and effective scrutiny of this purchased activity has been inconsistent. There has been an absence of coherent commissioning and an effective quality assurance framework for placement purchasing.

- The boroughs currently purchase the following placements for its LAC population:
    - 16 residential placement from 10 different providers.
    - 50 independent foster placements across a wide geographical range; no single agency has a significant proportion of this business with 29 separate providers participating.
    - 27 semi-independent living placements across a wide geographical range; 21 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) placements are provided by a number of suppliers.

- Local demand for culturally matched placements for *black and minority ethnic children* is significant and the scarcity of provision within the boroughs is a frequent trigger for an out of borough search.

- The services use specialist agencies in both adoption and fostering work within the independent sector to help meet the particular needs of *disabled children;* there is currently insufficient in-house provision available to meet both the placement and permanency needs for this group.

- *Contracts and Frameworks:* the boroughs continue to spot purchase their placements in the independent sector under the governance and contractual arrangements of the pan-London agreement and the sub-regional South West London Commissioning Group.

- Where children and young people require longer-term residential provision, this is sourced in accordance with individual need using the South West London Commissioning Group specified provider list on a spot purchase basis, which will be further reviewed within 2015 – 16.

- The boroughs maintain a single contract for short break residential respite provision with Action for Children at its Warren Park facility, providing overnight stays at weekends and school holidays for children with complex health needs and significant challenging behaviour. This is under review with our fostering services to ensure the provision matches need and delivers the best care to some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

Objectives:

- Ensure that all placements promote the overall safety and care of the children and young people placed.
- Through assessment identify individual needs in order to source the correct 'move-on' placement or provide any additional support of the child or young person where he or she is returning home.

Outcomes:

- Ensure, wherever possible, that children and young people are returned back home or to family and friends networks to ensure a high level of stability.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Increase in the number of children and young people who return home with appropriate support.

C – Independent Residential Children Homes

Location

There are no residential children's homes within Kingston or Richmond, but operational systems and business processes have been put in place to ensure that only good, or better, Ofsted-rated residential children's homes are considered. When a placement is required the appropriate type of provider is contacted from the specified provider list provided by the South West London Commissioning Group. It is a priority to place children as near as to their home borough as possible, ensuring that any placement made is in the child's best interest and matches their specific need.

Contracts and Frameworks

In the purchase and management of placements, a strategic commissioning process is used that takes into account:

- analysis of the requirement and demand for the provision;
- the development of local market provision; and
- a review of the delivery of services to inform an analysis of future requirements.

There is an increasing understanding of the market and maintaining business relationships with providers in order to support the development of services and capacity. At present, placement services are sought from over 60 different providers, but agreements are in place to ensure that the commissioned service is

providing best outcomes for children and young people and are value for money in terms of quality and price.

Objective

- Ensure that independent residential children's homes are only utilised when family placements have either ceased to be successful or are not considered to be appropriate for the child's needs or behaviours at the point of placement. They are predominantly undertaken as a time limited placement for further work to be undertaken with the child or young person, to help them return to a family arrangement wherever possible.

Outcomes

- Ensure that all provision with independent residential children's homes are focussed on providing safe, stable and good quality care, with a view for the children and young people placed with them to be returned back to a family and friends network wherever possible.

Success Criteria

- To stabilise and provide secure and safe accommodation for children and young people who are unable to live within a family setting, and to support them to meet their potential in a planned way.

D - Residential School Provision

Objectives

The sourcing of residential school provision is frequently undertaken across children's social care, education and health services. There is an agreement in place between these services that the lead commissioner for a particular placement will be the service that has the most influence or input into that placement; for example, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Service for schools and education placements. It has also been agreed between the services that funding will be split between the services involved in order to maximise collaborative ownership.

Success Criteria

- The success of our children placed within residential school provision is evident through good levels of stability, health outcomes and educational achievement.

E – Supported Accommodation

Location

It is a priority for the service to increase the range of 16+ accommodation, in collaboration with the local authorities' Housing Services and the South West London Commissioning Group. Our young people are prioritised in their home boroughs by

Housing Services and accommodation panels are undertaken to ensure there is an alignment and agreement as to those who are considered to have a priority need. Despite there being limited accommodation within the borough boundaries, there is evidence of good collaborative working with the young people placed to ensure the location of their accommodation meets their needs.

Objectives
- The objective of our supported accommodation approach is to ensure that our young people are able to receive good educational, employment and training opportunities and are able to be located in an environment that meets their needs and promotes their wellbeing.

Outcomes
- Good outcomes are judged through the health and educational achievements of our young people and through their ongoing engagement with involved professionals and other services.

Success Criteria
- Successful academic achievements and good levels of employment with continued engagement in family networks locally.

F - Adoption

Objectives
It has been a challenging few years for Adoption Agencies nationally: Government Adoption Reforms, revised National Minimum Standards, the Public Law Outline with reduced timescales for Care Proceedings, increased media interest and Government scrutiny with publicised scorecards, have had an impact on workloads and posed new challenges for all social care teams.

In July 2013 the latest government initiatives in tackling delay in placing children for adoption, speeding up the adoption assessment process, and increasing the pool of adopters nationally, came into effect. Since then, the two-stage adoption process, fast tracking of some prospective adopters (foster carers and second time adopters), introducing the concept of fostering-to-adopt, and using the new BAAF format for the Prospective Adopter's Report, have all been incorporated into practice and procedures. Information on websites, leaflets and information packs has also been revised to reflect these changes.

As part of the implementation of Achieving for Children, the structure of the Adoption and Permanency Teams in Kingston and Richmond are changing. Kingston and Richmond remain separate Registered Adoption Agencies; however one Adoption

Manager is appointed across both services to ensure a more consistent approach, and is supported by an Assistant Team Manager.

Recruitment of Adopters:
We continue to recruit adopters within the South West London Adoption Consortium (SWLAC) which is made of Kingston, Merton and Sutton. SWLAC has a shared duty system, standardised information packs and leaflets, and processes and procedures are being developed. Information meetings and preparation groups are shared and a new informative and interactive SWLAC website launched in November 2014.

Joint Adoption Panel:
The Adoption Panels of Kingston and Richmond merged in 2013. The first joint panel was held in August 2013. Since September 2012, in line with adoption legislation, children being considered for adoption are no longer presented to the adoption panel for a recommendation. The 'should be adopted decision' is now made by the Agency Decision Maker. The Adoption Panel continues to make recommendation about an applicant's suitability to adopt and the matching of children with prospective adopters. The panel also continues to make a recommendation on the 'should be adopted decision' when a child has been relinquished.

Following this change in legislation, it was envisaged that the volume of work for the panel would decrease and that a monthly half-day panel would be sufficient. The Joint Adoption Panels have therefore continued on a monthly basis, but the number of cases presented to panel has in fact increased and the panel has often extended into the afternoon. As the volume of work has grown more than anticipated, the timing and frequency of panels will need to be reviewed.

Both Agencies also required the panel to become an Adoption and Permanency Panel in 2014, so that they can consider and make recommendations about the matching of children, under the age of 12 years, with long term or permanent foster carers. The volume of work is likely to increase further so it may be necessary to schedule extraordinary panel meetings are also needed, at times, to be scheduled.

The quorum for the joint panel is six voting members, and as we are currently reaching capacity we will need to recruit more panel members for the central list. It is also acknowledged that the panel needs to be more diverse, and will also need to comply with both adoption and fostering regulations. A panel training day has been held to update members on the changes is legislation and implications for practice, and further half-day training sessions will be held to cover concurrency and becoming an Adoption and Permanency Panel, to be facilitated by trainers from CORAM and BAAF respectively

Agency Decision Maker (ADM):

Alison Twynam, Director of Children's Social Care, is the ADM for Achieving for Children. There is also a second ADM, Rob Henderson, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, who works across both agencies and is able to ratify panel recommendations in their absence. During this period, all recommendations made by the Adoption Panel have been agreed by the Agency, and papers are seen and signed in a timely manner within seven working days of receiving the final panel minutes.

National Minimum Standards (NMS):
As part of the independent, quality assurance role the panel comment on NMS. In relation to both children and prospective adopters, NMS stipulate that various timescales should be adhered to throughout the adoption process, unless the adoption agency considers that in a particular case complying with a timescale would not be in the child's or applicant's interest. In either case the reasons for delay should be clearly recorded. The relevant NMS are:

- The Agency Decision Maker, makes a considered recommendation/agreement on whether the child should be placed for adoption within two months of the statutory review where adoption was identified as the permanence plan.

- The adoption panel makes a considered recommendation on the proposed placement of a child with particular prospective adopters within six months of the adoption agency's decision-maker deciding that the child should be placed for adoption.

- A proposed placement with a suitable prospective adopter should be identified and approved by the adoption panel within six months of the agency deciding that the child should be placed for adoption.

- Where a birth parent has requested that a child aged under six months be placed for adoption, a proposed placement with a suitable prospective adopter should be identified and approved by the panel within three months of the agency deciding that the child should be placed for adoption.

- Adoption panels make a considered recommendation on the suitability of a prospective adopter to adopt within eight months of receipt of the prospective adopter's formal application to be assessed. (pre July 2013).

- Adoption panels make a considered recommendation on the suitability of a prospective adopter to adopt within 4 months of them embarking on stage 2 of the assessment process (post July 2014).

- All necessary information is provided to panel members at least five working days in advance of the panel meeting to enable full and proper consideration.

Success Criteria

The achievement of an increased number of approved adopters and children successfully placed for adoption.

Placing Kingston and Richmond children and young people for adoption within the timescales set through the performance indicators.

7. SUMMARY OF SUFFICIENCY PRIORITIES

In order to realise the ambition of our placement services, a number of key priorities have been agreed to ensure children who become looked after are offered the best opportunity for good quality care that is responsive to their circumstances:

The priorities are to:

- Increase the number of in-house fostering households by 60 over 3 years.

- Develop the range and quality of single occupancy supported accommodation within the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and its near neighbours.

- Develop the short break scheme for children with disabilities and their families.

- Develop a more local residential provision for disabled children.

- Increase the number of adopters able to offer a permanent family to siblings, children with disabilities, and BAME children.

- To maintain sufficiency taking into account the impact of the Staying Put arrangements.

- Embed a consistency of approach across Kingston and Richmond as part of the development of Achieving for Children.

- Successfully form and develop the Better by Design Innovation Framework with the view of improving recruitment and locally being able to meet the needs of some of our most challenging young people.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This Sufficiency Strategy sets the focus of how Achieving for Children will support the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to meet the shortfall in placements, so that the local authorities are able to place children:

- with family and friend carers if consistent with their welfare and wellbeing;
- with in-house foster carers if available and consistent with their welfare and wellbeing;
- close to home;
- at a distance from their home to protect their safety and wellbeing;
- without disruption to their education, training or employment;
- together with their siblings;
- taking account of any disability or special needs; and
- within in-house placements.

To success measures for the Sufficiency Strategy will be:

- an adequate supply of quality placements for looked after children by in-house and external providers including for children with special educational needs;
- a range of placement types which have access to universal and specialist services;
- that all placements meet National Minimum Standards and regulatory requirements;
- a range of services to reduce the need/ prevent children needing to become looked after;
- more children will be placed within 20 miles of their home;
- less unplanned placement moves;
- an increase in fostering household internally; and
- improved education, health and wellbeing outcomes for our LAC.

Appendix A: Nature of Placement Type