



**achieving
for children**

**Achieving for Children Fostering Team
Royal Borough of Kingston
and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames**

**Quarterly Report
to
Specialist Children's Services
Social Care Heads meeting**

April to June 2017

Introduction

Local authorities must make written reports on the management of the fostering service under National Minimum Standard 25.7.

The following format has been taken from the Ofsted Dataset Section F for this purpose.

Children and Young People

For the quarterly period April, May, and June 2017. Kingston's data is as follows:-

Kingston	April	May	June
No of children in care at the end of the month (excluding respite)	123	127	130
No of children in care at the end of the month (including respite)	126	130	133
Below figures are excluding respite cohort			
Becoming CLA	9	6	7
Ceasing to be CLA	3	2	3
Male	69	73	75
Female	54	54	54
Under 1	3	3	3
1-4	13	14	15
5-9	18	19	20
10-15	50	47	48
16-17	39	44	44

For the quarterly period April, May, and June 2017. Richmond's data is as follows:-

Richmond	January	February	March
No of children in care at the end of the month (excluding respite)	106	106	106
No of children in care at the end of the month (including respite)	106	106	106
Below figures are excluding respite cohort			
Becoming CLA	3	8	3
Ceasing to be CLA	5	8	3
Male	69	70	69
Female	37	36	38
Under 1	4	4	4
1-4	11	8	8
5-9	4	5	6
10-15	45	42	43
16-17	42	47	45

How do you ensure that foster care is provided as set out in the child's care plan?

To ensure foster care is appropriate in meeting a child's needs as identified in the care plan. Placement Agreement Meetings (PAM) are held within five days of a child being placed in foster care. These meetings are held to make a child's foster placement is set up to meet the child's needs on a consistent basis.

To make sure foster care is able to provides consistency of care for a child as set out in the child's care plan Children's Looked-After (CLA) Review meetings are held.

During this three month period in both Kingston and Richmond 100% of Children Looked-After (CLA) Reviews were held within expected timescales.

In Kingston, all 27 children participated in their reviews. Whilst in Richmond, of children (aged over 4 years) only one child did not participate in their review while 29 children did.

How well do children progress in their learning, health, and social well being?

By the end of this quarter on 30 June 2017, in Kingston of young people aged 3 to 18, 117 had an up to date Personal Education Plan (PEP) whilst 17 did not. And, in Richmond 109 eligible young people had an up to date PEP while 13 did not. This represents a similar performance in Kingston and Richmond in the last quarter.

At the end of last quarter there were 92% of children looked after in Kingston with an up to date medical check. This increased to 95% in April before dropping to 92% in May and 81% in June. In Richmond, the medical checks have increased from 79% in March to 85% in June.

Dental checks increased from 51% to 62% of children having an up to date dental check recorded in Kingston.

In Richmond, there was dip in April before returning to 71% in June. Improving the number of children with up to date dental checks and ensuring they are recorded will continue to be a key priority in the next quarter.

The fluctuation in this quarter, is due to a variety of factors like the change in the business support role, which had a negative impact during the transitional period. The new business support system has been embedded, and there is now that we will get back on track.

Children continue to report around their own experiences of education, and areas where they feel they require additional support through their Viewpoint questionnaires. A direct link to CAMHS workers continues to be available for looked after children and foster carers

How do you ensure that the fostering service contributes to promoting good outcomes for children and young people?

The fostering service contributes to the promotion of good outcomes for our children and young people by ensuring it continues to provide a quality pool of foster carers. The fostering service endeavours to increase the amount of children placed in-house. As this provides for continuity of a local connection in our children's lives - Where ever possible, we place young people with our in

house carers. They are better known to us than external placements, are more local and more able to support contact and continuity in health and education. This supports good professional working relationships. Where appropriate, additional support is offered to carers to enable them to take children such as respite, after school clubs, transport etc.

The data for this quarter is as follows:-

Number of fostering households (June 2017) = 39
 Number of children placed with in house foster carers (June 2017) = 37
 Number of foster carers with a Staying Put arrangement (June 2017) = 3
(This information is for Kingston)

Number of fostering households (June 2017) = 41
 Number of children placed with in house foster carers (June 2017) = 36
 Number of foster carers with a Staying Put arrangement (June 2017) = 7
(This information is for Richmond)

Vacancies (including respite) for this quarter:

AfC catchment area:	April	May	June
Kingston	13	11	11
Richmond	8	6	10

- The reasons for the high rate of internal vacancies include:
- Not being able to place a second child with the complex child in place long term.
 - The carer requesting a career break or a break due to house renovations.

In addition to the above a main cause of the long term vacancies is the surplus of foster carers approved for children under 2 years of age and the shortage of those children requiring a foster placement.

In order to increase the pool of foster carers. The current focus with recruitment is the expansion of capacity to place teenagers. This is not only the numerical demand on the service, it is also the age group that account for the majority of the high cost placements.

We continue to work creatively around recruitment and we remain confident that our recruitment strategy and matching policy will continue to provide positive placements for our young children.

All foster carers are subject to an Annual Foster Home Review (AFHR) to ensure they continue to meet the fostering competencies, this is in accordance with Fostering Regulations 2011.

To ensure our foster carers remain able to promote good outcomes for our children we are working to ensure all foster care reviews are held within timescale. Where reviews need to be moved outside of the 12 month timescale an extension of approval is signed off by the Agency Decision Maker.

10 AFHR's were undertaken in Kingston over this quarter, and in the case of Richmond there were 11. In both Kingston and Richmond one fostering household had an extension agreed by the ADM. In both these cases the AFHR's have been re-scheduled to take place within the fostering household's approval period.

What do children and young people say about the service and how they contribute to its development?

Children and young people are encouraged and supported to provide feedback for foster carers' Annual Foster Home Reviews, all of which are seen by and signed off by the Director of Social Care. The format of this form has been updated and developed in line with the change to the Annual Review paperwork and process, this is to enable us to seek more informative and quality feedback about the service and children's experiences of care.

Children also provide feedback through Viewpoint about the broader perspective of their care and wishes for the future, such as;

I like listening to music. Collecting things like Emergency Services Vehicles (UK), crystals, coins and note and pigs (fake ones). I also like playing video games like Euro Truck simulator, Emergency 5 simulator, police force 2 simulator and lastly roblox xD.

I would like to live with my Mum's and my Step-Dad's family. I never met my real father

I want to join a football club because it has always been my dream.

What do you enjoy most about living at Xxxxxx and Xxxxxx's? Going to see mum (at contact).

Children in foster placements are reporting that they are happy with the care they receive. The most common report of issues in placement is before and after contact with their birth family which is an obvious source of emotional turmoil for children. Children are supported by foster carers and workers to talk about this. They are helped through lifestory and direct work to understand their experiences and why decisions have been made about them not living with their parents

Working with Foster Carers

How do recruitment, assessment, training and supervision of foster carers promote positive outcomes for children and young people?

For the financial year April 2017 – March 2018 the fostering service originally aimed to recruit 20 new households across Kingston and Richmond. However, due to the number of retirements of foster carers, this target has been adjusted to a more challenging target to recruit foster carers to have 20 net gain at 31.03.2018 than was available on 01.04.2017. This is likely to equate to the recruitment of between 25 and 30 foster carers.

During the first quarter there were 2 newly approved fostering households across the service. Both of these were foster carers who had previously resigned and returned to foster for AfC.

The challenge of the target for recruiting foster carers cannot be understated due to a national shortage of foster carers combined with the competitive market of independent fostering agencies. There have been some staffing difficulties too but this has been rectified with more resources being allocated to assessment.

Currently there are a further 9 assessments, under way, which is an increase from the 3 last quarter. More encouraging is the 7 awaiting to begin assessment in July a further eight prospective foster carers participating in the skills to foster training.

Our contract with Home for Good has continued to provide referrals. Home for Good use church networks to find potential foster carers and an evening event was held in Chessington in June which included a contribution by the Head of Service.

The geographical area of Chessington is felt to be an untapped area of potential foster carers. As such opportunities will be explore the potential of recruiting more foster carers in this area.

Most households are expected to be visited within a minimum of 4 to 6 weeks, however some permanent placements may be up to 12 weekly visits, this currently relates to 5 fostering households (no change from the last two quarters) in Richmond with an additional 7 households being on hold for placements and therefore not requiring 6 weekly supervision meetings.

In AfC all fostering households are expected to be visited every 6 weeks, but in this period 4 households were on hold. The supervision policy across Kingston and Richmond is being aligned to clarify supervision frequency expectations and recording.

All our foster carers are subject to enhanced DBS Checks every 3 years, as of 30 June all 62 foster carers in Kingston requiring a DBS check were in date. Similarly, in Richmond all of the 65 foster carers requiring a DBS check are in date.

How do you involve foster carers in planning for children?

AfC foster Carers are involved in Placement Planning Meetings and Children Looked-After (CLA) Reviews and also Permanency Planning Meetings (PePM) where appropriate. Permanency Planning Meetings are held six weekly and foster carers will be involved in the setting of the permanency plan though they may not be involved in the six weekly meetings which track progress.

Foster carers are kept updated on plans for children through their supervising social worker visits, children's social worker visits, LAC Reviews, Permanency planning meetings, and general communication. They have a variety of opportunities to contribute their views to the plan, and are encouraged to give their opinions based on their knowledge of the children and young people.

How do you involve foster carers in: Plans for moving children and young people, planning for placements, reviewing placements, delegated authority, leaving care, and educational placements?

CLA Reviews are only held if the foster carer can attend or their views be communicated. Foster carers are strong advocates for the young people in their care and promote young people's needs and best interests. All foster carers have regular supervision which supports them in caring for children in line with their Care Plan, and addressing any issues which may arise.

All foster placements have a completed delegated authority plan and this is reviewed if a change in placement occurs e.g. a placement becomes permanent. Foster carers attend all PEP meetings and contribute fully to children's education plans, they work with the Virtual School to address any working relationship issues with schools and in general carers have positive relationships with the children's schools

As of 30 June 2017 there remained 8 young people in 'Staying Put' arrangements in AfC with in house foster carers. This is down the same as the last two quarters.

The aligned Staying Put policy has clarified arrangements and discussions are had with carers and young people well before their 18th birthday to enable time for appropriate planning should Staying Put not be an option. Some foster carers have raised some issues about the policy and this is being reviewed.

What do foster carers say about your service?

Through AFHR feedback in the last quarter we have received the following feedback from foster carers:

'We have a good relationship with X's Social Worker'

'We have been supported well. Y had therapy for a year and it was continued when I felt we needed some extra time to look at a particular issue.'

There are concerns from recently approved foster carers about the length of time it takes for prospective foster carers to be assessed and approved. This has been reflective of a period where we held a vacancy in the recruitment and publicity officer. These concerns are being addressed with the appointment of the recruitment and publicity officer and an increase in resources at the assessment stage.

There is also a common theme of concerns from foster carers presenting at the Fostering Panel about the need for improved communication with their foster children's social workers. This was a consistent theme where foster carers felt that they were undervalued when plans were changed without notifying them and that in general their view was given less weight than other professionals.

All comments made by foster carers are seen by the Director of Children's Services. Furthermore responses to identified thematic feedback is also addressed through the quarterly Foster Carers Forum meetings which are attended by the Associate Director for Permanency and the Director of Children's Social Care.

Despite some comments about the need for training in foster carer's feedback, the take up of training is low as is the attendance at support groups and the foster carers' forum. The need for foster carers to update their training has now been incorporated into all the fostering team members' appraisals to ensure there is a focus on attendance at training and forums.

A series of foster carer workshops have been set up over this quarter to look at behavioural difficulties and challenges, as well as the permanency planning process. The workshop ensure the fostering service is able to further support our fostering population.

How do you involve staff in the development of your service?

The staff have been located together since November 2016, currently it has been identified that more work needs to be done to develop more effective joint working with other arms of AfC's children's service.

Some peculiarities remain with inherited payment systems and mandatory training expectations. However, these are being investigated, clarified and aligned.

A joint duty system is in operation and phone lines and emails have been rationalised so that all referrals (and indeed expressions of interest in becoming foster carers) come through to one phone line and one duty in-box.

The team is currently responsible for placement commissioning for children and this can lead to extensive searches involving several staff in the team. A

commissioning team is to be developed in July and it is expected that the impact of this team will be realised in the next quarter.

Placement commissioning is to be led by a placement commissioning manager and will be supported by 2 placement commissioning officers. The commissioning team will lead the implementation of the commissioning strategy. The focus of the strategy will be on the robust procurement of good value for money placements, which is will embedded with positive outcomes for children alongside placement stability and quality.

Staffing has been fluid this quarter. Locum staff have been recruited to replace maternity leave as well as locum resignations. Active recruitment is being undertaken for all the vacant posts. The permanent Head of Service and Team Leader have been appointed and are due to be in post in the next quarter.

What plans for improvement and development are currently in place?

- A continuing focus and priority on recruitment of foster carers
- Subsequent focus on assessing prospective foster carers and presenting them at Panel.
- Continue to improve the number of PEPs – ensuring all children placed with in house carers have one.
- Continue to improve the number of dental checks – ensure children with in house carers are having an annual dental check.
- Continue permanent recruitment for the team.
- Promoting attendance at training and support groups

Dean Woodward
Interim Head of Fostering
3 August 2017