



**achieving
for children**

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2019 - 2022

Date published: April 2019

Date for review: Quarterly until April 2022

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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. Through a thorough analysis of the existing service and the wisdom of experienced operational managers, Achieving for Children has brought together recommendations that will tackle existing challenges within the system and plan forward for the next five years.
- 1.5. In keeping with the definition of sufficiency in the Children Act 2004, the scope of this strategy stretches beyond good quality placement sufficiency and includes the services whose primary aim is to support families caring for children in their home. This includes supporting families to stay together, wherever it is safe to do so, and so minimising the need for children to come into care, or supporting family reunification so that children can return home, if this is the right permanency option for them.
- 1.6. 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

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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

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
- 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

1.7. 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.

1.8. 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

1.9. We will hold workshops with key partners in education, health, housing, police and the voluntary sector to ensure that if, we are placing children locally, we are working in partnership to identify and support their full range of needs and manage any community risks.

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.
- 2.2. 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.
- 2.3. 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.
- 2.4. 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.
- 2.5. 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 need whilst being cost effective.
- 2.6. 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.

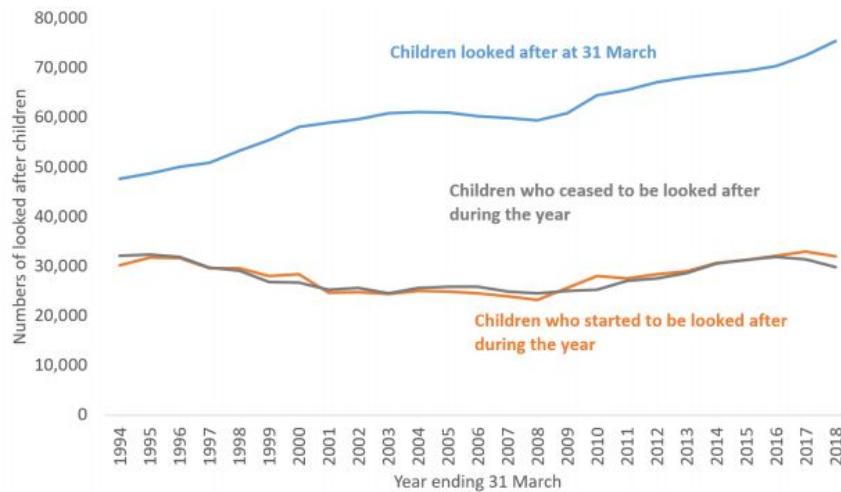
- 2.7. We will provide placements that can prepare children and young people for their transition to a permanent family environment or adulthood with confidence, a strong sense of self-worth, and the skills and abilities to thrive.
- 2.8. Wherever possible, we will return children to their birth families 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.
- 2.9. 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

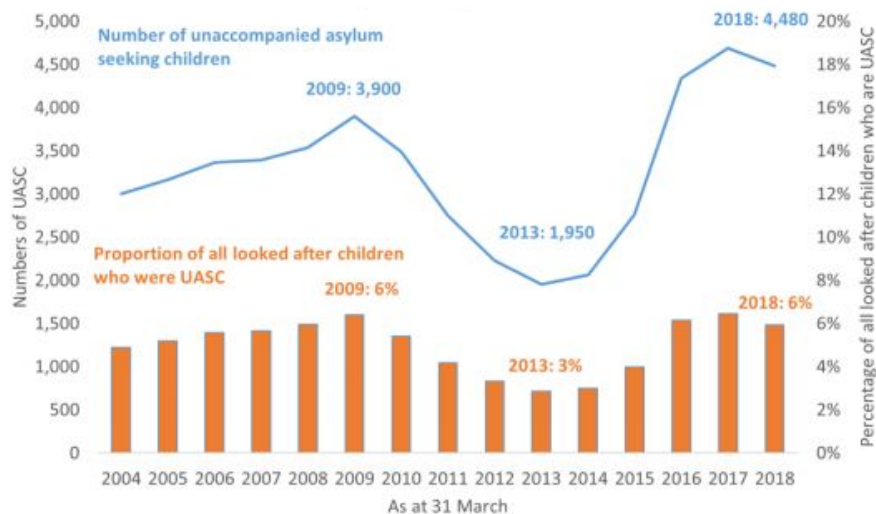
- 3.1. At 31 March 2018, the number of children looked after by local authorities in England increased, up 4% to 75,420 from 72,590 in 2017, continuing increases seen in recent years. This is equivalent to a rate of 64 per 10,000 in 2018, which is up from 62 per 10,000 in 2017 and 60 per 10,000 in 2016. The number of children starting to be looked after fell slightly in 2018 by 3%, after a period of gradual increases. The number of looked after children in England has increased steadily over the last ten years and is now at its highest point since 1985.

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 increase in looked after children reflects that more children started to be looked after than ceased. The changes seen in the characteristics of looked after children, those who become looked after, and care leavers are influenced by the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children cohort who tend to be non-white British, older children, with a main category of need of absent parenting.



- 3.3. The broad characteristics of looked after children have remained similar to previous years. Just over half (56%) are male and 44% are female. The largest age group (39%) of looked after children are aged 10-15 years; 23% are aged 16 years and over; 19% are aged 5-9 years; 13% are aged 1-4 years; and 6% are aged under 1 year. The majority of looked after children are of white ethnicity (75%). 9% were of mixed ethnicity and 7% were of Black or Black British ethnicity. Since 2014, the proportion of looked after children of white ethnicity has decreased steadily from 78% to 75%, whilst the proportions of 'Asian or Asian British' and 'Other' have increased slightly. It is likely this slight change is due to the broadly non-white make up of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, a group which has grown in numbers in recent years.
- 3.4. In 2018, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children continue to represent around 6% of all children looked after in England. At 31 March 2018, there were 4,480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, down 4% on the number at 31 March 2017. The fall in numbers is due to a decrease in children under 16 years, which stand at 820, down 22% on 2017, whereas the number of children aged 16 years and over have increased 1% to 3,660.



- 3.5. Most children are looked after under a care order. The numbers and proportions of children looked after under a care order continue to increase and the number who are looked after through a voluntary arrangement continue to decrease. At 31 March 2018, 55,240 (73%) children looked after were looked after under a care order, up from 40,090 (58%) in 2014. 14,500 (19%) were looked after under a voluntary agreement, down from a peak of 19,320 (28%) in 2015. This growth in numbers of children looked after under a care order, at a point in time, reflect the changes seen for the legal status of children starting to be looked after. In recent years, the number of children starting to be looked after under a voluntary agreement has fallen and the number starting to be looked after under a care order have increased. In addition, the numbers of children with a placement order have fallen steadily over the last five years. In 2014 there were 9,590 children looked after (14%) who were being looked after under a placement order; in 2018 there were 5,360 (7%), a decrease of 44%.
- 3.6. Most looked after children are accommodated in foster placements. 55,200 (73%) children looked after at 31 March 2018 were in foster placements, an increase in numbers from 53,010 in 2017, but similar proportions to previous years. An increasing proportion of those children in foster care have been placed with relative or friends, up steadily from 14% in 2014 to 18% in 2018. 11% of children looked after are placed in children homes and semi-independent living arrangements and 6% are placed with parents. There has continued to be a fall in children placed with prospective adopters. 2,230 children were placed for adoption at 31 March 2018, down 18% on the 2,710 children placed for adoption at 31 March 2017. This mirrors the decrease seen in all children looked after with a placement order.
- 3.7. 44,450 (59%) of children looked after at 31 March 2018 were placed inside the local authority boundary and 30,670 (41%) were placed outside, similar to last year. 55,740 (74%) children looked after at 31 March 2018 were within 20 miles of their home. This value varies, as we would expect, depending on the type of placement the child is in, for example, 79% of foster placements were within 20 miles but only 41% of those placed for adoption were. For 7% of children, the home address was not known or the distance between home and placement was not recorded.

- 3.8. 29,860 children ceased to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2018, which is a fall of 5% on the 31,410 ceasing to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2017. 57% were male and 43% were female (reflecting the large numbers of older unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who started being looked after in 2016 who are now likely to have reached 18 years). 31% of children ceasing to be looked after returned home to their parents. 13% were adopted (down from 17% in 2014) and 11% ceased to be looked after with a special guardianship order. Those leaving care are more likely to be aged 18 or aged 1 to 4. In the year ending 31 March 2018, 9,200 (31%) children ceased to be looked after on their 18th birthday, up from 6,830 (22%) in 2014. Over the same time period, the number of children aged 1 to 4 years ceasing to be looked after has fallen from 8,550 in the year ending 31 March 2014 to 6,430 in 2018. This corresponds to the age when most children who are adopted leave care and the fall reflects the drop in the number ceasing with a placement order (down from 4,930 in 2014 to 3,730 in 2018). The average duration of the latest period of care has increased slightly this year to 772 days (equating to just over two years), up from 758 days in 2017. Prior to 2017, it had been falling steadily (from 791 in 2014).
- 3.9. For 19 to 21 year old care leavers, 6% were known to be in higher education, 20% were in other education, 25% were in training or employment and 39% were known to be not in education, employment or training (which is compared to around 12% of all young people aged 19 to 21 years). For 17 year olds, 35% were in education, 14% in training or employment and 28% were not in employment, education or training and for 18 year olds the figures were 48%, 17% and 30%.
- 3.10. For 19 to 21 year old care leavers, 35% were living independently, 12% were living in semi-independent transitional accommodation, 12% were living with parents or relatives and 8% were living with former foster carers, similar to last year. Experimental statistics for 17 and 18 year olds show that for 17 year olds, 43% were living with parents, 9% were in semi-independent transitional accommodation and 9% were in custody (however, for 23% the information was not known). For 18 year olds, 26% were in semi-independent transitional accommodation, 19% were with former foster carers, 13% were in independent living and 12% were living with parents or relatives.
- 3.11. In 2018, 84% of care leavers now aged 19, 20 or 21 years were in accommodation considered suitable; as were 90% of 18 year olds and 67% of 17 year olds. However, information is not known for 9% of 19 to 21 year olds, 5% of 18 year olds and 23% of 17 year olds (which helps to explain the low proportion in suitable accommodation).
- 3.12. 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

3.13. 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 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 focus on child sexual exploitation and children that go missing from home and

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

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

Number of children looked after

- 4.1. At 31 March 2019, Achieving for Children were responsible for looking after 368 children and young people (Kingston: 129; Richmond: 115; Windsor and Maidenhead: 124). This is a 9% increase compared to the same time in 2018 (Kingston: 127; Richmond: 105; Windsor and Maidenhead: 107). 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
Kingston	33	32	30	31	33	33
Richmond	20	22	26	24	23	25
Windsor & Maidenhead	32	30	26	32	31	36
National	60	60	60	62	64	TBC

Legal status of children looked after

- 4.2. At March 2019, 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 all three boroughs under Section 20 than the national average (39% vs. 19%) but fewer care orders (53% vs. 73%) and placement orders (5% vs. 7%). It is planned for each authority area to undertake a study of their use of Section 20.

	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%	5%	-
Full care order	44%	38%	42%	73%
Interim care order	12%	10%	14%	
Placement order granted	5%	4%	6%	7%
Single period of accommodation under section 20	38%	47%	33%	19%

- 4.3. Of the children starting to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2018, 15,990 (50%) started to be looked after under a voluntary agreement under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Prior to 2016 this figure has fluctuated around 60% of all children starting to be looked after, but has fallen again this year to 50% (from 53% in 2017). The number of children looked after under a care order has again increased from 10,170 in 2017 to 11,120 in 2018. 35% of all children starting to be looked after were looked after under a care order in 2017/18, up from 31% in 2016/17. 13% of children starting to be looked after are detained for child protection and 3% start to be looked after under youth justice statuses.

Unaccompanied asylum seekers

- 4.4. Numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers coming into care in Kingston and Richmond has remained steady, with approximately 30 young people claiming to be unaccompanied asylum seekers presenting to each of these children’s services. This is likely due to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which was introduced on 1st July 2016 and which is 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 to child population, the Local Authority is able to arrange for the transfer of the child.

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

Age range of children looked after

- 4.5. A high percentage of children entering care in 2018/19 were 16 years of age or over (Kingston: 34%; Richmond: 42%; Windsor and Maidenhead: 21%). 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.
- 4.6. In Windsor and Maidenhead and Kingston, 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 turn 18 years old.

31 March 2019 / %	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	National
Under 1	2	3	3	6
1 to 4	6	12	9	13

5 to 9	11	3	13	19
10 to 15	40	34	41	39
16 and over	40	47	34	23

Time in care, and reasons for leaving

- 4.7. The largest proportion of children looked after are in care for less than 6 months (Kingston: 32%; Richmond: 38%; Windsor and Maidenhead: 27%). The table below gives the breakdown of those children who ceased being in care during the 2018/19

Length of time in care	Kingston / %	Richmond / %	Windsor and Maidenhead / %	National / %
< 6 mths	32	38	27	35
6 mths < 1 yr	21	18	13	17
1 < 2 yrs	24	21	22	19
2 < 3 yrs	11	6	16	10
3 < 5 yrs	5	9	9	8
5 < 10 yrs	6	6	13	8
10+	2	2	0	4

- 4.8. A total of 172 children and young people left care in 2018/19, which is exactly the same number as it was for 2017/18. Of these, 41 (24%) returned home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility. This is broken down at authority level as Kingston: 13 (21%); Richmond: 17 (26%); Windsor and Maidenhead: 11 (24%)

Diversity of children looked after

- 4.9. The ethnicity breakdown of children looked after in each of Achieving for Children local authority areas at 31 March 2019 is:

31 March 2019 / %	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	National
White	53	51	64	75
Black or Black British	12	12	6	7
Asian or Asian British	8	15	8	5
Mixed	16	16	16	9
Other ethnic groups	9	6	6	3
Other (Refused or Information not yet available)	1	0	0	1

4.10. When compared to the percentage ethnicity breakdown of each of Achieving for Children local authority area population 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 role of placement matching for children and an emphasis on meeting children's cultural and identity needs.

Care leavers

- 4.11. At 31 March 2018, Achieving for Children were responsible for supporting 202 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 15% since the previous year.
- 4.12. 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. Richmond compares well with a higher rate of accommodation that is considered suitable for care leavers, whilst Kingston and Windsor and Maidenhead compare less well, with both areas having lower rates of accommodation that is considered suitable.

31 March 2018 ^{7,8}	Care leavers now aged 19 to 21	Accommodation considered suitable	Accommodation considered unsuitable	Not in touch or no information
Kingston	75	53 (71%)	3	19
Richmond	76	70 (92%)	4	2
Windsor and Maidenhead	47	33 (70%)	7 (15%)	7 (15%)
National	28,000	23,510 (84%)	1,860 (7%)	2,630 (9%)

Education, employment and training

- 4.13. Achieving for Children generally compares favourably with the national picture, with the majority of care leavers in education, employment or training, based on the those care leavers for whom the local authorities have information. Kingston

⁷ An (x) denotes that data has been suppressed to protect the confidentiality of individuals who might otherwise be identifiable. This occurs when figures are very small.

⁸ It is not possible for local authorities to determine the suitability of the accommodation where the young person was deported, had gone abroad, or their residence was not known.

compares particularly favourably with the national picture, with 30% of care leavers in education (compared with the national average of 26%).

31 March 2018	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	101	0 (0%)	28 (28%)	0 (0%)	57 (57%)
Richmond	107	6 (6%)	22 (21%)	14 (13%)	65 (61%)
Windsor and Maidenhead	69	0 (0%)	11 (16%)	12 (17%)	25 (36%)
National	39,590	2,100 (5%)	10,610 (27%)	9,040 (23%)	21,750 (55%)

Leaving Care Comparative NEET & Not Known 2018	NEET/NK Aged 17, 18 (%)		NEET/NK aged 19, 20, 21 (%)	
	DfE 17 (Mar 17)	DfE 18 (Mar 18)	DfE 17 (Mar 17)	DfE 18 (Mar 18)
England Average	30	36%	50%	49%
South East (DfE 18)	38%	36%	51%	48%
Richmond	31%	21%	48%	46%
Kingston	39%	28%	42%	48%
Windsor & Maidenhead	53%	36%	51%	49%

5. Current Placement Mix

5.1. In 2018/19, there were a total of 786 placements across our total cohort of children looked after. Most of these were foster placements (487, 62%).

Placement	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead
Residential schools	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	3 (1%)
Children's Homes	24 (9%)	25 (10%)	28 (10%)
Family Centre or Mother and Baby Unit	6 (2%)	5 (2%)	0 (0%)
Foster placements	165 (53%)	138 (54%)	184 (68%)

Independent living	1 (0%)	4 (2%)	0 (0%)
NHS/Health Trust	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	4 (1%)
Placed for adoption	1 (0%)	6 (2%)	8 (3%)
Placed with parents or other person with parental responsibility	5 (2%)	4 (2%)	14 (5%)
Residential Care Home	2 (1%)	1 (0%)	3 (1%)
Secure Children's Homes	1 (0%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
Semi-independent living accommodation	49 (19%)	66 (26%)	26 (10%)
Young Offender Institution or Secure Training Centre	5 (2%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)

In-house fostering

- 5.2. Ofsted required Achieving for Children to register our fostering services as an independent fostering agency. As the Community Interest Company model has grown, and other areas have adopted the same model, Ofsted have developed their approach to inspection and regulation of fostering services in this kind of set up. To make sure we are in line with other community interest companies delivering children's services, and with the regulatory framework, Ofsted requested that Achieving for Children submit an application to register as an independent fostering agency by 31 March 2018. To operate as effectively and efficiently as possible, we are working on establishing Achieving for Children as a single IFA, working across all of our operational areas. We were granted registration in August 2018 and are aligning our operations to establish the IFA as a single service across all three Achieving for Children local authority areas by end March 2019.
- 5.3. As of November 2018, there were 106 approved mainstream fostering households across Achieving for Children local authority areas (Kingston: 31; Richmond: 38; Windsor and Maidenhead: 37). A total of 123 children were in placement. Across all three local authority areas, approximately 70% of children looked after are in foster placements (both in-house and external independent fostering agencies).

Placements 2017/18	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead
In-house	70 (42%)	104 (56%)	86 (56%)
IFA	97 (58%)	83 (44%)	68 (44%)

- 5.4. Where possible and in the child's best interests, 'connected person' placements will be sought for children and young people. Connected person placements enable children and young people to be cared for by a familiar person/s, which can often be

a good choice for the child and support placement stability. Connected person carers will be approved at the Fostering Panel. At November 2018, Achieving for Children had 38 mainstream fostering households in Richmond, of which three were connected persons full approval (for three children), two were connected persons temporary approval (for two children) and five were family link carers. In Kingston, Achieving for Children had 31 mainstream fostering households, of which seven were connected persons full approval (for ten children) and two were connected persons temporary approval (for six children). In Windsor and Maidenhead, there were eight connect persons households and Special Guardians.

- 5.5. The average vacancy rate in Richmond and Kingston for mainstream fostering households throughout 2017/18 was 13%, equating to 12 fostering households having vacancies at any one time. The average rate in Windsor and Maidenhead is 30% that is around 19 fostering households. A number of vacancies are due to the needs of children already placed with the carers precluding further placements, some are due to the carers' own household circumstances temporarily restricting their availability, and others are due to their approval terms. There are no carers that are restricted due to concerns about aspects of the care they provide.
- 5.6. Achieving for Children are committed to maximising the use of in-house foster carers. This is because they are able to provide the same placement for children at significantly lower cost than those provided by independent fostering agencies, which means that more money can be spent on supporting children and young people who are looked after. Controlling the overall cost of placements enables us to better invest in, for example, early help and prevention services that can support placement stability. Achieving for Children has set a target to recruit 100 new mainstream fostering households over the next five years.
- 5.7. **Approvals: Mainstream, Reg 24 Temporary & Connected Persons Carers 2018-19:**

	Kingston	Richmond	RBWM	Total
New approvals of mainstream carers	3	4	6	8
New approvals of Connected Persons carers	3	6	2	11
Referrals for connected persons assessments	8	20	13	41
Reg 24 Temporary Approvals of Connected Persons at 31.03.19	1	0	5	6
Mainstream fostering applicants in assessments at 31.03.19	1	2	3	6
Connected Persons applicants in assessment at 31.03.19	3	3	3	9

Connected Persons Fostering: In the vast majority of these referrals children had

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

- 5.8. We have re-written our foster recruitment and retention strategy in the establishment of Achieving for Children as an independent fostering agency. The strategy includes updating and improving our website, a Facebook campaign targeting residents in all three local authority areas that meet the profile for fostering, a newly launched “refer a friend scheme” and additional sessional workers to complete Form Fs in a timely way. We are also working with the London Mayors Scheme to identify existing foster carers who could be approved for additional placements if we extended their homes. Foster carer recruitment remains an area of considerable challenge, and we will still need to work with independent fostering agency market to ensure that there is sufficient choice and quality of placements to meet the needs to the children and young people in our care.
- 5.9. Achieving for Children has reviewed its fostering services and its offer to foster carers, including fees; allowances; training and development; and support. We have reviewed our remuneration structure and incorporated an assessment of the complexity of a child or young people’s needs into this. Our operational areas previously structured foster carer remuneration in different ways, and fees paid were not always aligned to the skills of the carer or needs of the child. There were also wide variances in the training, development opportunities and the support provided to foster carers. We are now providing our foster carers with a fairer, more transparent offer that is better able to meet the needs of children who are placed in our care based on the following principles:
- Promoting the wellbeing of children and young people to improve children’s outcomes in adult life.
 - A single, fair and transparent offer for all AfC carers that distributes money according to the child’s needs and the carer’s skills and experience, including incentivising care for the most complex children and stepping down to less intensive support.
 - A competitive offer that supports the recruitment and retention of foster carers in line with the sufficiency strategy and offers value for money to the Councils.
 - An offer that minimises disruption to carers and potential risk to placement stability, including the number of carers who might see a decrease in their income.
- 5.10. We have identified a need to improve our record keeping processes, including ensuring that tracking of foster carer training and our documentation of the profile of Achieving for Children foster carers is of good quality. Achieving for Children is reviewing its matching and placements process as part of its establishment as an independent fostering agency, to ensure that children and young people are

well-matched in placements with foster carers and that the placements promote the best interests of the child and are conducive to placement stability.

Independent fostering agencies

- 5.11. Similar to many other local authorities, Achieving for Children are reliant on independent fostering agencies to provide services for many of their children looked after. As of July 2018, 48% of children in foster care in each local authority were placed with independent fostering agencies.
- 5.12. Independent fostering agencies have been used for various reasons, including a decrease in the numbers of available in-house carers; 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.
- 5.13. At March 2018, 110 children were in fostering placements provided by independent fostering agencies. These are used across all age ranges, although there are fewer placements with children of primary school age (below 12 years old) across both operational areas.
- 5.14. Richmond and Kingston are heavily reliant on independent fostering agencies to place their unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, with 96% of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are looked after being placed with independent fostering agencies. This might be due to the reasons above, and could also be a result of insufficient training of foster carers in this area of children’s needs. In Windsor and Maidenhead, the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children population is smaller and not all are placed with independent fostering agencies, with only 6% of referrals to independent fostering agencies being for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children at March 2018.
- 5.15. In 2017/18, 18 external fostering placements were made in Richmond and Kingston and 16 external fostering placements were made in Windsor and Maidenhead. This excludes respite placements or placements of fewer than 100 days.

2017/18	Richmond and Kingston	Windsor and Maidenhead
Number of children referred to IFAs	18	16
Number of referrals for UASC	10	1
% of IFA referrals for UASC	56	6
Number of Children in IFA placements (July 18)	73	37
Number of UASC in IFA placements (July 18)	24	5
Number of UASC Looked after children (July 18)	25	6
% of children in IFA placements who are	33	14

UASC		
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- 5.16. Anecdotally, placements with independent fostering agencies are used for children and young people whose needs are more complex and who are harder to place. However, in Richmond and Kingston, 8/18 children placed with independent fostering agencies had low level need (including 6/10 UASC placements) .

Level of need ⁹	Number of referrals to IFAs including referrals for UASC	Number of referrals to IFAs excluding referrals for UASC	Number of referrals to IFAs for UASC
Low	8	2	6
Medium	9	6	3
High	1	0	1

- 5.17. Achieving for Children do not have an approved external provider list, but do have a provider list that we use when we send out a referral for an external foster placement. Some of these providers are on a framework and others are not, and we spot purchase the placement.

Residential provision

- 5.18. Achieving for Children have a relatively small number of children 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 to 31 March 2018 (Kingston: 16; Richmond: 20; Windsor and Maidenhead: 14). Approximately 8% of Richmond children looked after are living in children’s homes, 10% of Kingston’s, and 9% of Windsor and Maidenhead, which is in line with the national average of 8%. The age range of children and young people in children’s homes is 13 - 18 years, with the average age being 16 years, and there is also a slightly higher proportion of boys to girls in children’s homes (58% vs. 42%).
- 5.19. 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).
- 5.20. 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

⁹ Level of need determined using the Foster Child Behavioral Assessment (Iowa Department of Human Services), which can be found here: <https://dhs.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/470-4401.pdf>

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).

- 5.21. 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 Looked After Children Reviews.
- 5.22. 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. We are currently building an in-borough five-bedroom children's home in Teddington, which is anticipated to be completed by July 2019. Similarly, we have identified and submitted an offer on a property in Kingston for a second five bed Children's home that could also offer respite, shared carer and assessment for children with Special Educational Needs. Kingston Council have identified £2.5m capital to develop this provision. Work will commence to build a business case for developing residential provision in Windsor and Maidenhead that AfC also run directly. External residential placement costs in RBWM average over £4000 per week so there are strong drivers to no longer be wholly dependent on the market.

Adoption and Permanence

- 5.23. Nationally, as of 2013, there was a fall in the number of decisions for adoption and placement orders made. This fall is typically seen to have been a response to the Supreme Court Judgement Re B (Re B (A Child) [2013] UKSC 33) followed by the Court of Appeal Judgment Re B-S (Re B-S (Children) [2013] EWCA Civ 1146). For RBWM an update on the first year's performance of Adopt Thames Valley will be updated into this strategy.
- 5.24. However, in the years since these judgments were handed down, the number of decisions for adoption and placement orders made nationally each year has stabilised. There has been no continued decline in the use of adoption as an option for children – in fact there has been a small upward trend on both these measures. At the level at which the system has now stabilised, around 4,000 placement orders are being granted each year.
- 5.25. This suggests that the use of adoption still remains comparatively higher than in the last two decades. As a result of the widespread and successful efforts of the system to recruit more adoptive families, there were significantly more prospective adoptive

families waiting than children for some years. However, following the Re B judgement, some adoption agencies, faced with more prospective adopters waiting than children, scaled back adopter recruitment, but with significant consequences in the longer term.

- 5.26. In April 2017, the Adoption Leadership Board published a paper on adopter sufficiency, outlining findings from work done to forecast the impact of trends in the adoption system on the number of prospective adopters and children waiting. The model had been developed between CVAA, First4Adoption, and DfE analysts. The ALB data suggested that there were more new placement orders being granted than prospective adoptive families being approved. The paper concluded that if current trends continue, the number of approved families available in any given quarter will continue to fall faster than the number of children needing to be placed.
- 5.27. At Achieving for Children, the adoption and permanency team undertakes adoption and special guardianship functions on behalf of Richmond and Kingston local authorities.
- 23 Looked After Children in the care of Achieving for Children were adopted between April 2015 and April 2018
 - 34 Looked After Children in the care of Achieving for Children had an Agency Decision made that they Should Be Placed for Adoption.
 - 20 (12 RBK, 8 LBR) Placement Orders were granted in respect of Looked After Children in the care of Achieving for Children between April 2015 and March 2018
 - 21 Looked After Children in the care of Achieving for Children were matched with an adoptive family between April 2015 and April 2018
 - 27 children in the care of Achieving for Children were placed with an adoptive family between April 2015 and April 2018
 - 3 children in the care of Achieving for Children were placed in Early Permanent Placements between April 2015 and April 2018. There were 16 Agency Decisions that a child Should Be Placed for Adoption that were reversed due to Placement Orders not being made between April 2015 and April 2018.
- 5.28. In terms of prospective adopters, on 1st August 2018, there were five approved prospective adoptive families, and one prospective adoptive families in assessment. At the end of December 2017, there were three prospective adoptive families waiting to be matched and two prospective adoptive families being assessed, of whom no families were in stage one; two were in stage two, and none were on hold. From 1 July to 31 December 2017, one prospective adoptive family had been matched.
- 5.29. Data on the length of time children were waiting to be adopted shows that, at end December 2017, the children waiting for the longest period of time were four children aged nine months or over, the oldest child at four years of age, and two at three years of age. The two children waiting the longest were aged three and four years. Of the children with Should Be Placed for Adoption decisions not placed at the end of December 2017, two were part of sibling groups. Of the children with Should

Be Placed for Adoption decisions not placed at the end of December 2017, 25% were from a black or ethnic minority background.

- 5.30. Between 1 July and 31 December 2017, no children were placed in interagency placements.
- 5.31. For children adopted between April 2017 and March 2018, it took an average of 109 days for Richmond and 470 days for Kingston between the local authority receiving court authority to place the child for adoption and the Agency Decision Maker deciding on a match to an adoptive family. Between April 2015 and March 2018 this figure was 97 days for Richmond (rank in country was suppressed) and 305 days for Kingston (ranked 184th in country). The England average from the 2015-18 adoption scorecards is 201 days. Between April 2017 and March 2018, it took an average of 210 days for Richmond children and 630 days for Kingston children between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family. Between April 2015 and March 2018 this figure was 268 days for Richmond (ranked 1st in the country) and 652 days for Kingston (ranked 142nd). The England average from the 2015-18 adoption scorecards is 486 days.
- 5.32. The aim is to increase choice for Achieving for Children children but also to add to the national bank of prospective adoptive families approved in line with Achieving for Children's responsibilities to Adopt London South the RAA.
- The profile of children waiting longest and those placed in interagency placements is shaping a targeted recruitment programme, aimed at recruiting adoptive families for the priority children locally and nationally.
 - To improve timescales for placing children, all prospective adopters being assessed by Achieving for Children are expected to consider Early Permanence in line with the RAA.
 - Events will be run for approved adopters to learn more about the children currently waiting.
 - Between April 2017 and 31st April 2018, there were over 150 enquiries to Achieving for Children about adoption, with over 100 families attending information evenings.
 - Baseline recruitment activity will continue, with the emphasis on the website, social media, and word of mouth i.e. testimonials from already approved adopters.
 - In addition, a timetable will be developed for sending out recruitment material on a rolling basis to community centres, libraries, doctor's surgeries, dentists, hospitals, schools, faith groups etc.
- 5.33. The key challenges and therefore sufficiency priorities of the adoption and permanency service at Achieving for Children are:
- To recruit more adopters who can meet the needs of the children waiting longest, or whose plan for adoption is reversed. These are generally children who need to be placed in sibling groups, older children, and children with complex health needs or developmental delay. It is more challenging to recruit adopters to meet the needs of these children, locally and nationally.
 - To ensure all children with a plan for adoption move to their adoptive home in a timely way and are well prepared for the transition.

- To provide more sibling placements so that children are not separated from siblings, or their preferred permanence placements are not achieved.
- To recruit more prospective adopters able to promote each child's unique cultural and ethnic identity.

Placement location

5.34. Achieving for Children have a relatively high proportion of children who are placed outside their respective local authority areas but the main focus would be on placing children within 20 miles of their family address so that we can meet their needs as locally as possible.

Below is a DFE summary for 2017/18 for all 3 boroughs

Placement Location (outside LA) 2017/18	TOTAL CLA	Inside LA	Outside LA
Kingston upon Thames	127	28%	72%
Richmond upon Thames	105	25%	75%
Windsor and Maidenhead	107	32%	68%

Placement Location (outside 20 miles) 2017/18	TOTAL CLA	Placed 20+ miles
Kingston upon Thames	127	24%
Richmond upon Thames	105	Not published but 24% in 2016/17
Windsor and Maidenhead	107	25%

5.35. Children and young people in residential placements across all three local authority areas are placed on average over 100 miles away from home in areas as distant as Scotland, Wales, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Norfolk, East Sussex, and Hampshire. The Sufficiency Strategy will target creating 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.

- 5.36. 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 always 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.

Placement stability

- 5.37. In the year to 31 March 2018, 13% of children looked after had three or more placements (Kingston: 11%; Richmond: 9%; Windsor and Maidenhead: 19%). This is higher than the national average of 10%, and is predominantly due to the relatively high proportion of children looked after in Windsor and Maidenhead who experienced placement breakdown within the year.

Placement costs

- 5.38. The direct cost of an in-house foster placement is significantly less than that of an IFA placement often as much as half the cost. However, independent fostering agencies charge for all the costs associated with providing a placement for a child or young people, including the costs of recruiting, training, supporting and paying the foster carers; support from supervising social workers and management; and placement management. Therefore, to compare like-for-like of placements costs between in-house and external placements, consideration needs to be given to the fixed costs of running an in-house fostering service over the number of in-house foster placements that this would be spread.
- 5.39. Using data from July 2018, there are 48% of children in foster care across Achieving for Children who are placed with independent fostering agencies. For every child placed in-house instead of with an independent fostering agency, Achieving for Children could achieve savings of between £4,000 to £10,000.
- 5.40. Assuming we meet the target of placing 75% of our children with in house carers within the next five years, 40% (7 children) of our current referrals to independent fostering agencies would need to be placed in-house in Richmond and in Kingston every year for the next five years (excluding any growth in the number of children looked after). Similarly, 23% (4 children) of referrals to independent fostering agencies in Windsor and Maidenhead would need to be placed in-house every year for the next five years.
- 5.41. The average cost per child per week of a child in a children's home is £3,610 in Kingston, £2,852 in Richmond, and £4,083 in Windsor and Maidenhead. The average cost per child per week of the five most expensive placements in children's homes is

£4,641 for Kingston, £3,927 for Richmond and £5,407 in Windsor and Maidenhead. This is an approximate additional annual cost of £90,000 to £100,000 in the last year, due to price inflation of these placements.

- 5.42. Achieving for Children are establishing two in-borough children's homes in Richmond and Kingston. It is estimated that these will produce an annual saving of £125,000 shared across Kingston and Richmond, with a break-even occupancy rate of 80%; this is based on a conservative occupancy rate of 85% and our estimated costs of running a children's home. However, this savings estimate is approximate and does not take into account the savings that would be achieved from, for example, future improved outcomes and related savings by investing in the care of children placed in residential care (for example, the benefits of family reunification and successful therapeutic interventions), and the impact of children being placed in the local area.

6. Response to issues raised and how Achieving for Children will meet the Sufficiency Duty

- 6.1. One of the principal ways we are addressing the sufficiency strategy is by combining knowledge, skills and resources across the three local authorities. In April 2018, a decision was taken to bring the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Fostering Team into the Independent Fostering Agency that AfC were being asked to create by Ofsted due to being a community interest company. It was recognised that registering RBWM as a separate IFA or bringing them in to the already established IFA at a later date would miss the opportunity to involve RBWM carers in shaping, owning and growing the IFA from its outset. Best fostering practice, policy and procedure have now been taken from all three authorities. Creating a larger pool of foster carers has already begun to improve placement matching as it allows for RBWM children to be placed with Richmond or Kingston foster carers and vice versa. This will only take place in situations where a more local placement is either not available or has been ruled out for safeguarding reasons.
- 6.2. An IFA Board has been established and six workstreams, all with foster carer representation from Operational Area 1 and 2. There is a workstream leading on AfC's Offer to carers creating a fair and transparent fees and allowance system which rewards both the carers level of experience and taking children with higher levels of complexity. We have made our fees and allowances competitive with other IFA's and believe that AfC has a unique selling point to prospective carers in that we will prioritise placing children coming into care with our own carers. We have developed a new competency based training framework for carers with a much clearer progression pathway that maps against our fee structure. Our new IFA is developing an induction, training, peer mentoring and therapeutic support offer that will match any support packages being currently offered by Independent IFAs.
- 6.3. We have a Publicity, Recruitment, and Retention workstream that is overseeing the response to our Sufficiency Strategy, which has identified the need for a net increase of 100 carers across all three authorities. We are developing and investing in a new recruitment and retention strategy with an external expert in the field. The new strategy is based on attracting new carers through targeted postings on Facebook

and developing word of mouth recruitment by a more dynamic refer a friend scheme for foster carers, AfC staff, and wider partners that provides incentives at the point of initial contact, first home visit, commencing assessment and approval. We are also reviewing our assessment process from first referral to approval to ensure it is swift, supportive and delivers high quality induction training. We are reviewing our existing staffing structure to ensure we are agile and responsive to new enquiries so we can grow the service.

- 6.4. An Assessment, Approval, Review and Panel workstream is developing an operating model and policies relation to the assessment and approvals process for potential foster carers and the role and constitution of the panels. We are in the process bringing the RBWM and Richmond and Kingston fostering panels together aligning the processes and creating one central list. This should speed up the approval process for new foster carers. The Panel will still meet in two geographical areas but will be overseen by a Single Panel Adviser.
- 6.5. We have a Matching and Placement Workstream focusing on achieving better matching and placement for children to improve their chances of placement stability. This workstream will review vacancy rates to ensure we are maximising our use of in-house foster carers. We are planning to bring duty functions for all three local authorities together to have a more efficient process. Foster Carers have particularly asked us to review information that is given to them about the child and information about the prospective carers provided to the the child in advance of the placement.
- 6.6. We are aware that high morale is critical to retaining our existing foster carers and encouraging them to recruit new carers. There is a Policy, Systems and Inspection readiness workstream which has audited the fostering service against the National Minimum Standards to review any gaps and weaknesses in the current service. An action plan has been created in response to this audit and an independent auditor has been brought in to review foster carers' files. We have invested in a web based Fostering Handbook so that our carers have easy access to all relevant policies and procedures.
- 6.7. We will review our use of Section 20 to ensure that it is being used appropriately as it is so much higher than national average of 23% in all three areas particularly in Richmond.
- 6.8. We are committed to providing more in-house provisions for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. This includes foster care, staying put and developing our own supported lodging provision to complement commissioned providers. We will work with Kingston and Richmond colleges to establish a rolling enrolment programme for English as a Second Language (ESOL) courses. We believe that developing an in-house supported lodging scheme will attract those who are stepping down from foster care or may want to become foster carers in the future. Our recruitment strategy will target carers who might take unaccompanied asylum seeking children and help us identify any additional skills and support that local foster carers would need in order to care or provide supported lodging

arrangements for this cohort. We will develop training packages around asylum and immigration issues, meeting cultural and religious needs and overcoming language barriers. We have already developed supported lodgings assessment and monitoring processes within the fostering service, and a senior practitioner from our independent fostering agency will oversee the development of our supported lodging service.

- 6.9. We also will further develop parent and child fostering and have lodged a bid for funding from the DfE with neighbouring local authorities to increase capacity for parent and child fostering in the region. We will also develop respite fostering for children with disabilities in all three local authorities during 2019-2020. We are currently developing respite provision for disabled children at the Moor Lane Respite Centre, and reviewing of our Family Links Scheme providing respite breaks for disabled children with the aim of developing this service in RBWM.
- 6.10. We will conduct an audit of all 16 years+ currently looked after to identify those most likely to return to family settings post 18 years. Our strategic aim is to focus on those children who would be able to return home earlier with support in place to safely maintain these returns home.
- 6.11. We will conduct a review of those children who spent less than 12 months in care across all three local authority areas in order to understand whether the higher proportions were due to low thresholds for becoming children looked after, high proportions of 16 years+ children in care, targeted family reunification work, or any other reasons.
- 6.12. Both Kingston and Richmond are in the process of developing proposals to improve the local systems for supporting children, young people and young adults with special educational needs and disabilities in their respective boroughs. These transformation plans are bespoke to each borough, and in line with their statutory duties under the Children's and Families Act 2014, span those aged from 0 to 25 years. The strategic changes, many of which remain at a formative stage will apply to all children, young people and young adults with special educational needs and disabilities, whether they be looked after, were previously looked after, or have never been looked after by the local authority, and regardless of whether they have an education, health and care plan or not.

The future strategy is likely to include the following key themes of particular relevance to looked after children:

- Promoting local education (as opposed to education placements outside the borough). This requires an increase in the number and type of specialist education placements available within the borough, and an upskilling of the workforce (inside and outside schools) and wider community
- Supporting mainstream schools to be at the heart of provision
- Supporting the whole system (i.e. not just education, but also health and social care too) to identify need and intervene earlier

- Improving annual review process for learners with statutory support / with an education, health and care plan to provide better assessment and planning
- Greater proactivity with planning for transitions and pathways (both education and vocational) including preparing for adulthood
- Greater co-production (to include children, young people and young adults) and partner engagement

A workshop will be held with partners to help identify how this workstream fits in with the overarching Sufficiency Strategy in Q3 2019.

- 6.13. AfC took the strategic decision in 2017 to focus on Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) for Leaving Care young people recognising that this was a key metric of success. NEET applies both to the general population and Leaving Care. The Department for education closely monitors this information on a local authority basis. Historically the levels of NEET for Leaving Care have been much higher than the mainstream counterparts. This is in part due to the differing methodology, NEET for Leaving care is based around a 12 week period before and after the individual young person's birthday. As opposed to mainstream NEET which based on a specific time of year from November to February for all young people. However, the main reason is of course due to their often very difficult personal histories and circumstances which has meant for many of them education has not been a priority. However, NEET is a key metric especially at ages 16-19 of further issues and often greater levels of support. In 2016 AfC Introduced Vocational Pathways a programme wto support Leaving Care young people to participate post 16 with a view to accessing employment and achieving independence. While the focus was on all leaving care young people post 16, the key target group was 16 -19 year olds. Working closely with the virtual school and social care colleagues, a targeted programme to support young people with careers support and working with local employers, the council and AfC to offer supported employment opportunities a number of Leaving Care young people were supported into Traineeships, Apprenticeships & Vocational College placements.
- 6.14. Across AfC where the scheme was been rolled out in 2017, Leaving Care NEET for 17 to 18 years olds in Kingston was at 39% and in Richmond at 31% respectively. In 2018, due to the work of the teams involved and the introduction of vocational pathways, that figure had reduced to 28% in Kingston and 21% in Richmond, a drop of 11% and 10% respectively, and in Windsor, it dropped from 53% to 36% against a national backdrop of a 6% increase at 17 to 18.
- 6.15. The target in AfC for 17 to 18 Leaving Care NEET in 2019 is to secure a further 10% reduction in each of the local authority areas in out key target group of 17 to 18 year olds we believe the success of the programme with 17 to 18 year olds in previous will further reduce the 19 to 21 age group figure in 2019/20.
- 6.16. Edge of Care, enhancing the edge of care offer around Multisystemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy. While AfC has access to these services currently through the CCG arrangements, it tends to take some time before young people and families

to access these services. AfC identified it required a mechanism for quick referrals for specialist in the family therapeutic support for families facing breakdown and their children entering the care system. This service needs to be response and flexible and able to work in the home setting. There was a particular need around SGO and adoption breakdown. AfC has commissioned Positive Family through a social impact bond payment by results approach to deliver this going forward, to complement the existing services.

- 6.17. The number of adopters has been steadily falling over the last three years and this is in contrast with the number of children coming into care. This current trend is a national pattern and the response is the development and implementation of the Regional Adoption Agency. AfC will be a part of Adopt London South which is made up of nine local Authorities in total. The Authorities are: Kingston upon Thames, Richmond upon Thames, Merton, Sutton, Wandsworth, Croydon, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark. Adopt London South will go live in June 2019 and Southwark will be the host Authority. The vision is that more authorities together can go on to share resources and recruit and place children in a more timely and efficient way. There are already links within region and we are working to place children with adopters from the region. We are also working closely with our existing Adoption consortium (South West London Adoption Consortium). A good balance is needed to ensure careful recruitment messages target families who can adopt the children waiting and those children coming through the system. At present we are looking at our Consortium website and making it more efficient for prospective adopters to navigate through. We have also advertised at local community notice boards in Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead. Our recent recruitment activity was advertisement on cinema tickets within the Kingston, Richmond, Sutton and Merton area over a 4 week period. Adopt London South will go on to develop its own recruitment strategy over the next few months.
- 6.18. Our first AfC children's residential provision will open in Teddington December 2019 and we are in the process of securing a second property within the Kingston area that will offer assessment, respite and shared care arrangements for children with complex needs. There have been discussions around viability of AfC running a residential children's home in RBWM and a business case will now be put forward.
- 6.19. A Supported Housing Strategy has been developed for Richmond and Kingston and work will be undertaken in 2019 to include a strategy for Windsor and Maidenhead.
- 6.20. Kingston and Richmond Councils are eligible to take part in the Mayor of London's scheme which provides repayable loans to local authorities so that foster carers can extend their homes and provide more fostering places. Ten to fifteen fostering households have already identified they would like to take part and both councils have shown an interest in taking this forward with Cornerstone who will act as an agent of the GLA will project manage the scheme.

7 Actions for the three councils

7.1 This Sufficiency Strategy has identified a number of areas where we must engage with the Councils and a full range of partners to promote a “foster friendly and children in care friendly culture”. Firstly we want all three councils to sign up to becoming foster friendly employers. AfC are leading the way in adopting this policy which support foster carers and approved kinship carers by giving paid time off in any 12 month period as follows:

- assessment and initial training prior to approval as a foster carer - up to three days
- attendance at panel for approval – one day
- Child review meetings, annual foster carer review meeting and training – up to five days.

Councils will be awarded with the Fostering Friendly Employer status by the Fostering network and be given the Fostering Friendly Employers logo to use on websites and any communications regarding foster care.

7.2 We will develop a Foster Friendly Charter for businesses and partners to sign up to in

discussion with Local Enterprise Partnerships. The Charter would encourage employers to consider becoming a foster friendly employer and identify their own initiatives such as offering carers reduced fees for sports, leisure and cultural activities and events.

7.3. We will explore a reduction or exemption from paying council tax for foster carers. Kingston council is currently considering care leavers not being asked to pay council tax and we will cost out for each council the cost of also making foster carers exempt.

7.4 We will work with housing in all three local authority areas to identify where priority banding can be given to current foster carers and those going through the fostering approval process to bid for property moves and exchanges and conversion/extension of their properties so that they can foster more children. Opportunities to convert or extend existing homes will be critical in RBWM where the London Mayor’s scheme does not apply. We are also looking at how other authorities have resolved legal and lease issues to set up key worker housing for foster carers willing to take some of the most challenging and complex teenagers who do not have a suitable property themselves.

