

Achieving for Children

Independent Fostering Agency

**Statement of Purpose
2024/25**

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About Us

Achieving for Children [AfC] is a community interest company created in 2014 by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide their children's services. In August 2017, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead became a co-owner of Achieving for Children, and we now deliver children's services across all three boroughs.

As a community interest company, we can take a business approach to delivering our social aims. It means we have the independence and flexibility to create innovative solutions to the needs of young people and their families, and keep a strong bond and deep commitment to society and public service. Unlike a private company, any profits are reinvested for the children and young people we serve. Our independent fostering agency (IFA) delivers fostering services to children and carers in all three Achieving for Children areas - Kingston, Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead. We are committed to providing the best possible outcomes for the children in our care. For those children who cannot be with their birth families and for whom fostering is the plan, we strive to provide safe, secure, loving and stable foster families.

Introduction

This statement of purpose for Achieving for Children IFA has been written in accordance with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and Care Standards Act 2000, and aims to provide all service users, stakeholders, employees, carers, local authorities, children and young people, and the general public, with our aims, objectives and expectations of our IFA. The statement of purpose is reviewed by the Responsible Individual and jointly by the registered managers, it is submitted to Ofsted for review and available on our website annually.

This document is compliant with legislation, regulatory requirements and good practice guidance.

- Children Act 1989
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
- National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Children and Families Act 2014

- Children's Social Care: Stable homes built on love, 2023

Mission statement

Achieving for Children puts children and young people at the heart of our planning and decision making. Through our IFA we strive to provide safe, secure, loving and stable foster families so that children in our care can achieve the best possible outcomes, and live happy, healthy and successful lives within a family setting.

Achieving for Children IFA has an ethos based on a nurturing and supportive framework embedded in our practice which has a focus of equality, diversity and inclusion.

The vision and value base of our IFA

Following on from our first year, we continue to establish and develop our IFA to be AGILE.

Achieving

Our IFA will put children at the heart of everything we do. We will measure all our interventions against the child focused standards in the National Minimum Standards 2011 in order to demonstrate we are having a positive impact and securing better outcomes for children in foster care. We will work hard to support our foster carers to achieve the best outcomes and to realise Achieving for Children's mission to provide children and their families with the support and services they need to live happy, healthy and successful lives.

Growing

The larger our pool of foster carers the broader the range of fostering options and the greater choice we have in matching carers to our children's needs. The numbers of unrelated carers in Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead boroughs has been reducing and we want to use the creation of the IFA as an opportunity to breathe fresh life and vigor into the service and attract that next generation of foster carers as well as retaining and further developing our existing carers.

Innovative

Achieving for Children is a 'Partner in Practice' and this allows us to discuss with the Department of Education where we might want to adapt some of the current regulations to provide a better service to our children and foster carers. Developing the IFA will provide opportunities to hear from our children, their families and foster carers where the regulations have frustrated rather than supported them in achieving great outcomes. As we develop the IFA we would like to innovate and try out new ways of working where we are informed or know that our service could be improved.

Local

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

Ethical

We are very aware of recent press scrutiny around IFAs particularly where one company has bought and then sold an IFA for profit. Achieving for Children is set up to ensure that any profits are reinvested in front line services and the IFA will operate on the same lines.

Aims and objectives

Our IFA provides fostering services which are consistent with best practice, national standards and fostering regulations.

The primary aim of the service is to provide a range of safe, loving, enjoyable and high quality placements suitable for meeting the diverse needs of children and young people who are looked after. The ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, gender, sexuality and language of children and young people looked after and the particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when placement decisions are made. To achieve this, we will provide consistently high quality services, support and supervision to all foster carers.

We will employ sufficiently experienced, qualified and competent staff and offer training and development pathways for foster carers to develop their knowledge and skills.

Our objectives are to:

- listen to the wishes and feelings of children and those within their network that are important to them to inform how we look after them and ensure this is captured appropriately
- promote positive emotional and physical health of children by supporting and training foster carers to encourage children to have good health and engage in leisure activities
- promote the educational achievement of children by supporting and training foster carers and enabling them to provide opportunities for children to achieve
- Ensure we consider kinship caring options, exploring family and friends through initial assessments, providing advice and guidance through this process, and ongoing support post positive assessment
- provide good quality induction, supervision and a broad range of effective and good quality learning and development for staff and carers
- provide foster carers with a full range of support and advice with regard to the child's education, health, mental health, leisure and preparation for returning home or independence
- provide a clear framework of training and development opportunities which is based on foster carers' needs so that they continue to develop the knowledge and skills required to provide high quality care

- maintain retention of carers through wide range of support services so that approved foster carers feel valued, supported and integral to the Fostering Service and their services as carers
- further develop a recruitment and publicity strategy, which focuses on the recruitment of local carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of children looked after in our boroughs. This supports the Sufficiency Strategy which outlines the placement needs of our children looked after and aims to enable children to remain in placements locally whenever it is safe for them to do so
- achieve an annual increase in the number of approved fostering households
- maintain competitive and annually reviewed fostering fees and allowance structure, based on nationally recommended rates

Commitment to equality and diversity

Our IFA is committed to ensuring that equality is at the heart of our practice and is embedded in our policies, practices and approach. We acknowledge and embrace the diverse community in which we operate and the diverse community of our employees, service users and network. We are committed to ensure that we practice under the Achieving for Children Equal Opportunity policy, that our daily decision, organisational planning and staff structure is diverse and reflective of our community.

We promise that all staff and carers will engage in mandatory equality and diversity training, unconscious bias training and engage in regular conversations through peer and group supervision, one-to-one supervision and support groups. Our service will ensure and be committed to promoting a person's sense of identity, taking into account each child's and young person's own race, culture, religion, gender variance, sexuality, geographical origin, and ability is carefully and thoughtfully considered while they are in the care of our service. We are committed to challenge those individuals or groups that discriminate against others for these reasons and promote educating anyone willing to learn and embrace the diversity of others.

Principles and standards of care

Our IFA promotes the values, principles and practice enshrined in the relevant legislation, regulations, government guidance and standards detailed above. The principles and values guiding the service align with those detailed in the national minimum standards.

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the center of their care.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills, leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.

- Every child should have their wishes and feelings taken into account including those of birth children in fostering families.
- Every child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.
- Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible without unnecessary restrictions.
- All work will be undertaken in partnership with children, their parents, birth families, foster carers, social workers, and other relevant stakeholders.
- The significance of contact for looked after children, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- The service will operate in a manner that promotes equality, values diversity, challenges discrimination, and aims to meet the varied needs of children looked after. In recruiting foster carers and making placements consideration will be given to needs arising out of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, disability, language and sexuality.
- The needs of children looked after will be met in respect of education, and this will be achieved by working closely with other professionals particularly the Virtual School.
- The needs of children looked after will be met in respect of health including mental health, and this will be achieved by developing a genuine partnership with other professionals including the specialist doctors and nurses for children looked after and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- Children will be supported and encouraged to develop independence skills appropriate to age and ability, and encouraged to develop friendships and leisure interests in line with their wishes and individual care plans.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer should be acknowledged and foster carers will be recognised as a core member of the team around the child.
- The IFA will be regularly monitored and quality assured against the full range of regulation and national minimum standards, and will strive for constant improvement.
- The child's responsible authority will review the child's case in accordance with the Care Planning, Placement & Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (as amended).
- A foster carer handbook will be supplied to each carer and reviewed annually. It will provide a full description of the IFA, summaries of local policies and practical advice about how to provide care of the highest quality.



Services provided

Placement of children

Our IFA offers a daily duty service Mondays to Fridays to receive referrals for children entering care or looked after for immediate and planned placements. The aim is to identify an in-house fostering resource to meet the identified needs of the child. Our primary focus is on matching those identified needs with the carers skill set. Where possible we also try to match the child's racial, linguistic and religious needs and where a match is not possible we support those carers with meeting these needs.

The fostering service is able to agree a placement outside of a carer's approval terms for a period of up to six working days if there is adequate evidence that the carer is able to meet the child's needs with additional support. If no placement is available with our own fostering resources, permission is obtained from senior management to refer to our commissioning team to search for an external placement. In the case of a proposed placement which is also 'at a distance' will not be put into effect until it has been approved by the Director of Children's Services (DCS). Before approving such a decision the senior manager, or as the case may be, DCS must be satisfied that:

- the placement is the most appropriate one available for the child and consistent with their care plan
- the child's relatives have been consulted where appropriate
- the independent reviewing officer (IRO) has been consulted

The emergency duty service is informed of foster carer vacancies each week in case children need a placement outside of normal office hours. Carers remain on the EDT rota for a week at a time. Foster carers are provided with an effective out of hour's advice and support service. The out of hours service is every work day evening and half day on weekends, supported by current fostering staff with a direct line to whomever is on the rota.

Subject to the child's age and understanding, our IFA will ensure the child receives the children's guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the content of the children's guide in a way that is accessible. Where the child requires it, the guide will be made available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative methods of communication, eg, Makaton, pictures, tape recording and translation into another language.

The children's guide includes a summary of what the IFA sets out to do for children, how they can find out about their rights, how a child can contact their IRO, the children's commissioner and the chief inspector if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure an independent advocate.

Recruitment and approval of foster carers

Our IFA will recruit and support foster carers in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers Guidance and Regulations 2013. Plans for recruiting foster carers are outlined in the Fostering Recruitment Strategy which is updated and reviewed annually. Our IFA primarily recruits and approves the following types of foster carers.

Family and friends (Kinship)

Where a relative, friend or connected person comes forward to offer care to a child they already know, the IFA assesses, approves and provides support to these carers. We support kinship arrangements such as regulation 24 temporary approved, connected carers, special guardianship arrangements.

Family Link Care

This service provides respite and short-breaks to families of children with disabilities, managed between the Fostering and Disabled Children's Service. Recruitment information regarding this provision is given to all potential fostering applicants.

Short term

These placements provide care to children for specific periods of time, usually whilst permanent arrangements are being made. Foster carers in this category are approved for a specific number, age range and gender of children.

Long term

When children cannot return home and when adoption is not the right option, long term fostering provides an alternative form of permanent care.

Respite care

Respite care is planned care for short periods of time. This could be to give the child's family, or main carer, a break or to cover a period where the usual care is unavailable. Respite care can range from a few hours a day, a weekend, the duration of a school holiday, or for any other specific period of time.

Alternative to residential and step down from children's residential care

We have a small number of children who have highly complex needs and require very intensive support from their foster carers and a wide range of professionals to prevent them from needing to be placed in a children's residential setting. We are also developing a step down programme for children coming out of residential homes into foster care where we would provide additional training and support for carers who wished to be matched. The IFA board chair can agree for foster carers to receive an enhanced fee and support for taking on these types of placement.

This more intensive fostering programme will enable the child or young person to reduce offending behaviour, self-harm and substance misuse, improve school attendance and grades, improve relationships with birth family, and improve their ability to live successfully in a family setting.

Staying put

Enables previously fostered young people to remain living in the foster carer's home post 18 years, whilst developing further independent skills and managing the transition to adulthood. Support is offered by our IFA in setting up this arrangement and the case overseen by the Leaving Care Service in these instances.

Supported Lodgings

16+ accommodation arrangement is for young people looking for some further flexibility and independence but within a supportive home environment. This is a beneficial offer for young people who are interested in living independently within the next 2 years or want to start progressing towards this and away from fostering. The supported lodgings carers is assessed, trained and supported, with the appropriate checks completed similar to approved foster carers.

Parent and child arrangements

Our aim for 2022 is to further market a recruitment scheme for parent and child arrangements. It will involve additional training and skill set for any prospective carer interested in this.

Private Fostering

Private fostering assessments are undertaken by a social worker from the IFA. Careful consideration is given to person/s who have parental responsibility and their ability to exercise this while their child is in a private fostering arrangement. The supervising social workers meet with the private foster carers and child/ren once every 12 weeks and more frequently if needed.

Our recruitment process

- The Kingston, Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead website enable those interested in fostering for Achieving for Children to register their interest online.
- Following an enquiry, either online, by email, via the services Freephone line direct call to the team or through Home for Good (see below in this section), a team member telephones the enquirer and completes the enquiry form within 24 working hours.
- If the enquirer potentially meets the standards required at this stage, an initial home visit will be undertaken by a social worker and a written report is completed within five working days and signed by the fostering branch manager.
- If the enquirer potentially meets the standards required at this next stage they will be invited to attend the preparation training, 'Skills to foster'.
- During the training course a decision is made about commencing a Stage 1 assessment including the collection of a range of checks and references.
- When all the Stage 1 assessment information and checks have been returned a decision is made within 10 working days.
- A Stage 2 assessment may run in parallel for those transferring.
- The aim is to complete Stage 2 assessments within four months.
- All Form F assessments are considered by the Fostering Panel.
- The panel makes a recommendation to the agency decision maker (Director, Children's Social Care) as to the suitability to foster and the approval terms.

- The agency decision maker makes a considered decision within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and the final set of Fostering Panel minutes. The foster carer is notified of the outcome orally within two working days and in writing within five working days.

Kinship - family and friends foster carers

The Fostering Service also undertakes assessments of potential 'kinship' carers. These are extended family members or friends connected with a child or young person who needs to come into care. Our service jointly assesses, with a social worker from the relevant children's team, potential kinship foster carers for immediate temporary approval under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

Where there is Regulation 24 consideration or occurrence, the viability assessment report is presented to the agency decision maker to authorise immediate approval. The temporary approval lasts for a period of up to 16 weeks during which time a full fostering assessment will be presented to the Fostering Panel for recommendation of approval and subsequently to the agency decision maker for the decision regarding approval. As part of the assessment process; they will complete the skills to foster training for connected carers which is specifically designed for connected arrangements. In exceptional circumstances the agency decision maker can authorise an extension of up to eight weeks for completion of the assessment under Regulation 25. We consider as part of the assessment the best permanency plan for the child, this might be special guardianship or connected caring.

Our support, training and supervision of foster carers

On approval all foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker and where possible this worker will be introduced during the assessment process.

The supervising social worker provides support, supervision and guidance to foster carers. They will also monitor the foster carer's performance and placements. As well as undertaking regular home visits (minimum six weekly or 12 weekly if a permanent placement) and attending meetings, the supervising social worker undertakes two unannounced visits annually and produces a comprehensive report for the annual review of the foster carer.

Foster carers are provided with the fostering handbook and are required to sign up to the foster carers charter agreement and supervision agreement after approval.

Except when there are identified factors which dictate to the contrary, carers will be given delegated authority to make day to day decisions about health, education, leisure, etc. The IFA will provide carers with a published policy setting out its approach to delegation.

There is a robust training programme in place, in line with the national minimum standards and the training, support and development standards for foster carers. This is to enable all foster carers to receive continued professional development. It is expected that carers will complete a minimum of five training courses a year and undertake identified mandatory training courses. Training sessions are held on a rolling programme at a variety of times to suit all circumstances. Online training is also available.

All foster carers receive weekly child maintenance allowance to cover the costs of fostering and a carer reward. They are provided with or loaned equipment, and we make sure that their home and contents insurance arrangements are sufficient.

All carers have an annual foster home review that includes an appraisal of the standards of care over the previous 12 months and reviews the training attended and support provided. Contribution forms are requested from the supervising social worker, the foster carer, foster children, birth children, placing social workers, independent reviewing officers and other relevant professionals.

The fostering panels will consider reviews in the first year of approval, every three years and all reviews following the conclusion of investigations into allegations or serious concerns, as well deregistration reports.

Following each review, the agency decision makers will sanction continued approval of the foster carers, or change or terminate the carers' approval.

Reviews are conducted by an independent reviewing officer and independent support is available to carers through the foster carer associations and the fostering network or fostertalk, membership of which is offered to all approved foster carers.

The IFA provides social work supervision and support to approved connected person foster carers in the same way as to mainstream foster carers. The supervising social worker together with the child's social worker will also provide information about the option of applying for a special guardianship order or child arrangement orders as appropriate to best meet the needs of the child.

Handling allegations and suspicion of harm

All allegations are managed so that any child is protected and supported, as is the person subject of the allegation.

Copies of our child protection procedures are made available to all staff, volunteers and foster carers and children receive their own guide.

The registered manager will be responsible for managing all allegations and liaising with the local authority designated officer (LADO) and where required notifying Ofsted.

Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a child protection allegation, this is dealt with as a child protection enquiry and is investigated under child protection procedures led by the local authority designated officer (LADO). Independent support will be made available to the foster carer during this process.

As soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed.

Investigations into allegations of harm will be clearly separated from discussions over concerns about standards of care.

Ofsted will be informed of the outcome of any serious concerns or allegations immediately.

Positive Relationships & Safeguarding

AfC adopts and supports a trauma informed approach to building and maintaining positive relationships with children, youtube people of their connected networks. We will be updating our policies and handbook in line with AfC Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, Exploitation processes and missing from home protocols, and in line with Regulation 13 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

The IFA will take all reasonable steps to ensure that no form of punishment is used on any child placed with a foster parent, no child is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable, and physical restraint is used on a child only when it is necessary to prevent likely injury to the child or other persons or likely serious damage to property. We ensure we follow mental capacity 2005 laws.

Records

Records will be clear, up-to-date and stored securely. Retention of fostering records are compliant with the fostering regulations (2011).

Fostering panel arrangements

The key purpose of the fostering panel is to quality assure the recruitment, assessment and ongoing performance of the foster carers. At present Achieving for Children wishes to maintain fostering panels in both operational areas, but decisions will be made on this and who within the IFA management structure takes on the role of panel adviser in conjunction with Ofsted as part of the application process.

The IFA Fostering Panel membership is maintained in the central list and includes people with a wide range of experience and skills. The panel has an independent chair, and a vice chair. Panel members include representatives from Children's Services, including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post qualifying experience, health and education services and independent members including a family and systemic psychotherapist and someone with experience as a foster carer for another local authority.

The panel adviser is part of the IFA management team. The IFA will pay a reasonable fee to fostering panel members, determined as being a reasonable amount. The panel considers approvals for the whole range of fostering options listed above. The panel also considers foster carers annual reviews. The panel chair prepares an annual report of its business.

All foster carers are invited to attend the panel when their assessment or review is being presented and it is usual practice that they attend. They are prepared in advance of attending a fostering panel by their supervising social worker and written information is available, including a 'panel members profile' folder.

The panel makes a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations, which are passed to the agency decision maker. The agency decision makers are the Associate Director of Children's Social Care in Kingston and Richmond and the Director of Children's Social Care in Windsor and Maidenhead.

All carers receive oral feedback about the outcome of the panel recommendation and the agency decision maker's decision within five working days.

If a foster carer's approval is terminated the reason for this will be made clear in the panel minutes. Following a panel recommendation which proposes termination of approval and where this recommendation is agreed by the agency decision maker, the foster carer will receive written notification and will be advised of their right to request the panel to reconsider or make an application to the independent review mechanism.

Qualifying determination

- If the agency decision maker decides that the applicant is not suitable to foster, they will write to the applicant informing them of this decision (a qualifying determination) giving full reasons for it and a copy of the fostering panel's recommendation. The applicant will be advised that within 28 days of the qualifying determination, they may submit any written representations they wish to make to the IFA, or apply to the Secretary of State for review by an independent review panel of the determination.
- The IFA will proceed to make its decision if, within the 28 day period, it does not receive any representations, and the person does not apply to the Secretary of State for a review by an independent panel of the qualifying determination.
- If, within the 28 day period, the IFA receives any written representations, it will refer the case to the fostering panel for further consideration and make its decision taking into account any fresh recommendation made by the panel.
- If, within the 28 day period, the person applies to the Secretary of State for a review by an independent review panel of the qualifying determination, the IFA will make its decision, taking into account the recommendation of the fostering panel and the independent review panel.
- As soon as practicable after making one of the relevant decisions referred to above, the IFA will notify the prospective foster carer in writing and provide written reasons for the decision.
- In a case where an independent review panel has made a recommendation, the IFA will send to the Secretary of State a copy of the notification if the decision is not to approve the person as a foster carer.

Commitment to permanence

Achieving for Children is fully committed to achieving permanence for children in its care. Permanence planning is fundamental to the process of care and this is actively promoted and monitored. This means that permanence is considered at the earliest stages of involvement and is reviewed and prioritised at every stage of the child's journey. Where placements have been initially considered in an emergency or short term, consideration will be given to these becoming permanent placements where it is evidenced that these placements meet the long term needs.

Our IFA also works with foster carers who have already been approved for long term or permanent placements and are matched with a named child. The supervising social worker visits continue to be made at six weekly intervals.

Our IFA also undertakes family finding in order to seek a permanent family for children who cannot live with their birth family and for whom adoption is not an appropriate option.

There are regular permanency planning meetings to identify the best possible matches. The ratification protocol for children whose permanence plan is not adoption, is that they are presented to the fostering panel if the child is under 16 years. There is currently different practice around family finding in the two operational areas and these will need to be aligned.

Partnership

The Fostering Service works in partnership and in collaboration with all the social care clusters, teams and services in all three boroughs to coordinate and provide support to children, their families and their carers.

Referrals for placements are received in the fostering duty system, placement options are sought and final placement agreed by the placing social worker. Checks, contracts, and quality assurance work is completed by the fostering duty workers.

The service works in partnership with the teams with regard to care planning, permanency planning, and coordinating care and services for all children looked after by Achieving for Children.

The service works together on plans for independence with young people, their carers and social workers for young people leaving care from the age of 16 upwards.

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Emotional Health Service
- Children Looked After Doctors and Nurses
- Substance Misuse Worker
- Phoenix Project (children at risk of sexual exploitation)
- Project X
- Youth Participation



The Fostering Service liaises directly with these and other appropriate health professionals to coordinate input from physical health, emotional wellbeing, substance misuse, child sexual exploitation, and recreational activity specialists.

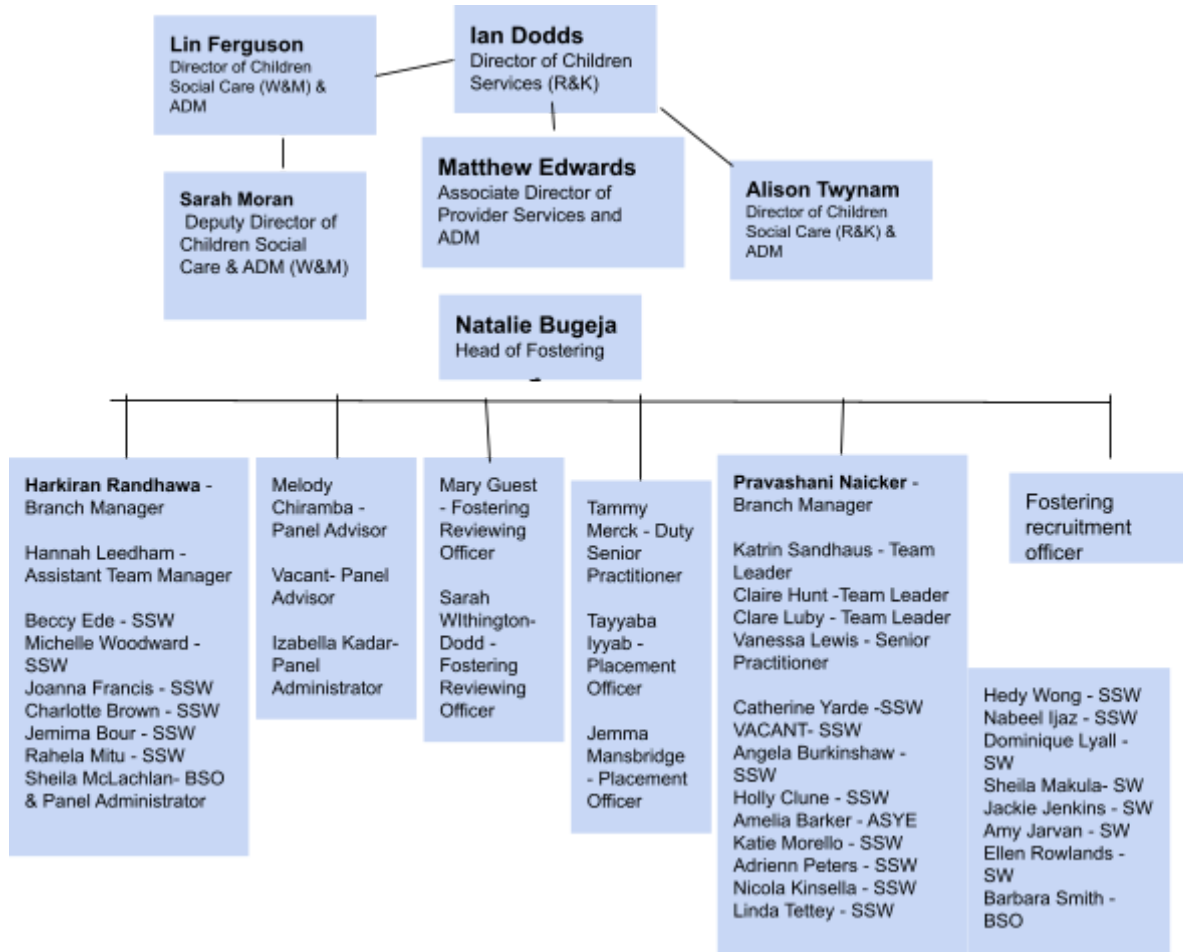
The service liaises regularly with the Virtual School and SEND to ensure children and young people's educational needs are met within their identified placement.

Where needed services to young people placed in fostering are also coordinated with the YOS and the police, and specialist risk assessments undertaken as required.

Our organisational structure and management oversight

The IFA is located within children's social care services provided by Achieving for

Children shown in Figure 1 below:



Corporate parenting panels in all three authorities receive regular reports on fostering services and examine and review the activity of the IFA.

As of January 2024 our ‘responsible individual’ is Matthew Edwards, the head of service is Natalie Bugeja, and the branch managers (Registered Managers) are Pravashani Naciker (OA1) and Harkiran Randhawa (OA2).

Our staffing

In recruiting staff, our IFA works to the requirements set out in the Fostering Services Guidance and Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011. In addition to the management posts outlined in Figure 1, the service is staffed by:



Operational area 1 branch

Branch/Registered Manager, Team leader (4 FTE), and 1 senior practitioners (1 FTE), 13 social workers completing assessment, support and supervision (7 FTE, 6PT), and 1 business support workers (1FTE).

Operational area 2 branch

Branch Manager, Assistant Team Manager (2 FTE), 5 social workers (5 FTE), and 1 business support worker including panel administration (1 FTE)

The IFA also has the following resource shared across branches:

- recruitment, retention and publicity officer
- business support for both areas is provided through the Permanency Business Support Team

IFA staff across both branches

Head of Service (1 FTE), Panel Advisor (1 FTE 1 PT), Fostering reviewing officer (2PT), Fostering Duty Senior Practitioner (1 FTE), Placement Officers (1 FTE, 1PT) & Business support officer and panel advisor (1FTE), Recruitment and Retention Social Workers (1PT)

The Team

All managers and social work staff hold a professional qualification in social work and have a range of experience in working with children and families, and in fostering.

Business support staff have skills and experience that are particular to their positions, and all staff members receive appropriate supervision and training. All staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually. Information about each member of staff is included in the Foster Carers Handbook that is made available to all foster carers.

Complaints & Registrations

A complaint may be generally defined as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of the organisation which requires a response’. The following principles reflect the National Minimum Standards 2011 and guide our complaints procedure.

- Complaints and representations are welcomed as an important part of improving our service and ensuring quality.
- There is a commitment to making changes to our services where a complaint or representation shows a need for change.
- We are committed to ensuring that our complaints system is accessible and available to everyone.
- Establishing what the complaint is, together with the desired outcome at an early stage, can lead to a better resolution for all involved.
- We are committed to responding to complaints speedily and, wherever possible, to achieving an outcome which is agreeable to the complainant.
- We aim to achieve the easiest, least stressful way to involve the complainant in the complaints process.

- We are committed to helping and supporting children and young people to make a complaint or representation to the organisation and ensuring that they have a clear understanding that they will not be subject to any reprisals for doing so.
- Wherever possible, complaints are dealt with informally. Where appropriate, in the first instance, any complaint by or against a foster carer will be dealt with on a problem solving basis. There is a written procedure given to all foster carers as part of the Fostering Handbook. AfC has corporate and Children's Services complaints procedures that operate if no resolution can be achieved at the problem solving stage.
- Foster carers must notify their supervising social worker if they experience any verbal threats, aggression or violence. These are taken very seriously and dealt with quickly and the outcomes documented.
- There is a leaflet for children and young people, which advises them what to do if they have a complaint.
- The registered branch manager will automatically refer any serious complaints against foster carers to Ofsted, for information, and will advise Ofsted of the outcome of any investigation.

Our complaints process

Our complaints policy and procedures do not seek to replace or restrict the child and/or other individuals of their rights to make independent complaints and representations to outside bodies. Please note that for the purpose of this complaints policy and its procedures, allegations and concerns about safeguarding and child protection issues, are not managed under these procedures, but separately using the Achieving for Children Safeguarding Policy and the guidelines of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) for the area in which the foster child lives.

Aligning services across the three authorities and evaluating and monitoring performance of the IFA

The IFA has been developing aligned systems for recording, tracking and monitoring data around referrals, assessments, approvals, reviews, training, allegations and complaints.

Our aligned policies and procedures including information about fees and allowances is all included in our fostering handbook www.fosteringhandbook.com/achievingforchildren

Achieving for Children has professional membership of both CORAMBAAF and the Fostering Network.

Ofsted

The IFA service is regulated and inspected by Ofsted.
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Date IFA Statement of Purpose initially created: 30 April 2018

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Most recent review date: 30 January 2024

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