

## Equality Assessment (EA)

<b>Service Area:</b>	Fostering services- Kingston, Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead
<b>Name of service/ function/ policy/ project being assessed:</b>	Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Offer to Foster Carers
<b>Officer leading on assessment:</b>	Charlotte Johnson - Strategy and Programmes Project Officer
<b>Other staff involved:</b>	Sophia Spence-Cheng - Policy and Project Officer

### BACKGROUND

#### 1. Briefly describe the service/ function/ policy/ project:

Ofsted required Achieving for Children (AfC) to register our fostering services as an IFA. We were granted registration in August 2018 and are aligning our operations to establish the IFA as a single service across all three AfC local authority areas (Kingston, Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead) by the end of March 2019.

Our operational areas currently structure foster carer remuneration in different ways. Fees paid are not always aligned to the skills of the carer or needs of the child. In Kingston and Richmond, a small proportion of foster carers are paid disproportionately more than other carers and the amounts paid are out of line with statistical neighbours. There are also wide variances in the training, development opportunities and the support provided to foster carers.

We want to provide 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. Our offer must also be competitive, supporting our strategic aim to recruit new local foster carers for local children so that we can reduce reliance on more expensive placements secured through other IFAs and residential care. Furthermore, over the last ten years, there has been a larger cohort of children with complex needs coming into foster care; we therefore need to progress and train as many of our carers as possible to the highest carer level rather than retain a small pool of 'specialists'.

The proposed offer to all approved foster carers, including connected persons carers, includes:

- A competency based training and development programme aligned to the fee bands recognising caring experience and professional expertise as well as training undertaken;
- A banded reward fee based on the the experience and skill level of the carer;
- A supplementary fee, paid per child in placement if the child reaches a threshold level of need;
- An allowance based on the needs of the child, paid per child in placement; and
- Continuing supervision and support from a supervising social worker, but expanded peer to peer and therapeutic support.

## 2. Why is the equality assessment being undertaken?

As a major AfC project which will affect foster carers across all of our boroughs, it is necessary to complete an equality assessment to understand the impact of the changes that are being implemented.

From previous analysis, 21 specialised/high level foster carers have been identified as being negatively affected by the change.

## 3. What sources of information have been used in the preparation of this equality assessment? (e.g national research, local needs assessment, user feedback) Please provide the details in the table below:

<i>Information source</i>	<i>Description and outline of the information source</i>
Fostering team - Kingston and Richmond	Protected characteristic data of specialised/level 3 carers affected by the change
Fostering team - Windsor and Maidenhead	Protected characteristic data of specialised/level 3 carers affected by the change

## ANALYSIS OF IMPACT

## 4. Assess the relevance of each protected characteristic group to the service/ function/ policy/ project and explain what the data, customer feedback, complaints or discussions with stakeholder groups tells you about the impact.

### *Other questions to consider:*

- *How well are diverse needs met?*
- *Have any differences in access to services/functions been identified for any group?*
- *Has the area identified any disadvantages experienced by groups, which need to be addressed?*
- *Have there been any complaints about a failure to receive an appropriate and fair service?*
- *Is there any other evidence of differential impact or different outcomes which needs to be addressed?*
- *Is there any evidence that participation in areas of public life is disproportionately low for any particular relevant protected characteristic group?*
- *Have the needs of disabled people been identified and addressed where these are different from the needs of non-disabled people?*
- *Have you identified any need to tackle prejudice or promote understanding between different relevant protected characteristic groups?*

*Remember that equality assessment is not simply about identifying and removing negative effects of discrimination but it is also an opportunity to identify ways to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations.*

<i>Protected Group</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Age	<p><b>Data</b></p> <p>Of the 21 impacted foster carers across the boroughs, ages range from 44-67 years old:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 40-44 years - 9.5%</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 45-49 years- 33.0%</li> <li>- 50-54 years - 14.3%</li> <li>- 55-59 years - 14.3%</li> <li>- 60-64 years - 24.0%</li> <li>- 65-69 years - 4.7%</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b> There is a potential loss of earnings for foster carers in the upper age groups as they may have less opportunity to access other means of earning which may in turn have a potential effect on pensionable savings or income.</p>
<b>Disability</b>	<p><b>Data</b> 76.2% of impacted foster carers identify as having no disability while the disability status of 23.8% foster carers is unknown.</p> <p><b>Impact</b> No impact has been identified for foster carers whether they have a disability or not.</p>
<b>Gender (Sex)</b>	<p><b>Data</b> 61.9% of the impacted foster carers are female while 38.1% are male.</p> <p><b>Impact</b> No specific impact of the proposal has been identified based on gender but the changes will disproportionately impact on women because they are overrepresented in the foster carer cohort.</p>
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	<p><b>Data</b> AfC does not routinely collect data relating to gender reassignment.</p> <p><b>Impact</b> The new offer to carers is considered of low relevance to gender reassignment.</p>
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>	<p><b>Data</b> Of the 21 impacted foster carers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 81% Married</li> <li>- 9.5% Widowed</li> <li>- 4.5% Divorced</li> <li>- 4.5% Single</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b> There are six married couples within the impacted cohort who both receive income from providing foster care. There are also four individual foster carers who only receive income through the provision of foster care. The new offer may impact on these couples and individuals as their income is likely to reduce.</p>

<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	<p><b>Data</b> None of the impacted foster carers have identified as being pregnant or on maternity leave.</p> <p><b>Impact</b> The new offer to carers is considered of low relevance to pregnancy and maternity</p>
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	<p><b>Data</b> 90% of the impacted foster carers identify as White British while 10% identify as African/Caribbean.</p> <p><b>Impact</b> No impact has been identified based on race/ ethnicity.</p>
<b>Religion and belief including non-belief</b>	<p><b>Data</b></p> <p>The religion and belief of the impacted foster carers is set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Christian - 14%</li> <li>- Christian, Practising - 14%</li> <li>- Church of England, Non-practising - 14%</li> <li>- Church of England, Part-practising - 9.5%</li> <li>- Church of England, Practising - 19%</li> <li>- Roman Catholic, Non-Practicing - 9.5%</li> <li>- Roman Catholic (Practising/Non-Practising not specified) - 9.5%</li> <li>- No practicing religion - 9.5%</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b> No impact has been identified based on religion and belief.</p>
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<p><b>Data</b> 90% of impacted foster carers identify as heterosexual and the sexual orientation of 10% is unspecified.</p> <p><b>Impact</b> No impact has been identified based on sexual orientation.</p>

**5. Summarise the key findings of the equality assessments of impact- have you identified any data gaps in relation to the relevant protected characteristics and relevant parts of the duty?**

*Other questions to consider:*

- *Are there findings of unlawful discrimination?*
- *Can you address any identified adverse impact?*
- *Can you mitigate any negative impact?*
- *Please provide rationale if you are unable to address any adverse impact.*
- *Have you identified any ways of advancing equality in this area? For example, meeting diverse needs?*

● ***Is there a need for any actions to promote understanding between different protected groups?***

The analysis demonstrates that one of the main impacts of the new offer to carers is that the foster carers in the upper age ranges may have reduced income and may be less likely, and less able, to obtain income elsewhere due to their age. This disproportionately impacts women as they are over represented in the foster caring cohort.

The group of foster carers that are impacted by this change are specialised or highly qualified foster carers, meaning they have a certain amount of experience. This group of carers would potentially have historical pay agreements from when they started making them susceptible to the changes being made.

The other significant impact of the changes relate to foster carers who rely solely on income from providing foster care- either in a married couple or individuals. The changes to the allowances may mean a reduction in income which could have a considerable impact if the couple or individual are not able to obtain any other income.

In order to mitigate these impacts, AfC is removing the stipulation that specialist foster carers must always be available to receive a placement and must take any placement referred to them. This will allow impacted foster carers to seek additional income if desired and provide them with more autonomy over their placements.

Although this assessment has shown that there may be a potential negative impact for some existing foster carers, the new offer will also bring a number of overall benefits:

- 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.
- Upskilling a larger cohort of foster carers to be at the highest level and therefore they are better equipped to support and care for children who have more highly complex needs (e.g. those with disabilities or placement breakdowns).
- With a larger highly skilled pool of foster care our ability to successfully match children to foster carers culturally and with the appropriate skill set.
- A competitive offer that supports the recruitment and retention of foster carers in line with our 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.

## CONSULTATION

**6. What consultation have you undertaken with stakeholders or critical friends about the key findings? What feedback did you receive as part of the consultation?**

We have consulted foster carers across all three local authority areas on:

- The proposed fees and allowances;
- The Foster Child Behavioral Assessment for assessing the complexity of a child's needs;

- The proposed training, development and support framework; and
- Transitional arrangements.

During the consultation, we have:

- Developed a web page with information on the offer and about the consultation, including a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section relating to the development of the IFA in general.
- Run an online consultation using SmartSurvey.
- Provided an 'IFA' email address to which carers can direct their questions and comments.
- Developed a fees and allowances 'impact calculator' for carers.
- Written individual letters to all carers, outlining the proposed Offer to Carers.
- Offered and conducted individual consultations with carers who would see a reduction in their income.
- Offered individual consultations for all carers who would not be negatively impacted by the proposals, but prioritised those carers who would see a reduction in their income.
- Held forums available to all foster carers, where carers were able to share their opinions and where AfC were able to respond to any comments or questions.

#### **Feedback and consultation responses**

The consultation has shown that some foster carers who responded have stated that they could stop being foster carers if the fees are reduced or if they do not continue to have a retainer paid when not having a child or young person placed with them. They also stated that the change in fees would be taken into consideration when deciding whether to take on long-term placements or not.

Given the scale of the changes, this response was expected. As set out previously, although some foster carers may lose out financially as part of the changes, overall, it will bring a considerable number of benefits, most importantly for children and young people, as foster carers will be more equipped to support those with complex needs and those typical hard to place children and young people will be more likely to be placed.

#### **ACTION PLANNING**

<b>7. What issues have you identified that require action?</b>			
<i>Issue identified</i>	<i>Planned action</i>	<i>Lead officer</i>	<i>Completion Date</i>
Income reduction	Working with those impacted to ensure the negative impact doesn't preclude them from continuing as foster carers	IFA Registered Manager	Ongoing

**MONITORING AND REVIEW**

**8. How will the actions identified above be monitored and reviewed and where will the actions be captured i.e. Business Plan, project plan, service and improvement plan, service plan poster or Personal Development Plan?**

As one of the key strategic projects in AfC, the implementation and impact of the new IFA including the new offer, will be monitored regularly as part of the project monitoring framework. The new IFA will also be responsible for working with all existing foster carers to ensure they are supported to carry on as foster carers, in spite of any potential negative impact.

**PUBLISHING THE COMPLETED ANALYSIS**

**When completed, the equality assessment should be approved by a member of AfC Management Team and published on the Achieving for Children website. Please provide details below:**

<b>Approved by</b>	Ian Dodds, Interim Chief Executive, AfC
<b>Date of approval:</b>	December 2018
<b>Date of publication:</b>	