

EQIA Submission – ID Number

Section A

EQIA Title	Future Service Options for External Fostering Arrangements
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Responsible Officer	Rebecca Rhodes
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Type of Activity

Service Change	
Service Redesign	
Project/Programme	
Commissioning/Procurement	✓
Strategy/Policy	
Details of other Service Activity	

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate	Children, Young People and Education
Responsible Service	Integrated Children’s Services
Responsible Head of Service	Christy Holden
Responsible Director	Sarah Hammond

Aims and Objectives

Local Authorities as part of their Sufficiency Duty must take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within its areas to meet the needs of children they are looking after and, helps support social workers in matching their requirements to providers and foster carers.

The aim of this activity is to set out how the Council will meet its responsibilities with regard to children and young people in care living in independent fostering provision through the commissioning of a Framework Agreement and effective contract management.

Kent County Council seeks to commission high quality foster care that provides a family environment in a home, bringing stability and which meets individual Children’s and Young People’s needs and outcomes, at the right time, with the right carers, in the right location.

By April 2022, the Council will secure a framework for Independent Fostering Providers (IFP’s) to join so that placements for children and young people in care assessed as requiring fostering through an IFA is sourced and managed via a contract, in line with Spending the Council’s Money and Public Contract Regulations.

The beneficiaries as a result of further commissioning work are the children in care for whom the Council has a corporate parenting responsibility.

We would not expect to move any children that are already in settled placements as a result of the outcome of the procurement and award of the Framework.

Commissioning a new framework provides an opportunity to re-think the structure of placement types and categories of need and consider additional specialist placements to meet current and emerging needs of our children in care population.

As part of the Council’s standard contractual terms and conditions, service providers will be required to have an Equality and Diversity policy and meet the requirements of all related legislation. This is monitored as part of contract compliance on an annual basis. Social workers have a responsibility under relevant care

planning legislation to monitor their placements to ensure that all their needs are being met and that individual outcomes are being achieved.

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?	Yes
It is possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way?	Yes
Is there national evidence/data that you can use?	Yes
Have you consulted with stakeholders?	Yes

Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?

The Market

- Regular attendance at the Fostering Network Kent Independent Providers Forum (six weekly) Framework and non-Framework (Spot) Providers. A varied agenda including national, regional, and local policy and practice issues and information exchange, Commissioning and Provider issues, KCC updates.
- Regular updates from national bodies including the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers and National Fostering Network.
- KCC led Provider Forum meetings (six monthly) Information exchange and updates, including policy, practice, and performance.
- KCC produced and shared a survey with IFPs to gain an understanding of their experience of working with the current framework agreement as well as any insight of good practice they have from working with other local authorities.
- KCC are running a focus group with IFPs to assist in the shaping of new arrangements.

Our Partner (Medway Council)

- Regular Partnership meetings with Medway Council to manage the existing Framework, including Contract Compliance.

Operational Teams

- Both the Children in Care (CIC) teams and the Total Placement Service (TPS) were approached for their views on the current Framework Agreement and provision.

Children and Young People

- Virtual School Kent's participation team have worked with a small number of children and young people seeking their views on living with IFP carers.

All of the above engagement with stakeholders has enabled opportunities to discuss equality issues and this has influenced the content of the service specification. It is felt that all key stakeholders have been consulted and engaged through the planning and development of the new contract.

Has there been a previous Equality Analysis (EQIA) in the last 3 years?	No
Do you have evidence that can help you understand the potential impact of your activity?	Yes

Section C – Impact

Who may be impacted by the activity?

Service Users/clients	Yes
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Staff	Yes
Residents/Communities/Citizens	No
Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing?	Yes
Details of Positive Impacts	
<p>Development for future IFP provision will mean looked after children and young people can remain in the county and be supported and enabled to integrate socially and develop emotionally within the community. Future IFP provision will achieve this by continuing to support the education of looked after children and young people as well as maintaining appropriate links with family and connected persons.</p> <p>Additional benefits from carrying out this activity include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enabling access to a wide range of foster care placement types from registered, good quality IFP's • Improving placement stability supported by effective matching • Exhibiting strong collaboration and partnership working to ensure the child's needs and outcomes are central • Demonstrating the involvement of the child or young person ensuring their voice is heard and listened to through participation in decision making (where appropriate) • Demonstrating effective and efficient communication to support placement finding <p>The proposal will not impact negatively on children, young people and their families currently receiving these services. The planning and modelling of a new contract will enable us to improve the way we meet a diverse range of needs and achieve the required outcomes by ensuring that the services we commission and purchase from the Independent Fostering sector are fit for purpose and in line with the Council's new Commissioning and Procurement requirements. This will be monitored and evidenced through the robust contract management arrangements and the statutory care reviews. In addition, Independent Fostering Providers are inspected by Ofsted, and the Council regularly monitors the ratings and takes this into consideration should any under-performance or quality requires a sanction process. Continuity of service provision will be ensured by having a transition and mobilisation plan in phase.</p> <p>The external fostering supply market in Kent has not seen considerable growth over the last few years. However, the market does experience some limited instability through periodic ownership changes including equity company buy-outs and parent company changes. Ofsted inspection outcomes will also impact on which providers the Council chooses to work with.</p> <p>The current Framework Agreement includes a total of 36 Independent Fostering Providers, and the provision includes: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term or permanent placements (as per care plan – 12 months and over) • Short Term / Task Focused / Bridging placements (up to 12 months) • Short Break Placements for disabled children • Parent(s) and Child(ren) • Step Down • Emergency (same day, out of hours and/or within 24 hours of referral) • Sibling groups • Solo placements (with no other children within the foster household) <p>The Council wishes to provide greater clarity between which types of placements and age cohorts will be required from IFP's through its Commissioning Strategy including new and emerging demand for specialist</p>	

placement types further benefiting recruitment strategies for the IFP's and the protected groups described in the screening. This will relate to all children and all protected groups and characteristics as this will be identified within the service specification and as part of the referral and matching process for placements. This will also provide greater transparency to the marketplace regarding the Council's future demand and where capacity is required from IFP's.

Every placement is currently based on the individual needs of the child as described in their care plan and placement referral form. This practice will continue under the new commissioning arrangements for Independent Fostering provision.

Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions

19. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age

Are there negative impacts for age?	Yes
Details of negative impacts for Age	
It is clear from data that KCC's in-house fostering service is able to place most of the children in the 0–4-year-old age group. Therefore, the focus of the new IFP Service will rest predominantly on the placement of 5–18-year-olds.	
Mitigating Actions for Age	
Although a new IFP Service will continue to provide and improve the number and quality of local placements available regardless of age group, there will be further commissioning work involving the market to look at the number of placements Kent requires for older children, particularly adolescents. Needs relating to age will be identified in the child/young person's care plan and included in referrals made to IFPs.	
Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age	Madeline Bishop

20. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability

Are there negative impacts for Disability?	
Details of Negative Impacts for Disability	
Mitigating actions for Disability	
Responsible Officer for Disability	

21. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Sex

Are there negative impacts for Sex	No
Details of negative impacts for Sex	
Mitigating actions for Sex	
Responsible Officer for Sex	

22. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender	No
Negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender	
Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender	
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender	

23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Race

Are there negative impacts for Race	No
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Negative impacts for Race	
Mitigating actions for Race	
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race	
24. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Religion and belief	
Are there negative impacts for Religion and belief	No
Negative impacts for Religion and belief	
Mitigating actions for Religion and belief	
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Religion and Belief	
25. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation	
Are there negative impacts for Sexual Orientation	No
Negative impacts for Sexual Orientation	
Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation	
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation	
26. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity	
Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity	No
Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity	
Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity	
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity	
27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships	
Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships	Yes
Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships	
The minimum legal age to enter into marriage is 16. Fostering placements do not allow partners to stay permanently in this type of provision.	
Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships	
Marriage and civil partnerships related needs will be identified in services users' care plans and included in referrals made to IFPs. Support will be provided to signpost service users onto accommodation that will allow partners to stay more often / permanently.	
Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships	Madeline Bishop
28. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities	
Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities	No
Negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities	
Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities	

Responsible Officer for Carer's responsibilities	