

City of London Corporation Children's Service Case File Audits – Summary of findings December 2019

1 Introduction and Methodology

- 1.1 A total of 19 cases were audited during the second half of December 2019 by 4 auditors – two external and two internal from the Corporation. Audits were based solely on a review of the electronic case file and focused on the period June – December 2019. This report provides a brief summary of the findings of these audits.
- 1.2 This report provides reflection on both outcomes and process components of social work practice in the City of London. At least one case from each practitioner was subject to audit. Cases that were audited were not graded.
- 1.3 Cases were broken down by case type as follows:
- 1 early help case
 - 7 children in need cases
 - 5 child protection cases *
 - 4 looked after children **
 - 2 care leavers

*(including 2 recently closed cases who moved to another authority)

** (including 2 children subject to Placement Orders and placed for adoption)

2. Findings

- 2.1 Overall, the audits identify good and outstanding practice demonstrating positive practice development. It is apparent that the introduction of the systemic practice model earlier this year is making impact, particularly upon the quality of supervision. Case notes and supervision notes indicate greater reflection and testing of hypotheses about families.
- 2.2 Process is closely followed at every point of intervention on cases from referral to leaving care. Early help and CIN cases demonstrated that work is targeted and focussed in the right areas to support families. Management direction is written up as case notes, demonstrating



a clarity of process, although some most recent supervision notes have not been uploaded onto the Mosaic system.

- 2.3 There were no cases audited that required immediate notification to the team or service manager due to concerns or a need for remedial action noted by auditors.
- 2.4 Audits generally identified positive direct social work practice and partnership working. Positive relationship-based practice with young people is a strong feature of most cases and social workers work hard to engage and motivate looked after children and care leavers to fulfil their potential. There is evidence of the positive impact that this has on young people's lives. Most young people are seen regularly, are listened to and heard and their wishes and feelings are recorded in assessments, plans and reviews. These findings indicate sustained good practice and highlight positive practice developments from previous audit findings.
- 2.5 Visits are regular and within timescales, however, more attention should be given to ensuring there is evidence that visits are planned with specific outcomes in mind. Recording suggests the visits can appear to be opportunities to "check in" with young people rather than being more purposeful. This makes it difficult to see how some visits drive forward plans and make an impact. The visits tool under Practice Standard 5 in the Practice Handbook should be referred to and reflected in visit recordings. Summaries that are prepared ahead of LAC reviews and CP plans are very helpful in measuring distance travelled but the quality of recordings of the Core Group Meetings that were audited seemed less effective (77870, 77686).
- 2.6 There continues to be little evidence of tools being used to engage with children. We would suggest that visits should be clearer in their purpose, more frequent according to need and that children are seen in different contexts, for example in school and in a non-resident parent's household. We would also expect to see social workers using a variety of direct work skills and creativity. Again, Practice Standard 5 in the Handbook should be considered when planning direct work.
- 2.7 Detailed findings in each section are set out below.

a) Referral and Response

- 2.8 The quality of the few referral and contact forms that were audited as part of this process continues to be good. They are generally timely and appropriately detailed. However, questions remain about whether responses are always proportionate or over-reactive. For example, 71570 where the family had been referred previously following a suicide attempt and then re-opened to support a young person with developing a CV and applying for work when she was already engaged in education and in CAMHS service.



b) Assessment

- 2.9 Assessments take place within agreed timeframes – for example 10 days for CP cases and more if required to allow for more in-depth assessment in LAC or Care Leaver cases. It means that cases are considered quickly, and this reduces delay and drift. Extensions to timeframes are clearly authorised by the team manager.
- 2.10 Assessments are of good quality . It would seem this is partly due to the systemic training that the City of London have invested in.
- 2.11 Fathers are absent in some assessment reports (100291, 83526, 72697). Attempts are made to engage but these are not followed through and these attempts are often via text or email, rather than clear attempts to visit or meet with them. For example, in 83526, father’s work commitments are presented as justification for the worker not making stronger efforts to meet with him and therefore involve him in the assessment process, even though he is a significant member of the family unit and lives in the family home. This has been an issue commented on in previous audit programmes and some improvement is noted in this audit, for example in 77686 and his sibling 77687.
- 2.12 Whilst chronologies were found on all cases in the audit sample, these still tend to describe children’s services process events e.g. visits made, meetings held, case transfers, assessments completed rather than providing information on the child or any concerns at that time and the outcome for the child. This is a missed opportunity for practitioners to provide greater clarity about each child/family history and therefore inform the assessment process. The MOSAIC Chronology function is not well used.
- 2.13 Most case records have a risk assessment document completed. However, it appears that the risk assessment is often used as a “one-off” process and the assessment is not reviewed as new information becomes available. We would question whether the template is fit for purpose. The template limits the scope for analysis, evaluation and conclusion and it does not provide an option to comment on unknown risk or scale or grade risk. Furthermore, there is no capacity to evidence whether the assessment has been seen or authorised by a manager or to suggest what next steps should or could be followed to respond to identified risks and vulnerabilities. Auditors queried the purpose of the risk assessment document as it is not clear with whom this is shared or how the risk assessment document links in with supervision or the child’s plan.



c) Implementation and intervention

- 2.14 The Early Help practice audited was purposeful and well-focused on specific outcomes for children. The quality of intervention is very good and the consistent quality of supervision by the Early Help Coordinator supports strong and reflective practice.
- 2.15 Most cases have chronologies, genograms, photos and case summaries on them which are helpful and informative. Most have been updated in the past 6-month period.
- 2.16 Records are updated promptly, and case records are child focussed and detailed. Notwithstanding, some records are less clear about the impact of their interventions – for example, what has been learned from each contact/discussion and how it might inform on going direct work or plans or decision making processes and what still needs to be understood or explored further. This hampers their ability to demonstrate their “workings out” behind plans and other interventions (103751, 72697). However, auditors remarked that young people would be able to make sense of their histories when they access their own files post 18.
- 2.17 Visits are undertaken regularly and in timescale according to the type of case that was audited. Whilst children are routinely seen alone and intervention is child focussed, there is a mindfulness evident in some cases that parents need some support to enable them to bring their children up and this is helpful. However, there is little evidence that visits are rigorously planned with clear outcomes to be achieved and the impact assessed at the conclusion in several cases. This makes it difficult to assess whether visits drive plans forward and that intervention makes an impact to the child. No evidence of ecomaps was found in this sample and evidence of “showing the working out” and the preparation process was lacking. Often visit seem to be an opportunity for social workers merely to “check in”.
- 2.18 Case 84586 is a good example of where a social worker has worked hard to engage with a young person who frequently goes missing, to understand his pattern of behaviour and reduce (successfully) his missing episodes.
- 2.19 Case 103751 provides strong evidence of good quality direct work.
- 2.20 Placements for looked after children and care leavers are good quality and stable. There is evidence of good partnership working with Tenancy Support Officers (71813).
- 2.21 Children’s views and wishes were observed to be woven throughout records. This demonstrates that workers are considering the child’s world from their perspective.
- 2.22 The Prospects Service has been observed to be particularly helpful in supporting young people with their choices around education and transitioning to the workplace (72697, 77686).



d) **Planning and Review**

- 2.23 There was little evidence of contingency planning in the sample audited.
- 2.24 In the sample of LAC cases that were audited, there is evidence of good quality LAC reviews. LAC Reviews are recorded as a letter written to young people.
- 2.25 The IRO “footprint” is apparent on all but a very few files with evidence of timely midpoint reviews (94436 and 83206, siblings who have been placed with prospective adopters) and ongoing scrutiny and oversight by the IRO in specific case notes.
- 2.26 The Pathway Plan reviewed by an independent officer demonstrates good practice and is positive (71813).

e) **Supervision and Management oversight**

- 2.27 The quality of supervision has improved considerably since the previous audit. Supervision is held frequently and regularly although across all the cases audited, auditors found that most recently supervision had had not been updated on the file at the time of the audit (as at 23/12/2019).
- 2.28 Supervision records indicate careful and thoughtful consideration of children’s circumstances where hypotheses are developed and usually explored. Actions are set up to move cases forward although these are not always SMART and if these are not completed, they are simply moved to the next supervision date, with little challenge recorded as to why tasks are incomplete. That said, there is also evidence of robust tracking of actions which is effective (84586).
- 2.29 Key decisions are authorised, for example when assessments are signed off, although at times it would be helpful for analysis and rationale to be more detailed and explicit (103751).
- 2.30 Supervision takes account of previous audit recommendations and elements of plans to ensure that things are kept on track.
- 2.31 The “Top 3” meeting provides oversight and monitoring by top tier management and is a multi-agency process. This is effective for keeping track on specific cases and provides direction and SMART plans (72697). This case is also subject to consultation with a systemic practice consultant who offers to provide family therapy to support the parent-child relationship.
- 2.32 Furthermore, the Assistant Director meets with a looked after child (84586) in order to ensure his care was within expectations and follows up with a letter to confirm the contents of their



discussion and detail actions that still needed to take place. This demonstrates positive corporate parenting.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 There is clear evidence of the positive impact of the City of London Corporation's investment in the systemic approach within children's services, particularly in the quality of social work assessment and supervision. Case files that were audited demonstrate positive child focused, reflective practice and the testing of hypotheses in good quality interaction and intervention across most cases. Supervision takes account of the recommendations of LAC reviews, previous audits and individual plans helping to keep things on track.
- 3.2 Processes are followed well and interventions are compliant with statutory and practice requirements.
- 3.3 Areas for improvement should include a focus on developing these skills into the planning of visits to ensure that social workers are purposeful and consider their impact and are able to move cases on more quickly and effectively. This will support the development of effective plans and help social workers measure progress. It is acknowledged that the social work team are still learning and implementing the skills they have learned and it is good to see that they are making use of consultation from advanced systemic practitioners.
- 3.4 Assessments are overall completed in timescale and timescales are appropriately shortened or extended dependent upon the child's circumstances. Assessments would benefit from more consistent engagement s from fathers when they play significant roles in the lives of their children.
- 3.5 Early help practitioners provide an excellent level of service.

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