

Committee: Safeguarding Sub-Committee	Dated: 10/02/2020
Subject: Service Development Plan 2019–20	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children’s Services	For Information
Report author: Rachel Green, Service Manager, Children’s Social Care and Early Help	

Summary

The Service Development Plan has been updated to provide evidence of progress in the last quarter with the work of the Children’s Social Care and Early Help Service.

The cover report highlights work that has had a good impact on children and families – for example, care leavers receiving their full financial entitlements such as having top-up funding for their winter fuel bills, and children with disabilities having a wider range of social and leisure opportunities available to them. The report also highlights where further drive to complete work is needed, such as finalising contracts for additional mental health support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) as they move into adulthood.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

The Children’s Social Care and Early Help Service Development Plan

1. The aims sit under the five priorities in the Children and Young People’s Plan, which are:
 - a. **Safe:** our children and young people are safe and feel safe.
 - b. **Potential:** our children and young people have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and are well prepared to achieve in adulthood.
 - c. **Independence, involvement and choice:** our children and young people are co-producers of cultural and support services. They will have the resources to develop independence, and the empowerment to play an active role in their communities and exercise choice over their services.
 - d. **Health and wellbeing:** our children and young people enjoy good health and wellbeing.

- e. **Community:** our children and young people grow up with a sense of belonging as part of cohesive and resilient communities. They are able to create and participate in the cultural and creative opportunities available in the Square Mile.
2. The attached Service Development Plan (see Appendix 1) shows how each aim has been progressed over the last quarter. Following a review of this plan at the Achieving Excellence Board on 14 January 2020, some aims that are duplicated in the staff handbook have been removed to streamline the document. The Board also recommended focusing specifically on the impact of our work on children and families. In the 2020/21 plan there will be an 'impact' column to highlight embedded evidence.

The impact of our work on children and families in the last quarter

3. *Consistency:* as a result of the work undertaken by the Children's Social Care and Early Help Service in the last quarter, children should receive a more consistent service, as new and current social workers have a fully refreshed an up-to-date practice handbook and clear guidance.
4. *Financial wellbeing:* care leavers are receiving their full financial entitlements with, for example, additional funds to help with their winter fuel bill. This is because Tenancy Support and commissioned providers have received and are using our financial entitlement guidance.
5. *Value:* care leavers have said that they liked having the Deputy Team Manager chair their pathway plan reviews, and that they felt important as a manager was visiting them in their home.
6. *Clarity:* staff feedback is positive about the Deputy Team Manager chairing the first Child in Need (CIN) meetings. Staff have informally reported added confidence when there is conflict in working relationships. There was positive overall feedback from December audits on CIN planning quality. This means there was better and clearer planning for families.
7. *Speed:* young people have had a shorter wait for age assessment completion with the service returning to being provided in-house. The quality is better, and challenge and uncertainty are avoided.
8. *Choice:* families have more choice in short breaks for their children following joint commissioning work between the Children's Social Care and Early Help Service and that of the Education and Early Years' Service. More leisure opportunities gives children with disabilities a better chance of finding an activity that suits them.
9. *Quality:* young people can have confidence in their placements, and will not experience poor-quality provision as we have taken sub-standard providers off our list of options.

10. *Positive relationships*: children and young people continue to be able to contact their social worker easily and have good-quality relationships as their caseloads have reduced due to additional staffing. December audits show that relationships are a real strength of our work, and that our social work practice is having a meaningful impact on children's lives.
11. *Broader thinking*: systemic training and use of the systemic clinician is improving our thinking, offering opportunities for wider thinking, and looking for solutions within the family. Families have had the benefit of joint therapeutic work, and family feedback has been positive so far on the help offered.

Key achievements

12. Key achievements in the last quarter include, among others, development in our practice with children with disabilities.
13. *Children with disabilities*: joint work has taken place between the Children's Social Care and Early Help and Education and Early Years Services. Managers and frontline staff from both services have attended training together on special educational needs and disability (SEND), including on best practice in Education, Health and Care (EHC) planning. Further joint training and workshops are in the diary for this quarter, including the London SEND strategic managers and parent carer network. There is now a Social Work Lead in this area, and the service is piloting a pathway for children with disabilities. A children's disability workshop has been planned and arranged for the afternoon of Monday 10 February.
14. *Refugee Week*: a celebration focused on the theme of 'imagine' will take place after Committee on Monday 15 June. Members are invited to celebrate with young people at an event that will include poetry, drama, dance, music and food, all surrounded by flags of the countries our young people are from. All will work together to produce a large map of the world, covering where we are all from. Discussions are in the early stages with the City of London School as part of a further enrichment programme.
15. *Social work leads*: one of the challenges of having one Social Care team is ensuring that all areas of practice are covered. It is not practicable to train each staff member in all topics on a yearly basis. All staff are training in systemic social work practice, and time is precious. To ensure that our offer to families is of a consistently excellent quality, each social worker has responsibility for leading on an area of practice, and then sharing their expertise. Social work leads cover children with disabilities, gangs/child exploitation, UASC, modern day slavery, and adoption.
16. *Senior Social Worker*: proposals to build in recognition of experience and qualifications have been accepted, with the formation of a senior social worker increment. This is building towards our practice learning hub jointly with adult social care, and recognises the work of practice educators in our service.

17. *Group supervision*: this is taking place monthly, is well attended and valued by staff, including administrative staff who are supporting young people and families behind the scenes. Group supervision means there is a broad skills base. This leads to all staff contributing to thinking through a family situation, which builds expertise and allows for creativity.

Areas for development

18. Most of the actions are RAG-rated 'green' or 'blue'. None are rated 'red'. A few actions remain as 'amber' and need further work to be undertaken. Key areas include:

19. *Mental health*: currently our looked-after children have access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and we spot purchase bespoke provision where needed. Action 1 of the Health and Wellbeing section remains 'amber'. The plan that was being progressed at the last Committee was to access the Clinical Service at the London Borough of Hackney, with bespoke UASC support groups. That plan has now changed, and our Director of Community and Children's Services has requested a new plan to design a service with Coram and the Tavistock Centre. This action remains 'amber' as a proposal is awaited. Progress is tracked via monthly meetings between Commissioning and Children's Social Care.

20. *Social isolation*: key workers and social workers ensure that young people have access to local activities and are connected to community groups. Young people entering our care as UASC say that they are bored while waiting for education to start, and after education has started with so much free time, given full time courses ordinarily provide 15 hours tuition a week. Young people would like more trips across London and would like more opportunity to practise English-speaking skills to improve their social connections and advance in their careers faster. Our Commissioning team and Independent Reviewing Officer are progressing work to make this happen.

21. *Direct work with children*: practitioners have built up their use of the systemic clinician, and are using consultations to plan direct work. The clinician is undertaking joint work with practitioners, and the feedback is positive. For example, one family residing in the City has found the systemic family work really valuable and it has supported them in better communication within their home.

22. Our audits showed strong, relationship-based practice, but also that planning and undertaking direct work needed further development. Training/coaching sessions are planned with staff in February alongside promoting the uptake of consultation with the systemic clinician to boost confidence and ability in this area.

Conclusion

23. There has been strong momentum in our work over the last quarter, particularly in strengthening our work with children with disabilities, in extending the short breaks services available to families, and in fully embedding systemic practice.
24. December audits provided evidence of good management oversight of cases and excellent relational work. The next areas of focus are around direct work with children, extending our mental health and wellbeing offer, and enabling a fuller social and leisure timetable for our young people on entry to our care.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Service Development Plan 2019–20

Rachel Green

Service Manager, Children's Social Care and Early Help

T: 020 7332 3501

E: rachel.green@cityoflondon.gov.uk