

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Safeguarding Sub-Committee	07/02//2022
<b>Subject:</b> Practice Assurance Stocktake Children's Social Care	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	Outcome 1
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Pat Dixon, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service	

### Summary

In October 2021, 27 cases open to the Children and Families team and Early Help service were reviewed by independent auditors from Aidhour and an independent consultant who chairs the Achieving Excellence Board for the City of London. The review was a practice assurance stocktake across the spectrum of cases open to the team. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the quality and impact of practice against the findings and recommendations from the last Ofsted inspection for Children's Services in March 2020. This report summarises the findings and the steps taken in relation to the recommendations.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. As part of the quality assurance framework, independent auditors, Aidhour, are commissioned on a quarterly basis to complete audits on a selection of cases open to the Children and Families team and Early Help service. The quality assurance work carried out by Aidhour is reported on and reviewed at the Achieving Excellence Board, which is also chaired by an independent consultant.
2. In October 2021, the independent chair of the Achieving Excellence Board was commissioned to complete a practice assurance stocktake on a selection of

cases open to the Children and Families team and Early Help service. This corresponded with the audits being completed by Aidhour. To minimise disruption to the Children and Families team and Early Help service, it was agreed that Aidhour's audits would be completed in conjunction with the stocktake.

### **Current Position**

3. A total of 27 cases were reviewed, 17 were reviewed in depth with the social workers and cases, 10 were given a less in-depth review. The cases reviewed were sourced from across the whole spectrum of children's social care services: Early Help, Children in Need, Child Protection, Looked-after Children and Young People, and Care Leavers. The review combined reading through case notes on the electronic recording system, Mosaic, and case discussions with the allocated worker. The impact review forms completed by the reviewers were subsequently shared with the allocated workers and their managers. The value of these meetings was that the allocated worker and their manager had the opportunity to clarify and challenge any issues.
4. The baseline used to measure the outcome of the practice assurance stocktake was the full Ofsted inspection in March 2020. Through the case-reviewing process, the practice assurance stocktake sought to evaluate whether the City of London had successfully implemented the recommendations and other areas for improvement. It also sought to establish whether the areas that contributed to the outstanding judgements had been sustained. The evaluation schedule applied by Ofsted for their inspections of local authority children's services was used for evaluating the quality and impact of practice. In line with inspection procedure, the practice assurance stocktake reviewed the quality and impact of practice over the last six months.

### **Summary of Findings**

5. Overall, the practice assurance stocktake identified excellent social work practice across all areas. As would be expected in a development review of the service, the stocktake identified areas for further focused work to ensure that the recommendations from the inspection were consistently embedded within practice. The response to contacts was good with some excellent features, and conscientious practice was evidenced.
6. The quality of relationships between practitioners, children, young people and families continues to be of an exceptionally high quality. This is strengthened by good partnership working and regular communication evidenced in case notes, professionals/network meetings and reviews.
7. In terms of child protection, no cases reviewed identified a child requiring immediate safeguarding measures to be put in place. One child protection case did require further exploration by the auditor regarding the historical decision-making and risk assessment; this case was resolved following discussions with the Head of Service. In some of the cases reviewed it was identified that there could be more professional curiosity applied to understand

potential exploitation/contextual safeguarding indicators. In some cases, more evidence was needed on the child's lived experience, as the needs of the adults seemed to be the primary focus.

8. Personal education plans and Education, Health and Care Plans were of an excellent quality. They were comprehensive and were used as a driver to improve outcomes for children and young people. Visits took place at appropriate and expected intervals. Practitioners had felt supported and safeguarded by the City of London Corporation during COVID-19.
9. Children and young people have benefitted from good quality placements, both regulated and unregulated. Oversight of unregulated placements appeared to have been reduced somewhat and are only activated when a concern is raised, rather than being a dynamic oversight. Regulation 44 reports were not being used to good effect as an oversight mechanism.
10. There are now systems being implemented to resolve these concerns, whereby all Regulation 44 reports are being sent to Commissioning to be used as part of the quality assurance process. There is also a quality assurance framework in place for 2022 to review both regulated and unregulated placements.
11. There were good examples of direct work with children and young people identified in both face-to-face and virtual visits. Some practitioners had noted that virtual visits with some young people had been far more successful than face-to-face visits, and there had been a greater level of engagement. Less time involved in travelling and the ability to arrange convenient times were highlighted as positive aspects of virtual meetings.
12. There continued to be strong evidence on case files and in discussions with practitioners of the effective application of systemic thinking and practice. Some excellent examples and insight were provided in discussions with allocated practitioners, which included a greater curiosity about culture, wider family networks and dynamics, and knowledge of the impact of trauma. Reviewers found that, although records on the case files were good, there was a greater depth of analysis, hypothesis and planning in discussions with practitioners which, if included in records, would improve the quality.
13. The practice assurance stocktake identified that the application of systemic thinking and practice was variable in supervision notes. There were some exceptional examples of supervision seen in Early Help cases that provided evidence of child-focused planning, hypothesis, analysis and reflection. In other areas, supervision was found to be present on files but the frequency and timeliness of uploading notes was inconsistent.
14. Practitioners working with looked-after children and care leavers continued to go the extra mile. Services to care leavers were effective and were described as "working like a well-oiled machine". There was strong evidence of creative thinking and activity in engaging young people. As mentioned previously, COVID-19 and the necessary virtual working provided an opportunity to

engage with young people more frequently and with greater success. There is also evidence of face-to-face support to young people at important events and meetings that has strengthened relationships.

### **Options**

15. N/A

### **Proposals**

16. N/A

### **Key Data**

17. N/A

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

18. Financial implications – N/A

19. Resource implications – N/A

20. Legal implications – N/A

21. Risk implications – N/A

22. Equalities implications – N/A

23. Climate implications – N/A

24. Security implications – N/A

### **Conclusion**

25. The practice assurance stocktake completed in October 2021 provides evidence of the excellent relationships that practitioners have with the children and young people open to the Children and Families team and Early Help service. The review also highlights the use of innovative strategies to engage with some of the children and their families, which has improved outcomes for the young people involved. Where there were areas for improvement, managers have acted quickly to implement the review's recommendations.

26. On 7 January 2022, an Achieving Excellence meeting was held to review the progress of the recommendations. This meeting was chaired by the Assistant Director of People. The recommendations that were made on each case were reviewed: the majority had been implemented; and those outstanding were followed up and acted on following the meeting. It should also be noted that the practice assurance stocktake took place during a period of change for the Children and Families team and Early Help service. Some of the practitioners

who were involved in the Ofsted Inspection in 2020 had left and there were new practitioners who had recently joined the team.

## **Appendices**

None.

### **Pat Dixon**

Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service  
Department of Community and Children's Services

T: 020 7332 1215

E: [pat.dixon@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:pat.dixon@cityoflondon.gov.uk)