



# **Annual Quality Assurance Report**

**April 2015 to April 2016**

## **Introduction**

In April 2015 a restructure of Children's Social Care took place, this corresponded with changes in staff within the social work team and management structure. Part of this restructure was the formation of a new Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, which corresponded with the independent reviewing service being delivered by the City of London. This provided independent scrutiny, as it separated this service from the Children and Families Team, which is a generic children's team that covers commissioned adoption services, early help, children in need, children with disabilities, child protection, children looked after and care leavers.

The total number of cases open to the Children and Families Team at and the end of April 2016 was 66. The average case load for a social worker is between 13 to 15 cases, and the case loads are varied, covering the full range of services offered by the team. This requires a good understanding of the legal framework that covers these services and the guidance that goes alongside.

This report will review the quality assurance activity that has taken place within Children's Social Care between April 2015 and March 2016, identifying strengths and areas for development in line with the quality assurance framework. Recommendations for service improvement have been fed back as part of the quality assurance cycle are noted within the identified areas for development set out in the report.

### **Quality Assurance Activity**

For the purpose of this report I have reviewed the quality assurance activity that has taken place from April 2015 through to April 2016 in regard to the Children and Families Team, reviewing the outcomes and progress from the following audits and quality assurance activity that has taken place;

- Quarterly Early Help audits
- Thematic audits carried out in June 2015 on Children in Need, Child Protection, Children Looked After including pathway planning and Missing arrangements.
- Aidhour audit cycle completed on all open cases and 8 closed cases in quarter 3 2015.
- Multi- agency audits completed bi-annually through the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children's Board, (CHSCB) with theme's identified by the CHSCB quality assurance sub group.
- The Assistant Director of People's oversight of case work and annual visits to Children Looked After in the City.
- Information from the Director Community and Children's Services and Lead Member.

There is evidence through the above activity that the Quality Assurance Framework has been implemented and imbedded into practice.

The framework has been under constant review to ensure that it meets the needs of the service and the following amendments have been made:

- changes to the auditing tool being used, to support a clear and coherent analysis on frontline practice
- rationalising the auditing cycle to minimise the impact on frontline practitioners, whilst keeping a line of sight over practice.

Findings from audit form part of a continuous cycle of improvement. Case specific findings are fed back to social workers and the Team Manager in a timely fashion. Thematic findings are fed into the service improvement work led by the Children Families Service Manager via quarterly quality assurance meetings between the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service and the Children and Families management team. Finally, thematic findings that form part of the service improvement plan are fed into the Children Services Senior Management Team, Departmental Leadership Team and the Service Improvement Board.

### **Overall Strength Identified by Audits**

- Overall the outcomes for Children and Young People in the City of London are good, and at times outstanding.
- There is good evidence of multi-agency working on case files and the majority of assessments.
- The AD of People writes to all the children looked after annually to arrange to see them in placement.
- Supervision is clear and concise, with timely actions; there is also evidence of case discussion and reflection.

- The in-house IRO service has significantly improved the service for Children Looked After, and children subject to a Child Protection Plan.
- Reports and plans for children and young people are child focused and permanency plans are now in place.
- There is evidence of independent challenge from the IRO in reviews and conferences.
- Children and young people are seen by the IRO between reviews, recordings of these visits are child focused and show a good relationship between the IRO and the young person.
- Staying put arrangements for care leavers are supported and encouraged, overall placement stability is good.
- There are good examples of direct work with children by the social workers and recording of visits give a clear picture of the child.
- The majority of the assessments completed are good and evidence a child focused approach.
- There is good support for children and young people in relation to the emotional and mental wellbeing, all young people are offered a CAMHS assessment when coming into care.

#### **Overall Development Areas identified by Audits**

- Review of templates around care planning to support an outcome focused approach. This has been actioned with full review of templates completed.
- Life story work to be progressed with Children Looked After and Care Leavers as soon as coming into care; This has been actioned with evidence of engagement between Social Workers and CLA around life story happening at early stage after coming into care.
- Ensure that in CIN cases where engagement with families or young people are proving difficult and where statutory interventions are not required, case files to set out reasons clearly and attempts made to engage families. Action linked to commissioning of research into work with affluent families.
- Thresholds around the step up and step down process in a small number of cases are not being applied appropriately when there are safeguarding concerns and consent is not being given by parents
- Ensure Pathway Plans are updated. This has been actioned following audit feedback.
- Ensure return interviews for children who go missing are commissioned and carried out within timescales. This has been actioned.

#### **Five Early Help Audits**

Early help auditing takes place on a quarterly basis. Findings are reported to the EH Sub Group. Audits identified that overall, the offer of early help is strong. CAF activity is undertaken by the Early Help worker, and engagement from school and health is positive and has an impact on the lives of the children and families engaged in the process.

Areas for development included:

- Audits identified the need to ensure practice standards regarding CAF process were understood. This was actioned through development work carried out by the EH Coordinator.
- Information sharing and consent in respect of CAF quality assurance needed to be understood by partners. This was actioned via the EH sub group.

#### **Aidhour audit cycle in Quarter 3 and Quarter 4**

Aidhour were commissioned to complete audits on all the cases open and eight closed cases in Quarter 3 and 4. Audits were initially completed from data from Frameworki; revisions were made to some of the audits following discussion with the case workers. Follow up review of audits to check on progress was carried out end of Quarter3. Smaller audit was completed in Quarter 4.

The Children and Families service fully engaged in the audit and addressed audit findings in a timely fashion. Social workers fed back that they found the direct engagement with auditors helpful.

The areas of strength and development from these audits have been highlighted above. In addition to the findings, in terms of process the audit identified that on occasion information such as ethnicity and documents were not always uploaded onto Frameworki in a timely fashion. This could be improved by the improved use of the compliance and administration officer functions in the service thereby relieving pressure on social work time. As a result of this, the People Senior Management Team has commissioned an Administration Review to help improve efficiency and effectiveness of administration processes.

#### **Multi- Agency Audits**

The joint City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Board carry out multi-agency audits in the corresponding local authorities twice a year; these audits inform the board of the strengths of multi-agency practice and identify area of improvement, both in terms of practice and organisational leadership. Identified actions from these audits are then included onto an action plan and monitored through the QA sub group of the board.

#### **Overall Strengths**

- Evidence that agencies were contributing towards assessments and working together to meet the needs of the child.
- Agencies co-ordinated resources to support the family during a difficult time.
- Evidence of a “Think Family Approach” between adult and children’s services.
- Communication between partner agencies in supporting families’ engagement with agencies.
- The use of escalation procedures when required, resulting in the engagement of the agency in the child protection process.
- Agencies were able to balance the needs and vulnerabilities of the parent, whilst not losing focus on the child.

- Early identification of risk from partner agencies which contributed to a cohesive approach in supporting a mother and baby.
- Evidence of professional awareness around potential risks when managing domestic abuse.
- Professional going above and beyond their remit to ensure continuity to children and families, Health visitor support child until he was settled in school.

#### **Areas for Development**

- Surgeries to be aware and provide services for patients with a disability. This has been actioned by the Lead health professional who supported surgery in reviewing their practices in relation to patients with disabilities.
- Health Visitors are to be given a comprehensive handover on new cases. This has been actioned by the Lead health professional has reviewed the protocol in regard to cases and this is in place and being used.
- Staff need to receive monthly supervision which is clear in regard to decision making and timely. This has been progressed and is evidenced by auditing process.
- For professionals to know and understand the Child Protection Conference process and their role. This has been actioned by the service and CP chair.
- Not allowing litigious parents to distract the focus away from the children by making threats. Research by Goldsmiths commissioned to explore link between neglect and affluence and role of social work in tackling this. Report due summer 2016.

#### **Feedback from visits carried out by Assistant Director People**

The Assistant Director of People visited six young people in their placement, all those contacted knew who their social worker and how to contact them.

- All young people spoke very positively about their relationship with their social worker. It was clear that young people felt supported by their Social Worker.
- Several young people were able to immediately produce contact details for both their social worker and IRO wanting to demonstrate that they had their details on their phones. Nobody complained that they had difficulty contacting their social worker or IRO.
- All the looked after children knew of the Virtual School Head (VSH). There was less immediate recognition of the VSH compared to the social worker and IRO but again, when prompted all were able to say that they were aware of who the VSH was.
- They were also to reference the role of the VSH regarding PEPs and cited examples of the VSH attending college and schools for PEP meetings. Less young people knew how to contact the VSH compared to the social worker and IRO.
- In relation to foster carer's feedback, all knew how to contact the social worker, IRO and VSH. Several carers spoke very highly of the support provided by each professional for example, one carer stated that they had never had an IRO visit any of the children in placement in between reviews in the way the City IRO had done so.
- At the time of visiting all but 1 of the placements were stable. The young person in the less stable placement was going through a planned placement move. Despite the associated challenges in this case, the young person stated that they felt very much supported by their social worker.

### **Additional interventions**

Following the visits further suggested interventions were fed back to the service including;

- Work experience was set up in the CoL Corporation Public Relations Office for 1 young person wanting to pursue a career in journalism.
- Cricket development opportunities were arranged via Lords/ MCC development training programme for 2 young people.
- Funding of extra tuition arrangements were addressed for 1 young person
- The IRO will be continuing to promote their role via work with the CiCC.

### **Quality Assurance oversight Departmental Leadership Team**

The following activities have been undertaken by the Assistant Director People during Quarters 3 and 4 2015/16.

### **Visits to Children Looked After**

The AD carried out a number of visits to CLA( 55% of CLA population) in their placements as part of the bi-annual programme of visits.

The visits form part of the AD's quality assurance activity and focus on exploring the quality of the relationship between the young person and the service as a corporate parent.

### **Audit**

As part of the implementation of the QA strategy, the AD chaired 'Getting to Good' oversight improvement meeting of cases that were judged as Requires Improvement.

Following the 2015/16 quarter three audit programme, six cases were subject to review through this forum. Learning from this exercise included;

- An assurance report that confirmed the status of all CLA and Care Leavers having a Passport/ Birth Certificate/ NI number and actions required to ensure where applicable this documentation was available.
- The placement sufficiency strategy was reviewed. Confirmation that placement finding following disruption was robust and effective.
- Evidence that learning from case audits had been fed back into the management / supervision process.

### **Performance Monitoring**

Fortnightly performance monitoring meetings chaired by the AD provided oversight of front door activity and provided basis to determine if caseloads are manageable, compliance against practice standards were met and decision making was timely and effective.

This forum has supported the need to build additional social work capacity to meet increasing CLA demand; monitored impact of front door oversight of non-City resident contacts and overseen partnership referral activity.

### **Permanency Planning Tracking meetings**

On a quarterly basis, the AD People chairs the Permanency Planning Tracking meetings. This forum invites social workers to set out the permanency plans for all CLA, ensuring that drift is avoided and actions undertaken to secure permanency as soon as is possible.

Through the challenge and support provided via this forum, delaying issues in relation to a SGO process were identified and addressed. The learning from this supported the timely implementation of a second SGO for a City CLA.

### **Director of Community and Children's Services and Lead Member**

The Director of Community and Children's Services has a clear line of sight on frontline practice, reviewing cases files on Frameworki on an ad hoc basis. He has also reviewed two cases in depth, which has involved discussions with the allocated social workers.

The following meetings have also been observed by the Lead Member:

- The Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) meeting.
- A Child in Need Review, with the parents' consent.
- Observed a Child Protection Conference in May 2016.
- Attended Children's Executive Board.
- City Safeguarding Executive and the LSCB.

Members also receive regular updates in the Safeguarding subcommittee from the Children and Families Team and the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service on the performance and key priorities of Children's Social Care Service.



## **Conclusion**

This annual report gives an overview of the quality assurance activity that has taken place between 2015 and 2016 in line with the Quality Assurance Framework. The report has focused on highlighting key strengths and areas of development that audit and quality assurance activity has identified.

As highlighted in this report, quality assurance activity has a demonstrable impact on the quality of work carried out by the Children and Families and partners. As previously noted, there is clear evidence that the findings from audits are being fed back to social workers and the Team Manager, and are being acted upon in a timely fashion. Furthermore, the thematic findings are fed directly into the Children and Families Service improvement plan which is monitored by the Children Services Senior Management Team, Departmental Leadership Team and the Service Improvement Board.

It is positive that as a result of audit activity, there has been evidence of improvement in respect of life story work, pathway planning and missing interviews. Future audit activity will include focus on ensuring that progress in these and the other areas identified for improvement are sustained.

This report identifies considerable strengths around frontline practice and line of sight from the Departmental Leadership Team and Members. In terms of supporting potential improved efficiency and effectiveness of practice, an administration review will be undertaken that will potentially relieve admin burdens on social workers and ensure that admin process and documentation management do not detract from the core business of social workers carrying out high quality direct work with their children and families.

**Pat Dixon**

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**May 2016**