

ANNEX 1 - Children with Disabilities (CWD) C&F Assessment Dip Sample Audit Report

A request was made, in support of CWD practice improvement and learning, to undertake a dip sample of C&F assessments.

The dip sample from December 2022 consisted of 29 C&F assessments selected from CWD services across Surrey; the assessments were undertaken between May 2021 and November 2022.

Purpose: The purpose of this dip sample audit is specific to understand the quality and timeliness of C&F assessments completed within CWD over the period May 2021 – November 2022.

1. Audit Cohort:

29 children were initially selected for the audit based on the following criteria:

- C&F assessment completed by CWD
- Comprised of children and young people from across the borough.
- Selected from the period May 2021 to November 2022
- Children and young people were selected from a CWD cohort that had the following subcategories: C&F completed, subject of child protection and had had a Sec 47 completed, though not met threshold for ICPC.

The areas of practice assessed in the dip sample:

- Timeliness of the C&F
- Consent to share information.
- Was the child or young person seen? (Whether seen alone and reason provided for this if not)
- Did the C&F capture the lived experience of the child or young person?
- Did the C&F document contain well referenced interactions with partner agencies?
- Did the C&F use the facility of a genogram, chronology, and parental capacity to inform an understanding the parent(s) history?
- Is there evidence of MI within the content of the assessment?
- Did the C&F utilise family strengths in completing an outcome focused plan?
- Where there had been a previous C&F, did the previous C&F reduce risk and improve the child or young person's lived experience?
- Was there an appropriate response to safeguarding concerns?
- Was the C&F of good overall quality?

2. Key Findings:

- The assessments were completed for a range of reasons, neglect, parental dysfunction, parent child interactional difficulties, learning disabilities, CSE, child and adult mental health.
- There was a need to improve the overall content in the majority of the C&Fs. The themes specific to the need to improve the content of assessment are set out below.
- In all the assessments audited, the practice was safe.
- Where there was a safeguarding issue the response was proportional.
- There is evidence of safety planning that is at the appropriate level of need and proportional to needs presenting, however there is also evidence of drift in terms of review of plans evolving from out of timescale C&Fs for example.
- The child is recorded as having been seen in all the audits completed.
- Where the child has been seen, though not been seen alone, there is rationale provided.
- Ethnicity is recorded on all assessments audited. There are instances whereby ethnicity is explored within the assessment, though on the whole, such could have been better utilised within the assessment to inform the assessment content.

3. Themes within the assessments

- 1. There is a need to focus on providing a brief statement to identify the purpose of the assessment being undertaken. There is also a need to summarise the section ‘What led to this assessment’**
 - Providing a brief clear statement as to why the C&F is being undertaken assists the reader and provides clarity to the beginning of the assessment.
 - The need to summarise the ‘What led to this Assessment’. Providing a succinct overview of what led to the assessment is essential as it assists the reader and provides clarity and focus to the need for the assessment to be undertaken. In these C&Fs, there is evidence of cut and paste entries that makes the reading of the document less fluid overall and needing the clarity of purpose provided by a succinct statement.
- 2. Where an assessment is *in* timescale, this is usually due to it being in response to a safeguarding issue specifically as part of process toward ICPC or initiating CLA process.**
 - This factor is relevant in all audits related to CP and 1 CLA. This is evidence to show that safeguarding issues have been responded to in a timely and proportional manner.
- 3. There is a predominance of out-of-date assessments in the dip sample.**
 - There are assessments that are significantly out of date in terms of overall timescale from initiating to completion.

- Whilst these assessments are significantly out of date, there are no instances of unsafe practice, which also applies to the whole of the sample where assessments were out of date.
- Where C&F assessments were out of date, there were a range of reasons provided within the document by the team manager for the delay in the assessment being completed, such as: worker availability, postponed by SSD and awaiting information from external agency. In most of these assessments, there was no recording to provide more clarity to this reason within the team manager's authorisation of the assessment.
- There were also instances where a reason for delay had been provided, yet the assessment was in date.
- In two scenarios, there was a need to contact the team manager to clarify an aspect of the assessment and planning. In both these scenarios, the response was proportional, and the team manager subsequently recorded MO specific to the issue requiring clarity.
- There are also assessments that had incorrect completion date added; i.e the date entered fell before the date that the assessment was commenced.

4. Consent to information sharing not completed on almost all the audits.

- From the dip sample, six audits had consent to information sharing recorded as granted. Gaining consent to complete the assessment and the sharing of information is essential to clarify with the family the role of the social worker and the purpose of undertaking the assessment as well as engaging with a family in a proactive and equitable manner.

5. There is need to for more use of chronology and genogram. Within the overall dip sample, there was a predominance for the following:

- Chronologies were not concurrent with the forms section on LCS, thereby not providing a full appraisal of previous contacts.
- Chronologies consisted of entries that present to be cut and paste from referral information and as such the chronology form not completed in all three areas provided.
- No chronology pulled through into assessment.
- No genogram pulled through into the assessment.
- Where genograms were used, in most assessments, the genogram recorded direct family members only. Genogram that records wider family members provide to the assessor a greater dimension to the content of the assessment and also the opportunity to highlight levels of support within the family network.

6. The assessment content would benefit from the addition of dates when assessment information was collected and the name of the person who the information was collected from

- Whilst the dip sample provide information from agencies, the evidence and scripting of this aspects of assessments is varied across the dip sample. This facility would be greatly enhanced if the person from whom the information was gathered was recorded within the assessment and the date on which the information was gathered is provided.
- There is great value to providing this information within the assessment as for example, it enhances the facility to recontact professionals to gain update or clarity on information provided and reinforces the need for accountability of information provided.

7. **There is a reliance within the family history section to relate only to history of CSC involvement**
- In almost all the dip sample assessments, the family history section tended to be only the referral history when the form indicates:
‘What would the family like to share about their history?’
‘What aspirations do you have about your future family life that we can work towards?’
‘What’s the legacy of your family history/relationship to Children's Social Care history that gets in the way of you believing the current plan will succeed and what can we do that would enable you to be more relaxed with this history so that we can work together?’
 - There is great value in recording an overview of the parent’s family history in that it validates their experiences as a younger person and helps bring understanding to the scope of analysis for the assessment and reflects on outcomes in terms of dimensions of support highlighted.
 - One audit for example, records detail of the parent’s wedding and what they remembered of it. Whereas another audit there is no parenting information of the father, the information about him has been put in incorrect sections, and there is a need to be mindful of detail - eg - the s47 that led to this C&F assessment stated heroin was the substance found in the car with the father and the knife and another person. The assessment read cocaine not heroin. This man is clearly a risk, yet the parenting sections have not been completed for him. There is no in-depth understanding of parental background and how this links to current parenting style and the focus is on the father's behaviours and the mother's ability to protect. Whilst these aspects are essential to report on, they are component parts of a bigger picture, from which analysis and planning can be completed outside of the understanding that safety is on account of the father not being at the family home.
8. **There was a tendency for the social worker recording the child/young person’s view as opposed to the use of direct quotes.**
- Within the overall dip sample, there is a predominance for summarising a child or young person’s views as opposed to the use of direct quotes – there is great value in the use of direct quotes if for no other reason that the future opportunity for the child or young person to wish to access their records. In this context, the social worker is recording in essence, memories for the child or young person to recall on reading the information held about them.
 - Where the child or young person is non-verbal – there are recordings of observations, though these vary in quality and depth and length.
9. **There is a need to engage with Motivational Interviewing (MI) within the content of the assessments**
- **Motivational interviewing is a ‘directive, client centred counselling style for eliciting behaviour change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence.’ Rollnick and Miller (1995, p. 326)’.**

- **There is some evidence within the dip sample of the assessment engaging with the person-centred foundation of MI for example:**

In one audit

The social worker had made contact with the child's father and established from him that he wished to play no role in his son's life outside of providing maintenance.

In another audit

The inclusion of the mother's background and the general tone of the assessment suggests the consideration of MI principles and there is content to suggest progress, though not to the level of threshold of risk being reduced. There is evidence within the assessment of the transition to adulthood for the young person and the engagement with adult services.

In a further audit

The assessment provides dimension to the background of each of the parents and the young person's views are clearly represented - MI is present in the scripting of the social worker's recordings within the assessment as there is evidence that the SW has engaged with the family in a meaningful way to seek to determine level of need presenting - a greater emphasis on recorded dialogue in terms of felt support needs would have enhanced this detailed assessment.

10. There is a need to ensure timely review and recording of safety and support plans.

- **Whilst delay and drift have not ultimately led to a child or young person being unsafe, (and the C&F dip sample included a combination of first and review C&Fs), there are a variety of examples to evidence the need for improvement:**

In one audit

The team manager cites the urgent need to develop a care package and acknowledges drift in the assessment, whilst the need is outlined, the plan is overdue. It is worth noting that CIN plan reviews have taken place since the completion of the C&F assessment, however the issue of immigration is not contained within the plan, and given the need for stability for the family, one would suggest that such is a task in the CIN plan.

In another audit

Plan recommended is for support via targeted services and for respite for the mother who is a single parent with limited support. This was to be reviewed in November 2022 however there is no recording of the plan having been reviewed by then on the pathway though there is evidence in case notes of actions undertaken.

4. Summary:

Practice Strengths:

- No child and or young person within the dip sample was audited as being unsafe – this mirrors the recent JTAI inspection.
- In all the assessments audited, the practice was safe.
- The child is recorded as having been seen in all the audits completed.
- Where the child has been seen, though not been seen alone, there is rationale provided.
- Ethnicity is recorded on all assessments audited, though on the whole, such could have been better utilised within the assessment to inform the assessment content.
- Where there was a safeguarding issue the children and young people audited, the response was proportional.
- Specific assessments within the dip sample are worth noting for the following elements and as such are good examples;

Example 1

The overall content of the assessment provided a well-rounded overview of the young persons lived experience, inclusive of summary of observations of interactions. The assessment has a clear statement as to why the assessment is needed.

Example 2

The social worker has actively engaged with the child's father with a view to ascertaining his role in his son's life. It is also good to see within the TM authorisation comments there is task to continue to engage with the father.

Example 3

A review assessment, with good detail in the analysis and outcome - it is encouraging to read background relating to the mother. The inclusion of the mother's background and the general tone of the assessment suggests the consideration of MI principles and there is content to suggest progress. There is evidence within the assessment of the transition to adulthood for the YP and the engagement with adult services.

Example 4

The overall content of the assessment is detailed and there is evidence of MI and the parenting section is inclusive of some background of both parents background as opposed to a history of contacts within children's services. The social worker has done well to gain all the information for the assessment and the quality of the assessment could have been improved by naming the persons contacted and the dates that the contacts were made. The voice of the child is present and detailed.

Example 5

This is a detailed assessment that provides much information regarding the parents, their challenges, and their willingness to parent the children. This is sourced from previously parenting assessments to cross reference past and present, the assessment

is balanced in that it provides opinion and analysis of the parent's strengths versus the need to safeguard.

Example 6

Thorough assessment that clearly evidences supportive parents and multi-agency reports. The assessment has clearly engaged with the parents to provide outcome of further support needed within the overall context of need of the young person. In the family history, there is a brief overview of the mother's past (though this section would benefit from the same of the father). The content of the assessment evidence observations and report of interactions of the young person with others as the young person is non-verbal.

Example 7

A Pre-birth assessment is completed with a view to initiate court process in relation to the child. There is a swathe of information relating to the mother's history and a brief section on the mother's views in this regard. The mother has concealed the pregnancy and states would do so if she fell pregnant again. The mother needs support and the recommendation is with regard to proceedings and accommodation of the child. There is consideration regarding contact arrangements within the safety plan. This assessment evidence threshold to initiate proceedings.

Areas for Development:

- There was a need to improve the overall content of C&F assessments with regard to the areas of improvement are recorded within this report, such being:
- Confirming consent to undertake the assessment.
- Timeliness of assessments.
- A brief statement providing purpose to the assessment.
- Better use of chronology and genograms.
- The influence and impact of ethnicity on the content of the assessment.
- The better exploration of parenting capacity.
- The better use of MI principles within the content of the assessment.
- Specific details of information gathered from inter-agency partners (date of and person contacted) within the content of the assessment.
- Greater use of direct quotes from children and young people where possible or recording of interactional observations otherwise within assessments.
- Safety plans would benefit from being more thorough and SMARTer, and greater evidence of management oversight throughout the assessment process.

5. Conclusion

This dip sample of 29 children and young people from within CWD services across the borough evolved from a previous dip sample related to practice that had a small proportion of CWD audits within the whole dip sample. This sample was able to identify recurrent themes within assessment

content for improvement however, the rigour of this dip sample also been able to highlight areas of good content and practice as recorded above.

This was a detailed audit looked at the content and timeliness of the C&Fs completed between the timespan of May 2021 and November 2022.

The role of the social worker within CWD services cannot be underestimated in terms of its nuanced complexities and skills base. The purpose of this audit then, has been to support and assist with improving the standard of recorded assessment practice within CWD.

Within the sample, there was a predominance of a need to improve the overall content of C&Fs (and plans) for the reasons set out within the themes of this report. There was also a predominance of C&Fs being out of timescale, whether or not the C&F was a first or review assessment of need.

Where C&Fs were within timescale, this was mostly related to the assessment being a document that led to ICPC of a higher threshold of need due to a safeguarding matter. In this context, the dip sample illustrates that responses to safeguarding were proportional and timely.

Further, the dip sample evidences that no child or young person was found to be unsafe; such echoing the finding of the recent JSTAI.

There is the potential within a further dip sample of C&Fs to review the recommendations made within this report, to gauge the level of change and take up of the points raised for improvement.

6. Recommendations

- There was a need to improve the overall content of C&Fs with regard to the *Areas for Development* recorded within this report.
- Safety plans would benefit from being more thorough and SMARTER, and greater evidence of management oversight throughout the assessment process.
- The summary section of this report provides aspects of good assessment content and areas for development in assessment. These two combined constitute a thorough C&F.
- For a good example to be constructed from the above listed good assessment content.
- For the content of this report to be shared in team meetings.
- A further dip sample review within a six-month period would go some way to measure change from this point.

Report completed by APS Lead (24.04.23).