

Single Assessment Framework Practice Guidance

1. Introduction

The guidance aims to assist social workers and their managers undertake a Child and Family Assessment under LBTHs single assessment framework.

The Single Assessment timeline sets out what is expected of social workers and team managers when undertaking a statutory assessment of a child and their family's needs.

The timeline for undertaking an assessment incorporates the recommendations of Working Together 2013 which states:

“Decision points and review points involving the child and family and relevant professionals should be used to keep the assessment on track. This is to ensure that help is given in a timely and appropriate way and that the impact of this help is analysed and evaluated in terms of the improved outcomes and welfare of the child.”

A key aim of the single assessment framework is to set out clearly the assessment timescales and process agreed within Tower Hamlets.

This single assessment framework will:

- Encourage the use of Restorative social work
- Aid relationship building with children and their families
- Strengthen reflective social work and supervision
- Strengthen use of research in our assessments
- Identify the balance of risks and resilience
- Assist us to explain why we are involved in a child's life to them, their families and partner agencies.

The intention of the framework is not to be overly prescriptive and to allow social workers to use their professional judgement during the assessment process. The framework is intended to be used across all of Tower Hamlets statutory children's social care assessments and it supports the Restorative and Trauma informed practice adopted by London Borough of Tower Hamlets Children social care.

This single assessment framework will support social workers to practice as confident practitioners. We will support this through the provision of continued professional development, quality supervision, a robust quality assurance framework, and continued access to national research through the Social Work Academy.

This single assessment framework promotes high quality effective assessments, leading to purposeful plans and interventions, which are developed through meaningful relationships with children, their families and those involved with them.

The single assessment will be used for initial care planning, child in need planning, presenting child protection concerns to an Initial Child Protection Conference, reviewing the risks to a child through the Review Child Protection Case Conference pathway, reassessing the needs of children in need or children in care at points of change in their lives, such as preparing for re-unification.

Assessments of children's needs should be a continuous process with at least an updated single assessment undertaken. A new single assessment should also be undertaken when there is a critical incident or significant change to the child and family's circumstances.

The role of supervision is critical in successfully embedding the single assessment framework. Supervision will continue to be at least 4 weekly for frontline social workers. Supervision will be based around a Restorative supervision framework which enables practitioners and managers to critically reflect and plan their intervention with a child and their family.

2. Principles

Social workers should work to Tower Hamlets Social Work Principles and Values when undertaking an assessment, particularly:

- The welfare and safety of the child is paramount
- Families are unique and know their own story
- Children are best maintained within their own family unit wherever this is safe to do so.
- We have a duty to assist families to identify support either within their own family or the community in order to meet their child's needs and keep them safe.
- When working with families we will do our best to explain what we are doing and why, and the legislative framework within which we practise.
- We will always seek consent to undertake an assessment, even where there are concerns about significant harm, unless to do so will put any person at immediate risk of harm.
- We will always treat children and family members with respect, openness, and honesty when undertaking the assessment, talk to them, listen carefully and record and take into account their views.
- We will undertake assessments in a timely manner.
- The assessment will balance risk and resilience factors.
- The child will remain central to the focus of the assessment, whilst involving immediate family members and any other significant people in family or community.
- The assessment will lead to an agreed plan of intervention incorporating the wishes and feelings of the child, their family and professional agencies involved.
- Each plan will be outcome focused and lead to action, where needed.

3. Single Assessment Timelines

These are the agreed timelines in London Borough of Tower Hamlets for carrying out a child and family single assessment. All assessments must be completed, be written up and agreed within a maximum of 45 days, however the timelines below expect assessments to be completed much sooner generally.

It is the responsibility of social workers to follow the assessment timelines as set out below. It is the responsibility of team managers to ensure that assessments are reviewed at the intervals set and management actions are recorded and that assessments are completed in the time frame set.

In Tower Hamlets front door service, the expectation is that all single assessments/ majority will be completed within 35 working days.

An assessment can be concluded at any point within the 1 to 35-day timeframe as long as this is agreed by the social work team manager and managerial oversight is captured within case records on the child's electronic records (MOASIC). It is important to bear in mind what Working Together 2013 says:

Whatever the timescale for assessment, where particular needs are identified at any stage of the assessment, social workers should not wait until the assessment reaches a conclusion before commissioning services to support the child and their family. In some cases the needs of the child will mean that a quick assessment will be required."

Timelines

On **Day 1** (this should be within two working days of the receipt of the referral) the case will be allocated to the social worker by the Duty Team Manager (TM). The TM will complete a case note on Mosaic flagging this as a significant event. This case note will identify the reason the assessment is being undertaken, what actions the TM expects of the social worker and will set a provisional timescale for completing the assessment.

By **Day 10** the manager will add a case management review casenote to Mosaic identifying what work has been undertaken and what further interventions are necessary with an agreed timescale for the assessment to be completed, unless, the assessment has already been completed and further action or closure agreed.

At **Day 35 it is expected that the single assessment** is completed, fully written up and authorised by the manager. In a minority of cases where the manager agrees that there are areas or issues that require furthermore detailed assessment

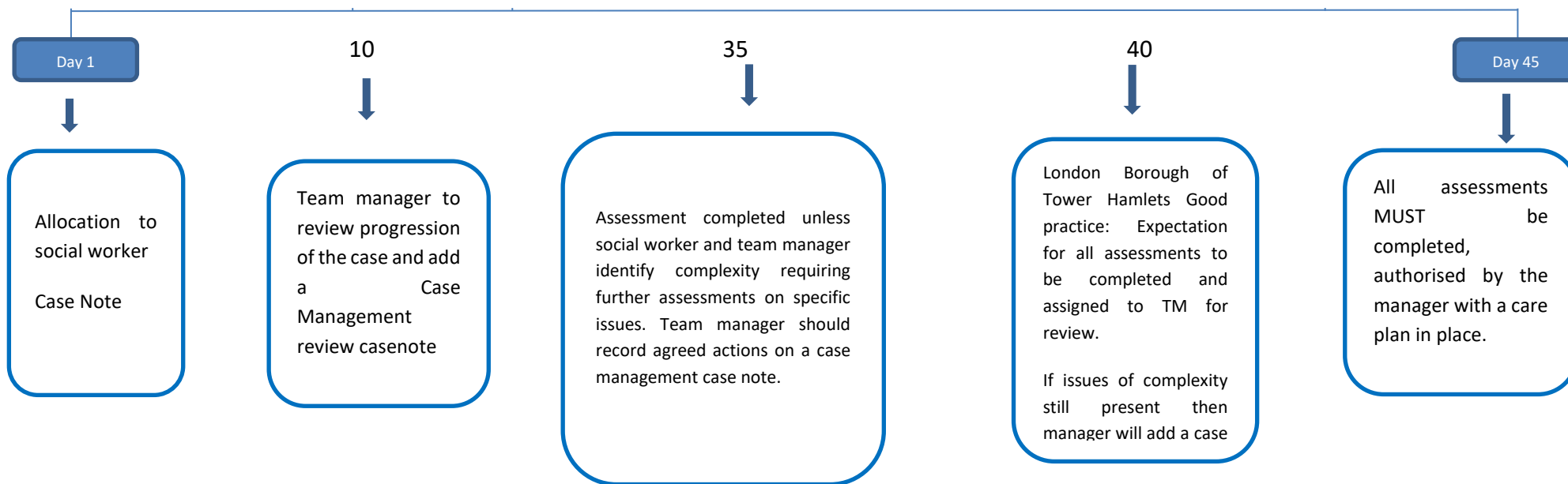
the team manager can authorise the assessment to continue for up to 45 days. The team manager will discuss the needs of the family with the social worker and record on a case planning case note the actions agreed to complete the assessment.

At **Day 45** all assessments are expected to be completed. Only in exceptionally complex cases should the manager agree to extend the assessment to the maximum 45 days. The manager will add a case management review casenote to MOSAIC identifying what work has been undertaken, what further interventions are necessary and why the assessment requires additional time beyond 35 days.

By **Day 45** all assessments must be completed, signed off by the manager and with an intervention plan in place where needed.

Assessment Timeline

Assessment can be concluded by the Social Worker and Signed off by the Manager at any time



4. Completing and recording the single assessment

The Single Assessment template is a form available on Mosaic. This section looks at the headings of the template and the information required to complete each section.

Some aspects of the single assessment template will be pre-populated from existing records held in respect of the child and their family within Mosaic. However the main information within the assessment template will require the social worker to demonstrate their understanding of the child, family, reasons for and information contained in the most current referral, and how this is perceived within the context of the family's history.

Family Composition

Additional family members/significant others identified as a result of the assessment need to be added to the child's record on Mosaic and to this assessment record. Records can be deleted from this assessment if appropriate to do so.

Professional Agencies

Records can be deleted from this assessment if appropriate to do so. Records must also be updated on Mosaic and any errors amended as a result of this assessment.

Reason for the assessment

The social worker must clearly outline the reason this assessment is taking place. This should be a brief narrative including the referral information, what the impact of the historical information tells us at the point of referral and why we are concerned. The social worker must also identify how this meets the Level 4 criteria for a statutory assessment.

Good practice indicators:

- *who do you need to consult with*
- *what other information do you need access to*
- *how long will this work likely take*
- *keep an open mind; but remain curious*

Consent and Information Sharing

Before undertaking an assessment we should always seek consent from parents, even when undertaking a Section 47 enquiry. Section 17 – child in need – assessments always require parental consent and the consent of young people of

age and ability to give agreement. Consent for S.47 assessment should be sought unless to do so would put anyone at immediate risk. In seeking consent, the worker should explain openly the concerns behind the referral, the purpose of the assessment and the subsequent process. Section 47 assessments should continue even if consent is not given, as we have an over-riding duty to protect children from significant harm.

The social worker must be able to demonstrate that consent has been sought from the child (if age appropriate), and any person with Parental Responsibility. Consent should be gained either in writing using the Introduction Pack for Families, or via the telephone with a clear case note record stating the date, time and person giving consent and the telephone number contacted on. All discussion about consent should be clearly recorded on Mosaic.

Child Protection

If at any point from the referral during the assessment there is a reason to believe the child/young person is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, Childrens Social Care has a duty under the Children Act 1989, section 47, to investigate. Reference should be made to the London Borough of Tower Hamlets procedures and London Child protection procedures and Working Together to Safeguard Children which provide advice and support for undertaking a Child Protection (Section 47) Investigation.

The S47 Investigation needs to reach an informed decision about whether the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. If the child is deemed to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, an Initial Child Protection Conference should be convened within 15 working days of the strategy discussion. The social worker should indicate if the assessment is as a result of a strategy meeting decision to undertake a Section 47 Investigation and the summary of the investigation should be added.

Where significant harm is found, the Team Manager, when authorising the assessment, will ensure an Initial Child Protection Conference has been scheduled within the 15 day timeframe.

If the assessment is to be presented to a Review Child Protection Case Conference, this is very unlikely at the front door assessment team but it can happen in exceptional circumstance if that is the case a brief summary of the progress made should be included here.

Good Practice Indicators:

- *record the level of engagement with social care and other agencies*
- *record the views of the child and their family*

- *clear managerial oversight recorded*
- *record any outstanding tasks from the CPP*

Interviews and any meetings with the child and their family

This section should record all the interventions with the family including:

- direct work undertaken
- when the family home has been visited, who was present
- when the child or any member of the family has been seen; where and for what purpose
- any meetings that have taken place and whether the child/young person was present

The Assessment

This section populates the factual information relating to the start and due dates of the assessment. The social worker should provide a brief overview of the referral information stating who raised the concern, what the concern is and what, if any, action has already been taken by the referrer, it is good practice to contact the referrer.

The Child

For Children in Need: The child's profile/story will include areas pertinent to the life of the particular child for example education and health and any issues that may impact on their development. Are there any disabilities, substance abuse, mental health issues? It is important that the social worker collates and records the impact of the current situation on the child's everyday life, including what is the child's understanding of their situation, and how this impacts on their learning and development.

Where a child is too young to verbally share this information the social worker must use their skills and experience and gain information from other sources such as family, professionals involved with the child. The social worker must analyse their own observations of the child within the family environment and other settings if appropriate.

For Children in Care, there will be information and assessments on the child's electronic record addressing the reasons why the child came into care. The care plans will have been monitored through a structured reviewing framework via Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. This assessment will be beneficial when a plan is for a child to return home or the child is subject to risks, for example is a frequent absconder, there is an allegation of harm against their carers or is the subject of further care proceedings.

For a child with a disability, it is important to consider the impact of the disability and any additional needs on the child and their family. These may arise from barriers in society, health needs or a raised vulnerability owing to the level/type of disability. Where a child has a learning disability or impaired communication, it is important to pay particular attention to means of communication that are suitable and reasonable for the child. The social worker must not make assumptions that the child cannot communicate or give credible evidence during their assessment. The child should be respected as an individual and be provided help and support to participate in the assessment process. The social worker needs to remain conscious that the parents are often experts in their child's disability, but also be alert to the vulnerability of a child with a disability. The assessment should include an assessment of the child's carers' needs. If you have limited experience in working with children with disabilities that do not meet the criteria for children with disabilities services, speak to CWD team to access support.

Parents/Carers

This section should present information on strengths and any issues that limit effective parenting, such as substance abuse, mental health issues and previous involvement with social care. The social worker should record here information on the parent/carer's ability to meet the child's basic care, safety, emotional warmth displayed, stimulation, parental guidance and boundaries, and stability. The social worker must give consideration to whether a referral to other agencies, such as Adult Social Care, is required. Consideration should be given to the family history, wider family impact or support, housing or accommodation issues, employment and income, the family's community and social integration and any resources and resilience support in the community.

The social worker should give consideration to the parent/carer's background and the impact on their ability to meet the child's needs. When considering the wider family the social worker should consider what the impact of this is on the family, what are the dynamics in the wider family?

Social workers must remember absent parents and new partners in all of their assessments detailing their role in the child's life and what this means to the child. Effort should be made to contact absent parents (often fathers) and gain their views and information about their relationship with the child.

Previous Agency Involvement

This segment should include significant events for the child and family from all agencies involved, i.e. Referrals, Assessments, Interventions, Outcomes, how long were agencies working with the family at each intervention and how effective was this. Did the family demonstrate meaningful engagement and/or progress? What worked well and what was less successful?

The social worker should include dates and significant events from the family's history as relevant to this referral and assessment. The social worker must

carefully consider what information is contained here and be able to demonstrate how these events impact on the current family circumstance and inform this assessment.

Family Tree and Eco Map

Good practice to use Family Tree: The social worker, working with key family members, should draw a clear and understandable family tree (genogram). Wider family networks can be demonstrated in a wider family tree. The family tree will need to be generated either electronically in a word document or hand drawn and scanned into Mosaic to maintain on the child's electronic record.

Eco Map: The social worker, working with key family members, should draw up an Eco Map which is clear and understandable. It is essential that we understand the family's perception of their family and professional systems and how they relate to the world around them. The Eco Map will assist with the assessment, identifying areas of support and areas which may pose additional stressors for the child and family.

Good Practice Indicators:

- *What do these pieces of work say to you?*
- *Ask questions of the family to gain their perceptions of their family and support systems*
- *Who is missing, is there a reason for any person's absence?*
- *What does this mean?*
- *Do family member's views differ from the child's?*

The Social Worker's understanding of the child and family's current situation

The social worker must pull together all the information gathered during the assessment process from the child, family members, and other agencies involved with the whole family. The social worker must use their professional expertise to gain an understanding of the family's current situation and the implications for the child's immediate and future welfare needs. This will require the social worker to make sense of the referral concerns in the context of the family's current situation and balance any historical information held in respect of the family.

The social worker will draw upon social work theories, research, past experience, evidence and most importantly the needs of the child, in order to reach a professional opinion leading to meaningful care planning for the child. The social worker will be supported in this process through the use of systemic supervision from their team manager.

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Children's Social Care practises within a Restorative and Trauma informed approach. Therefore the social worker has to consider the following:

What are we worried about what is the risk to the child?

The assessment identifies the risks for the child, and it should summarise the concerns the social worker has for the child's immediate and future wellbeing. Consideration should be given to the identified needs of the child and how the parents/carers can meet these needs. Are there any factors within the wider family or community which pose a concern for the child? What do the adults/child consider as a risk? What are they worried about?

Good practice indicators

- *What is or has been happening?*
- *What might happen? (based on professional and evidential knowledge and research)*
- *How likely is this to happen?*
- *What will be the impact of this happening?*

What is the impact of historical concerns in this family?

The social worker must demonstrate throughout the assessment that they are aware of the family's history and have taken this into consideration. The pattern of historical information should assist the social worker with planning for the child, ensuring the most effective interventions are identified with the family. An analysis should be drawn to demonstrate the level of understanding and meaningful engagement from the family and what this predicts for future engagement.

What are the strengths identified for the child/ren?

This looks at the strengths identified within the assessment. The social worker must identify the resilience factors within the immediate and wider family and friend's network. The Eco Map and Family Tree will be important in assisting this analysis, providing an understanding of the family's systems and how they impact on the child. Consider whether the child identifies a trusted adult, do they have a strong relationship with a professional, are they engaged with activities outside of the home?

Where care arrangements are fragile, a Family Group Conference may be considered in order to identify the support mechanisms within the wider family.

What further information do we need to know and what are we going to do about it?

This section needs to consider the areas where the social worker considers further information is required;

- Consider how this can be obtained,
- What will be the impact on future involvement with the family?

- What and who is missing at this stage?
- Do the family understand the concerns?
- Do the family understand what is expected of them?
- Have all agencies been contacted?
- Should a referral be made to any other agencies for the family, individually or as a group?

The social worker needs to consider and record how to monitor changes made by the family and record the progress made.

Social Worker's recommendations, including reasons and outline plan if appropriate

A balanced and evidenced professional opinion will have been reached in the analysis above; therefore the social worker should make recommendations here clearly stating the reasons for the recommendations and how these have been derived. The social worker should use management and peer support in coming to the recommendations.

Social work plans are the key document from which families understand what the concerns are and what needs to change in order for statutory services not to be involved. Every child involved in the assessment process should have a plan developed specifically for them. The social worker will develop the outline plan of intervention in this section.

Managerial Oversight

The authorising Team Manager must complete this section outlining their professional opinion on the social worker's recommendations. The team manager is required to make comment on whether the assessment was completed within the agreed 35- or 45-day timescale and provide a clear explanation if the timescale has not been kept to. The team manager will need to verify that the child was seen (and spoken to (where age appropriate) as part of the assessment and provide an explanation if the child was not seen.

Further information

It is important for us as an organisation to receive feedback about the service we provide to children and their families. Feedback is received in many different ways and should be recorded and shared in order to improve our service delivery. Families should be encouraged to share their own views regarding the service planning or delivery. If disagreements cannot be resolved with the social worker they should be informed of how to use the complaints process.

Addressing service user complaints is an effective way of learning from our delivery in order to improve services.

This section will provide details relating to the provision of complaints information. The social worker must also demonstrate they have shared the assessment with the child and their family recording any feedback.