

# Quality Assurance Framework

## Tower Hamlets Supporting Families Division

December 2022,  
reviewed September 2023



# 1. Vision

We believe that the best place for children is to be raised within their own families, immediate or wider, wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

In Tower Hamlets we are committed to building relationships and strengthening families by working with people in a compassionate and understanding way.

We are ambitious for Tower Hamlets children and families and endeavour for every child and young person to be healthy, safe and successful.

Our practice model, “Better Together”, and the 6 Cs is how we deliver this.



People and Relationship Matter. That's our Mantra. Focus on people and everything else will follow.

We frame our interventions with families and children around building strong connection within respectful relationships, exercising curiosity, co-producing with families, promoting children in their own communities, and collaborating with children and families to produce change. Then we check back to make sure that we are achieving what we said we would do.

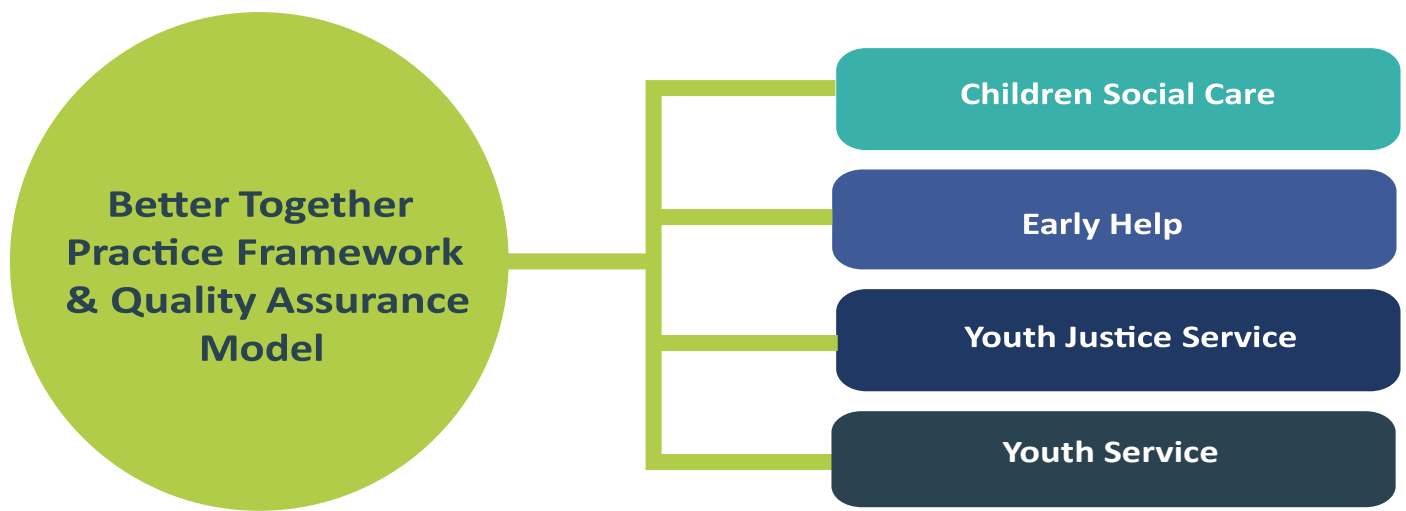
We see relationship-based work using our practice model “Better Together” as the key to achieving this. Quality assurance activity is how we check back with workers and with children and their families to measure how well we achieve this.

At the heart of our quality assurance is aspiration for children and families. We use our quality assurance to understand their experience, reflect on how we work so that we can improve and strive for excellence.

We also recognise that Tower Hamlets is on a journey and that the quality assurance framework is progressive and dynamic, responding to changing needs. It will develop and grow over time with the service.

## 2. Principles of Quality Assurance in Tower Hamlets:

- Quality assurance is first and foremost about understanding how well we have supported **children in their unique experience and journey so that we can improve outcomes for children.**
- **The purpose of quality assurance is to drive professional learning, service development and improvement, to achieve excellence.**
- Our relationship-based practice model, “Better Together”, is how we define good practice in **Tower Hamlets and our standard for measuring good work.**
- **We value each child’s individual uniqueness and see good outcomes as the result of effective relationship-based work.**
- **Our relationship-based approach is, however, built on top of a foundation of sound practice standards and statutory requirements, and does not replace these.**
- We aspire to “do with” and not “do to” in all our work - whether with families or with staff. – **Children and families’ voices are at the centre of our work and are key to help us build and promote good services.**
- **High aspiration for children and challenge and accountability are at the heart of the conversations we have about our work.**
- **We aim to promote an active and positive learning culture at the heart of practice that** makes a tangible difference for children. Everyone is a learner is involved in the continual **conversation we improve the quality of our work.**
- Everything we do in quality assurance is focused on impact and “closing the learning loop”. – Our intention is to grow confident practitioners who use their professional judgement and skills well to engage children and families effectively to facilitate good outcomes.
- We deploy independent external challenge to give a 360-degree evaluation, to ensure that **we are benchmarking our work correctly, and to avoid blind spots.**
- Early Help, the Youth Justice Service and Children’s Social Care all share the same **“golden thread” of an aligned and integrated approach to practice through our practice model and quality assurance model.**



- We use audit and other quality assurance tools proportionately and purposefully.
- We keep the framework under annual review. It is developing as the services grow and develop.

### 3. Quality Assurance Framework:

#### Governance Structure:



The Children’s Services Continuous Improvement Board (CSCIB) is chaired by the Corporate Director and is attended by the Divisional Director, the Heads of Service, the Principle Social Worker, the Head of Strategy and Policy, a lead for Human Resources and the Leader Member for Children in the Council.

It holds key responsibility for overseeing and driving the work of quality assurance across local authority work with children, including social care, the YJS and early help. It retains a clear line of sight and accountability for the quality of services, performance and tasks, tracks and monitors progress of the Improvement Plan.

It has key responsibility for:

Performance and audit

Staff engagement

Staffing  
– recruitment and retention (including  
scrutiny of the Learning Academy)

Overview of improvement of  
the action plan

The Learning Academy services the CSCIB. It administrates the audit cycles, the dip samples, it runs Practice Weeks, and provides audit reports and intelligence to the Board, and updates the Improvement Plan.

### Governance between the CSCIB and other strategic partnership and statutory boards.

The Early Help service and the Youth Justice Service report to their partnership and statutory boards respectively. The CSCIB does not replace the governance of the Youth Justice Executive Board & Youth Justice Operational Board or the Early Help Board, but complements it. Its role is to ensure that the quality assurance work of the local authority in children's social care, early help and the YJS are aligned and effective. The focus of the CSCIB is on the local authority element of the work. It works in partnership and in alignment with the Youth Justice Executive Board & Youth Justice Operational Board and Early Help Board, as these have shared objectives.

The CSCIB also leads on the performance and quality of children's services on behalf of the Tower Hamlet's Children's Safeguarding Partnership Board. Its quality assurance function supports the work of the Children's Safeguarding Partnership Board in the delivery of its scrutiny function of children's services.

The Tower Hamlets Corporate Parenting Board is responsible for the development and effectiveness of services for looked after children. The CSCIB supports the delivery of the strategic vision set by the Corporate Parenting Board by helping to drive the quality of practice and performance. Where appropriate, the CSCIB reports to it.

### Reports into the CSCIB:

The CSCIB uses a range of tools to give a 360 degree view of the quality of practice and the services across the YJS, early help services and children's social care.

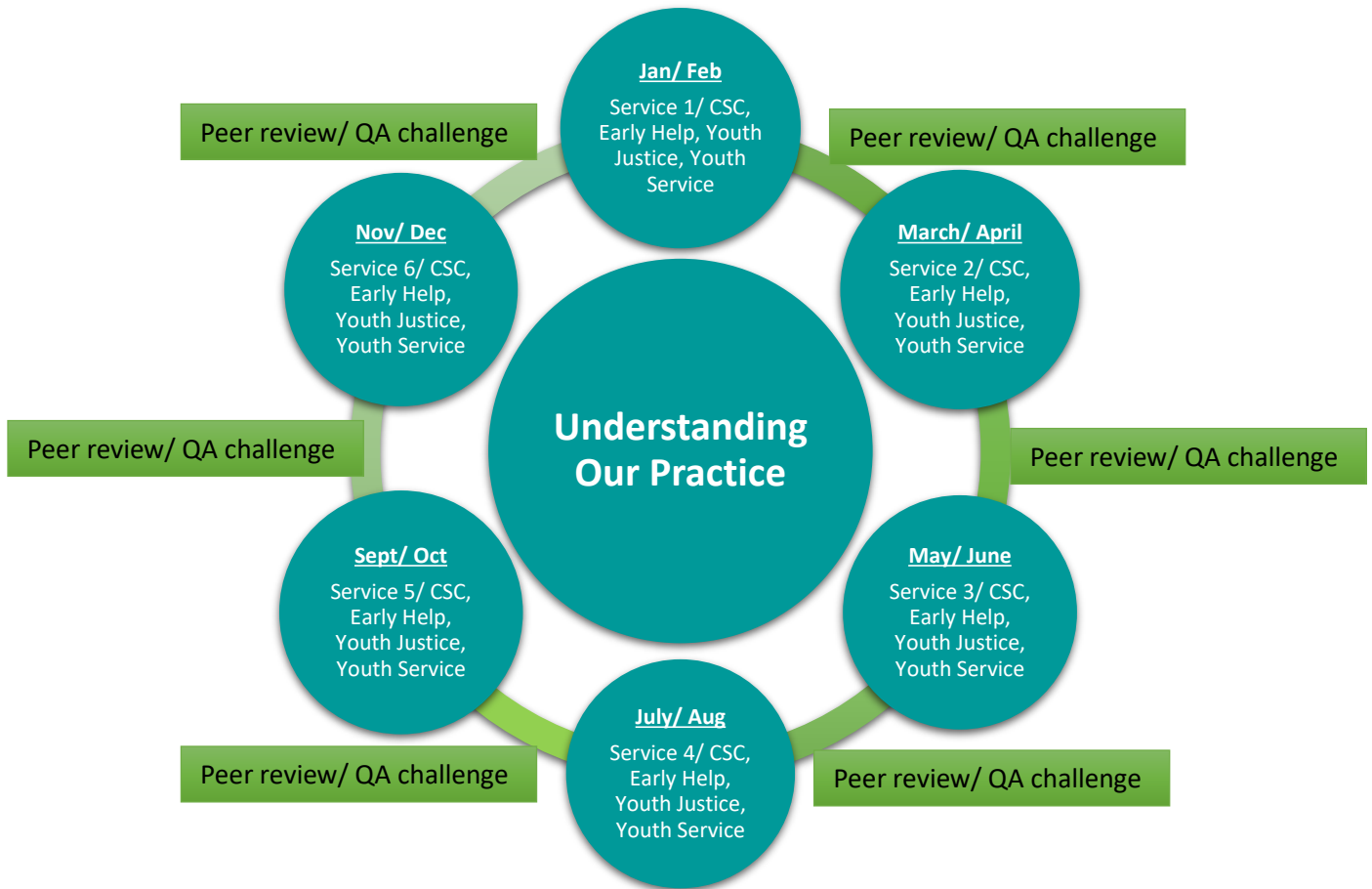
**The integration of all three services into the quality assurance framework is a work in progress, starting with the audit programme, performance data, dip samples and practice week.** Additional reports in early help and YJS will be developed and grow in sophistication throughout the year under the direction of the CSCIB.



Monthly	Bi-Monthly	Annually
<p><b>The Children’s Social Care Performance Score Card.</b> Children’s Social Care provide a monthly performance data digest, with narrative analysis and comparisons with statistical and regional neighbours and national comparators. These are reviewed on a monthly basis at performance surgeries, chaired by the Divisional Director.</p>	<p><b>Bimonthly “Understanding our Practice” audit report.</b> Audits are completed with frontline staff in Early Help (including Youth Service) and Children’s Social Care every two months. Every service in children’s social care is involved during the year. Audits include telephone contact with children and families to invite their evaluation of the service.</p> <p>An “Understanding our Practice” audit highlight report is produced on a bi-monthly basis, which triangulates the findings of audit, dip samples, data, service user feedback and staff feedback. The report is also condensed into a succinct “Top Ten Findings and Learning” report for practitioners.</p>	<p><b>The LGA Health Check summary and the Social Work/ Practitioner Health Check report</b> The annual staff survey monitors the extent to SFD is successful in creating an environment where good practice can flourish.</p>
<p><b>Monthly “Understanding our Practice” audit report in YJS.</b> Audits are completed with frontline staff in the Youth Justice Service. Audits include contact with children and families to invite their evaluation of the service.</p>	<p><b>Bimonthly dip sample reports:</b> audits are supplemented by a range of focused dip samples to test specific hypotheses and areas of practice.</p>	<p><b>The IRO Use of the Resolutions Process</b> report provides an annual analysis of themes and issues arising for children by IRO’s. “It’s all about Me” is a report from the IRO written to young people looked after to feedback service learning and action taken from consultation.</p> <p><b>The child protection chairs</b> also provide an annual report to identify key issues in planning and the running of the child protection service.</p> <p>A collation of themes from <b>partner agency child protection procedure escalations</b> also provides an overview of wider partnership pinch points around safeguarding. (This report needs to be developed)</p>

Monthly	Bi-Monthly	Annually
	<p><b>Bimonthly Practice Day:</b> senior managers and leaders in Children’s Social Care observe and discuss work with the practitioners and review learning from the last audit cycle. Although this is a learning process, feedback from service users and frontline staff are also gathered to inform service development and interaction with practitioners gives the Board soft intelligence about the service.</p> <p>Feedback from Practice Day is included in the next audit report that relates to the specific service area.</p>	<p><b>The Corporate Annual Complaints and Representations report</b> analyses key messages and themes from service users and children. (This report needs development)</p> <p>The <b>Advocacy Service Annual report</b> provides key feedback from advocates for children. This report needs further development.</p> <p><b>Practice Week reports</b> capture feedback from practitioners, senior leaders, and families about the effectiveness of the service.</p>
		<p><b>External peer reviews and other external assurance</b> checks, such as the DCS East London group quality assurance peer challenge.</p>
		<p><b>Feedback from children and families</b> Feedback is routinely sought in different service areas across SFD. A report is produced to collate all feedback to analyse and inform service development and improvement across SFD.</p>

# 4. The Audit Programme – how this works:



## How do we go about it:





## How do we know:



## The Audit Programme – how this works:

Please refer to the Operational Guidance for each service area (EH, YJS, CSC) for the specific process in their area.

### When:

Audits take place on a rolling timetable throughout the year, so that each service in Children's Social Care is audited twice in the year (MASH/ A&I, FSP/ CWD, CLA/ TCS).

Early Help and the Youth Service complete audits every two months.

Youth Justice Service complete audits monthly which is specifically linked to the service improvement plan.

Audit tools by Early Help, Children Social Care and the Youth Justice Service are bespoke to each service but aligned with the Practice Model.

### By whom:

The audits are undertaken by Managers and Advanced Practitioners (in CSC only) and are done with the worker in the form of reflective discussions. The audit includes making contact with the family or child, where appropriate, to invite them to give their views and experience of the work undertaken.

There is a training offer available for auditors in all services.

## Moderation:

Audits in Children's Social Care and Early Help are moderated by a group consisting of the Divisional Director, the Heads of Service, Group Managers and Quality Assurance Officers.

Audits are also benchmarked in group discussions to ensure consistency of approach and to collate and understand the emerging themes.

The Youth Justice Service deploys an external independent moderator to moderate audits.

## Independent Assurance

An external social work consultant is employed to check the accuracy and impact of the audit programme twice a year. The consultant reviews a sample of audits with practitioners, auditors and the moderators and checks the file record. The findings are reported to the CSCIB with recommendations for refining and improving the process.

## Report:

An audit findings report is provided to the CSCIB by each service area that sets out the grades, main themes under strengths, and areas for development, key learning and recommendations for service improvement.

A briefer report/ newsletter is provided to practitioners to inform about themes arising from audits.

Issues arising from the audit for service development are taken forward in the Improvement Plan and the Service Plan or Team Plan.

## Stage 1: Immediate follow up of individual work level learning (month 1)

All work that is audited, **including audits that are graded as "good" and "outstanding"**, are to be discussed in feedback meeting (UoPP meeting) between the auditor, social worker/ practitioner and their team manager to reflect on what went well, what actions need to be taken to ensure progression and good outcomes for the child/ family, and on any learning. The record of the UoPP meeting and actions agreed is to be sent to the HoS and the Audit Team/ Learning Academy who will monitor progress. It is also to be evidenced in supervision.

Re-audits/ dip audits will be completed on work that were graded requires improvement or inadequate after 6 weeks to review progress and highlight any drift or delay. The findings of this dip audit report will be shared with the Head of Service/ Group Managers to explore and address any concerns with the practitioner and their manager.

Please refer to the Operational Guidance for each service area (EH, YJS, CSC) for the specific process in their area.

## Stage 2: Learning campaigns and embedding practice (months 3, 4, 5 and 6)

Following each audit cycle, a report is produced to encapsulate the key learning for practitioners. It is succinct and concise and captures the headlines for practitioners.

Each Service area will identify targets for practice improvement and development from the intelligence in the audits and the audit highlight report. Each service area will devise their own learning campaigns.

Please refer to the Operational Guidance for each service area (EH, YJS, CSC) for the specific process in their area.

### Stage 3: Re-audit (month 6)

As part of the following audit cycle, a selection of audits that were graded requires improvement in the last audit cycle will be put forward for re-audit to track whether learning from the audit has been integrated into work and the quality of work now reaches “good”. The results of this are reported back to the CSCIB.

## **5. Appendices: (to be included as hyperlinks once all docs have been signed off)**

### **1. Audit Templates/ tools**

- a Early Help
- b Youth Justice Service
- c Children's Social Care

### **2. Operational Guidance for Audits**

- a Early Help
- b Youth Justice Service
- c Children's Social Care