**Background**

The Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda aims to ensure that every child achieves five desired outcomes: that every child or young person is given the opportunity to

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

There are a number of tools and developments designed to support practitioners as part of the EMC programme:

- a Child Index which will give basic information about every child;
- national Core Skills & Knowledge in which everyone in the children’s workforce will be expected to have trained;
- the development of local directories of services to support children with additional needs;
- national guidance on information sharing;
- a Common Assessment Framework (CAF)
- a Lead Professional to be allocated to cases where more than one agency is supporting a child to ensure agreed actions are completed and to act as the main contact for the child/young person and their family.

**What is the CAF?**

The CAF aims to ensure that every young person receives the universal services to which they are entitled and any additional services they need at the earliest opportunity.

It is a standardised process for undertaking a common assessment, to help front line practitioners gather and understand information about the needs and strengths of the child, based on discussions with the child, their family and other practitioners as appropriate.

The framework uses a common language that will be adopted by all practitioners so that they can more easily communicate ideas with children/young people, parents and each other.

The national documentation includes a standard form to help practitioners record the findings from the assessment in terms that are helpful in working with the family to find a response to unmet needs.

Using the national model as a template we have developed a Tower Hamlets CAF which is the one that we will be using locally. The local form includes additional guidance, is easier to navigate and facilitates the monitoring of progress over time.

The national documentation includes a pre-Assessment Checklist but locally we will not be using this as it is unnecessarily bureaucratic.

The CAF form is primarily a tool that will help practitioners work with the family to identify needs and decide together how they can better support the child/young person but, where appropriate, it can also be used to share information with other agencies who may be able to help. Completion of a common assessment is not however a guarantee of additional services.

The CAF is entirely voluntary and a common assessment cannot be undertaken unless the child and/or their parent agrees.
If the child or parent refuses but the practitioner is concerned about the welfare or safety or the child they should follow LSCB procedures.

A Holistic approach
The CAF provides a process to assess the additional needs of a child or young person and to give a holistic view that considers strengths as well as needs.

The Tower Hamlets CAF identifies these strengths as protective factors that make it more likely the child/young person will achieve the five outcomes and risk factors which mean the child/young person may not achieve the five outcomes.

Through this holistic assessment practitioners will be better placed to agree, with the child and family, what support is appropriate.

CAF elements and domains
The CAF builds on factors used in other assessment frameworks and has been developed in consultation with local authorities and their partners and following trials in a number of areas during 2005-06. Evaluations of the trials informed revisions to the CAF form and guidance.

The elements that form the framework for common assessment are:

**Development of Child**
- Health
- General health
- Physical development
- Speech, language and communication development
- Emotional and social development
- Behavioural development
- Identity, including self-esteem, self-image and social presentation
- Family and social relationships
- Self-care skills and independence
- Learning:
  - Understanding, reasoning and problem solving
  - Progress and achievement in learning
  - Participation in learning, education and employment
- Aspirations

**Parents and Carers**
- Basic care, ensuring safety and protection
- Emotional warmth and stability
- Guidance, boundaries and stimulation

**Family and Environmental**
- Family history, functioning and well-being
- Wider family
- Housing, employment and financial considerations
- Social & community factors and resources, including education

**The Benefits of CAF**
The CAF:
- Provides an easy to use assessment that is common across services
- Provides a method of holistic assessment to ensure all strengths and needs are understood
- Ensures better, more evidence-based interventions and, where appropriate, better referrals
- Facilitates early intervention and speeds up service delivery
- Informs whether further specialist assessment is necessary
- Enables a picture of need to be built up over time and, with appropriate consent, to be shared among professionals.
- Reduces the number and duration of different assessments that historically some children and young people have undergone
- Improves joint working and communication by helping to embed a common language across agencies
- Helps to improve integrated working by promoting co-ordinated service provision.

‘When is it the right time to do a CAF assessment for a child?’
A CAF assessment will be necessary when a child/young person is at risk of not achieving one or more of the five ECM outcomes without additional services.
A front line professional may have a concern or a parent may have raised a concern. A CAF is designed for use in these situations when the needs are unclear or broader than the one agency can meet.

It is not necessary to do a common assessment for every child: children who are progressing well or have needs that are already identified do not need one. An agency need not undertake a common assessment if it is already clear about the child’s needs and is able to meet them without referring to other services.

Having completed the holistic assessment, the agency completing the assessment will plan with the child/young person and parent/carer to meet the needs identified and in many cases will be able to meet these needs “in house”.

However, in some cases they may need to share the information (with the consent of the child/young person and parent/carer) with another agency in order to explore accessing additional support.

**Information storage, sharing and consent**

With the parents’/carers’ permission the completed form is kept on record.

They must also be given a copy to keep themselves. Should another agency at another time have concerns about the child, they can check to see if there is an existing assessment, and, as long as they have the necessary permission, they can have access to the form so that they can update and build on it.

This will reduce the time taken in form filling and interviewing, and concerns can be dealt with more quickly.

The development of the CAF has the potential to significantly improve information sharing between agencies in support of children and young people but it will also help to clarify the basis for information sharing.

Information can only be shared with the consent of the children/young people and their parent/carer unless there are exceptional circumstances (defined in legislation) where information can be shared without consent.

For the latest government guidance on dealing with consent/confidentiality etc see the DfES Information Sharing Practitioner Guidance.

**CAF and specialist assessments**

The CAF provides a common process / tool to enable front line practitioners to identify and meet a child’s additional needs at an early stage. Locally it is recommended that the CAF is used as the default document for capturing information required for all processes once a child is highlighted as having additional needs or needs requiring multi-agency support.

Sometimes a more detailed assessment may be needed to supplement part of the CAF assessment e.g. a detailed literacy assessment may support analysis of strengths and weaknesses in learning but wherever possible these assessments should be “CAF compliant” i.e. using the language of the CAF.

Where the front line agency is unable to meet all the needs they may decide to refer on to another agency and again, where possible the CAF form should be used for onward referral.

For example, in Tower Hamlets there will be an expectation that a CAF will have been completed prior to referral to the Social Inclusion Panel (SIP) and used to inform the agency’s own practice but, should there be a need to refer on to SIP, there will no longer be a need to complete a SIP referral form as the CAF form will replace this.

The CAF does not replace specialist assessments but will help to identify whether a specialist assessment is necessary, and avoid duplication by building on accurate up-to-date information. For example the CAF will also take the place of the initial assessment for Children’s Social Care in Tower Hamlets and provide information upon which a core assessment, if necessary, can be made. And although specialist assessments will still be needed, we are looking to integrate the CAF with these and specialist agencies are being asked to explore how CAF can be built into existing working arrangements.

Where there is a need for an immediate specialist assessment, the CAF will not delay that process.
Where there is a concern that a child may have been harmed or at risk of harm, LSCB procedures should be followed immediately - practitioners should not stop to do a common assessment.

**Implementation**

National implementation began in April 2006, to be fully embedded by March 2008.

In Tower Hamlets we aim to have implemented the CAF by July 2007.

The development of CAF will be led by a multi-agency Early Intervention Group reporting to the Children and Young People’s Strategy Group.

It is proposed that locally the Attendance and Welfare Service will become the hub for the co-ordination of common assessments.

For further details on local plans see the TH CAF Implementation Strategy.

**Training**

All new entrants to the children’s workforce will have learnt about the Common Assessment Framework in their initial training. National training materials have been produced to support the development of existing employees and training started in May 2006 in Tower Hamlets at a range of levels.

**Find out more**

National guidance documents, training materials and case studies are available from [www.ecm.gov.uk/CAF](http://www.ecm.gov.uk/CAF)

Local guidance, training materials and implementation plans can be found at [www.tower-hamlets.lgfl.net](http://www.tower-hamlets.lgfl.net) by clicking on the Every Child Matters button.

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**The Triangle of Support**

The Common Assessment Framework & Lead Professionals

- **SPECIALIST SERVICES**
  - Those with complex needs
  - Requirement already exists for practitioner to take lead role

- **INTEGRATED TARGET SUPPORT**
  - Children with additional needs
  - Relevant practitioner takes on Lead Professional role

- **TARGETED SUPPORT SINGLE AGENCY**
  - Common Assessment can be used from this point
  - Lead within agency identified

- **UNIVERSAL SERVICES**
  - Children with no identified additional needs
  - Lead Professional not required