

Children, Schools and Families – Safeguarding Children Unit

Select Committee Report – Quality Assurance

1 Introduction

‘One County, One Team: Quality Management Framework’ sets the guiding principles in how the County Council manage the quality of our services and the activity we undertake to continue improving as an organisation. It is County Council approach to self-regulation, and within Children’s Services it has been developed into an Annual Quality Assurance programme. The Quality Assurance activity is based on an agreed set of standards which describe good quality social work practice within Children’s Services.

The purpose of the quality assurance framework is to:

- Improve outcomes for vulnerable children
- Design quality into our services through practice standards
- Ensure services are achieving consistently high standards
- Engender an organisational culture committed to learning and continual improvement
- Improve the level of feedback on quality of services from children, their families and staff
- Support the continuous improvement and development of the children’s workforce

2 Quality Assurance Framework

2.1 The following Quality Assurance activity forms the basis of the framework:

- Supervision
- Senior management oversight of cases
- Monthly self evaluation
- Themed audits
- Multiagency audits
- User feedback
- Deep Dives
- Regular data analysis in key areas – for example Missing children and children at risk of sexual exploitation
- Data provided by the Independent Chairs of Child Protection Conferences
- Themed practice development workshops

2.2 The topics are chosen following feedback from Inspections, actions arising from Serious Case Reviews, changes in Legislation Learning from Research and in response to

Performance Data.

- 2.3 Service Improvement Plans are agreed following outcomes of audits and provide a focus for management development work. These are followed up by re-audits.
- 2.4 The emerging themes and learning points from the above activity are presented to the Learning and Development Group for integration into the Training Programme.
- 2.5 Any changes required to procedures are made and communicated to staff.
- 2.6 The activity is most effective when the Quality Assurance Officers work together with the front line managers and this approach is promoted.

3 Impact of the Quality Assurance activity

- 3.1 It is important to note that the above activity has highlighted both good practise and areas for improvement, and the emerging themes below reflect this. It should not be assumed that in such a large County any poor practise is reflected across all teams

3.2 Service Improvement – evidence of good practice

The quality assurance activity is evidencing good quality social work and family support practice, for example:

- Analysis of risk factors based on evidence gathered
- Good communication between partner agencies
- Improved focus on the importance of the child's race and culture
- Regular supervision and support to staff
- Seeking the views and wishes of the child and seeing them on their own
- Child in Need plans and Child Protection plans are focused and regularly reviewed
- Clear systems to promote multi-agency intervention with children who go missing and children who are at risk of sexual exploitation.

3.3 Service Improvement – ongoing work

The quality assurance activity has highlighted key aspects of social work practice that require ongoing focus and are being addressed in the Service Improvement plans. For example:

- Building upon the elements of good practice in analysis and assessment identified in case file audits and Deep Dives and embedding this consistently across the county.
- Working closely with partner agencies to support early help for parents
- Develop further the role of children and young people in the improvement of our service, begun with the Service User Surveys carried out quarterly
- Building upon the work in producing clear outcome-focused Child Protection Plans

- across all care planning, particularly to Child in Need Plans.
- Addressing neglect at an early point to prevent cyclical patterns of abuse for children
- Continue the improvements achieved in providing permanency for children, both within their extended family and outside of their family, within clear timescales.
- Building on all the Quality Assurance systems within Children's Services and multi-agency, for example the role of the Independent Review Officers in scrutinising plans throughout care proceedings and role of multi-agency group for missing and sexually exploited children
- Achieving a higher level of consistency of good practice across the County, via social workers having access to a 'library' of assessment tools which address specific risk factors and a 'research bank' to inform their judgement

5 Key Challenges 2013-14

- Continuing to improve the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Framework – the focus needs to remain on integrating Performance Data with Quality Assurance activity in order to fully understand the Performance Data, embed with managers the importance of implementing changes, the programme of audit work in 2014 to be outcome focussed and integrating the Independent Review Officers new role to scrutinise a child's care plan into the framework
- Continue to support the work to improve the quality of social work intervention with children and their parents / carers, whilst implementing the statutory changes of the revised Public Law Outline (Children and Family Bill 2013) and single assessment process (working Together 2013)

6 Conclusion

Social workers and their managers are committed to achieving continual improvement and as such contribute actively to the Quality Assurance work and implementing the Service Improvement plans.

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