

# Title of report: Children and Young People's Quality Assurance Briefing

**Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 17 September 2024**

**Report by: Head of Service Safeguarding and Review**

## Classification

Open

## Decision type

This is not an executive decision

## Wards affected

(All Wards);

## Purpose

To brief the Children and Young Scrutiny on the Quality Assurance Framework for Herefordshire Children's Services, including the values and principles underpinning this. Also to describe the means by which quality assurance activity is undertaken, the outcomes from quality assurance activity in the last year and the impact of the quality assurance activity in the Herefordshire Children's Services improvement journey.

## Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) That the Committee notes the content of the report.
- b) For the Committee to make any recommendations as to how quality assurance activity within Children's Services could be enhanced.

## Alternative options

1. The Committee may choose the option not to review the report, however this is not recommended as the report is provided to inform the Committee of current quality

assurance activity in supporting improvement work within the Children's Services Department

## Key Considerations

2. Quality assurance activity monitors and evaluates our social work practice so that we understand our practice strengths and also our development needs. In line with the Improvement Plan the Children's Services Department aims to improve our services to achieve our services priorities of keeping our children and young people safe and giving them a great start in life.
3. Our restorative practice model is that we work openly alongside children, young people and families in a strengths based way. We aim to demonstrate that our work with children, young people and their families places their needs and wishes at the heart of everything we do.
4. Quality assurance activity is our focused activity to measure the effectiveness of the work we do and to support the wider service to improve service delivery to ensure we have a positive impact.
5. Quality assurance provides a mechanism to provide robust scrutiny and challenge at levels of our social work practice. We are committed to achieving excellence in service delivery through the continuous improvement of our practice. We aim to foster a departmental culture of 'high support and high challenge', to demonstrate that we understand our practice and that we are can show progress on our improvement journey, tackling issues that arise openly and honestly.
6. Quality assurance is at the heart of the Children's Services Improvement Plan. Our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is made up on three equal and complementary components:
  - Hearing the voice of children, young people and parents and carers;
  - Audit activity and
  - Key Performance Indicators.
7. It is through a combination of these three mechanisms we can understand the impact of what we do, understand the quality of our practice and understand our service performance against statutory and internal indicators such as timeliness of work efficiency of workflows.
8. Our Improvement Plan Phase 2 identifies a wide range of Quality Assurance measures and can be read as measures against each of the Ofsted Recommendation in the plan on a page. (Appendix B)
9. A foundation to the audit work is Case file Audits. Monthly case file audits are completed by managers in the department. The quality and effectiveness of our work is measured against six individual domains. These are:
  - Voice of the child, how well can we understand the child's story, current situation and wishes and feeling from the evidence on the file.
  - Assessment, in relation to the concerns that exist how good is the assessment of the strengths and challenges for the family?

- Quality of Plans, how understandable and effective is the current plan in meeting the safeguarding concerns?
- Effectiveness of partnership working, how well is Children's Services and other partner organisations working alongside the child and family to meet their needs?
- Supervision and management oversight, is the worker receiving good quality, reflective supervision and is there evidence that the manager is providing clear direction and decision making in the child's file?
- Embracing diversity, does the work evident on the file take account account of the child and family's social, cultural and other needs such as disability etc?

10. A guide to audit grade descriptors supports the auditors and within each of the domains there are a range of quality indicators that support the auditors to form a judgement as to whether the evidence found on the file demonstrates that the quality of the work meets the standard required for Outstanding or Good work, or whether it shows that the work is of Requires Improvement or Inadequate standard. The QA team are currently updating the grade descriptors in line with our restorative practice model and to complement the revised case audit template. This work will be completed by the end of September 2024.

**It is important to note that work graded as Inadequate means that whilst there be urgent and significant work to be completed it does not mean that a child is unsafe.**

11. Between April 2023 and June 2024 307 case file audits have been completed. This scale of work has enabled the Quality Assurance team to inform children's services of a detailed inventory of what the strengths of our work with families is and also areas in need of development.
12. The Quality Assurance team also oversees the audit moderation process whereby senior managers validate the judgements and grades given by auditors. Moderators can change audit grades, however for the period April – June 2024 only 13 audits were moderated demonstrating that our auditing judgements are robust.
13. Our departmental case audit activity is now showing that Social Work practice is beginning to improve. The data from audits show that quality of practice continues to need support and development. There are areas of good practice such as the 'consideration of the impact of diversity' and improving practice in the areas of 'decision making and management oversight' and 'supervision'. There remain a number of areas that require further development, seeing and hearing the child', 'assessments', 'plans' and 'meetings and reviews'. Given the priority given in the Phase 2 Improvement Plan to listening to families and especially to children and young people it is really important that we see rapid improvement in the 'seeing and hearing the child' domain. It seems likely that improvement here will also improve the quality of 'assessments' and 'plans'. It is encouraging that there were no audits graded Inadequate in June and that June also had the highest number of audits graded Good (43.75%) over the last 6 months.
14. Family feedback is an integral part of the auditing process and should be used to support service design and delivery. We need to increase the numbers of feedback gained through monthly audits and other methods and ensure that the findings contribute to all service improvement activity and ultimately positive outcomes for children.

15. Overall we continue to have work to do to improve our practice in specific areas of practice and to ensure this is consistent improvement across the service. From September 2024, a new audit process including a revised audit template will be used and will consider practice across the whole service on a monthly basis. This will offer more opportunity to compare monthly data and identify areas of practice that are improving and those that need further focus across the different service areas.

## Community impact

16. A robust and reliable Quality Assurance Framework for Children's Services will support the improvement in the practice of the Department. Quality assurance activity underpins the work detailed in the recently developed Phase 2 Improvement Plan which drives our continued improvement activity alongside our staff, partners and most importantly the children, young people and families that we work alongside in our community. This is vital in meeting our aims to keep our children and young people safe and to give them a great start in life.

## Environmental Impact

17. Whilst the work detailed in this report will have minimal environmental impact, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's environmental policy.

## Equality duty

18. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
19. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this is a decision on back office functions, we do not believe that it will have an impact on our equality duty.
  20. The Children's Services Quality Assurance Framework pays full regard to the Council's responsibilities as set out in the public sector equality duty.

## **Resource implications**

21. There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

## **Legal implications**

22. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## **Risk management**

23. There are no specific risks arising from this report.

## **Consultees**

24. Not applicable

## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Quality Assurance and Learning Framework, February 2024

Appendix B: Phase 2 Improvement plan on a page – Ofsted Recommendations and Measures

## **Background papers**

None identified