

Quality Assurance and Learning Framework

Herefordshire Council Children and Young People Services



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Foreword

Welcome to our updated Quality Assurance Framework. Working with children, young people and their families is hugely complex and we need ensure that our work is effective and that we continually evaluate and learn from our practice.

Successful children's social work and family support is about effecting change through relationships. Herefordshire has adopted restorative practice, working alongside children and families and in partnership with a range of colleagues and professionals. Our Quality Assurance activity challenges us to look at our practice strengths and also where we need to develop.

We are committed to achieving excellence through continuous improvement, where children and young people are at the heart of everything we do, and have the opportunity to influence and shape the services they receive.

Our Quality Assurance programme has three domains and each are important if we are to understand our practice and the difference its making to the children, young people and families we work with.

This framework also sets out the mechanisms we will use across our services to assess the quality of our practice, systems and processes, and use the learning to make improvements in practice and outcomes.

Dylan Harrison – Head of Service for Safeguarding & Quality Assurance and Principal Social Worker

Our model of practice

At Herefordshire Children's Services we are adopting Restorative Practice as our practice model. Restorative practice is a term used to describe behaviours, interactions and approaches which help to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict.

Restorative practices enable those who work with children and families to focus upon building relationships that create and inspire positive change. Creating change sometimes requires challenge as well as support. Through implementing restorative approaches we aim to work alongside children, families and partners to remove barriers, promote a sense of community and share accountability.

In Herefordshire, we are working with Leeds Restorative Practice Centre to implement and embed this new approach. Working with staff, partners and families to improve the way in which we work alongside families and, most importantly to improve outcomes for children.

Our Quality Assurance Approach

Our Quality Assurance Framework is made up of three complementary components:

The Components are:

- Case Audit – including regular case audits and targeted audits giving us evidence on the quality of work and compliance with our practice standards
- Feedback from children and families to understand how they are receiving our services
- Analysis of key performance indicators that enable us to monitor workload, workflow, demand and timeliness

Through this programme, we can understand the impact of what we do, the quality of our practice and our service performance against statutory and internal indicators.

The framework seeks to:

- Ensure the right level of support is offered at the right time to children and families as we full fill our duties and responsibilities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people as paramount in our work.
- Improve the quality of services by identifying strengths in practice that can be shared and built upon.
- Improve outcomes for children and families by identifying areas of development within practice and services offered which can be addressed through service planning, training and commissioning.
- Ensure that all staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities for Quality Assurance, and that improving quality of practice is part of “business as usual” for all staff within Children’s Services.
- Ensure staff are supported in carrying out their roles both safely and effectively and that they are compliant with our policies and practice standards.

- Foster a culture of “high support, high challenge” that sits within a work cycle that drives a culture of continuous improvement, tackling problems openly and honestly and leading to visible change.
- Embed the voice of children and young people in practice and improvement activity.

There is an overarching Quality Assurance programme for Children’s Social Care consisting of monthly case audits, service user feedback at the end of each intervention to families, an overarching set of Performance Indicators for the Improvement Plan and a Children’s Service set of Performance Indicators reporting to Chief Executive and the council plan and the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA)

Service Area Quality Assurance Activity

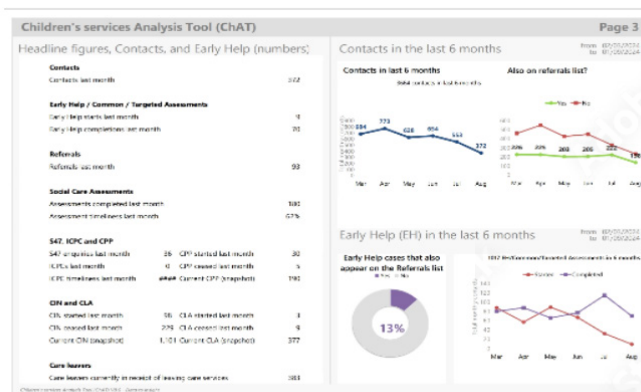
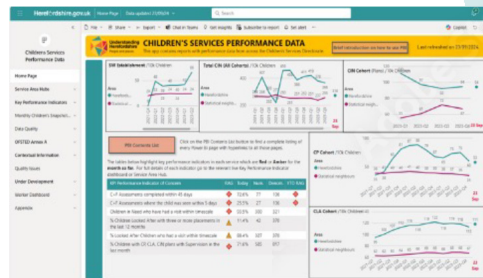
To support the overarching programme each Service Manager has developed a Service Area Quality Assurance Programme which for each quarter which includes targeted audit activity, service user feedback collected within their teams and specific Key Performance Indicators where there is an identified need for improvement.

These quarterly overview report are then fed into the Senior Leadership Team and taken into account in the service overview reports presented to All Member Briefings, Improvement Board, Safeguarding Partnership Scrutiny and other forums as required.

Our Quality Assurance Framework described - Component One - Qualitative Data

Quantitative data tells us how much we are doing in our provision of services to children and their families and whether we are meeting statutory timescales in managing demand and timeliness.

- PowerBi – Case Management Dashboard – ‘live’ performance data for managers and practitioners to track of progress on their individual case work and that of teams they are responsible for. It is also a tool to alert managers to any issues before they develop into wider concerns
- Analysis of performance data is a core function of managers and senior leaders and informs other methods of scrutiny, for example thematic audits, and will contribute to wider organisational learning, planning, development and delivery.



- ChAT - The Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) transforms child-level data and benchmarking statistics into a visual report that covers all areas of Children's Social Care. It enables managers, service managers and our senior leadership team to understand trends so that we can see how Herefordshire compares nationally and to our statistical neighbouring authorities.
- Further investigation through auditing and review can be undertaken based on the ChAT data and any corrective action taken.



Component Two - Audit Activity

Our audit activity tells us how well we are doing in our practice and provision of services to children and their families. We monitor, review and learn about our practice and leadership through the following methods:

Case Audits

- Monthly Looped audits consisting of peer and lead case audits with moderations
- Thematic Audits – delivered in service areas
- Multi-agency Audits – delivered through MASH and the Safeguarding partnership

Monthly Collaborative Case File Audits

In Herefordshire, our Early Help, MASH, Assessment Teams, Safeguarding Teams, Get Safe Team, Children in Care and Care Leavers Service undertake monthly peer case file audits. This provides an overview of the quality of case work and supports issue specific analysis. Audits are structured around our Practice Standards which are informed by legislation, regulation, our restorative practice framework and policies and procedures. They embed a culture of learning, confident practice and feedback, and provides assurance that intervention supports positive outcomes for children and their families. Audits encourage continuous improvement and development in practice.

The audit tool is structured into 6 domains:

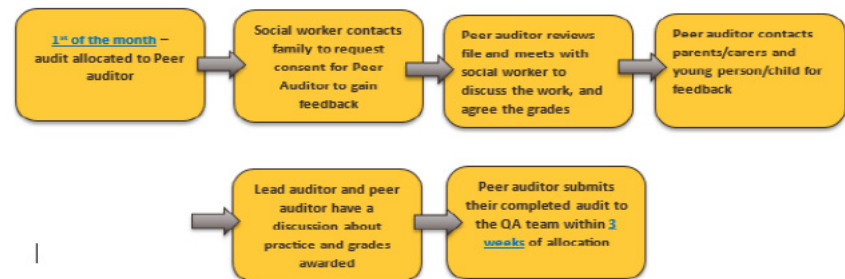
- Voice of the Child
- Assessments
- Quality of plans
- Management Oversight
- Effectiveness of Partnership Working
- Embracing Diversity

The QA team randomly identify children's case files to audit and these are allocated to managers on the 1st of each month. The audit is conducted by two auditors, the Lead Auditor is the case responsible Team Manager. The Peer Auditor and will be a member of the wider Quality Assurance Team, and Service Managers. The Peer Auditor will complete the audit tool alongside the allocated worker, facilitating a reflective discussion about practice and impact of our involvement. The Peer Auditor will also seek the views of the child or young person and their parent or carer(s) when completing a case file audit unless this is not possible.

Lead Auditor – Team Manager of allocated case



Peer Auditor – IRO/CP chair/Service Managers/QA practitioners

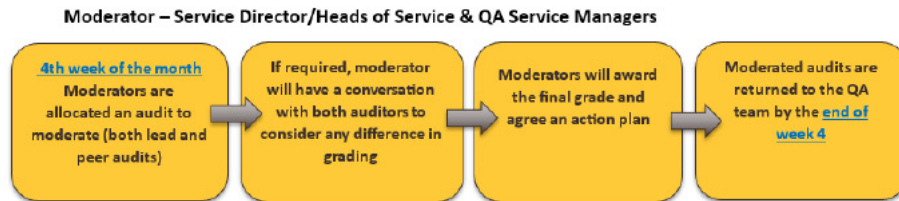


Grade descriptors have been developed to ensure accurate and consistent grades are applied. A copy of our grade descriptors can be found here– [add link to grade descriptors here](#)

The completed audit is uploaded onto Mosaic by the QA team and alerts are sent to all relevant staff and managers involved with the case to highlight the findings and any consequent actions.

Audit Moderation

Audit moderations will take place for any audit where there is a difference in the grade given by the Lead and Peer auditors, and also any audits where there are discrepancies in any domain grades. Moderators are drawn from the senior management team, including Service Directors, Heads of Service and the Principal Social Worker will be responsible for agreeing the final outcome grade and an action plan based on the audit findings. This will ensure quality and consistency across our auditing activity and will enable senior leaders to have robust oversight of the quality of practice in Herefordshire. Wider practice and organisational findings are also captured as part of the audit process and these are discussed in monthly meetings and an appropriate plan of action timetabled.



Inadequate Audits

Any case audit that has been graded 'Inadequate' is alerted to the Head of Service for oversight and comment. Inadequate audits are reviewed at 6 weeks and a senior manager will re-audit 3 months after the initial audit to satisfy themselves that all actions have been completed and there has been an improvement in the service the child and family receives.

Tracking audit outcomes and 'closing the loop' activity

Case file audits are tracked by the Quality Assurance team and senior managers to ensure any actions are completed and reflective discussions about the findings take place within supervision to support the development of the practitioner and improve service delivery and outcomes for children. Tracking of audit outcomes at overall and domain level takes place at a department, service, team and practitioner level allowing us to quickly identify any practice that needs to be challenged. This enables managers to initiate immediate changes to case management to positively impact on children and young people. We routinely record audit grades for each domain within the audit, as well as overall grade and use this data in our reporting to demonstrate trajectory of improvement and target areas for development.

Learning from audit

Learning from collaborative audits is collated and presented in a monthly managers' briefing and quarterly Quality Assurance reports. These provide analysis that identifies overall themes, and data for individual service areas and teams, to enable managers to focus on particular areas of practice. Managers review findings from audit with the practitioner within supervision, and any support or learning is identified.

Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs Challenge and Escalation

In Herefordshire the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and Child Protection Chairs (CPC) form part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. A key aspect of their role is to provide oversight and if required, challenge of practice, independent to the operational service. IROs and CPCs have a duty to monitor how Herefordshire Children's Services carries out its statutory duties towards children who are looked after by the Local Authority or subject to the statutory child protection process. Where an IRO or CPC does not believe the expected practice or quality of service has been provided, or where they have safeguarding concerns for a child, the IRO/ CPC will seek to discuss the concerns with the social worker and their manager as part of the escalation process. If no resolution has been achieved, the concern is escalated through the Dispute Resolution Process, which can be found [here ...add link](#)

The Service Manager for the IRO service produces an annual report detailing their activity together with learning and recommendations for the wider service.

Component Three - Children, Family and Carer Feedback

Feedback from children and families is an integral part of our quality assurance activity. Along with the evaluation of data and audit findings, this helps us understand the experiences of children, their families and carers who receive our services. Feedback also enables us to measure the impact of practice and service delivery and the analysis used to determine actions to improve the quality of our services and also the experience of children and families receiving our services. We gather feedback at different points in time in the following ways:

- Surveys of children and young people at specific points in their journey through our services. These are undertaken through the use of structured questionnaires both service wide (such as when cases close) and within service areas (such as after a Child Protection Conference).
- Complaints and compliments
- Feedback from independent advocates
- Placement Review Meetings
- Children's feedback from Children Looked After reviews
- Herefordshire Young Voices Group and other activity led by the Participation Officer
- And through a range of feedback opportunities in the service area QA programmes



How we use the Learning from Quality Assurance

Themes from the quality assurance activity is shared in the following ways:

- Practice briefings and a rolling programme of targeted practice development workshops delivered by the Quality Assurance Team and Social Care Academy.
- A monthly briefing to the Managers' Meeting by the Quality Assurance Team to reflect the previous month's case file audit activity. This will include information on compliance, overview of grades, audit themes, good practice and areas for development.
- A quarterly Quality Assurance report to the Improvement Board will summarise the previous 3 months overall case file audit activity, an overview of learning from complaints, feedback from those using the service, Rapid Reviews, multi-agency audit and any other quality assurance activity.
- Presentation of the findings from Quality Assurance at the Staff Conferences and Principal Social Worker Forums.
- A monthly newsletter from the Social Care Academy will bring together key audit findings, areas for development and impact for children and young people and training and development opportunities.
- Significant learning from quality assurance activity is published as briefing notes and also posters for the locality bases.
- The Complaints Team will continue to provide quarterly and annual reports to CLT and DLT and a summary of the quarterly report will be shared with the Quality Assurance Team in order to incorporate into the quarterly report.
- A library of good practice exemplars is held and updated by the Quality Assurance team.
- Team Managers are responsible for sharing audit findings at Team Meetings and for supporting individual Social Workers with any individual feedback. This ensures any outstanding practice is celebrated, but also that any practice identified as Inadequate is challenged at the earliest opportunity to improve outcomes for children and families.

Learning from Compliments and Complaints

We take a positive approach to complaints and value them as an important form of feedback on our services. We use the lessons learnt from complaints to continuously improve our practice and we aim to work collaboratively with families to ensure we provide a high standard of service that meets their expectations. Taking a restorative approach we offer children, young people and families an early resolution conversation as an alternative to the formal process. Formal complaints are dealt with under the Herefordshire Complaints Procedure – **Get involved – Herefordshire Council** and first stage complaints are handled by the Quality Assurance Team to offer families or professionals an independent review of their complaint. Quarterly and annual reports to senior leaders provides information about any complaint received by Children's Services.

Our other methods of Quality Assurance

Staff Feedback

- Annual Social Work Health Check
- Annual colleague Health Check
- Collaborative audit
- Exit interviews
- Supervision
- Ofsted Annual Conversation

Practice Leadership

- Restorative Practice Framework & Expectations
- Management oversight on case records
- Learning Reviews
- Practice observations
- Supervision
- Child Protection Conference Consultations

- CP chair and IRO Midway reviews
- Escalations: Child Protection Conference Chairs, Children Looked After Independent Reviewing Officers

Multi-agency Quality Assurance Activity

- Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) multi-agency audit activity
- Multi agency partner feedback
- Escalations from partner agencies

A multi-agency audit is an opportunity to consider cases involving more than one agency where there are areas for potential learning and future multi-agency practice improvement. Selection and prioritisation of these audits are determined by the Quality and Effectiveness (Q&E) sub-group of the Herefordshire Children's Safeguarding Partnership. Multi-agency audits are led and facilitated by senior officers nominated by the Q&E sub group. The focus of practice will inform the agencies responsible for the audit team but can include colleagues from Health, Education, the Police and any other agency that may be relevant to the nature of the practice being reviewed.

Inspections & Reviews

- Ofsted ILACS inspection and Monitoring Visits
- Ofsted and CQC SEND Inspection
- DfE Commissioner reports to the Minister for Children and Families
- Skills for Care Audits
- Local Authority Peer Reviews

Workforce Development

A Learning & Development

An essential part of our Quality Assurance Framework is taking the learning from the range of activity to drive practice improvement. This is achieved through a variety of methods, including manager oversight and guidance, training and development opportunities, refreshed policies and processes, practitioner forums, reports and publications. We know that well trained, well supported staff are key to delivering best practice and achieving better outcomes for children and their families, and practitioners in Herefordshire are supported to grow, develop and progress, whatever stage they are at within their career. We are committed to developing a learning culture that is response to the needs of our staff and training opportunities are regularly advertised – see **SCA Learning Offer 1st April 2024 v2.pdf** for our current learning & development offer.

Our workforce improvement plan is refreshed periodically and monitored through our Workforce Delivery Board. Through a skilled, engaged and flexible workforce, we aim to develop our Children's and Young People's Services to be consistently 'Good' and ensure that our children and young people receive the best possible services from us. We have different methods and forums to capture staff feedback and we use this feedback to ensure we create a culture of support and learning, where staff have the skills and tools to deliver high quality practice. See <http://hcintranet.herefordshire.gov.uk/Id/Shared Documents/Workforce strategy FINAL 2024-2028 Accessible Word Version.docx> for the workforce strategy. (need a better link)