

SESLIP Developing Regional Quality Assurance Capacity

Project Sponsors: Steve Crocker, DCS, Stuart Ashley, AD, Hampshire County Council

SESLIP Consultant: Diane Williamson

PROPOSAL FOR COMMON COMPONENTS OF A QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This proposal has been developed as part of the SESLIP improvement plan priority to develop regional quality assurance capacity. It draws on discussions with the Quality Assurance leads across the region, a review of the Quality Assurance Frameworks used across the region, learning from the North West Association of Directors of Children's Services Quality Assurance: Practice and Principle, and learning from the Research in Practice Strategic Briefing, Building a Quality Culture in Child and Family Services.

1.2. During the initial scoping exercise, many of the Directors of Children's Services said that they would like to see commonality and moderation of QA systems across the SE region; a shared understanding about the components of an effective Quality Assurance Framework and some guidance on what a quality assurance framework could include.

1.3. Quality assurance is often expressed as a continuous improvement cycle using a range of interdependent methods to measure prevalence, monitor practice, listen to people's experiences, identify areas for improvement and enact change as a result. An effective model will identify both 'what is working well and why' and 'what we need to do better'.

1.4. The quality assurance framework should provide a clear structure, which ensures that practice is thoroughly explored and analysed through the routine oversight of case work, a robust cycle of case auditing, learning from complaints and consultation, and scrutiny by the independent reviewing officer. Learning is translated into whole-service change through the service improvement plan. (Ofsted, City of London (2016))

1.5. Understanding practice should focus on three Ofsted self evaluation questions,

- What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
- How do you know it?
- What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

These questions need to be underpinned by professional curiosity to understand the lived experience of the child, what professional intervention might feel like to children and young people and what impact it has on their life.

1.6. There are some common themes in stronger local authorities that have been identified by Ofsted through inspections.

- A strong culture of continuous learning and improvement within the local authority and across the partnership, informed by audits and links to training

- Good quality performance data that is used effectively to identify potential strengths and weaknesses.
- Scrutiny and analysis of performance data results in effective exploration of underlying practice issues and leads to effective action
- Wide ranging quality assurance programme with a variety of methods including group supervision, audit, multi-agency audits, external scrutiny and peer review.
- A range of good-quality performance and quality assurance reports with clear narrative explaining the findings and actions required to improve practice. This gives senior managers an effective line of sight to the quality of frontline. Being able to effectively articulate and evidence the impact of quality assurance activity is key to securing a positive judgement for the impact of leaders on improving practice.

Excerpt from Practice and Principles Quality Assurance (1) - Ofsted and NW ADCS.

1.7. A key component of the ILACS inspection is the “Impact of Leaders on Social Work Practice.”

This judgement is likely to be judged good if the following apply:

- **Strategic Leadership** – “The chief executive and lead member are well informed and hold the DCS and their leadership team to account for the quality of practice and the challenges in the local area. This is exemplified through accurate assessments of practice that drive improvement”
- **Learning Culture** - “The local authority has a track record of responding appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies or new demands and shows resilience to new challenges. The local authority’s self-evaluation of practice is accurate... The local authority can demonstrate evidence of practice that is informed and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence about the quality of services”
- **Performance management** “The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated understanding of its effectiveness and uses this to drive improvement...Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and used clearly to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people”
- **Workforce** – “Careful monitoring of workloads and oversight of the impact of wider systems on working conditions for practitioners ensures that they have the capacity and ability to develop meaningful relationships with children and families... There is effective organisational support for the training and professional development of social workers and managers. Leaders and managers have created an environment where good social work can flourish and this is evident in the overall quality and impact of social work”

1.8. This proposal identifies 12 core components for a Quality Assurance Framework with brief (not exhaustive) explanatory notes to help to develop a common understanding that should be tailored for each organisation.

2. PROPOSED COMPONENTS OF A QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

The proposed components of a whole system Quality Assurance Framework are:

- i. Performance meetings and reports
- ii. Performance data
- iii. Practice standards, including procedures and regulation
- iv. Case audit
- v. Supervision standards and audit
- vi. Practice observation
- vii. Feedback from children and families, inc learning from complaints and compliments
- viii. Distributed leadership and accountability with clear roles and responsibilities – inc clear role for PSW
- ix. Voice of the workforce
- x. Learning culture that informs training and practice development
- xi. Moderation system
- xii. Self-evaluation and improvement plan

2.1. PERFORMANCE MEETINGS AND REPORTS

- Performance boards/meetings consider performance data and reports, alongside workforce development and summary audit reports with an emphasis on analysis, findings, action and learning, with the ability to drill down into services or themes
- Performance meetings will be tailored to the needs of the organisation but need to have a golden thread through the organisation
- Discussions about quality of practice and learning from audits should be an integral part of regular performance discussions and learning.

2.2. PERFORMANCE DATA

- Quantitative reviews of data are a means of indirect QA (rather than a direct examination of practice), most often focused on monitoring compliance through process measures that tell us how much and how often and less often looking at outcome performance measures.
- Data confidence requires understanding of:
 - Data source– where is it drawn from on the case recording system
 - Accuracy and timeliness of recording
 - Purpose - what it is describing/measuring and what it may be telling us about practice and impact
 - Trend and comparison (internal and external)
- Data output is only as good as the input, therefore recording needs to be addressed, as does the understanding of whether the reports are drawing information from the correct sources

- Performance information should not be treated as a straightforward measure of good or bad practice but interrogated to see what lies behind it. A low number of children being removed from their birth families, for example, can arise from skilled help making the children safe or from a poor quality assessment of risk. Munro (2011)
- Effective organisations will be drawing a range of data from across the system to triangulate with other evidence. Since ‘not everything that counts can be counted’, data must be analysed in combination with qualitative analysis of written records, observation of practice and feedback from children, families and young people

2.3. PRACTICE STANDARDS, INCLUDING PROCEDURES AND REGULATION

- Practice standards that promote a shared understanding of good practice and support consistency of practice
- They should be informed by the local authority’s social work model
- Practice standard and procedures that are clear about the expectations of front line practitioners in terms of practice and recording and are clear about accountabilities
- Informed by national professional guidance and legislation, Ofsted criteria, social work principles and standards of proficiency, and drawing on sources such as the Professional Capabilities Framework, the Knowledge and Skills Statements for child and family social work, as well as practice frameworks used in your organisation
- Informed by asking children and young people and their carers about what is important to them. There are some consistent messages from research about basic standards that are important to children such as
 - workers skilled at listening and demonstrating an understanding of what is important to children and young people;
 - professionals turning up to meetings and appointments on time;
 - having one person who coordinates things and that person doing what they say they will do;
 - not having to tell sometimes painful stories over and over again;
 - knowing who does what and where to go for help.

2.4. CASE AUDIT

- Case files should be a rich source of information about the presenting needs and services provided, quality of practice, case recording, management support and the views, experiences and outcomes of the child. The challenge is to move away from an onerous process led, marking of compliance and practice and use it to understand practice, its impact on the child and the family and how the system and organisation supports or impedes good practice.
- It is an opportunity for staff and managers to use audit as a means to promote reflection, learning, professional curiosity and debate and for organisational learning. Use audit to identify what has led to the (good) quality of practice – which interventions, factors or behaviours have contributed to this outcome for the

child(ren) in this instance. What is it that has made an impact and can that be shared or replicated?

- if completed alongside service user feedback, it needs to consider the child/family viewpoint of the work undertaken
- Themes and issues should be fed back into the culture of learning and improvement and remedial actions and recommendations followed up with a clear tracking system.
- Frequency and nature of audits will be dependent on the needs of the organisation. However, their purpose should be clear and understood throughout the organisation
- Audits may fall into 5 main types
 - i. Regular case audit
 - ii. Thematic /deep dive audit
 - iii. Multi-agency audit
 - iv. Focused audit as a result of identified performance management issues
 - v. Externally commissioned audit

2.5. SUPERVISION STANDARDS AND AUDIT

- Supervision and management oversight is a fundamental way of understanding and quality assuring practice.
- The quality assurance of supervision itself helps to identify variability in the quality and regularity of supervision and management oversight. Quality assurance of supervision involves the audit of supervision records as well as the observation of supervision and 360-degree feedback. If done throughout the organisation it provides a golden thread from senior managers to frontline practice

2.6. PRACTICE OBSERVATION

- Observation of practitioners, both in their everyday work and at meetings, is an important element of quality assuring front line social work. This enhances the quality assurance undertaken through case file audits to more fully understand the way practitioners work, support and build relationships with children and families.
- Observation of social work practice by senior managers helps senior managers to understand the experience both of practitioners and families

2.7. FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, inc learning from complaints and compliments

- Datasets include indicators which monitor children and young people's participation
- Embed the voice of the child and family in all elements of the child's record including assessment and care planning records
- Participation activities that enable organisations to understand how their services and interventions is experienced by children and families, providing insight into how to improve services and practice to make a positive difference to children & families
- Service user feedback, for example in case file audits, weeks in practice and peer reviews and You said, we did feedback
- Engage technology – e.g. Mind of My Own (MOMO) app
- Use learning from complaints and compliments

2.8. DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY WITH CLEAR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- It is important to create ownership and challenge throughout the organisation with clarity of QA roles and responsibilities from political leader and senior managers through to front line practitioners and partners

2.9. VOICE OF THE WORKFORCE

- Ensure staff are part of QA activity and find ways to support them to see QA as a learning tool
- Celebrate success and identify what needs to be better and encourage reflective feedback from practitioners, asking them what they have done well and what didn't go well, what would help them.
- Listen to staff about their experience of working for the organisation
- Use staff surveys and health checks

2.10. LEARNING CULTURE THAT INFORMS TRAINING AND PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

- Develop a QA culture which encourages everyone to speak up or identify emerging problems at an early stage.
- Recognise that poor practice will happen and needs to be identified as early as possible so that any system issues can be corrected and poor practice reduced.
- Focus on what has gone well and how to build on those strengths
- Share examples of good practice through team meetings, service bulletins.
- Use opportunities for families to feedback on where things have worked well
- Incorporate learning from outside the organisation, e.g. learning from SCRs, OLA Ofsted inspections and Peer Challenges and self-assess against this learning
- Develop a clear role of the PSW and workforce development in supporting learning and practice development, especially for ASYEs

2.11. MODERATION SYSTEM

- Moderation of case audit within the organisation provides challenge and supports consistency of understanding about the quality of practice and what good looks like
- Peer moderation in an organisation promotes reflective discussion and debate
- External challenge is increasingly common in authorities seeking to hold a mirror up to practice, often providing a useful benchmark for self-assessment and validation and/or challenge of what has already been identified as areas of strength and areas for improvement
- External audit could be undertaken at the same time as the organisation auditing the same cases in parallel (rather than before) and comparing findings

2.12. SELF EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

- Based on the Ofsted framework, the self-assessment looks at where the service is, what we know about the quality of front- line practice, how we know this and what areas need to be focussed on in the next year.
- Ensure the SEF is evidence based and demonstrates management grip
- The SEF needs to present as whole system around the priorities and the journey and experience for the child
- Ensure strengths are clearly backed up with tangible evidence, including impact on children and families
- Clearly articulate the improvement journey with evidence from the QA system
- Evidence Learning throughout
- From the self-assessment a quality improvement plan is formulated, monitored and reported to senior managers with additional action and activities undertaken where necessary and the cycle begins again

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