

Quality Assurance Framework for Nottinghamshire Children's Services

Contents

1. Introduction and Purpose
2. Application of the Quality Assurance Framework
3. Quality Assurance Cycle
4. Quality Assurance Activity - Our Expectation of Services
5. Quality Assurance Responsibilities
6. Governance Arrangements

1. Introduction and Purpose

The Children, Families and Cultural Services Department is committed to achieving the ambition of Nottinghamshire being “a place where children are safe and happy, where everyone enjoys a good quality of life, and where everyone can achieve their potential.”

In order to ensure that children and families in Nottinghamshire receive a high quality service, robust quality assurance arrangements must be in place to evidence that this is the case, and to identify any areas where improvements need to be made. Many services already have quality assurance arrangements in place and this overarching framework is intended to bring consistency to these arrangements. At the same time, it is recognised that individual service responsibilities and regulatory frameworks mean that they may have specific requirements that will need to be incorporated into service level quality assurance arrangements.

This document will articulate:

- the quality assurance cycle, and range of quality assurance activities that will be undertaken;
- the role that elected members and senior officers will play in relation to the quality assurance of children's services; and
- the governance arrangements for quality assurance reporting.

The quality assurance activities outlined in this document are in addition to routine performance monitoring undertaken through processes such as supervision, Employee Performance and Development Reviews (EPDRs) and Leadership or Management Team meetings. Leadership and Management Team meetings should be used to monitor:

- key performance indicators;
- budget;
- workforce data such as vacancies, turnover, sickness absence, caseloads, workforce development;

- implementation of service plans.

Supervision and EPDRs should be undertaken in line with the corporate policy which can be accessed via <http://intranet.nottsc.gov.uk/managersresourcecentre/>. The Performance Management Framework for Children, Families and Cultural Services should be read in conjunction with this document.

2. Application of the Quality Assurance Framework

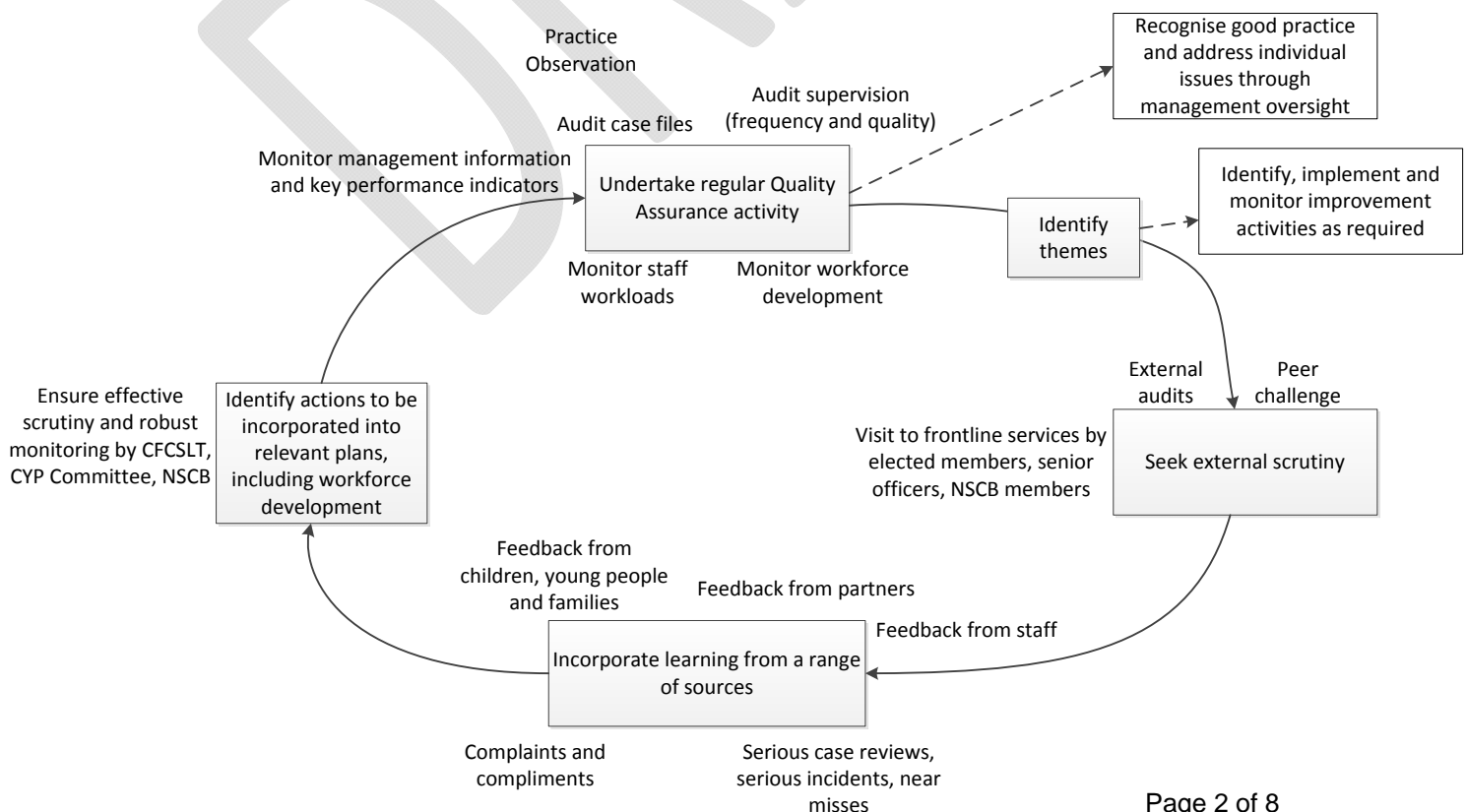
The services that come under the auspices of this Framework are direct delivery services to children and families managed within:

- Early Help (Common Assessment Framework, Targeted Support (including Supporting Families), Early Years and Early Intervention)
- Children's Social Care
- Youth Justice
- Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy and Provision
- Achievement and Equality

The quality assurance requirements set out in this document apply to services provided directly by the Council and to those commissioned by it.

3. Quality Assurance Cycle

The diagram below outlines the quality assurance cycle that we will use to underpin the Quality Assurance Framework. This shows that information about the quality of service provision will be gathered from a range of sources, analysed for trend information, and used to identify improvement priorities, such as workforce development needs.



4. Quality Assurance Activity - Our Expectation of Services

4.1 Casework

Key early help and specialist services commissioned and provided by the department include Early Years and Early Intervention, Targeted Support and Youth Justice Services, Children's Social Care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy and Provision. These services provide support to children and their families to enable them to achieve their best possible outcomes by taking a casework approach, involving assessment of needs – planning – intervention – review. Each service is expected to adopt and work to the *Working Together 2013* definition of a high quality assessment, which notes that assessments:

- “are child centred. Where there is a conflict of interest, decisions should be made in the child's best interests;
- are rooted in child development and informed by evidence;
- are focused on action and outcomes for children;
- are holistic in approach, addressing the child's needs within their family and wider community;
- ensure equality of opportunity;
- involve children and families;
- build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties;
- are integrated in approach;
- are a continuing process not an event;
- lead to action, including the provision and review of services; and
- are transparent and open to challenge”.

4.1 Feedback from children, young people and families

In line with the commitment to participation outlined in the Children's Trust Participation Strategy, each service area is expected to have arrangements in place to seek feedback from children, young people and families, analyse the information gathered, and use it to inform service planning and development. Where there are opportunities to actively involve children, young people and families in service development, these should be promoted.

4.2 Complaints and Compliments

Quarterly complaints information is provided to each service area in Children, Families and Cultural Services. This information is 'high level' and intended to identify trends and problem areas, as well as providing information about individual complaints.

Additionally, an action plan is developed for each Stage 2 investigation and Stage 3 panel, unless there are no recommendations or learning because the complaints were not upheld. The action plan includes specific recommendations and learning points from the investigation or panel, the action required to implement these, the responsible manager and a timescale

for completion. The Complaints and Information Team monitors action plans and ensures that they are completed.

4.3 Feedback from staff

Each service area is expected to have arrangements in place to promote a two way dialogue between frontline staff and senior managers. The purpose of this is for staff to be able raise issues, identify solutions, and contribute to service developments. Examples of such arrangements could include think tanks, forums and focus groups. Staff surveys can also be used as a mechanism to gain feedback.

4.4 Feedback from partners

Each service area should put in place arrangements including briefings, workshops and surveys where appropriate, to seek feedback on the quality of service provision.

4.5 Case file auditing

Each service should have arrangements in place for managers to audit case files, using an audit tool appropriate to the service being delivered. Auditing should take place on at least a quarterly basis. Audit tools should incorporate the following areas:

- quality of assessment (as outlined in the introduction to this document)
- identification of risk
- quality of planning and review
- quality of intervention
- evidence of child or young person's views being heard and acted upon
- evidence of diversity needs being considered and addressed
- effectiveness of coordination between agencies and quality of joint working
- evidence of management oversight
- evidence of impact/improved outcomes

Audits should be recorded and uploaded, where appropriate, to the child or young person's file on the case management system.

If any immediate concerns are identified regarding a child or young person's safety or wellbeing, the auditor is responsible for ensuring that the case holding social worker and their team manager are notified as a matter of urgency. Where the case is not open to children's social care, the case holding lead professional and their team manager should be contacted and the MASH notified of the concern.

Audits should be graded to enable progress monitoring, using the standardised categories of outstanding, good, adequate and inadequate. Each service should provide guidelines to support auditors in reaching

grading decisions. A summary report detailing audit grades should be produced on a quarterly basis, to enable trends to be identified.

In addition to routine auditing, themed or deep dive auditing into specific issues should be undertaken. Service areas are encouraged to involve children, young people and families and frontline staff within the auditing process, where this is considered to be appropriate.

4.7 Practice Observation

Direct observation of the practice of frontline staff by first line managers is a key way of ensuring that children and families are receiving a quality service that addresses the needs of children. It is expected that each frontline practitioner is observed twice a year, and that supervision should be the means of ensuring that good practice is commended and areas for improvement identified and addressed.

4.8 Serious case reviews, serious incidents and near misses

Serious case reviews, serious incidents and near misses provide the opportunity to reflect in detail on practice within individual cases, and to identify and act on areas for improvement. Each service area is expected to engage fully with the requirements outline in *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013* and the Youth Justice Board *Guidance on Serious Incident Reporting Procedures 2007*.

4.9 External Reviews

In addition to internal quality assurance activities, the department's Senior Leadership Team will commission external scrutiny. This may take the form of a peer review, safeguarding assurance visit or practice challenge, from the regional sector-led improvement programme. Each type of event involves a team of peers (officers and elected members) from other local authorities scrutinising an area of practice according to key lines of enquiry that have been agreed in advance.

Additionally, the Departmental Leadership Team will commission external reviews of practice when internal audit or performance information indicates that there is an issue that requires independent scrutiny.

Finally, external inspections of children's services provision by Ofsted provide an analysis of strengths and weakness in relation to early help and children's social care services and include specific recommendations for improvement.

5. Quality Assurance Responsibilities

In order to ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny of children's services provision, the Chief Executive, Corporate Director for Children, Families and Cultural Services and lead elected members will undertake a number of direct roles. This includes directly engaging with children and families and frontline

staff to obtain their views on service provision, as well as scrutinising the outcomes from quality assurance activities undertaken within service areas.

5.1 Chief Executive

Task	Purpose	Frequency
Attend Children in Care Council	To gain first hand knowledge of the experiences and issues of looked after children for whom the local authority is corporate parent	Annually
Attend Social Work Forum	To gain first hand knowledge of the perspective of and issues for frontline staff	Annually
Observe the NSCB	To gather assurance about the effectiveness of the Board	Annually
Meet with Chair LSCB, lead elected members, Principal Child and Family Social Worker	To gather assurance on performance strengths and challenges within Children's Social Care	Every six months
Meet with DCS and SD Children's Social Care	To follow up on issues arising from QA activity	Every six months
Commission independent and/or peer reviews	To seek external assurance of key performance areas within Children's Services	As required

5.2 Elected Members

Task	Purpose	Frequency
Meet with children and young people through a programme of visits including children's homes (rota visits)	To gain first hand knowledge of the experiences and issues of looked after children for whom the local authority is corporate parent	Quarterly
Lead member to attend Children in Care Council	To gain first hand knowledge of the experiences and issues of looked after children for whom the local authority is corporate parent	Every meeting
Lead member to meet with frontline staff through a programme of visits to area offices and provision such as Children's Centres, schools	To gain first hand knowledge of the perspective of and issues for frontline staff	Quarterly
Lead member to attend the NSCB as a participant observer	To gather assurance about the effectiveness of the Board	Quarterly
Lead member to meet with the Principal Child and	To gather assurance on performance strengths and	Every six months

Family Social Worker	challenges within Children's Social Care from the perspective of frontline staff	
Meet with DCS and SD Children's Social Care	To follow up on issues arising from QA activity	As required
Report to the Children and Young People's Committee	To report issues arising from QA activity and action taken in response	Every six months

5.3 Director of Children, Families and Cultural Services (DCS)

Task	Purpose	Frequency
Meet with children and young people through a programme of visits including children's homes, early help provision, schools	To gain first hand knowledge of the experiences and issues of children and young people in Nottinghamshire	Monthly
Attend Children in Care Council	To gain first hand knowledge of the experiences and issues of looked after children for whom the local authority is corporate parent	Three times per year
Meet with frontline staff through a programme of visits to area offices and provision such as Children's Centres, schools	To gain first hand knowledge of the perspective of and issues for frontline staff	Monthly
Attend Social Work Forum	To gain first hand knowledge of the perspective of and issues for frontline staff	Every six months
Be an active member of the NSCB	To provide appropriate scrutiny and challenge to partner agencies with regard to their safeguarding responsibilities	Quarterly
Audit 2 case files	To monitor the quality of case work	Quarterly
Commission independent and/or peer reviews	To seek external assurance of key performance areas within Children's Services	As required
Scrutinise the outcomes from quality assurance activities and agree improvement activity required	To ensure that quality assurance activity leads to service improvement	Quarterly

5.4 Service Directors

Task	Purpose	Frequency
Meet with children and young people through a programme of visits including children's homes, early help provision, schools	To gain first-hand knowledge of the experiences and issues of children and young people in Nottinghamshire	Monthly
Meet with frontline staff through a programme of visits to area offices and provision such as Children's Centres, schools	To gain first-hand knowledge of the perspective of and issues for frontline staff	Monthly
Attend Staff Forum(s)	To gain first-hand knowledge of the perspective of and issues for frontline staff	Quarterly
Audit 2 case files	To monitor the quality of case work	Quarterly
Consider the outcomes from quality assurance activities and identify improvement activity required	To ensure that quality assurance activity leads to service improvement	Quarterly

The responsibilities of Group Managers through to first line managers and practitioners will be outlined within individual service quality management frameworks, in recognition of different services' regulatory frameworks.

6. Governance Arrangements

A quarterly report collating the outcomes from individual service areas' quality assurance arrangements will be collated by the Planning, Performance and Quality Assurance Group for scrutiny by Children, Families and Cultural Services Leadership Team. This report will also include the outcomes from quality assurance activity undertaken by senior officers and elected members.

A report will be prepared for the Children and Young People's Committee and the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board every six months.

Each report will identify themes from the quality assurance activity undertaken, outline improvement activity required, and plans in place to address this.