

14 October 2013**Agenda Item: 6**

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURE

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE CHILDREN'S SERVICES QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval from the Children and Young People's Committee for the implementation of a Quality Assurance Framework for the children's services functions within Children, Families and Cultural Services.

Information and Advice

2. Assuring the quality of the services provided to children, young people and their families directly by staff employed by the Children, Families and Cultural Services department and by staff in contracted services is of critical importance in driving service improvements and ensuring that children and young people are effectively safeguarded.
3. Nottinghamshire Children's Social Care has had a Quality Management Framework in place since 2009. This framework outlines expectations of managers in terms of a range of quality assurance activities including case file audits, supervision audits and direct observation of social work practice. These activities are intended to provide evidence of the quality of practice, and identify areas for improvement and plans to address these. The Targeted Support and Youth Justice Service also has Quality Frameworks in place, and is in the process of developing a framework for the Supporting Families area of work.
4. This overarching framework intends to bring consistency to service specific frameworks, and to provide guidance for those service areas that do not yet have formal quality arrangements in place, such as the new Multi-Agency Commissioning Hub delivering Education, Health and Social Care plans. The framework is explicitly for those services within the department that deliver services on a case work basis directly to children, young people and their families.
5. The framework formalises the role of elected members and senior officers in quality assurance, and specifies expectations in terms of activities such as case file auditing, and visits to frontline provision to meet with children, young people and families and staff. It sets out a mechanism for feedback to be provided directly to the Chief Executive by lead elected members, the independent chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the principal child and family social worker, so that the Leadership Team within Children, Families and Cultural Services can be appropriately challenged and held to account.

6. In November 2013, Ofsted will publish a new framework for inspecting services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. Ahead of this new framework, Ofsted published a consultation document in June 2013, seeking comments on the proposed descriptors of 'good' authorities. Amongst the proposed grade descriptors of 'good' leadership, management and governance are the following:
- "The local authority knows itself well, is a learning organisation and can demonstrate evidence of practice that is informed, modified and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence about the quality of services and the experiences of children, young people and families who use them. This may, for example, include feedback from the children in care council, change that arises from complaints that children and families make about their experiences or from successful or disrupted placements or adoption breakdown.
 - The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated understanding of its effectiveness. It demonstrates a track record of dealing rigorously and effectively with areas for development. Leaders, including elected members and managers, have a comprehensive and current knowledge of what is happening at the 'front line' and a track record of responding appropriately and quickly to service deficiencies or new demands.
 - Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and demonstrably used to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people."
7. Whilst these are not definitive grade descriptors, it is highly likely that they will form part of the inspection framework when it is published in November. It is therefore crucial that the department embeds the quality assurance arrangements described in the document attached as **Appendix 1** and uses them to drive service improvements.
8. It is intended that through the proposed regular reporting of the outcomes from quality assurance activity to the Children, Families and Cultural Services Leadership Team and the Children and Young People's Committee, the organisation will develop a stronger learning culture and services to children and families will continuously improve.
9. The Quality Assurance Framework will be implemented by the Planning, Performance and Quality Assurance Group within the Children, Families and Cultural Services department, working with operational service leads where appropriate. This will include developing a programme of activity to support implementation of the framework, including briefings and workshops.

Other Options Considered

10. No other options have been considered. Extending quality assurance arrangements across the range of services delivered to children and families will improve the quality of service provision and thus lead to improved outcomes for children and young people.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

11. Implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework for Nottinghamshire Children's Services will strengthen scrutiny by elected members and senior officers of the quality of frontline practice and drive service improvements across the range of children's services functions.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

13. Service users will benefit both from having increased opportunities to provide feedback on the service they receive, and from higher quality services.

Financial Implications

14. The financial implications of the quality assurance framework can be met within existing resources in the Children, Families and Cultural Services departmental budget.

Safeguarding of Children Implications

15. Strengthening the quality assurance of arrangements to safeguard children and young people will lead to service improvements and the improvement of such arrangements.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Quality Assurance Framework for the children's services functions within Children, Families and Cultural Services be approved.

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Constitutional Comments (LM 19/09/13)

16. The Children and Young People's Committee has delegated authority within the Constitution to approve the recommendations in the report.

Financial Comments (KLA 18/09/13)

17. The financial implications of the report are set out in paragraph 14 above.

Background Papers and Published Documents

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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