

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ADULT & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	7 NOVEMBER 2013	AGENDA ITEM:	14
TITLE:	CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK & STANDARDS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR JAN GAVIN	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN & FAMILIES
SERVICE:	EDUCATION, HOUSING AND SOCIAL CARE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	KAREN REEVE	TEL:	0118 9374163
JOB TITLE:	HEAD OF CHILDRENS SERVICES	E-MAIL:	<a href="mailto:karen.reeve@reading.gov.uk">karen.reeve@reading.gov.uk</a>

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report highlights the new children's social care quality assurance framework being introduced across the service and its associated new set of practice standards that will be used to benchmark the quality of practice.
- 1.2 Attached are the Quality Assurance framework strategy document and the set of quality standards. These have been produced after considerable research and checking across other areas rated as good or outstanding and also with the help of Cornwall Children's Social Care who kindly offered their assistance after being recommended in the recent Ofsted inspection as being one of the few local authorities considered to have got the balance right in practice.

**2. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- 2.1 To scrutinise the framework

**3. POLICY CONTEXT**

- 3.1 Reading provides children's social care services to a broad range of children in need, in need of protection and looked after. In overall terms it is important that the service and its elected members know how well these services are provided and know what it is like for a child to receive the services. Having an effective quality assurance and performance management framework in place helps to ensure that services are always improving what it provides and helps direct resources to the places they are needed most.
- 3.2 In the recent Ofsted Inspection of child protection arrangements in the Borough the inspection team noted good progress was being made in a host of areas but that further work was needed to secure this across every aspect of

children's services. Children's social care have been working since then to further strengthen its quality assurance framework with the aim to expressly improve the way the child's journey through the system is understood and subsequently changes are made to continue to develop a service of excellence.

- 3.3 Ofsted also noted that service standards could be better defined to enable first line managers to consistently monitor and challenge practice to achieve greater levels of consistency and more rapid improvement.

#### 4 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Quality assurance involves the systematic monitoring and evaluation of practice, policies, and procedures, with the aim of improving services to achieve better outcomes for children and their families. To be effective our quality assurance framework (QAF) needs to be an integral part of everyday practice within children's social care. Measuring the impact of service delivery is central to achieving improved outcomes for children. This requires a strong quality assurance system to be in place that evidences that services are being delivered effectively and to standards that enable children's welfare to be safeguarded and promoted.
- 4.2 The service has reviewed its pre-existing QAF and identified areas where it needed to improve, in particular it needed to develop some practice standards for use by its front line managers and to act as a benchmark for surveys and practice audits and also improve the way the 'voice of the child' and the child's journey through the system was experienced to better enable it to make swift improvement in its journey to achieving excellence.
- 4.3 Hence after learning from elsewhere and reviewing what the best authorities are doing a new quality assurance and performance management framework has been developed and a corresponding set of service standards- both are attached.
- 4.4 The Framework can simplistically be shown as a triangle where the balance of scrutiny is around three key areas, service user (& practitioner) voice, quantitative data and qualitative data. Whilst the pre-existing QAF had many elements of all three elements it was less strong in the service user voice and the qualitative data needed further work to strengthen it. Hence the strategy shows these three aspects in better balance and also has an associated action plan and timetable of activity that will ensure the balance is maintained.
- 4.5 Elected Members will have already seen the difference in the way the service reports its work with more emphasis on the experience of children and their outcomes and a greater focus of quality, whilst not minimising the importance that performance indicators have in alerting you to the things you need to investigate further.
- 4.6 As noted earlier the QAF is underpinned by a set of practice standards (appended) which will be continually reviewed and updated in line with new learning and understanding gained through improvement. Further standards will be applicable for particular activities and processes.
- 4.7 A performance and quality meeting will be held quarterly chaired by the Head of Children's Service's (HoCS). The meeting will look at the various strands of

quality assurance activity and will agree action plans developed as a result of activity. This meeting will act as a challenge meeting where the HoCS can scrutinise activity, receive exception and corrective action reports and call managers to account. The outcomes from these meetings will be reported on a regular basis to the Lead Member.

4.8 Members of the ACE Committee are therefore asked to scrutinise the framework.

## 5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Strategy and its adoption will specifically contribute the Council's aims by promoting equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all

## 6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The strategy and standards have been developed using learning from other areas and research documents and have engaged and involved children, young people and adults that were using the services, the strategy is expressly written to ensure that the Child's voice in particular will be better heard in the work of the service.

6.2 Staff at all levels have been involved in the development of the strategy, the thoughts and professional views of social workers are well reflected in the content of the strategy and standards.

## 7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 The work of the strategy and its implementation will ensure that children's social care are better able to exercise its functions, and will enable it to better provide for services that;

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation
- will advance equality of opportunity between persons particularly the most vulnerable children in need within Reading;
- and better enable good relations between families and communities in Reading

7.2 The work will have a differential impact on children some of whom will be amongst the most vulnerable of Reading's citizens and will require a targeted and specialist service from social care.

## 8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications inherent in the report, although the strategy's implementation will enable the service to better fulfil its statutory responsibilities under the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- there are none inherent in this report itself

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Ofsted Inspection Report, March 2013, Inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children.

# Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework

September 2013 - September 2015

**Contact:**

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services

Version 1 Sept 2013



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

## 1. Introduction

Quality assurance involves the systematic monitoring and evaluation of practice, policies, and procedures, with the aim of improving our services to achieve better outcomes for children and their families.

Quality assurance is an integral part of everyday practice within children's social care. Measuring the impact of service delivery is central to achieving improved outcomes for children. This requires a strong quality assurance system to be in place that evidences that services are being delivered effectively and to standards that enable children's welfare to be safeguarded and promoted.

Reading Council is committed to achieving excellence through continual improvement where children are at the heart of everything we do, and have the opportunity to influence and shape the services they receive.

Primarily, it can help us ensure and evidence that children are being kept safe from harm and are protected. It helps improve outcomes for children and families we work with by identifying gaps and problems within practice and services offered, which can be addressed through service planning, training and commissioning. Crucially, it also helps us identify what interventions work for children and families and highlight good practice. It also assists the service in ensuring staff are supported in carrying out their jobs both safely and effectively.

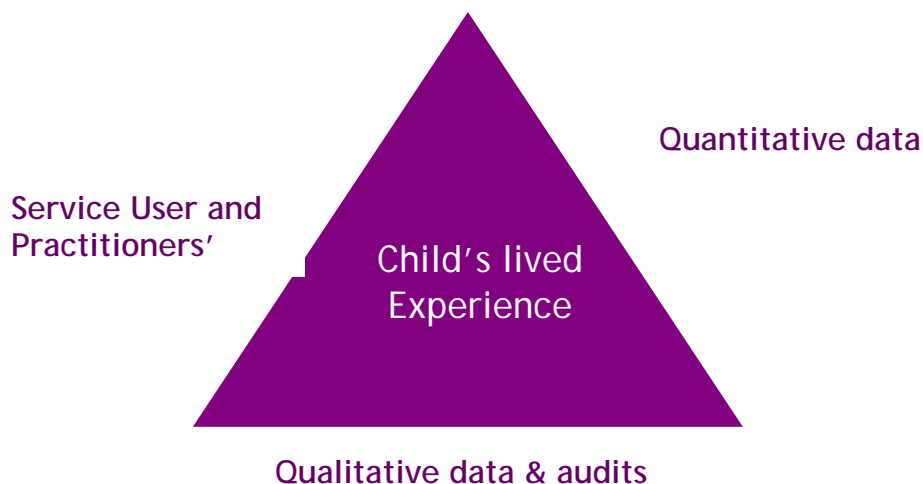
## 2. Background

The foundation of Reading's Quality Assurance Framework is illustrated in the diagram below and reflects that children's social care must move towards understanding the need to have a holistic view of the quality of practice and away from,

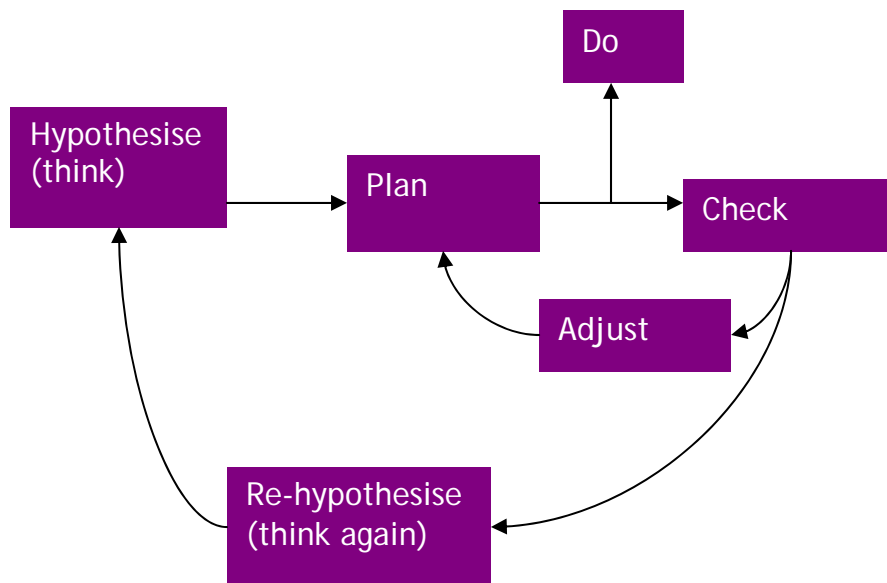
"a system that has become over bureaucratized and focused on compliance to one that values and develops professional expertise and is focused on the safety and welfare of children and young people"

(Eileen Munro 2010)

The Framework can simplistically shown as a triangle where the balance of scrutiny is around three key areas:



Underpinning the Quality Assurance Framework is an understanding that continual improvement depends on a culture of reflection in action and reflection following action (reflection during social work practice and in supervision/ consultation/ discussion). This is then fed into the double learning loop for the practitioner, service and organisation so that we can re-think, plan appropriately and improve outcomes.



Double Learning Loop (adapted from Agyris and Schön 1978)

The Framework is underpinned by a set of overarching principles and standards (appended) which are continually reviewed and updated in line with new learning and understanding gained through improvement.

Further standards are applicable for particular activities and processes.

### 3. Scope

This framework covers quality assurance activity in the Multi-agency safeguarding Hub, the Access and Assessment Team, Locality Teams (including Leaving Care), looked after children, child protection and child in need cases including social work cases held within the Disability team and cases held in the Edge of Care Service.

The framework is complemented by the information provided by and the methodologies and approaches adopted by:

- The Fostering and Adoption Teams
- The Child Protection Chairs & Independent Reviewing Officers
- Knowledge Management and;
- The Children's Action Teams
- The Local Safeguarding Children's Board

### 4. Activities and Processes supporting the Framework

#### 4.1 Service User and Practitioner voices

This will include the following activity

- Surveys of children and young people (CIN, CP and LAC)

- Parents' and carers' surveys
- Focus groups
- Immediate feedback
- Complaints and compliments

This will also include the views of practitioners through the

- Social worker health check
- Exit interviews
- Principal Child and Family Social Worker project
- Feedback to the Head of Service and other senior managers and Councillors visits to teams and services

#### 4.2 Quantitative data

- The Purple Book -the document that reports on the key performance indicators
- Service/ team/ worker level data

#### 4.3 Qualitative data

- IRO and CP Chairs reports & challenges
- Development of key Quality Indicators (QI's)
- Qualitative audit including Peer audits, Multi-agency audits & Managers' audits
- Supervision audits
- Direct observations of practice
- Appreciative evaluation
- Case & Learning Reviews (sometimes in partnership with the LSCB)

## **5. Implementing the Framework**

Quality assurance is an integral part of each and every practitioner's daily duties and should be part of 'business as usual'. The programme of activities and processes is set out in an action plan/timetable and will be a working document regularly reviewed by the management team. It will incorporate the expectations of managers within the service.

All activity will be measured against the agreed set of standards for practice across the service.

The Head of Children's Social Care will be responsible for the oversight of the entire framework who will ensure the formal feedback to the Director, elected members and the LSCB regularly.

There are three key forums that will drive continual improvement and the embedding of the double learning loop in practice.

### 5.1 Audit Feedback and Moderation Meetings (monthly)

Moderation amongst the auditor group is a key component to ensure consistency and credibility. The Service Manager for improvement will chair moderation meetings for selected participants, including Higher Specialist Social Workers. The aim of these meetings is to:

- i. 'Audit the auditors' - is the audit of high quality?*
- ii. Develop a sense of what good looks like.*
- iii. Agree further audits necessary*

## 5.2 Performance and Quality Meetings (quarterly)

The performance and quality meeting is chaired by the Head of Children's Social Care. The meeting will look at the various strands of quality assurance activity and will agree action plans developed as a result of activity. This meeting will act as a challenge meeting where the HOCSC can scrutinise activity, receive exception and corrective action reports and call managers to account. The following reports will be received:

### 5.2.1 Service User/ Practitioner voices

- Summary reports from any surveys of young people, families, carers
- Complaints reports
- Reports from the Principal Child and Family Social Worker project
- Summaries from social worker surveys and exit interviews

### 5.2.2 Quantitative data

- Exception reports (extract from Purple Book) and Corrective Action Plans

### 5.2.3 Qualitative data

- Reports from the IRO/ CP Service
- Internal audit report and action plan
- External audit report and action plan
- Report on the QIs

## 5.3 Performance and Quality Workshop (twice yearly)

This workshop will be led by the Children's Social Care Management Team and will involve practitioners at all levels of the service. The aim of the workshop will be to celebrate success, identify areas of potential risk and will adopt a 'turning the curve' process which will enable the service to identify the priority outcomes they want to improve.



# Good Practice Standards for Children's Social Care

September 2013

**Contact:**

Karen Reeve, Head of Children's Services

Version 1 Sept 2013



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
Working better with you

This document sets out the standards of service we work to and against which we are measured in the quality assurance and performance framework. The standards will be applied in day to day practice by first line managers who will use their professional judgement as to whether that standard has been met in that particular case. The threshold for professional judgments will also then in turn be tested in a variety of audits, practice checking and benchmarking across teams and managers

## Standards Overview:

1. In all our activities, the child's best interests will come first.
2. In our assessments and work we aim to understand and improve the child's lived experience.
3. Work is carried out in partnership with parents and carers to enable them to meet their responsibilities and achieve the best outcomes.
4. Children have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them.
5. In all our work, we will maintain an awareness of equal opportunities and the impact of discrimination.
6. We will work closely with other agencies to improve support that is offered to children, young people and families.
7. Work with children and families is undertaken within the legislative framework and makes use of best practice guidance.
8. Our records are accurate, complete and demonstrate the child's story.
9. Work with children is managed and supervised to achieve the best possible outcomes.
10. We treat children, families and our working partners with courtesy and respect.

## Standard 1

In all our activities, the child's best interests will come first

### Criteria

- 1.1 We will follow the Berkshire LSCB policy and procedures to ensure that children are safeguarded from harm.
- 1.2 Children's needs are identified and assessed using the agreed assessment processes, tools and frameworks.
- 1.3 Children are supported to achieve and enjoy their full potential in all aspects of their development.
- 1.4 We will ensure that our work promotes permanency for children - either in their birth families or in alternative permanent arrangements.

## Standard 2

In our assessments and work we aim to understand and improve the child's lived experience.

### Criteria

- 2.1 Children are seen alone, where appropriate, observed and communicated with according to their developmental needs and in accordance with the plans for them.
- 2.2 Intervention with children is timely and responsive to risk and need.
- 2.3 Children's identity is promoted through life story work and ensuring that they have personal possessions and family material.
- 2.3 All Plans for children will be focused on improving outcomes and the child's daily lived experience. Plans will be SMART and written in language that is understood by parents, carers and partners.

### Standard 3

Work is carried out in partnership with parents and carers to enable them to meet their responsibilities and achieve the best outcomes.

#### Criteria

- 3.1 Planning and decision making promotes the child's upbringing within family and community networks wherever possible.
- 3.2 Parents and carers are engaged in assessment, planning and implementation of services to their family.
- 3.3 Parents and carers are treated with respect and encouraged to express their views and potential solutions to current issues.
- 3.4 Parents and carers are advised clearly about concerns and what needs to change to keep their children safe.
- 3.5 Contact is maintained between children and their families and communities wherever possible.
- 3.6 In the event that children can not live with their parents, all steps possible will be taken to ensure that they can remain within their extended networks wherever possible.

### Standard 4

Children have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them.

#### Criteria

- 4.1 Children's rights are promoted in all areas of work.
- 4.2 We will use a variety of tools to enable children to communicate their lived experience, their worries and hopes to us.
- 4.3 We run our meetings to enable children's participation wherever possible. Where they can or should not attend, we will use a variety of methods to ensure that their views are taken into account.

## Standard 5

In all our work, we will maintain an awareness of equal opportunities and the impact of discrimination.

### Criteria

- 5.1 Work challenges organisational culture and practices which contribute to discrimination and disadvantage.
- 5.2 Casework addresses and respects individual's race, culture, language and religion.
- 5.3 Work takes into account the impact of social disadvantage in neighbourhoods, networks and communities.
- 5.4 We advocate with and on behalf of children, parents and carers to enable them to access sources of support.

## Standard 6

We will work closely with other services and agencies to improve support that is offered to children, young people and families.

### Criteria

- 6.1 Assessments, plans and reviews take full account of the information and professional opinions
- 6.2 Plans for children are holistic and use the resources of the wider family and partner agencies.
- 6.3 Working relationships with agency partners are professional and responsive in including and engaging local agency forums and lead professionals.
- 6.4 Communication with agency partners is clear, timely and proportionate to the child's needs. This includes a commitment to share information as appropriate.
- 6.5 Active steps are taken to resolve conflicts should they arise between teams, services and agency partners.
- 6.6 In cases concerning child protection, agency checks will be undertaken.

## Standard 7

Work with children and families is undertaken within the legislative framework and makes use of best practice guidance.

### Criteria

- 7.1 Work is in accordance with legislation, guidance and local policy and procedure.
- 7.2 Work is undertaken with due regard to the national minimum standards, best practice guidance and is informed by the best evidence available including research findings.
- 7.3 Work is in accordance with the principles of Best Value.
- 7.4 Work will contribute towards self-evaluation and external inspection.

## Standard 8

Our records are accurate, complete and demonstrate the child's story.

### Criteria

- 8.1 Case recording is up to date and demonstrate the purpose and outcome of each contact. We will avoid the use of jargon and acronyms wherever possible.
- 8.2 All relevant basic details concerning the child are reflected on the case record and are up to date.
- 8.3 There is a genogram, care plan and chronology for each child receiving a service. These adhere to the good practice guidance.
- 8.4 Recording is concise, analytical and distinguishes between fact and opinion.
- 8.5 Information about the child is written and stored in accordance with Data Protection and Information Sharing protocols.

## Standard 9

Work with children is managed and supervised to achieve the best possible outcomes.

### Criteria

- 9.1 Managers use agreed systems to ensure that children receive a timely and appropriate service.
- 9.2 Work is allocated to suitably trained and qualified staff, who fully understand what is required of them.
- 9.3 Management accountability and decision making is evidenced at all stages of work with the child from referral to closure.
- 9.4 Managers audit case records on a regular basis and require action to be taken where necessary.
- 9.5 Good practice is promoted and recognised.
- 9.6 Reflective supervision takes place regularly and outcomes and decisions are recorded.
- 9.7 Managers critically evaluate the work of their staff and actively challenge poor practice, delay and drift in decision making.

## Standard 10

We will treat children, families and our working partners with courtesy and respect.

### Criteria

- 10.1 Communication through email, telephone and letter will be timely, polite and responsive.
- 10.2 We will be punctual for meetings and visits and if we are unavoidably delayed, we will explain and apologise.
- 10.3 The Council will be presented as one organisation and we will take responsibility for resolving any inter-service issues without involving service users or partners.