Children's Services

Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Framework

January 2016

Version Control:

Date	Version	Changes
01/12/2015	V1	
21/10/2016	V2	Removed old QA activity schedule – previously Appendix 1 Added hyperlink to new QA activity schedule (pg5) Citizen Challenge updated - Elected Member Challenge (pg8-9) Old audit tool removed – previously Appendix 3 New audit tool added – Appendix 1

Contents

Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Framework

1.0   Introduction

This children's services quality assurance and continuous improvement framework forms part of the People Directorate Performance Management system. It focuses specifically on casework services for children provided by children's social care and early help services. It focuses on quality assurance that underpins continuous improvement.
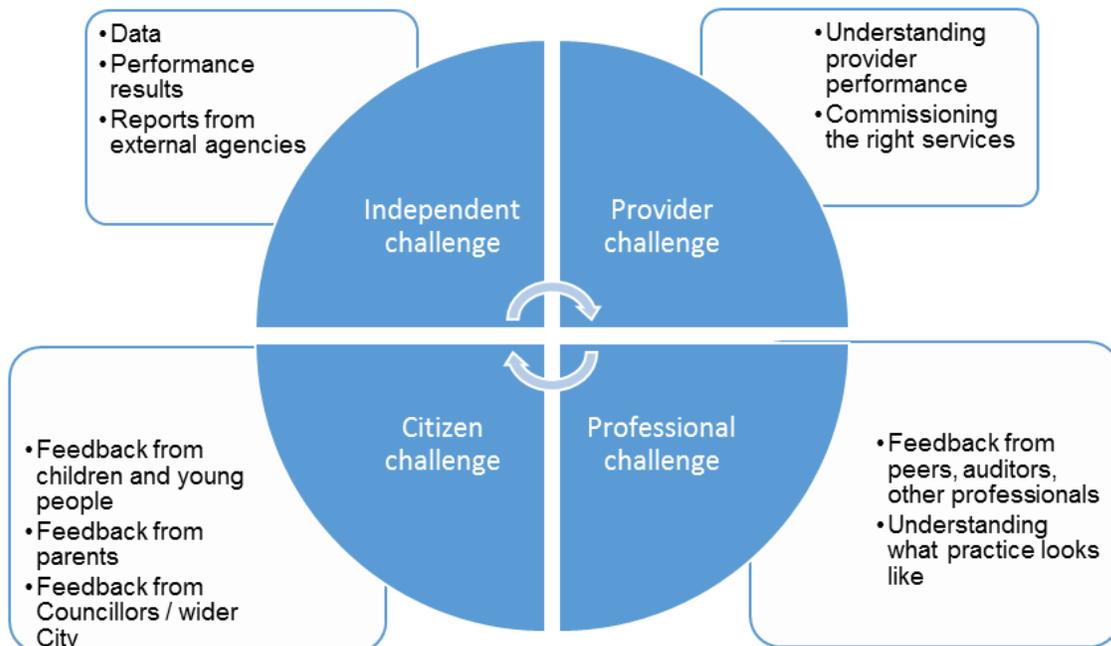
1.1 What is quality assurance?

 Quality assurance (QA) is: -

   "A systematic process to ensure the quality of outcomes"

It is the aim of this framework to deliver improved outcomes through a wide range of indicators of quality. Assuring quality of practice is essential to the provision of a good service to the children and young people of Coventry.

1.2 The four "lenses" on quality

There are 4 lenses through which quality should be viewed. A number of authorities have adopted the "four lenses" approach as a basis for their own quality assurance. The diagram below shows these lenses together with examples of aspects of quality assurance which relate to each lens:

- Data
- Performance results
- Reports from external agencies

Independent challenge

Provider challenge

- Understanding provider performance
- Commissioning the right services

Citizen challenge

Professional challenge

- Feedback from children and young people
- Feedback from parents
- Feedback from Councillors / wider City

- Feedback from peers, auditors, other professionals
- Understanding what practice looks like

To complement these lenses, it is also helpful to be mindful of the key messages from the Munro Report:

- Achieve better outcomes for children by being less concerned about measuring processes, especially timescales
- Improve the quality of direct work and relationships with children and their families
- Achieve effective early help for families
- Understand the child's experience in the "child's journey"
- Review performance indicators; focus less on process, more on outcomes
- Restore faith in practitioner professional judgement
- Value reflective practice and supervision and establish a learning culture

1.4   What does the framework achieve?

The quality assurance and continuous improvement framework articulates how Coventry City Council Children's Services manages and measures quality. Improving the consistency in the quality of work improves outcomes for Coventry's children. This supports the development of a culture that expects and values high standards that improve the quality of service to users and carers. These aspirations and standards drive up expectations, improve learning and strengthen outcomes and impact.

The framework continues to evolve as changes as a result of information learnt from the assurance activity is embedded. It is informed by learning from the audits, single agency learning reviews and serious case reviews overseen by Coventry Safeguarding Children Board. It has close links to the workforce development strategy 2016 and supports the vision of that strategy of:

"ensuring that children and young people within the city are kept safe through high quality services provided by a qualified, resourced and skilled children's work force."

The implementation and sustainability of the continuous improvement framework is the responsibility of the Director of Children's Services supported by the Head of Children's Safeguarding and Quality.

## 2. Using the four lenses to assure and improve quality

2.1 The principles in delivering effective quality assurance

In order to deliver effective and impactful quality assurance, Children's Services follows the following principles:

- Establish a learning culture and be self aware
- Sustain the drive and commitment to continuous improvement
- Promote value for money by improving the effectiveness and quality of work
- Provide support to enable staff to achieve the required changes
- Check to ensure that improvements have been achieved and maintained

2.2 Using the four lenses approach

The diagram below shows the types of information viewed under each of the lenses.
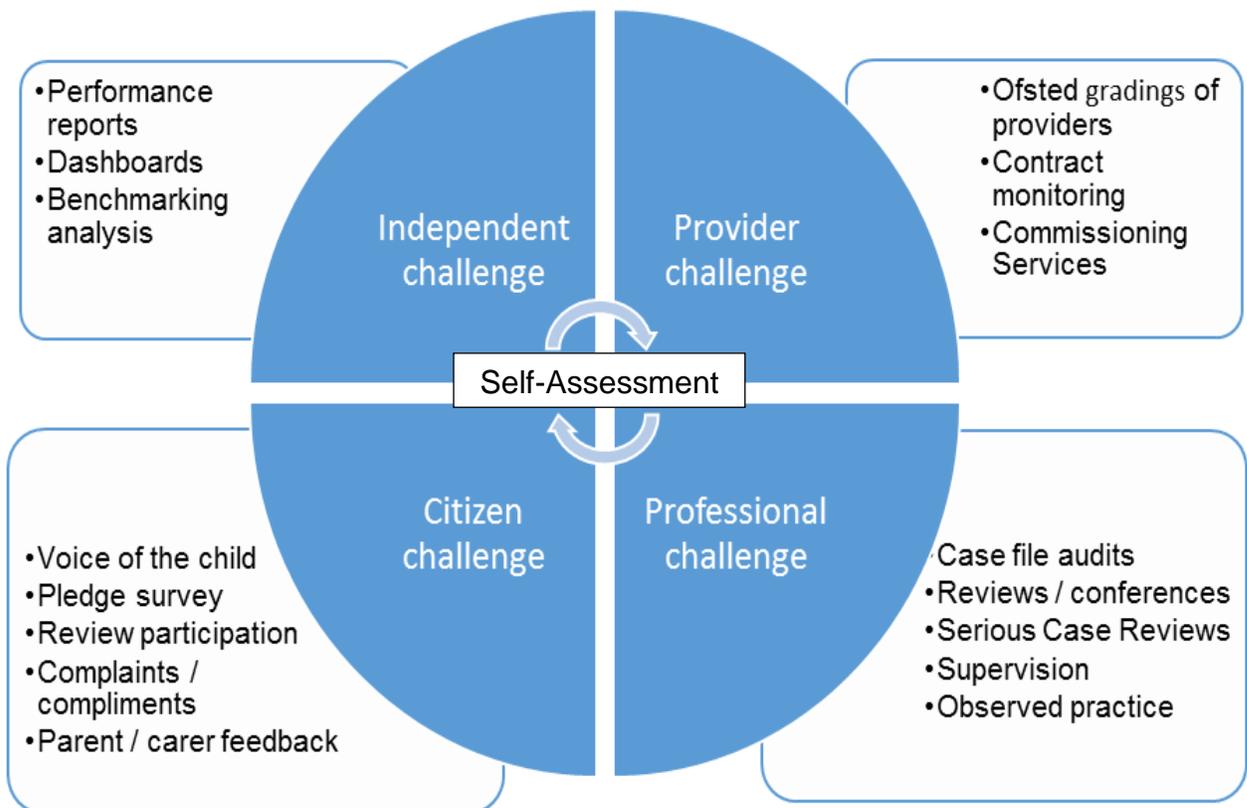
A summary of the Quality Assurance and improvement activity undertaken throughout the whole of children's services is set out in the CYPS Quality Assurance Schedule

2.3 Self-assessments

At the heart of our four lenses approach is the self-assessment. The service continues to assess and review itself and has an up to date and rigorous self-assessment. Individual services develop their own self assessments through the performance review process (see below). This is key to the service knowing itself well and producing realistic and deliverable plans to be monitored by using the four lenses approach.

The full Children's Services self-assessment is updated annually in line with regional timescales and to enable the Council to participate fully in the regional challenge process (usually October each year).

2.3.1. Service Performance Reviews

To make the self-assessment process dynamic and to ensure it drives improvement children's services undertakes a process of service performance reviews every six months. Heads of Service and service managers produce their own self-assessment using the four lenses approach. They report as to how they are doing in each of the four aspects of quality assurance and what this is telling them about their service.   A panel made up of members of the Children's Services Leadership team challenges this. The discussion leads to the creation of a service action plan for improvement.

The self-assessment process can be summarised in the diagram below:

A template for the serv[ice performance review] based on the four lenses has been developed and is attached at **Appendix 2.**

2.4   Independent Challenge

Children's Services is subject to external scrutiny by Ofsted.

Children's Services has wide range of data that informs the tracking and reporting of performance using key performance indicators. Management information provides managers with detailed and timely information about progress against assessment and care planning processes and outputs. This enables managers and practitioners to review and take corrective action directly with individual cases as well as target improvements in service design and practice guidance. The service continues to use national, statistical neighbour and regional benchmarking in indicator analyses to ensure that it aspires to achieving the best performance. Recognising that regional performance is generally not good, there is a particular focus on benchmarking performance against the best of our statistical neighbours and those rated "good" by Ofsted.

The dashboards which each team uses are a daily source of management information. Managers use and share these dashboards to enable them to monitor the quality of their own team's work. Team members equally are able to peer review their own performance through this data and this should be considered as part of supervision.

Every month (on the 4th of the month or as shortly afterwards as possible) the monthly performance compendium is created and shared with all managers in the service. This is reviewed in service manager meetings and also the Children's Services Leadership Team.

Performance data is shared with the Improvement Board at every meeting (currently every six weeks). The People Directorate Leadership Team have agreed a set of key performance indicators for the Directorate (which includes Children's Services indicators) and reviews these by exception every month and routinely every quarter at their Budget and Performance meeting. The Corporate Parenting Board receives performance reports in line with the priorities identified in the corporate parenting strategy. Key indicators are included annually in the Council's annual report. Political oversight of performance is achieved through regular Member briefings and Scrutiny Board is given performance information relating to areas of interest as required.

2.5   Provider Challenge

All commissioned services are commissioned and tendered using established processes and there are contracts in place to ensure services are delivered as specified. There is regular contract monitoring. Market development activity helps providers to develop and improve the quality of their services.

In relation to residential placements, Ofsted has overall responsibility for the inspection of children's homes. All children's homes are inspected twice a year. In addition the quality assurance regime involves a range of stakeholders including the commissioning team, procurement service, placements team, social workers and providers themselves. Feedback is also sought in a variety of ways from children and young people.

Coventry's approach is to place children in provision which is rated good or outstanding. At the point of placement there are a range of checks on provision for example, latest

Ofsted reports, regulation 34 reports, references from other Local Authorities, insurance, statement of purpose. Social workers also visit provision.

If a provider received an inadequate Ofsted rating, they are required to develop an action plan which shows how they will address Ofsted's concerns within a given timescale. Social workers visit the child to review whether it is appropriate for them to remain at the home and ascertain whether needs are still being met. In the event of the provider not meeting their needs, a decision is made on whether a child is moved from the home; this depends on the type and severity of the concerns.

2.6   Citizen Challenge

For this framework the main citizen challenge is the Voice of the Child. Consultation with children, young people and their families should occur at every level. In addition to this, challenge from elected Members, for example through Scrutiny Board or the Corporate Parenting Board is part of the Citizen challenge.

The Directorate has in place wide range of processes engaging children and young people in service design, commissioning services and wider developments.   Vital information can be provided by surveys and feedback through the Voices of Care Council and other participative groups. It is essential that such feedback shapes the services offered and the improvements made.

The views of children and young people, their parents and carers must be heard to ensure that the service provides effective assessment of need, planning, intervention and review. The responsibility in capturing these views and taking these into account in care planning and risk management is with the allocated case holder, their line manager and chairs of reviews. It is essential that audits and supervision emphasise the need for the child / young person's voice to be heard in their case and their views to be considered in decisions made about them.

To support this activity there are a number of performance indicators that are routinely monitored as illustrative of the voice of the child being heard. These include visits being undertaken on time, children being seen alone and participation of the child in their child protection conference or LAC review. These proxy indicators identify the direction of travel for this area of work.

Children, families, and carers are heard through the monitoring of compliments and the resolution of complaints. Informal complaints and those made through the Coventry City Council complaints procedure are a source of learning. The Children's Complaints' Officer creates regular reporting of complaints, timeliness of responses, emerging themes and learning. These are shared across the Service.

Children's Services undertakes regular surveys of LAC and Care leavers. The Annual Pledge survey is the largest survey. The Service as a whole will develop means of enabling children and young people involved in early help or social care to give us their views about the support they have been offered and the changes which have been made. The breadth of children and family feedback methods as well as what they are

telling us forms part of the service performance review process of all services (see draft template at **Appendix 2**).

Outcome monitoring of the impact of work undertaken is an important part of this framework. This is initially being developed in Early Help using radar charts. Measurement of impact is also being used through the Troubled Families programme. Future developments will include extending this impact monitoring to all children and families involved with social care.

Elected Member Challenge

The purpose of the Safeguarding member's scrutiny is to assure both elected members and the council that the services being delivered to the children, young people and families of Coventry are to a good standard and are fundamental in improving outcomes for the Coventry families. The members undertaking the visits will gather evidence and feedback and direct this back to the council so that service improvement based on customer feedback and observations of members can continue to improve the service.

This will be undertaken by monthly visits to a service area identified which supports the members in undertaking this responsibility. An evidence based pack will be made available to members two days prior to the visit and they will be accompanied by a Head Of Service. The pack will contain relevant information detailing the area to visit, information relating to service area and performance. Any interaction with families that are open to the relevant service will have had an audit of their case file and provided to the relevant member.

The members' visits will include discussions with partner agencies as well as front line mangers and staff. This will be in order to triangulate the information to ensure the quality of service and responses are acceptable.

2.7   Professional Challenge

Quality auditing for children's case work services is vital and regular monitoring and action planning improves case work practice. In order to address the need for continuous improvement and to ensure measurement of and focus on outcomes, there is a schedule for regular case file audits. All case work services are targeted within this.

The professional challenge programme includes:

a. Case file audits of cases undertaken monthly by all managers at all levels and IROs
b. Themed practice audits undertaken at relevant intervals assuring specific areas of practice.
c. RAG rating of care and CP plans by the IRO / CP chair at each review
d. Observed practice sessions, and;
e. Supervision and appraisals of case holders and line managers

The monthly full case file audits follow a standard approach. There is an agreed case file audit tool for social care and early help cases (see **Appendix 1**. Managers complete this and discuss their findings with the case holder to ensure direct feedback of learning and improvement. Audits are reviewed on return by the Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social worker to identify themes and practice issues which emerge. These are fed back through a regular newsletter (QA Matters) and are woven in to sessions of the monthly Practice Improvement Forum as a basis for practice improvement. Where a case is identified to be less than good, the service manager has to confirm that corrective action has been completed in the month following the completion of the audit.

These regular monthly full case file audits are supplemented by themed audits and reviews which consider specific issues. The programme of themed audits and LSCB multi agency audits is set out in the CYPS Quality Assurance Schedule.

Where case file audits identify areas of concern a further deep dive audit of similar cases will be undertaken to ensure that appropriate corrective action is taken. This process will follow the Ofsted improvement offer methodology. This includes case file audit, case file sampling, discussion with the case holder and feedback to the manager.

As part of their function to assure effective planning for children and young people, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) undertake a RAG rating of the care plans they see at reviews. Individual ratings are shared with workers and their managers and details of this are included in the monthly performance report as well as the IRO Annual Report that is presented to the Corporate Parenting Board (a Cabinet Advisory Panel).

The RAG rating system includes child protection conferences so that a wider quality assessment can be made. RAG rating proportions are reported within the monthly performance framework with generic learning being fed into the Practice Improvement Forum meetings.

Every quarter managers undertake some form of observed practice. This is reviewed with the worker so that areas of good practice and of improvement can be identified. This also informs more senior managers of the quality of live practice as it happens. Examples of this include the Adoption Decision Maker observing Adoption Panel, the Head of Safeguarding observing a child protection conference, the IRO service manager observing a LAC review, a service manager observing a strategy discussion, or a team manager observing some direct work with a young person.

Every case holding worker has supervision at least monthly in line with the Council's supervision policy. Outcomes of supervision are recorded and case related decisions and directions are recorded on the child's file. Supervision is scheduled to be audited twice a year or be the subject of observed practice to ensure that it is effective.

Working with partner agencies through the Coventry Safeguarding Children's Board, the service uses audit, serious case reviews and experiences from other areas to assure and improve practice. Relevant representatives from children's services teams participate in multi-agency audits and learning from these is fed back alongside internal

audit activity. Feedback from such learning activity and events is also shared and reviewed within the monthly Practice Improvement Forums.

The professional challenge lens requires specific governance to ensure that the audit and observed practice is focused, consistent and well managed. For each audit completed results are collated by the Head of Safeguarding and the Principle Social worker to ensure consistency of grading and the identification of general themes. This learning is fed back to auditors and practitioners and informs the focus of future audits and observed practice. The Head of Safeguarding chairs a monthly QA group of the Heads of Service to create and monitor the impact of the audit and observed practice programme.

3.0   Closing the loop- ensuring that our QA has a positive impact going forward

All the QA activity described above only has a value if it leads to improvement in services received by children, young people and their families that then leads to better outcomes for the young person.

In order for the QA activity to deliver the improvement it is essential to "close the loop" to ensure learning informs practice. This is achieved as follows.

Each audit undertaken, as described above, includes direct feedback and discussion between the auditor and the case holder. This provides immediate opportunity to discuss good practice and improvement opportunities. Where the auditor does not grade a case as at least good, service managers ensure that appropriate corrective action has been put in place to improve this specific case.

Audits also lead to general learning and a regular briefing note "QA Matters" has been established to share generic learning. A similar note covers learning from complaints.

There is a monthly Practice Improvement Forum which is attended by all managers across Children's Social Care and Children and Families First. This is a key vehicle for sharing learning from audits and raising specific practice issues they highlight. This forum can also be used more generally to pick up on good cases, through appreciative enquiry, or to use case study discussions to prompt thinking. Team managers are required to cascade the messages and learning from these monthly meetings within their teams.

The six-monthly service review process is designed to enable the creation of service-level summaries of quality assurance against each lens. The framework includes a summary to be communicated to all team members to engage them in understanding the self-assessment and the improvement plans for the future.

Quality Assurance Group

December 2015

Updated October 2016

Appendix 2 – Case File Audit Tool

Local Authority-Case audit template

Auditor name	
Tracked case number	
Audited previously	
Age band	
Strand	Help and protection Children looked after and permanence Adoption/ Care Leavers Leadership, management and governance Local safeguarding children board

Field	Quality of child's experience (Exceeds good/meets good/ does not meet good)	Text (please keep this evaluative and succinct)
Risk is identified, responded to and reduced in a timely way. Where relevant, include evaluation of identification and response to children who experience and/or are at risk of: ▪ sexual exploitation ▪ neglect ▪ emotional abuse ▪ sexual abuse ▪ physical abuse ▪ domestic abuse		
Children, young people and families are appropriately involved Is there evidence of impact of the involvement of children and their families in assessment, planning and intervention. Are the views of significant males effectively gathered? Are children seen, and seen		

alone, and do they benefit from stable and effective relationships? Do children and parents/carers have an equal voice? Does it evidence individual work undertaken, including appropriate direct work? Is this linked to the plan and the reduction of risk? What is the impact of this for children and their families?		
Decision making is effective and timely. Is there evidence of effective and timely management oversight and direction on cases, and clearly recorded rationale for decisions being made? Is case recording clear, comprehensive and reflective of work undertaken and focused on the experience and progress of children and young people?		
Assessments are timely, comprehensive, analytical and of high quality - **and lead to appropriately focused help.** Do they incorporate historical factors, informed by up to date case chronology? Do they identify risk, needs and protective factors, including parental capacity?		
Coordination between agencies is effective. Is joint working, information sharing in improving and sustaining the experience and progress of children and young people.		
Consideration and impact of diversity. For example, age, disability, ethnicity, faith or		

belief, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation.		
Quality of plans. Are they: up to date and updated, timely, comprehensive, specific with measureable outcomes and dynamic? Are they implemented? Consider length of plan or any themes? Do they show quality of management oversight? Are they influenced by views of children and parents/carers and diversity issues?		
Permanence is achieved without delay and reflects assessed needs. Are plans for permanence, including adoption, in the best interests of children and young people, and achieved without delay? Evaluate the quality of preparation for placement.		
Children and young people participate in and benefit from effective regular reviews Are reviews scrutinised and challenged robustly to ensure that they support children in making good progress. What is the influence and impact of Independent Reviewing Officer/Child Protection?		
Quality of placement (at home or looked after) – Are children appropriately placed according to their assessed needs? Evaluate the effectiveness of: matching, stability and maintenance of contact with		

family/friends support for placements (including adoption support)		
Are young people prepared for independence and are they living in high quality accommodation that meets their needs. Is it safe, permanent and affordable (children at home or looked after)?		
How has the help provided improved outcomes? Are children supported to achieve their full potential? Evaluate impact (including education, physical health, and their emotional well-being). Do children have developed networks within their community and are they safe?		
Agreed actions to achieve good outcomes for child	**By whom**	**By when**

Coventry City Council

<u>Case File Tracking Template - Hints and tips for completion.</u>

Introduction: As we think about completing this exercise, we should remind ourselves of its philosophical basis. **It is an exercising in doing audits with social workers and team managers as opposed to doing it to them;** a charge often levelled against any audit process. We **do not want this to be a deficit model**. Instead we want it to be **a model based upon focused and sometimes challenging conversations with those front line professionals** so that we can come to **a (hopefully) shared view** about what can be done **to secure at least a good experience for the child/young person who is receiving services.** Our focus will not be on what has not been done (though we will identify and understand the relevance of these features), it will be **on what now needs to happen**.

Some argue that this model is too soft on poor compliance with statutory or policy and procedural requirements. It is absolutely not. It recognizes that these requirements are normally important to get right but it also recognizes that **an auditors task is to identify the impact of those shortcomings on the child and young person's experience**. Sometimes there will not be any adverse impact or you will find that **the perceived shortcoming occurred as a result of a conscious and thought through decision** by the front line practitioners and managers. For example, a short delay in completing an assessment which tips the process beyond the laid down timescales might be justifiable if the workers can specifically identify why the over-run was necessary and show how any risk to the child was minimised, mitigated or managed.

So what are things we can do to make this audit process effective?

- Look back only 6 months unless there is a pressing need to look back further in order to understand the current position
- Focus in on looking sparingly at documents-as a starting point the most recent referral, assessment, plan, review, court documents and the chronology gives you what you need to follow through on. If you can't find the information, stop looking and be confident that if the social worker or team manger can't locate it, you can conclude that either it does not exist or it is not written up and you will have to make a judgement call about what that means to the judgement you are to make
- When you fill in the audit document be clear that the first thing you will fill in will be the judgement box. You will then turn to the narrative box where you are asked to write succinctly and evaluatively. You will find both f these requirements easier to fulfil if you construct your thinking under the two headings evidence that supports the judgement and its impact on the child and young person.

- You should re-read what you write and take note that if shortcomings are numerous and/or significant you will need to work hard to be confident that a good judgement is justified.
- Equally if you can't identify the impact of work you will find a 'good' judgement illusive. However, a cautionary note. If you don't find impact evidence at first go back over the material. Because social care professionals tend not to write impact material explicitly (although that is changing with the signs of safety model), it is sometimes 'hidden below' the actual words on the page.

Finally have confidence in your professional skills. What we are asking here is for you to exercise your judgement over and beyond assessing whether work is simply compliant. Enjoy the challenge and be confident that what you will find on an individual case will help children have a better experience and the aggregated findings from all cases will help the service improve and give senior managers evidence about the capacity and capability of the service.

Appendix 2 – Service Performance Template (draft)

SERVICE PERFORMANCE REVIEW – to be completed and reviewed every six months

Service Area	
Performance period being considered	
Date of review panel	
Key outcomes required from this service area	
Key population data (size of cohorts, proportion of wider population, relevant demographic summaries etc)	

1. **Independent challenge - What is our Performance Data and Analysis telling us?**

Judgement Area	Comments Summarise your team's position in relation to the judgement area. Show the key pressure points in Teams and what solutions have already been tried to resolve issues. It is also an opportunity to share what has worked well	Evidence List and provide evidence that supports the comments you are making about your service area	Judgement (I, RI, G, O)	Actions identified
Performance on key indicators from dashboards / monthly reports				
Workloads / staffing / caseloads				
Reports from external agencies (where available)				
Capacity to improve				

2. Provider challenge – How are our providers performing? Are we commissioning the right things and getting good service outcomes from commissioned services?

Judgement Area	Comments Summarise your team's position in relation to the judgement area. Clearly show the key pressure points in Teams and what solutions have already been tried to resolve issues. It is also an opportunity to share what has worked well	Evidence List and provide evidence that supports the comments you are making about your service area	Judgement (I, RI, G, O)	Actions identified
Provider performance / issues				
Placement sufficiency				
Quality / impact / outcomes of commissioned services				
Quality of partner contribution to the service being offered by the LA				
Capacity to improve				

3. Professional Challenge – what are we finding from our own reviews / knowledge and feedback from others?

Judgement Area	Comments Summarise your team's position in relation to the judgement area. Clearly show the key pressure points in Teams and what solutions have already been tried to resolve issues. It is also an opportunity to share what has worked well	Evidence List and provide evidence that supports the comments you are making about your service area	Judgement (I, RI, G, O)	Actions identified
Results of structured case file audit activity				
Results of dip sampling / other audit activity				
Results of observed practice				
Feedback received from other professionals / multi-agency audits				
Relevant learning from serious case reviews				
Capacity to improve				

4. Citizen Challenge – What are those we are working to help telling us?

Judgement Area	Comments Summarise your team's position in relation to the judgement area. Clearly show the key pressure points in Teams and what solutions have already been tried to resolve issues. It is also an opportunity to share what has worked well	Evidence List and provide evidence that supports the comments you are making about your service area	Judgement (I, RI, G, O)	Actions identified
Engagement of children / young people in service				
Engagement of families / parents / carers in service				
Direct feedback from children / young people				
Direct feedback from parents / families				
Complaints / compliments received				
Results of any relevant surveys				

Capacity to improve				

5. **Key summary points for communication to all members of service being reviewed**

(List here the points you will be communicating back to your team as a result of this service performance review process so that they can understand their team's performance and the priority actions)

6. **Input from panel, actions to be taken away, comments, areas for improvement etc.**

Detail here input / suggestions / comments made by panel to support the service. Identify clearly any actions to be taken away from the review.