

Children's Services

Quality Assurance Framework for Dorset Council Residential Children's Homes

'Yeah, no 100% because a lot of these people like high up would have had, you know, relatively good upbringings and they will never have felt what a child in care has ever felt like.'

Quote from a young person in the care of Dorset Council

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1. Principles and Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this document is to set out the means by which Dorset Children's Services will gain assurance that its residential children's homes are of high quality, are approved by the children and families with whom we work and achieve positive impact.

1.2 The principles of this framework for learning and improvement are aligned with the Dorset Council's four Behaviours (responsibility, respect, recognition and collaboration) and the key principles of our service as set out below:

- **Child Centred:** the focus of quality assurance will be on the experiences, progress and outcomes of the child or young person on their journey through our social work and safeguarding systems
- **Restorative & strength based:** quality assurance will focus on relationships, ensuring that frontline employees and managers provide both high support and high challenge
- **Outcomes Based:** in line with the key behaviours for children's services, the focus of quality assurance will be on outcomes as well as process
- **Positive:** our approach to quality assurance will be positive - informing and encouraging improvement and supporting the development of staff and services; building on quality of practice
- **Reflective:** our quality assurance framework is designed to be about promoting reflective practice and shared learning and utilising this to close the learning loop

2. Summary

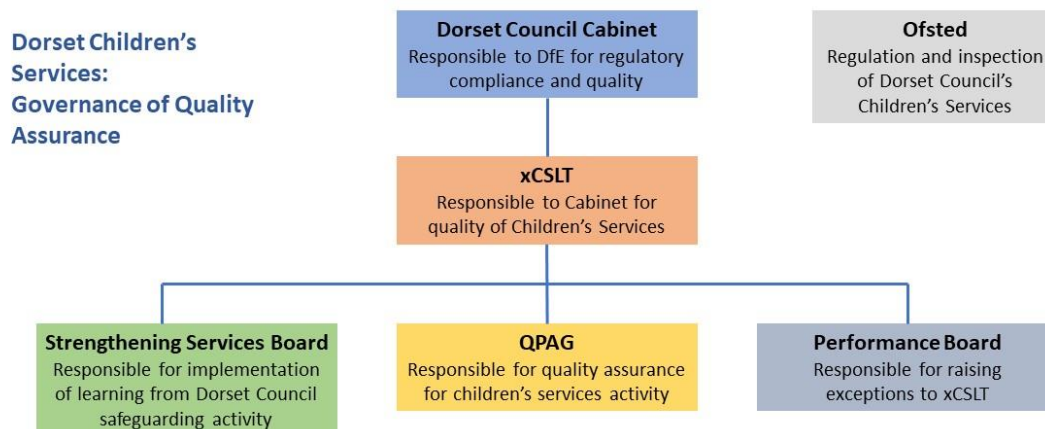
- 2.1 Quality Assurance embraces all activity that contributes to service improvement and understanding the quality of practice. Quality Assurance activities monitor compliance with policies and procedures: evidence strengths and good practice; identify gaps and areas for development; and drive learning and service improvement with a key focus of how this contributes to the quality of practice. Dorset Children's Services Quality Assurance Framework enables those with leadership, senior management, case management or scrutiny responsibility for children, to understand how effectively services are being delivered to keep children safe, promote positive outcomes and identify where improvements should be focused.
- 2.2 Our Quality Assurance programme aims to demonstrate that we are providing services of a good standard that have a positive impact on the child and their family.

2.3 Dorset Children’s Services Quality Assurance is dynamic and evolving. There is an embedded cycle of monitoring, continuous reflection and learning, based on the principle of continuous improvement. Our approach to Quality Assurance is owned by all and managers at all levels who routinely undertake Quality Assurance activity with supervisees, teams and service areas.

2.4 As a learning organisation, Dorset Children’s Services uses a range of methods to gather quantitative and qualitative information from a variety of sources, to measure and analyse the aggregated information against an agreed set of standards. Measuring practice is only purposeful if the loop is closed and the organisation uses the learning to plan and deliver service improvements and or expand areas of good practice.

3. Governance of Quality Assurance

The governance of Children’s Services Quality Assurance broadly follows the pathway set out in the Children’s Services Performance Management Framework. The specific governance mechanisms for quality assurance are shown in the following diagram:



4. Methods of Quality Assurance

4.1 Quality Assurance will be evidenced by the following sources:

- Audits – core, thematic and dip sample
- Performance data and exceptions reports
- National and local inspections
- Peer Reviews
- Serious Case Reviews, Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Internal Learning Reviews
- Appreciative Inquiries
- Practice Week
- External validation
- Annual Report of the Pan Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Feedback from independent Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers (QARO)
- Feedback from children, parents and carers.
- Complaints and compliments
- Children in Care Council
- Employer Health checks
- Staff Feedback – Exit Interviews
- Keep in Touch Meetings
- Supervision, Probation and Appraisal
- Legal feedback from proceedings
- Multi agency partner feedback
- Fostering and Adoption
- Early Help
- Training Feedback
- Observations of Practice

4.2 The following documents and processes underpin our Quality Assurance framework:

- a) Children's Strengthening Services Plan
- b) Audit Schedule, both quality of practice and thematic
- c) Audit Tools
- d) All Practice Standards
- e) The Performance Cycle
- f) Governance processes to facilitate the QA Framework – Quality of Practice and Action Group (QPAG) and the Practice, Policy and Procedures Group (PPP)

4.3 The quality of practice audit will routinely contribute to measuring core areas of practice:

- a) Children are safe and risk and need have been identified and managed through appropriate interventions.
- b) Interventions are child centred with a clear understanding of the child's lived experiences; the voice of the child informs our planning and work.
- c) Management oversight and decision making is effective, in line with practice standards.
- d) Timely assessments that are comprehensive and analytical.
- e) Co-ordination between agencies is effective
- f) Plans and planning are timely and effective with evidence that they are making things better within a timeframe that is right for the child.
- g) Permanence planning is timely and well matched to need.
- h) Children in care and care leavers are living in good quality placements or accommodation that meets their needs.

4.4 In addition to the above there will be specific areas that will periodically require a review or focused thematic audit. These areas might be identified as a result of analysis of patterns and themes emerging from Annex A child level data, regular auditing activity, notable issues and/or changes raised through performance data, complaints, a management review or changes in legislation and regulations. These will be routinely tested and reviewed through our Quality of Practice and Action group (QPAG). QPAG will not only be

responsible for highlighting exceptions but will ensure appropriate learning and actions are progressed, so the learning loop is closed. Membership will include senior management representation from across Children’s Services including SEND, Early Help, Children who are Disabled, Fostering and Adoption and locality SW teams.

- 4.5 Practice, Policy and Procedures (PPP) group provides governance for changes in practice, procedures, legislation and guidance to prevent silo working and ensure consistency of practice across the service. The group approves all new and revised guidance and has a system to review impact and embed into practice. The QPAG and PPP link into one another to ensure a robust QA approach.

5. Assurance Roles, Responsibilities and Frequency

Role	Activity	Frequency
Corporate Directors (Chair), Heads of locality and Service Managers for ChAD, Care Leavers and corporate parenting, Head of Service for Children in Care and Care Leavers, Fostering Service Manager QA Service managers Head of QA and Partnerships, Principal Education Psychologist.	Attendance at Quality of Practice and Action Group (QPAG). This will share reports, themes and findings along with data exceptions to enable action plans and any additional QA requirements. This facilitates the closing of the learning loop to share findings and agree action plans including training and any links to PPP.	Monthly

<p>Heads of Localities, Service Managers, Heads of Service, QAROs, Head of QA and Partnerships, Principal Education Psychologist and Virtual Head</p>	<p>Monthly moderation of audits to review all 1st tier audit findings and ensure this has highlighted the quality of practice appropriately and any additional actions</p>	<p>Monthly</p>
<p>Operational, Service and Team Managers</p>	<p>Routine schedule of direct practice observations i.e. meetings, supervision, home visits to ensure quality of work. This can either be linked to the audit undertaken or as part of themes identified through QPAG</p>	<p>Monthly</p>
<p>Representatives from a cross section of teams to include relevant managers, QA Service Manager, Principal Social Worker, Principal Education Psychologist, Social Worker, Team Manager, Early Help, SEND Co-ordinator, Advanced Practitioner and practitioners and multi-agency partners where appropriate</p>	<p>Reflective sessions, thematic audits, Learning Circles on specific areas of practice or children</p>	<p>When learning is identified or for cases where practitioners feel 'stuck'</p>

<p>Social Work Team Managers, SEND Team Leaders, Early Help Managers, Advanced Practitioners, Safeguarding Standards Advisers</p>	<p>Checking and authorising a range of reports and activities on child's record</p> <p>Monitoring and routinely reporting performance in performance meetings.</p> <p>Feedback from families aligned to case audits</p> <p>Routine schedule of case file auditing</p>	<p>Daily</p> <p>Weekly</p> <p>Monthly</p> <p>Monthly</p>
<p>QAROs (IROs and CP Chairs)</p>	<p>Focussed audits as part of standard assurance work</p> <p>Completion of monitoring form for children who are CP or in care</p>	<p>Monthly</p> <p>For each CP Conference and Child in care Review</p>
<p>Social Workers, Planning coordinator, Early Help Workers</p>	<p>Self-assessment to inform monthly case file audit</p>	<p>Monthly</p>
<p>Chief Executive, Executive Director, Corporate Director, Lead Member, Corporate Parenting Board Members and partner agencies</p>	<p>A programme of activities observing different areas of practice and case audits during Practice Week</p>	<p>Every 6 months</p>

6. Evidence used for quality assurance purposes

The following types of evidence will be used to provide assurance as to the quality of our Children's Residential Homes:

a) Evidence of compliance

This will include evidence of compliance with statutory guidance, and local strategies and procedures in respect of such matters as care planning and record-keeping, vetting of employees and mandatory training.

b) Quantitative operational data

This will provide evidence in area such as occupancy levels, duration of placements, employee retention, and the numbers of compliments, complaints and safeguarding concerns

c) Qualitative data

This helps us to understand children and young people's experience of life in our homes, and the difference that the homes make in their lives. This evidence will come from the children and young people themselves, from their families, from engagement opportunities provided by Youth Voice and from measures of progress relating to health and wellbeing, education, training and employment.

d) Learning from exceptions

This includes internal learning from incident and Need to Know reports, and recommendations from independently led Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

7. Gathering evidence for quality assurance

7.1 The following table sets out the schedule for gathering evidence:

Table of Quality Assurance and Performance Activity:					
Quality assurance activity	Description of activity	Responsible	Frequency of activity	Report function	Reporting arrangements
Scheduled full audit	Provide quantitative and qualitative evidence based upon regulations and SCCIF normally completed when a new manager has taken over the home or when there are concerns	Head of QA and Partnerships	Determined by Head of Service/Corp Director	Full audit report Actions added to combined action plan	CSLT Strengthening Services Board
QA Monitoring review	<p>Completed in line with Ofsted action plans and timeframes to ensure requirements are completed and actions are met.</p> <p>Homes with requirement and overall good rating – within timeframes as per Ofsted action plan</p> <p>Homes with requirement and overall requirements improvement rating – every two weeks until actions completed</p> <p>Homes with requirements and overall inadequate and/or compliance – every week until actions are completed.</p>	Head of QA and Partnerships	Post Ofsted inspection	Actions added to combined action plan	xCSLT Strengthening Services Board

Dip sampling	Provides a 'drill down' audit of a specific incident or situation in a home	Service Manager or Reg. 44 Visitor	As required	Action plan proposed by Service Manager and agreed by QPAG	QPAG
Thematic review	Provides an in-depth review of a specific area across homes, regions or the organisation	Service Manager (Internal Services) QA Service Manager (External)	Ad hoc	Action plan proposed by Service Manager and agreed by QPAG	QPAG
Regulation 44 visits	Children's homes are subject to regular visits by officers independent of the residential service in order to undertake inspections regarding the quality of care provided to children living in children's homes. This includes speaking to staff, young people and scrutinising records held in the home	Independent visitors	Monthly, report to be completed within 2 weeks, checked and sent to senior managers within 22 working days	Action plan proposed by Home Manager, approved by Service Manager	Home Manager and Service Manager
Need to know, LADO, notifications	To submit records within 24 hours in relation to safeguarding concerns about a child and allegations against an adult working with children	Registered Manager	Within 24 hours	As required	Service manager Head of service QPAG
Safeguarding, LADO, complaints and	To provide an analysis of the themes raised in timeliness of responses,	Service Manager	Weekly	Weekly update	Head of Service

notifications monitoring	identified learning , actions taken and outcome				
Young people's feedback	Completion of feedback and survey from young people living in our homes	Evidence collated by QAPAudits	In advance of each Reg. 44 visit	Evidence of service quality and impact	Corp Director Service Manager QPAG
Professional feedback	Collation of views from social workers, IRO's etc on our performance	Evidence collated by QAPAudits	In advance of each Reg. 44 visit	Evidence of service quality and impact	Corp Director Service Manager QPAG
Quality and Performance Reporting	Review of KPI's to examine trends and themes for further review [to be implemented by April 2023]	Registered Manager Service Manager	Monthly	Report	Head of Service QPAG
Health & Safety Audit	To ensure all H&S audit actions are completed.. To escalate concerns and drift in actions taken to resolve shortfalls	Home Manager	Monthly	Assurance and exceptions reporting	Service Manager
Fire Safety	To ensure fire risk assessment audits are completed and monitor the completion of all actions. To escalate concerns and drift in action taken to resolve shortfalls	Home Manager	Monthly	Assurance and exceptions reporting	Service Manager

Statutory check review	<p>To record and hold central records of all statutory compliance checks for the homes/schools.</p> <p>To audit home/school information to ensure checks have been completed and homes/schools are compliant</p>	Service Manager	Monthly	Assurance and exceptions reporting	Head of Service
GDPR	To ensure GDPR compliance in all departments	Service Manager	Monthly	Assurance and exceptions reporting	Head of Service

8. Quality assurance: reporting and learning

- 8.1 As set out in the above QA schedule, qualitative evidence for children's homes is reviewed by the Quality of Practice Action Group (QPAG), which meets monthly.
- 8.2 For each QPAG meeting, Residential Service Managers will prepare a joint report setting out:
- Report on thematic reviews carried out in the past month
 - The number of Reg. 4 visits carried out in the past month, with a summary of any particularly good or adverse findings
 - Review of key performance indicators for quality assurance
- 8.3 Every six months, the report will also include more detailed feedback from young people living in children's care homes, informed by a survey sent to all young people in the homes. Each survey will have a distinct focus and presentation, to avoid 'survey fatigue.'
- 8.4 Every six months, the report will also include analysis of feedback from professionals who have visited homes; again, this will be informed by a survey.
- 8.5 Every other month, the QPAudits team will issue a request for Dip Samples to be undertaken in a given area of the service; the results will be shared with the next QPAG meeting.
- 8.6 The findings of any Practice Reviews will be shared with QPAG by Service Managers as they are completed.
- 8.7 Each QPAG meeting having received the Service Managers' report will agree any improvement actions it believes are required. These will be tracked to completion via the QPAG Action Tracker.
- 8.8 Where an improvement action is not completed in a reasonable space of time, or where the QPAG meeting identifies other exceptions, the Chair of QPAG will escalate these to the Children's Services Leadership Team.