

# Quality Assurance Framework



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3	April 2020	Denise Green on behalf of Ruth Lacey Head of Safeguarding Standards Service	Paul Angeli 24 <sup>th</sup> April 2020	April 2021

Wandsworth Borough Council  
Children's Social Care



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## INTRODUCTION

### What is the Quality Assurance Framework?

1. It is a supporting structure around the work we do with, and the services we offer to, children and families. It details the mechanisms in place to monitor the quality of our work as we progress through the child's journey making sure the welfare of the child is paramount (Children Act 1989) and we are promoting a "child centred system" (Munro Review of Child Protection 2011).
2. It provides practice scrutiny that is established, systematic and used to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people.
3. It is a tool to support the development of practice and to ensure that services are responsive, efficient and cost effective. It is used to learn from and embed practice that has worked well, and address practice that needs to change, develop and improve.
4. It judges quality based on the child, young person or family's experience of using our services and their individual progress and outcomes.
5. It is a mirror on how true we are being to our "obsessions" in the Children and Young People's Services Plan

7 obsessions – the 7 things we are absolutely committed to:

1. Children always come first and are at the centre of everything we do.
2. All children are safe from harm: our front door is safe; vulnerable adolescents are well safeguarded; and all children have a safe 'forever' home.
3. Our children with Special Education Needs and disabilities are everyone's priority. We will endeavour to identify their needs early, meet their needs locally and ensure they achieve the best outcomes and feel like they belong.
4. We will be the best corporate parents for our children in care and those with lived experiences.
5. Our children attend and participate in school regularly and achieve great educational outcomes in local good and outstanding schools.
6. Our workforce are valued as our biggest asset; they are agile, resilient and skilled.
7. A strengths-based practice model underpins our work with children, families and partners.

### Why do we need the Quality Assurance Framework?

6. It outlines the mechanisms in place to drive and monitor quality and impact, and describes how we will collect, interpret and use data and other information to drive innovation and improvement.

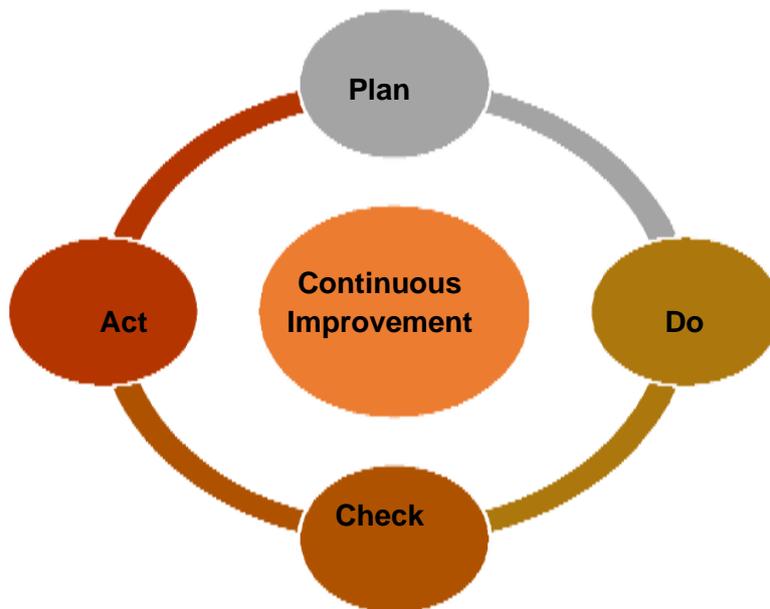
7. It helps us to understand where we have come from (baseline), where we are headed (forecast), what action we need to take, and what success looks like if we do better than our baseline (turning the curve).
8. In simple terms the Quality Assurance Framework tells us:
  - How much we did.
  - How well we did it.
  - Is anyone better off?

(Outcome Based Accountability Friedman 2005)

9. Its purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people by:
  - Embedding quality into services
  - Ensuring services are monitored and evaluated
  - Seeking feedback from children, young people, families and carers
  - Promoting a culture committed to learning and development; listening to and valuing staff views
  - Applying learning from quality assurance processes

### How does a Quality Assurance Framework work?

10. The QAF works by promoting continuous improvement. The diagram below shows the four stages of improvement.



11. Wandsworth's Children and Young People's Plan captures our vision that Wandsworth is a great place to live and learn with children at the heart of everything we do. The plan recognises the need for Children's Social Care to improve outcomes faster for children from vulnerable and deprived backgrounds.
12. Our 7 "obsessions" (see above) detail what we are absolutely committed to for our children.
13. The 6 "ways" detail what we are going to do to deliver the plan.

1. Being the best partner, including working together with partners on thresholds application and risk minimisation plans for children, with strong and effective governance
2. Strengthening the relationship between audits and learning
3. Ensuring our assessments and interventions are evidence-based
4. Creating a targeted and innovative early help and traded offer with schools at the heart of it
5. Enabling good transitions for children
6. Promoting a sustainable 'school-led' school improvement model focusing on value for money and maximising impact

14. The purpose of the Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework is to check that what we are delivering the vision and the plan; that outcomes for children from vulnerable and deprived backgrounds are improving at pace.
15. Case audit findings are acted upon, grabbed, applied and re-tested to support continuous improvement

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE APPROACH**

### **Individual responsibility**

16. Children's Social Care staff are required to take individual responsibility for the quality of their practice in line with legislation, statutory guidance, policy and procedures.
17. All social workers are required to take individual responsibility for ensuring they meet the requirements of the professional registrations and standards (including Professional Capabilities Framework, and Knowledge and Skills Statement for child and family practitioners and Social Work England professional standards).
18. To assist colleagues in feeling confident in their role induction, ongoing training and development opportunities are provided. Access to managers and regular supervision provides a supportive environment.

### **Case work supervision and management oversight.**

19. Case work supervision is the routine quality assurance monitor of services provided to individual children, young people and families. Good quality reflective supervision is critical to good outcomes for children. Working Together 2018 describes the role of supervision is assuring the quality of social work in children's cases.

Effective professional supervision can play a critical role in ensuring a clear focus on a child's welfare. Supervision should support professionals to reflect critically on the impact of their decisions on the child and their family. The social worker and their manager should review the plan for the child. Together they should ask whether the help given is leading to a significant positive change for the child and whether the pace of that change is appropriate for the child. Any professional working with vulnerable children should always have access to a manager to talk through their concerns and judgements affecting the welfare of the child. Assessment should remain an ongoing process, with the impact of services informing future decisions around action.

Working Together 2018

20. Children & Families Division has a comprehensive supervision policy. Social workers are supervised every 4 weeks. Supervision focuses on their professional development and wellbeing and reviews the plan for each of the children they are working with. Group supervision is used by teams, particularly if social work intervention is not improving outcomes for a child. Joint supervision is used where more than one team or service are contributing to the child's plan to ensure a coordinated approach.
21. Management oversight is a quality assurance driver. Managers at all levels respond to unplanned events in a child's circumstances, intervene to avoid drift in a child's plan, resolve professional differences in a child's case, facilitate positive communication between services working with a child.

### **Children & Families Division Performance Data and Analysis**

22. Regular, systematic and detailed scrutiny of performance data is at the heart of tracking progress and alerting managers to issues at an early stage before they become serious concerns.
23. Scrutiny of performance data is a key aspect of management oversight and is a core function of all managers, from team managers through to senior officers and Elected Members.

### **Linking Performance Data and Case Auditing**

24. Performance data is used to inform the audit programme. Themed case audits are undertaken if data indicates that practice standards are not being met.
25. Data is used before and after improvement plans are put in place as a measurable outcome and indicator of the impact of any action or changes made following findings from audit.

### **Case Auditing**

26. Case audit is central to the Quality Assurance Framework. Its purpose is to ensure that social work practice is in line with legislation and statutory guidance and reflects the Child and Young People's Plan in achieving the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families.
27. The audit process is used to recognise areas of good or outstanding practice, as well as to identify areas for improvement, or where urgent action is required to correct inadequate practice. In addition to formal casework audit, all managers and staff are responsible for reviewing case records on a regular basis, and ensuring they take prompt action to address gaps in information.
28. The Safeguarding Standards Service oversees auditing activity, monitors audit findings and analysis, ensures services are taking learning forward to improve practice and monitors the impact of improved practice on outcomes for children.
29. Case audits are carried out internally by Team Managers peer reviewing cases managed by their colleagues. Case audits are dip sampled for moderation by the Head of Safeguarding Standards with external support as required to minimise the risk of peer audits reinforcing and normalising ineffective behaviours. Peer auditors are given feedback if their findings or grades are amended through moderation and links made with learning and development for further input if needed.
30. Audit summaries are written following themed audits or a cycle of individual case audits and form the basis for discussion; identification of learning. Findings feed into the Divisional self-evaluation and service plans to drive continuous improvement.
31. Practice learning weeks aim to gain a broader insight into practice than standard methods of case audit. Senior managers spend time with front line practitioners undertaking case audits, practice observations and collecting service user feedback to understand the current practice strengths and challenges.

### **Responding to individual case audits**

32. The standard case audit tool is embedded in the child's social care record. Where possible case audits are carried out sitting alongside the allocated social worker to encourage their learning from the audit process. Auditors make recommendations for improvement. This is discussed between the team manager and social worker in

supervision and agreed actions are carried forward into future supervision sessions to be tracked to completion.

33. When a case audit finds practice that is inadequate or requiring improvement the Team Manager must dip sample three more cases allocated to the social worker to test if the same concerns are present. If the same concerns are found the social worker's case load is audited.
34. It is the responsibility of the team manager to ensure a recorded response to audit findings and that any actions needed to improve outcomes for children are carried out promptly.
35. Individual case audits are completed by Service Managers giving assurance that audit recommendations have been followed through resulting in the required improvement.

### **Escalating individual case audits**

36. Case auditors escalate any urgent concerns that arise for a child during their audit to the Head of Safeguarding Standards Service who requests and monitors a response from the Service Manager and Head of Service.

### **Aggregating and reporting of case audit findings**

37. Audits findings are reported routinely in the weekly tracking data that is circulated to all managers.
38. Case audit grades are aggregated by service and team in **Performance data and analysis** to support their assessment of the quality of service delivery.
39. Summary reports of themed audits are presented to the Divisional Management Team.
40. A quarterly analysis of audit findings is presented to the Director of Children's Services to review the impact of case audit findings - the difference it has made to the quality of children's services.

### **Link between case audit and learning**

41. Strengthening the relationship between case audit findings and learning is one of the 6 ways in which we will meet our commitment to children and families in the Children and Young People's Plan.
42. As a learning organisation that is committed to continuous learning. We understand that it is imperative that learning from all quality assurance activity is captured, addressed, implemented and monitored. It is important that learning is targeted to the right people and used in a meaningful way which will contribute to improvements in service and practice leading to improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

43. Learning from case audits is shared with managers at the monthly manager's meetings with clear expectations that learning is passed on in social work team meetings and embedded in improved practice.
44. Team managers will use case audits to spread good practice when findings are good or outstanding and to review and manage individual capability when findings require improvement or are inadequate.
45. Themes from case audits will inform the Training Programme.

### **Comments, Compliments and Complaints**

46. Comments, compliments and complaints are vital in helping to determine the quality of services and practice provided to children, young people and families when used in conjunction with other quality assurance methods.
49. The complaints monitoring for Children's Social Care is a function provided under Regulation 13 of the Children Act 1989. The Compliments and Complaints Team are positioned corporately as part of SSA functions. The Children & Families Head of Business Support acts as a bridge between the corporate complaints team and social work services. The complaints report is submitted each September to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
50. The Children's Services Department receives two types of complaint which are dealt with under two processes:
  - Corporate Complaints relating to services failing to meet the expectations of clients; and
  - Statutory Complaints relating to complaints made by a child, young person or their representative, who receives or are entitled to receive, a service relating to specialist provision covered under the Children Act 1989 and subsequent amendments in 2004 and 2006. If a complaint is not eligible to access the statutory procedure, the Council's Corporate Complaints procedure is applied. Statutory Complaints are, by their nature, generally more complex than Corporate Complaints.

All efforts are made to resolve complaints informally at the first point of contact. Early resolution enhances the customer experience, maintains a high level of satisfaction and is the most cost-effective approach to complaints management.

51. Concerns that cannot be resolved informally are administered through the Corporate and Statutory procedures. Each of the procedures enables escalation through three stages. If complainants remain dissatisfied having exhausted these procedures, then

they have recourse in both instances, to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

52. Learning from complaints is a primary purpose of the complaints process alongside trying to resolve the complaint. The Council analyses complaints and draws together common themes if these emerge. A quarterly summary report is presented to the Department's senior management team. Themes or concerns are then addressed with individual services and reviewed by the senior management team. Learning from complaints is addressed in an annual report to the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
53. The Compliments and Complaints Manager attends the Manager's Meeting to present the annual report. The Compliments and Complaints Manager, Head of Business Support, Quality & Improvement Manager and the Social Care Academy Practice Development Lead meet to bring together intelligence from case audits and complaints to identify common themes for improvement.

### **Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Partnership Board**

54. The Wandsworth Safeguarding Children Partnership Board scrutinises the work of all safeguarding partners and subgroups and holds them to account on safeguarding practices. The Board will analyse and identify unassessed or developing risks to children, using performance and audit data and reports from safeguarding partners.
55. Safeguarding Learning Events are arranged to develop collaborative partnership relationships and find creative and innovative solutions to achieve better outcomes for children. The aim of Safeguarding Learning Events is to analyse lessons from practice, locally and nationally, to improve practice and achieve ambitious outcomes for all children, including those who use universal services.

### **Stakeholder Feedback**

56. The Council is committed to listening to residents as a way of informing how services are delivered. The Youth Council is active in ensuring the voice of young people informs how universal services are delivered for them in Wandsworth.
57. There is an expectation that every child, young person, family and carer who comes into contact with Children's Social Care is provided with the opportunity to express their views. All case audits will consider the appropriateness of contacting children, young people and their families as part of the internal auditing process.
58. Feedback from partners who share our work with children is valued. Feedback from colleagues in key agencies Health, Education, Police is important information in our understanding of what is working well to improve outcomes faster for children from vulnerable and deprived backgrounds and what we need to improve.

59. Feedback from staff is valued. Various surveys are used to listen to staff, Social Work Health Check, Community Care Retention Survey as well as opportunities to meet with senior managers. Responding to their feedback is important and subject to the four stages of continuous improvement to ensure the improvement loop is completed.

### **Listening to the Voice of the Child**

60. The views of children, young people about the services they receive and the impact it has on their lives are sought and gathered in a number of ways:
- Being seen alone when their social worker visits and through direct work
  - Talking to their Independent Reviewing Officer when they are looked after children
  - Being supported to attend their child protection conferences
  - Being supported to attend their LAC reviews or get their wishes and feelings into the LAC review by their preferred method
  - Being supported to chair their LAC review when they are of sufficient age and understanding to do so
  - Young people's feedback forms to inform foster carer's annual household reviews
  - Through the offer of an independent advocate to act on their behalf
  - Providing feedback as part of their Personal Education Plan
  - Participating in the Children in Care Council (known as CLICK) and their projects aimed at improving service delivery.
  - Ensuring their wishes and feelings are heard at the Corporate Parenting Panel
  - Participating in service development days.
  - Responding to surveys e.g. Brightspots survey
  - Compliments and complaints monitoring.
61. The Children's Participation Officer provides children looked after with opportunities to participate in decision making processes on issues that affect them. CLiCK (Children Looked After in Care Council) provides an effective voice for children looked after and Care Leavers. This has been extended to seek the voice of children in need of help and protection through a group called VoiCiN (Voice of Children in Need).

### **Innovation**

62. Wandsworth has been awarded a grant from the Department of Education's Innovation Programme to implement the Family Safeguarding Model in 2021. Project planning is underway.
63. It is anticipated that full implementation of the programme will transform the quality of work with children in need of help and protection, improving work with families to co-produce plans that will be clear, and outcome focused.

## **Whistle Blowing**

64. The Whistle Blowing Code of Practice was updated in October 2016 and can be found on the intranet (known as the Loop). It is aimed at employees of Richmond and Wandsworth Councils as part of the Shared Services Agreement between the two Boroughs.
65. The code is for use if an employee has a concern about danger or illegality that has a public interest aspect to it, usually because it threatens others (e.g. customers, stakeholders or the public)

## **Quality Assurance Effectiveness Framework**

66. We are constantly seeking to achieve the right balance between case audit activity and embedding improvement as a result of case audit findings either for individual children or for whole services.
67. The Effectiveness Framework has been introduced in 2020 to track recommendations from all quality assurance activity and drive improvement. It is monitored by the Children & Families Divisional leadership team.
68. It connects with learning and development to ensure learning is shared with the right people and used in a meaningful way which will contribute to improvements in service and practice leading to improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

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