

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	Children's Services Improvement Plan - Themed Item
Meeting date	7 June 2022
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	There is evidence of some progress in relation to Quality Assurance because of the leadership 'buy in' and change to the Quality Assurance Framework, which is now more meaningful, engaging and impactful. Compliance and quality has begun to increase and there is now accountability of actions and a clear learning loop.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: The content of the report is accepted as a summary of the progress in relation to Quality Assurance.
Reason for recommendations	Practice improvement is in line with the Improvement plan.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Mike White
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley – Corporate Director Children’s Services
Report Authors	Tammy Lawrence, Head of Quality Assurance, Safeguarding and Partnerships.
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Update and Information

Background

1. Concerns expressed by Ofsted ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Childrens Services) were that audits were of poor quality and moderators have a much clearer idea of ‘what good looks like’. There was not enough confidence that Quality Assurance (QA) identifies areas for improvement, action tracking needed improvement and worker participation was lacking. Use of performance information is under-developed, and trackers are yet to be wholly accurate or child-focused and are process driven.
2. The improvement plan states ‘Revise and Review the Quality Assurance Framework so that it is more meaningful and has greater impact. The framework to set out expectations of quality assurance for all workforce and closing the loop on the learning. Practice Standards to provide clarity around quality assurance.
3. Immediately, following the ILACs, the return rate of Practice learning Reviews (PLRs) remained low. This has recently taken a significant turn for the better as there is now Senior Leadership ‘buy in’ to the Quality Assurance Framework and the principle that it is part of everyone’s day to day business. This message has been communicated clearly and is a significant positive change.

Children’s Services Improvement Plan – Quality Assurance update

4. The Quality Assurance Framework has been reviewed and revised and is due to be launched in May 2022, following some final tweaks. The principal changes are as follows:
 - 4.1. All managers will complete one collaborative Practice Learning Review (PLR) each month (changing from 2 PLRs). Compliance will provide the necessary 10% of work to be reviewed.
 - 4.2. Collaborative PLRs are completed by managers alongside practitioners to support their professional development.
 - 4.3. PLRs that identify immediate concern or graded Inadequate are shared within 24 hours and allocated team have management grip and responsibility to ensure children are safe.
 - 4.4. PLRs are moderated by Practice Learning Reviewers (Auditors) within the Quality Assurance Service in partnership with the manager who has completed the PLR.

- 4.5. The Quality Assurance Service will allocate a link Practice Learning Reviewer for each Service who will support the Quality Assurance process, support the learning, and feedback loop.
 - 4.6. 20% of PLRs will be moderated by the Quality Assurance Service to ensure consistency of approach/gradings.
 - 4.7. Actions will be tracked on a shared database between the Quality Assurance Service and Service areas. It is the responsibility of allocated team to update tracker.
 - 4.8. The allocated Social Worker, Team Manager is responsible for achieving the actions. Quality Assurance will have oversight.
 - 4.9. The Quality Assurance Service will attach the PLR to the child's electronic record.
 - 4.10. Practice weeks will take place 4 times per year.
 - 4.11. A programme of thematic reviews will take place in line with the Improvement Plan.
5. The following will support the learning loop:
- 5.1. Link Practice Learning Reviewers (Auditors) to present bite size briefings from PLRs to service areas.
 - 5.2. Mandatory standing agenda item at all team meetings to feedback themes and learning from PLRs.
 - 5.3. Monthly and quarterly reports are provided to the Childrens Service Quality Assurance and Improvement Board by the Quality Assurance Service.
 - 5.4. Learning from Quality Assurance will inform the Workforce development agenda.
 - 5.5. Learning from PLRs, Local Learning Reviews, dip sampling will inform focused (thematic) reviews.
6. There has been a clear direct message from the senior leadership team that Quality Assurance is a priority and a necessary part of practice to help understand our work and the impact on the children and young people that we work with.
7. All senior managers and managers are now undertaking Practice Learning Reviews each month and the compliance is improving (see below). The link Practice Learning Reviewer is assisting to instil more confidence in the service to undertake PLRs of good and consistent quality as well as the experience of the practitioner whose work is being reviewed.
8. There is also now a clear communication and governance strategy, in particular a Childrens Service Quality Assurance and Improvement Board where the learning from PLRs and thematic reviews is considered and the impact on practice is reflected upon. This also provides a forum to hold the action plan and a clear line of accountability for all senior leaders and managers to ensure that learning and action from reviews is acted upon and shared.
9. Quality Assurance also support the scrutiny of performance data at the Performance Surgery to ensure that there is a clear focus on the impact and outcomes for children and that this informs further areas of focus and development.
10. There is now a clear programme of focused reviews based on performance data and learning from the ILACS outcome which will monitor the areas of improvement and where further development is needed.

11. Feedback from children, young people and their families as become a routine aspect of focused reviews now and the learning is being used and shared to inform better practice and identify the areas where there needs further strategic change. The main learning is around the change of Social Workers and the communication issues that arise from this which is being addressed by the recruitment and retention strategy. Self-assessment by practitioners and/or managers also forms part of the quality assurance and learning for each focused PLR.
12. A Practice Week Framework has been created. Practice Weeks are planned with the first taking place in July 2022 focusing on care experienced young people. It will include peer review so that it is collaborative at all levels.
13. The PLR compliance evidences a recent increase in compliance of PLRs. The compliance increased to 60% in April which is a significant improvement. Moderation of the April PLRs is underway and is so far evidencing that the dedicated Practice Learning Reviewers are having a positive impact with supporting managers to audit and grade as fewer PLRs have changed grade following moderation.

QUARTER 4 2021/2022

Month	PLRs sent by QA Service	PLRs returned to QA Service	% PLRs returned by Service
January	80	13 (6 completed by QA, 7 by Service)	79%
February	78	6	8%
March*	46	16	35%
TOTAL	204	35 (29 by Service)	14%

*The smaller sample size in March is due to the change in requirement from 2 PLRs per month per manager to 1 PLR. (March (16th) DCS emailed the service outlining the expectation that all managers are to complete PLRs).

14. The following outlines the grading and evidence that the significant majority of the practice falls in the requiring improvement to be good range.

QUARTER 4 2021/2022

Grade	January	February	March	Total	%
Outstanding	0	1	0	1	3%
Good	2	1	6	9	26%
RI	9	3	9	21	60%
Inadequate	2	1	1	4	11%
TOTAL	13	6	16	35	100%

Summary of financial implications

15. There are currently no identified financial implications

Summary of legal implications

16. There are currently no identified legal implications

Summary of human resources implications

17. There are no resource implications for sustaining this progress. The PLR team is fully staffed and there is a Service Manager for the PLR team. There has been some challenge around resourcing the Business Support role that is essential to support the team to work efficiently and make the necessary progress. The challenge specifically, has been around securing an appropriately skilled and reliable resource. A recent further interim appointment has been made.

Summary of sustainability impact

18. There are currently no identified sustainability implications.

Summary of public health implications

19. There are currently no identified public health implications.

Summary of equality implications

20. There are currently no identified equality implications.

Summary of risk assessment

21. The risk of not sustaining the improvements made and having insufficient and poor-quality practice learning reviews is that the service, senior leaders, and stakeholders cannot be assured about the impact of the practice on children, young people, and their families. There would be a lack of knowledge and grip about the quality of practice across the services and therefore it would be difficult to support and guide practice improvement. It would inhibit professional development for staff and reduce the evidence to support learning conversations for practitioners. Quality Assurance is a necessary part of the everyday business to support safeguarding children

Background papers

None.

Appendices

None attached.