Gloucestershire Children’s Social Care
Quality Assurance and Learning Framework

Introduction

This Framework applies to all children’s services teams and services.

The framework sets out how Gloucestershire learns from all activity completed to ensure children and families are being supported in the right way at the right time, and understand what difference has been made. The framework sets out the approach and how learning is embedded and evidenced in practice.

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF): provides a level of confidence about service delivery and the positive impact on children and their families in Gloucestershire.

Measuring impact is key - What difference are Gloucestershire County Council and their partners making? It is this reason that outcomes for children is at the heart of the Framework.

The Quality Assurance Framework includes capturing data to ensure standards are met and procedures followed. However, these measures alone do not assure positive impact and there is a need to ask “so what”?

Priorities

The needs of children and families are understood
Children are at the centre
Children and families benefit from every visit and meeting
We understand and improve the impact of our work.

Our guiding principles for embedding the Framework are that:

1. **Children, young people and their families are at the heart of what we do.** The focus of quality assurance must be on impact and outcomes for the child or young person in their journey through our social work and safeguarding systems.

2. **The approach to Quality Assurance will be underpinned by Restorative Practice,** and a desire to examine and capture best practice. This means that QA activity is done ‘with’ staff, rather than ‘to’ or ‘for’, in ways that build relationships and are characterised by respecting each other’s perspectives, high expectations, high support and high challenge, to enable us to learn, improve and change.

The framework takes into account key messages from "Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015" and learning from Serious Case Reviews. It is informed by analysis of effective approaches to Quality Assurance highlighted by Ofsted Single Inspection Framework reports.

There are 6 stages in the framework. A way to remember this is “STARLIng”. Each stage is proactive, to inform action and improve outcomes for children which are at the heart of our work.

- **Standards** - what standards are we aiming for?
- **Tools** - how are we using a range of QA tools, against those standards?
- **Analysis** - what do the results of using those QA tools tell us?
- **Review** - how well are we doing it, and is anybody better off?
- **Learn** - what do we learn from this, to feed back into practice?
- **Impact** - what are the outcomes for children and families?
### Standards For Practice

**Standard 1** All children will have an assessment and a plan which reflects their experiences, wishes, feelings and needs are known and understood.

**Standard 2** All children will have an assessment and a plan which reflects the wishes, feelings and needs of parents and carers; enabling them to fulfil their responsibilities.

**Standard 3** All children will have a plan which explains what needs to happen; by when; who by; what outcomes we are seeking together; how risk is being managed; and what the contingency plan is.

**Standard 4** As far as age and understanding allows, children will be spoken to alone and worked with by professionals who have the tools to directly engage them.

**Standard 5** All children's case records will be analytical, well written and timely, so that everyone can understand significant events that have happened; what the plan is; the purpose of actions and contacts; and what difference has been made so far for the child.

**Standard 6** Every child will be supported by management oversight of the professionals' working with them. This includes reflective supervision; checking that work has been done to agreed standards (monitoring and quality assurance); seeing what difference it is making; and what needs to happen next.

### Customer Service Standards

We will maintain our local Customer Service Standards throughout our work (link). We will:

- explain why we are working with you and your family and what we can and cannot do;
- listen to you and take into account your wishes and feelings in everything we do;
- take care to ensure you understand what we are saying, by using clear and straightforward language or a translator if necessary;
- do everything we say and when we say we will do it;
- be on time for meetings and appointments;
- keep you updated on progress;
- try to answer your questions or find someone who can.
2. Tools

Managers and Heads of service will continue to complete case audits at their discretion, with their staff, so they understand the quality and impact of our work:

1. Regular, monthly audits about the child’s journey through our services (taking a sample)

2. Auditing on a theme, in relation to specific subjects e.g. supervision, pathway plans, response to domestic abuse.

3. Audits with partners from Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (Multi Agency Quality Assurance Sub Group).

**Monthly Audit Tool and Method**

The audit tool incorporates social work practice standards, but focusses on evidence and on impact for the child. It will check particularly the journey and experience of the child through services; that the rationale for decisions made on behalf of the child is evident; that the help offered is planned and purposeful; and that improvement to the child’s life has pace.

Through this Framework, Quality Assurance of supervision and managerial oversight will also be strengthened.

Audits will be completed each month by three Audit Groups. Cases will be selected by the Head of Quality liaising with the County Council Performance Team, themed in accordance with the annual audit programme, but always about the child’s experiences and outcomes.

Audit Groups comprise a range of Senior Managers, Principal Social Workers, Team/Deputy Managers, Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs. Each month auditors will audit 1 case per person within a 2 week window, working as individuals or in pairs.

Each month an agreed sample of audits will be moderated by one of the Audit Groups, examining quality, outliers, analysis, themes, observations and any contributions to improved impact for children. Moderation will in turn support learning, discussion and actions. In this way, the three Audit Groups work in rotation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month One:</th>
<th>Group 1 Audit</th>
<th>Group 2 Moderation</th>
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<td>Month Two:</td>
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<td>Group 3 Audit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Month Three:</td>
<td>Group 2 Audit</td>
<td>Group 3 Moderation</td>
<td>Group 1 Improvement</td>
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A competency framework for auditing is available, which manager’s will work to.

The auditing process will include systematically making sure that all staff have 1 case audited, 1 practice visit observed. Managers will be measured against audit competencies and have an observed supervision.
Dip Sampling

This will involve rigorous, thematically driven scrutiny of a large number of cases, checking for particular practice, outcomes, and themes.

Triangulation

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) Audit will include the views of children and their families about their experience of receiving services and the impact our work has on their lives. Gaining views from staff will also be critical to informed judgements about good practice, barriers to progress and next steps;

- Monthly audits will include the auditor/audit pair directly obtaining the child and parental/carer view, whenever it is practicable and appropriate to do so. This will be supported by the Advocacy Service and Ambassadors for Vulnerable Children and Young People.

- Monthly audits will include reflections from the child's social worker/lead professional about the work and impact on the child. Suggestions and recommendations will be given on how to gain pace and impact for the child.

- The QA framework will use Children’s Services intelligence from our Customer Feedback Framework; complaints and compliments; and feedback from key partners (e.g. health professionals and education settings) as well as safeguarding themes drawn from reports of allegations management.

Staff Observation

All staff will be observed to assess the quality of their practice in working with children and families and/or partner agencies.

Why: Observation of staff in their everyday work is an important element of quality assuring professional practice. Observation of practice adds to a whole picture about the way that our workforce build relationships, maintain Honest Open and Transparent (HOT) conversations, challenges and reframes on behalf of children and families. This will identify professional developmental needs and grow workforce confidence, direct feedback and autonomy.

How: All Team Managers (or Deputy and Senior Practitioners where agreed) will

- observe practice of newly qualified workers in line with local and national ASYE policy;
- observe the practice of experienced workers at least once every year;
- identify any workers within the team in need of support to improve performance;
- share observations with workers in reflective supervision sessions;
- negotiate individual action plans with workers as necessary;
- share completed observations with the Practice Learning Team.

Ethical guidance: During each observations of practice, the observer will be sensitive to the potential pressures on, and the apprehension of, children, young people, families and staff.

The observer will consider and discuss the appropriateness of each observation and whether they should observe all or part of the activity. Any observation will be with the explicit and informed consent of the children and families. The relevant practitioners will be asked to gain this consent. The observer will confirm the consent with the children, young people and families. The observer will explain the purpose is to assess the effectiveness of help, care and protection for children, not to make judgements about them. After the observation of practice,
the observer will aim to have a brief discussion with the child and family about their experience of the services received and their impact. The observer will also constructively critique the practitioner following observation.

The Practice Learning Team will have a key role in the audit process, analysis of findings, observations of practice and the mentoring of staff, to support applied learning and drive up practice standards.

The Practice Learning Team will consider the findings of staff observation at least once per year, highlighting key learning points and identifying actions for workforce development.

Meeting Observation

Key decision-making meetings will be observed through a programme led by senior leaders within the service, to assure their effectiveness and pace. Observations will consider key factors such as governance, terms of reference, leaders and leadership of our workforce, multi-agency working together, and the involvement of impact on children and families.

Why: It is important to assess meeting in relation to the quality of shared working, decision-making and actions which are implemented via key meetings. These groups and processes are the driving force of the safeguarding system in Gloucestershire. It can helpfully inform multi-agency practice by feeding back findings to governance boards such as the Children and Young People’s Partnership, Health and Wellbeing Board and Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board.

How:
- Heads of Service will observe key meetings twice per year;
- Heads of Service will complete a record of the observation and discuss this with the meeting Chair. A shared record of learning and actions will be agreed and recorded;
- Heads of Service will send a copy of the observation record to the Performance Team;
- Directors will observe key meetings once per year; roles as above;
- Learning will be shared with partner agencies through the Children’s Partnership or Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board.

The following will be observed:

- Early Help Assessment Meeting
- Strategy discussion/meeting
- Child Protection Conference - Initial
- Child Protection Conference - Review
- Core Group meeting
- Looked After Child Initial Planning Meeting
- Looked After Child Review Meeting
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- Domestic Abuse ‘Morning Meeting’ (MASH)
- Legal Planning Meeting
- Pre Proceedings Meeting
- Court Proceedings
- Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) Formulation Meeting
- Team Around the Child (TAC) Meeting
- Family Group Conference.
4. Analysis

Each month, Heads of Service will use Managers Performance and their leadership meeting to analyse challenge and improve performance data, learning from quality assurance activity and explore the data.

Children’s case files provide an invaluable perspective on practice. Effective audits can provide insight into the quality of recording, the quality of work, ‘change’ for the child, the quality of management oversight, support for the worker and importantly, the views, experiences and outcomes for the child.

Quarterly reports provided separately by the Child Protection Conference Team Manager and the Quality Manager (Independent Reviewing Service) will provide analysis of themes around good practice and escalations of concern, according to the distinct roles and responsibilities of these two teams. The impact of both services and the way in which Gloucestershire learns from/responds to their input will be critically examined.

Completed Monthly Audit Tools, corresponding SW questionnaire/conversation feedback and service user feedback will be collated and considered by each auditing individual or pair, to inform their overall findings with regards to the quality and impact of service provision to the child and their family. The findings and conclusion will be discussed as part of the moderation carried out by a Principal Social Worker and the Head of Quality and will lead to learning and development and or an acknowledgement of good practice: developing an expectation and understanding of good practice and high impact.

A Quality Assurance Forum – including frontline practitioners - will meet every 3 months, to analyse and amplify the findings from data, audit, staff feedback, escalations, children’s views, compliments and complaints. Views of children and young people will include learning from the contributions of Ambassadors for Vulnerable Children and Young People; feedback from children and young people who use the MOMO (Mind of My Own) App; and a range of consultations completed with children in their journey through services.

The Quality Assurance Forum will over time, build ways to be inclusive of a wider demographic, for example including input from student SWs, partners, Ambassadors and Foster Carers, as a rich source of learning and advice. This development underlines the commitment to ensure that the QA process is informed by those who are practicing - ‘doing with’ not ‘to’ or ‘for’.

A briefing for the Director, Assistant Director and Lead Member will be provided every month by the Head of Quality (Children & Young People), including quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis on how practice is improving over the year and impacting upon outcomes for children and young people.
This key stage will make sure there are robust processes in place for turning the findings from audit analysis into reflection and improvement planning.

- **Aggregated findings** from monthly ‘journey and impact’ audits and dip sample themed audits will be produced by the Head of Quality, who will review them for headline themes and recommendations. This process will inform improvement planning to be progressed by Team Managers, Consultant Social Workers and Principal Social Workers, with oversight, support and challenge from Heads of Service.

- The 3 monthly **Quality Assurance Forum**, chaired by the Head of Quality, will review the audit findings alongside performance data and all forms of service feedback available, to determine the learning and how this will be a) reported to the Joint Leadership Team and b) shared and embedded in practice or services. Members of the Performance Forum include a range of managers, heads of service, Principal Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs.

- All teams will run a structured review of quality assurance feedback and data every 3-6 months, through a **“Performance Clinic”** meeting with a range of senior leaders for shared learning. Teams will have received:
  - Locality based performance indicators
  - Results from audit
  - Consultation data
  - Key practice issues arising from SCRs
  - Learning from feedback, compliments and complaints
  - Feedback from practice observation

The Team Manager will review the outcomes of the various pieces of quality assurance information above related to their team over the past six months, and in discussion with their team, agree key priorities to target. The Team Manager and Head of Service will discuss the reasons or causes for good and poor practice, negative and positive impact and next steps.

This will include:

- Identifying individuals who need additional support, direction, guidance and training
- A further learning session or two to engage the team itself in understanding and taking ownership of the practice problem and find solutions
- ‘Coaching’ input from Principal Social Workers and Consultant Social Workers
- Themes that need bringing to the attention of Senior Managers, other parts of the Council or partners to support practitioners (e.g. changes to procedures, guidance, resources, training).

All children’s service staff will continue to have an annual Professional Development Review. This appraisal of practice takes the aims and priorities set out in the Council Strategy and Service Plans and translates them into objectives and targets for individual staff members. This provides an opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses in staff performance and provides a vehicle to address any concerns.
IROs and CP Chairs complete a "checklist" about each conference/review, about quality and impact of practice. Feedback will be given to the social worker/lead professional’s line manager for discussion in supervision, to ensure improved practice. This information is aggregated by the IRO and CP Conference Team Manager for oversight and reported to the 3 monthly Quality Assurance Forum, to inform analysis of data and audit findings.

The Virtual School and Quality Manager (Independent Reviewing Service) will quality assure the development and review of Personal Education Plans for Children in Care, to assure their effectiveness in meeting each child’s needs for learning.

5. Learn

So that the framework is a reflective learning experience for practitioners, Auditors complete part of the audit with the case worker.

On completion, the Auditor feeds the results of the audit, reflections and any actions required to the Social Worker and copies the documentation to their line manager.

This will be used for reflective discussion in supervision, to inform future practice and service provision. Audit outcomes will be tracked by the Practice Learning Team to ensure learning is happening.

The Head of Service will discuss the audit findings and reflective supervision session with the Team Manager, during the Team Manager’s supervision. This will include discussing the impact of service delivery/planning for the child/young person, and agreeing what needs to happen next.

Principal Social Workers will take the lead in ensuring that learning from the various audit and quality assurance activity informs the workforce strategy and learning and development pathways for children’s services staff.

Themed findings from audit/outcomes for children and families will influence the Learning and Development Programme. In addition, they will be targeted to the team, area or whole service as necessary.

The Training Co-ordinator from the GSCB Business Unit will take the lead in ensuring that learning about the wider safeguarding system informs/is reflected in multi agency safeguarding training.

The Head of Quality will summarise monthly audit findings to be signed off by the Audit groups. A quarterly overview report will be received and discussed by the Quality Assurance Forum and senior leadership team meetings to review any trends, any areas of practice that are good and those that require further development.

In addition,

- Individual Audit documentation and outcomes will be both discussed in supervision and used to demonstrate social workers’ and managers' learning and reflections, on the quality of decision making progress of cases.

- Registration of social work staff with the Health and Care Professions Council is contingent upon evidence of minimum learning requirements over a three year period.
It requires managers to provide oversight and to sign off evidence of learning for each qualified Social Worker for whom they are responsible.

- Principal Social Workers and their colleague Consultant Social Workers will use audit results to inform social work learning and development programmes (i.e. induction programme; ASYE; workforce strategy).

- Cases celebrated by the Operational/ Joint Leadership Team as outstanding practice will be fed back into training.

- Learning from children, young people, parents and carers through the Customer Feedback Framework (where they are asked to rate the service and to comment on things that went well and things that did not go so well) will be shared with the Operational/Joint Leadership Team on a quarterly basis and circulated to all participating teams.

- The Children’s Complaints Manager provides quarterly reports, as well as an annual report, which identifies trends and make comparisons about the nature of complaints on a year by year basis. The Complaints Manager also contributes to a biannual briefing sheet that is circulated to all children’s services staff. This briefing sheet contains information about common themes and lessons from complaints, compliments and customer feedback.

**How does this Quality Assurance Framework link to wider assurance of practice and of service development?**

Gloucestershire Children’s Services will consider information provided from audits to inform and develop all relevant plans, specifically;

- Children’s Services Improvement Plan, overseen by the GCC Improvement Board:
- Gloucestershire Early Help and Children & Young People’s Partnership Plan, overseen by the Gloucestershire Children’s Partnership (GCP);
- Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board Business Plan, overseen by the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board.

The welfare of children and young people is everybody’s business. For this reason, the Quality Assurance and Learning Framework sits alongside the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB) Learning and Improvement Framework accessed through the GSCB website.

- The GSCB Multi Agency Quality Assurance (MAQuA) sub group has oversight of multi-agency performance data and undertakes multi-agency audits, to inform multi-agency action.

- This process is carried out using bespoke audit tools and will include consultation with children, parents and practitioners. The Social Care representatives will contribute to writing the report to the GSCB and feeding the learning and recommendations back into Children’s Services.

- The GSCB will also run 8 weekly Restorative Practice Learning Circles with ‘stuck’ Child Protection Core Groups, particularly those working with children who have been subject to a CP Plan for 18 months or more, or for a second or subsequent time.

- GSCB sub groups such as the CSE/Missing sub group or Workforce Development sub group, may also undertake multi-agency audits to understand the quality of service provision, identify gaps and strengths.
• Children’s Services managers, as part of the GSCB and its sub-groups, participate in the above multi-agency audits and learning circles. It is expected that any actions or learning arising from such audits for Children’s services will be considered and responded to.

Children’s services will also from time to time be involved in external Peer Challenge reviews. This means working with another Local Authority, or other organisation external to Gloucestershire, to examine a specific area of practice or theme to help understand areas of strength and further development.

6. Impact

Evidencing the impact of learning from audits will be central to ensuring audit makes a difference for children and families.

The Head of Quality and Practice Learning Team will ensure it is recorded that the case has been audited and that the TM confirms any actions requiring implementation has been completed within the required timescale.

The audit will be part of the child’s record, as an integral part of the worker’s supervision and child’s next review.

An annual survey will also be developed for social care staff, to evidence the effectiveness of the audit programme; dissemination and embedding of learning and improvement to practice across teams.

Measuring quality is something done with, and by, service users and professionals rather than an exercise done to them. Mutual accountability for practice that has an impact on good and better outcomes for children and families will be upheld through supervision discussions, Restorative Practice meetings and our existing protocols.

To make sure the Framework is truly child centred, following the journey of the child through our services, the impact of the Framework will be judged on the following factors;

• Is all quality assurance activity being carried out in partnership with service users and professionals, from student social workers to senior managers?

• Are we continually seeking to improve performance and demonstrate the impact of help for children and their families in improving their outcomes?

• Are the findings from all QA activity driving service improvement and creating better outcomes for our children and our workforce?