

Early Help Quality Assurance Framework and Guidance Notes

Updated June 21

Principles and Purpose of QA

1. The principles and purpose of this Early Help Quality Assurance Framework are aligned with the journey of children and families through the services they receive, experience and the outcomes achieved. This will be attained through.
 - **Child Centred Approach:** focusing on the experience of children and young people and their families, are they safe and protected from harm, is their voice visible and heard;
 - **Restorative:** quality assurance will be restorative. Rather than a top down approach, quality assurance work will be based on working with staff and managers to achieve better assessments and outcomes for the family.
 - **Outcomes Based:** in line with the key behaviours for Early Help services, the focus of quality assurance will be on achieving better outcomes as detailed in the Trouble Families Programme.
 - **Positive:** our approach to quality assurance will be positive - looking at informing and encouraging improvement and supporting the development of staff and services;
 - **Reflective:** our quality assurance framework is designed to be about promoting reflective practice and shared learning

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The purpose of the case audit process is to support the raising of practice standards by providing the opportunity to reflect on practice and measure the effectiveness of the work being undertaken with children and their families who use the service. Whilst the audit process has a scrutiny role to evidence that practice is undertaken in line with the agreed standards, it is important to highlight that auditing also has a supportive and educative function, providing an opportunity for learning, that guards against complacency and embedding a culture of continuous improvement.
- 2.2 The process of auditing is a responsibility shared by all those who are accountable for the quality of practice within the organisation. It is on this basis that those auditing cases include Early Help Practitioners (where applicable) Case Managers, Senior Practitioners, Area Managers, and the Senior Leadership Team. This enables more audits to be completed, ensures more robust scrutiny of the quality and effectiveness of practice and facilitates the development of baselines for good practice across the services.
- 2.3 The monthly case audit process will be complemented by a monthly themed audit schedule, where the audits will be based upon recommendations from serious case reviews, issues arising from performance information, case audits or other sources of information where we need to enquire further regarding practice and outcomes (e.g. Neglect/Domestic Violence/young carers).

- 2.4 It is expected that the outcomes of audits, alongside other available performance information, is used in supervision and appraisal to support practitioners to improve the quality of their practice, and the delivery of good outcomes for children and their families in addition to tackling any issues in
- 2.5 respect of poor performance. In addition, audits should inform training needs, team & service development and can reflect wider systemic issues which impacts on the service delivery.
- 2.6 The case audit process should not delay immediate action being taken to safeguard a child if a situation of imminent risk has been identified by the auditor/manager.
- 2.7 The audit process will result in practice in teams being more open to scrutiny, challenge and accountability, but it is important for this to be undertaken in a way that can be heard and received as well as be acted upon in such a way that it leads to an improved service to children and their families.
- 2.8 The outcome of case audits will be collated in monthly reports and the findings and key themes shared with practitioners and managers through a variety of channels to include managers meetings, practice forums, team meetings and service meetings.

2.9 Audit Procedure

- 2.10 There are **12 audits cycles per calendar year, one per month**. This consists of a case audit period followed by a Quality Assurance meeting to discuss findings.
- 2.11 Auditors are paired at random and allocated with two cases to audit prior to the upcoming Quality Assurance meeting. Audit allocations will be sent out to all auditors by the Troubled Families Practice and Outcomes Officer at least 2 weeks before the meeting.
- 2.12 Cases for auditing are selected based on a prevalent issue identified at the preceding QA meeting. Depending on the theme/focus, Team managers may be expected to provide the Troubled Families Practice and Outcomes Officer with a selection of cases presenting with this particular issue. These cases will be distributed and allocated to a pair ensuring that Team Managers are not auditing their own practitioner's case.
- 2.13 Practitioners, whose cases are selected for audit, are provided with a Perspective of Worker form. This consists of questions that seek to gain their feedback as a case worker including any challenges they may have faced. This is sent to the auditors who are auditing their case to provide a holistic picture of the case work.
- 2.14 Evidence should be provided to support the judgement grading awarded and should highlight areas of good practice. Each domain of the audit tool should be completed, where applicable, and auditors must provide comments throughout the audit report in order to evidence their outcomes and ensure that qualitative data is available to inform the learning from audits.
- 2.15 In any Early Help intervention, it is possible that there was a change in practitioners and/ or teams during that time. If the auditor identifies, that the practice completed by the previous practitioner/ team shows particular strengths or highlights areas of concern or requiring improvement, it is the expectation that the auditor will seek to feedback these findings to the relevant practitioner and team manager where possible.

- 2.16 Each case audit requires the auditor to determine a rating for the quality of practice in each domain as well as overall. **The grading are as follows:**

Judgement of Quality of Work	Definition
Outstanding	There is strong evidence of good practice throughout, and there is clear evidence of outcomes and impact throughout
Good	There is evidence of good practice in this case and evidence that the practice of the worker is deemed to be what would be expected
Requires Improvement	Practice standards have been followed but with gaps in assessment, planning and direct work with child/family
Inadequate	Practice standards have not been adhered to and there are gaps in relation to practice

- 2.17 If **any immediate concerns** arise in respect of the child's safety during the course of the audit process then the auditor is responsible for ensuring that the Team Manager is notified as a matter of urgency, so that corrective action can be undertaken.
- 2.18 In cases where there is a disagreement about practice and the auditor and the Team Manager do not agree with the findings, the Head of Service for Quality Assurance will take an independent look at the audit report and consider the findings.
- 2.19 It is expected that all audits will be completed within the given timescale. Where an auditor is unable to complete the audit due to annual leave or sick leave, the expectation is for the other auditor in the pair to complete and feedback at the meeting alone.
- 2.20 Discussion of Audit Findings:**
- 2.21 Case audit findings are discussed in the following QA meeting; approximately 10 minutes is allocated to each case discussion. This discussion should focus on the impact of the intervention, how well the needs were captured and addressed as well as strengths/areas of development for the worker.
- Following this meeting, the Troubled Families Practice and Outcomes Officer is to send the original audit report to the practitioner's Manager and record a case note on Mosaic (see 3. Example of accompanying case note for Mosaic). Where there is a judgement of inadequate/inadequate-critical, the service manager will be alerted to ensure they oversee and follow up any actions required.

- For cases judged as requires improvement the expectation is that the Team Manager and Practitioner will discuss the audit findings and agree on smart actions on how the practice on the case will be improved and the identified concerns addressed.
- Managers are expected to record their discussions within a supervision or management oversight case note. These are to be reviewed by the Audit team at the following QA meeting and any issues with non-compliance to be escalated to Senior Management.
- Where a case is judged as Inadequate or Inadequate Critical, a re-audit will need to be completed 2-3 months following. This will be completed by a Senior Manager and will seek to monitor required actions/improvements.

2.22 It is the expectation that Team Managers meet with their relevant Practitioner as part of the audit process to discuss their findings and engage in a reflective discussion with the practitioner in order to explore areas of practice strengths and areas requiring further focus. Any additional information obtained through this conversation needs to be highlighted in the following QA meeting and recorded by the Troubled Families Practice and Outcomes Officer.

3. Example of case note accompanying a completed audit

The screenshot displays a web application interface for case notes. The main window is titled "Person Case Notes - Miss Skye Stone (9357016)". The content includes:

- Title:** Quality Assurance: case audited
- Contact date:** 14/11/2017 at 11:40
- Description:** This case was audited on 13/11/17 as part of the Early Help Quality Assurance process. Original audit has been sent to manager.
- Metadata:** Entered on 14/11/2017 at 11:40 by Alexandra Burling. Last Updated on 29/11/2017 at 14:46 by Alexandra Burling.

The interface also features a sidebar on the left with "Subject (ID)", a right-hand panel with a "Team" list including "Disability Enablement - South Team", "CS - Early Help Team (Group)", "Emergency Duty Team", and several "CS - Early Help 0-11 (Leytonstone)" entries. At the bottom, there are navigation buttons: "Print Multiple Case Notes", "Find Case Note", "Show Related People", "View", and "Ac".

Completed feedback will be returned to all Early Help Assessment practitioners. Where Early Help Assessments are found to be inadequate, the Early Help auditor should inform the Early Help Practitioner's manager, offering information, advice and guidance. Feedback discussions should take place at the monthly audit to ensure that the lessons learned are built into professional development and service improvement.

Janice Bryden

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