

Learning from audit in Children's Social Care (2017-18)

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation:

Members of the children's scrutiny committee are requested to:

- Consider the report and note the activity being undertaken to further develop our learning from quality assurance activity.
- Indicate how and when they would prefer feedback on the progress of activity to be undertaken during 2018/19.

1. Introduction

1.1 Children's Social Care is committed to improving outcomes for all children and young people and supporting them to achieve their full potential. In order to do this we must continually evaluate three key elements of our work:

- The quality and effectiveness of our interventions leading to positive outcomes for children in terms of safety, well-being and stability.
- The quality of each practitioners approach and line management oversight in supporting the achievement of positive outcomes.
- The quality of our partnerships with all agencies we work with to effect positive outcomes.

1.2 The Quality Assurance Framework sets out the approach we will use to provide continual assurance that we are achieving positive outcomes. Where there is success, best practice messages are shared so that these can be replicated across the service. Where we identify gaps or issues for corrective action this is shared in order to support improvement.

2. Summary of audit activity during 2017-18.

2.1 A summary of key themes emerging from the range of case, themed and deep dive audit activity that have taken place are outlined in Appendix 1.

2.2 We are continuing to develop our quality assurance approach and several developments are set out in the [Audit Plan 2018/19](#) section of this report.

- 2.3 During the course of 2017-18, it has been important to focus on some key issues of compliance with key social work processes given the inconsistent nature of practice in some parts of the service.

3. Service Review (May 2017).

- 3.1 An external Service Review was commissioned to take place during May 2017. The external review team agreed with our evaluation of our practice based on case audits. The service review reflected our own evaluation that we remain a *requires improvement* authority with the potential and ambition to get to good. Some areas of practice remain variable and inconsistent. The summary report and improvement plan which Scrutiny has examined set out our key strengths as well as some priority improvement areas. See link to summary [document here](#).

4. What has audit told us about practice?

- 4.1 Following a full programme of audit activity this year, some key messages of strengths and areas for further development have emerged. These are summarised in Appendix 2.
- 4.2 As the quality of interventions and outcomes is insufficiently consistent across the county it is important to understand some key themes for focus and review as part of the forward plan. These are related to the quality of our assessments, plans and interventions; reflective of the work many local authorities continually work on to improve.
- 4.3 We need to disseminate information about the quality and performance of the services we manage, in a way that can be used by frontline staff to directly improve their work with children and families. We need to progress in our use of a holistic and realistic system that helps us deliver a high quality approach to auditing.

5. Positive Outcomes Framework.

- 5.1 As a service we must evidence the positive difference we make to children's lived experience. We intend to evaluate our practice in line with a set of key outcome measures which test the quality and impact of our interventions as well as adherence to professional practice standards.
- 5.2 Compliance evaluates practice in line with key processes including the timeliness of assessments, visits, completion of plans and review meetings. These all provide some consistency of structure to the work undertaken while at the same time supporting transparency in our working methods. It is important that families experience this consistency between teams and localities so that they know what to expect from our involvement with them.
- 5.3 It is also important that children and families experience staff reliability and continuity, kindness and understanding, competence, flexibility, knowledge and skills. A case audit approach that seeks direct feedback from families supports our understanding of this so that we can replicate what works well and make improvements where required.

- 5.4 Best outcomes are achieved in light of the application of good practice standards. The need to articulate this for all practitioners and managers is key to our ability to see best practice outcomes when we review and audit our practice. These practice outcomes are set out in Appendix 3.
- 5.5 During the coming year we will be further developing our expectations of teams to meet these standards to develop the consistency of good practice in all the work we do.
- 6. Audit Plan for 2018-2019.**
- 6.1 The case audit plan for this year will continue to include monthly case audits with a locality focus. This year's focus will emphasise quality of interventions as they support improved outcomes for children, as well as compliance.
- 6.2 We will develop our audit tool to ensure practitioners and manager focus on key evaluative questions, such as:
- What is the overall outcome for the child we are trying to achieve?
 - How will we know we have got there?
 - How are we doing in respect of the most important measures (safety, well-being, permanence planning)?
 - What could work to make a difference?
 - Who are the people who could help?
- 6.3 These questions will be built in to an online audit tool that is being developed to support easier completion, analysis and dissemination of key findings and recommendations for action.
- 6.4 Planned themed audits for the coming year include:
- Sexual Abuse to review the quality of practice and outcomes in light of an historical child sexual abuse Serious Care Review due to be completed in July 2018.
 - The quality of Child in Need practice.
 - Placement Stability and Placement.
 - Quality of assessments and plans.
 - Child Sexual Exploitation in line with the current Joint Targeted Area Inspection focus.
- 6.5 Finally, a 'Good practice Evidence Bank' is in development in our recently launched [reSOURCE](#) Children's Social Care SharePoint website. The Principal Social Worker will ensure the quality of this evidence. This will serve as a shared repository for good practice aimed at supporting and celebrating practice that makes a positive difference. It is very easy for audit to focus on corrective actions needed; particularly when a service requires improvement. The evidence will be used to support training, good practice messages and any external review of our service.

Darryl Freeman

Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)
Children's Social Care

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills: Councillor James McInnes

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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Appendix 1: Children's Social Care Audit Activity 2017-18

Audits	Focus	Output
Monthly Case Audits	To regularly review the quality of our processes and interventions Case work: Compliance and practice quality audits.	A Summary Report with a slide pack is produced to summarise key strengths and areas for improvement. Each locality has been responsible for developing a programme of improvement and sharing good practice messages within their locality area.
Pre-supervision audits	Each month line managers choose two cases to audit prior to supervision with each practitioner to support discussion and feedback about the quality of casework.	Managers are expected to undertake this activity and share it with the practitioner so that continuous learning is possible. They will pick up individual learning as well as themes for their team and locality.
Themed Audits	Placement of children subject to care orders with their parents.	A summary report and guidance followed this audit to support best practice messages.
	Single Assessments leading to case closure	A summary report, slide pack and presentation to the service was completed in respect of this audit. This theme will be revisited in 2018/19 to evaluate improvements.
	Pre-birth Assessments	A summary report, slide pack and presentation to the service completed to share learning and key areas for improvement.
	Semi-independent placement provision for 16+. A themed spot check audit.	Practice guidance was issued to support practitioners, managers and Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that 16+ placements were made at the right point in a young person's development towards independent living.
Deep Dive Audit	North Locality Practice Review. Following the Service Review in May 2017 the North Locality was identified as in need of some additional review and support.	Summary Report and meetings with key representatives of the locality lead to an improvement plan and board that met regularly while key changes and improvements were successfully implemented.
	A review of the Child Protection Conference Model.	This work is ongoing and due to be finalised in May with a summary report of key findings and recommendations to be shared across the partnership.
	Service Review.	Summary report and feedback given to the service resulting in an improvement plan in line with the key areas for improvement identified.

Self-assessment	<p>Care Leavers.</p> <p>Given the current judgement by Ofsted in respect of this area of practice, work was identified to evaluate our practice with all care leavers.</p>	<p>Summary Report and improvement plan has been developed with the four localities.</p> <p>An externally commissioned Peer Challenge is planned to review our corporate parenting response and our self-assessment and practice with this group of young people.</p>
	<p>Neglect.</p> <p>An externally commissioned neglect peer challenge has been agreed by the ADCS. This self-assessment has been undertaken to support this activity.</p>	<p>Summary Report in progress and improvement plan to be developed. An internal workshop to discuss key findings is scheduled for late May 2018.</p> <p>Peer Challenge scheduled for 12-13 July 2018 by Dorset County Council.</p>

Appendix 2i: Good Practice Messages from audit

1	Practitioners evidence that they know the children they are working with and demonstrate via discussion that they have a clear understanding of their safety, needs and plans.
2	CSE risk assessments audited evidence a good understanding about some of our most vulnerable adolescents with safety plans that reflect efforts to reduce this risk and improve resilience and protective factors.
3	Effective and reflective supervision is offered to a range of practitioners, particularly personal advisors for care leavers.
4	The wishes and feelings and lived experience children is effectively captured in an increasing number of cases and these are integrated into planning /decision making in respect of children and young people.
5	Where cases are deemed inadequate by an auditor they are re-audited in the next round of audits to monitor action taken. Improvements have been made in a number of these cases, evidencing the attention by social work teams to improving key practice.
6	Well evidenced step-down work to ensure a positive targeted early help response when a statutory service was no longer deemed necessary.
7	Evidence of improving Independent Reviewing Officer oversight, including mid-point checks and problem-solving challenge.
9	Evidence of effective direct work with individual children to explore their needs, wishes and feelings and these reflect work required in their plan.
10	Evidence of effective multi agency work in a range of child in need, child protection and children looked after cases.
11	Evidence of effective professional challenge in respect of thresholds for intervention.
12	Effective use of well evidenced risk assessment to inform decision making to keep children safe in a timely way.
13	Some examples of excellent use of tools such as chronologies to support assessment and planning for children.

Appendix 2ii: Areas for continued improvement

Theme	Key Issues	Action Required
Single Assessments	<p>Timeliness and quality can be variable including limited evidence of well triangulated analysis to support effective outcome focussed planning so that key improvements are targeted and evaluated for impact.</p> <p>Assessments must include a clear assessment of parental capacity including the capacity to change.</p> <p>Undertaking assessments in partnership with families.</p>	<p>Assessment Toolkit /guidance to support practice which will include exemplars is available in reSOURCE.</p> <p>Assessment Training is ongoing provided to each locality.</p> <p>Team and Area Managers must focus support in this key area of work.</p> <p>Monthly case audit will continue to review the quality and compliance issues highlighted.</p> <p>The development of key qualitative measures of successful assessment practice and outcomes.</p>
Chronologies to highlight key strengths and concerns for children	<p>A history of significant risks, strengths and issues impacting on a child is central to our assessment and planning approach. These are not always updated or used to support decision making and planning.</p>	<p>Assessment training and toolkit includes a focus on chronologies.</p> <p>Team Meetings and Group Supervision to be used to consider this type of practice tool.</p> <p>Monthly case audits will continue to review progress in the use of this tool for assessment and analysis.</p>
Repeat Referrals to Children's Social Care	<p>We are ambitious to reduce repeat referral rates for families where similar concerns re-emerge. We are focussed on ensuring that families get the right service (universal, early help and/or statutory) at the right time and that we do not miss the opportunity to make a positive impact at the earliest opportunity.</p>	<p>MASH and Initial Response teams must, as part of their assessments, consider the likely impact of concerns on children to ensure the right response/intervention.</p> <p>This will be the subject of continued monthly audit.</p>
Case Summaries/Pen Pictures of children	<p>There is inconsistent evidence of a clear and easily accessible summary of children's cases on their electronic case file. These summaries contribute to regular review of the progress of our involvement.</p>	<p>Eclipse (new electronic record system for children) includes a requirement that social workers complete case summaries every three months and 'pen pictures' are required on the electronic file front page.</p>
Visits	<p>While visits are increasingly recorded in a timely way, the quality of intervention (or recording) requires improvement to support what</p>	<p>Guidance about minimum standards for records needs to be reiterated.</p> <p>The development of a shared strengths based approach to our practice during 2018-19 will support a</p>

	practitioners tell auditors about their practice approach.	more consistent approach that will be closely evaluated.
Supervision	Inconsistent practice evident.	All supervisors must adhere to the Supervision Policy that guides line managers practice.
Management Oversight	Inconsistent evidence that decision making discussions taking place outside of supervision are routinely captured on a child's file.	All managers must promptly record key decisions that affects the plan for each child.
Child in Need Plans	Some evidence of drift in decision making. Inconsistent quality of plans that are not always linked to clear SMART outcome focussed outcomes.	Introduction of Child in Need Independent Reviewing Officers to support effective planning.
Pathway Plans for care leavers	Evidence that some are not regularly reviewed for all young people.	Increased monitoring via each Permanence and Transition Teams.
Permanence Planning for children looked after.	Inconsistent evidence of progress. Some plans are not progressed in a timely way (longer than 6 months after a child has become looked after).	All Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that key permanence options and plans are considered at the point a child becomes looked after. Permanence Tracking panel to highlight cases that are drifting to Team and Area Managers.
Compliance with key processes:	Inconsistent record keeping in respect of key processes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Group Meetings. • Decisions to close cases. • Incomplete processes. 	Regular case audit will continue to monitor compliance with core processes that support the progress of cases.

Appendix 3: Outcomes Framework Indicators

1	Children and young people are listened to, practice is focused on their needs and experiences and influenced by their wishes and feelings.
2	Children are seen and seen alone where this is required and in their best interests.
3	Children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with practitioners.
4	Children young people and families are engaged in all actions and decisions and understand the intentions of the help they receive,
5	Assessments are well evidenced using a range of sources. Assessments robustly and accurately evaluate key risks and protective factors that require support and intervention. Assessments result in a direct offer of help to address any identified needs,
6	Plans are timely and they will identify what work that will be offered to help the family and the necessary changes to be achieved within necessary timescales to keep a child safe. There is evidence that the plan has guided positive change within 6 months of any statutory involvement.
7	Interventions with families effective in supporting change and development.
8	Practice is informed by feedback from children and families about the effectiveness of help they receive from the point they need it until it ends.
9	Children are protected through effective multi-agency arrangements. Key forums/meetings are effective in planning, monitoring and reviewing these arrangements.
10	Multi agency work, information sharing and challenge is timely, specific and effective, leading to positive outcomes.
11	Where there are concerns about safety and protection and parents do not engage there is a full risk assessment and urgent involvement of managers in decision making about next steps is evident.
12	Comprehensive records are held and shared between agencies to help and protect children and young people.