Quality Assurance Framework

2019-2020
<table>
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<th>Issue Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date Of the Next Review</th>
<th>Lead</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 2019</td>
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<td>August 2020</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

The central purpose of Wokingham’s Quality Assurance Framework is to facilitate improvements in our performance - both in terms of day-to-day social work practice and the outcomes of children, young people and families. The Framework seeks to achieve this by promoting a way of working which is continually listening and learning, while also working respectfully with families.

The Quality Assurance Framework outlines all of the quality assurance activity in Children’s Social Care; providing an overview of the purpose, processes and tools used and how they link together.

This framework document sets out:

**WHY** we are doing it – an explanation of our current QA journey and future ambitions.

**HOW** we will do it – captured in the principles which underpin this work; our approach to working with children and their families and the methodology for undertaking QA activity.

**WHAT** we are doing – an overview of the types of quality assurance activity being undertaken and our QA cycle of improvement.

**WHO** we will work with – our ambitions for involving and developing ownership at all levels of the organisation.

**WHEN** we will do it – our commitments to timescales and a calendar of future activity.

‘The improvement process must always listen to the experience of and be accountable to the least powerful people who are most directly affected by the professional practice’

(Turnell and Munro, 2015)

2. WHY

We have been on a journey to improve our quality assurance process and have been reviewing our existing approach, building on aspects which have been embedded and doing more to engage staff at all levels of the organisation. Our ambition is that by producing better quality information about our practice and by being able to analyse and respond to the findings in a timely way that we will be able to target our interventions more effectively in order to improve outcomes for children. We will do this by undertaking a variety of quality assurance activity throughout the year, including two Practice Review Weeks. This activity will identify and cascade learning back to frontline practice which will in turn drive improvement for individual children, as well at a team, service and organisational level.

3. HOW

The principles underlying this framework are;

- Improving day-to-day social work practice, as well as outcomes for children and young people in Wokingham.
- Keeping the voice of the child and young person at the centre of this activity
• Listening and being receptive to feedback from families, staff members and other partners about the services we provide
• Promoting continual learning, by supporting change and the embedding of good practice, as well as closing the “QA loop” by monitoring the impact on children.
• Ensuring an inclusive and participative approach to QA which is understood and owned by everyone at all levels in children’s services.
• Being curious, inquisitive and interested, and offering constructive and thoughtful challenge in order to improve practice.
• Embedding the Signs of Safety practice framework which sets out a way of working with families in a respectful way with a continuing scrutiny and questioning of the model and how it is making a difference to the work we do with children.

QUALITY ASSURANCE MODEL

This model sets out the cycle of quality assurance and how we will assure ourselves that we are making a difference for children. This will involve listening and learning from the quality assurance activity and providing appropriate support and challenge to practitioners to improve the service. The QA cycle is continual and flexible and might go back and forth as learning emerges. The four main components of our work are represented in the green circles, which set out the key benchmarks of the continuous loop of improvement. Four supporting activities are also positioned alongside the blue arrows, which will underpin our overall approach.

The four main components:

• **Set standards** and be clear about the performance that is expected of the Service - particularly in terms of how we measure against key performance indicators, our
adherence to policies, procedures, and statutory obligations, and the need to respond to best practice identified through research and case reviews. (For more details on our practice standards see Appendix 1 - *Children’s Services Practice Standards*)

- **Monitor, audit** and gather information (quantitative and qualitative) and feedback from children and families and our staff.
- **Analyse** what this information is telling us and evaluate how well are we doing and whether children are better off as a consequence of our work.
- **Change and improve**; make changes to practice, policies and training
- **Repeat the cycle** of monitoring and auditing whether the learning identified has been embedded and whether it is making a difference to the work we do with children.

The supporting activities inside the blue arrows help to create the conditions for improvement where there is high quality supervision, performance monitoring, staff are supported and managers and senior leaders are supporting and driving improvement across the service.

### 4. WHAT - QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITY

#### 4.1 Listening to children and families

Our aim is to seek feedback in a consistent way that engages children and their families meaningfully. We will seek to make this collection of feedback an integral part of all of our quality assurance activity, and to develop systems which can collate it in one place.

We will use a range of tools including feedback questionnaires and conversations with children and parents following audits, as well as more in depth approaches such as
appreciative inquiry to obtain meaningful feedback from children and families. One good example of this approach is demonstrated in the Early Help Team, where workers complete feedback forms with families during their final session. This feedback provides part of the reflective review of where the family were when the work started and what they are doing now as a result of Early Help input.

The QA Operational Group will help to collate feedback and will also seek to make better use of the information we routinely collect from the questionnaires and surveys of parents, young people and other professionals, by identifying and communicating cross cutting themes.

4.2 Listening to Staff – Annual survey

A key element to quality assurance is having an effective and stable workforce. Historically, recruiting and maintaining an effective and permanent workforce has been a challenge in Wokingham and is an issue nationally. We will continue to seek feedback from social workers via a range of methods including the Annual Health Check Survey so that we can learn from their experience of working for Children's Services and providing a service for children in Wokingham.

Wokingham Borough Council also conducts an annual staff survey which provides information about staff satisfaction, and the Principal Social Worker regularly seeks feedback from ASYE social workers. All of these sources of feedback will be used to identify messages from frontline staff and managers about the service.

4.3 Learning from Performance information and Statistical Data:

The performance cycle plays an integral part in the Quality Assurance framework as it can both identify areas where focus may be necessary and illustrate the effects of any action taken on previously identified areas of concern.

The Performance Team undertakes the running of management information packs on a weekly basis and disseminates the information to team managers. A weekly report suite covering the broader scope of all social work teams is also made available to team and service managers. This enables managers and practitioners to identify data recording gaps and areas where timescales may be in jeopardy, and also allows for more effective worker supervision.

Following this, monthly performance information is produced - the quality of which is directly impacted by the actions managers take with regard to their understanding of management information - which aims to highlight how the service is performing across a broad spectrum of key performance indicators. Alongside this, team managers are provided with a priority theme which will be the focus of that month’s discussion at the Performance Surgery. The Performance Surgery is chaired by the Assistant Director for Children’s Social Care and Early Help and is attended by all Team and Service Managers as well as representatives covering performance and quality assurance. The expected action on Team Managers is that they understand on a case-by-case basis the reasons behind their team’s performance with regards to the chosen theme, and can come prepared to highlight the strengths and challenges to the group.

Where contrasting trends are observed between the Social Work Teams, the merits of their different approaches can be explored and inconsistencies of practice can be highlighted. Where consistent trends across the teams are observed, further analysis of the data can be undertaken to test any hypotheses as to the underlying causes. The Quality Assurance Operational Group will offer assistance to fully understand the factors at play if further
analysis of the data proves inconclusive. An example might be where an audit of re-referrals is undertaken to identify any practice issues, if the re-referrals do not seem to be centered on a particular worker or team.

Performance information is also used to invite overview and scrutiny. Quarterly reports are provided to Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny, the Corporate Parenting Board, Executive Members and the Berkshire West Safeguarding Partnership Independent Scrutiny Group.

4.5 The Signs of Safety Scorecard

In addition to the information collated by the performance team, further information by way of a ‘score card’ is collected by our team of Signs of Safety practitioners to measure the compliance with aspects of our Practice Framework - such as whether workers are developing danger statements, safety goals, words and pictures and convening network meetings. This helps to inform the extent to which the Practice Framework is being used and embedded across the service. The Signs of Safety Score card data is collected via structured interviews with case workers or self-reported by workers / practice leaders. The score card counts whether or not any of seven key practice elements are present on a case file. It does not take the quality of these pieces of work into consideration.

The seven areas currently measured are:

- Group supervision
- Mapping – evidence of a Danger Statement, Safety Goal and Scaling question
- Child’s voice – use of direct work tools with children in past 3 months
- Trajectory – trajectory / timeline on file which had been created / reviewed or updated in past 3 months
- Child’s version of the plan – Words & Pictures or other specific child’s version of the plan created or reviewed in past 3 months
- Words & pictures explanation for the child – created / reviewed / shared in past 3 months
- Networks –the number of connected people who are actively involved in attending meetings and who contribute to the safety plan other than the child’s parent / carers or involved professionals.

4.5 Core Audits

A core audit programme provides a broad focus on standards and compliance, as well as the quality of social work practice and its impact on the child. Completing core audits on a regular basis helps to identify areas of practice which need attention. They focus on the journey and experience of the child through services, as well as the rationale for decisions made on their behalf. This allows us to identify if the help that has been offered is planned, purposeful and undertaken in a timely manner. We have adopted a collaborative style of auditing which involves the social worker and auditor conducting a live audit of the case, which is then followed up by the auditor contacting the family to find out their experience of the help being offered. Cases are selected by the Impact and Performance Team.

The core audit tool measures against core standards and includes guidance notes within it to assist auditors. It also enables the quality assurance of supervision and managerial oversight. (For more detail on this tool see Appendix 2 - Core Audit Template)

We will undertake core audits on a regular basis (at least 1 month of each quarter) and intersperse them with themed audits or other quality assurance activity. This programme is set out in the Quality Assurance Forward Plan.
So that we can be confident in the accuracy of our findings, our QA programme will ensure that we audit at least 10% of cases which have been open during the course of the year. There will be an expectation that each Social Worker will have at least one of their cases audited collaboratively a year, as well as an expectation that they will have their practice observed at least once a year (see 4.7 Practice Review Week). This expectation will be communicated clearly in induction materials and ongoing communications.

Audits will be completed by a group of auditors consisting of team/assistant managers, and Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs.

Following each audit period, an agreed sample of audits will be moderated by one moderation panel. The panel will examine quality, outliers, analysis, themes, observations and any improved impact for children. The moderation process will in turn support learning, discussion and actions. (For more details on this process see Appendix 3 - Terms of Reference of Moderation Panel). Each completed moderated audit will be sent to the manager and social worker and the actions will be uploaded on the child’s file. It should be discussed in supervision and recorded in a Mosaic step.

4.6 Thematic Audits and Reviews

The methodology for each thematic review will be determined by issues arising from performance, previous audits or feedback from external sources such as Ofsted. This activity might involve dip sampling cases or undertaking a bigger audit of cases and developing a bespoke tool. The Quality Assurance Operational Group will clarify the nature of the issue to be explored and agree a proposed methodology and approach, confirm a time frame (if not already in the Forward Plan) and agree who will undertake the work. A proposal will then be agreed by the Quality Assurance Board. Our QA model is designed to be a cycle of continual learning, so if a theme arises from another piece of quality assurance work our aim is be able to respond with pace and make some fairly quick recommendations for change.

Lessons from thematic reviews will be fed back to the Learning and Development Service and the wider plans for continual improvement across the service. Where concerns or deficits are identified about partner agencies these will be shared with them where appropriate, escalated through the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangements (formerly known as the Local Safeguarding Children Board).

Additional thematic audits will be undertaken by the partnership and reported back to the Independent Scrutiny Group (ISG). The Independent Scrutiny arrangements consider how effectively the arrangements are working for children and families as well as for practitioners. The focus of the ISG will be on;

- Effective analysis of performance information
- Multi-professional audit or reflective learning discussions
- Understanding the lived experience of local children and young people
- Understanding the frontline experience, strengths and challenges of frontline staff and volunteers.

More details are available here: https://www.berkshirewestsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/scp

4.7 Practice Review Weeks

Every six months, all senior managers spend a week on the front line observing practice and talking to social workers about the children, families and carers they work with. The
aim of Practice Review Week is to help Senior Managers understand what it is like for front line practitioners, and to gain a deeper understanding of current practice by observing it first-hand.

Each Practice Review Week will include a series of collaborative audits in relation to a particular theme which allows for a more in-depth review of practice and the opportunity to gain feedback from children, parents and carers about the quality of service they have received. Practice Review Weeks also help to embed the concept of quality assurance with staff throughout the service, particularly in the way they can generate learning across the organisation.

As mentioned above, there will be an expectation that Social Workers will have their practice observed at least once throughout the year as part of a Practice Review Week.

4.8 What happens with our findings?

The findings from all of our QA Activity are recorded and tracked centrally, as part of the QA Learning Log. The Learning Log is maintained by the QA Officer, but is monitored and discussed as a standing item at QA Operational Group Meetings. It provides a record of the issues that QA activities have identified, and then if appropriate allocates a lead member of staff - usually a Service Manager - with responsibility for developing an action plan in response. Crucially, action plans are also recorded as part of the log, which allows us to set timescales to return to them and evaluate any progress made (see more detail under 7.1 Completing the Cycle). Key findings are routinely communicated to the wider workforce via newsletters and other communications, to ensure that the programme is transparent, accessible and “everybody’s business”.

4.9 Key messages from quarterly and annual reports from QAST service

These reports provide a useful overview of how the plans for children in need of protection and children in care/care leavers are operating and they also identify deficits and areas for improvement. These reports also provide information about the voice of the child and the views of parents and include issues brought to the attention of the children’s advocate. The informal challenges and formal disputes from the IRO service also highlight a range of themes about the timeliness of decisions and the provision of services more generally (including any deficits) which can also inform learning and drive improvement.

The quarterly and annual reports from the Complaints Service contain messages and themes arising from complaints and compliments. The number of complaints can be seen as a barometer for the health of the organisation and how it is progressing, and so it is important to try to understand how complaints have come to be made and whether they indicate that changes are needed to wider working practices. Equally the service learns from positive feedback and compliments, which allow us to highlight instances of good practice being demonstrated within the service and disseminate them. There are some cross-cutting themes between IRO/Chair challenges and complaints, as well as between advocacy and allegations reports which can be cross referenced to help determine how best to target improvements.

4.10 Continual Learning

In line with the Workforce Development Strategy 2018-2021 Wokingham is committed to developing and maintaining a professionally qualified, highly skilled, motivated, diverse and integrated workforce. The strategy provides a framework and direction to guide the activities that support our goals for the workforce.
The Learning and Development service delivers a range of training programmes for Children and Adult Services, working to our strategic goals and aligning ourselves to the Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS), Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and Local Government standards, whilst also identifying opportunities to help develop the skills and knowledge of staff to achieve best practice and personal progression.

Wokingham Children’s Services understands the need to transfer skills and knowledge and we have adopted the 70:20:10 model of learning. The principle behind the 70:20:10 framework is that a one-dimensional focus on structured training and development alone, misses the opportunity to exploit learning and development where most of it happens, which is through learning from other and direct experience.

The 70:20:10 model

- 70% LEARN & DEVELOP THROUGH EXPERIENCE
- 20% LEARN & DEVELOP THROUGH OTHERS
- 10% LEARN & DEVELOP THROUGH STRUCTURED COURSES & PROGRAMS

All our training will be aligned to the KSS, Professional Capabilities Framework, Learning from QA Audits and priority subject areas. Information will be collated in the new Training Record to ensure training delivers on the standards and priorities for all levels of our workforce. The QA Audit process will inform the learning cycle by identifying knowledge gaps and learning need and feeding this information into the Training Record which will enable us to react quickly to our workforce learning needs.

The overarching L&D programme will be a regular standing item on the QA Operational Group agenda. This will ensure that we capture gaps in knowledge and consider how we can change practice through learning and development opportunities. It will also provide an opportunity to review the impact of the training being delivered.

4.11 External Challenge, Ofsted Self-Evaluation and Peer Review

As part of our Quality Assurance Framework, Wokingham Children’s Services systematically undertakes an annual comprehensive self-evaluation exercise of its Social Care and Early Help services which is subject to mid-year review.

The self-evaluation process comprises three stages:

- Collection of evidence to support the evaluation of our services;
- Reflection by operational managers and leadership on the presented evidence alongside knowledge about current work programmes, resulting in a considered evaluation of areas of good performance and areas for improvement; and
• Identification of recommended actions based on the self-evaluation to address the areas identified for improvement.

The self-evaluation follows a prescriptive framework designed to robustly assess all areas of service delivery, focusing on the impact of services on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Whilst the self-evaluation is subject to formal mid-year review, the process is designed to be a dynamic one, with an improvement plan developed from the findings which is under constant review in response to evidence gathered or received during the year.

A SMART improvement plan is co-produced with leadership and Service Managers, setting out the priorities and timescales.

Each year Wokingham Childrens Service has an Annual Conversation with Ofsted.

There is also quality assurance activity which relates to the monitoring and progress on any action plans arising from Ofsted inspections and the DfE Partners in Practice initiative.

5. WHO – INVOLVING STAFF AT ALL LEVELS

Our aim is to make sure that the Quality Assurance Framework is understood and embedded across all service areas and offers a clear structure, but with sufficient flexibility to incorporate national and local changes and service priorities as they arise. (For details on specific roles and responsibilities see Appendix 4 - Who does what in the Quality Assurance Cycle?).

Our arrangements are led by the Quality Assurance Board - which sets the overall strategic direction of our work - and the QA Operational Group, which meets more regularly to drive forward the programme and take forward actions from the Board. This ensures a clear interface between operational activity and governance, with feedback loops to learning and development and front line teams.

The goal is for the leadership team to create the conditions where good practice and improvement can take place. This involves;

5.1 Governance of the QA Framework:

The Quality Assurance Board will consist of the Director of Children’s Services (Chair), the AD Social Care and the AD Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, Service Managers from Social Care and Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, a representative from Commissioning, a representative from the Continual Improvement Project, a representative from the Signs of Safety practice framework project, the Service Manager for Intelligence and Impact, the Principal Social Worker and the Complaints Manager.

The QA Board will meet quarterly to provide oversight of the QA process and to scrutinise whether the work is improving the service and helping to drive improvement.

The Quality Assurance Operational Group will consist of the Assistant Director, QA and Safeguarding; the Service Manager, Quality Assurance and Safeguarding; the Service Manager, Impact and Intelligence; the Principal Social Worker, the Complaints Manager, the Signs of Safety Practice Lead; the Learning and Development Lead; the Quality Assurance Officer; the Policy Officer and the three CSC Service Managers. Other operational staff may be co-opted as required.
The Quality Assurance Operational Group will:

- Co-ordinate and plan the audit activity; agree audit tools and scope the forward plan of audit activity.
- Provide feedback on the quality of the auditing
- Collate and record all completed audits; analyse and identify themes.
- Maintain a learning log of actions from audits which the operational group will review at each meeting.
- Provide analysis and a summary report of recent QA activity; (including key themes and learning which may impact service delivery to children) to the Quality Assurance Board in a quarterly report cycle.
- Ensure that details of identified learning needs are fed back to the Learning and Development Lead in Children’s Social Care & Early Intervention Service.
- Disseminate information about key themes, learning opportunities and actions taken in response to audit activity to frontline staff via a quarterly QA communication, to ensure staff can clearly see the impact of audits and other QA activity that they support.

Once themes and learning have been identified and actions identified to improve practice this will be communicated to frontline staff though an information cascade from the QA Operational Group on a quarterly basis so that staff can see the links between case audits and wider learning.

**6. WHEN**

The detailed timeframe for activity is set out in the QA Forward Plan but in addition there will be activity on a weekly, monthly quarterly and annual basis.

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<tr>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Weekly performance reports</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Weekly monitoring of performance by managers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Informal supervision and management oversight</td>
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<td>Feedback from parents and professionals at CP conferences</td>
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<td>Monthly</td>
<td>The QA Operational Group will meet monthly.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly audit activity - either core or themed audits/moderation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feedback from parents during monthly collaborative audit activity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Monthly performance pack</td>
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<td>Managers performance meeting</td>
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<td>Supervision of staff</td>
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<td>Partners in Practice work</td>
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<td>Quarterly</td>
<td>The QA Board will meet quarterly</td>
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<td>QA quarterly update report</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Quarterly reports from Independent Review Officers (IRO); Child Protection Conferencing; Allegations (LADO) and Complaints</td>
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<tr>
<td>Six monthly</td>
<td>Practice Review Weeks every 6 months</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collection of Signs of Safety Score card data</td>
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### Annually

- QA Annual Report.
- Annual reports from Independent Review Officers (IRO); Allegations (LADO) and Complaints
- Annual Ofsted Conversation and Self-Assessment
- Inspections and Peer Reviews
- Annual SW Health Check and Staff Survey
- Annual Children in Care Council Survey on the Pledge

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#### 7. OUTCOMES AND IMPACT – how will we know?

The following measures will help to find out and measure if what we are doing is making a difference and whether the outcomes for children are improved.

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<th>Areas of Impact:</th>
<th>Timely intervention informed by child's views</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Evidence of understanding and analysis of the child's lived experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence of Impact:</td>
<td>Timely analytical assessments with the child at the heart</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Direct work tools inform evidence based practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Plans are SMART, reviewed timely and enable change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence of Outcomes:</td>
<td>Child's lived experience is understood</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We know from what children and families tell us that we have made a positive difference</td>
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We will have a clearer view about how well we are doing by taking on board the information from performance data; the learning from audits; practice observation; the feedback and challenges from IROS and CP Chairs; the messages from complaints and compliments and the feedback from children and their families, partner agencies and from staff.

#### 7.1. Completing the Cycle

The aim of this framework is to provide an infrastructure to grow confident and resilient practitioners and managers who are able to develop a culture of good practice in line with strong underpinning principles – all of which will support them in working effectively with children and families.

The development of a Learning Log has allowed us to create a record of audits undertaken, as well as their themes and key findings. This in turn has provided a tracking mechanism to use in the QA Operational Group, which allows us to close the loop of the audit cycle more effectively.

Additional checks and balances built into the QA process will help to make sure learning is not lost. The Operational Group will add rigor to the process, keeping an operational overview of all the QA activity, tracking progress on past QA activity, identifying future audits and making sure learning is captured and fed back to frontline workers and into the learning and development cycle. The Operational Group will also consider whether any immediate training or practice guidance is required to alter the performance and they will progress this immediately rather than waiting for the next QA Board.

Alongside the audit activity referred to previously, managers at all levels will continue to be provided with performance data which gives them the tools to notice changes in
performance, increases in demand or any areas of consistently poor performance. If following further analysis of the data, the reasons remain unclear or ambiguous, the Quality Assurance Operational Group will consider whether an audit would be beneficial.

This Quality Assurance framework is designed to evolve and be responsive to the needs of the services. The framework will be reviewed annually to ensure that it continues to meet the objectives set out.

**Appendix**

**Appendix 1: Children's Services Practice Standards**
For the current Children’s Services Practice Standards document, please see the *All Children: Policy, Values and Principles* practice guidance chapter of the Wokingham Children's Services Procedures Manual.

**Appendix 2: Core Audit Template**
For the current Core Audit Template document, please see the *Quality Assurance* practice guidance chapter of the Wokingham Children's Services Procedures Manual.

**Appendix 3: Terms of Reference of Moderation Panel**
For the current Terms of Reference of Moderation Panel document, please see the *Quality Assurance* practice guidance chapter of the Wokingham Children's Services Procedures Manual.

**Appendix 4: Who does what in the Quality Assurance Cycle?**
For the current *Who does what in Quality Assurance Cycle?* document, please see the *Quality Assurance* practice guidance chapter of the Wokingham Children's Services Procedures Manual.