

To:

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Dear Colleagues

Re: Monthly quality assurance auditing standards

I hope you are all keeping well.

I wanted to give an important update on the children's social care quality assurance processes at a key point in our continuing improvement journey as we move ever closer to receiving the much anticipated Ofsted inspection notification for our Inspection of Local Authority Services (ILACS). I know we are all determined to provide children, young people and families with the best quality service that we can and quality assurance is one of our main ways of checking that we are doing this.

Quality assurance activity allows all of us some protected time to reflect, evaluate, learn and improve. This is a really important aspect of our practice as it can lead to a positive impact for the child who is the subject of the audit and can also assist with learning for all practitioners, managers and teams who are involved. In turn, when all individual audits are considered together this can provide important learning for the department as a whole. For this reason, all staff in management and leadership roles are expected to participate and undertake monthly audits and this is part of your professional accountability to achieve and maintain oversight of the quality of practice in the service.

In the 2017 inspection, Ofsted reported that "Quality assurance processes are underdeveloped and are not sufficiently well targeted or purposeful in identifying key weaknesses in practice. Audit activity has been limited, and findings from audits have not been collated effectively or used sufficiently well to drive improvement in children's services." Whilst there's arguably always more that can be done to raise the bar to the next level, we are considerably better off now than we were in 2017 and a lot of distance has been travelled. More recently however, over the last few months, the audit completion rate has dropped and I am appealing for full cooperation to ensure this is addressed with immediate effect.

We now have approximately 100 staff trained as auditors and moderators, and we have a comprehensive range of monthly auditing, dip sampling, thematic audits and service reviews being undertaken. All of these contribute to our understanding of our strengths and areas for improvement in the quality of our practice. By looking at the totality of this work, we can confidently share how we are doing and I am really pleased to report that in the last 3 months we have consistently met our short-term Accelerated Improvement Plan targets of at least 40% of practice rated as good or better, and less than 12% of practice rated as inadequate which is fantastic progress.

Quality assurance auditing is an important aspect of our practice and to complete it well it does take time. I would like to thank everyone who has participated in undertaking regular audit activity as your continued commitment to this area of practice has been key in evidencing notable differences in the services that we

provide. This is commendable given the additional CV19 pandemic challenges that we have faced over the past year.

In order to ensure that we maintain a robust quality assurance process and address the recent drop in our audit completion rate, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that audit exemptions will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, for example:

- Prolonged absence from work, due to ill-health for example
- Undertaking other quality assurance activity, for example multi-agency audits for the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Unusually high levels of statutory work, involving attendance to give evidence at final court care proceedings hearings, for example

Exemptions due to exceptional circumstances can only be agreed following a process that requires a formal request via your Head of Service. Your Head of Service will make the exemption request to me and I will consider these on a case by case basis. With appropriate forward planning and wherever possible, audit exemption requests should always be made prior to the issuing of monthly audits but, if this cannot happen, at the earliest possible opportunity. Please don't leave audit exemption requests to the last week of the month as this often suggests that there hasn't been any timely planning and the audit has often been left to the last minute. If there is any risk of slippage you must notify your Head of Service at the earliest opportunity so that they can liaise with the Quality Assurance Team to confirm if there is any capacity to accommodate this. Failure to do so will mean that you will miss the end of the month completion deadline and your audit will not be counted which will be a huge shame given the effort that will have gone into it.

I would also like to remind all auditors that completed audits should always be submitted on or before the last day of the month. Once the audit process is complete there is an intense process that gets underway to make sure all audits are moderated, evaluated and reported in the monthly quality assurance report. I am sure you can appreciate that there is a very tight turn around month on month. Any delays at any point has a knock-on effect and may have an adverse impact on our ability to meet our reporting deadlines. Very importantly, any remedial action that may be required for the child should also be actioned as soon as possible so delays need to be avoided at all costs.

So, let's keep up the good work on this as we maintain our ethos of being a department that is professional, self-aware, and always learning and improving so that the lives of children, young people and families can get better.

Yours sincerely



Gail Hancock
Interim Director for Children's Safeguarding and Care