

--

Title / Subject:	Quality Assurance and Audit	Date:	21 December 2023
Report For:	Children's Service Scrutiny Panel	Report By:	Melanie Field Head of Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Principal Social Worker

1.0 Introduction & Background information

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the audit findings following the launch of the strengthened Quality Assurance Framework in October 2023 as requested by Children's Service Scrutiny Panel on 8 November 2023.

2.0 What we have done to date?

It is recognised that our improvement journey must be underpinned by a robust framework that provides for the development and embedding of a learning culture which is founded upon securing positive outcomes for children.

Diagnostic work across Children's Social Care took place in Summer of 2023 and identified that there was more work to do in order to strengthen the Quality Assurance Framework with specific reference to audit activity.

The findings of this diagnostic work is set in the context of the 2021 focused visit which stated:

'Scrutiny by senior leaders is too focused on measuring process through performance data and overall audit grades rather than the evaluation of the experiences of children. Although leaders have a broadly accurate self-view about the weaknesses in areas of service, their oversight does not have sufficient impact on practice improvement and on children's experiences.

Although the results of audit work are collated and reported to senior leaders, these reports remain focused on grades rather than what is required to improve social work practice and the experiences of children. Many individual case file audits provide some good information about strengths and weaknesses and include actions for improvement. However, these actions are often too focused on process and do not routinely have an impact for children.'

The findings of the April 2022 Ofsted Focused visit identified a number of practice areas requiring priority improvement, thus further supporting the need for a robust Quality Assurance Framework to be embedded. It is recognised that Senior Leaders, including members require a reliable child focused program of quality assurance activity which provides a line of sight into the quality of social work practice interventions along with the impact, difference and outcomes achieved. Furthermore, Senior Leaders including members need to be assured and confident that when practice deficits are identified, there is a swift response to address areas for improvement, learn and improve practice as a result.

The Quality Assurance Framework was refreshed in October 2023 to ensure that it is appropriately focused upon the lived experience of the children and families we work with at Tameside. The framework has been simplified to ensure a sharper focus is placed upon collaborative learning which includes the feedback from the children, parents and carers we work with. The purpose of the framework is help us to answer the question as to what impact, difference and outcome Tameside

has made to children's lives and what needs to happen to ensure we are continuing to improve. This information alongside our performance data ensures that there is a clear line of sight into practice which corresponds with planned learning and improvement activities.

The Quality Assurance Framework holds children at the heart of everything we do and acknowledges that we can always be better. We are ambitious for our children. Thus, the framework underpins the culture of learning at Tameside and demonstrates that the improvement journey belongs to everyone at Tameside.

This work ensures that all staff have an unequivocal understanding that that good social work practice takes place from a foundation of clear bottom lines consistently being in place. Bottom line basics are the current focus of audit and practice improvement activity at Tameside as analysis of most recent audit findings tell us that this must continue to be our priority.

Training in relation to the strengthened audit process has been delivered to all auditing managers and moderators and monthly sessions continue to take place to ensure that audit is well understood as the golden thread that runs through improvement.

A triple lock quality assurance of audits is now in place. This means that all completed moderated audits are quality assured by the Head of QA to ensure the audits provide a reliable evaluation of practice. This will also support the development auditing and moderation skills as every audit provides an opportunity to embed the shared understanding of what good looks like.

Auditing is now recognised as a learning experience. The collaborative discussion and child focused actions to improve practice are immediately acted upon and while there remains work to do in order for practice to be consistently good, the impact of this approach is evident with upscaling of audits in some areas.

3.0 Audit findings

The audit tool provides judgements across 7 key areas of practice which, in Tameside are referred to as 'brilliance at the basics'

Since September 2023 there has been reduction of the number of inadequate moderated audits month on month.

The moderated audits continue to provide a more reliable measure of quality of practice due to the strengthened model.

All audits consider outcomes for children which is based upon the previous 6 months of practice. As such, audits will continue to identify legacy poor practice whilst also recognising improving practice most recently. This accounts for the variability of judgement within the requires improvement and good categories.

Improving practice is evidenced within upscaling of some judgement within key areas of the children's files such as demographic information, summaries and chronologies. This provides demonstrable evidence of the collaborative learning and improvements as a direct result of audit activity.

The quality of audits is improving which provides a more reliable judgement of the quality of practice with children and families. There is more work to do to ensure that feedback from children, their families and carers is consistently sought and triangulated with the child's file when undertaking audits.

Learning from audits tells us that practice is variable. Some more work is required to strengthen the quality of children's assessments and plans. This includes ensuring timely planning for permanence and how this is evidenced on children's files.

There is further work required to strengthen management oversight and supervision to ensure timely progression of children's plans. The impact of Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs requires strengthening to demonstrate the difference they are making for children's outcomes.

Chronologies require strengthening across all areas of children's services to ensure these are meaningful for children and to inform assessments.

Direct work with children and young people can be further strengthened to ensure this is consistently evidenced on children's files and analysed in order to inform planning.

September 2023 moderated audits		
	Primary Audits	Moderated Audits
Inadequate	29%	41%
Requires Improvement	53%	59%
Good	18%	0

October 2023 moderated audits		
	Primary Audits	Moderated Audits
Inadequate	19%	19%
Requires Improvement	43%	43%
Good	38%	38%

November 2023 moderated audits		
	Primary Audits	Moderated Audits
Inadequate	13%	13%
Requires Improvement	37%	62%
Good	50%	25%

4.0 Conclusion

Work has rapidly been undertaken to strengthen the Quality Assurance Framework and Governance structure. Whilst it is recognised there is more work to be done, we are confident that the resource and structure is in place to deliver against the plan. In order to drive practice improvement the strategic decision to hold firm our expectations of practice bottom lines supports unequivocal understanding of what good practice looks like when supporting outcomes for children. The strengthened framework has received oversight of the Children's Improvement Board and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel as part of the performance and governance structure thus ensuring this model addresses previously identified weaknesses and underpins the improvement journey. Audit data is reported to both forums.