



# Quality Assurance Framework

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## Section 1- QA background

Bolton Council is committed to the process of continuous improvement and ensuring that services are securing the very best outcomes for children, young people, and families in the borough. Learning identified from a variety of sources, and this will feed into improvements delivered through workforce development, management, and systems.

## Section 2- Quality Assurance values and principles

The principles and purpose of this framework are aligned to the Bolton Family Framework.  
[Principal Social Work Team - Children's \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

The QA system encompasses the following key elements for our service:

1. **Restorative:** All case auditing is undertaken using a restorative approach based on working with staff and managers and building relationships. As a restorative process quality assurance will be characterised by both high support and high challenge.
2. **Child centred:** the focus of quality assurance will be on the experiences, progress and outcomes of the child or young person on their journey through our social work systems. The voice of the child is heard and voices of parents/carers and heard and evidence of their involvement seen.
3. **Outcomes based:** the focus of quality assurance will be on outcomes rather than processes in place. Findings should be used to shape improvement at every level.
4. **Positive:** Our approach to quality assurance will be positive, seeking to inform and encourage improvement and supporting staff and service development.
5. **Reflective:** our framework is designed to be about promoting reflective practice and sharing learning.
6. **Learning:** Learning from quality assurance: learning should be robustly and systematically shared.
7. **Closing the Loop:** Where a child's records are found inadequate or requiring of remedy swift actions are taken to rectify the area of concern and secure good outcomes for children and young people.

What are our methods of quality assurance?

A combination of quantitative and qualitative information allows us to measure standards and outcomes and can be evidenced by the following: these will identify good practice and areas for improvement:

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Case file audit                     | <p>Six weekly case file audit</p> <p>Multi-agency audit *1</p> <p>Thematic audit</p>   |
| Case management systems & core data | <p>Performance data &amp; review- analysis, key trends</p> <p>Reviews in response to emerging issues</p> <p>ChAT</p> <p>Corporate parenting</p>                            |
| Family Feedback                     | <p>Parent/carer/young person feedback</p> <p>Compliments &amp; complaints *2</p> <p>Observations of practice</p> <p>Feedback from children &amp; young people *3</p>       |
| Staff feedback                      | <p>Staff surveys</p> <p>Feedback at case file audit</p>  |
| Practice Leadership                 | <p>Bolton Family Framework &amp; expectations</p> <p>Learning from rapid review</p> <p>Learning from success reviews</p>   |
| External Feedback                   | <p>Peer reviews</p> <p>Ofsted</p>  |
| Practice review                     | <p>Supervision</p> <p>Group supervision</p> <p>Issue Resolution process by independent reviewing officers</p> <p>Practice week</p> <p>National &amp; Local inspections</p> |

\*1 The children's social work service works closely with colleagues and partners to support wider quality assurance and learning.

\*2 Complaints are a source of intelligence on both strengths and areas for improvement.

\*3 Involving children and young people providing insight into the views and experiences of children, young people and their families. Voice for you & the lead participation officer.

## **Section 3 – What does Quality Assurance mean?**

***‘The measure of the success of child protection systems, both local and national, is whether children are receiving effective help.’ (Munro 2011)***

Quality assurance is the regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation of practice, with the aim of improving to achieve better outcomes for children. If managers do not know what practitioners are doing, then they cannot know that it is good enough. Quality assurance is an everyday activity for practitioners, managers, and leaders (Heads of Service, Principle Social Worker and Assistant director). Where there is a culture of continuous learning and improvement, rather than defensiveness, this information should be seen as positive and reflected upon with the aim of driving practice forward.

### What does ‘good’ look like?

Quality assurance activity will allow us to understand ourselves and the difference we are making to the lives of children, young people, and their families & carers through good use of data, feedback from service users, compliments, and complaints.

Ofsted criteria for what good looks like can be viewed here. [Inspecting local authority children’s services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/312222/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-2015.pdf)

### Social workers

Practitioners will work with families using the Bolton Family Framework upholding their values and guiding principles of practice. If social workers are involved in a case file audit they will collaborate with the auditor, complete their feedback in relation to the audit and take responsibility for progressing relevant actions from the audit. Practitioners will take up the learning offers which are adapted to the learning needs identified by quality assurance activity.

### Team managers

Team managers will maintain oversight of case work through supervision, practice observation and case management oversight. Team managers provide an overview of the performance of their team enabling them to share good practice and highlight any difficulties.

Leaders: Heads of service (HOS); Assistant Director (AD) ; Principal Social Worker ( PSW).

Leaders seek to understand any challenges, visible and approachable, listen to feedback and consider different perspectives when making decisions and taking actions. Policies and procedures will be transparent with the aim of consistently improving the quality of practice.

Leaders may direct activity which may lead to restructuring; new procedures; developing new models or approaches.

### Work is measured in three ways

1. Quantity- How much or what did we do?
2. Quality- How well did we do it?
3. IMPACT/OUTCOME- What difference has it made to children?

By ensuring that our quality assurance framework measures these three things, we should be able to answer the 'so what' question. Is our intervention helping children and are they making progress? If the answer is 'no', then what do we plan to do about it? Use of the framework supports practitioners, managers, and leaders to answer these questions and feed into team meetings; service meetings; improvement plans and corporate planning with clear links to established governance.

## **Section 4- How do we use this framework?**

Bolton Council recognises that quality assurance is not just about audits. It is also about the continual collection of data and intelligence that informs the organisation about the quality of practice, the effectiveness of processes and procedures, and most importantly the impact that has on the child. Audits allow us to measure ourselves and provide confidence to leaders (HOS; AD; PSW) of the management 'grip'. Learning from audits is transferred across all areas of practice.

Quality assurance activity incorporates:

1. Performance data across the service including local, regional, and national data.
2. File audit & moderation- reflective discussion with practitioners and feedback.

Through the application of our model of practice we aim to continuously drive for better outcomes for children and young people.

## **Section 5- Quality Assurance activity**

### What are we measuring?

The quality assurance activity will measure:

1. The child's voice.
2. Quality of assessment
3. Quality of planning
4. Use of chronology
5. Management grip and supervision
6. Parent/carer engagement and feedback

How are we measuring it?

For consistency in measuring the quality and impact of file audits the OFSTED judgements from the inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services ( updated 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2022; [Inspecting local authority children’s services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services) will be used:

- **Outstanding**
- **Good**
- **Requires improvement to be Good**
- **Inadequate**

All audit activity will be recorded and shared with the social worker and manager. The audit actions tracker (master copy held by QA lead) will be regularly updated and shared with leaders. Any gaps or deficits must be addressed (closing the loop). Where multiple practitioners are involved, for example the independent reviewing officer or complex safeguarding practitioner, then they too must engage in this activity.

How do we gather the information as part of our quality assurance activity?

1. Performance data
2. File audit & moderation
3. Thematic audit- where key themes have been identified from performance data that require further quality assurance. This might be in a service area or a particular cohort of children and may take the form of dip sampling with or without partners.
4. Partnership auditing- linked to themes and development areas identified by the partnership which could impact on shared learning and improvement planning.
5. Practitioner feedback – recognition of strengths and areas for development. Supervision.
6. Direct practice observations. (Case file audit; managers; senior managers/Practice week)
7. Feedback from children and young people- Next Steps and Voice for you-Participation team.
8. Other activities- peer review; dispute resolution; feedback from commissioned services.

Roles and responsibilities

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Director<br><br>Assistant Director | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic direction &amp; improvement priorities</li> <li>• Set targets and standards for performance</li> <li>• Identify performance issues</li> <li>• Promote the QA framework</li> <li>• Understand the impact of decision making on outcomes for children</li> <li>• Be aware of staffing pressures and caseloads for teams</li> <li>• Understand the added vulnerability of some children</li> <li>• Triangulate evidence from various sources and visits</li> <li>• Listen to the teams as well as the data</li> </ul> |
|------------------------------------|---|



|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <p>Heads of Service</p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the QA framework</li> <li>• Ensure actions identified by framework are carried out</li> <li>• Promote practice model</li> <li>• Management of performance data</li> <li>• Ensure service <b>audit action tracking</b> and closing the loop activity is routinely addressed.</li> <li>• Service thematic work</li> <li>• Participate in moderation of case file audits</li> <li>• Collaborate with other Heads of Service or colleagues with more experience in a particular area</li> <li>• Know your practitioners and team managers and understand the impact of your work and decision making</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Team managers</p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the QA framework</li> <li>• Promote practice model</li> <li>• Management of performance data</li> <li>• Ensure service <b>audit action tracking</b> and closing the loop activity is routinely addressed.</li> <li>• Share good practice</li> <li>• Know your practitioners and children</li> <li>• Understand the impact of your work and decision making</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Practitioners</p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be familiar with the requirements of the framework</li> <li>• Understand Boltons practice standards</li> <li>• Engage in reflective discussion during case audit</li> <li>• Accept challenge</li> <li>• Share good practice</li> <li>• Listen to feedback - act upon feedback (close loop)</li> <li>• Know your children on your case holding</li> <li>• Understand the impact of your work and decision making</li> </ul>  |
| <p>QA &amp; Workforce team</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop &amp; review QA framework</li> <li>• Promote practice model</li> <li>• Support implementation of QA framework</li> <li>• The QA lead will hold master trackers for administrative tasks such as audit allocations &amp; Audit actions tracker.</li> <li>• QA lead will review updates on audit actions</li> <li>• Learning from framework will feed into training plan.</li> <li>• Feedback from all service users will be reviewed and utilised to inform and challenge performance, service-based advice, support and training as required.</li> <li>• Produce thematic reports as per direction</li> <li>• Produce 6 weekly audit report &amp; 7 minute staff briefings</li> <li>• Produce annual QA report</li> <li>• Ensure Senior leadership oversight of risks and agreement on actions required.</li> </ul> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support project and service evaluations</li> <li>• Moderation of case file audit</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

## Section 6- Quality Assurance Schedule

The QA lead will collate summary findings, themes and learning from bimonthly audit collation. Outcomes will be presented and cascaded down to practitioner level, to ensure everyone understands their part in driving practice improvement. This will be through performance meetings, managers meetings, team meetings, learning events and events during practice week.

| QA activity  | who                       | frequency  | Outcomes   |
|--|---------------------------|--|--|
| Performance Data   | Policy & Performance team | Various  | Shared and utilised to inform QA activity by AD, HOS, team managers & thematic audit work.   |
| Case file audit  | Team manager              | 6 weekly   | Collaboration and support to frontline practitioner  |
| File audit moderation                                      | QA Lead                   | 6 weekly   | Moderation of portion of overall audits completed by TMs.  |
| Service wide themes and findings report on case file audit | QA Lead                   | 6 weekly   | Report on findings, themes, and learning   |
| Closing the loop on case file audit                        | QA Lead                   | 6 weekly tracking and ongoing review and updates to HOS. | QA lead oversight and review of closing the loop tracker to ensure actions are completed and reasons if they are not recorded.<br><br>HOS updates re progress. |
| Thematic audit   | QA Lead                   | As directed by PSW & AD                                  | QA lead completes findings, learning and recommendations.  |
| Dip sampling   | Head of service           | As required  | HOS completes findings, learning and recommendations based on dip sampling.<br><br>Individual service area meetings .  |
| Practice week direct observations of practice              | Head of service           | 6 monthly  | HOS completes observation of practice on template as part of practice week.  |

|   |   |                                     |  |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Children, young people, family/carer feedback | Team manager                                      | 6 weekly as part of case file audit | QA Lead as part of 6 weekly report on audit & feedback to AD.    |
|   | Compliments & complaints                          |                                     | HOS Conference & review  |
|   | Conference & Review Unit                          |                                     |  |
|   | Participation team- Voice for you, Next steps     |                                     | Report on feedback from young people. Corporate Parenting Board. |
| Practitioner experience                       | Practitioners staff engagement – staff well being | 3 monthly                           | PSW  |
|   | Practice week                                     | 6 monthly                           |  |

## Section 7- Case file audit

Quality audit tools can be found on the liquid logic system in forms.

This tool has been designed to audit case file work that is held on the child’s file and includes an area for feedback from the child/young person/family/carer as well as feedback from the allocated social worker.

### Steps in case file audit process:

1. **Case Allocation.** Randomly selected and recorded on **Audit allocation tracker** and following a schedule over the year with **6 weekly allocation**. The spreadsheet indicates the auditor, the allocated worker, the allocated team manager and also the moderator where applicable. This means that team managers are aware of which cases are being audited on their team. The auditor will prepare for the audit and load the tool into forms on the child’s file. Timescales for completion of audit and moderation are provided at allocation.
2. **Collaborative audit.** The auditor should meet with the allocated worker. During audit the worker should evidence areas of impact and where this can be found on the child’s file. Any actions should be agreed as the worker is asked how they could create further impact on outcomes for the child/young person or their family. The auditor may observe social work

practice within the case file audit. However, an observation of practice is not expected in every audit.

3. **Feedback:** Obtaining feedback from children, families, carers, and professionals is essential to the auditing process. Feedback from children where age appropriate and with understanding from their family.
4. **Leaders: HOS, PSW:** will be randomly allocated an audit for moderation . The aim will be for all audits to be moderated by either senior leader or QA Lead.
5. **Grading:** The auditor should record their overall grading and a rationale as to how they came to this grade. The final grading should consider evidence seen by the auditor on review of the file, practitioner information and feedback from child/young person/ family/carers. Weight should be given to impact and outcomes. The auditor should inform the practitioner of grading.
6. **Moderation:** The moderator may agree or disagree with the grading recorded by the auditor. If the moderator disagrees with the grading they may meet/discuss with the auditor providing a learning opportunity to reflect on areas of strength and areas for development in audit practice. Head of service for the relevant area will be informed of any audit graded as Inadequate indicating the case requires immediate attention.
7. **Actions:** Actions required need to be clearly identified at the end of the audit form with timescales for completion. Any immediate actions required, to meet good, should be clearly indicated. Actions will be collated by the QA lead in the Audit Actions tracker. On completion of the audit cycle (allocation, completion, moderation) a copy of the tracker will be distributed to the Heads of service for the relevant areas as well as the Managers of the conference and review service.
8. **Closing the loop on audit:** The manager and worker will review actions within supervision and the manager will record this and a timeframe for action on any issues identified at audit. The QA lead will update the master Audit Actions tracker once actions have been completed.
9. **Inadequate Audits:** It is essential that any urgent concerns are raised immediately with managers and Head of service.

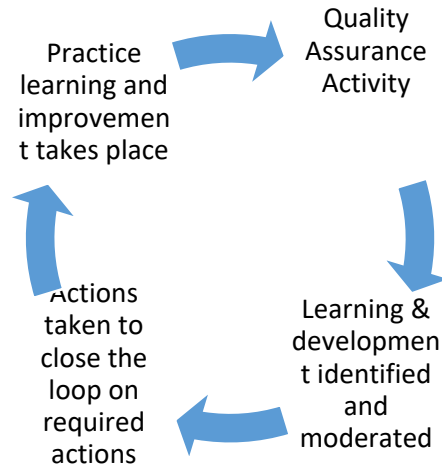
## Section 8- Measuring & sharing learning

This framework has been developed to support us in evidencing, through a variety of regular activities, that we have insight into each child/young person's experience of services in Bolton. Bolton wants to develop skilled workers who work to a high standard. We should be able to evidence the impact of the work that we do with the aim of improving outcomes for children, young people, and their families. We should also use learning to support service development.

### How do we improve the quality of practice through shared learning?

We want to move beyond performance to quality of practice.

1. Performance meetings
2. Closing the loop in **all** audit activity completed.



3. QA report to be shared with Senior managers.
4. Annual QA report

## Appendices

[The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report - A child-centred system.pdf](#)  
([publishing.service.gov.uk](#))







