



Quality Assurance Sub Group Annual Report

2016 - 2017

June 2017

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1. Introduction/context/background

This report covers the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017 and provides details of the activities undertaken by the Quality Assurance Sub Group, focusing specifically on successes, challenges and future plans.

This year the Group conducted three multi-agency case audits for the period April to December 2016, with the fourth MACA due to be undertaken in March being delayed until May 2017 due to a requirement to change the MACA process following a learning review.

The Sub Group met on a monthly basis from April to August 2016, and then on a bi-monthly basis from November 2016 through to 31st March 2017. The Group maintained good and consistent multi-agency attendance and commitment to meetings.

The Sub Group was chaired by Jane Bell, an Independent Consultant who was previously Head of Nursing at Nene and Corby Clinical Commissioning Group until November 2016, upon which, Sharon Muldoon, Assistant Director for Quality & Performance, Northamptonshire County Council took on the role of Chair.

Following this appointment a review of the work of the QA group happened and it was agreed that a number of structural changes needed to be made in order to improve the work of the group and demonstrate an evidence base and a structure based on tangible outcomes for the work of the Sub Group.

2. Statutory and legislative context

The purpose of this report is to provide the NSCB Board with an update on the progress of the quality assurance function.

Working Together (2015) page 67 states the below in relation to quality assurance:

In order to fulfil its statutory functions under regulation 5 the LSCB should use data and, as a minimum, should:

- *Quality assure practice, including through joint audits of case files involving practitioners and identifying lessons to be learned.*

3. Governance and accountability

The Quality Assurance Sub Group is responsible, on behalf of the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB), for meeting the statutory function in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of single agency and multi-agency safeguarding processes by:

- Developing a fit for purpose quality assurance framework which evidences the impact of the business plan and NSCB priorities in safeguarding children;
- Assessing the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families including early help by all organisations;
- Quality assuring multi-agency practice through joint audits in assessing the effectiveness of practice and quality;
- Ensuring audit findings are shared with NSCB Sub Groups in particular, the Learning and Development Sub Group;
- Overseeing and ensuring that there are effective quality assurance processes in place across NSCB partners;

- Developing and maintaining the evidence of the NSCB performance framework;
- Identifying issues that compromise the ability of one or more agencies to provide services that keep children safe, challenge where appropriate and ensure that the NSCB is fully appraised of any issues raised; and
- Ensuring that service users and partners are involved in giving their views on the quality of service they receive.

4. Progress/services/provision (including progress on actions arising from recommendations in previous annual report)

In March 2016, the findings of the Ofsted review of the NSCB presented the following recommendations regarding the Quality Assurance Sub Group:

- *Strengthen the quality assurance functions to include evaluating and monitoring progress against section 11 and section 175 audits. Ensure that there is effective scrutiny of work with all the vulnerable groups for whom the NSCB should have oversight.*
- *The remit of the quality assurance subgroup is too wide and is not delivering on the improvement agenda effectively. The group scrutinises audits from the improvement board, single agency audits, specific themed reports, section 11 audits, designated officer reports and progress on the serious case review composite action plan. However, NSCB multi-agency audits are limited, with only two, involving 12 children, having been completed over the last 12 months. Although there is a substantial amount of activity being monitored, action planning is more limited and improvements are not being robustly identified.*
- *The NSCB dashboard provides multi-agency data, but there is no benchmarking against England or statistical neighbours, which means that the board is unable to understand how well it is performing. The dashboard also lacks oversight of some vulnerable groups, for example children looked after placed outside the county, private fostering and homeless 16- and 17-year-olds.*

It should be noted that a review and restructure of the Board and its Sub Groups was undertaken in the summer of 2016 and a proposal to integrate the Business Office functions of the NSCB and the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board (NSAB) was agreed in January 2017. A consultation process followed, completing in March 2017. The review of the structure has enabled a reduction in the number of Sub Groups and also the merger of others, such as the Learning and Development function. The quality assurance functions may merge in the future.

To support the work of the Quality Assurance Sub Group and address the Ofsted recommendations, a dedicated QA Officer has been agreed by Board with a recruitment process starting in Quarter 1 2017-18. The role of the Officer is to;

- Provide a highly effective quality assurance function for the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) and Northamptonshire Safeguarding Adults Board (NSAB), through the creating and delivery of an annual quality assurance programme;
- Review the safeguarding practices from key agencies within the NSCB and NSAB partnerships including Northamptonshire County Council, Northamptonshire Police, the Health Economy, Schools, Early Years settings and identified others. To raise any areas of best practice or concern across the partnership;

- Develop and co-ordinate the policies and procedures function for both Safeguarding Boards, ensuring regular links are made with both Children and Adult service Policy Officers;
- Undertake independent audit activity to ensure safeguarding consistency across the partnerships, producing quality reports and presenting these to the Boards;
- Lead the multi-agency case audit (MACA) activity programme. This will include engaging in audit activity and offering a professional, technical view of the quality of work, strengths and areas of development pertaining to Safeguarding activity in Northamptonshire; and
- Develop a Section 11 programme, to include various aspects of audit activity e.g. desk based work, site visits and group work. Ensure that this activity meets the requirements of Working Together 2015. To visit sites and produce reports to the Quality Assurance Sub Group and the full Board on progress, strengths and areas of concern.

Three MACAs have been undertaken from needs to cover 1st April 2016 to 31st March 17?

Multi-agency Case Audit	Date	Number of cases and children involved
Domestic Violence II	12 th December 2016	6 cases reviewing 24 children
Homelessness	23 rd September 2016	6 cases reviewing 15 children
Child Sexual Exploitation II	10 th June 2016	6 cases reviewing 6 children

With the appointment of a new Chair in November 2016, a review of the Terms of Reference was undertaken and the Action Plan was revised to include:

- Review of the membership together including Data Officers, to ensure improved performance reporting to Board;
- Four audits will be undertaken each year under the MACA process to incorporate how Early Help is undertaken across the partnership). Priorities to include:
 - EHE (to identify gaps);
 - LAC % based OOC (look at placement stability);
 - Care Leavers (focusing on the new Social Care bill); and
 - DA/Toxic Trio and impact on services.
- The recruitment of a dedicated Quality Assurance Officer (qualified Social Worker) to support the Business Manager. QA Officer tasks will include visits to key partners to observe audit activity and help to implement and review Section 11 partnership audit;
- Partners to confirm their scheduled agency audit activity;
- A revised Terms of Reference; and
- A Quarterly report on the Use of Restraint.

In addition, the frequency of meetings was changed from monthly to six-weekly to give partners the opportunity to undertake actions from the meetings.

The Dashboard and Scorecard are reviewed by the QA Sub Group every quarter. Following comments from Ofsted, vulnerable cohorts have been added to the Scorecard but some comparators are not available.

5. Outcomes/performance/successes and achievements

The multi-agency case audit (MACA) process was not as effective as it could be with too much time dedicated to the reviewing of case work and it was felt that it was not sufficiently outcomes focused. Since November 2016 improvements continue to be made with the MACA process and from April 2017, the focus will follow the Signs of Safety model in respect of: what has worked well, what could be improved; and the necessary recommendations and actions needed to improve practice.

Learning Summaries and 6 Step Briefings are produced following each MACA. The Learning Summaries and 6 Step Briefings are distributed across the partnership to enable practitioner learning from the audits analysed. We have evidence to suggest that these briefings are also discussed at team meetings/briefings. The 6 Step Briefings are also published on the NSCB website.

Findings from each of the case audits undertaken in 2016-17 include:

The **Domestic Violence II MACA** identified how professionals ensure they sensitively capture the Voice of the Child at their LAC Review meeting. This ensures their wishes and feelings are heard at the Core Group meeting, without them having to attend in person which could put them in a potentially vulnerable and difficult position.

The **Homelessness MACA** has led to the Homeless Families with Children Protocol being developed via the Homelessness Task & Finish group to ensure robust planning when families with children face eviction. Once the protocol has been approved, a programme of awareness will be undertaken including the roll-out of training for practitioners across Safeguarding Children's Services and District & Borough's Housing teams.

The **Child Sexual Exploitation II MACA** identified how agencies promote and raise awareness of the CSE Toolkit within ongoing training and encourage professionals to use the tool at the earliest opportunity.

As mentioned above, on the appointment of the new Chair, with a review with group members was held and it was agreed to be more focused on quality assuring practice across the partnership and as a result, the group is now confident that outcomes from this Sub Group will improve.

6. Challenges/issues/developments/opportunities

One of the main challenges during the year was the frequency of monthly meetings which did not allow professionals sufficient time to undertake necessary actions due to resource constraints. This has now been addressed by moving to six-weekly meetings from April 2017.

There was a lack of resource to undertake any meaningful partnership audit activity. Again, this will be addressed by the appointment of a dedicated officer.

7. Next steps/plans/priorities/actions

- Performance and membership will continue to be monitored and reviewed on a six monthly basis;
- The Quality Assurance Action Plan will be refreshed and monitored in line with recommendations following the review of the NSCB's business priorities;
- A robust Section 11 audit activity has been developed and this process will be undertaken in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2/3 to include schools, partnership agencies, and voluntary sector and faith groups. The findings will be reviewed and scrutinised by a peer to peer group and presented to ESG in December and Full Board in January. The process will embed within IBO business activities on an annual basis;
- Multi-agency Case Audit activity to include:
 - Looked After Children Out of County – May 2017
 - Neglect – August 2017
 - Care Leavers (checking the implementation of the new Social Work Bill and use of the Care Leavers Housing Protocol) – November 2017
 - Toxic Trio – February 2018
- Recruitment of a dedicated Quality Assurance Officer to focus on audit activity across the partnership.