

See, Hear, Act

Putting the customer voice in the centre of quality assurance of commissioned services

The Strategic Commissioning Approach

Strategic Commissioning Business Unit
December 2016



Introduction:

The People Group Quality Assurance Framework states that:

Quality is important. We all know how it feels when a service exceeds our expectations. We tell our family, friends, neighbours and others about it and recommend it to others. It feels personal and shows us that we are important. We can trust a high quality service. It works in partnership with us and genuinely wants to know our experience of using the service to find out how it can improve in the future. A high quality service wants to know what it does well and how it can do better in the future. It learns and improves.

We also know when a service fails to meet our expectations. We feel disappointed, let down, sometimes angry and even unsafe. We tell our family, friends, neighbours and others about it. We may complain and tell others to avoid the service. We can sometimes be at risk because of poor service quality. This was brought to our attention by the media reports on high profile cases such as Mid-Staffordshire Hospital and Winterbourne View. They illustrate the appalling consequences that can occur when an organisation accepts poor quality practice and fails its customers.

The relationship between high quality and excellent outcomes is clear. Our key message is that a high quality service for our customers is everyone's business. Our customers have a right to expect this from us. We must all strive to ensure it is consistently delivered.

Our Quality Assurance Framework will help identify the things we do well. It will enable our high quality practice to be celebrated, shared and built upon. It will quickly highlight areas for improvement so that prompt and effective action is taken. The framework will support organisational learning and develop a culture of continuous improvement.

It also outlines the scope of the People Group Quality Assurance Framework:

The scope of the QAF includes:

- All business units in the Warwickshire County Council People Group;
- Services provided by the People Group;
- Services commissioned by the People Group;
- Service users and customers from pre-birth to end of life;
- Quality as distinct from activity and outcomes.

The See, Hear, Act Strategy outlines how the Strategic Commissioning Business Unit will implement the People Group Quality Assurance Framework for commissioned services.

Our Vision:

With the move to an outcome-based commissioning approach for the delivery of support, and the unprecedented financial and demographic challenges, the need to have robust customer-centred quality assurance mechanisms in place is vital.

In response to this, the commitment of Strategic Commissioning is to:

- Commission services in a way that means providers clearly understand the outcomes that our customers need to achieve.
- Transform the way we quality assure commissioned services with the voice of children, young people, adults, parents and carers at the heart.
- Focus on understanding the lived experiences of our customers, and how commissioned providers are assisting them to achieve positive outcomes.
- Use the customer experience to form the basis of our quality judgements.
- Work proactively with commissioned providers to facilitate the improvement of quality of care and support.
- Focus quality assurance resources on areas where risks may be greater and/or individuals more vulnerable.
- To work collaboratively with our Social Care colleagues, Business Intelligence and all other stakeholders to follow the People Group Quality Assurance Framework.
- To work collaboratively with health colleagues to assure and improve the quality of social care provision within Warwickshire.

What is quality and the role of quality assurance?

There are many definitions of quality. There can be no 'one size fits all' in personalised services. A person-centred approach understands individual and family personal history, current circumstances, future aspirations and beliefs. Each service user and customer will have their own view of quality services and high quality.

The Department of Health consultation '[Transparency in Outcomes: a framework for quality in adult social care](#)' (March 2011) states that:

'A high quality care and support service must consist of the following three core components; Positive Customer Experience, Safety and Effectiveness. A service cannot be judged to be good quality because it is safe whilst ignoring its effectiveness or people's experiences and ensuring value for money.'

Customer Experience, Safety and Effectiveness, with the addition of **Viability**, have been established as key factors of our quality assurance approach.

Achieving and improving quality means making sure that these components are addressed and encouraging continuous improvement. It includes taking steps to restore good standards where things go wrong. It reflects that high quality is only achieved where all four components are present at the same time, balancing the potentially conflicting demands of choice and control with the availability of services and the ability of a provider to remain viable.

Quality assurance is a process to evaluate and improve service user and customer experience, safety and service effectiveness. A consistent and structured approach for quality assurance will drive improvements in service quality for service users and customers.

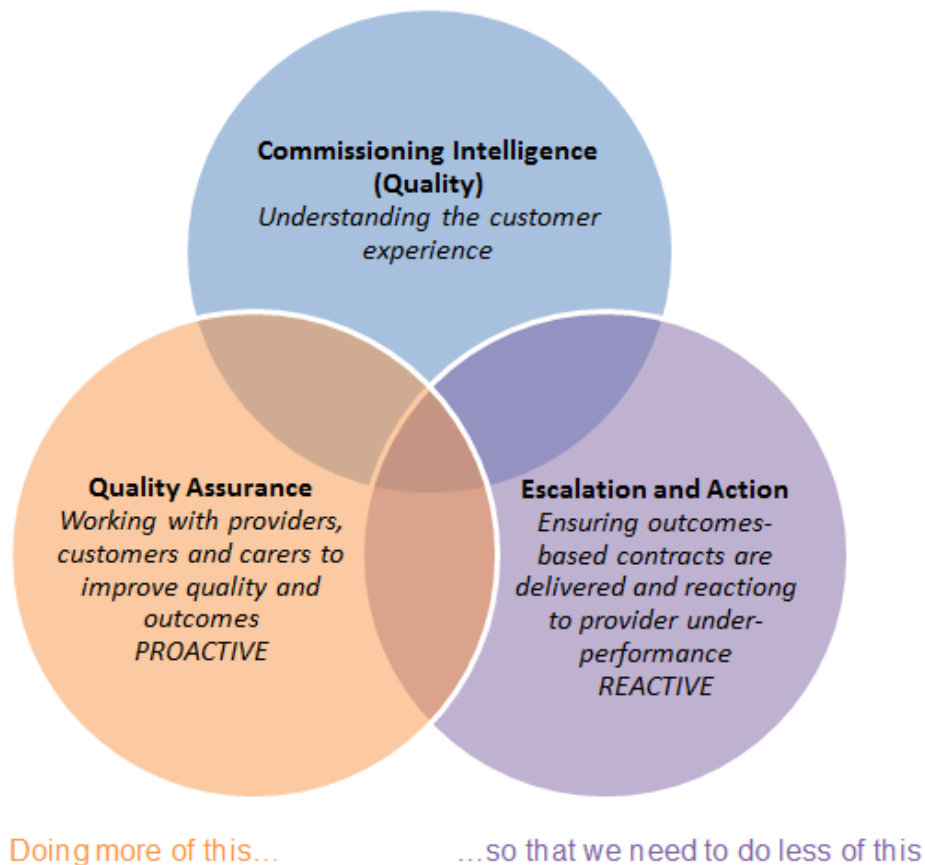
We will assess the quality of care and support in the above factors by:

- Gathering in-depth, real time intelligence about the quality of commissioned services to inform assurance activity and judgements; with a focus on information from and about individual customers. Measuring outcomes is a principal measure for quality assurance of services.
- Proactively deploying the Quality Assurance and Improvement Team in the market to observe practice, gain customer insight and work proactively with providers to assure quality and intervene early where there are sustained concerns.
- Ensuring our contracts are being delivered by commissioned providers as specified; using an outcome based approach and reacting to significant failures in the market in a robust and consistent way.

Once the quality of care and support has been assessed we will work collaboratively with providers to improve that quality as required. All providers will be striving to constantly improve the quality of what they do - this in itself is a marker of quality. In some cases, providers may not have reached the agreed standards and will need to take specific action to remedy these shortfalls. We will help providers improve their quality by:

- Encouraging them to record and report on their plans to improve their quality.
- Where specific shortfalls exist, we will highlight these to the provider and work with them to write a SMART improvement plan focused on tackling these shortfalls.
- Provide signposting to sources of support to help providers develop effective, evidence based action plans.
- Monitor their progress against the improvement plans to ensure they move to a position of delivering care and support at the standards we expect.

Our Approach



As illustrated in the above diagram, there are three key elements to our model.

Intelligence

Our approach to quality assured commissioned services relies upon access to timely, accurate and robust data and intelligence. We will use this information to assess levels of concern and risk and to inform quality assurance activity.

The customer experience is central in determining the quality of commissioned services. Information is gained directly from the customer, their carers and family in a multitude of ways, including feedback through reviews, the use of web-based feedback platforms, customer comments and complaints to complement the other sources of data collected to ensure the services we are commissioning are meeting the quality standards required.

Commissioned service providers are supported to submit intelligence to us which includes, but is not limited to, outcomes delivered, activity undertaken, provider self-assessment, published information, financial information etc. This is combined with information gathered from other sources such as the voice of customers and carers, stakeholder intelligence (i.e.; professionals visiting premises as part of their role), Quality Assurance activity, CQC and other inspection reports.

All of these varied information and intelligence sources are compiled to form our quality dashboard which helps us to make an informed decision regarding risk and where we should focus intensive quality assurance and improvement work with commissioned providers to ensure standards are acceptable.

Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance and Improvement Team play a fundamental role in the delivery of Warwickshire's quality assurance framework for commissioned services. Team members will have relevant health and social care qualifications and experience, ensuring they have the skills and knowledge to effectively implement this approach.

They are responsible for undertaking a series of visits to commissioned services to assure quality and to work with the market to make improvements and share good practice. Activity should largely be proactive where officers visit services based on collaborative discussions with colleagues in social care and health and the customer centred data collected in the quality dashboard.

Provider quality visits consist of talking to customers and carers, observing the delivery of care and support and the interactions between customers and paid carers, reviewing suitability of environments, considering support plans and documentation and talking to staff about their perceptions of their role in facilitating outcomes. Providers will receive onsite feedback about improvements needed, with an improvement action plan developed if required.

Escalation and Taking Action

Specific checks are completed as required when the customer experience information and/or the quality dashboard illustrate a concerning picture regarding the quality of the provision, e.g., reduced performance levels. As a consequence, this may initiate additional visits to provider premises by the Quality Assurance and Improvement Team and the development of action plans, which will be actively monitored, to resolve specific issues.

It may also result in a 'special measures' approach being undertaken depending on the level of concern and potential risks identified. Appropriate measures will be overseen by the Service Escalation Panel (SEP); a multi-agency forum where significant provider failings or concerns are jointly managed and improvement action plans monitored on a monthly basis.

Clear standards will be developed to ensure the degree of oversight, support and compliance measures are applied in a consistent way across all providers.

Our approach in action.....

The following case study gives a flavour of our approach to assuring and improving quality, with the customer being central to the process:

Concern: A Social Worker raised some concerns about a supported living service for 2 people with a learning disability in Warwickshire. She was concerned about staff not following guidelines and had observed a poor standard of interaction between staff and customers. The customers were receiving a lot of intervention from health and social care professionals as well as from their support provider; however the Social Worker felt she needed to highlight quality issues.

Response: Based on the reported quality concerns, the Quality Assurance Officer made an unannounced visit to the service. Her primary aim was to talk to the customers and gain their perception of the experience living in this supported living home. In addition to gaining their valuable feedback, she also spent time observing the environment, talking and staff and checking records and files. The Quality Assurance Officer highlighted a number of further concerns including environmental issues, the content and quality of support plans and a lack of meaningful activities.

Action: The Quality Assurance Officer reassured the customers that she would provide immediate feedback to the service provider and would support them to develop and implement an improvement plan to achieve better outcomes. In a very short period of time a number of service improvements were initiated. This included increased supervision for staff, support plans being updated and made more accessible, adjustments made to the management of behaviours that challenge, introduction of a new activity planner and significant improvements to the physical environment making it more personal and homely.

Impact:

'The customer is proudly showing his room off to all visitors to the house. His mom visited and XX showed her his room and she cried!' Quality Assurance Officer

In light of this the Quality Assurance Officer undertook further quality visits to other services delivered by the same provider to get a further 'sense check' of the organisation. There was clear evidence that the provider had transferred the learning and improvements to their other services. Minor improvements and changes continued to be made as the provider responded proactively to feedback.

Roles and Responsibilities

For this approach to work effectively, everyone must play their part. Quality Assurance and Improvement team, Commissioners, Intelligence Analysts, Social Care operational staff and wider partners will need to work collaboratively to provide an effective, responsive quality assurance function.

The following summarises the key roles and responsibilities:

Strategic Commissioning will:

- Develop service specifications which include appropriate quality outcome measures for each commissioned service.
- Actively collect and monitor feedback, information and data on commissioned services to understand the quality of provision they deliver and any risks they may pose.
- Visit providers of commissioned services to check on the quality of services provided, focusing on the quality of experience for customers.
- Support providers to improve the quality of their provision, particularly when issues are identified.
- Take action when the standards of quality as outlined in service specifications are not met.
- Work alongside other relevant organisations such as CQC and CCG on the above roles where appropriate.
- Run a Peer Reviewer programme to support those with a lived experience of care and support to comment on the quality of care and support provision.

People who use care and support will:

- Highlight any concerns they have over the quality of the care or support they witness. Safeguarding procedures continue to take precedence where relevant.
- Be involved in the peer review process, if they wish, ensuring the lived experience remains at the core of the quality assurance process.

Social Care and Support (including Safeguarding) and Children and Families will:

- Act on concerns raised about the services specific individuals receive in line with organisational policy.
- Inform Strategic Commissioning of any concerns and/or outcomes of investigations to improve understanding of customer experience of providers.

Those observing social care provision in a private or professional capacity will:

- Highlight any concerns they have over the quality of the care or support they witness. Safeguarding procedures continue to take precedence where relevant.

Tools and Processes

Our approach to quality assurance is supported by a person-centred approach and a range of processes and tools that help us gather information on the quality of commissioned services. This helps us to have confidence that we have a good picture of the quality of commissioned services, and where additional support and monitoring oversight is required.

To ensure we are able to gather the intelligence we need in the most effective ways, we have developed a small number of tools to help capture the voice and experience of the customer:

- Quality Assurance Tools – which focus on capturing the experience of customers and carers.
- See, Hear and Act checklist – which captures feedback, observations and concerns from stakeholders such as Social Workers, Fire & Rescue and Ambulance services, Hair-dressers for example.
- Quality Provider Returns – these returns from providers capture quantitative and qualitative data which help to measure quality.
- Customer Feedback Tools – such as customer's surveys, complaints and compliments.

Stakeholders will be encouraged to feedback on the quality of providers through a range of media, including dedicated online platforms.

A team of peer reviewers will also work with the team to provide a different perspective on the quality of commissioned services. The peer reviewers are from different backgrounds and experiences, including being carers, living with disabilities and they will have an important role in meeting customers and family members to gain information about the quality of care. They will be trained and fully supported during and after visits.

This strategy forms part of the wider approach across the People Group and the wider council to ensure the customer experience sits at the heart of ensuring we deliver great quality services. Work being undertaken by other People Group Business Units both complements this approach and enables many of the processes. This work continues to be strengthened and developed.

Implementation

The timeline for the development and implementation of this strategy is show below.



It is important to recognise that there will be a phased introduction of this approach across all services to ensure the appropriate tools and resources can be developed in an effective way.

Conclusion

This strategy outlines how Warwickshire County Council Strategic Commissioning Business Unit both assures the quality of the providers they commission, but also actively support those providers to improve the quality of their services.

It outlines how everyone can have a role in this and what specific work Strategic Commissioning will undertake.

Through this approach we will ensure that all those who receive care and support from a service that we commission can be confident in the standards they will meet. Where a provider falls short of those standards this will be identified, action taken to support the provider to improve and, if required, steps will be taken to ensure customers receive only acceptable standards of care and support.

Please contact the Quality Assurance and Improvement team if you have any questions or suggestions about this strategy on:

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