

Medway Council, Children Commissioning - Quality Assurance Framework

This Quality Assurance Framework outlines how Medway Council monitors and assesses commissioned services for Children and young people. Commissioned services monitored under this framework are as follows:

- Independent Fostering Agencies
- Residential
- 38 & 52 Week Residential Schools
- Parent and Child Provisions
- Supported Accommodation
- Floating Support
- Activity Provisions
- Secure Units
- Short Breaks Respite Provision/Packages
- Bespoke Commissioning Arrangements

This framework was developed in line with:

- The Care Act 1989 and 2014
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023
- Kent and Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures
- Medway Council's Core Values and Leadership Standards

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Section 1: Introduction

Medway is ambitious for its Looked after Children and Care Leavers and wants every child to enjoy their childhood and achieve their potential.

Quality assurance (QA) is a term that embraces all the activity that contributes to continual service improvement, ensuring agreed standards are being met, and outcomes for children and young people are being achieved. Quality Assurance is therefore a continual and dynamic process. It is an integral component of the commissioning and improvement cycle by which standards are set, impact is monitored, and information serves to improve services. Quality assurance is more than meeting targets and a counting activity; it is a coherent and qualitative approach. We aim to embed systematic procedures and work with partner agencies to achieve continued improvement to services.

The purpose of this Quality Assurance Framework is to be:

- *Child Centred*
- *Restorative*
- *Outcome Based*
- *Positive*
- *Reflective*
- *Measured*

Responsible Ownership:

The responsible officers for ensuring the effective delivery of this quality assurance framework are; the Head of Service for Children's Commissioning and Placements, Senior Commissioning and Quality Assurance Officers and the Quality Assurance and contracts Officer/(s). This can only be achieved in working in partnership with key stakeholders which include but is not limited to:

- Access to Resources Team
- The LAC and Leaving Care Teams, and all other social care teams
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
- LADO – Local Authority Designated Officer
- MSCB – Medway Safeguarding Children's Board
- All providers for commissioned services.
- Specialist Commissioning Programme Manager and all other Commissioning Officers within the Partnership Commissioning Team
- Children and Young People
- Foster Carers
- MISPER Lead
- Police/YOT
- LAC Nursing Team & Designated Nurse
- Virtual School
- CAMHS providers

- Other Local Authorities and regional working groups including, Fostering Network, and Independent Children's Homes Association
- Ofsted/CQC/Care Inspectorate

Section 2: Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA)

In April 2022 Medway Council re-commissioned a high-quality foster care framework in partnership with Kent County Council. The aim of the IFA contract is to enable Medway Council to have priority access to appropriate high quality foster care, for Children and Young People in care who have wide range of needs, from a framework of accredited Independent Fostering Providers identified through the tender process.

At times Medway Council do make placements outside of the framework on a spot contracted basis; framework providers are given priority however in some circumstances the needs of the children/young people cannot be accommodated with a provider on our framework and our placements team must explore alternative spot contracted providers.

All spot contracted providers are measured and monitored against the same contractual and quality standards as our framework providers, this is to ensure consistent quality and outcomes is provided to all our looked after children.

Contract Management and Quality Compliance

All Independent Fostering Agencies (Framework and Spot) are monitored against:

- *Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011*
- *Service Specification*
- *Quality Assurance Framework*
- *Individual Placement Agreement*

Quality Compliance:

- As part of the commissioning process for the joint Kent County Council and Medway Council Framework, all approved providers went through a robust tender process in 2022 including a deep dive into their compliance information. KCC's procurement team led on the procurement process, and the initial compliance information is held by them.
- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for monitoring and addressing any **quality** concerns/matters identified with Framework and spot contracted providers. This includes regular reviews of information held on file.
- Medway Councils Quality Assurance work collaboratively with Kent County Council regarding all framework providers, including information sharing on a need-to-know basis.
- The Quality Assurance Team have a robust QA process which includes reviewing of all essential compliance information, and monitoring of their Ofsted rating and reports.
- Close partnership working with all key stakeholders.

Please note, Medway Councils Quality Assurance Team do not visit Foster Carer Homes. It is the responsibility of the independent fostering agency to ensure the regulations and requirements are met through their fostering assessment. Quality Assurance will visit head office or attend virtual meetings when required in line with the service specification and processes.

Contractual Compliance:

- For the duration of the Kent County Council and Medway Council IFA Framework there is a contract management schedule, outlined within the *service specification*. All approved providers will have a contract management visit/meeting at least once within the duration of the contract.
- Framework contract management visits/meetings are attended by both Kent County Council commissioning lead (**Madeline Bishop**) and Medway Council commissioning lead (**John Taylor**).
- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for co-ordinating these contract management visits/meetings.
- For any contractual compliance matters, the quality assurance team will work closely with the commissioning lead to ensure that the matters are progressed and resolved.

Section 3 – Residential

In late 2017 Medway Council became part of a consortium of Local Authorities across the Southern Region to commission high quality residential care for looked after children. In October 2024 the CRC Residential framework was re-commissioned as a consortium of 21 local authorities.

Providers appointed to the Framework have achieved an Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement or above' and are tiered according to their rating within the Framework. Homes which have an Ofsted rating of Outstanding or Good will be appointed an '**A**' rating on the Framework, homes which have an Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement' will be appointed a '**B**' rating on the Framework and homes that are regulated under The Care Inspectorate (Wales and Scotland) or have not yet been inspected will be appointed a '**C**' Rating on the framework.

At times Medway Council do make placements outside of the framework on a spot contracted basis; framework providers are given priority however in some circumstances the needs of the children/young people cannot be accommodated with a provider on our framework and our placements team must explore alternative spot contracted providers.

All spot contracted providers are measured and monitored against the same contractual and quality standards as our framework providers, this is to ensure consistent quality and outcomes is provided to all our looked after children.

Contract Management and Quality Compliance

All Residential Providers (Spot and Framework) are monitored against:

- *Guide to the Children Homes Regulations Including Quality Standards 2015*
- *Service Specification*
- *Quality Assurance Framework*
- *Individual Placement Agreement*

Quality Compliance:

- As part of the commissioning process for the CRC Residential Framework, all approved providers went through a robust tender process in October 2024 including a deep dive into their compliance information. This tender process was agreed and approved by all local authorities within the consortium. Southampton City Council's procurement team led on the procurement process, and the initial compliance information is held by them.
- Medway Council Quality Assurance team regularly liaises with consortium members, sharing information on a need-to-know basis and attending regular CRC framework meetings.
- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for monitoring and addressing any **quality** concerns/matters identified with Framework and spot contracted providers. This includes regular reviews of information held on file.
- The Quality Assurance Team have a robust Quality assurance process which includes reviewing of all essential compliance information, and monitoring of their Ofsted rating and reports.
- Close partnership working with all key stakeholders.

Contractual Compliance:

- For the duration of the CRC Residential Framework there is a contract management/visiting schedule; consortium members attended workshops in January and February 2025 to contribute to the agreed terms of this arrangement. Priority will be given to providers where Ofsted have issued a poor judgement (***Requires Improvement or below***), or where consortium members have flagged known concerns.
- Southampton City Council are the lead local authority for co-ordinating contract compliance visits to Framework providers.
- For any contractual compliance matters, the quality assurance team will work closely with the Medway Councils Commissioning Lead (**Charlotte Ongley**) to ensure that the matters are progressed and resolved.

Section 4 – 38 Week & 52 Week Residential Schools

Over the recent years Medway Council has dedicated extensive resource to develop and improve processes, systems, outcomes and quality for learners with special educational needs. Medway Council is ambitious for all children and young people and expects them to receive a high standard of education that prepares them well for a successful future, regardless of where they are placed in the education system.

Placements for 38 week and 52 week Residential/Boarding schools are made by the Access to Resources Team and SEND Officers. All young people will have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) which is reviewed annually. Some placements are made purely on the young person's

educational needs outlined within their EHCP, whilst others will have a social care element and will have an allocated worker.

38 Week and 52 week Residential/Boarding schools are specialist provisions for children and young people with complex needs.

Contract Management and Quality Compliance

All Residential/Boarding Schools are monitored against:

- *National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022*
- *Quality Assurance Framework*
- *Individual Placement/School Contract*
- *National School Contract*
- *Education Quality Assurance Framework.*

Children's Commissioning Quality Assurance are responsible for the quality assurance and monitoring of the residential element of all specialists residential/boarding school placements.

Quality Compliance:

- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for monitoring and addressing any **quality** concerns/matters identified with residential/boarding school provisions. This includes regular reviews of information held on file.
- The Quality Assurance Team have a robust Quality assurance process which includes reviewing of all essential compliance information, and monitoring of their Ofsted rating and reports.
- Quality Assurance work alongside the Quality and Inclusion Team, and Head of Education (**Rebecca Smith**) who are responsible for the quality assurance of the education element of all residential/boarding provisions.
- Medway Councils Quality Assurance team regularly liaises with CCRAAG members, sharing information on a need-to-know basis.
- Close partnership working with all key stakeholders.

Contractual Compliance:

- Residential/Boarding school provisions are measured and monitored against the *National Schools Contract*, and their *independent placement/school contracts*.
- For any contractual compliance matters, the quality assurance team will work closely with the commissioning lead (**Stephanie Brown**) to ensure that the matters are progressed and resolved.
- Medway Council lead on the fee uplift discussions via CCRAAG for residential/boarding schools.
- Quality Assurance attend 4 weekly meetings with the quality and inclusive lead, and Commissioning lead to regularly share intelligence.

Section 5 - Parent and Child Provisions (P+C)

There are three different types of parent and child provisions, as follows:

1. Residential Family Assessment Units
2. Parent and Child Independent Fostering Placements.
3. Low Level Supported Accommodation Parent and Child provisions.

Residential Family Assessment units are used to facilitate robust parenting assessments to support court proceedings; these provisions can support lone parents with one or more children, or two parents with one or more children.

Residential parenting assessment units form part of the new CRC Residential framework which was re-commissioned in October 2024.

Providers appointed to the Framework have achieved an Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement or above' and are tiered according to their rating within the Framework. Homes which have an Ofsted rating of Outstanding or Good will be appointed an 'A' rating on the Framework, homes which have an Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement' will be appointed a 'B' rating on the Framework and homes that are regulated under The Care Inspectorate (Wales and Scotland) or have not yet been inspected will be appointed a 'C' Rating on the framework.

Independent Fostering Parent and Child provisions support court proceedings by facilitating parenting assessments and court reports. These placements are monitored in line with the Kent County Council and Medway Council IFA Framework that was commissioned in 2022.

At times Medway Council do make placements outside of the framework on a spot contracted basis; framework providers are given priority however in some circumstances the parent and child/children cannot be accommodated with a provider on our framework and our placements team must explore alternative spot contracted providers.

All spot contracted providers are measured and monitored against the same contractual and quality standards as our framework providers, this is to ensure consistent quality and outcomes is provided to all our looked after children.

Contract Management and Quality Compliance

All Parent and Child Providers (Spot and Framework) are monitored against:

- *Residential Family Centres National Minimum Standards*
- *Service Specification*
- *Quality Assurance Framework*
- *Individual Placement Agreement*

Quality Compliance:

- As part of the commissioning process for the CRC Residential Framework, all approved providers went through a robust tender process in October 2024 including a deep dive into their compliance information. This tender process was agreed and approved by all local authorities

within the consortium. Southampton City Council's procurement team led on the procurement process, and the initial compliance information is held by them.

- As part of the commissioning process for the joint Kent County Council and Medway Council Framework, all approved providers went through a robust tender process in 2022 including a deep dive into their compliance information. KCC's procurement team led on the procurement process, and the initial compliance information is held by them.
- Medway Council Quality Assurance team regularly liaises with consortium members, sharing information on a need-to-know basis and attending regular CRC framework meetings.
- Medway Councils Quality Assurance work collaboratively with Kent County Council regarding all framework providers, including information sharing on a need-to-know basis.
- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for monitoring and addressing any **quality** concerns/matters identified with Framework and spot contracted providers. This includes regular reviews of information held on file.
- The Quality Assurance Team have a robust Quality assurance process which includes reviewing of all essential compliance information, and monitoring of their Ofsted rating and reports.
- Close partnership working with all key stakeholders.

Contractual Compliance:

- For any contractual compliance matters, the quality assurance team will work closely with the Medway Councils Commissioning Lead for the CRC Residential Framework (**Charlotte Ongley**) and the commissioning Lead for the IFA Framework (**John Taylor**) to ensure that the matters are progressed and resolved.

Section 6 – Supported Accommodation

In April 2022 Medway Council commissioned a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for Supported Accommodation and Floating Support. The aim for the DPS Framework is to secure and commission good quality providers that can offer suitable provisions and support for our care leavers.

The DPS is an open framework that allows providers the opportunity to tender for the framework throughout the contract duration.

All Supported Accommodation providers now have to be regulated by Ofsted following the new regulations that were developed and implemented in 2023. There are three tiers within the regulations which are as follows:

1. Single Occupancy
2. Ring Fenced Shared Accommodation
3. Shared Accommodation (Non-Ring Fenced)

At times Medway Council do make placements outside of the framework on a spot contracted basis; framework providers are given priority however in some circumstances the needs of the children/young people cannot be accommodated with a provider on our framework and our placements team must explore alternative spot contracted providers.

All spot contracted providers are measured and monitored against the same contractual and quality standards as our framework providers, this is to ensure consistent quality and outcomes is provided to all our looked after children.

Contract Management and Quality Compliance

All Supported Accommodation Providers (Framework and Spot) are monitored against:

- *Regulating Supported Accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers aged 16 and 17 2023*
- *Service Specification*
- *Quality Assurance Framework*
- *Individual Placement Agreement*

Quality Compliance:

- As part of the commissioning process for the Supported Accommodation DPS, all providers went through a robust tender process including a review of basic compliance information before being approved on the DPS Framework.
- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for monitoring and addressing any **quality** concerns/matters identified with Framework and spot contracted providers. This includes regular reviews of information held on file.
- The Quality Assurance Team have a robust QA process which includes reviewing of all essential compliance information, and monitoring of their Ofsted rating and reports.
- Medway Councils quality assurance team are responsible for monitoring providers progress with registering with Ofsted, following the new guidance and regulations issued October 2023.
- Close partnership working with all key stakeholders.

Contractual Compliance:

- For the duration of the Supported Accommodation DPS Framework there is a contract management schedule, outlined within the *service specification*.
- For any contractual compliance matters, the quality assurance team will work closely with the commissioning lead (**John Taylor**) to ensure that the matters are progressed and resolved.

Section 7 – Floating Support

In April 2022 Medway Council commissioned a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for Supported Accommodation and Floating Support. The aim for the DPS Framework is to secure and commission good quality providers that can offer suitable support for children, young people and families in the community.

The DPS is an open framework that allows providers the opportunity to tender for the framework throughout the contract duration.

Floating Support providers remain unregulated by Ofsted therefore it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the provider is suitable and can meet quality standards. Some providers are regulated by CQC so that they can facilitate personal care.

At times Medway Council do make placements outside of the framework on a spot contracted basis; framework providers are given priority however in some circumstances the needs of the children/young people cannot be met with a provider on our framework and our placements team must explore alternative spot contracted providers.

All spot contracted providers are measured and monitored against the same contractual and quality standards as our framework providers, this is to ensure consistent quality and outcomes is provided to all our looked after children.

Contract Management and Quality Compliance

All Floating Support Providers (Framework and Spot) are monitored against:

- *Service Specification*
- *Quality Assurance Framework*
- *Individual Placement Agreement*

Quality Compliance:

- As part of the commissioning process for the Floating Support DPS Framework, all providers went through a robust tender process including a review of basic compliance information before being approved on the DPS Framework.
- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for monitoring and addressing any **quality** concerns/matters identified with Framework and spot contracted providers. This includes regular reviews of information held on file.
- The Quality Assurance Team have a robust QA process which includes reviewing of all essential compliance information.
- Close partnership working with all key stakeholders.

Contractual Compliance:

- For the duration of the Floating Support DPS Framework there is a contract management schedule, outlined within the *service specification*.
- For any contractual compliance matters, the quality assurance team will work closely with the commissioning lead (**John Taylor**) to ensure that the matters are progressed and resolved.

Section 8: Activity Placements

Activity Provisions, or Crisis Intervention Provisions are short term placements that offer an intense package of support, usually 2:1 staffing and a high level of activity and engagement. These placements are usually considered when a child or young person has high risk-taking behaviour and requires support to disrupt their reoccurring high risk behaviour.

Activity placements tend to be for 28 days, however there are some regulated provisions who operate 12-week placements. These provisions tend to be in rural areas that offer lots of outdoor activities.

Activity Placements that operate and accommodate children/young people in a static accommodation such as a house must be regulated by Ofsted, or the regulatory body for that area.

Unfortunately, Ofsted/Care Inspectorate can not regulate non-static accommodation, this could include:

- Barges
- Caravans
- Holiday Parks

Activity placements that are accommodated in non-static accommodation can be high risk due to the limited oversight available. For these provisions it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the provider is suitable and can meet quality standards.

Contract Management and Quality Compliance

All Activity, or Crisis Intervention Providers are monitored against:

- *Service Specification*
- *Quality Assurance Framework*
- *Individual Placement Agreement*

Quality Compliance:

- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for monitoring and addressing any **quality** concerns/matters identified with Activity providers. This includes regular reviews of information held on file.
- The Quality Assurance Team have a robust QA process which includes reviewing of all essential compliance information.
- Close partnership working with all key stakeholders.

Contractual Compliance:

- For any contractual compliance matters, the quality assurance team will work closely with the commissioning lead (**John Taylor**) to ensure that the matters are progressed and resolved.

Section 9: Bespoke Commissioning Arrangements

Despite there being a variety of different services and provisions in the current market, there are times when the needs of a young person exceeds what can be identified/commissioned. These occur infrequently but when a young person with complex presenting needs that doesn't 'fit' into a standardised provision is presented as a council we identify alternative options that would best suit that young person.

In these scenarios, the services that could be commissioned may fall into multiple service types, for example, Residential and Floating Support, Supported accommodation and Domiciliary Care. If this

occurs Quality Assurance will identify the service elements and monitor the bespoke commissioning arrangement in line with each service requirement, to ensure quality standards are delivered and maintained.

Section 10: Unregulated/High Risk Placements

Medway Council like all local authorities at times make placements in unregulated provisions, this is due to a young person's needs being too complex, or there not being a suitable regulated placement available for them.

An unregulated placement is when a child who is in receipt of '**Care**' is placed in an unregistered setting or supported accommodation. Children or young people who are in receipt of '**Care**' should be accommodated in a suitable regulated placement that can meet their needs.

An unregulated placement can be defined by two categories:

- Under 16 placed in an unregistered setting or 16+ supported accommodation.
- Over 16 with high-risk vulnerability and care needs placed in an unregistered setting or 16+ supported accommodation.

Medway Council have developed robust process for risk managing and monitoring unregulated placements, this process was acknowledged by Ofsted during a Children in Care inspection in 2023.

All unregistered providers who support/accept a young person with '**Care**' needs are measured and monitored against the same quality and contractual requirements as a Residential provider, this is to ensure consistent quality and outcomes are provided to all our looked after children.

Contract Management and Quality Compliance

All Unregulated Placements are monitored against:

- *Guide to the Children Homes Regulations Including Quality Standards 2015*
- *Service Specification*
- *Quality Assurance Framework*
- *Individual Placement Agreement*
- *Medway Council Unregulated Placement Process 2023*

Quality Compliance:

- Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team are responsible for monitoring and addressing any **quality** concerns/matters identified with unregulated placements.
- The Quality Assurance Team have a robust Quality assurance process which includes reviewing of all essential compliance information.
- Medway Councils Quality Assurance Team will conduct regular in depth QA visits to each unregulated placement.
- The Quality Assurance Team will monitor and review all daily, weekly, monthly and incident reports.
- The team will attend professional meetings, safeguarding meetings, placements meetings.

- Quality Assurance are responsible for notifying Ofsted to each unregulated placement and providing regular updates throughout the placement.
- Medway Councils Quality Assurance Team will support and work with each provider to ensure a full application for a children's home is submitted and progressed.
- Close partnership working with all key stakeholders.

Contractual Compliance:

- For any contractual compliance matters, the quality assurance team will work closely with the commissioning lead to ensure that the matters are progressed and resolved.

Section 11: Quality Assurance Compliance and Inspection Standards

For all commissioned services, Spot contracted and Framework, the Quality Assurance Team are required to complete thorough checks and reviews to ensure suitability and standards are met against a set criteria outlined within *regulatory regulations*, *service specifications*, *Individual placement agreements* and processes.

Quality Assurance Tracker and Monitoring

An essential role of Quality Assurance is to track and monitor activity, this enables us to identify trends within specific areas of work, monitor providers holistically and inform wider processes within the council.

Over the last 4 years the quality assurance team have continuously developed a robust QA tracker and duty log which encompasses all QA activity, essential provider information, CCRAG compliance, and complex placement monitoring. The data that has been produced from this tracker has been vital to ensure our children and young people are supported, and safeguarded.

The tracker is stored securely in our Quality Assurance area within the W-drive; historic trackers are also located in the same area and can be referred back to at any point.

The tracker is refreshed yearly, enabling us to see a years' worth of data in one go. The previous years data is also inputted into the new tracker so we can compare activity and inform senior management of any changes to the landscape.

The Quality Assurance team securely store essential provider information and case information within the Quality Assurance W-Drive area, this information is stored for up to 5 years in line with *Medway Councils Records Management Policy* and *Data Protection Policy*.

The Quality Assurance W-Drive area mirrors the tracking categorisation within the quality assurance tracker to ensure easy navigation when locating information.

Compliance Reviews and Frequency

Compliance reviews and checks are an essential part of the quality assurance function; by requesting and reviewing essential compliance information of each commissioned service we can ensure providers have robust policies, procedures and mechanisms to support and safeguard children. Providers have to meet a minimum standard outlined within the *service specifications* and *Ofsted/regulatory requirements*; quality assurance can support providers by giving feedback/advice following a review to ensure they remain compliant to these standards.

For any commissioned service a compliance review is required prior to a child or young person accessing that service.

In some circumstances there is insufficient time to complete a full compliance check prior to the child or young person needing to move, or access the service; therefore, Quality Assurance as a *minimum* must review the following:

- Health and Safety Documents
- Staff Training
- Insurance

Quality Assurance will also attend an urgent meeting with the provider to explore in further detail key aspects of their service and information.

If the placement/package goes ahead Quality Assurance will continue the full compliance review process and aim to finalise these checks within 24-48 hours of the placement/package commencing.

Figure 1: Standard Compliance Review Frequency

Service Type	Essential Compliance Documents	Frequency of Review
Independent Fostering Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Statement of Purpose- Insurance Documents- Staff Structure- Latest Ofsted Report- Ofsted Action Plan (if applicable)- Regulation 35 (quality assurance report completed by the agency)- Safeguarding policies and procedures- Missing person policy- Foster Care training matrix/training schedule.	Every 2 Years or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Regulated Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Statement of Purpose- Insurance Documents- Staff Structure- Latest Ofsted Report/Care Inspectorate report- Ofsted Action Plan (if applicable)- Regulation 44 Reports/Independent visitor reports- Safeguarding policies and procedures- Missing person policy- Staff Training Matrix- Gas and Electric Certificate	Every 2 Years or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.

38 + 52 Week Residential Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statement of Purpose - Insurance Documents - Staff Structure - Latest Ofsted Report/Care Inspectorate report - Ofsted Action Plan (if applicable) - Regulation 44 Reports/Independent visitor reports - Safeguarding policies and procedures - Missing person policy - Staff Training Matrix - Gas and Electric Certificate 	Yearly or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Supported Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statement of Purpose - Gas and Electric Certificate - Insurance Documents - Locality Risk Assessment - Fire Risk Assessment - Staff Training Matrix - Staff Structure - Safeguarding policies - Missing person policies - Video Tour of the provision/Photos - Ofsted Reference Number/URN 	Yearly or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Floating Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statement of Purpose - Insurance Documents - Staff Training Matrix - Staff Structure - Safeguarding policies - Missing person policies - Lone working policies - Lone working risk assessments - CQC Certificate/Report (if applicable) 	Yearly or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Activity Provisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statement of Purpose - Gas and Electric Certificate - Insurance Documents - Locality Risk Assessment - Fire Risk Assessment - Staff Training Matrix - Staff Structure - Safeguarding policies - Missing person policies - Video Tour of the provision/Photos - Ofsted Reference Number/URN 	Yearly or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Unregulated Placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statement of Purpose - Gas and Electric Certificate - Insurance Documents - Locality Risk Assessment - Fire Risk Assessment - Staff Training Matrix - Staff Structure - Safeguarding policies 	Every 6 Months or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Missing person policies - Ofsted Reference Number/URN 	
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Quality Assurance Visits

The Quality Assurance team are responsible for conducting quality assurance visits to all commissioned services that accommodate any children or young people, this includes:

- Supported Accommodation
- Residential Homes
- Internally Commissioned Residential Provisions
- 38 + 52 Week Residential Schools
- Parent and Child Provisions
- Unregulated Placements

Quality Assurance will conduct visits either as announced or unannounced depending on the current situation and circumstances. ***Unannounced visits will be completed with 2 quality officers to ensure staff safety, unannounced visits will be triggered when significant concerns have been identified and raised about a provider.***

There are several levels of visits that can be completed by the Quality Assurance Team depending on the circumstances which are as follows:

- Full, comprehensive Quality Assurance Visit
- Assurance/Monitoring Visit
- Property Only Visit (mainly new providers with no young people)

For any commissioned service a Quality Assurance Visit is required prior to a child or young person being placed.

In some circumstances there is insufficient time to complete a full quality assurance visit prior to the child or young person needing to move, if this is the case, the quality assurance team will aim to complete a visit within 24-48 hours of the placement commencing.

Figure 2: Standard Visit Frequency

Service Type	Frequency of Visit
Supported Accommodation	Yearly or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Residential	Every 3 Years or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Internally Commissioned Residential Provisions	Yearly or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
38 + 52 Week Residential Schools	Every 3 Years or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Parent and Child Provisions	Every 2 Years or,

	If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.
Unregulated Placement	3 Monthly or, If a Quality Concern or Safeguarding Matter is raised.

The quality assurance team will complete a comprehensive review of the following compliance areas during a visit:

- Staff files and Safer Recruitment
- Staffing/Use of Agency
- Young Person Files and Outcomes
- Condition of the property
- Health and Safety
- Risk Assessments
- Incidents/Accidents/LADOs
- Any Concerns that may have been raised.

Following any level of quality assurance visit a formal quality assurance report will be produced and distributed to the provider and key professionals. It is the responsibility of the quality assurance team to monitor any actions identified and issued during a visit to ensure the provider is compliant.

The quality assurance reporting templates have been developed in line with this quality assurance framework, and have incorporated key sections from [service specifications](#), [Ofsted regulations](#) and contract monitoring tools from CCRAg to cover all essential areas.

Property Standards

It is the responsibility of the provider to ensure the property is to a good standard and remains compliant with the requirements outlined in the [service specification](#) and [Ofsted regulations](#).

The provider should have processes and mechanisms in place to ensure regular health and safety checks are completed, and that the property is maintained.

The quality assurance team review the property standards in line with the requirements of each service specification and Ofsted regulations. The property standards can vary slightly depending on the needs of the current children or young people placed, if this is the case then Quality Assurance will review the young persons risk assessment and support plan in conjunction with the property requirements to ensure the provision is meeting the needs of that young person.

Figure 3: Minimum General Standards for Accommodation Settings

Lounge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sofa/Sofas (enough to accommodate all young people) - Television - Suitable Flooring - Electrical points - Suitable Lighting - Games/activities for the young people
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Dining Room/Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Table and Chairs (enough to accommodate all young people) - Suitable Lighting - Suitable Flooring - Electrical Points
Kitchen Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sink with Drainer - Supply of Hot and Cold Water - Full Size Cooker with Hob, Oven and Grill - Refrigerator - Microwave - Kettle - Toaster - Food Storage Cupboards - Cutlery, Crockery, Pots and Pans - Electric Points - Suitable Lighting - Fire Blanket, Fire Extinguisher - Carbon Monoxide Detector
Bedroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single or Double Bed - 2 x Fitted Sheets and Duvet Sets - Bedside Cabinet and Light - Wardrobe - Chest of Drawers - Suitable Lighting - Suitable Flooring - Curtains/Blinds - Adequate Power points
Bathroom/Toilet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least 1 bathroom for every 4 young people. - Sink - Toilet - Shower or Bath - Supply of Hot and Cold Water - Bathroom doors should be lockable from the inside with access able to be gained by staff from the outside if needed.
Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable size - Secure - Available seating for the young people.
Office Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure Storage for records - Computer/Laptop - Secure storage for petty cash - Secure medication cabinet - CCTV monitoring (if applicable)
Water Drainage	All properties should have an effective drainage system above and below ground, for drainage of foul waste and surface water.
Windows	There should be adequate natural light within the property, windows should be double glazed. Windows should be able to be open and be locked if required.
Ventilation	Adequate ventilation in the kitchen and bathroom areas.

Heating	The property should have either gas or electric based heating system which provides heat to all rooms. The provider must ensure the heating system is inspected yearly.
Electric	All electrical equipment will comply with UK and EU electrical 'kitemark' standards Provider should ensure electrical equipment is PAT tested yearly. Provider must ensure that the electrical system is inspected every 5 years.

Contract Management

The contract management of commissioned services is completed in line with the KPI's and contract management schedule outlined within each *service specification* and contract. Quality Assurance work closely with the commissioning leads to progress and resolve any contractual issues that may occur with our commissioned services.

Figure 4: Lead Commissioners

Service Type	Lead Commissioner
Independent Fostering Agencies (Framework)	John Taylor – john.taylor@medway.gov.uk Madeline Bishop – Madeline.bishop@kent.gov.uk
Independent Fostering Agencies (Spot)	John Taylor – john.taylor@medway.gov.uk
Supported Accommodation (DPS and Spot)	John Taylor – john.taylor@medway.gov.uk
Floating Support (DPS and Spot)	John Taylor – john.taylor@medway.gov.uk
Emergency Fostering Provision	James Harman – James.Harman@medway.gov.uk
Eden House	James Harman – James.Harman@medway.gov.uk
Residential (Framework)	Charlotte Ongley – Charlotte.ongley@medway.gov.uk CRC Residential Lead - TBC
Residential (Spot)	Charlotte Ongley – Charlotte.ongley@medway.gov.uk
38 + 52 Week Residential Schools	Stephanie Brown – Stephanie.Brown@Medway.gov.uk

Section 12: Risk Ratings and Sanctions

Medway Councils Quality Assurance Team receive a substantial amount of information on all our commissioned services and external providers; this information is used to identify current areas of risk and their impact, current restrictions or sanctions that need to be issued/progressed, and any immediate actions needed to ensure our children/young people are safeguarded.

Risk Ratings and Monitoring

The quality assurance team have developed and maintained a robust tracker that encompasses all QA activity, essential provider information, CCRAG compliance, and complex placement monitoring. Within this tracker the quality assurance team have developed and embedded a formula to track individual provider activity across the year, meaning that when a new QA case is logged for a provider this will pull through onto the essential provider data and show a total figure of how many cases each provider has per year.

This total figure is then **RAG** rated to monitor any escalations in concerns/issues and allows the Quality Assurance team to not only monitor providers on a case-by-case basis but monitor them throughout the year/(s) and establish any known patterns in concerns/issues that arise.

Figure 6: Risk RAG Rating Criteria

Number of QA Cases/Concerns	RAG Rating
0	
1-4	LOW
4-10	MEDIUM
10+	HIGH

Whilst the above criteria have been set, should a significant safeguarding or quality concern come in for any commissioned service or provider, the quality assurance team will review this on an individual case basis and progress in line with our *QA Framework* and *Medway Councils Risk Management Process*.

Medway Councils Quality Assurance Team also adhere to the Risk Flagging system as agreed in line with the Kent County Council and Medway Councils joint IFA *Framework Specification* for our approved IFA Framework providers. This flagging system **RAG** Rates providers based on level of risk relating to:

- Performance/Practise
- Safeguarding
- Contract Compliance

Figure 7: Risk Flagging IFA Criteria

Risk Level	Risk Rating
No current concerns or low-level concerns.	LOW
A concern has been identified, but an embargo hasn't been issued.	MEDIUM
Significant concerns, or embargo issued.	HIGH

Action Plans

The quality assurance team aim to work in partnership with our providers and try to resolve any quality concerns/issues via our standard QA processes, however at times an informed decision will be made to issue a provider with an action plan.

An action plan will be issued to a provider if:

- Multiple concerns or safeguarding matters have been raised within a short period of time for a provider.
- Multiple actions or areas of improvement have been identified through our compliance review.
- Additional oversight and support is required.
- The providers risk rating has moved to 'Medium' or 'High'.

The quality assurance team will collate all the information on that provider and produce a detailed action plan in line with the [QA framework](#), [service specification](#) and [regulatory requirements](#).

The provider will be issued with timescales for completion on each area depending on the level of risk, and the quality assurance team will monitor and track the providers compliance to this. ***An extension to the completion dates can be issued depending on the circumstances and agreement has to be given by the quality assurance team.***

Figure 8: Timescales for Action Plan Completion

Concern Level	Timescale
LOW	2-4 Weeks
MEDIUM	1-2 Weeks
HIGH	24-48 Hours
SIGNICANT	Immediately

If an action plan has been issued to a provider the quality assurance team **must** also inform the social work team of the known concerns and risks to inform their risk management planning for their child/young person.

The quality assurance team will continue to work alongside the social work team in line with [Medway Councils Risk Management Process](#).

An action plan can be removed from a provider for one of the following reasons:

- The provider has met all identified areas and there is evidence of improved quality.
- Medway Council no longer has any children/young people with this service.
- Concerns have escalated and a formal embargo has been issued.

Providers that are regulated by Ofsted or the Care Inspectorate can be subject to a regulatory action plan if:

- A provider receives a judgement of Requires Improvement or below.
- Widespread Concerns have been identified during an inspection.

- The regulatory body has issued the provider with a restriction or suspension.

In these circumstances, it is the responsibility of the provider to develop an action plan in line with the regulatory requirements and the areas identified during their inspection. The provider must share the action plan with the regulatory inspector and ensure compliance to the agreed actions.

The Quality Assurance team will monitor and review the providers action plan to ensure they are compliant, this information will also be shared with the social work team to inform their risk management planning for their child/young person in line with *Medway Councils Risk Management Process*.

A regulatory action plan can be removed from a provider for one of the following reasons:

- The regulatory body has reinspected and issued a judgement of Good or above.
- The provider has met all areas in the action plan and evidence has been seen by the regulatory body.

Embargo

The quality assurance team try to work proactively with our providers and commissioned services to improve quality and standards without the need to escalate, however there are times when the concerns/issues are too significant, or the provider fails to improve in which case an informed decision is made to issue the provider with an embargo.

An embargo will be issued to a provider if:

- The provider has failed to make suitable improvements following an action plan being issued.
- There are significant safeguarding concerns.
- The provider has received a regulatory judgement of Requires Improvement or below.
- The providers risk rating has reached 'high' and continues to escalate.
- Kent County Council have alerted Medway Council to a provider on the IFA Framework being issued with a Red Flag.

Agreement **must** be sought from senior management before a formal embargo can be issued, the quality assurance team will collate all information and present this information to senior management so they can make an informed decision regarding the embargo. An embargo is a last resort and not something the quality assurance team issue lightly.

A formal notification will be issued to the provider advising them of the reasons why the embargo has been issued and what the next steps are. ***An embargo can vary in length depending on the providers compliance and their circumstances. Some providers remain embargoed indefinitely, whilst others will make improvements, and the embargo will be removed.***

There are times when a provider is informally embargoed meaning that they have not formally been advised of the decision to embargo them; this can be for the following reasons:

- There is an ongoing case review or investigation, and information can't yet be disclosed to the provider.

- The provider is not known to Medway Council however are operating in our area and concerns have been raised.
- Provider has been issued a restriction, or low judgement by the regulatory body.

If an Embargo has been issued to a provider the quality assurance team **must** inform the social work team of the known concerns and risks to inform their risk management planning for their child/young person.

The quality assurance team will continue to work alongside the social work team in line with *Medway Councils Risk Management Process*.

Regulatory Restrictions

The Quality Assurance team are responsible for reviewing, logging and tracking all Ofsted alerts. Usually, Ofsted will send a formal letter to the director, which will then be forwarded onto the Artquality inbox for processing.

An Ofsted alert could be advising us of one or more of the following:

- A restriction on a provider's accommodation or registration
- A suspension to the providers registration
- Termination of their registration
- Inadequate Judgement or Widespread Concerns
- Advising that the previous restriction has been lifted.

If a provider who is currently supporting a Medway child/young person is subject to any restriction or poor judgement issued by Ofsted, then the quality assurance team will maintain increased oversight and will monitor the providers compliance in line with the *QA Framework*, *Ofsted/CQC Quality Assurance Process* and *Medway Councils Risk Management Process*.

Ofsted tend to issue a 12-week period on their restrictions and will send an updated alert should the restriction remain in place, or whether it has been removed.

CQC and the Care Inspectorate do not issue any formal alerts like Ofsted, Restrictions will be issued if the provider receives a judgement of Requires Improvement or below. Medway Councils quality assurance team will monitor a providers CQC/Care Inspectorate report and regularly check for changes to their judgement.

Provider Sanction List

The quality assurance team have developed a spreadsheet that contains details of all providers that are subject to a form of sanction. This spreadsheet is regularly shared with our Access to Resources team, and Senior Management to ensure robust risk management processes are being completed.

This spreadsheet provides a brief overview of the concerns raised about each provider and what sanction has been issued/is currently in place, this can include:

- Embargo on Provider/Agency

- Embargo on specific property/properties
- Embargo on Foster Carers
- Action Plan
- Regulatory Action Plan
- Poor Judgement/Restriction
- Ceased Operating

It is the responsibility of the quality assurance team to ensure this data is kept up to date and is regularly distributed with key professionals.

Section 13: Partnership Working

Medway Councils Quality Assurance Team have continuously developed strong working relationships with internal and external professionals. We have proactively identified ways to strengthen information sharing, and partnership working with internal teams, external providers and key stakeholders.

Access to Resources

The Access to Resources team (ART) are responsible for exploring and identifying suitable provisions for children and young people, the quality assurance team work closely alongside ART to ensure providers meet quality standards and that we are commissioning suitable placements for our children and young people.

- The quality assurance team complete compliance checks on all proposed placements.
- Quality Assurance provide feedback on all placement funding requests.
- The quality assurance team attend weekly drop-in sessions with ART and social care.
- The quality assurance team will provide support and suggest placement options to ART in emergencies.
- Quality Assurance regularly liaise with ART providing them with updates on providers where there are known concerns.

LADO Service

Over the last 3 years Medway Council's Quality Assurance Team and Medway Councils LADO team have developed a robust working relationship to support quality standards, safeguarding and better outcomes for Children and young people placed within Medway and surrounding areas.

We have worked collaboratively to develop mechanisms to ensure information is shared effectively between both teams, supporting prompt responses to concerns/issues that have arisen.

- The quality assurance team will attend a meeting with the LADO every 4 weeks to discuss current cases and any concerns that have arisen.
- The quality assurance team will provide support to the LADO service on joint evaluation meetings (JEM), Allegation management meetings and professionals meetings.

- The quality assurance team will continue to develop and deliver training to social workers and providers with the Medway LADO service, to improve safeguarding practises and quality for our children and young people.

Education and SEND

Over the recent years Medway Council has dedicated extensive resource to develop and improve processes, systems, outcomes and quality for learners with special educational needs. The Quality Assurance Team work alongside the Quality and Inclusion Team, and Head of Education (**Rebecca Smith**) who is responsible for the quality assurance of the education element of all residential/boarding provisions and other educational settings.

- The quality assurance team will attend a meeting with the quality inclusion team, Head of Education and Commissioning lead every 4 weeks to discuss current cases, new placements, and placement/school concerns.
- The quality assurance team will support the Education Quality and Inclusion team on joint visits to Residential/Boarding schools and support on multiagency meetings.

CCRAG (Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group)

Medway Council is an active member of CCRAG since 2023 and the aim is to improve outcomes for all children with an emphasis on Children Looked After, Children in Need and those with special educational needs and disabilities. CCRAG does this by maintaining a Provider Database, coordinating procedures that supports the sourcing, contracting, monitoring and annual fee negotiations for Children's placements.

The CCRAG Providers Database provides the basis of a mutual monitoring and fee increase system that improves results, creates efficiencies and reduces workload for local authorities.

- The Quality Assurance team will input placement data, provided by the Access to Resources team on a yearly basis during the 2-week data input period in March.
- The Quality Assurance team will liaise with the lead commissioner (**Charlotte Ongley**) for CCRAG regarding any matters/issues.
- Quality Assurance are responsible for quality assuring and reviewing all allocated provisions for Medway Council, in line with the CCRAG Partnership agreement.
- The Quality Assurance team will liaise with CCRAG members sharing information on a need to know basis.

Planning

Whilst the quality assurance team have a robust database of providers, it is nearly impossible to know every single provider operating in our area. One way we have improved our mapping of these provisions not known to us is by tracking the planning requests for change of use from C3-C2 in Medway.

- The quality assurance team will review the weekly planning list and track any new applications for change of use.

- Quality Assurance will provide feedback on any known provision/area to the planning team, this could include if the provider is embargoed, or the area is high risk.
- The Quality Assurance team will organise an introductory meeting with any new unknown provider looking to operate in the area and establish relationships.

Social Care

Over the last 4 years Medway Councils Quality assurance team have developed strong working relationships with our social care teams through trust, transparency and accountability. Most local authorities work in isolation when it comes to quality assurance and commissioning, however Medway Council have robust mechanisms and processes in place to ensure we have a strong 'Team around the Child/Young Person' approach.

- The quality assurance team will continue to develop and deliver training to social work teams, 'What Good Looks Like'.
- Quality Assurance will provide regular updates and feedback to key professionals following a compliance review or quality assurance.
- The quality assurance team will support the social care teams on professionals meetings, strategy meetings, LADO meetings and placement planning meetings where required.
- The quality assurance team will support on joint visits to placements.
- Quality Assurance will seek feedback from key professionals as part of our overall quality assurance review.

External Professionals

The quality assurance team regularly liaise with external professionals, this can include Health colleagues, Councillors, Youth Offending, regulatory bodies and local police.

- The Quality Assurance team will respond to any concerns raised by local councillors and provide reassurance where possible.
- The quality assurance team will share information with external professionals on a need-to-know basis.
- Quality Assurance will regularly communicate with Ofsted, CQC and the Care Inspectorate regarding concerns, whistleblower complaints or Ofsted applications.
- Quality Assurance will continue to maintain working relationships with the local Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's).

Section 14: Voice of the Child

It is Medway Councils Ambition to work together to help children and young people feel safe, secure, valued and to ensure that the voice of our children and young people is at the heart of our thinking and planning.

As part of our quality assurance function, we are continuously looking for ways to include our children and young people in the process; some of the ways we have delivered on this so far are as follows:

- Actively engaging with the children/young people during our quality assurance visits and seeking their feedback.
- Advocating for the children/young people following QA compliance checks to ensure their needs are being fully met.
- Developing and setting up a 'Young Inspectors' Model.
- Setting up workshops/forums where children and young people can directly liaise with quality assurance and share feedback.

Section 15: Supporting Documents and Appendices

Supporting Documents	Appendices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QA Category Key • QA Inbox & W-Drive • QA Master Spreadsheet • Ofsted Alerts • Ofsted-CQC Quality Assurance • Provider Sanctions List • Placement Funding Agreements • ART & QA Weekly Report • Planning Data • IFA Contract Management • IFA Quality Assurance • Supported Accommodation Quality Assurance • Floating Support Quality Assurance • Residential Quality Assurance • SEND Quality Assurance • Action Plans and Embargos • LADO Investigations • Unregulated Placements (QA) • Useful Jargon • Terms of Reference – QA and LADO • Medway Councils Unregulated Placement Process • Medway Councils Risk Management Process • QA improvement plan template • QA Report Template (Residential, IFA, Supported Accommodation, SEND) • QA compliance review template • Risk Assessment – Poor Judgement • Need to Know Proforma • Defensible Decision-Making Tool • Notification to Ofsted – UCH • Individual Placement Agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Care Act 1989 and 2014 • Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 • Care Standards Act 2000 • Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 • Kent and Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures • Medway Council's Core Values and Leadership Standards • Fostering Service: National Minimum Standards 2011 • Guide to Children's Home Regulations including Quality Standards 2015 • National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022 • Residential Family Centres National Minimum Standards • Regulating Supported Accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers aged 16 and 17 2023 • Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations • IFA Service Specification • CRC Residential Service Specification • National School Contract • DPS Service Specification/(s) • Education Quality Assurance Framework • Access to Resources Procedure Document • CCRAG Partnership Agreement • Medway Councils Records Management policy • Medway Councils data protection policy