



Claire Carthy, Interim Chief Social Work Officer,
Derrick Pearce, Chief Officer,
East Dunbartonshire HSCP,
Kirkintilloch Health and Care Centre,
10 Saramago Street,
Kirkintilloch,
East Dunbartonshire
G66 3BF

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Our Ref: JSWSE/EDC

Dear Ms Carthy and Mr Pearce,

Justice Social Work Self-Evaluation: performance and quality assurance

Thank you for engaging with us in relation to Phase 2 of our national self-evaluation activity in which your service was one of four areas selected for validation. This letter offers feedback on our findings. The content is personalised for your justice social work service and is for you to share within your organisation and with partners as you decide most appropriate. The thematic findings from the four areas, and two pilot areas will be anonymised, aggregated and referenced within final report, due for publication in early May 2025.

Background

Building on our previous scrutiny activity, we developed a self-evaluation approach to enable justice social work services to consider the extent to which their service can confidently and robustly evidence the performance, quality and associated outcomes of the community support and supervision they provide. This relates to the Scottish Government priorities outlined with the National Strategy for Community Justice, specifically:

- *Aim 2 to: Ensure that robust and high-quality community interventions and public protection arrangements are consistently available across Scotland.*

The focus also aligns to Social Work Scotland's priorities and the work of their performance and quality assurance sub-group. The aggregated findings from the self-evaluation activities will contribute meaningfully to an evidence-based understanding of strengths, challenges and opportunities for improvement in how the sector measures and reports on the performance, quality and outcomes of community sentences.

Self-evaluation Process

During Phase 1, your service completed a self-evaluation using a structured template based upon an adaption of Quality Indicator 6.4: Performance Management and Quality Assurance. This was drawn from our [guide to self-evaluation for community justice in Scotland](#). As well supporting you to identify local improvement priorities, this activity also

supported your service to become more familiar with the quality improvement model and to build capacity and experience to undertaken further self-evaluation.

As an area selected for validation, during Phase 2 we engaged with your service in the following ways:

- we read carefully the written self-evaluation.
- we requested and received supporting evidence which was reviewed against the self-evaluation and informed our in-person activities.
- Care Inspectorate staff met with relevant members of justice social work staff and people who use services to explore the supporting evidence and triangulate key findings of the self-evaluation.

Summary of Findings

Approach to self-evaluation

East Dunbartonshire Council's commitment to this self-evaluation work was positive. Managers within both the justice social work service and community justice partnership took ownership of the process and worked effectively to complete the self-evaluation template. The resulting submission was clear, concise and captured the considered approach which underpinned their conclusions. Appropriate strengths and areas for improvement were identified and were supported by some helpful references to practice initiatives.

The self-evaluation was accompanied by a good and proportionate range of relevant supporting evidence which was well organised and referenced against the key domains. It conveyed a helpful sense of practice across key aspects of the service. It reflected that the service had undertaken a thorough review of their evidence and systems in support of the task.

On-site validation activity was well planned, and there was strong representation and buy-in from staff at all levels of the service. Those who participated showed a clear interest in, and commitment to improving practice, and this was confirmed by the honest and reflective nature of the discussions. The focus on trauma and staff wellbeing was clearly evident in the culture of the service. Overall, the service demonstrated that they are confident in planning and implementing self-evaluation and committed to developing understanding and driving improvement locally.

Feedback on self-evaluation

Our feedback on the self-evaluation is informed by Quality Indicator 6.4. This considers how the justice social work service is using performance management to ensure high standards of service delivery. It also explores how quality assurance arrangements are enabling staff at every level to take responsibility for the quality of service delivery.

ENSURING HIGH STANDARDS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

How effectively are you able to measure the performance of your service in delivering support and supervision for people on community sentences?

A documented justice social work performance framework was in place which helpfully mirrored the wider East Dunbartonshire Council performance management framework and reflected a 'golden thread' running through organisational, service and team plans. Within the framework, specific service performance indicators were linked to overall service and strategic outcomes and priorities. The indicators were largely focussed on requirements around the outcomes, standards and expectations reflected in the aggregate return to Scottish Government. As a consequence, there was an inevitable focus on volume and process efficiency. A small number of indicators also focussed on outcomes which was positive.

A small number of justice related measures were reported through the councils 'How good is our service' (HGIOS). Spreadsheets were in place to focus on workload monitoring measures. Data spanned more than five years in many cases which enabled a focus on performance trends. Data and other measures relating to performance were reported through the HSCP and Community Justice Partnership. This included regular updates through the clinical and care governance group. Staff at all levels of the service were clear about the key performance measures and fully understood the importance of accurately and promptly recording these. Leaders and staff noted the benefit reporting on performance had on developments such as the peer navigator service and 'one-stop shop'. This suggests that data is being used to inform evidence-based improvement.

Whilst there was a focus on a range of performance information, the service lacked a definitive performance dashboard or performance report. The service recognised this as an area for improvement and had been benchmarking possible approaches with other local authorities.

A number of tools, processes and systems were in place to support oversight of performance issues. This included a range of spreadsheets, staff supervision, statutory reviews, countersigning of reports for registered sex offenders (RSOs) and robust oversight of MAPPA. Team meetings and management meetings incorporated standing discussion on performance. Staff and managers understood the focus and importance of performance and managers used data to evaluate practice and develop the service. A weekly check-in between the team leader, senior practitioner and business support colleagues were helping with early identification of issues. Within unpaid work, service processes were in place for daily interviews, debriefs and job allocations. Collectively, these processes helped managers to be assured about performance and maintain oversight.

Managers acknowledged some processes could be more robust to better support performance monitoring and management. This included the consistency of undertaking reviews and recording of LSCMI completions.

How effectively are you measuring the quality of work you undertake to support and supervise people on community sentences?

A range of processes, tools and systems supported a focus on quality within the service. Robust MAPPA audit processes provided oversight and assurance to East Dunbartonshire Chief Officers Group (COG) and the Strategic Oversight Group (SOG) and leaders cited

examples of how this had driven improvement. Staff supervision was well embedded and was recently reviewed to support a focus on individual practice, conceptualisation of theory, monitoring of caseloads and consideration of personal wellbeing. Staff were also encouraged to bring complex case concerns to managers and all newly qualified social worker reports were reviewed by a manager. Reports for registered sex offenders were counter-signed and statutory reviews were taking place consistently, providing opportunities for managers to review the quality of work. Although consistency varied, reviews, alongside the use of end of order questionnaires also allowed the service to gather feedback from people using services.

A number of tools supported audit activity such as programme evaluation tools and justice social work report audit templates. However, these were not consistently or routinely prioritised which limited their effectiveness. There was no systematic process for reviewing case records, or the quality of assessments, and the service had not undertaken any Serious Incident Reviews in recent years which, considered collectively, limited the range of quality assurance activity. There were aspirations to implement a peer evaluation template developed pre-covid, but there was an honest reflection of limited capacity within the service to deliver this.

Whilst the quality assurance templates in use reflected that quality measures were in place, leaders acknowledged their ability to aggregate results of audit activity was limited at present. Never-the-less, staff we spoke to had a clear understanding of the standards of practice required and were committed to meeting those standards. The service was also able to demonstrate that they had used learning from service user feedback about the quality of unpaid work activities to drive improvement initiatives including the creation of a fishing group that supported mental wellbeing and allowed for positive post-order support.

Leaders noted that systematic quality assurance activity resulting in aggregated data was a gap and had identified an action to develop a framework to support a schedule of quality assurance activity.

How effectively are you measuring the difference your delivery of community sentences is making to people on community sentences?

There was a focus on identifying and capturing outcomes for people who use services. A number of tools, which contained outcome measures, were in use. This included end of order questionnaires for both unpaid work and those subject to CPO supervision requirements. There were opportunities taken to capture unpaid work recipient feedback which was being reported through the Community Justice OIP annual report and the Scottish Government CPO annual return. Successful completion of CPOs were reported using long term data trends.

Front line staff had a good understanding of what constituted a positive outcome in the context of their work, citing public safety, reducing offending and social inclusion as important outcomes. Identifying change and good access to services were also noted as important. Service users talked positively about the effect the service had on their circumstance with one person noting that the support provided had 'saved my life'. People who used services also highlighted frequent efforts to capture their opinions regarding outcomes. Managers had aspirations to introduce a system of QR codes that would support them to capture and report on data from questionnaires and other forms of

feedback. The service was frustrated by delays in getting IT systems that would support them to implement this.

While the service had a range of initiatives focussed on capturing outcomes, they were not yet able to consistently report on these which limited their ability to demonstrate impact and celebrate success. Statutory reviews were taking place but opportunities to capture data and report on them were yet to be developed. Although the service had commissioned Justice Outcome Star, they had yet to fully train staff, implement and embed the use of the tool in practice. And whilst exit questionnaires were noted to be commonly used, very low numbers of completed questionnaires were being collated and reported on in an aggregated way.

Whilst the service was clearly focussed on outcomes and there was evidence to suggest the service being provided was positive, systems and processes to capture and report on outcome data were not yet well developed.

ENABLING STAFF AT EVERY LEVEL TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE QUALITY OF SERVICE DELIVERY

The self-evaluation also asked you to consider the wider organisational capabilities and drivers that underpin your performance management and quality assurance activities. This helped to identify what is enabling effective practice and highlight barriers that may be getting in the way of efficient, effective and responsive service delivery.

A culture of learning and continuous improvement

Staff were supported to provide quality services that benefitted people. A supportive management team and access to learning and development were highly valued by staff. A strong learning culture was in place. After recent high turnover of staff, managers had recognised the social work team were inexperienced and were therefore investing in additional support and training. Whilst the service was committed to meeting their needs it was recognised as an additional pressure for managers.

A strong commitment towards staff wellbeing and a culture of trauma-informed practice was evident from discussions with staff, managers, service users and was clearly reflected in documentation such as the induction pack and supervision policy. The supervision process was consistently implemented and valued by staff.

Leadership

The Chief Officer and the Head of Service/Chief Social Work Officer (acting) were committed to increasing awareness, understanding and visibility of justice services within the wider justice landscape. The CSWO chaired the Community Justice Partnership which demonstrated active and engaged leadership. Performance reports and discussion with leaders ensured the Chief Officer recognised the contribution of justice social work. The service was recognised in press releases or committee reports and leaders noted that the service had been nominated for, and achieved an award for the quality of the service. The service manager was aware of and engaged in improvement plans for the service and had a key role in delivering identified improvement actions.

Both social work and unpaid work staff felt valued, and appreciated the support provided by their first line managers. Staff also understood the demands on their managers. The routine of team meetings, regular supervision and co-location of staff aided the accessibility of operational managers. Managers sat with staff which had helped to break down negative cultures and practices within the UPW team. An 'open door' approach supported staff wellbeing and helped maintain a focus on quality. Beyond operational manager level, staff felt leaders were less visible.

Governance

The Community Justice plan fed into the Community Planning Partnership and Local Outcome Improvement Plan, the Community Planning Executive Group and the HSCP. This provided a strategic 'golden thread' through planning structures. The CSWO/Head of Children and Families and Justice Service also chaired the Community Justice Partnership allowing for continuity of oversight. Clear reporting routes through the clinical care governance group to the IJB were also evident. Justice social work was meaningfully reported on in these settings and the Community Planning Partnership and other council committees regularly received performance reports relating to justice social work.

Clear governance was in place for MAPPA through the Chief Officers Group and Strategic Officers Group. This was supported by a strong approach to quality assurance.

Knowledge, Expertise and Resources

The service was working to ensure they had the necessary knowledge and expertise in place. Staff acknowledged there was good access to training and development resources and there was relevant expertise within the service to support their practice. Supervision was positively re-enforcing practice and was valued by staff. Business support staff had important levels of knowledge and expertise and were helpfully prompting managers about key processes and timelines. This capacity and skill set was noted to be critical in enabling the service to gather and report on performance, quality and outcome data.

First line managers appreciated the support received from the service manager in terms of brokering resources where possible. The service manager was noted to be critical in leading on a number of actions in the service improvement plan.

Operational managers noted that recruitment and retention issues had created general capacity issues across the team and that upskilling staff required significant on-going investment. As a result, there were on-going operational pressures which limited scope to implement change ideas (e.g. peer reviews, developing QR codes for service user feedback). In addition, with only one team manager, capacity for strategic development was similarly limited and there was very little resilience and contingency within the team in the event that someone was off sick. Protecting time for strategic development or improvement work will always be a challenge and whilst there were aspirations to recruit an 'improvement lead' this was acknowledged to be 'blue sky thinking'. Limitations relating to the availability, functionality and capacity of IT resources and systems was a noted to be a barrier to desired service improvement initiatives.

Conclusions and next steps

The self-evaluation identified a range of appropriate priority areas for improvement. These included:

- development of an efficient performance dashboard to reflect the performance framework in place.
- development and implementation of a quality assurance framework. This would include key quality measures, templates to be used, governance and reporting arrangements.
- systematic undertaking of audit exercises.
- identifying a clear set of quality and outcome measures for the service and agreeing governance reporting structures for these.
- development of a quality improvement lead (subject to financial resources being available).

Based on your self-evaluation submission, the supporting evidence and our validation activities, we are confident that the justice social work service has the ability and leadership required to achieve the objectives of the improvement plan. That said, the capacity to deliver on this will require careful consideration and prioritisation given the ongoing recruitment challenges and balance of responsibilities across operational and strategic leaders within a very small service.

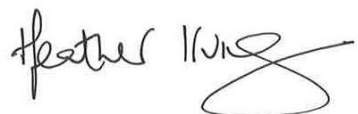
In conclusion we would like to thank you and your staff for proactively engaging with us and collaborating to deliver new approaches to support continuous improvement locally and nationally.

This letter has been shared with our link inspector colleague Louise Officer who will support your intentions.

Yours sincerely



Tim Ward
Strategic Inspector
Care Inspectorate



Heather Irving
Strategic lead
Care Inspectorate

Cc – Louise Officer, Link Inspector