



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Supporting Families Programme Guidance 2021-22

Chapter 5 Checks and Balances

April 2021

What does this document cover?

Guidance relating to the delivery of Supporting Families in 2021-22

Who is it for?

Intended for use by local authority Supporting Families teams and their partners, auditors and analysts.



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How to use this Guidance

This guidance (previously referred to as the financial framework) sets out the objectives of Supporting Families in 2021-22. It also provides a guide for local authorities and their partners delivering Supporting Families.

This guidance is made up of five chapters and whilst each covers a different element of Supporting Families each chapter should not be taken in isolation but read as a whole.

Chapter 5: Checks and Balances

This chapter sets out the risk based approach to assurance visits and reviews in 2021/22 and the audit requirements of Supporting Families

This guidance comes into effect from April 1st 2021 and covers the period up to and including March 2022

Assurance Reviews and Visits in 2021-2022 (formerly spot checks)

The national Supporting Families team will continue to conduct assurance reviews in 2021-22 to check the validity of Payment by Results claims and ensure Earned Autonomy areas are continuing to progress and to capture and share practice.

As Supporting Families is now very well established, with a large amount of data behind it and experienced local auditors, we are now in a position to apply a more nuanced approach to the assurance process in 2021/22.

This means the national Supporting Families team will move from assuring every area in the year, to risk assessing areas and targeting tailored assurance visits where they can add most value. This will apply to both Earned Autonomy and Payment by Results areas to align the approaches.

To determine areas that may benefit from an assurance visit to identify additional support or intervention the national team will use indicators such as

- An unexpected number of claims/successful family outcomes
- Issues identified during a previous spotcheck/assurance visit
- No spotcheck/assurance/engagement for a significant length of time
- An area part of the Recovery/Improvement process
- An area consistently appearing in Top 30 Poor Performers (PbR areas)

These will not be considered in isolation; consideration will also be given to:

- Areas not progressing their data maturity
- Engagement with the Early Help System Guide
- Communications with areas and work already happening locally
- Understanding of work already in progress with Other Government Departments
- Understanding work already in place with teams within The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government
- Concerns that an Earned Autonomy area may not meet the threshold/conditions for Earned Autonomy areas beyond March 2022 (these threshold/conditions are subject to consultation and ministerial decision during the coming year)
- Engagement with national team on population metrics and reporting all early help cases (Earned Autonomy areas)

Scope of Reviews for payment by results areas

The assurance review process will seek to ensure the successful family outcomes claimed meet the criteria set out in this guidance and in an area's own local outcomes plan.

To do this local authorities will be asked for anonymised information on 10 randomly selected claims submitted in the most recent claims window.

Following these case reviews the national Supporting Families team may request a (virtual) visit to discuss the selected cases in more detail.

At these visits the national team will review how local authorities use their case management and data systems to track, monitor and evidence outcomes.

Where appropriate the national team may ask to meet with keyworkers and/or partners to better understand how whole family working is being embedded within the area and how Early Help is being delivered through partners, and where the team may be able to offer support and guidance.

Scope of Reviews for Earned Autonomy Areas

The national Supporting Families team will ask that as previously, areas submit a self assessment detailing their progress against

- Whole System Transformation
- Whole Family Practice and family outcomes
- Data transformation and reporting Against All Early Help cases.

A tailored (virtual) visit may be requested to understand more and support against any number of these as the evidence from the review suggests may be required.

Principles for internal audit

The role of local authority internal auditors

As laid out in this document, local authorities' Internal Auditors should continue to verify results claims before they are made. However, MHCLG has reflected on learning from the first programme and worked with local authorities to consider how this function should operate in the context of the current programme's different approach. In response, a group of local authority Internal Auditors have worked with the national Supporting Families Team to lay out four guiding principles. These principles are intended to inform audit practice and ensure that the right balance between rigour and proportionality is struck in the wider interests of the programme's delivery and value for money objectives.

Internal Audit Principles

1. Collaboration

Internal Auditors and local authority Supporting Families Coordinators should jointly agree the evidential expectations required to claim a result within their Supporting Families Outcomes Plan. This should be a collaborative relationship, based on early and ongoing joint work.

2. Proportionality

While the rigour of the process is important and appropriate practices should be in place to ensure claims are valid, the burden and costs associated with these practices should be proportionate to the size and financial value of the claim. For example, it may represent a disproportionate burden and expense for Internal Auditors to validate every result before a claim is made. As a minimum, and following standard local practice, the following should be undertaken:

- a representative sample of 10%¹ of results should be verified by the Internal Auditor before each claim is made, but larger sample sizes may be required for small numbers of claims in order to ensure the audit is meaningful. Also where, in the professional judgement of the auditor, 10% is a disproportionately large number of claims this sample size can be reduced to 5% but should not be less than 20 claims. It is expected that this flexibility will only be used by areas with very large numbers of families. The national team should be informed where the sample size is less than 10% and will check the approach to audit at spot check;

¹ This sample should include claims for both significant and sustained progress and continuous employment as well as examples of claims from the different departments/agencies contributing to the programme

- the audit should verify the families' eligibility for the programme, with supporting evidence and with reference to the programme guidance; and
- the audit should verify whether the progress measures have been achieved, with supporting evidence and with reference to the local authority's Supporting Families Outcomes Plan.

3. Best evidence available

While 'hard' data from local administrative systems will be available for many outcome measures, it may not be accessible in every case and this should not limit the programme's ambition to achieve improved outcomes for families. Furthermore, such administrative data may not always tell the full story where formal reporting levels are variable (e.g. domestic violence reporting to the police). In such cases, qualitative evidence provided by practitioners and families may be suitable alternatives. For all data, the Supporting Families Coordinator should ensure appropriate quality assurance processes are in place and the Internal Auditor may review these arrangements as part of their verification process.

4. Communication

Supporting Families Coordinators and Internal Auditors should share with each other as much information as far in advance as possible. This should include any relevant guidance documents provided to Supporting Families Coordinators by the national Supporting Families Team, any results claim timetables and any new Internal Audit expectations.