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[Home](#) > [Society and culture](#) > [Community and society](#) > [Supporting Families Programme guidance 2022 to 2025](#)



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Guidance

Chapter 6: Checks and balances

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Applies to England

Contents

[Supporting Families programme guidance 2022 to 2025](#)

[Assurance reviews and visits](#)

[Scope of Reviews for payment by results areas](#)

[Scope of Reviews for Earned Autonomy Areas](#)

[Principles for Internal Audit](#)

 [Print this page](#)

Supporting Families programme guidance 2022 to 2025

What does this document cover?

Guidance relating to the delivery of Supporting Families in 2022-25

Who is it for?

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

Assurance reviews and visits

The national Supporting Families team will continue to conduct assurance reviews from April 2022 to make sure that all areas are adhering to and progressing against the programme sign up conditions.

During assurance checks DLUHC will also check the validity of Payment by Results claims and make sure Earned Autonomy areas are continuing to progress and to capture and share practice.

Supporting Families is now very well established, with a large amount of data behind it and experienced local auditors. From April 2022 DLUHC will continue with a risk-based approach to assurance checks, targeting tailored assurance visits where they can add most value.

This will apply to Payment by Results areas and Earned Autonomy areas from April 2023 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 with consideration also 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 of work already in place with teams within the Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities

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 the national Supporting Outcomes framework (or local Supporting Families Outcomes Plan ahead of national framework implementation) and assess progress against an authorities sign up conditions.

To do this, local authorities will be asked for anonymised information on 10 randomly selected claims submitted in the most recent claims window and a self-assessment detailing their progress against their sign-up conditions.

Following the case reviews and self-assessment the national Supporting Families team may request a 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

During 2022/23, all existing Earned Autonomy areas will receive an assurance visit to assess progress against the maturity markers outlined in the Earned Autonomy prospectus. An outline agenda for these visits is included in the prospectus.

From 2023, for any EA areas identified for an assurance review, the national Supporting Families team will ask that areas submit a self-assessment detailing their progress against:

- The programme sign up conditions
- Whole System Transformation
- Whole Family Practice and family outcomes
- Data transformation and reporting against All Early Help cases.

A visit may then be requested to understand more and to offer support.

Principles for Internal Audit

The role of local authority internal auditors

Local authorities' Internal Auditors should continue to verify successful outcomes before they are submitted. However, DLUHC 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 that the evidence used to demonstrate programme eligibility and successful family outcomes is in line with the national Supporting Families outcome framework.

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% 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.

- 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 national Supporting Families Outcomes Plan.

3. Best evidence available

While the national outcomes framework sets out proposed evidence sources these may not be accessible in every case and this should not limit the programme's ambition to achieve improved outcomes for families. In such cases a local authority may agree alternative evidence sources with DLUHC. This should also be completed in collaboration with local authority internal auditors.

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.

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