Driving and evidencing improvements

Developing an improvement action plan

Write an action plan

Writing an action plan is a good way to plan improvements.

If your service has fallen below the fundamental standards, the CQC may ask for a formal action plan to assure themselves that your service is serious about improving.

Here are some tips to help you write an action plan.

What to include in your action plan	
✓	Include SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) and a clear list of delegated tasks and timeframes. These should answer: ■ what are you aiming to improve and by how much? ■ when do you plan to complete the improvement by? ■ what do you expect to achieve from the improvement? (For example, a 'good' CQC rating.) Ensure your action plan includes a clear and explicit definition, so everyone understands what you're doing and why. Avoid a vague and aspirational plan that's difficult to measure. We recommend that the care manager or quality lead is responsible for writing the action plan and recording evidence of success but everyone should be involved in deciding the actions and putting it into practice.
✓	Be clear about the scope of the action plan to ensure everyone involved stays focused on achieving it. This will avoid additional elements being added during the project.
✓	Align improvements with other organisational objectives, if possible, to help you get leadership buy-in and longer term support.
✓	Set realistic and achievable time frames for each goal to be achieved. Is there a specific time frame, for example, an imminent CQC reinspection? Create milestones to mark significant stages in your progress. Consider splitting your action plan into two parts - short-term actions/quick wins, and long term actions.

✓	Assign a unique reference number for each action which can be used as a quick reference in discussions.
✓	Identify any risks when you're planning improvements and write risk assessments/risk management plans for how you can resolve them if they happen. You could include the solutions to potential risks as part of your action plan.
✓	Consider where existing staff can help you to achieve the improvements you want to make. When you delegate tasks to them, clearly set out the task(s) they need to complete, the desired outcome or result, and how they should report back to you. Include this in the action plan so everyone knows who's doing what.
✓	Take a baseline measure for all areas of planned improvement and know what achieving your goal will look like.
✓	Use process mapping or a flowchart to map your action plan. Process maps show a series of events that produce an end result, in a visual way. This could also highlight other areas in which you might need to improve.
✓	If you're responding to a negative CQC inspection, map each area of improvement identified in your report to the activities in your plan. This will help you to evidence your activities for your next CQC inspection.
✓	Avoid making the action plan too detailed or confusing, even if the issues you're looking to improve may be complicated. It needs to be a practical resource that people understand.

Implementing your action plan

✓ Assign someone to manage the implementation of the action plan. This could be a part of the role of an existing staff member, or you could recruit a new position. Whoever has this responsibility needs to have good project management skills.

✓ Communicate the action plan with everyone involved so they know what's happening and if/how they'll be impacted by the changes. Develop a communications plan alongside the action plan to help you do this. Produce a version that can be shared with people who need care and support, their friends, family and advocates.

✓ Consider carrying out small tests and pilots when you've agreed on the proposed solution, to see if/how it'll work in practice.

✓ Update your plan regularly and share progress with others. Apply version control and retain earlier versions for your records. Ensure it's a working document that's easily accessible and available in a format that helps you, and others, to track and update progress. Add a status column to your action plan to show whether the action is 'closed' or 'open'.

✓ When you've achieved an action, keep records of lessons learned, issues, communications etc. You could move 'closed' actions to a separate tab for future reference.

✓ Be consistent in how you measure progress toward your goal(s). Study the results and compare data from each area of the action plan to identify whether the changes are being implemented successfully and if these are achieving your original aims.

✓ Adjust and adapt the action plan, if needed. Don't stick to it if the circumstances around the improvement change.

✓ Obtain ongoing feedback from all those involved on how to improve the action plan. Remember that your action plan may change as you work towards your goal(s), so make sure you're flexible.

✓ Recognise and reward individuals or teams when you achieve improvements or milestones. This will help them to stay motivated and keeps up the momentum of the action plan.

Further information and advice about Quality assurance and improvement is available from
www.skillsforcare.org.uk/COVID-19webinars