

# Family Services

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# Contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Barnet Family Services Quality Assurance Framework.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Barnet Family Services Practice Framework .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Leadership of the Quality Assurance Framework .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5. Appreciative Inquiry Audit Approach .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>6. Service User Feedback .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>7. Team Managers &amp; Quality Assurance Officers .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>8. Conference Reviewing Officers &amp; Independent Reviewing Officers.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>9. Safeguarding and Reviewing Escalation Protocol .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>10. Performance Information and Data.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>11. Internal Challenge.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>12. External Challenge .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>13. Regional Improvement Alliance .....</b>	<b>12</b>

# 1. Introduction

Barnet Council is committed to ensuring that children receive high quality Early Help and Children’s Social Care Services. To achieve aim this we have, through our Workforce Development Strategy set out our ambition to attract and retain the highest caliber of child and family practitioners, social workers and practice leaders who are focused on achieving good outcomes for children.

Alongside our Workforce Development Strategy, we have developed our Quality Assurance Framework which sets out our aim of fostering a culture of support, challenge and learning within our workforce and within the multi-agency partnership through rigorous, collaborative and child centered quality assurance activities.

# 2. Barnet Family Services Quality Assurance Framework

Our Quality Assurance (QA) Framework sets out our approach to ensuring that work undertaken with children, young people and families meets our Practice Standards and enables the council and its partners to meet our core strategic objectives of:

- Empowering and equipping our workforce to understand the importance and meaning of purposeful social work assessments and interventions with families
- Ensuring our involvement with the most vulnerable children in the borough positively impacts on their outcomes
- Providing effective practice leadership and management throughout the system to ensure progress is made for children within timescales that are appropriate and proportionate to their needs and that practitioners are well supported, curious and child focused

Performance Management	Quality Assurance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing relevant and accurate data which provides a lens on practice in relation to compliance at a provider and team level</li> <li>• Providing performance management information used to drive change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking audit with an appreciative inquiry mindset</li> <li>• Creating quality conversations with practitioners and managers with a team around the social workers</li> <li>• Establishing internal and external challenge to quality</li> </ul>

This QA Framework is designed to ensure thoughtful consideration of work undertaken with children and families through *Appreciative Inquiry* and *reflective* and *reflexive practice* which enables practitioners to learn, grow and develop. Our approach enables practitioners to consider their assessment skills, intervention approaches and the quality of relationships they have with children and young people and

the familial and professional systems that support them within the context of the practice framework embedded in our Practice Standards.

### 3. Barnet Family Services Practice Framework

Practice in Barnet Family Services is underpinned by a [Resilience Philosophy](#). The term resilience is used to describe a situation when good outcomes occur for individuals or families in the face of adversity. Daniel et al defines resilience as ***‘The capacity to adapt and rebound from stressful life events strengthened and more resourceful’*** (Daniel et al., 2012). Our Practice Framework is comprised of resilience and strength based tools, methods and approaches that have been integrated for use in day to day practice to improve children’s circumstances and outcomes.

#### BARNET FAMILY SERVICES PRACTICE FRAMEWORK



[The Practice Standards](#) have been developed by the Operational Director so senior leaders, managers and practitioners across Family Services have clear guidance on their roles and responsibilities so we can promote and develop practitioners and managers that are confident and enabled to exercise sound professional judgements. We want to achieve consistent standards of practice that are open to scrutiny and challenge from others and place children and young people at that centre of all we do. (Barnet Practice Standards 2018).

### 4. Leadership of the Quality Assurance Framework

Our QA processes measure practice against the Practice Standards and instil clear expectations and a strong sense of accountability in staff for the impact of their work on the lives of children and families. Our QA activities aim to ensure staff are supported to deliver best practice through appreciative inquiry and reflective and meaningful feedback which focuses on practice strengths and encourages learning. The process is closely aligned to the Workforce Development Strategy and informs our workforce development and training offer.

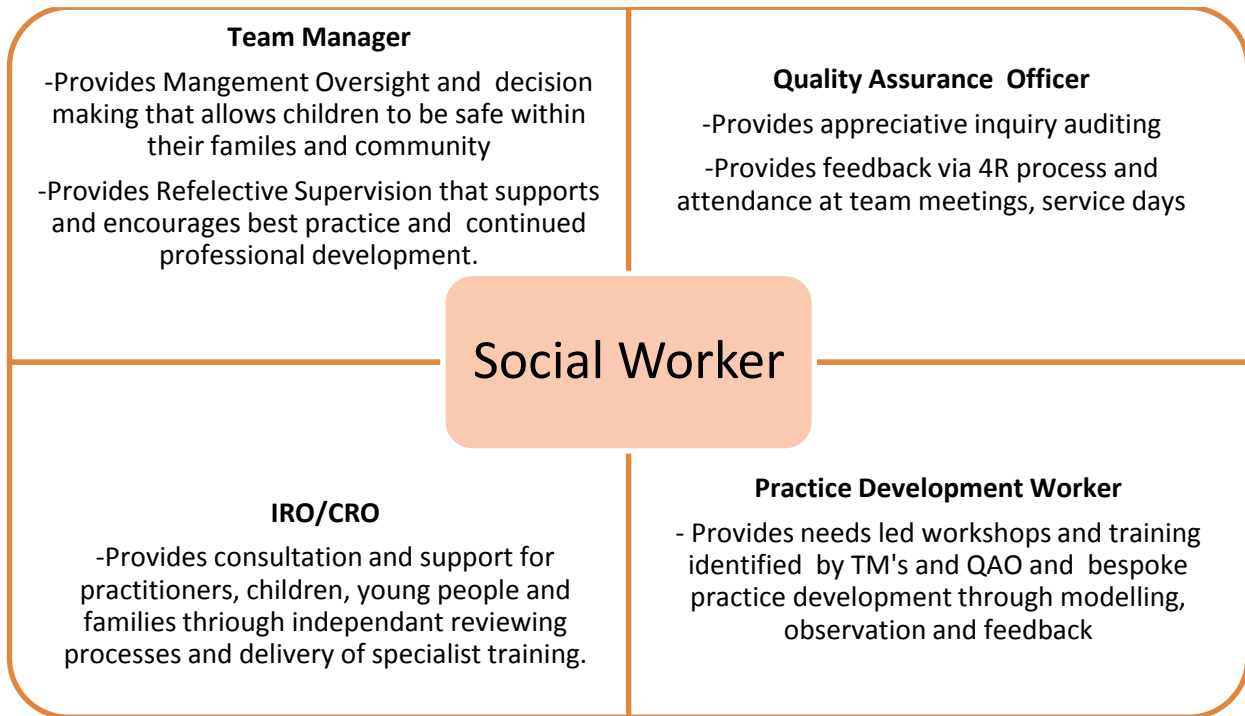
The Head of Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Workforce Development leads the QA framework to ensure systemic accountability for the quality of practice and service delivery. Through close liaison with Heads of Service and the Senior Leadership Team the Head of Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Workforce Development can ensure that those in positions of influence within the organisation shape and develop the practice environment by setting and modelling high standards and motivating others to do the same.

Further supporting individual, team and organisational learning are four Practice Development Workers who are located across the service areas to provide hands on support to Social Workers and Team Managers through a range of activities including delivery of bespoke workshops and training sessions for individuals, teams and services areas and one to one support using social learning theory approaches of practice modelling, feedback and observation

To facilitate integration across the domains of quality assurance and practice development, each Social Work Team is linked with a Practice Development Worker, a Quality Assurance Officer, an Independent Reviewing Officer and a Child Protection Chair. This enables consistent and seamless quality assurance activity, practice support and feedback through respectful challenge in the context of Appreciative Inquiry and continued learning opportunities.

Our expectations in relation to quality assurance against all roles and responsibilities are tabled below:

Role	Responsibility
Operational Directors	To drive and monitor best practice and effectiveness of service delivery across all aspects of Family Services
Head of Safeguarding, Quality Assurance & Workforce Development	Oversight, implementation and accountability for QA activity, safeguarding practices and workforce development
Head of Service	Leading the workforce to deliver excellent outcomes for children and young people within and across service areas
Team Managers	Deliver the highest standard of practice through professional support and supervision, practice leadership and casework oversight and direction
CRO/IRO	Provide independent oversight and reviews or plans for children and young people subject to child protection plans and children looked after through rigorous and respectful challenge
Practice Development Worker	Provide bespoke support to enhance individuals, teams and service areas to deliver best practice
Social Worker	Deliver child focused assessment, intervention and planning activities for children and young people adhering to the expectations as set out within the Practice Standards.



## 5. Appreciative Inquiry Audit Approach

The cycle of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) audit forms the foundation of our quality assurance activity. AI is a conversation methodology that has a particular way of asking questions by seeking out ‘the best of what’ has occurred in any given system. The aim is to build on self-identified strengths and to practice asking questions that strengthen capacity to reflect, share best practice, innovation and to build the future around what works. The model was developed by David Cooperrider and is a powerful change tool which attempts to support cooperative action, foster positive relationships and decrease focus of problem based narratives. It has been adapted and is a basic principal of Systemic approaches to intervention and practice which makes it an effective and meaningful tool within our Resilience based model of practice.

A variety of audits across predefined areas of practice, which form our regular audit activity<sup>1</sup> are completed. Themed audits are decided quarterly based on strategic priorities or identified areas for learning and are allocated to auditors (QA Officers, IRO/CRO’s, Team Managers) for completion. Key learning points are disseminated across the service and where appropriate across the local partnership. Impact is monitored through routine case tracking and analysis and quality assurance approaches. Thematic multi-agency audits are undertaken to support systems learning further.

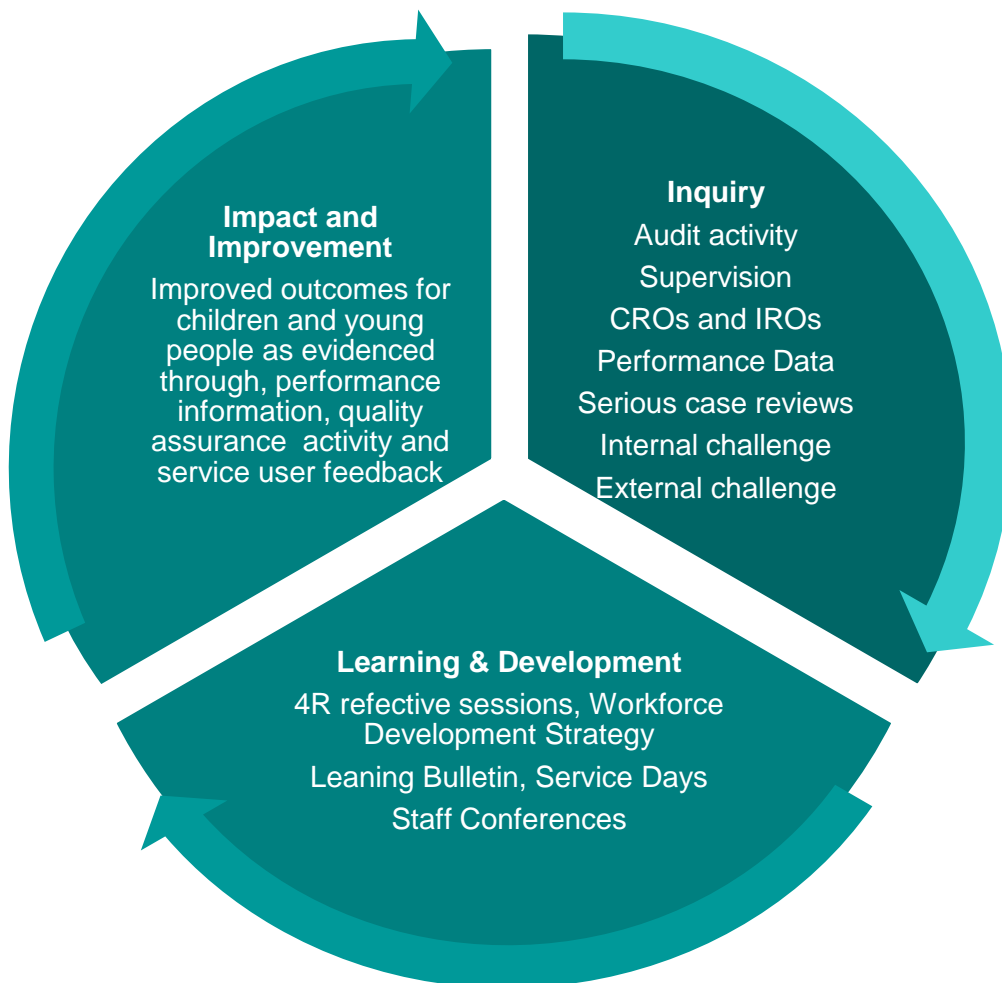
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<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of 2019 this is defined as 12 MASH, 1 Private Fostering, 1 MARAC, 1 CSE, 10 Open and Closed Contacts, 5 CLA in and CLA out audits

Through integration of our internal and multi-agency audit outcomes, information management systems and learning from local and national reviews of case work and case management Barnet is able to develop as an organisation that learns and shares best practice and is responsive to identified areas for practice improvement in collaboration with the wider systems working with vulnerable children and young people.

## 6. Service User Feedback

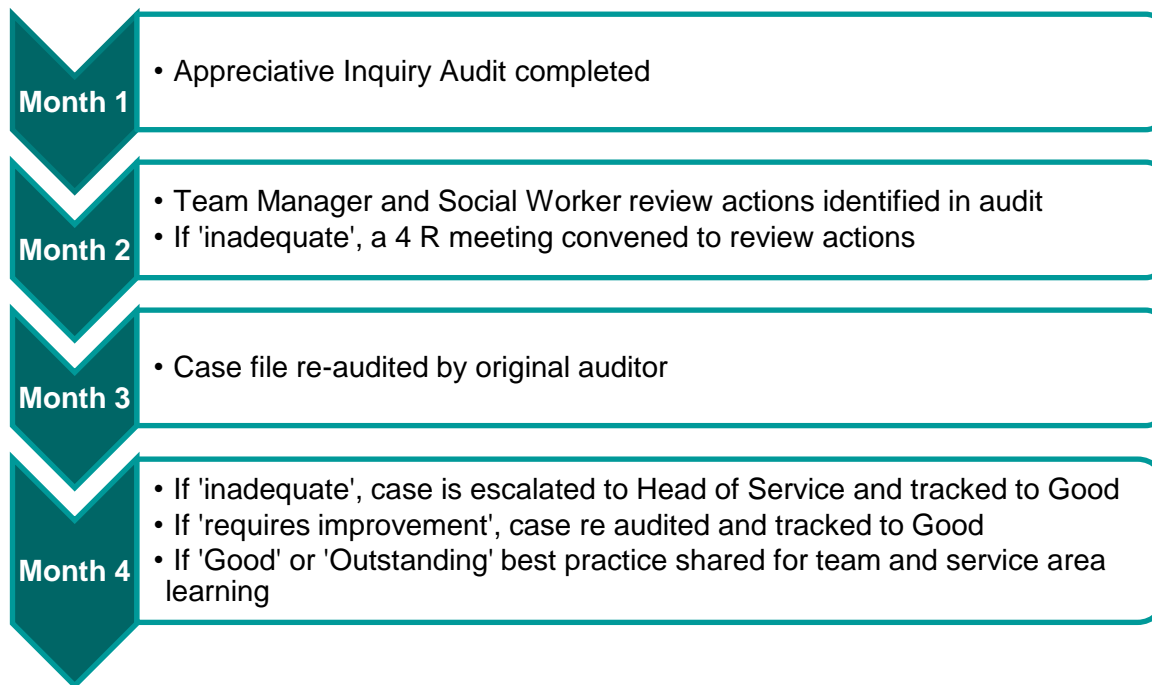
Service user feedback is an important element of our QA work, it is collected across the service via surveys, text messages, focus groups, complaints and compliments. The CRO and IRO evaluation forms add to the wider service user feedback systems which also include CAMHS, SEND and commissioned services user feedback.



## 7. Team Managers & Quality Assurance Officers

Quality Assurance Officers complete one audit each month from their linked Social Work Team case list; the Team Manager completes one every two months. The QA Officer and Team Manager meet to compare and reflect on learning outcomes from the audits undertaken and feedback practice learning into supervision, team meetings and workforce development activities.

In our system it is important that all managers are able to understand 'what good looks like' in Barnet linking to our Resilience Philosophy to support this.



The Quality Assurance team provide monthly reports in order for Team Managers and Heads of Service to understand the outcomes of the audit cycle, including:

- Head of Service Monthly Report
  - Overall gradings and key domains of audits per service area, by team
- Re-audit Monthly Report
  - Outcomes of all re-audit activity
- 4R Monthly Report
  - 4R meetings that have taken place across the month

Quarterly reports consolidate the overall and domain grading outcomes. This information is used to identify learning and development needs and areas for strategic development, in line with the AI learning and improvement cycle. This information is used for self-evaluation. Reporting to Members etc.

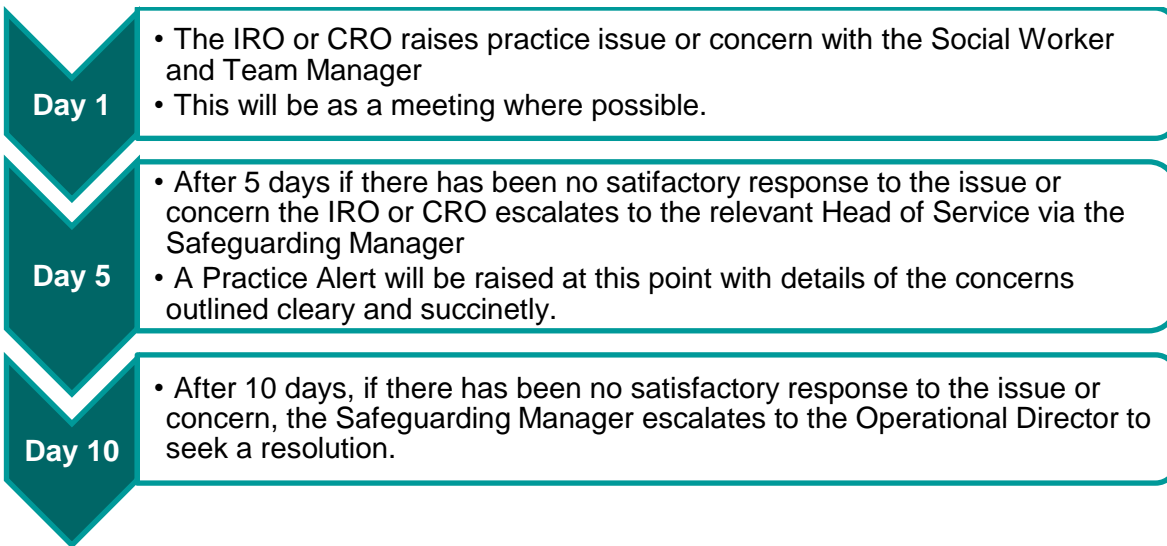


## 8. Conference Reviewing Officers & Independent Reviewing Officers

Conference Reviewing Officers (CROs) and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) have a number of key functions in providing quality assurance:

- As with every member of staff, CRO's must ensure that their own work is of a consistently good standard. They must ensure that the Plans they outline and oversee are SMART and outcome focussed and that risk assessment is informed and proportionate leading to safe and timely risk management;
- The CRO's have a responsibility to ensure meetings are held on time and the minutes arising from reviews and conferences are accurate and timely;
- CRO's must ensure that children benefit from Plans which are relevant, up to date and proportionate to their assessed needs
- Reviews and conferences are multi-agency meetings providing insight into the effectiveness of the Child Protection and Children Looked After system. The CRO service reports into management forums and also into Corporate Parenting arenas and the Barnet Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP).
- The CRO service collect the views of children and families who participate in the meetings they chair which are collated and fed back into services;
- The CRO service has established and detailed escalation procedures (Practice Alerts), designed to raise concerns about individual cases with line managers. The starting point is always to seek to resolve those concerns at the lowest possible point in the practice hierarchy – without compromising the need for timely, safe and effective outcomes for children, where this cannot be achieved an escalation process is in place;
- As individuals, Chairs and IROs engage with social workers and practitioners (including their managers) on a regular basis to problem solve, offer guidance and expertise and to ensure that working relationships with front line staff are actively constructed to meet the best needs of children.

## 9. Safeguarding and Reviewing Escalation Protocol

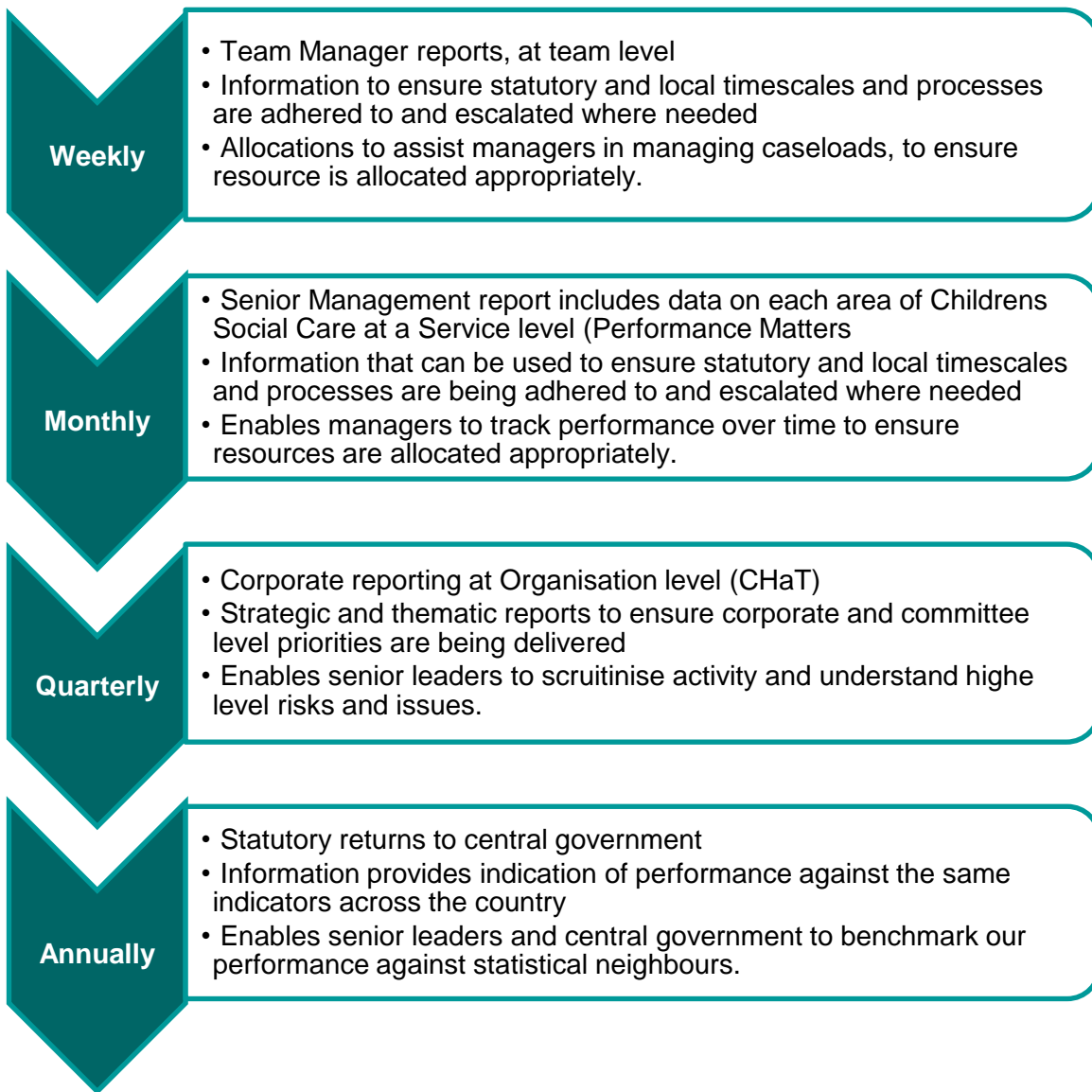


The Safeguarding and Reviewing escalation protocol sits alongside guidance for Social Workers, IROs and CROs which makes clear the timescales and report requirements. The guidance aims to support the need for ongoing communication about the child or young person’s situation and applies to key partner agencies.

## 10. Performance Information and Data

Family Services utilises qualitative and quantitative data collated from reports drawn from the case management system to inform understanding of practice quality and team performance. The reports are used to provide assurance to members, chief officers and external observers that the local authority is meeting its statutory responsibilities to protect children and improve their outcomes.

Performance data is used to map themes and trends and when triangulated with audit findings helps to identify service strengths and gaps which can be used to develop good practice initiatives and improve areas of practice that are falling below our practice standards. Data is also used to monitor demand pressures and target resources efficiently.



The data we collate is used to feed into learning and development activities at multi-agency meetings and is instrumental in ensuring key stakeholders are engaged in understanding their impact on the system particularly at the ‘front door’, in child protection processes and within corporate parenting processes.

## 11. Internal Challenge

Internal governance mechanisms are crucial to ensuring Family Services is delivering quality social work interventions with positive outcomes for children in our local context. Scrutiny is achieved through the context of high challenge and high support which drives accountability and improvement at all levels. Our monthly Performance Matters & quarterly CHAT reports are scrutinised within a Challenge session with the Lead Member for children, the chair of Barnet’s Safeguarding Children Partnership, the Chief Executive, Director, Children’s Services and Operational Directors.

Further senior leadership scrutiny of performance information and quality assurance activity is provided via the Improvement Board, Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee and Barnet's Safeguarding Children Partnership.

## 12. External Challenge

Barnet Family Services leadership team and senior managers value challenge, support and feedback from our Improvement Partner, Essex County Council which contributes to Family Services holding organisational learning and reflexive consideration at the core of our functions. Essex facilitate a quarterly 'stocktake' session which offer opportunity to systemically reflect and consider the barriers to improvement and the quality of service provided to vulnerable children and young people in Barnet.

## 13. Regional Improvement Alliance

Building upon the existing regional sector-led improvement approaches a more consistent, but not standardised framework for sector-led improvement in children's services has been established through Regional Improvement Alliances (RIAs). Improvement Alliances are a collaboration of local authorities working together to provide a robust improvement offer, where all LAs in the alliance are expected to offer and receive improvement support based on their strengths – a high challenge and high support relationship based on a partnership of equals.

Barnet is part of the North Central London Regional Improvement Alliance alongside:

- Camden
- Enfield
- Hackney
- Haringey
- Islington

Three of the six authorities are also Partners in Practice (Camden, Hackney and Islington). These authorities are resourced by DfE to support innovation and improvement across the country and will support neighboring authorities.