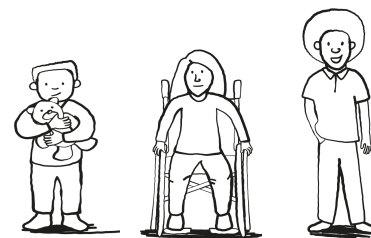


# Quality Assurance Framework



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## SECTION 1 - Quality Assurance background

### Introduction


*“Our Manchester – building a safe, happy, healthy and successful future for children and young people.”*

This revised Quality Assurance Framework is the next step to achieving consistently good practice .

We are reliably informed by the cadre of experts of the “improvement journey” that when we have reached the compliance aspect of the improvement journey the next focus becomes improving and delivering sustained and consistent quality in our interventions.

Having now achieved a reasonable standard of compliance we need to focus on the quality of practice with our ‘journey’ now needing additional engineering in order to reach our final destination of excellent practice, services and outcomes for our children. I propose we need to define the quality of practice, which becomes the focus of this Quality Assurance Framework as follows;

- 1) The use of audits and supervision outputs to monitor and report on how we are delivering against our practice standards.
- 2) Reporting on high quality practice that draws from our six golden threads, which our practice standards.
- 3) Ensure that whatever we do delivers against our strategic ambitions for children in Manchester being safe, healthy, happy and successful and that we are able to evidence this and over time ensuring this becomes embedded.



4) Our practice and service developments demonstrate influence by the voice of the child, parents, other service users, the wider partnership and driven by the best standard of evidence.

5) Our scaffolding for effective practice (supervision, audit, training, practice model peer support, career development expectations and vision) is well understood, well coordinated, delivered and embedded and as a public service we can evidence impact.

It is evident that there is a significant amount of work being done to support the quality of our professional practice and provide better outcomes for children and their families but if we are serious about maximising impact we require a more nuanced understanding of the interrelated and layered aspects of quality of practice identified above.

Working in Manchester, a city with a variety of opportunities and challenges for families some of whom are significantly impacted by poverty and poor health (physical and mental) is an undoubted challenge. I am however confident that having achieved a better balance of resource and demand and focussing on the 5 point framework above we can realise our ambition to improve the quality of social work practice and deliver improvement in the outcomes for children and their families in Manchester.

Over the coming months and years our focus will be relentless in improving the quality of practice underpinned by both a refreshed practice standards and quality assurance framework and ten commitments to underpin the improvement of our quality of practice.


Sean McKendrick  
Deputy Director Children's Services

*Taken from Sean's blog on the quality of practice currently posted on the Google plus learning page*

## **Vision**

***To deliver high quality services that are driven by high standards of practice, informed by evidence and based on continuous learning to improve the lives for children and young people.***

This document sets out how the Quality Assurance Framework will be delivered to ensure that we recognise the strengths in service delivery and work together to reflect, learn and continuously improve outcomes for children. The Quality Assurance Framework is a 'whole service' framework. It is designed to capture and drive high



standards of practice across Children's Services. The framework is measured against the 'Practice Standards' for all services that provide clear guidance on the approach, roles, responsibilities and expectations of practitioners and front line managers when working with children, young people and families in Manchester and leaders in overseeing this.

The Quality Assurance Framework sets out not just how we gather information about children's lives but essentially how we evidence that the information that we gather includes the voice and influence of children and young people and that we can see the impact of good quality of practice through better outcomes for children. This Quality Assurance Framework recognises that auditing activity alone will not improve the quality of practice. The vision must be owned by all staff and through a range of quality assurance activities practice will continue to improve.

Research tell us a good quality assurance framework must triangulate evidence from a range of sources to help us to understand what we are doing well and where we need to improve; not just for individual children but how well our services are meeting the needs of all children. The voice of parents/carers and partners is essential in order for us to know how we are doing. Importantly, that we can evidence also that we have used their views to influence operational and strategic improvement plans.

The Quality Assurance Framework will not only provide a self assessment of the quality of practice sits at any given time but will go beyond, giving the knowledge of what we can do to improve practice further. Within Manchester we are committed to ensure that our interventions have a positive impact upon the experiences and outcomes of children and young people and that their views and aspirations are at the centre of all that we do. Pivotal to the success of any quality assurance framework, is the ability to consistently share learning widely across services and in a way that is engaging and owned by practitioners and their managers.

## Quality Assurance Principles:

1. That the Quality Assurance Framework is easily and well understood by all and seen as part of 'business as usual'.
2. That the voice of the child young person is heard within any case file audit and quality assurance activity. Voices of parents and carers are heard and evidence of their involvement seen.
3. That quality assurance leads to the creation of a quality culture within Children's Services, where at every level, practitioners and their managers own the messages.
4. That findings from quality assurance activity should be used to shape improvement across teams and services.
5. That we learn from the triangulation of information from a variety of sources such as families, partner agencies, practitioners and across the Council.
6. That quality assurance activity identifies support being offered to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and evidence found of support for their aspirations.
7. That learning from quality assurance activity will be robustly and systematically shared and influence improvement planning. Also, that opportunities for learning from complexity is harnessed.
8. Where children's records are found to be inadequate swift action is taken by practitioners and their managers to remedy the areas of concern and to promote the well-being of children, securing a good outcome. (Closing the loop)
9. That audits are judged on recognised and agreed practice standards and performance measures.




## What does Quality Assurance mean?

*'The only sensible measure of how well the system is performing is the measure of how effectively it is helping children, young people and their families.'* (Munro,2011).

Quality assurance is the **systematic** and **regular** monitoring and evaluation of practice, with the aim of improving, to achieve better outcomes for children and families. If managers do not know what practitioners are doing they cannot know if it is good enough. It is an essential part of every day activity for Practitioners and their managers.

## Research in Practice - Continuous improvement - learning system





Quality assurance is not an additional activity it is the most important part of all our roles, because we are all responsible for the quality of what we deliver. It helps us:

- take responsibility for our actions as leaders, managers or practitioners;
- assist practitioners in carrying out their roles safely and effectively, because it helps managers recognise if they are performing well or need extra help;
- provide assurance that children are getting the right services, at the right time and are safe from harm;
- improve outcomes for children and families by highlighting strengths, gaps and areas for improvement in practice and in the intervention/services offered;
- identify what works for children and families;
- to identify development needs of individuals and teams and allows for peer support, identify training and commissioning needs. to identify and share wider learning across teams and service areas.

### The three ways in which work is measured:

- Quantity – “How much or what did we do”?
- Quality – “How well did we do it”?
- Outcome/impact – “What difference has it made to children?”

By ensuring our quality assurance framework always measures in this way we should be able to answer the “so what” question: Are children being helped and making expected progress by our intervention? If not, we must ask ourselves the question “What do we plan to do about it?”. The framework supports leaders, managers and practitioners to create learning spaces that allows these questions to be answered.

## SECTION 2 - Quality Assurance Activity

Manchester City Council Children’s Services Quality Assurance Framework recognises that quality assurance is not just about completing audits but the continuous collection of intelligence and data that informs the organisation about the quality of practice, the impact this has on the child and effectiveness of processes and policies. Audits add an additional layer to the process and allow us to assure ourselves and provide confidence to senior managers of the effectiveness of managers “grip”. The learning from audits is transferred across all practice.

We are relentless in our passion for ensuring that the practice models used and the **Golden Threads** have the force to continuously drive better outcomes for children and young people, including securing permanence at the earliest of opportunities for children. The Golden Threads are the basis of the Practice Standards for Children’s practitioners and frontline management. By aligning the practice standards with the Golden Threads we are benchmarking our practice to the passion and drive for delivering high quality services for children, young people and families.

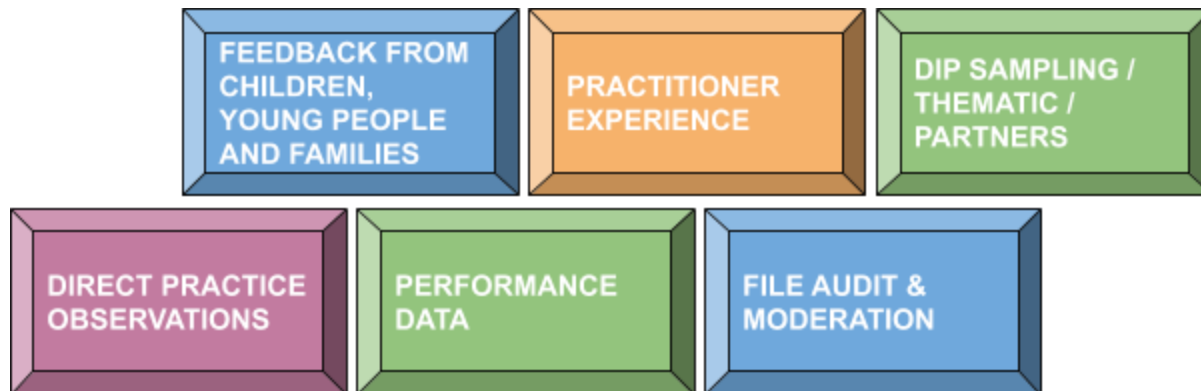
The Quality Assurance activity will therefore measure against the **6 Golden Threads**:

- (1) **quality of assessment**
- (2) **quality of planning**
- (3) **the use of chronologies**
- (4) **management supervision**
- (5) **the child's voice**
- (6) **parent/carer engagement**

The Golden Threads should all evidence the strength based approaches to practice that are adopted in Manchester with the overarching being the Signs of Safety Model.

The following activity wall highlights the key activities required to build a strong and robust quality assurance framework that recognises all aspects of quality assurance in driving continuous improvement across all services.

### QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITY WALL



### Quality Assurance Activity (how we gather the information)

1. **Performance Data**, covers a wide range of quantitative data and is the tool that drives intelligence for areas of focus. The performance data that is gathered relates to a range of activity from across the services, which relates to national and local standards.
2. **File Audit & Moderation**, sitting alongside and holding a 'Reflective Conversation' about the child and the case file. This enables the Team Manager to use the process to also consider the developmental needs of the practitioner. The discussion will include what went well, what has been learnt, what are they proud of, quality of practice, any barriers or complexity. The usual audit type questions around progression of the plan, evidence on case file etc will remain. However, within some audits the Service Leads / Locality Managers will act as an



independent moderator joining the audit conversation and will be looking for learning to share more widely, areas of strong practice, challenge, opportunities to identify areas of development not just for individual practitioner but across the workforce. What this will achieve is through one practitioner, one manager and one independent moderator, a level of richness around the child or young person, the quality of practice, learning and will help us to know if there is anything that we need to do differently as an organisation for this child, other children, this practitioner or other practitioners.

To be consistent in measuring the quality and impact of file audits the Ofsted judgements from the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS April 2019) will be used for recording the findings of the file audit as follows:

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires Improvement to be good
- Inadequate

All audit activity will be recorded and shared with the allocated worker and their line manager. Any gaps and deficits must be addressed (closing the loop) and any learning shared more widely.


*(NB: Where there are two key practitioners involved for example children / young people which crossover from Complex Safeguarding and Children's Social Care the manager completing the audit will ensure that both practitioners are engaged and actively participate to ensure assessment, planning and intervention are aligned).*

3. **Themed audits** will be undertaken on key themes that have been identified from performance data or identified as areas emerging from performance that require further spotlight for assurance. This might lead themed auditing within service area or particular cohorts of children.

When particular issues have been identified **Dip Sampling** will be undertaken on a number of cases e.g. 40 cases by Service Leads in the areas linked to the performance indicators or issues.

**Partnership audits** will be encouraged as part of Partnership Meetings agenda, in localities and in SIU that will be linked to the key themes and areas for development. The themes should also be aligned to issues that affect each locality, so that the learning can impact more specifically upon shared learning and improvement planning in localities.

**Supervision audits** will be undertaken to ensure that management oversight is strong and vigorous with evidence of reflection and clear plans. In addition this will ensure the learning and development needs of practitioners are understood and supported through a clear focus on developing highly skilled practitioners.

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4. **Practitioner Experience** - A Practitioner Improvement Board will be created to hear the views of staff and their experiences. We will use recommendations from this forum to influence service and practice development. Quality of supervision will be used as a tool to examine the effectiveness of supervision in improving the quality of practice. We will create a culture of shared learning spaces and promote peer audits within services to share learning through recognising strengths and areas for development.
  5. **Direct practice observations** will be carried out that will focus on the knowledge and skills of practitioners. Managers must progress their own development, have clear up to date knowledge and an ability to judge the quality of practice of every member or their team, regardless of whether issues are identified more widely. This is gained by regularly monitoring and measuring each worker's performance.
  6. **Our Children and Young People feedback & Family Feedback** will be achieved through a variety of sources to influence continuous practice improvement. Feedback should always be sought during a case file audit - children, young people and families should always be given an opportunity to input into audit activity and the same should apply to direct observations. The Complaints and compliments processes will also feed into the quality assurance framework - including evidence of how we respond to children. We will be creative moving forward in obtaining the feedback from children, young people and families and will engage their groups to influence the quality assurance framework.


The key activities that build the quality assurance framework is not exclusive and other activities can be added that will enhance the approach for continuous improvement. For example Dispute Resolution, feedback from Commissioned Services, peer reviews, Providers - Fostering Reviews by FIRO's

## Quality Assurance Oversight - Roles and Responsibilities

### Quality Assurance: Management Oversight

All managers must understand their role within the framework and that they play an integral part in developing quality practice. In order to achieve this policies, procedures and practice standards must be understood and translated by frontline managers into practice by setting and supporting staff to achieve and maintain high standards.

Managers have a responsibility to ensure that **Practitioners** are familiar with policy, procedure, research and learning tools. Managers must recognise the importance of ensuring that the work of their practitioners is regularly reviewed and findings shared with the staff member as part of their ongoing development. This is a significant feature of this Quality Assurance Framework. **Practitioners** are expected to take personal



responsibility to learn from quality assurance activity and proactively engage in training resources and developmental opportunities.

Management oversight is, “ the regular, consistent oversight of decision making and quality of practice which managers routinely undertake”. Heads of Service/Service Leads also need to assure themselves that work in their service area is undertaken to the required standards and to appropriate timescales. As such, the audit programme and random case selection will be relevant to individual service areas (you will audit your own service areas work).

Senior Managers in each service area will moderate all audits undertaken by front line managers to allow audit quality and accuracy to be consistently developed. It is important that Senior Managers evidence feedback to front line managers so that gaps and deficits are challenged and risks to children are effectively decreased.

Audits and other Quality Assurance activities are only effective if the closing the loop is completed. This means that if an audit or other quality assurance process takes place without any follow up of feedback to the worker, clarity re required actions or monitoring to ensure the actions were completed and made a difference, the process is ineffective. **(It is essential that any urgent concerns found for the child’s safety and welfare are raised immediately with Senior Manager / Head of Services in Social Care, Early Help, Youth Justice, Education Safeguarding and Deputy Director. Health concerns will be raised immediately by the Senior Manager / Head of Service with the Health Service).**

Managers/leaders are required to summarise and evidence the quality assurance activity they are undertaking to allow the Quality Assurance & Learning and Development Team to produce a monthly written report. The Safeguarding Improvement Unit (SIU) will provide monthly/quarterly reports that monitor the standards and progress of children’s plans and engagement. These reports will identify areas to support improvement.

## Who is responsible for what?

### **LM/Director and leadership team (individually/collectively):**

Are responsible for ensuring that we manage performance effectively and achieve the standards set by elected Members, Government, Legislation, Professional Bodies and Ofsted, and they:

- Advise Members, of the setting of strategic direction and improvement priorities;
- Set appropriate targets and standards for performance;
- Identify and manage strategic and cross cutting performance issues facing Children's Services;
- Promote the Quality Assurance Framework to all staff and ensure it is understood across the whole service;



### **Heads of Service & Service / Locality Leads:**

Are responsible for ensuring performance is effectively managed and improved in all areas of their service. They have a key role to:

- Promote the Quality Assurance Framework to all staff and ensure it is understood across the service;
- Ensure that the actions contained in the Quality Assurance Framework to improve and support child centred practice are carried out and the impact of any actions are monitored /evaluated routinely;
- Ensure performance management is integrated into service planning and About You's;
- Promote and embed practice models and standards to ensure a high quality of practice culture;
- Identify through regular moderation (e.g. audit, observation and feedback)
- identify strengths and gaps in performance;
- Service Leads / Heads of Service take ownership for the prioritisation of the moderation process.
- Heads of Service / Service Leads ensure there service audit actions tracker and closing the loop activity is embedded and routinely reviewed.
- Challenge and support managers to take account for the performance in their areas of responsibility;
- Identify, analyse, understand and continuously improve service performance;
- Incorporate results of customer feedback and complaints into service performance;
- Work with colleagues across the service to inform, challenge and improve performance in key areas.

### Front Line Managers:

Are responsible to quality assure performance effectively and actively promote learning reflection in their particular service area:

- Identify, analyse, profile and improve team performance;
- Promote the Quality Assurance Framework to all staff and ensure it is understood across the service;
- Analyse skills and training/development needs of all staff – ensure those needs are met in order that they are able to deliver services to the required standard;
- Set clear expectations and hold team members to account for their performance;
- Identify through regular monitoring (e.g. audit, observation and feedback) strengths and gaps in performance. Address and ensure that actions taken have made a difference;
- Ensure performance data is captured regularly, in a timely manner, and used as an evidence base to make improvements;
- Promote and embed practice models to drive quality of practice within the team;
- Develop a clear understanding of what it means and communicate it to team members;
- Report as required to Head of Service / Service Leads or performance clinics on findings and actions to address any deficits

### Practitioners

- Practitioners to be familiar with and understand the requirements of the Quality Assurance Framework;
- Understand practice standards and apply in day to day work with children, young people and families.
- Practitioners to be prepared to engage in reflective discussion about the child and family and to contribute to learning;
- Practitioners to be ready to share good practice and be receptive to challenge;
- Practitioners to be available and prioritise direct 1-1 audit activity; Practitioners to respond in a timely manner to audit actions set;
- To listen to and act upon feedback from thematic learning, which influences social work practice.





### Quality Assurance & Workforce Team

Quality Assurance & workforce team will:

- Promote practice models and practice standards in delivering a culture of high quality practice within the service;
- Develop the Quality Assurance Framework with arrangements for regular review;
- Support the implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework across all aspects of Children's Services; undertake coaching of managers to develop skills as required;
- The Quality Assurance Coordinator will complete the administrative tasks in the delivery of the activity for the Framework;
- The role of the Social Work Consultants will be to extract the key messages, feedback from the quality assurance framework and facilitate the learning and development for staff across the services on a monthly basis;
- The learning from the quality assurance framework will regularly feed into the training plan;
- Feedback learning from customer / service surveys and ensure that this is utilised to scrutinise, inform and challenge performance provision of Children's Services and service based advice, support and training as required;
- Assist in the coordination, development and review of the service planning processes and corporate improvement plans, representing the requirements and issues for Children's Services in order to strengthen performance management across MCC;
- Produce and maintain the Children's Services thematic and service balanced scorecard;
- Oversee audits of data integrity;
- Ensuring Senior Leadership Team oversight of risks and agreement on action required;
- Support project and service evaluations as required.

### Safeguarding and Improvement Unit (SIU)

Are responsible for ensuring performance is effectively managed and improved in all areas of their work in the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit;

- Promote the strength based approaches in the work of the unit to deliver a culture of high quality practice across services;
- Support the operational service in embedding the Quality Assurance Framework and provide effective checks and balances regarding the quality assurance function of the service.
- Undertake agreed audits including dip sampling;
- Highlights shared best practice for Looked After Children and children subject to Child Protection plans.
- Ensure feedback from children, young people and families is effective in driving quality of practice across the unit and improving outcomes.
- ensure compliance across services of practice standards, quality of practice and outcomes for LAC, Care Leavers and Children Subject to Child Protection Plans;
- Contribute to the reports on thematic audits.
- Be responsive to performance highlights that require additional scrutiny by undertaking/coordinating additional audit activity.
- Contribute to learning from Serious Case Reviews;



### SECTION 3 - Quality Assurance SCHEDULE

The schedule below highlights who is responsible for what and when. The quality assurance, learning and development team will play a central role in the collation of the summary of findings, themes and learning - through the Social Work Consultants (SWC). All outcomes will be presented to Director Children's Services assurance clinic and cascaded down to practitioner level, to ensure everyone understands and empowered to have ownership for driving practice improvement. This will be through practice forums, regular manager and team meetings and learning events.

Activity	Who	Frequency	Outcomes
Performance Data	Performance Research Intelligence Unit.	monthly	Disseminated across services and used to influence other quality assurance activity by CLT, HOS & SL - monthly
File Audit	Team Manager	1 per month	Service Lead /Locality Manager moderates findings.  Heads of Service complete report on file audit activity in the month.  Workforce Learning & Development Team complete 1 monthly cross cutting report on findings, themes, learning from across
File Audit Moderation	Service Lead / Locality Manager	1 moderation per Team Manager within the Service (aprox 6 or 7 per month)	
Locality Overview & Assurance Report	Heads of Service	Once monthly	
Service Wide Themes & Findings Report	Workforce Learning & Development Team	Once monthly	

Closing the Loop	Senior Leadership Team	Bi monthly	<p>the services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Locality Social Work</li> <li>- Permanence</li> <li>- Leaving Care</li> <li>- Early Help</li> <li>- Fostering</li> <li>- Complex Safeguarding Unit</li> <li>- Youth Justice</li> </ul> <p>Oversee the closing the Loop tracker to ensure actions are completed.</p>
Thematic Audits: Supervision	Service Leads / Locality Managers	Quarterly	Learning & Development Manager completes findings, themes & learning report - quarterly
Private Fostering	Social Work Consultants & Safeguarding Improvement Unit	Annually	Social Work Consultants complete findings, themes and learning report - yearly
Dip Sampling (e.g. repeat referrals, quality of EHA, partnerships engagement in strategy meetings)	Head of Service - responsibility to set the theme.	Quarterly	HOS complete findings, themes and learning report based on dip sampling activity.
Direct Observations	Team Managers	1 per month	Social Work Consultants completes findings, themes and learning report - monthly.



	Service Leads	Quarterly	Learning and Development Manager completes findings, themes & learning report - quarterly.
Children, Young People and Family/carer Feedback	Team Manager	1 per month as part of direct observations / case file audit	Social Work Consultant completes findings, themes and learning report.
	Complaints and compliments	Monthly	Report completed by Directorate Lead on children, young people and families feedback.
	Safeguarding Improvement Unit	monthly	Report on participation and feedback of children, young people, families and carers who are in contact with the Safeguarding Improvement Unit.
Practitioner Experience	Practitioner representation	bi-monthly	Practitioners Improvement Forum - bi-monthly.

## SECTION 4 - How we measure and share learning.

*The learning will be child-centred, strength based, focused on outcomes and reflective.*


Developing skilled, child-centred practitioners who work to a high standard, providing effective evidence-based support is at the core of this framework. This framework has set out how we will evidence through a variety of regular activities that gives a better insight into each child and young persons lived experience of services in Manchester.

The quality and impact of the work we do should be evidenced within this framework. We should be able to evidence the impact of good quality assessments that demonstrate professional expertise and good quality plans that are regularly updated with families and contain realistic goals with clear action to improve outcomes for children and young people. We should use this learning to influence service development. When we have got something wrong we should be able to identify quickly and provide an effective remedy.

### Quality Assurance Outcomes - how we improve the quality of practice through shared learning? - moving beyond performance to quality.

1. Performance Clinic becomes Performance and Quality Assurance Clinic with a section in the Service Leads Report on QA. This will include what they are doing, within their Service area about the themes from QA activity, monthly Reflective Conversation/QA report and Learning Circles. Template to be updated to ensure specific responses from managers. Minutes of P&QA Clinic include some narrative about improvement actions linked to QA.
2. Closing the loop in all activities will ensure learning and required actions have made a difference. The diagram below explains the closing the loop cycle.



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3. Learning Circles are a good way of learning from inadequate and good audits but currently largely benefit only the people who are in attendance at the Learning Circle. Under the proposed Quality Assurance Framework, the Learning Circles will be used to produce a quarterly report to be shared at CLT (if required), Managers Forum, Performance Clinic and Service Meetings. Service Leads will attend some of the Learning Circles for learning purposes.
  4. Managers Forum - QA Report and Learning Circles Reports to be shared with managers. Managers to continue to share areas of quality practice in this forum and what they are doing in response to the thematic issues in the Quality Assurance report/Reflective Conversations report.
  5. Findings, themes and learning Reflective Report/QA Report to be shared with teams by Service Leads. Social Work Consultants feed into Service Meetings to share QA Reports and learning.
  6. Quarterly Quality Assurance briefing including findings & learning produced as a 7 minute briefings for all staff. Practitioner improvement forum will drive practitioner input into identifying good practice by learning from outstanding case examples.
  7. The workforce training planning will be considered with outcomes of QA outcomes in mind and continuously updated throughout the year by the Learning & Development Manager to reflect the findings and learnings.
  8. Supervision, Observations and 'About you', should be a collaborative approach to learning and development.
  9. Quality of Practice Annual Report
  10. Staff Conferences will be developed to ensure that a programme is in place for continuous learning and development together.



## Appendices

This document should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

Performance Management Framework

Practice Standards August 2019

Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspection of local authority children's services. November 2017 (updated April 2019).

Tools for Managers to report on analysis of their Quality Assurance activity are contained within the Shared Google Drive "Quality Assurance Framework".

Links to:

RiP: Building a quality culture in child and family services: Strategic Briefing (2018)

National Principal Children and Families Social Worker Network: Promoting the Importance of Human Relationships. March 2019