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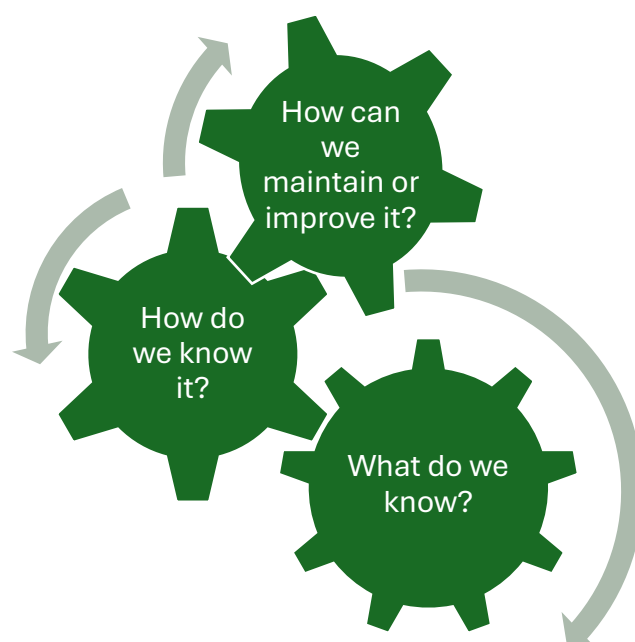
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## Introduction and purpose

The Children and Families Department is committed to its vision statement “to work with children and young people, together with families and our partners, to give the consistent support and protection they need to be safe, happy, and secure and have opportunities to achieve”.

In order to achieve this vision, it is essential that the Help, Care and Protection Division has a robust Quality Assurance and Improvement Team to maintain the arrangements that build evidence of high-quality practice and identify areas where improvements are necessary.

Our approach is based on a simple framework, built around three core and closely inter-related questions:



The principles upon which our practice is founded are:

1. We will put positive outcomes for children and young people at the heart of what we do.
2. We will focus on strengths within relationships and celebrate achievements.
3. We will promote a reflective learning culture which balances high support and high challenge.
4. We will empower the workforce to be creative and drive innovative and evidence-based practice.
5. We will work effectively with partner agencies to provide coordinated planning and support.
6. We will keep children at home with families wherever possible or when needed provide alternative permanent placements as quickly as possible.

7. We will recognise and support individual needs, challenge inequality and celebrate diversity and inclusion.
8. We will seek to make best use of the resources available to us.

### **The strengths-based approach and Practice Standards**

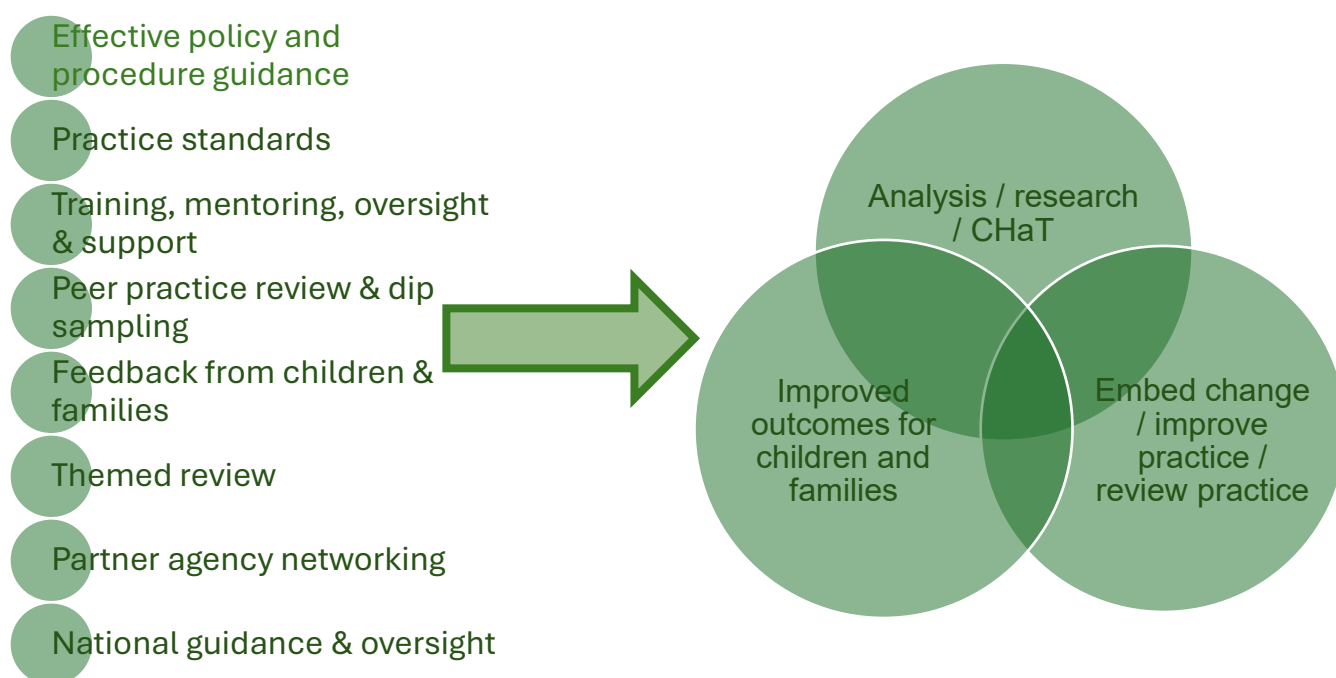
The Children and Families Department has been developing and embedding a strengths-based approach to working with each other, children, young people and families and our partner agencies ([Our Strengths-based Approach to Practice](#)).

Our social care practice is underpinned by four practice standards:

1. The safety and happiness of the child or young person is the focus for all that we do.
2. We know our children and families well.
3. We work with children and families with care and recognition.
4. We are creative and ambitious practitioners.

### **Quality Assurance Governance**

Quality assurance activity outcomes are presented regularly to all tiers of the leadership team to ensure effective decision-making and robust oversight correlates operational activity with effective systems and processes, leading to substantial and sustainable positive change for children and families.



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## **Responsibility for Quality Assurance**

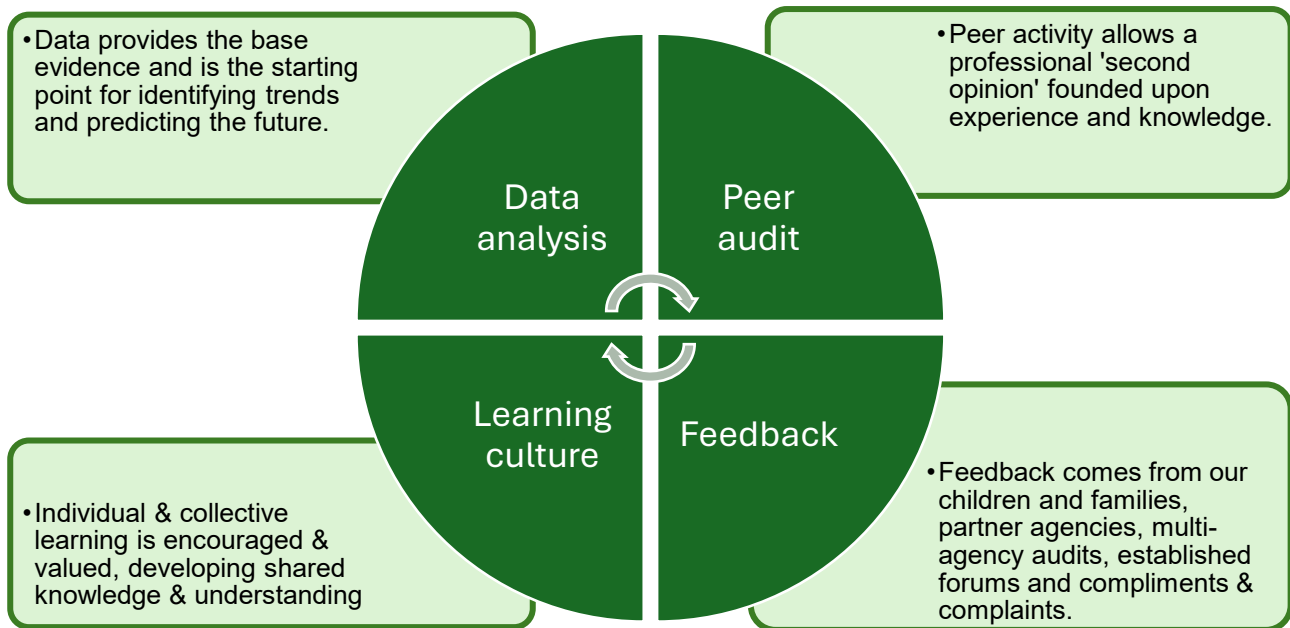
Everyone working within the Children and Families Division is making a contribution to meeting the needs of children and families, and therefore everyone has a part to play in quality assuring practice. It is activity that must be prioritised because we all need to know that we are having the impact to which we as individuals, teams, services, organisations and partnerships aspire.

- ✓ Children and families are supported and their lives improved through the hard work of practitioners every day, led by a strong and coherent leadership team.
- ✓ It is important we share examples of good practice widely to create a shared understanding of the needs and issues of our children and families.
- ✓ We realise that the support system is complex and that a change of any single part takes time to embed and has an effect on other parts.
- ✓ We recognise and build on our strengths, and we recognise and work to overcome our weaknesses by promoting a regular, reflective and dynamic review of practice.

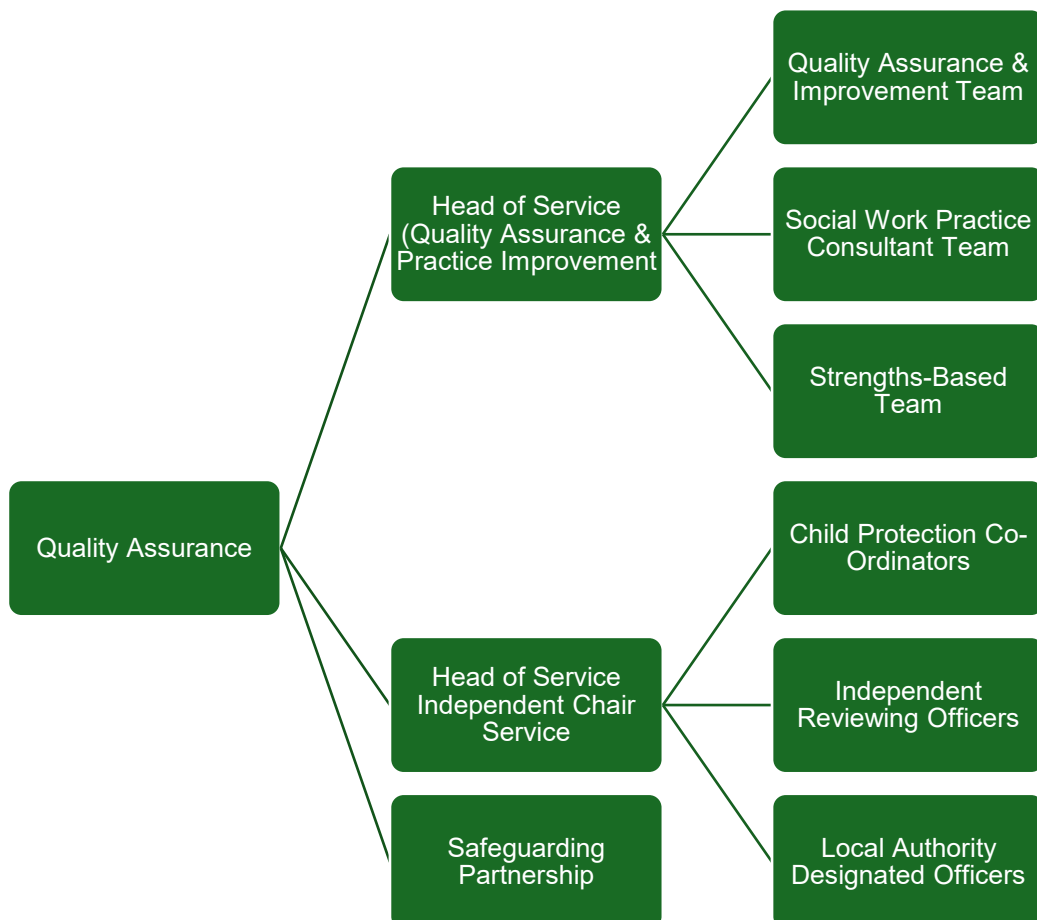
## **Quality Assurance Activity**

Our quality assurance activity goes far beyond traditional auditing, it incorporates learning from children, families, practitioners and partner agencies. We promote reflective, strengths-based, child-centred practice and evidence-based decision-making. We recognise what is working within a family as the starting point of our work and develop plans collaboratively with the child and family, sharing knowledge and experiences with partner agencies so that there is no re-traumatising of the child and family by having to repeat their story and relive difficulties.

Our quality assurance activity is built upon four core pillars of activity.



Quality assurance is not just the remit of a single team or service, rather it is a 'whole organisation' activity that involves a number of teams, each with their own unique fields of expertise.



Every member of the department has their own unique but critical role to play in the quality assurance cycle of our department.

Role	Responsibilities
Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure practice is statutorily compliant, meets professional standards, both national and internal and aligns with policy and procedure.</li> <li>✓ Ensure practice is child centred.</li> <li>✓ Seek managerial advice and guidance when required.</li> <li>✓ Ensure records are current and line with departmental standards and expectations.</li> <li>✓ Work reflectively in order to continually improve practice.</li> <li>✓ Participate fully in quality assurance activities, as requested.</li> </ul>
Team Managers	<p>As practitioners, plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Promote and monitor quality assurance with team members.</li> <li>✓ Ensure supervision is reflective and in line with departmental requirements.</li> <li>✓ Ensure every team member has an annual Employee Performance and Developmental Review.</li> <li>✓ Ensure staff training and development is available to all team members.</li> <li>✓ Identify and address capability issues sensitively and in a timely way.</li> <li>✓ Participate fully in quality assurance activities.</li> <li>✓ Use performance management information regularly to understand the performance of their teams, and the strengths and areas for development in the service areas they manage.</li> </ul>
Head of Service & Principal Social Worker: Quality Assurance, Service Improvement and Social Work Practice Consultant Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide support to all teams to ensure that practice improvements are embedded and secured.</li> <li>✓ Ensure action is taken to address all practice issues arising.</li> <li>✓ Collate training needs and notify these to the Learning &amp; Development Team.</li> </ul>
Quality Assurance and Improvement Team and Social Work Practice Consultant Team Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Work collaboratively to ensure the outcomes of quality assurance activity are translated into identifiable activity.</li> <li>✓ Ensure all improvement activity is accountable, with clear milestones and deadlines.</li> <li>✓ To manage the improvement tracker and ensure it is continually up to date.</li> </ul>
Quality Assurance and Improvement Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The design and develop a continual cycle and range of independent quality assurance activity that reviews all aspects of the department.</li> <li>✓ Collate the outcomes of individual pieces of quality assurance activity to prepare and present leadership reports.</li> <li>✓ Work with Heads of Service to design, develop and lead on bespoke quality assurance activity.</li> <li>✓ To manage the policy, procedure and guidance manuals across the</li> </ul>

Role	Responsibilities
	<p>department and liaise with the hosting provider.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To work with the Safeguarding Children Board to ensure effective multi-agency audits are carried out.</li> </ul>
Social Work Practice Consultant Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To support operational teams in ensuring the quality of their service.</li> <li>✓ To mentor new and lesser experienced practitioners in developing their knowledge and skills.</li> <li>✓ To act as role models for all practitioners and team managers.</li> <li>✓ To lead on specific areas of practice or training, as directed by the Principal Social Worker.</li> </ul>
Independent Conference Chairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure practice meets statutory, professional and service standards.</li> <li>✓ Ensure practice is child-focussed.</li> <li>✓ Ensure recordings are up to date, strengths-based and child-focussed.</li> <li>✓ Act as 'critical friends' in promoting best practice and challenging where appropriate.</li> <li>✓ Ensure that Child Protection Plans are adequate, achievable and reviewed regularly.</li> </ul>
Independent Reviewing Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure practice meets statutory, professional and service standards.</li> <li>✓ Ensure practice is child-focussed.</li> <li>✓ Ensure recordings are up to date, strengths-based and child-focussed.</li> <li>✓ Act as 'critical friends' in promoting best practice and challenging where appropriate.</li> <li>✓ Ensure that Children Looked After plans are adequate, achievable and reviewed regularly.</li> <li>✓ Monitor on an ongoing basis the quality of service provided to Children Looked After, which also includes monitoring the performance of the Council's function as a corporate parent.</li> </ul>
Heads of Service	<p>As above plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure team managers undertake and participate in quality assurance activities.</li> <li>✓ Ensure learning from quality assurance activities is cascaded and used to inform improvements in practice.</li> </ul>
Assistant Director	<p>As above plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure a 'high support / high challenge' and learning improvement culture within the department.</li> <li>✓ Actively promote the importance of quality assurance.</li> <li>✓ Engage with quality assurance activities.</li> <li>✓ Ensure Heads of Service are encouraged and supported to participate fully in all quality assurance activities.</li> <li>✓ Hold Heads of Service accountable for the quality of their services.</li> <li>✓ Provide Heads of Service with reflective supervision.</li> </ul>

Role	Responsibilities
Director	<p>As above plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure Assistant Directors engage fully with quality assurance activity.</li> <li>✓ Provide Assistant Directors with reflective supervision.</li> <li>✓ Hold Assistant Directors accountable for service quality and engagement with quality assurance within their service</li> </ul>
Business Support Officers	<p>Business Support Officers are able to help teams with their quality assurance activity but will not be held accountable for issues regarding quality of practice. Their role includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensuring tasks are completed within agreed timescales and to a good quality standard.</li> <li>✓ Entering updates onto Mosaic accurately and in line with departmental requirements.</li> <li>✓ Reporting practice quality issues to the relevant team manager.</li> </ul>

## 360° Quality Assurance

We recognise that we do not work in isolation, we work with partner agencies and with our children and families to bring about sustainable change that will enable them to thrive and reach their potential.

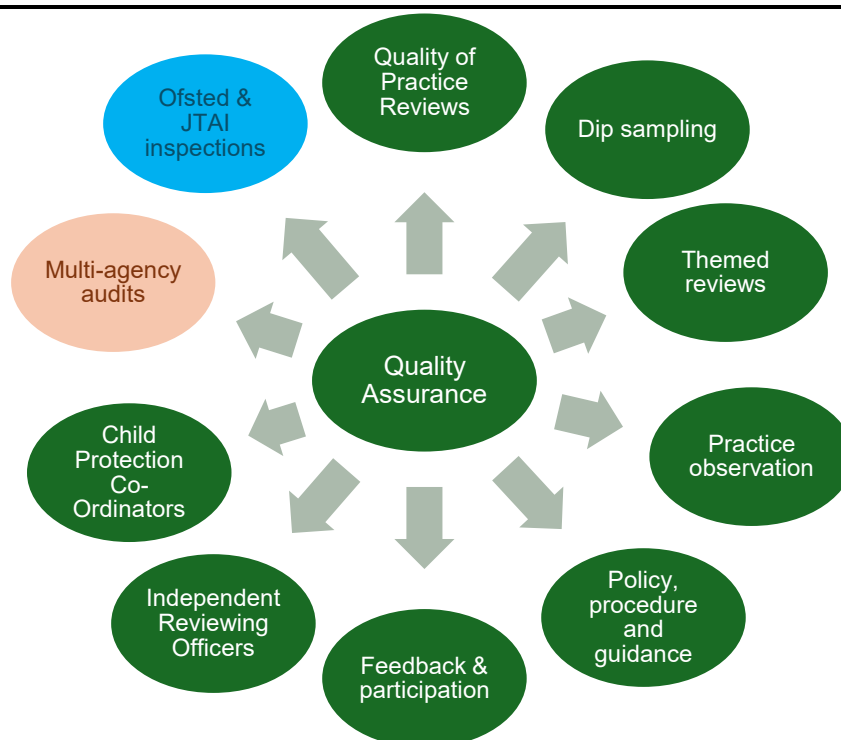
We know that our work affects the lives and circumstances of children and families in significant ways. We seeking to understand how partner agencies can best work with us and how our children and families have experienced the service they have received, listening to what they value, what challenges they faced in working with us and suggestions they may have for future improvements.

## Quality Audit Model

Quality assurance activity is transparent, with evidence-based judgements informed by professional experience, national guidance, local policy and practice standards.

Quality assurance activities are collaborative and reflective, focussing on identifying learning so that we know and understand our strengths and weaknesses, and so that we can develop a programme of meaningful continual professional development to support knowledge and enhance skills.





We use a wide range of methods and sources to build a quantitative and qualitative collection of evidence to demonstrate the quality of our outcomes for children and families.

#### *Quality of practice reviews*

Our quality of practice review audits are a collaborative and reflective process that combine a 'third party' independent consideration of the journey of a child with the embedded practice perspective of the practitioner. This allows us to recognise and celebrate success as well as identify and support improvement and progression for individual children and for practice as a whole.

The reviews are moderated by experienced social care practitioners and managers in order to provide a further tier of quality assurance of the standard of our practice.

#### *Dip sampling*

Dip sampling is an additional method that enables us to use short, focussed tools to explore specific themes or aspects of practice. This allows us to develop a baseline initially and review change going forward or identify explicit issues to investigate in more detail.

#### *Themed reviews*

We identify two or three themes per year to review in detail, bringing together a range of quality assurance evaluation sources to evaluate how we are performing in that area of practice. These sources include:

- ❖ National guidance and statute

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- ❖ Dip samples
  - ❖ Internal data
  - ❖ Statistical neighbour data
  - ❖ Focus groups
  - ❖ Feedback

### *Practice Observation*

Practice observation is not an individual performance tool, but a way of providing a structured assessment of how our systems and processes are being interpreted and deployed in practice. This gives us a sound basis for professional development and service improvement.

### *Policy, procedure and guidance*

Policies, procedures and guidance serve complementary roles, with policies setting the rules and expectations, procedures providing more detailed direction on how to meet those expectations, and guidance offering advice and good practice. Our comprehensive policy, procedure and guidance manual is hosted externally in order to ensure continued compliance with national guidance and statute, but tailored locally to ensure practice remains focussed on what works for Nottinghamshire.

### *Feedback and participation*

Gathering feedback and hosting participation events are essential parts of the quality assurance process as they are fundamental to our understanding of the experiences of the people we serve.

Feedback can be obtained in a number of ways and does not always have to be formally gathered.

Feedback can be found in:

- ❖ Assessments
- ❖ Supervision records
- ❖ Plans
- ❖ Case notes
- ❖ Compliments and complaints

There is an expectation that every child and family have the opportunity to express their wishes, views and feelings on their experience of our services.

Participation comes from specific events hosted to gather the views and thoughts of children and families generally:

- ❖ Development days
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- ❖ Celebration days
  - ❖ Team meetings
  - ❖ Service-wide development days
  - ❖ Service specific surveys and dip samples
  - ❖ Authority-wide feedback opportunities

#### *Independent Reviewing Officers*

Our Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are experienced social care managers who play a crucial role in ensuring care plans for children looked after are legally compliant, effective, in the child's best interest and provide the care and support to be expected of a nurturing parent. They act as an independent voice for the child.

#### *Child Protection Co-Ordinators*

Our Child Protection Coordinators (CPC) are also experienced social care managers, responsible for monitoring and improving child protection practice and ensuring that our children live in safety have their needs adequately met. They are crucial to ensuring that child protection plans are effective and regularly reviewed.

#### *Multi-agency audits*

Multi-agency audits are co-ordinated by the Safeguarding Children Board, who sit outside of Children's Social Care and exist as the body responsible for coordinating our local safeguarding work. The partnership is a joint venture with Nottingham City and comprises members of both local authorities, the police and health colleagues from a range of clinical commissioning groups.

#### *Ofsted & JTAI*

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) and JTAI (Joint Targeted Area Inspections) are Government-led national programmes of quality assurance to evaluate standards and performance.

- ❖ Ofsted inspectors measure against a published set of evaluation criteria around:
  - ❖ The help and protection of children.
  - ❖ The experiences and progress of children in care.
  - ❖ Arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after.
  - ❖ The experiences and progress of care leavers.
  - ❖ The effectiveness of leadership and management.
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JTAI visits are multi-agency inspections to assess how different agencies work together to support and protect vulnerable children, considering the partnerships and the effect this has on identifying need and creating innovative and effective support and protection.