

Children's Services



**One Children's Service - PROVIDING CHALLENGE AND
SUPPORT TO IMPROVE THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

Quality Assurance Framework

Revised January 2026

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1. Introduction; What is Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance is not an additional activity, but an integral part of everyday practice, providing essential insights and windows into the quality of practice. It is central to ensuring a quality service for children, young people, their families and carers in Swindon and therefore is essential to everybody's role within Children's Social Care.

It is through Quality Assurance and our performance management activities that we form an accurate self-assessment and demonstrate a robust understanding that we know ourselves well, where we are making a clear positive difference and impact to our children and families in Swindon, and identify where our practice needs to improve. We are able to measure the difference we are making to the lives of children and families and carers, through effective use of our performance data, quality assurance information and insights, children, young people and family feedback, compliments and complaints. These processes enable us to have a relentless focus on continually improving, always seeking and asking 'how can we improve things further' for our children and families.

Effective quality assurance is evolving and dynamic; an embedded Practice, Performance and Quality Assurance Framework ensures we are regularly assessing, reflecting on and learning from our practice with children and their families.

Measuring the impact of our work at all levels across Children's Services is crucial in closing the quality assurance loop and demonstrating the difference our services make to improving children's outcomes.

This framework covers quality assurance activity within Children's Services.

2. Why do we need a Quality Assurance, Practice and Performance Framework?

- Having a robust QA Framework ensures improved outcomes for our children, young people and their families
- To be responsive to any changes or deterioration in the quality and effectiveness of practice, and take action to address this and improve
- To celebrate strong, impactful practice and ensure this is replicated service wide.
- Learning from audits informs our training and staff development programmes, ensuring that staff are effectively skilled and equipped to deliver consistently good and impactful practice with our children, families and carers.
- Enables us to seek the views of children and families regarding approaches to practice that works for them, and to highlight good and outstanding practice which can be shared service wide.
- Establish whether the right families are being helped, with the right resources, at the right time, so that we can use our resources efficiently.
- To maintain the quality and practice standards that we use to hold each other to account.

3. We will know that we are making a difference to children's lives, when:

- Practice Audits, Thematic Audits and Quality Assurance activity will consistently identify that the majority of practice is identified as Good or Outstanding, and evidences positive impact on improved outcomes for children and families.
- Feedback from our children, families and carers will tell us that they felt listened to and respected, and the support provided made a positive difference and impact on their lives.

- External scrutiny will agree with our findings, providing assurance that we are making the correct judgements in assessing the quality of practice to our children and families.
- We receive fewer complaints
- Our performance information tells us that we are making improvements and consistently reaching and or exceeding our agreed improvement targets.

4. Our Vision, Values and Non-Negotiables

Our Vision
‘Children at the heart of everything we do’.
Our Non-Negotiables
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people are seen alone, and we know their lived experiences. • Children and young adults’ views are obtained, and they will inform planning and decisions for their lives. • All children and young adults have an up-to-date assessment that identifies their needs and a plan that addresses how their assessed needs will be met, by whom and by when. • All children and young adults are subject to a supervision discussion/management oversight on a minimum of a monthly basis, to ensure their needs are being met and they are safe. • All children know and are seen by their Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officer (QARO) who will oversee their needs and ensure their safety is being met, taking timely action where this is not the case.

5. A Culture of Continuous Learning and Improvement

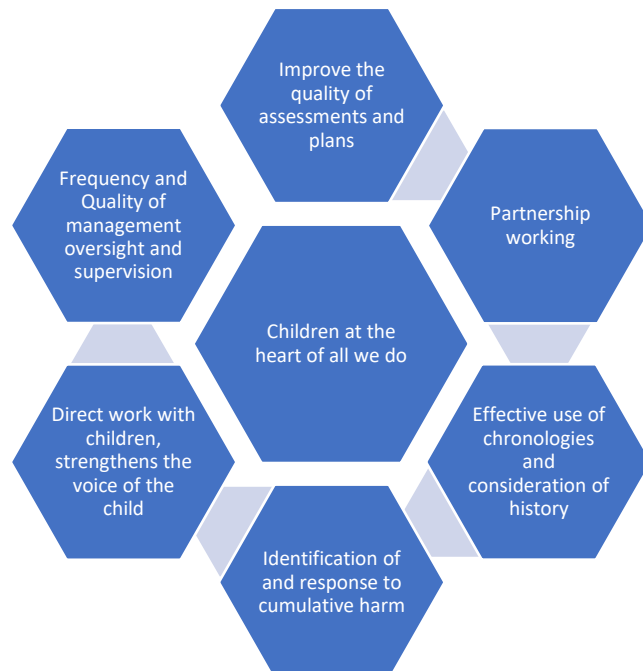
The aim and ambition embedded within this Quality Assurance Framework is to drive forward a culture of continual improvement and to realise the aspiration of consistently good and beyond, to outstanding practice. Key social work practice values include the ability to reflect and improve the quality of practice to children, families and carers that we serve; this is an essential requirement of good social work practice. A culture of continuous learning and improvement enables us to strengthen outcomes and make lasting positive changes.



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6. Practice Priorities

Our learning from Quality Assurance activity, and our serious incident notifications in 2025-2026 have identified key practice improvement priorities that will make the most difference and have positive impact in improving outcomes for our children, families and carers.



7. Our Practice Frameworks:

Swindon Borough Council Children's Services has two practice Frameworks, Family Safeguarding and Restorative Practice. The Family Safeguarding Model has been rolled out and implemented within the Family Safeguarding Teams and is now complemented by the current roll out of Restorative Practice in Q4 of 2025-2026 which provides a service wide Framework to drive forward consistently good practice. Both frameworks share the key values and principles of strengths based, relationship based, trauma informed and restorative practice which guide and underpin our approach to social work practice with children and families. A brief summary of each of our complementary practice framework is outlined below.

7.1: Family Safeguarding

Family Safeguarding is a model of practice that was originally developed in Hertfordshire as a more effective and ethical way of meeting the needs of children and their families. It was developed to improve outcomes for children and their families in the context of rising numbers of children becoming the subject of child protection plans and entering council care. It was recognised that 'traditional' ways of working with families had led to too many children being separated from their families, with parents feeling that they had not had the help that would have supported them to care for their children and to live happily and safely together. The Family Safeguarding Model is a strengths based, whole-family approach to child protection designed to keep children safely within their families by addressing parental risk factors and challenges such as substances misuse, domestic abuse and mental health problems. This necessitates several key elements to achieve better outcomes for our children and families:

Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MTD's): Social workers are co-located with adult specialists e.g mental health and domestic abuse worker enabling an integrated service/team providing wrap around support

Motivational Interviewing (MI) All practitioners use MI, a strength based, collaborative conversational style to engage parents in identifying required changes and solutions, this is an empowering approach fostering a sense of ownership in the change process.

Group Supervision: Group supervision involves all professionals working with the family to report on the family's progress and needs. The Requirement is for group supervision to occur on a monthly basis.

Structured Family Programme and Workbook: An eight-model intervention programme provides a consistent framework for direct work with children and their families, guiding practitioners in their support. The workbook is a shared, purposeful recording system used by all team members to streamline and strengthen information sharing.

The Continued Implementation of the Family Safeguarding Model will be driven forward by the Family Safeguarding Recovery Plan, and the implementation of the relevant service's Service Development plans which will be monitored through the Practice and Performance Board and CSLT Assurance Board.

7.2: Restorative Practice

The restorative practice model is a relational approach focussed on building, maintaining and repairing relationships by emphasising dialogue, accountability and empathy aiming to resolve

conflict and harm by involving everyone affected in finding solutions. Key Principles include **Relationships First:** Embeds the belief that healthy relationships are central to learning and wellbeing, using connection to build positive relationships

Repairing Harm: Focussing on addressing the impact of actions and repairing relational damage

Inclusion and Voice: Ensuring all parties involved have a voice and are part of the solution finding process.

Accountability and Empathy: Encouraging taking responsibility for behaviour and actions and other's perspectives.

The Restorative Practice Framework uses key practices and techniques to address and change challenges experienced by children and families. In addition, it drives forward the quality of social work practice ensuring a restorative approach in achieving improved outcomes and improving the lives of children and families. These key practices include:

Restorative Questions: Guiding children, young people, families, carers and staff to reflect on what happened, who was affected and what's needed to make things right.

Restorative Circles: Using a circle format for equal participation in discussions, building consensus and resolving issues/challenges.

Restorative Enquiry: A structured process to understand harm and agree on change/repair needed.

High Support. High challenge: Working with children, families, carers and staff to find solutions whilst holding them to account.

The training programme and Implementation of the restorative practice framework commenced in December 2025 and continues to be rolled out across Children's Social Care until the end of March 2026. An implementation programme will drive forward embedding of this practice approach to complement that of the Family Safeguarding across Children's Social Care, over the next 6-12 months and throughout the performance year of 2026-2027.

8. Our Quality Assurance Framework

There are a number of ways in which we assess the quality of practice, including audits, observations of practice, practice weeks, peer reviews and other external reviews.

8:1 Audits

8.1.1 Monthly child practice audits

Child Practice Audits are undertaken by TM, SM, QARO's, HOS, Directors and DCS, they will focus on children open to Early Help and Prevention as well as children open to Children's Social Care. These audits are completed collaboratively with the social worker and include feedback from children, young people and parents as part of the process.

Child Practice Audits are integral to our QA Framework to ensure the quality practice to our children, families and carers is good and exceeds required standards. Some child audits across the cycle may hold a specific focus to enable a particular sample or practice consideration.

These audits provide valuable insight and assessment of the quality of practice, in particular decision making, risk management, assessment, planning, participation and direct work with children and

families, supervision and management oversight. The expectation is that managers will review audit actions and their completion in supervision with staff.

8.1.2 Thematic audits

Thematic audits will be completed on a monthly basis by the Quality Assurance Service, these will focus on both vulnerable children, (for example children in secure estate, young carers , electively home educated , missing children, those at risk of exploitation, 16-17 year old homeless, privately fostered, those subject to Deprivation of Liberty Order, and those in unregistered provision as examples). Thematic audits will also focus on priority practice areas and emerging themes that require further quality assurance and analysis to inform practice improvement.

Additional themed audits may be completed in response to lines of enquiry emerging from other audit activity, from performance data, or to focus on specific requests or as a result of decisions by the senior leadership team. or at the Practice and Performance Board.

8.1.3 Multi-Agency audits (SSP)

The multi-agency audit programme is agreed through the local safeguarding children partnership. Data and performance from the safeguarding partnership assist in the identification of themed multi-agency audits, these audits assess and enable us to understand the impact of multi-agency working across the partnership.

Evidence gathered from this activity, as well as providing important information about effectiveness of the local partnership arrangements, can be used to inform planning and self-assessment for inspection by Ofsted, CQC HMIC, and HMIP as preparation for Joint Targeted Area Inspections.

8.1.4 Multi-Agency MASH/Front Door Audits

These occur on a monthly basis and involve social care and all key partners in the front door in the auditing process. They are thematic in approach and are informed by data intelligence and audit findings. The outcome and findings from these audits will be analysed and included within the children's social care monthly report. These are reported into Practice and Performance Board and Director's Assurance.

8.2 Audit tools, guidance and assessing the quality of practice

The Swindon Audit tool can be found at Appendix 2 to this framework.

The audit tool guidance document can be found in appendix 3, covering the areas of practice that need to be considered when undertaking a full audit, as opposed to a dip sample. This guidance should be used to assist practitioners in completing the child practice audits, and the evidence base for the audit grades/judgements given.

8.3 Child of concern process – where an audit identifies inadequate practice

Should the overall practice relating to a child, young person and their family be assessed as being inadequate through a file audit, the child of concern process must be followed. The auditor will share the with the relevant Directors, HOS, SM and TM and QA audits immediately/ same day on completion of their audit. Sharing pre-moderation allows for the urgent actions to be progressed in a timely way for the child. If moderation confirms the inadequate audit grade the child is added to the child of concern tracker for weekly tracking by the QA Team (and circulation to the senior leaders. Actions for improvement identified through the audit must be followed, actions are sent to TM's they will be expected to complete them within the timescales set within the audit, these are tracked

and reported on until the practice issues have been addressed and to ensure that these actions have been complied with and that practice for the child has improved.

In the event moderation has downgraded to Inadequate, the moderator shares/discusses with the auditor, and the audit is shared by the moderator with the HoS, SM, TM, SW and QARO if relevant and the same above tracking process is followed.

For audits graded requires improvement or good these are required to be tracked individually by TM's and SM's within their own service area, clear timescales are set within the audit for completion of actions, QA will also assist TM's and SM's with an Audit Management tracker for oversight and ensuring closing the loop and completion of audit actions occurs and practice is improved for children and young people. These will be monitored through Weekly Performance Clinics and Practice Board.

8.4 Practice weeks

Practice Week will take place twice per year, where service leaders spend time with frontline practitioners, observing their practice and finding out first-hand what is happening for the families they work with.

This provides senior leaders with the opportunities to 'walk in social workers shoes' and to directly observe the quality and challenges of practice. This provides senior leaders with practical insights and the opportunity to respond with appropriate solutions.

A summary report of the findings of Practice Week is presented to the Practice and Performance Board. This provides opportunity to celebrate best practice identified, and to continue to develop areas of practice where further work and scrutiny is required.

8.5 Feedback from Children, Family and Carers

The expectation is that Feedback from children, young people and families is obtained within our Child Practice Audits and is essential to ensure we gain a triangulated understanding of the child's journey.

Feedback is also obtained through:

- Complaints and compliments
- Raise your voice and VIP
- Voice Ambassadors,
- Parents and carers forum/ Family advisory Board
- Fostering panels
- Parent and Carers feedback
- Surveys
- Fostering panels

Feedback from children and families will be collated and reported on a monthly and quarterly basis. trends, themes and learning will then be fed back to staff via KIT and Quality Assurance meetings to improve practice to consistently reflect our approach to practice in Swindon. Children and Families

experiences and feedback will also be used to inform our practice improvement priorities and service development.

8.6 Quality Assurance and Reviewing Service

Our Quality Assurance and Reviewing Service plays a critical role in quality assurance ensuring sufficient scrutiny and oversight of decision-making, care-planning and outcomes for our children and young people. Quality Assurance and Reviewing officers will exercise these key functions through:

- Quality assurance following reviews and conference
- Mid-point reviews
- Dispute Resolutions
- Participation of children and young people in reviews and conferences

8.7 Other activities related to ensuring the quality of practice

There are a range of other checks and balances in our systems that help to ensure that our practice is effective at both an individual child/young person/family level and more generally. These include:

Learning from Practice Reviews both locally and nationally. Audits may be commissioned to review local practice in light of Practice and Rapid Review findings. During the audit process, we look for evidence that learning and improvement has been embedded. Practice Briefings are developed by the Safeguarding Partnership and reflective learning takes place. Regular Learning from Local Child Safeguarding Reviews and Rapid Reviews is delivered through Social Work Managers Meeting, with a closing the loop process to ensure the learning is disseminated to the teams and frontline practitioners.

Complaints, we will review complaints and identify the learning from these as part of our ongoing assessment of practice and priorities for practice. We will ensure that children and young people know how to complain and ensure we capture their voices and views to inform our learning and improvement priorities

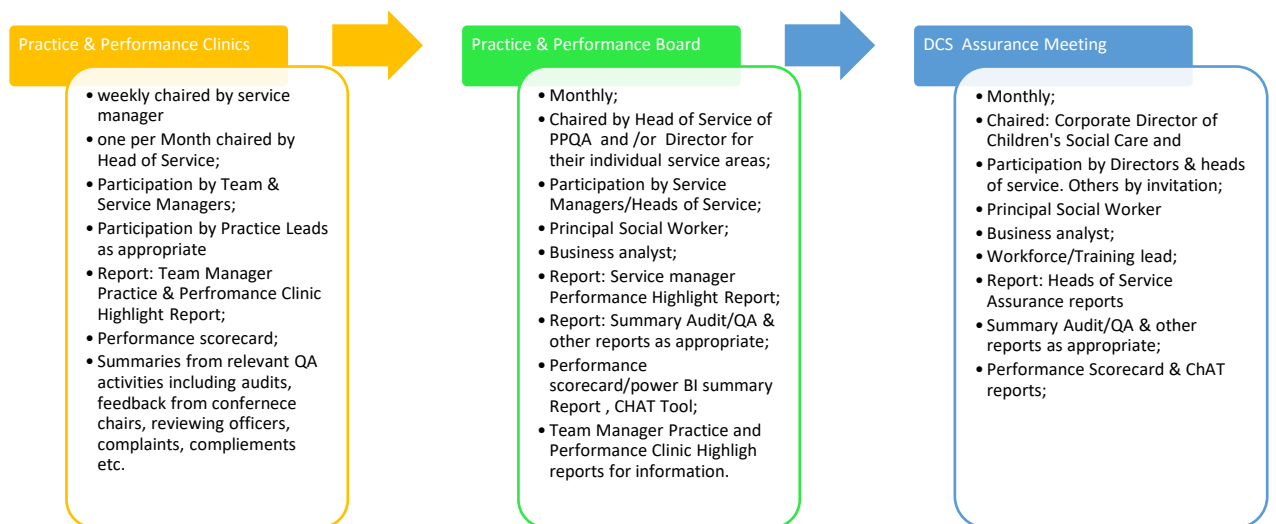
8.8 Moderation

Moderation is undertaken on a monthly basis as part of the child practice audit cycle; moderation ensures consistency with the assessment and encourages an evidenced based rationale for the judgement given regarding the quality of practice. It also enables a reflective discussion with the practitioner regarding the outcome of the audits to identify the learning and needed application to practice.

9. Reporting arrangements, governance and scrutiny

This section sets out the practical arrangements for practice and performance reporting in Swindon, as summarised in the following chart:

Summary: Practice & Performance reporting, discussion, support & challenge



9.1 Quarterly Quality Assurance Meeting

Findings from quality assurance and thematic audits will be collated, reported on and disseminated on a monthly basis, Monthly reports are available and learning on a page which will be shared with the workforce via the monthly KIT. In addition, there will be a Quarterly Quality assurance Meeting and a quarterly report of all QA activity and findings. The quarterly Quality Assurance Meeting will facilitate a more detailed work force discussion of the findings, implications for practice and consultation for further training and development facilitated by the Practice Academy or Learning and Development.

10 Responsibility for Quality Assurance

Everyone working within the system of Children's Services 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 whether we are having the impact we aspire to as individuals, teams, services, organisations and partnerships. Specific examples of our responsibilities to ensure effective overall quality assurance of practice include:

- **Practitioners:** Being available to participate in child practice auditing alongside the auditor. To have taken some time before any auditing activity to reflect on the impact of their practice and time after to think about putting any learning into place.
- **Managers:** to prioritise the completion of child practice audits, thematic audits and other activities as set out within this framework. To provide feedback to practitioners in strengths-based ways that encourage learning and development.
- **Leaders and Senior Managers:** to lead by example by completing audits and other quality assurance activities and in using motivational interviewing techniques and other strengths-based approaches and restorative practice techniques in their work across the organisation. To ensure that managers and others have the support and capacity they need to participate in effective quality assurance activities.
- **Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officers:** to ensure that they highlight good practice as well as address areas for improvement constructively and in strengths-based ways through the dispute resolution process. To ensure that plans for children and young people are effective and are developed with children and their families. To ensure that children and families are enabled to participate positively in conferences and review meetings.
- **Principal Social Worker and Practice Leads:** to ensure that learning from quality assurance activities is summarised and then embedded in the service. To support and facilitate reflective discussions about good practice examples as well as situations where intervention is stuck or failing to have the necessary impact in order to secure continuous improvement in outcomes for our children, young people and families.
- **Business Intelligence:** to ensure that managers and leaders across the service have timely access to key information at team and service level and are supported to interpret and analyse the data provided.

All staff are responsible for the quality of their own practice and have a duty to contribute to their own and other's ongoing learning through the evaluation of practice. They are responsible for being open to quality assurance work and learning, and for raising areas of strength and concern about delivery in the service so that improvements can be delivered.

11. Closing the loop: Learning and reflective practice

The sequence of practice and performance clinics and boards outlined above provide a clear framework for learning opportunities to be identified, as well as assessing the impact of such activities to date at all levels in the organisation. The model ensures that there is a clear and accurate ongoing self-assessment of the overall quality of practice and outcomes being achieved for children and young people. The discussions in these forums also feed directly into the learning and development cycle.

There are a number of other ways that learning from audit, practice observations, feedback from chairs and reviewing officers, parents, children and young people can inform practice and performance across the organisation. These include:

- **Monthly practice audit reports:**
These will be presented to Performance and Practice Board and the Directors Assurance Board and key findings practice implications incorporated into service improvement plans.
- **Briefings and key learning on a page monthly**
These identify key findings and implications for social work practice and are disseminated via KIT, Service and Team Meetings.
- **Reflective case and learning circles and discussions facilitated by Practice Leads:** An important part of the role of the practice lead is to facilitate reflective practice discussions that help to embed best practice. These can be focused on common themes being identified within audit activity, or a discussion around next steps in work with a family, child or young person where progress has become stalled.
- **Reflective discussions led by PSW/QA team**
- **Regular analysis of performance data:** Team and Service Managers scrutinise the latest performance data, taking operational action and giving direction as required.
- **Workforce**
Feedback to strengthen closing the loop activity will also be provided by
Monthly PSW newsletter
Monthly Briefings/Bulletins
Annual Health checks
Quarterly learning and QA Development sessions.
- **Sharing with Partners**

Bi-Annual reporting to Improvement Board /SSP. Key headlines from the QA Framework will be shared to ensure priorities for partnership working are informed by evidence.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Swindon child practice audit file audit tool.

Appendix 2 The Swindon child practice audit tool guidance

Appendix 3 Childrens feedback template 8-12 years

Appendix 4 Young People's Feedback

Appendix 5 Parents Feedback Template