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Children and Family Services Children's Social Care

Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework (QAIF)

Introduction

This policy outlines the main features of the Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework (QAIF) for the Children and Family Services Department, (Children's Social Care) and how the framework should be used to drive improvement for children, young people and their families.

When used effectively it will tell us about the quality and impact of social work practice in Leicestershire, evidence how we know it, and set out what our plans are for the next 12 months.

The framework is underpinned by the ongoing drive and commitment to ensure continuous improvement leads to better outcomes and experiences for our children, young people and families. The department is committed to achieving our vision of Leicestershire being "the best place for all children, young people and their families" and in order to achieve this a robust Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework is in place to evidence where services are working well and identify where we can do better.

Purpose, Scope and Approach

The purpose of QAIF is to improve what we do, how we do it and what we achieve in terms of outcomes for children and families. Evidence of outcomes and impact should be collated and where there is a need for improvement, clear objectives with measures put in place to achieve improved performance.

Our QAIF provides a holistic view of all the elements to be addressed to achieve required improvements and embed a culture of continuous improvement across the department. The QAIF has concentrated on the development of a structured, systematic and systemic approach to improving practice and management oversight across Children and Family Services.

We aim to:

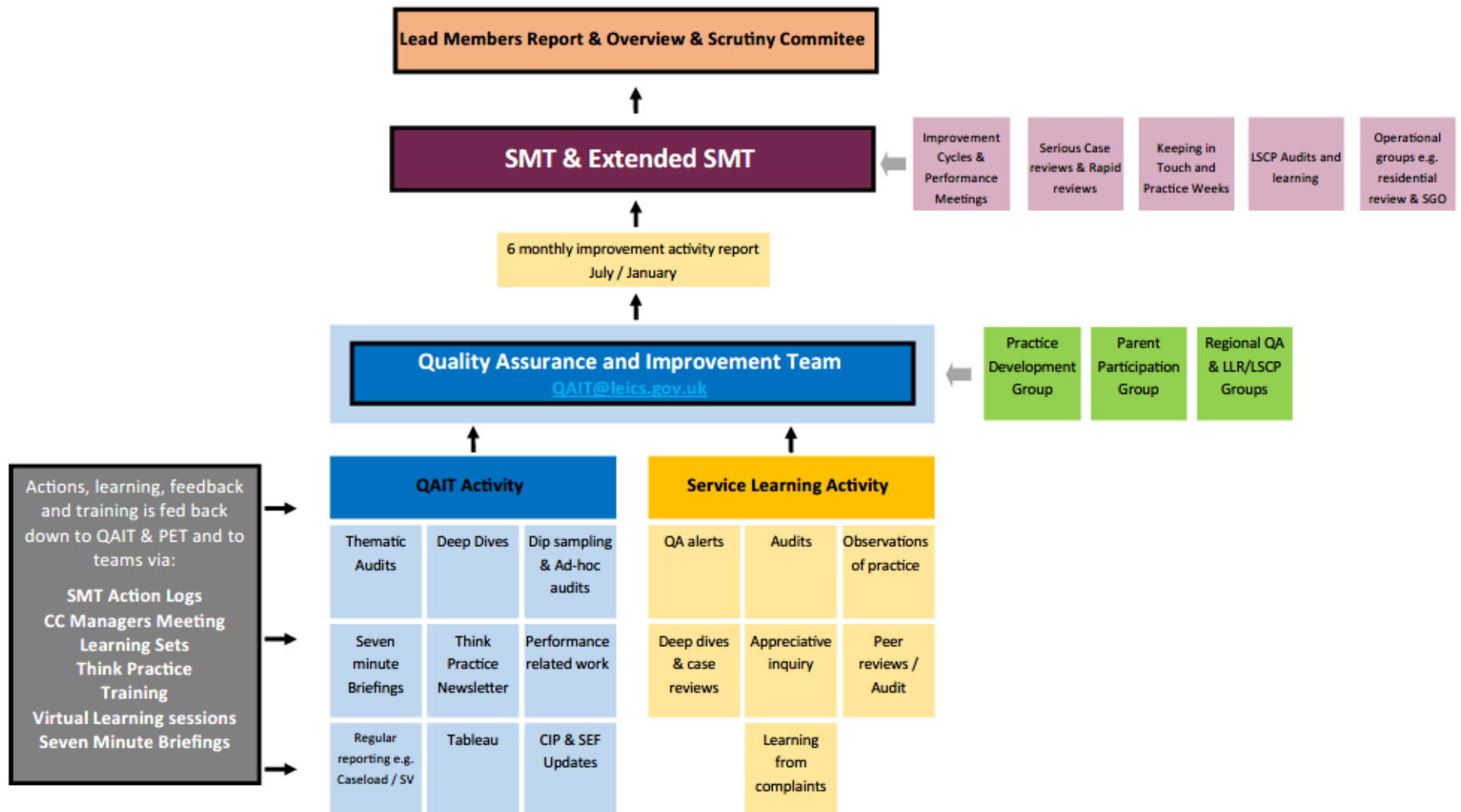
- Develop as a reflective learning organisation
- Embed excellent practice so that our delivery of services is consistent across Leicestershire, resulting in continuous improvement within practice.
- Ensure we have the right policies in place to support good decision making
- Use performance information to understand where we may not be getting it right for families and what the barriers may be
- Ensure that our systems and procedures are as effective as they can be
- Ensure that as a department we are ready to talk to others about how well we are doing (including our political leaders, our peers in the region and inspectors).
- Ensure our journey to becoming a trauma informed and trauma responsive service is embedded within our quality assurance functions

Our QAIF aims to achieve this by adopting an approach to quality assurance and service improvement that places self-evaluation at the core of improvement cycles and places this at every level of the department. QAIF focuses on our ability to ground self-evaluation in robust evidence and drive improvement plans that identify appropriate priorities and evidence-led interventions. QAIF applies to all services that support, safeguard, help and protect children and young people. It requires contribution and support at all levels from front-line practitioners, managers and senior leaders. Its approach is scalable to all management levels so that both strategic and operational quality assurance and service improvement takes place. QAIF is led by the Senior Management Team (SMT) at the strategic level and by Heads of Service, Service Managers and Team managers at operational levels.

The principles and purpose of this Quality Assurance Framework are aligned with the 'Road to Excellence' for learning and improvement. The key elements are that all learning and improvement activity will be **child-centered, strength based, focused on outcomes and reflective**.

Key message: All improvement activity and learning will be child-centered, strength based, focused on outcomes and reflective

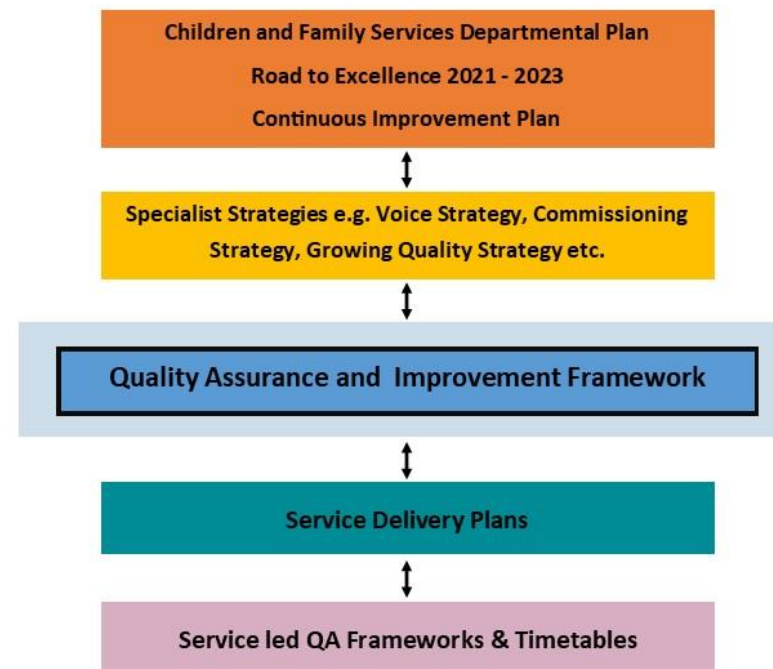
Quality Assurance reporting and monitoring



The scope of elements for improvement includes:

- People – Leadership, practice and working culture, staff and their development
- Systems – Core technical infrastructure, Mosaic, recording and functionality
- Process – Pathways, business processes, workflow, customer journeys
- Assets –, Data
- Resources – identifying gaps and targeting resources

Strategic alignment of the Quality Assurance and Service Improvement Framework



The QAIF sits alongside other departmental framework's such as Signs of Safety Framework and our Practice standards.

What does Quality Assurance mean?

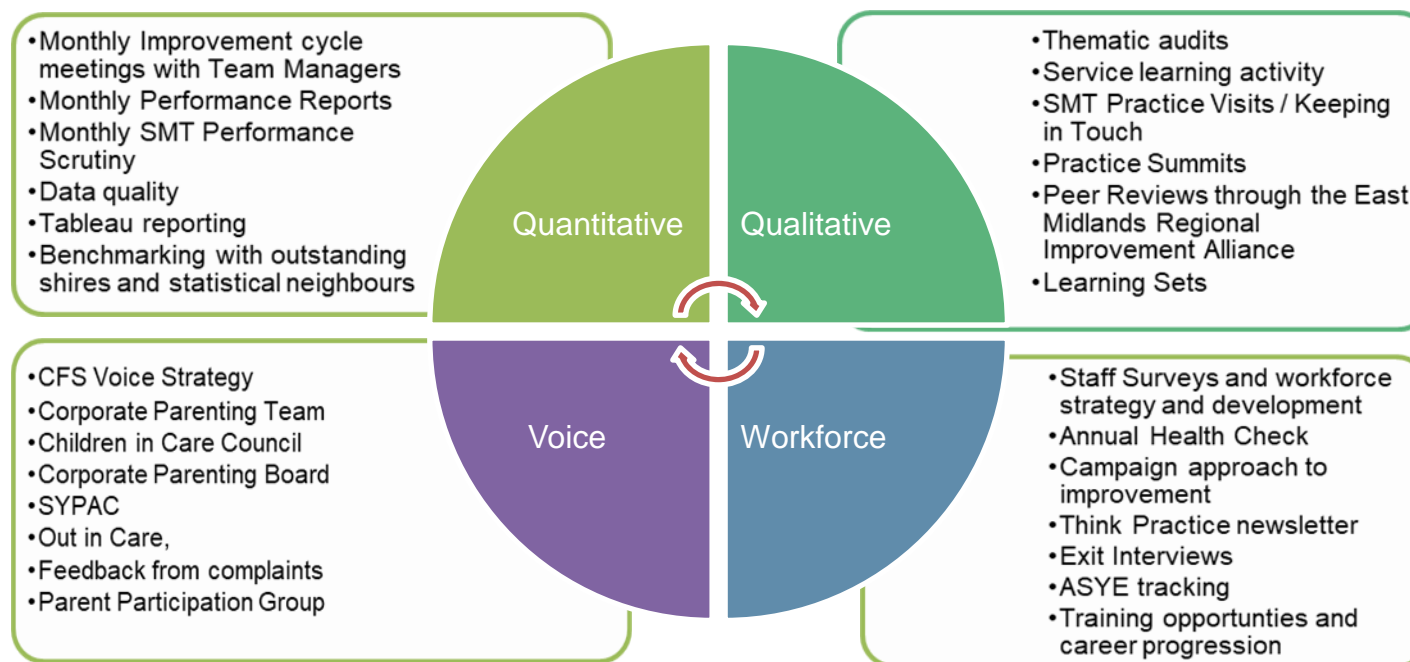
The only sensible measure of how well the system is performing is the measure of how effectively it is helping children, young people and their families (Munro, 2011)

Quality assurance is the systemic 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 everyday activity for practitioners and managers. This is based on a continuous learning and improvement cycle of analyse, plan, do and review.

Improvement activities and tools sit at the heart of the QAIF approach in collaboration with the Safeguarding and Performance Service and the Practice Excellence Team:

- Collate evidence for self-evaluation and thereby identify priorities for improvement;
- Quality assure services by testing self-evaluations;
- Improvement activity
- Aligned Improvement plans are monitored for impact on outcomes.

The department currently has a suite and cycle of improvement activities which fit into four quadrants (see below):



Quantitative (Data)

Tableau

Performance reporting has been developed to show if targets are being met on key areas of activity so that action can be taken to prevent essential practice elements being missed, e.g. it will show when a statutory visit is due to a child or young person. It will also show what the performance has been in relation to practice retrospectively over a period of time. Reports will allow performance to be measured by Service, Team and at an individual practitioner level and over time can demonstrate trends and impact of improvement work where performance has changed including targeted improvement achieved.

Tableau reports should form part of routine managerial oversight to performance and should be viewed at least weekly by Service Managers and Team Managers and data used to inform targeted action within service areas and teams.

Front line practitioners should access Tableau reports to explore their individual performance in respect of case management so that key targets are met routinely. Data reporting can be used by managers to explore performance at a team level in Team meetings and use supervision to explore practitioner's performance as part of both case work and individual development.

Managers should be using data to support management oversight generally and quality assure effective case management and decision making; Supervision and APR's should be seen as an integral part of the improvement cycle with a focus by managers and staff on improved outcomes for children and young people.

Performance and Improvement Cycles

All Service Managers chair improvement cycle meetings, providing operational challenge against performance and targets for all their teams. All team managers and Service managers attend to look at what the data is telling us, monitor progress and unblock obstacles to improvement. A Service Manager template is completed at this meeting and feedback to the Head of Service via a monthly meeting. This is then shared in SMT via HoS. The Transformation team support these meetings by providing dashboards, completing the action log and feeding in messages / focus areas from SMT.

The Senior Management Team (SMT) is accountable for performance management and will consider a monthly presentation of improvement cycle activity at SMT performance meetings to explore specific trends and thematic messages in respect of service wide performance with specific reference to the Continuous Improvement Plan and evidence to support progress in key practice areas. Performance data is also benchmarked against our statistical neighbours and Ofsted rated outstanding 'shire' local authorities. Each Head of Service will be able to interpret data relating to their own service area and to lead activity to response to emerging trends and cross service themes where gaps are

identified or to recognize areas of strength. This analysis may inform both service-learning activity and wider ad-hoc learning to consider areas of specific action required to understand changes and inform improvement.

The focus on managers is driven by leadership requirements to champion continuous improvement, implement improvement activities and deliver the improvements identified in the Continuous Improvement Plan; service delivery plans should be actively reviewed in service areas. Continuous improvement should be viewed across the whole journey of the child and should not be limited to the area of service delivered by individual managers and staff.

Qualitative (Data)

Key Principles & Parameters

- All quality assurance work should aspire to be collaborative in nature (e.g. warm audits)
- Quality assurance should be seen as a learning process that assists workers to critically think through their own work and grow their learning and skills.
- Wherever possible auditors should routinely contact family members/carers and children to take feedback on the work completed. This can be a phone call or a standard feedback questionnaire. If this is not included the rationale for not doing so should be included on the audit report.

Thematic Audits

All Childrens Social Care Managers will undertake one cross service themed audit per quarter. Topics will be agreed by the Assistant Director and Senior Management Team and are likely to be linked to the Ofsted schedule of ILACS Inspections, JTAI themes, regional work or the Continuous Improvement plan. Audit templates will be developed and provided by QAiT and Practice Excellence Teams so that there is consistency across the service. Audits will include both measures against the key theme but also against standard practice standards and compliance measures. Each thematic audit will have a scoping period of 6 months. Auditors are asked to include in their audit findings any significant events outside the scoping period which may be impacting on current work. All audits will be completed collaboratively 'warm audits', giving workers an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the work and share best practice.

Service learning

In total each Team Managers and Service Managers will undertake 10 pieces of service learning activity each year. This will include 4 Thematic Audits per year, 2 service learning exercises supported by QAiT (Health Check and Supervision) and other pieces of work determined by HoS – this can be individual or group pieces of improvement work. Heads of Service will undertake at least two improvement activities per quarter. Each service area will complete an annual Service Learning Framework identifying the themes and Quality Assurance Activity which will be undertaken

throughout the year. This will be aligned with the Continuous Improvement Plan and key service performance measures linked to outcomes. Additional ad-hoc activity will be undertaken to evidence or dispute hypotheses about emerging patterns or trends.

QAiT will quality assure the Service Learning Framework for each service to ensure alignment with the Continuous Improvement Plan and these will be overseen by SMT at the start of the learning cycle.

Findings from any improvement activity will be routinely fed back to practitioners on both an individual level via supervision and to teams collectively. The QAiT team utilise seven-minute briefing messages to provide succinct messages on improvement activity and other relevant areas to staff and teams across the department. Responsibility for providing high quality feedback to support teams in reflecting on practice rests across all levels of management. All managers are required to submit improvement activity forms detailing any service learning and quality assurance activity they have undertaken so this can be collated centrally by the QAiT team. (QAiT@leics.gov.uk) via the Improvement Activity Feedback form [here](#) so that learning can be collated, and themes identified and linked to the Continuous Improvement plan in respect of outcomes being achieved.

An overview of service learning will form part of the monthly Performance SMT meeting so that impact of this work can be tracked and overseen by SMT. Every six months in QAiT will collate all learning activity and provide a thematic overview to SMT this will be presented in August and February of each year. Heads of Service will be accountable for the delivery of Service-Learning Framework as a means to deliver continuous improvement within their service areas.

Dip Sampling/Ad-hoc audit

QAiT, team managers or service managers will undertake a 'dip sampling' approach to check on aspects of practice or issues which occur through the year. This ad-hoc audit activity may be directed to specific service areas or undertaken across service areas where trends emerge. This approach may also be useful to identify aspects of practice which are good and which can be shared more widely.

Deep Dive

On occasion, the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care may commission a 'deep dive' review to explore an emerging issue or a new area of concern. Depending on the issues, auditors will be identified from the Heads of Service, the Service Manager group and from the Practice Excellence Team. On the occasions where these deep dive audits are commissioned auditors will be exempt from other audit work in that month.

Practice Observations

All managers are routinely expected to observe their staff in practice and provide constructive feedback on what they observe and help to pinpoint how staff may need to develop. The improvement activity form can be used to record practice observations and all learning activity should be recorded and summarised on the Learning Activity Feedback [here](#). These should be returned to QAiT@leics.gov.uk

Keep in Touch with Front Line Practice Visits

The Director of Children's Services, the two Assistant Directors and the Lead Member for Children's Services routinely visit services and teams who work with children and families. They meet with practitioners and managers and also observe practice or meetings to ensure they fully understand the key issues in practice. This also enables direct contact with children/families. A Collaborative Learning activity could be included as part of the Keep in Touch Visit.

Practice Week

Twice a year the Director of Children's Services, Assistant Director, Heads of Service and Practice Excellence Team spend a week immersing themselves in practice. The focus of this activity is to observe practice and give staff an opportunity to showcase excellent practice and for Senior Leaders to engage with children and families to gather feedback.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

A central responsibility for the IRO's is quality assurance of care planning and review for our children in care and children subject to a child protection plan. The IRO has effective independent oversight of a child's case and their role is to ensure that the child's interests are protected throughout all stages of planning. The IRO will drive plans and quality of planning and intervention and will raise an informal or formal Quality Assurance Alert to challenge as appropriate when performance and practice concerns are identified. The IRO will also utilise the Quality Assurance Alert to highlight Good Practice recognising that this is an effective way to share learning and affect positive change in practice. Click [here](#) for link to QA process procedures.

The Service Manager for Safeguarding and Performance completes 6 monthly Quality Assurance Alert audits to highlight themes and patterns in the alerts being created both for concerns and good practice.

LADO

The LADO service embraces audit activity, which includes dip sampling within the service, completed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding and Performance, as well as the team completing peer audits. The LADO service also meet with Leicester City and Rutland LADO services, whereby the three Local Authorities will audit a sample of each others cases, linked to a specific them and provide feedback and learning. The LLR LADO process is well embedded and provides good learning opportunities for the service, considering the quality of intervention and bench mark decision making and practice to inform learning and development work.

How we measure and share learning - Closing the learning loop

Six monthly, QAiT will produce an overview of learning activity including impact and outcomes achieved from all Qualitative and Quantitative learning activity. This will provide SMT with an overarching view of improvement linked to the Continuous Improvement Plan.

Each set of audits or service learning may itself trigger learning responses at individual, team, service or departmental level to target improvement. Approached to learning may vary in relation to specific actions required.

All will consider the quality assurance outcomes and how we improve the quality of practice through shared learning enabling us to move beyond performance to improving quality.

Virtual Learning Sessions / Lunch & Learn sessions

Virtual learning sessions have been created to support broader engagement and effective sharing of learning, They are comprehensive, informative and relevant, yet importantly concise. These may be targeted at specific service areas or open to a general audience. Some may be delivered and lead by the Practice Excellence team others by Heads of Service or service manager level to specifically target improvement areas.

7 Minute Briefing

QAiT will produce a one page 7 Minute Briefing for all thematic audits, Continuous Improvement Plan and the SEF. This is to support accessible and effective sharing of learning. The 7 Minute Briefing can be used within Team Meetings and Pods to enable reflective discussion of learning and create service specific actions to improve practice.



Think- Practice Email

The mailbox is part of our drive to improve communication with front line practitioners. Messages from ThinkPractice Mailbox:

- 👉 Will be a comprehensive source of information which will be clearly focused on achieving outstanding practice.

- Will allow practitioners to search and locate messages – all from one source.
- Will provide regular themed information around important improvement topics and topics identified by the Practice Development Group that are relevant to practitioners
- Will provide links to new or updated procedures and a link to find these in the procedure manual and local resources
- Will provide opportunities for good practice to be circulated

Previous editions of the Think Practice Newsletter can be found [here](#)

Pods

Pods are regular weekly or fortnightly meetings of practitioners within a team to look at new cases, stuck cases or challenging cases. They can use two different styles:

- The Group Supervision Process focuses on the process of Signs of Safety without getting caught up in the detail of a case. It aims to build the skills in working through a case as a group. This style is good for perfecting writing Danger Statements and Safety Goals, and for stuck or challenging cases.
- The other style is Content Mapping, which is just another term for the three columns mapping that you would normally do with a family and other professional. It is an assessment of the case made through exploring the detailed evidence using skillful questions in a structured process. This style is good for practicing mapping skills and for new cases.
- Pods can also be used for shared learning and best practice to support closing the learning loop.

Regional Improvement Alliance

Leicestershire is part of a two year regional cycle of self-assessment and peer challenge working in partnership with our neighboring East Midlands local authorities.

These peer reviews aim to:

- To strengthen local improvement of self-evaluation and improvement plans through the scrutiny and challenge of peers
- To identify priority areas in which each LA could benefit from the support of others and areas in which they could offer such help
- And subsequently to formulate a regional arrangement through which this improvement is brokered and organised between the local authorities.

Extended SMT Peer Challenge

This is a new process starting from September 2022 where service areas and teams will be able to bring challenges, themes or issues to extended SMT and experience a 'peer review' process. It is expected this will be a 'safe space' where problems and issues can be openly discussed and members of extended SMT can provide appropriate challenge and scrutiny as a 'critical friend'.

Quality Assurance Schedule

Activity	Who	Frequency	Outcomes
Improvement Cycle Meetings Service specific performance meetings focusing on Tableau reporting and compliance.	QAiT Team Managers Service Managers	Monthly minimum	Key performance trends are understood and linked to service-learning activity. All operational managers own and take responsibility for using data and learning to improve outcomes for children
SMT Performance meeting Overview of improvement cycle meetings activity Overview of monthly performance report (Business intelligence)	Heads of Service Assistant Director	Monthly	SMT can understand and be accountable for performance and service learning - Identify themes, patterns and agree areas of development linked to CIP
Service Wide Thematic Audit Themes for Thematic Audits will be set for the year by SMT	Team Managers Service Managers Head of Service Assistant Director	Quarterly	All managers are accountable for thematic learning which will measure progress against the CIP, JTAI themes and OFSTED preparation. Quality of practice will be well understood and areas for further improvement identified for action. Will include an annual moderation style audit
Service Specific Learning Service learning Framework will set out themes quality assurance activity to	Team Managers Service Managers Heads of Service	Monthly	Managers within service areas will understand the quality of practice in their area and have opportunities to identify areas of strength and for development in line with the service plan and CIP

support hypotheses and learning.			
LRSCP Multi-Agency Audits Themes will be based on themes or patterns raised through the partnership or JTAI themes.	Heads of Service / Service Managers as appropriate to the theme.	Quarterly	To provide multi-agency perspective to learning as part of improvement planning.
Supervision compliance To identify the compliance of supervision in line with the supervision policy	QAiT	Monthly	Provide oversight of the frequency of supervision of all staff. To identify any areas of development and support.
Case load analysis	QAiT	Monthly	Provide SMT with overview and analysis of case loads enabling identification of pressure points and support needs.
Health Check	QAiT Team Managers	At least annually	Provide a clear picture of what is working well, how practice is developing and ensuring confidence in the impact of improvement work in some of our basic standards of case recording.
Supervision – quality	QAiT Team managers	Yearly	To understand the quality of supervision, whether actions are SMART, SV are driving the plan and actions are followed up / tracked.

Voice

Feedback from children who use services has to be a key element of quality assurance and improving our performance. Every worker and manager need to take account of what children, young people and their families tell us.

There are a number of ways currently across the department that we hear feedback from children, young people and their families:

- Children in Care Council
- Care Leavers Council
- SYPAC
- Childrens Rights and Participation Officers
- Child Protection Focus Group
- Using tools with children and families
- Complaints & compliments.
- Feedback from Child Protection Conferences and Review of Arrangements

Meaningful participation and active involvement of parents, carers, young people and children is central to our practice. This also extends to co-production with young people, and to young people having a voice on recruitment and selection panels for staff. Our values mean we must work openly and collaboratively with families – treating them with dignity and respect. We must give equal value to the assets and resources within families as it is these strengths and resources that will increase autonomy, increase families' skills, competence and readiness to deal with life's challenges.

We want the voice of children, young people, their parents and carers to be influencing and shaping everything we do and how we do it. We know that involving families who have experienced our care, in the design, development and evaluation of services, helps us improve and be aspirational. The Voice Strategy is an important document which sets out the different ways our services gather the views of children, young people and their families. The Voice Network Group and the Voice Strategic Group lead on ensuring that Voice is central to all of the work that we do and that learning is captured and shared.

Click [here](#) for link to our Voice Strategy

As part of our journey to becoming a trauma informed organisation, Leicestershire Childrens Social Care are setting up a parent participation group for parents/carers or extended family who have worked with us within the last 3 years, or are currently working with us, to share their experiences about their involvement with Child in Need, Child Protection and Looked After Child services in a safe environment. Participants would also have the opportunity to share their thoughts on what and how we do things here, as well as being involved in recruitment.

Workforce

The department has a Workforce Development Strategy. This sets out how we want to develop our workforce over the next three years taking into account our self-assessment as well as the findings of recent inspections or peer reviews. As an employer of social workers, the department must also work to fulfil the 8 key standards set by the government.

The standards are:

- Have in place a social work accountability framework informed by knowledge of good social work practice and the experience and expertise of service users, carers and practitioners.
- Use effective workforce planning systems to make sure that the right number of social workers, with the right level of skills and experience, are available to meet current and future service demands.
- Implement transparent systems to manage workload and case allocation in order to protect service users and practitioners.
- Make sure that social workers can do their jobs safely and have the practical tools and resources they need to practice effectively. Assess risks and take action to minimise and prevent them.
- Ensure that social workers have regular and appropriate social work supervision.
- Provide opportunities for continuing professional development, as well as access to research and practice guidance.
- Ensure social workers can maintain their professional registration.
- Establish effective partnerships with higher education institutions and other organisations to support the delivery of social work education and continuing professional development.

The Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework will continue to support the Recruitment and Retention Strategy as the primary vehicle for workforce development. This will support social workers and managers at all levels in order to evidence a strong, stable and well-informed professional workforce.

Learning from Exit interviews will be coordinated by Practice Excellence team and form part of our understanding of the quality of provision to the workforce. The outcome of these interviews will be collated 3 monthly by the Principal Social Worker and an overview analysis and quarterly reporting can be shared with SMT & DMT.

Governance, Roles and Responsibilities

Members of the Safeguarding and Performance Service and the Practice Excellence Team, provide the necessary infrastructure to coordinate and deliver the different components of QAIF and practice improvement. The team uses a variety of arrangements that includes virtual teams and networks to deliver improvement activities.

Improvement Activity and Impact is reported on within the 6 monthly overview report which will be shared with SMT and all managers at the Childcare Managers meeting and the SEF is updated annually. This contributes to strategic self-evaluation that is based on the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework.

In addition to team or service activity there are key forums and roles which have a defined challenge function and are charged with holding us to account for our work. Workers and managers may have to present in such forums.

These are:

- Overview and Scrutiny Panels.
- Member scrutiny is carried out through specific committees or panels including:
 - Children's Social Care
 - Children in Care
 - Child Protection.
- Senior Management Team and Departmental Management team – these leadership & management teams routinely review proposals, papers and reports prepared by managers across the service and monitor the impact of provision.
- Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children's Partnership – Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships (LSCP's) were established by the Children Act 2004 and updated in Working Together 2018, which gives a statutory responsibility to each locality to have this mechanism in place. LSCP's are now the key system in every locality of the country for organisations to come together to agree on how they will cooperate with one another to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The purpose of this partnership working is to hold each other to account and to ensure safeguarding children remains high on the agenda across their region.
- Roles which support practice improvement – we have specific roles and posts within Social Care which are specifically concerned with improving performance and checking the quality of provision. These include:
 - Independent Reviewing Officers
 - Agency Decision Maker


- Childrens Rights Officers
- Quality Assurance and Service Improvement Officers
- Safeguarding and Performance Service
- Practice Excellence Team
- Principal Social Worker.

Outcomes and Impact

The Safeguarding and Performance and Practice Excellence Teams, by working together with a range of teams and services, intends to deliver improved outcomes to children and families whilst enabling learning and growth within the organisation. Leadership alongside effective and integrated use of improvement tools will focus the department on delivering demonstrable improved outcomes.

The Safeguarding and Performance Team have oversight of the Continuous Improvement Plan and collate the learning from the quality assurance activity to evidence impact against all of the recommendations. This is reviewed regularly within Extended SMT and is also reported on to Overview and Scrutiny bi-annually.

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