

# QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Executive Summary



**Kent  
County  
Council**  
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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Quality Assurance Framework

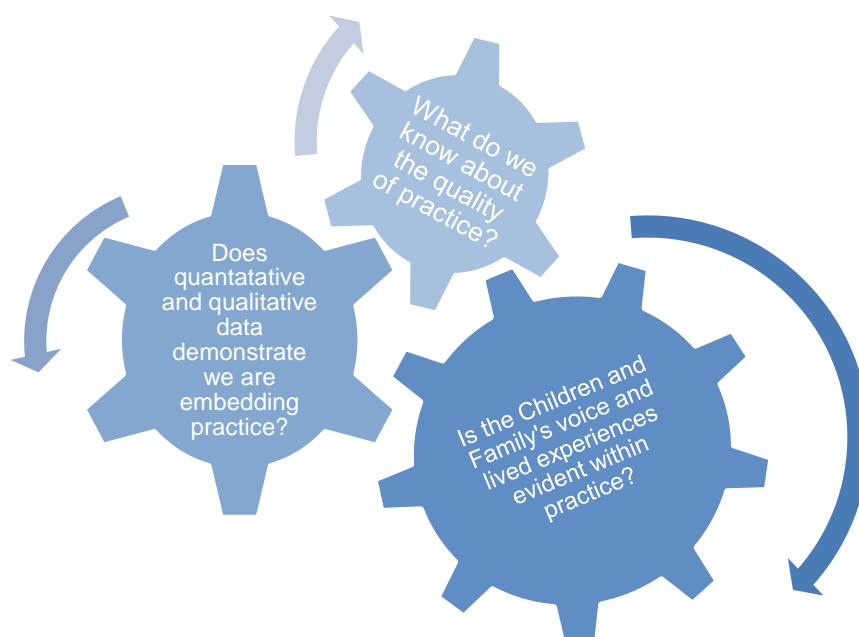
The Children Young People Education (CYPE) directorate underwent a strategic transformation in April 2019 to better align and integrate Open Access, Youth Justice, Early Help and Children's Social Work services. CYPE also includes Special Education Needs (SEN) and from September 2019 the Disabled Children's Services, 0-25 services.

A vital component of this framework is to lay the foundations within Kent County Council's values and to evolve Kent's many strengths by importing innovative ways of thinking and practice from peers, other councils and from evolutionary practice models. Kent's ambition is to achieve outstanding outcomes for children and families and to be able to export learning to fellow peers and other councils whilst making a valuable contribution towards research in practice.

## 1.2 Fundamentals of the Framework

The dangers of an auditing culture are in adopting a faceless approach which removes opportunities to have an open dialogue with effective challenge between critical friends. Kent observes Peer auditing and group discussions regarding practice must be the culture rather than becoming overwhelmed by the bureaucracy of a tick box culture. By focussing on analysing the impact of work and what needs to happen to achieve good outcomes for children and families, this creates greater staff engagement with stronger outcomes for children and families. Stakeholders will also experience greater satisfaction with improved coordination of multi-agency services.

This framework sets out all practitioners must consider the following questions when reviewing and analysing the impact of their work with children:

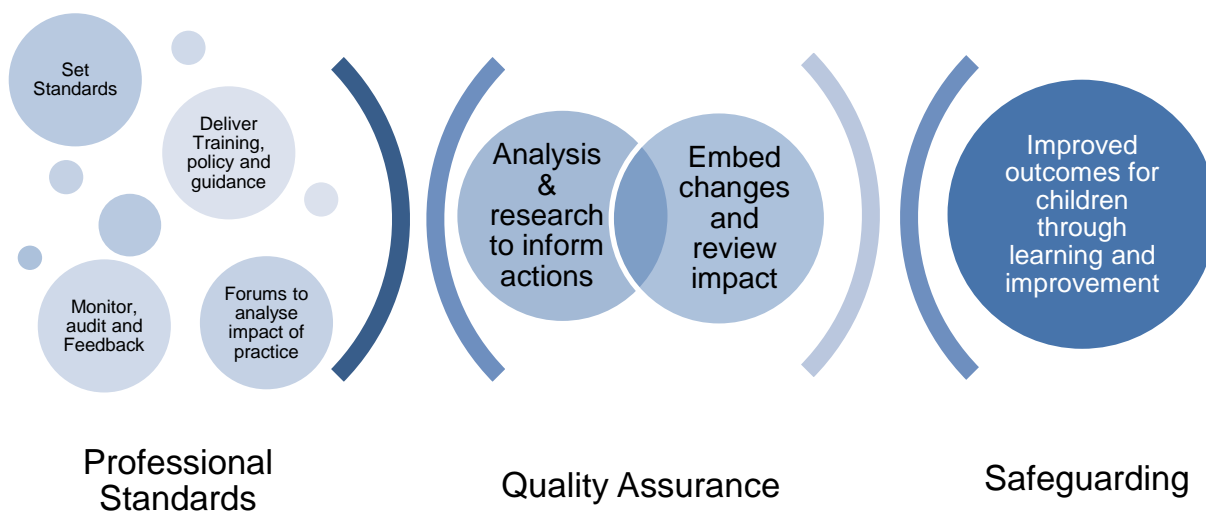


Answering the above three questions ensures Kent is mindful of the importance of reviewing the quality and impact of our own work, whilst identifying the strengths of our service delivery and understanding the challenges of embedding our framework. Embedding the framework is by far the greatest challenge, but by having honest conversations within day to day practice, as well as practice forums to review the impact of the framework and to identify solutions to overcome challenges, Kent is completing the reflective cycle to evolve our practice.

### 1.3 Building a learning culture

There are several steps to creating a transformative learning culture that will make Kent successful and develop excellence. The Quality Assurance Framework must acknowledge learning is on a continuum and not responsive within a culture of blame, nor by failing to understand the impact of our work, nor by over relying on compliance of work which may lose sight of the child’s lived experiences.

The following diagram presents the phases of merging learning and quality cultures to embed a mentality of “we’re all in this together”, whilst using open and honest communication to discuss accessible information, how Kent focusses on practice and not blaming individuals and how Kent views the impact of work as learning experiences and not successes or failures.

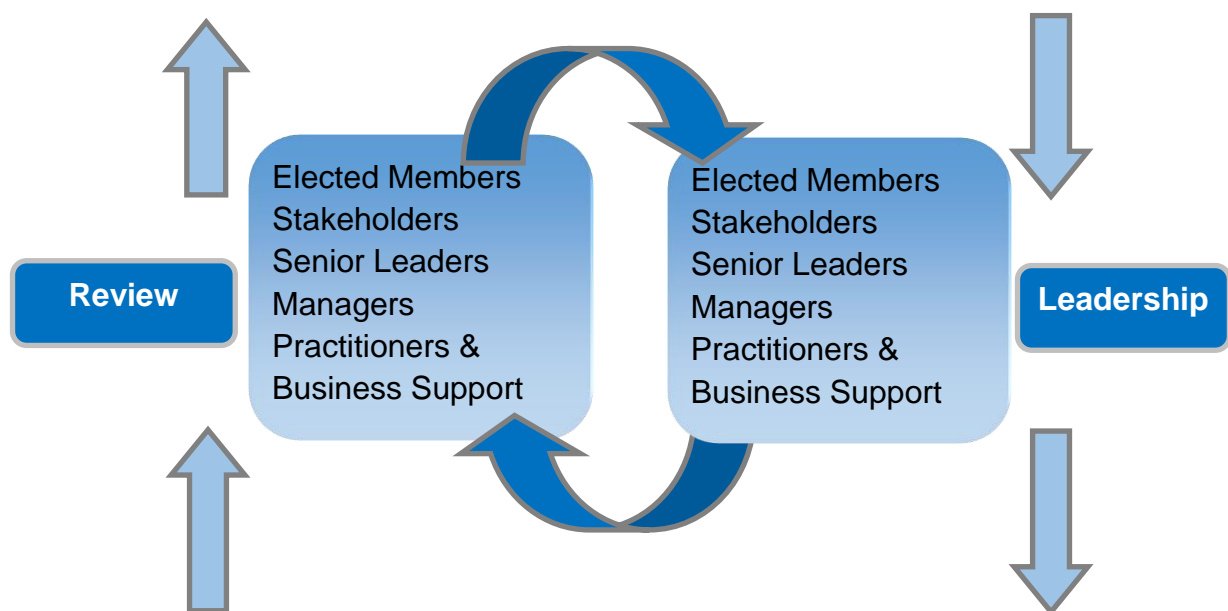


Repeating these phases will promote robust challenge of the processes in place and encourage stronger analysis of the impact of our working with children.

## 2. Quality Assurance Framework

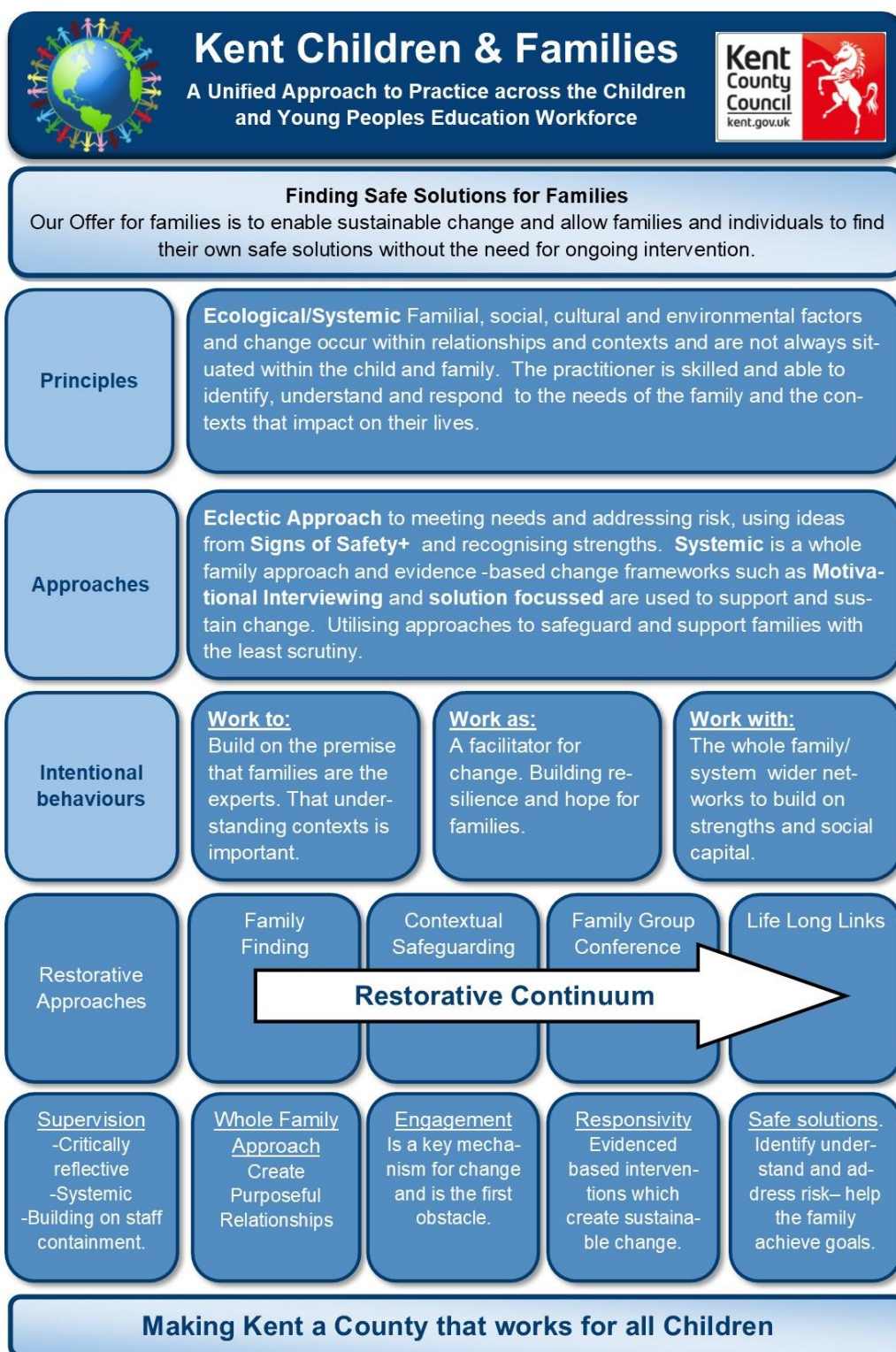
### 2.1 Responsibility for Quality Assurance

It is incredibly important the information available to strategic managers supports their decision making whilst their leadership does not become diluted but is experienced by children and families. Likewise, the quality of information strategic managers consider will be generated by practitioners whose autonomy and mastery must be respected and valued where those practitioners are able to make valued contributions for strategic managers to consider. Behaviours come from the top down and the quality of analysis and recommendations must be rooted from the bottom up to support implementation of effective strategy; two vital components which work in parallel and need to be in sync given they inform one another's influence. Therefore, Quality Assurance is everybody's responsibility and relies on ownership at all levels.



### 3. Models of Practice – “Finding safe solutions together”

Kent’s Practice Framework is an ecological and systemic approach based on the premise that familial, social, cultural and environmental factors and change occur within relationships and contexts and not always situated within the child and family. Kent uses a strengths-based and restorative approach that holds families and children at the centre. Practice is about how Kent functions as a system.



### 3.1 Practice Development Teams

The Practice Development Team, responsible to the Principal Social Worker, is made up of three key teams of Practice Development Officers who are committed, skilled practitioners with a clear understanding of the key principles of the practice framework. Each team will have a clear remit for the portfolio of practice across CYPE and operate in a unit/hub model, modelling the systemic approach of hypothesising and constantly questioning what works. The alignment of the unit was developed with a clear remit for practice delivery and coaching frontline staff. All teams contribute towards the creating, facilitating and delivery of practice. However, one team considers the learning from audits and thematic analysis, the other focuses on the research to address the gaps and build on identified strengths and the final team focuses on embedding practice; a fluid approach to practice quality and development.

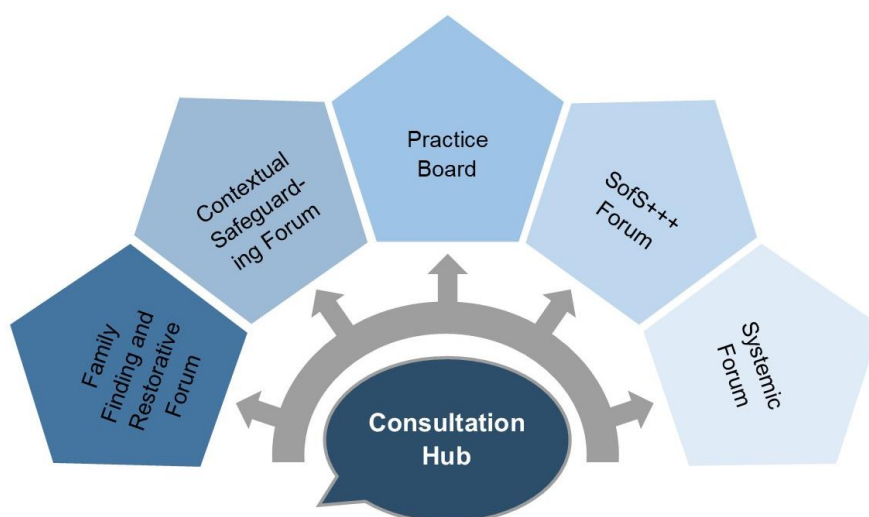
### 3.2 Practice Forums

A series of forums facilitated by Practice Officers are designed to act as best practice and sharing forums. The forums provide support to build the internal capacity of the organisation to sustain the model and encourage learning from best practice across the continuum. The membership will be from self-selecting and representatives of all parts of the service who are motivated to achieve and support change. The organic, grass roots nature of the forums mean there is real life experience 'on the ground' so they hold currency when making recommendations to peers and senior management. Forums will feed into a strategic practice board that drives workforce delivery.

Forums are made up of practitioners at all levels who are practice leaders in the four key areas of practice.

The forums will feed into the Practice Board whose primary function will be to steer the practice framework activity.

The Consultation hub is a central contact point for practitioners to share best practice and identify concern's relating to practice that are fed into the relevant forums for support and development work.



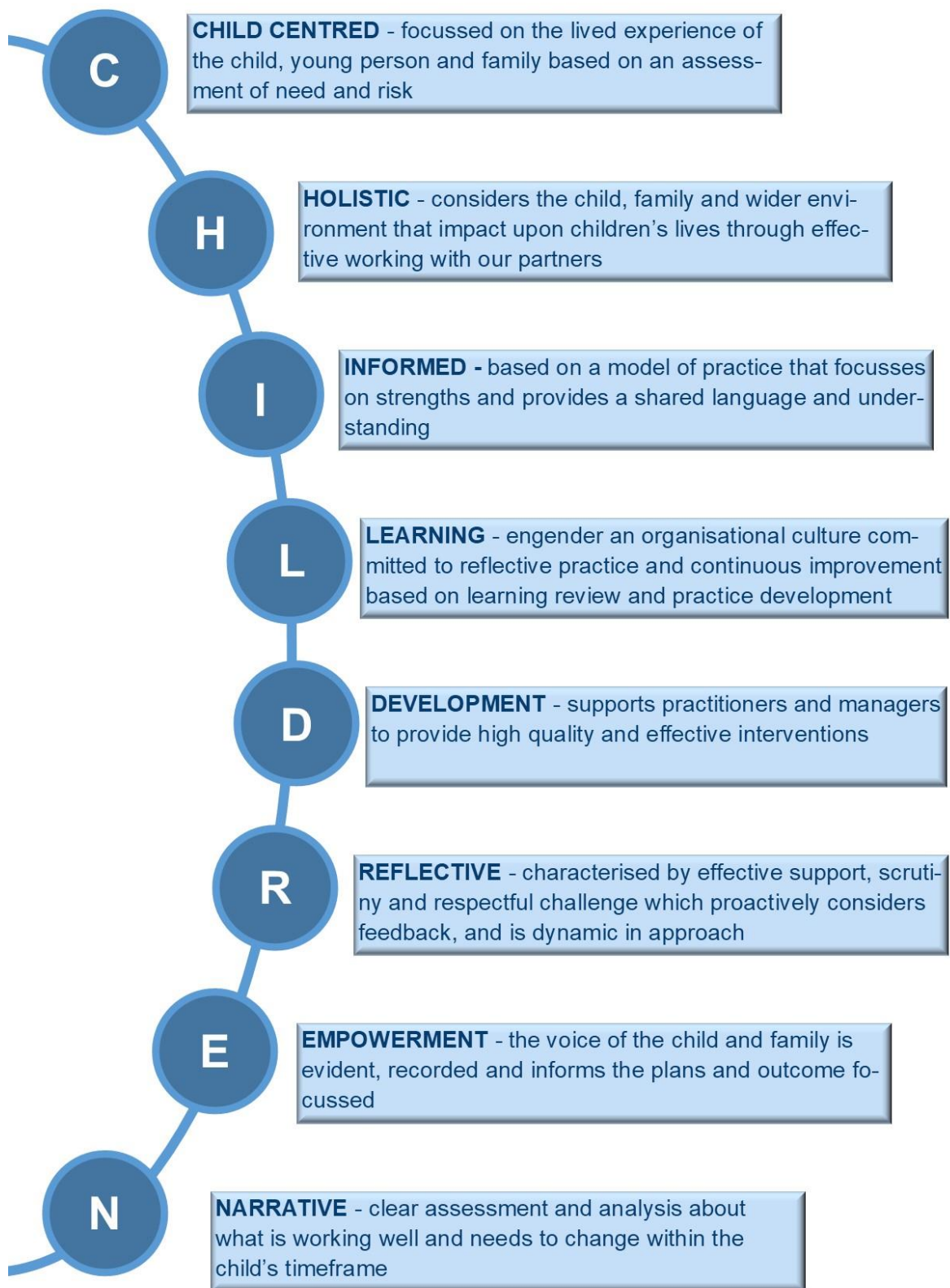
### 3.3 Table of Practice Development Forums

Information Source	Informing quality of practice	Frequency
<p>Practice Forums; Respond to the needs of frontline delivery. There will be a forum for each specific area of practice framework:</p> <p>Family finding/restorative</p> <p>Contextual Safeguarding</p> <p>Signs of Safety+++</p> <p>Systemic</p>	<p>The forums will develop learning activities and support for frontline staff, they will occur in each district and monitor findings from audits and feedback. These forums are about practice learning and improvement but also give frontline practitioners the opportunity to feedback on good practice and challenges.</p>	Monthly
Practice Board	<p>The practice board is a strategic board hosted by the Principal Social Worker across the County with strategic managers. It oversees the development of the practice framework and identifies good practice and new innovations. Feedback from practitioners is captured formally through the Social Work Health Check, Kent Staff Survey. Key messages are also captured in the bi-monthly audit/Learning and Improvement report where progress against agreed actions is tracked.</p>	Bi monthly
Consultation Hub	<p>The consultation hub sits within the Practice Development Team. It is a virtual space for frontline staff to seek guidance, share ideas and innovation and develop practice.</p>	N/A



## 4. Focus of the Framework- CHILDREN

This section identifies the mechanisms in place to focus on **CHILDREN**. The framework addresses the following areas:



## 4.1 Audits

The audit cycle for review, learning and practice improvement is set out in a tri-annual format. The four monthly cycle will provide an invaluable perspective on front line practice across all the Integrated Service areas. Effective audits can provide insight not only into the quality of recording but also into the quality of direct practice, the quality of management and support for the worker and, importantly, the views, experiences and impact for the child, young person and family.

Month 1	Practitioner audits within own Service	Universal audit tool will be completed across all Integrated Childrens Services that focuses on evidence and impact.
Month 2	Appreciative Inquiry	Appreciative inquiry is an important methodological lens and a creative approach used for all quality of practice work. This allows Integrated Children’s Services to build on identified strengths and good practice. This complements other aspects of quality assurance by asking questions that focus on what works and ideas for what could be better.
Month 3	Peer audits across areas	Provides an opportunity for managers to audit another area/service and to share audit findings across areas and disciplines to improve a consistent approach to what “good” looks like across the County and share learning.
Month 4	Triad audits	Link together two managers and a member of the Safeguarding, Professional Standards and Quality Assurance Unit where there is the greatest variance (from audit analysis) to have professional dialogue about the reasons for variance. The audit should explain any differences and identify any learning.

The practice framework will inform and weave through auditing to promote an outstanding quality of practice and that outcomes and impact for children, young people and families is measured avoiding a sole focus on process. Regular training in auditing and diagnostic will be offered. The Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Professional Standards Unit will consider and report to County DivMT on the findings of this tri-annual cycle of review, learning and practice improvement three times per year, highlighting key learning points and identifying actions for workforce development.

## 5. Key Priorities

### 5.1 Disabled Children and Young People 0-25, Special Education Needs/Health

The Quality Assurance of Disabled Children and Young People 0-25 services is aligned with that of SEN and Health. This is given each of these services face the same challenges where they essentially work with the very same children. However, SEN and Health work with a broader range of need and so they must be able to ask the same questions but consider how they fulfil their obligations across a wider range of the continuum of need.

There is a growing population of children with severe and profound disabilities and/or learning disability who need significant support to reach their full potential and remain safe. Some of this increase is due to medical advances which are leading to improved life expectancy for children who would previously not have survived or would have had a short life expectancy.

The emphasis for the Disabled Children and Young People (DCYP), SEN and Health services is to identify both family and local connections and resources to support the family in developing resilience to care for their child and offer them consistent and, in some cases, lifelong support. Kent will know it is fulfilling its role to vulnerable children and young people, experiencing any level of disability, by robustly reviewing local offers, making these offers visible to children, young people and families and understanding the impact of those offers in developing resilience. Kent needs to support local providers of services to children and young people in understanding their responsibility to be inclusive of disabled children and young people. Kent will know it is effective in its role to vulnerable families when there is a strong enough local offer which can meet their needs without necessarily requiring support from specialist Social Care, Health or Education services.

If disabled children and young people are observed to be at risk of harm, Kent is obligated to be creative in identifying ways to communicate with them to understand their world and how their needs may influence their understanding of their experiences. Therefore, Kent recognises its responsibility to advocate for vulnerable children whilst taking appropriate steps to safeguard them. Kent will know it is keeping children safe by evidencing the child's world through creative direct work whilst demonstrating a sensitive approach and understanding of how a child's needs may influence their interpretation of the world. Therefore, the disability will not be observed as a barrier to the child or become a label that masks what is happening to them or be an explanation to justify their presentation or the experiences they receive. Regardless of disability, Kent will remember the child is still a child and not defined by their disability or challenges.

## **5.2 The Role of Strategic Commissioning in Quality Assurance**

Strategic Commissioning, including the purchasing function of the Total Placement Service (TPS), provides a function to robustly manage the contractual terms of commissioned services with the external provider market. The approach taken is one of partnership and managing relationships day to day with strong contract management when the services provided fall below expected requirements and standards. Kent County Council sees Analysis, Evidence-Based Commissioning and Practice needs a critical balance in securing good outcomes for Children and Young People with the greatest value. Kent is determined to work collaboratively and effectively with service providers and partner agencies to improve the health, welfare, and educational outcomes of all Kent looked after children.

The relationship with Service Providers is changing as market factors are challenging the existing contractual landscape. With the emerging best practice from other Local Authorities Kent are embracing for our in-house services, and the improved integrated offer from our Social Work function, Strategic Commissioning has a responsibility to communicate our practice and commissioning intentions with the existing, emerging and future provider market. This will enable the provider market to adjust, up-skill, diversify and/or develop their services to meet the needs of the children and young people. Kent will engage the provider market to work with us to help identify and co-design the solutions with young people and Social Work professionals.

The TPS will ensure the initial referral information provided to service providers is of a good standard so they can make informed decisions as a first step in placement matching to meet need, manage risk and increase chances of longer-term stability. Services can be costed based on need and, at times, other market factors seen as a premium to secure placements. They also support the capture and collation of data to identify service gaps, training opportunities and information sharing needs and feed back to Commissioners and CYPE Senior Managers to collectively address these requirements.

Commissioners actively monitor quality of services through intelligence received from complaints, Safeguarding, Ofsted and Social Workers along with monitoring Key Performance Indicators, quality monitoring visits and formal contract management strategic meetings.

### **5.3 Corporate Parenting**

Kent's Corporate Parenting services must be leaders in modelling this responsibility to all adults who provide services, care and support towards children and young people in care. Kent needs to support communities and providers in delivering an inclusive model of support to our most vulnerable children and young people who are not able to safely remain within their family unit or network. Children and young people must be able to freely express themselves, whilst receiving responses from the adults around them, that we understand what they are saying and how they present their feelings through their actions and behaviours. Kent will adopt trauma informed, sensitive and thoughtful responses to children's past and present trauma.

Kent will know it is fulfilling its obligations to children in care by creatively finding ways to communicate with them whilst supporting relationships and compassion from peers, corporate siblings, with similar experiences where they support one another to develop resilience to overcome their challenges. Kent will know the children's families will be as best included within care planning and experience safe contact arrangements that will promote placement stability whilst establishing lifelong links to prepare our children and young people for adulthood. Kent will know they are establishing placement stability for children by understanding their children's needs and matching them with appropriate long-term options that can meet their needs throughout their majority, thus reducing the chances of placement breakdown and moves for our children in care. Kent will know it is successful in fulfilling our corporate parenting responsibility by improving placement stability, achieving the best academic and health outcomes whilst supporting our children in care in being as best included within local provisions of services where they can proudly celebrate being children in care.

### **5.4 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

Kent is a key gateway to Europe being one of the main points of entry into the UK with robust practice in identifying vulnerable children and young people to provide support and safety. Whilst Kent has robust procedures to identify children and young people at the first point of contact and ensure their safety, the Home Office is responsible for identifying the age and date of birth to inform Kent's responsibility. If the child or young person is under the age of 18, Kent will be responsible for providing immediate appropriate accommodation whilst meeting their health, educational and emotional wellbeing. Kent acts in the best interests of children and young people by ensuring best practice and completing a children and family assessment within 45 days from the point of contact or facilitating their transfer under the National Transfer Scheme whilst considering family reunification with other Local Authorities, where appropriate. Where asylum applications are being processed, Kent provides suitable accommodation to support community integration and access to health, education and services regarding emotional wellbeing.

Kent will know it is fulfilling obligations towards UASC by supporting their transfer from the point of contact to a place of safety within expected timescales, in respect of completing assessments, and transition to suitable community accommodation. Kent can also measure practice by successfully integrating UASC with our local communities, services and providers so they continue their journey and transition, regardless of where their future home may be.