

Quality Assurance Framework



LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL
SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
CHILDREN SOCIAL CARE AND EARLY HELP DIVISION
August 2021



1. Introduction

Leicester City Council's Social Care and Education department is committed to supporting children, young people, vulnerable adults and families to be safe, be independent, be ambitious for themselves, and live the best life they can.

Sitting within the Social Care and Education department, the Children's Social Care and Early Help division has worked hard to embrace and inhabit strength-based practice and a positive culture, reflecting by 5 goals for practice, underpinned by the Signs of Safety framework. The division strives to enable children to live with their families and aims only to intervene in children's and families' lives to give them the right level of support when they need it. Based on the Lundy model of participation, the workforce listens to and acts upon the views of young people and their families to inform their work. An emphasis is placed on only involving statutory services when absolutely necessary for establishing safe environments required to protect children.

The department's principles of engagement are:

- ✓ Understand the impact and value of what we do
- ✓ Intervene early, quickly and as effectively as possible
- ✓ Personalise our approach to fit the needs of the individual
- ✓ Ensure we give those we work with the best life opportunities
- ✓ Forge links with the community and encourage safe support networks
- ✓ Establish and maintain the trust and confidence of those who we work with, through strong partnerships

The practice goals across Children's Social Care and Early Help are:

- ✓ Children, adults and families who we work with will have a clear understanding of why we are involved, what change needs to happen and who will support them to do this.
- ✓ Families, children and young people will be supported to stay together, where safe to do so; developing plans and strategies with their support networks to support this to happen.
- ✓ Families and children where children are cared for will have a clear understanding of why they are looked after by the local authority and have had an opportunity to make sense of their experiences.
- ✓ Children, young people and care leavers will be supported and challenged to achieve their goals and have the building blocks for a successful adult life. They will have a clear understanding of who is there to support them to do so.
- ✓ The professional network will feel confident and supported in their work, with a consistent framework for practice, strengths and needs are recognised and space given for reflection, development and learning

2. Why is Quality Assurance important?

For the aspirations for children who experience our care and are supported by our early help and statutory services to be realized and their outcomes to be improved and achieved, it is important for arrangements to be in place to evaluate the standards our service deliveries.

Leicester City's Children Social Care and Early Help division has developed and implemented a range of Quality Assurance (QA) activities aimed to measure the local authority's ability to evidence the quality of services delivered to children and families.

Services within the Social Care and Early Help division undertaking audit activity are as follows:

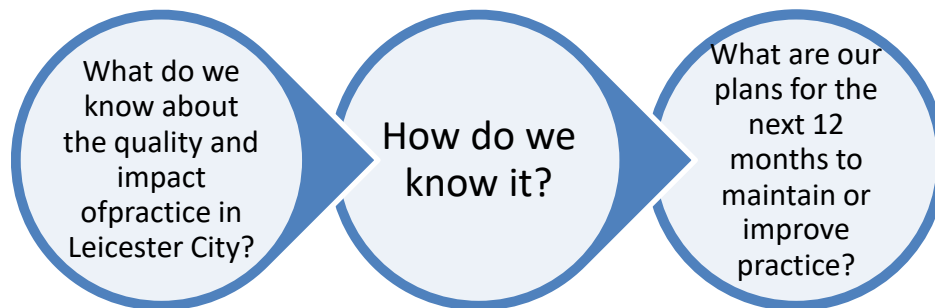
- Social Work Teams
 -  Child in Need
 -  Looked After Children
- Early Help and Prevention
 -  Children & Young People's Justice Service
 -  Children Centres and Family Support
 -  Targeted Youth Service
 -  Multisystem Therapy Service
- Safeguarding Unit
 -  Independent Chairs
 -  Rights and Participation Service
 -  Complaints and Access to Records
- Corporate Parenting
 -  Residential Homes
 -  Fostering and Adoption

3. External drivers

In January 2018 the new framework for the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) was launched by Ofsted promoting a more focussed approach *to assessing the quality and impact of social work practice for children and families. (Appendix 1)*

The core part of the ILACS looks to ensure that leaders maintain an accurate self-evaluation of practice, and that they build environments where good quality social work can flourish.

The self-evaluation of social care and early help practice should be drawn from local Quality Assurance activity and should answer three key questions:

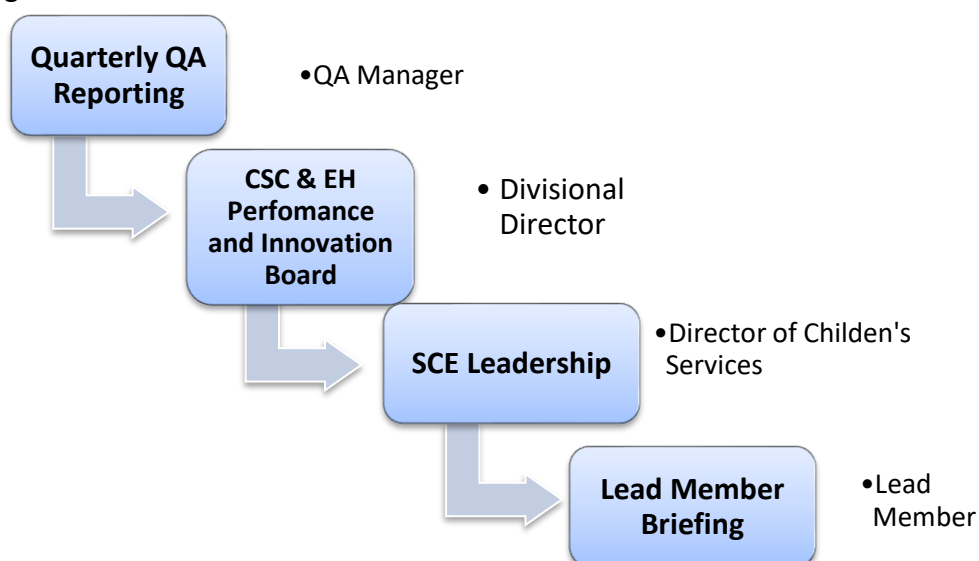


4. Overview: Contributors to effective Performance and Quality Assurance

There are a range of QA activities (to include quantitative and qualitative data) developed and due for implementation across the division aimed to evidence the quality of practice and service delivery.

4.1 Governance arrangements





A summary of the findings is collated by the QA Manager on monthly basis with the report being overseen by the Social Care and Early Help Performance and Innovation Board (Chaired by the Divisional Director); SCE leadership (chaired by DCS) and Lead member Briefing



In addition, quarterly QA presentations will be submitted for Scrutiny by the City mayor Executive Group and Education and Children's Scrutiny Commission.

4.2 Performance data:

Managers at all tiers have access to a range of live data sets on daily, weekly and monthly basis. The performance information is revised and tested via dip-sampling:

-  Daily Team and Service Managers' oversight;
-  Weekly Service performance meetings (Early Help and prevention, Social Work Teams and Safeguarding Unit);
-  Monthly Partners' Performance meetings led by the Service Manager for Duty and Advice and Single assessment Services.
-  Monthly performance book and ChAT (Head of Services; Divisional Director; Director of Children's Services, Lead member).

4.3 Bespoke QA activities undertaken in Leicester City

All our QA activities are undertaken during 10 months within an year cycle. The months of August and December are used to reflect and embed the learning from the QA and bespoke children and parental participation activities.

4.3.1 Audits

- ✓ Audit activity is key to QA in gaining an understanding of the quality and consistency of practice.
- ✓ In Leicester City, audits are a key component of all managers' roles. Our new audit process is promoting an approach whereby the practitioner and families are active participants in the audit process.
- ✓ We use performance data to identify themes for the audits in order to understand the practice behind the performance data. This is one way of understanding why performance has improved or declined, enabling our leadership team to make changes swiftly to improve the quality of practice.

4.3.2 Audits Moderations

As a local authority, we want to be assured that every manager within the division understands what 'good' looks like for service provisions to children and families and they apply this knowledge not just in the audit process but within their day to day operations/ functions.

Moderations pf case file audits are undertaken by Head of Services and Service Managers on monthly basis.

4.3.3 Practice Observations

In its broadest sense is another key feature of QA and is being undertaken on monthly basis and during 'Focused practice days'. This gives the opportunity for managers to observe reviews, conferences, team around the family reviews, children centre sessions, youth projects, groupwork programmes, one to one work with children and young people, direct work and other meetings. This enables management to identify if the links to wider improvement strategies are evident and understood by practitioners.

4.3.4 Monthly Spotlights

We use performance data to identify monthly thematic spotlights. Once a theme was agreed by the Performance and Quality Group and we will undertake relevant QA activities (i.e dip-sampling; bespoke audits etc) to gather further understanding and evidence.

Other service areas have bespoke focused themes informed by regulatory frameworks or key statutory requirements eg) Youth Offending, National Youth Work framework.

4.3.5 Focused practice days

The use of **Practice Days and guided conversation** adds to QA activity and offers opportunities for senior leaders to observe practice and make links between strategy and practice on the front line.

These days are focused opportunities for the senior managers to engage with front line staff and it can include audit activity, practice observation, hold sessions with practitioners, guided conversations etc. In Leicester City we have a 6-monthly plan for focused visits that included the involvement of Director of Children Services, Divisional Director, Heads of Service

4.3.5 Oversight from the Independent Chairs

There is a range of performance and quality related information and intelligence available within the system through the work and remits of the Safeguarding Unit. The quality assurance roles of the Independent Chairs are underpinned in statutory guidance and legislation and their findings are summarised within the quarterly reports.

4.3.6 External QA

- ✓ Regular peer and external reviews are built into our QA programme to give us a sense check on leadership, our services, our quality of practice and the impact we make. These reviews give us fresh perspectives to help reinforce our plans or to consider alternative ways in which to improve practice and outcomes for children and young people.

- ✓ An example of external reviews we commission:
 - Test practice on emerging themes/identified service areas
 - Local Government Association (LGA) Reviews;
- ✓ Other External and peer reviews include:
 - DfE advisor reviews
 - Annual Regional Alliance Peer Reviews
 - Youth Offending Service Peer Reviews
 - Leicester City Children's Services Improvement Board thematic reviews

The above list is not exhaustive – any other QA activities will be included and reflected in monthly QA reports.

4.3.7 Involving Service users

Involving children, young people and families in QA activity is the supports our understanding around the quality of service delivery. Our practice observation/audit process includes conversation/s with the family of a case that has been audited or practice observed. This requirement is built into the overall audit process, and the findings are shared alongside the learning from audits.

- ✓ Compliments and complaints are explored in detail, and learning is gathered and shared from them about improvements that can be made to the services provided.
- ✓ In addition, we have developed bespoke parents/ carers/ children feedback mechanisms within division which is underpinned by our participation strategy.

4.4 The importance of communication of QA activity

Effective communication of the findings of QA activity is important at both operational and strategic levels in the organisation and across the wider partnership. Openness and transparency about the findings from QA activity contributes to and enables a culture of shared learning and responsibility. There are a number of ways we deliver the learning from QA:

- ✚ The findings of individual audits/ practice observations both in terms of case specific actions, and wider system improvements. If cases have been audited, it is expected that any actions required feature on the child's LL record, and an effective management mechanism is in place to ensure that these actions are recorded, tracked and closed.
- ✚ Accessible quarterly QA and spotlights reports summarising the findings from the number of QA sources (MS Teams)
- ✚ Presentations delivered to the management team by Quality Assurance Manager, principal Social Worker and other leads
- ✚ Learning roadshows to team meetings to share the learning (Augusts and Decembers)
- ✚ The use of seven-minute briefings to convey key messages
- ✚ Learning and Success Reviews

Success/ Good Practice Reviews

Success / Good Practice Reviews are a new addition to our QA framework. Where work with children and families has been identified by a number of sources to have made a real difference, a success review is facilitated by the Principal Social Worker to celebrate the archived outcomes for the children, as well as our practitioners.

The aim of these reviews is to scrutinise and understand what it is that has made the positive difference and messages and learning for future practice both for the workers involved and the wider department. There is no expectation that everything will have been perfect / worked as intended but more that the practice and outcomes have been positive for the child. As part of these reviews all the workers involved are invited to give their perspective and to consider the impact of their actions / activity and that of the multi-agency group from the child /children and family's perspective.

Feedback will also be gained where possible from the child / family and their involvement considered in the review. The review uses the Signs of Safety framework and appreciative inquiry.

Learning Reviews

Learning reviews have been introduced in 2019. These are chaired by those independent of the operational decision making. These take place if a number of concerns are raised regarding the progression of a plan for a child, an audit identifies that there are significant inadequacies, or an incident occurs which requires greater scrutiny. This does not replace the on-going need to follow procedures or take any required actions.

The aim of the review is to identify

- What has worked well in terms of the support for the child / family, and the positive impact for the child,
- What we are worried about / the issues that have led to the case being escalated
- Any things that could /should have been done differently
- Any generalised learnings

This process is not designed to place the blame or criticise people's practice, but instead to identify how things could be done differently in the future.

The detailed learnings from both the Good Practice Reviews and Learning Reviews are shared with those involved, with more generalised learnings shared across the division via 7 minute briefings and/or workshops.

Being explicit about **training and development linked to QA** can support wider culture change as to how audit and QA is viewed by practitioners and help to understand the impact of it.

The ability to demonstrate how services have improved as a consequence of Quality Assurance is key to evidencing that effective processes are in place.

4.5 Performance and Innovation Board

The Performance and Innovation Board is the monthly, departmental scrutiny mechanism responsible for the review of findings from the QA activities. Its role included is to analyse performance information regarding Leicester City Children Social Care and prevention division; benchmarking against good and outstanding LAs; plan, scope and task the assurance processes; analyse findings from QA processes to include feedback from children, parents and partners ; explore ideas for innovation and further developments (Terms of Reference July 2021, Appendix 2)

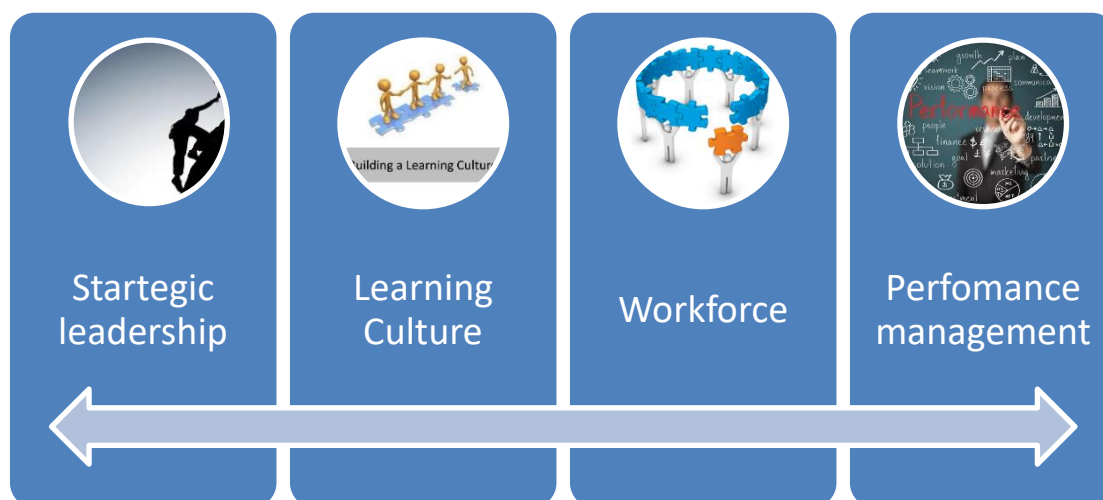
4.6 Making links to training and development

The **role of leaders in QA activity** is important at all levels across the organisation. Equal in importance to effectively communicating the findings from Quality Assurance activity is being explicit about the learning and development opportunities that have been generated.

Team Managers and Practice Leaders have a vital role to play in making the links from QA to individual training plans for their practitioners. Individual development plans for practitioners could be drawn from an understanding of their practice established through QA activity. Where explicit links to examples of strengths in practice are noted in personal development plans, alongside areas that have been identified that could improve. This can help to embed the overall understanding of the impact of QA activity at a personal level. As most authorities are moving towards practitioners being active participants in Quality Assurance, it seems appropriate that this is fully utilised in individual development plans.

4.7 Leadership – measure through the QA activity

A key component of the ILACS inspection is the impact of leaders on practice. There are four key points that are evaluated to inform this judgement, these are:



Underpinning all of the above is what we have learned through their QA activity, how accurate this is and how effective this is in improving the outcomes for children and young people.

- Our QA framework and training investments promote **a strong culture of continuous learning and improvement** within the local authority and across the partnership, informed by audits and links to training (*implementation of SoS*)
- **Good quality performance data** that is used effectively to identify potential strengths and weaknesses (*performance data available daily, monthly*)
- **Scrutiny and analysis of performance data** results in effective exploration of underlying practice issues and leads to effective action (Team meetings, Quality and performance meeting)
- **A wide-ranging quality assurance programme** with a variety of methods including group supervision, audit, multi-agency audits, external scrutiny and peer review.
- A range of **good-quality performance and quality assurance reports** with clear narrative explaining the findings and actions required to improve practice. This gives senior managers an effective line of sight to the quality of frontline (*Appendix 3*)

August 2021

Appendix 1

ILACS New inspection approach

The ILACS inspection places more emphasis on the quality of front-line social work and the impact of leaders on enabling good practice to thrive. Most of the time spent in an inspection is with the front-line workforce.

Inspectors are less likely to speak with Directors, Heads of Service and Service Managers; instead, judgements of leadership are formed based on what they see in practice and how the workforce is supported to deliver good quality social work.

Evidence is gathered from looking at the experiences of children and young people. This involves:

- having guided conversations with practitioners,
- reviewing cases and looking at children's records.
- take into account the starting point of the child and will look to understand the impact of the work that is being done with children and families.
- During the inspection they will not individually grade cases.

Sitting with practitioners is the bedrock of the ILACS inspection. Practitioners will be spoken with directly and should expect to have guided conversation about their cases. During an inspection these conversations are driven by a specific focus, inspectors will be evaluating practice and will be looking for evidence of improved outcomes for children.

These are things that can replicated locally:

- through audit;
- helping to prepare practitioners to articulate their cases;
- ensure that case recordings show their knowledge of children and the impact that they have;
- and help leaders to understand what practice looks like on the front line

Appendix 2



Leicester City Performance and Innovation Board

Extended Senior Managers Team

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Version: DRAFT v0.01

Version date: June 2021

Date terms of reference agreed:

Date of last review:

Aims and Purpose

The role of the Leicester City Performance and Innovation Board to:

- ✓ Analyse performance information regarding Leicester City Children Social Care and prevention division; benchmarking against good and outstanding LAs
- ✓ Plan, scope and task the assurance processes
- ✓ Analyse findings from QA processes to include feedback from children, parents and partners
- ✓ Explore ideas for innovation and further developments
- ✓ Provide scrutiny and oversight of the divisional QA framework

Membership

Membership of the Performance and Innovation Board (PIB) comprises the following representatives:

- ✓ Divisional Director Children Social Care and Prevention
- ✓ Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance
- ✓ Head of Early Help and Prevention Services
- ✓ Head of Social Work Teams
- ✓ Head of Corporate Parenting
- ✓ Principal Social Worker
- ✓ Quality Assurance Manager
- ✓ All the Divisional Service Managers

Meeting arrangements

Frequency: Meetings of the PIB will take place monthly

Chairing: The PIB will be chaired by the Divisional Director Children Social Care and Prevention; in the Divisional Director's absence, Safeguarding HoS will deputise

Quoracy: At least one member from one of member of each service area


Location: Meetings will be held initially via the MS Teams

Support: Administration support for the PIB will be provided through the Business Support Team .

Governance

Powers of Delegation

The PIB has the following powers delegated from the Leadership Team:

-  To request assurance or additional performance information from the different areas of services

Decision making

The PIB will work towards unanimous agreement on decisions.

Reporting Arrangements

The PIB is part of the divisional QA framework and is responsible for overseeing the performance and QA activities undertaken by the Division (both internally and externally).

The findings will be summarised in a quarterly report and will include:

- ✓ Analysis and draft recommendations from assurance processes
- ✓ Analysis of performance information
- ✓ Progress on planning and implementation of multi-agency assurance processes

Roles & Responsibilities:

The role of the Chair

- ✓ Ensure that meetings are conducted with sufficient leadership to enable the group to meet its goals in line with the division 's core duties, 3-year plan and strategic objectives
- ✓ Support open and productive discussion and challenge
- ✓ Ensure any areas for focus are raised with the relevant service Managers and Head of Service
- ✓ Attend meetings as appropriate to represent the group

The role of Group Members

- ✓ Work in partnership and aim to improve outcomes for children living in Leicester
- ✓ Share information on time to take forward the work of the group
- ✓ Each service would populate their own services' performance analysis (using the attached templates)
- ✓ Scrutinise and analyse information provided to support the group in analysis and making recommendations
- ✓ Receive and provide challenge and support to other colleagues in a professional manner.

Review

The Terms of Reference for this group will be reviewed within 3 months.

Appendix 3

How QA is evident in leadership

