GROWING SAFETY

Leicestershire County Council

Children and Family Services

Growing Quality in Social Care

'When you work here in Leicestershire you are signing up to a shared vision and mission for local children and families'

The Road to Excellence

Welcome to new colleagues

Dear Colleague,

Welcome to Leicestershire County Council and congratulations on your appointment to the Children and Family Services Department. We are delighted that you are joining our experienced and committed workforce. You are now a member of a workforce that has a strong ethos of collaborative work with families, engaging them in building plans for change. We strongly believe that listening to the voice of children young people and their families is pivotal to creating sustained positive change and improving children's future life chances. Our evidence based model Signs of Safety underpins our practice and supports our ethos and value base.

As you start in Leicestershire you are part of a shared vision and mission for local children and families:

- ## The Vision
  Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people and their families

- ## The mission
  Children and young people in Leicestershire are safe and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities

To deliver our mission we believe that children and young people, their parents and their natural networks of support need to be at the centre of all aspects of our work. We do this by having a strong focus on practice that builds productive relationships, promotes the wellbeing and development of all children so that they can flourish with their families, and natural networks of support including schools and other settings. For a small number of children and young people when this is not possible and they need to be in the care of Leicestershire County Council, we will ensure they receive high quality care.

Whilst our vision is clear and we have made some good progress – we know we are not where we want to be yet. If we are to do our best for children, we must always question how things could be better. So our improvement journey is challenging but necessary. There is some excellent practice in Leicestershire and these are strong foundations which will help us grow. Following our Ofsted inspection in November 2016 we have developed a clear plan for improving further over the next 2-3 years. We call this 'the road to excellence' to match our ambition for children and young people. As a member of our team, your contribution to excellence is key. Our 'bottom line' for behaviour we expect to see on a daily basis is set out in this plan. We have also produced the highlights of this plan on one page which can be found here.

Safe and effective services depends on a healthy culture of support and challenge – we believe we need both aspects if we are to make progress. The guidance contained in this document will help in supporting us to create this kind of culture. Please make good use of it.
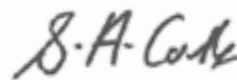
Whilst it is intended for new staff joining the department it should be used as a handbook for all existing practitioners and managers.

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1. Purpose of this document

We have called this document **'Growing Quality'**. The document is intended to support our collective ambition to improve the quality of services provided to children and families.

The document:

- **Sets out the vision and the values that must underpin practice**

- **Makes explicit the ethos and approach we expect our workforce to use in their work with children and families to improve children's outcomes**

- **Clearly articulates a set of quality statements for practice which we expect to see delivered across the workforce**

- **Describes the routine activity which is undertaken to ensure work is carried out to the highest quality.**

- **Describes the ways in which the learning from improvement work will be disseminated across teams and services.**

We intend this to both support new employees as they start work in the department as well as being a useful reference guide for all employees. We intend for this document to be a live document which can be updated as we develop our tools and resources further.

It sets out what we expect from you as well as what you can expect from your managers. The document will also signpost you to a number of key strategies and guidance documents which will also support you to deliver your best practice.

The guidance contained in this document is aimed at those practitioners who are working directly with children and families. There are a number of links embedded in the document which should help you to find further information in relation to your individual service area. Please also see the final chapter for a comprehensive list of links.

2. Our vision and values

The departmental **'Practice Framework'** is relevant for all those practitioners who work directly with children, young people and their families and with their wider networks of support. The framework describes **Signs of Safety** as the evidence based methodology which must underpin our work with families across the continuum of need. This approach is helping to ensure that all teams and services are working consistently as families move between teams. The practice framework has been formally endorsed by the Council's Cabinet in July 2016.

Implementation of our practice framework is a continuous learning and development cycle. The infinity loop diagram below illustrates that everything we do across the department matters. The quality of the service families receive is influenced very strongly by the organisation and its culture. We believe that our reforms will have the best chance of succeeding when we focus on all aspects of this loop.

2.1 Summary of our approach

- **Working to keep families safely together where ever possible:**
  Most children do best when they are with their family. In Leicestershire we want to work with families in ways that ensure more children can live safely within their own support networks and communities.

- We believe we must **build resilience and reduce risk in families** to bring about change in families who are often dealing with multiple disadvantage.

- **Securing Permanency** for children is a shared objective across all services and goes far beyond legal options. We recognise the significance of family relationships for children, their need for a sense of belonging and mutual connectivity and their need to make sense of their history, their present circumstances and their potential future. For children and young people who need to live with foster carers or in residential care, placement stability and placement choice is vital. Carers will be supported and receive training that enables them to meet that particular child's needs and prepares that child for permanence. We consider our carers to be part of our team.

- **Proportionate and tailored responses**
  This means providing the lowest level of intervention necessary to meet need, working with families to help them resolve their issues and support them to get back on track as quickly as possible.

- **Healthy Scepticism**
  Workers need to be **'risk aware'** and robustly monitor the changes that families and their networks put in place. We believe that almost all families are the experts on their own lives and most want the best for their children. However maintaining 'professional curiosity' is key and we will continue to check and challenge families so that children are safe, can achieve success and have stability in their lives.

- **Constructive working relationships are key to achieving lasting change**
  Using the Signs of Safety approach means that we always work with the child's wider family and their supportive networks and connections. We know that this helps families build lasting solutions and sustain the changes that are needed.

- We know from both national research and our own practice experience that the children living in families who are isolated with few or poor social networks are at higher risk of poor outcomes, of neglect, abuse, and poor mental health. Helping parents identify and seek support at the earliest point from within their neighbourhood or naturally occurring networks can help strengthen families and support parents when they are struggling or feel overwhelmed.

- Focus on outcomes: We want to ensure that all of our work with children, young people and families is effective in improving outcomes – for example children are healthy, children are safe, children are achieving their potential at nursery or in school.

3. Reflective practice

3.1 Introduction

The diagram below describes our approach to practice improvement and how we learn and respond – the learning loop.

```
        We set the
        standards
        for our work
                                    We develop
                                    tools to help us
                                    assess how
                                    well we are
We change                           meeting our
our practice,                       standards
our systems
and/or our
processes
                    We assess
                    and review
                    our practice
                    and agree
                    what needs
                    to change
```

Of course all practitioners are responsible and accountable for the quality of their own practice. The Social Work competency framework and the LRSCP competency framework are helpful in describing good practice.

However, in Leicestershire we are seeking to develop a set of local expectations about how we work with children and families regardless of profession or training. We believe this will help to improve the quality of care we provide as a department.

To this end we have developed a set of overarching quality statements to guide our practice and support greater consistency of care in our work with children and families across the department. In short these help us to:

- Measure the quality of the services provided and evidence when this is good
- Identify the areas we need to improve and understand how we could improve our services

Getting the basics right:
Our commitment to children, young people and their families

We expect all staff to make a commitment to all service users to get the basics right. These basics of care and respect underpin the quality statements set out in this document. They are:

- ✓ Everything we do will be to improve outcomes for your children.

- ✓ We will explain why we are working with you and what you can expect

- ✓ We will listen to you and those important to you to understand your experiences.

- ✓ We will work with agencies with your full knowledge wherever possible.

- ✓ However we will be unable to inform you if this places your child at risk.

- ✓ We will include you and take notice of your wishes and feelings in everything we do.

- ✓ We will communicate with you in the way that best meets your needs.

- ✓ We will use plain language and talk in a straightforward way with you and we will use an interpreter if they are needed to make sure everyone understands what is being said.

- ✓ We will do what we say we are going to do and do it on time

- ✓ We will be on time for meetings and appointments.

- ✓ We will keep you updated as things change

- ✓ We will give you copies of reports and plans

- ✓ We will keep safe all personal information about you that we have to have – and be clear with you how we are going to use it

- ✓ We will tell you how to make a complaint or give us a compliment

- ✓ We will always try to answer your questions or if we can't we will find someone who can

- ✓ We are committed to ensuring that there are no unplanned changes in practitioner.

- ✓ When we have to make changes these will be explained to you

- ✓ We understand that maintaining a consistent professional relationship will support good outcomes for children

3.2 Quality statements

The seven statements described below are focused on practice with children and families. They are informed by statutory guidance and regulation. They outline what is required for effective, professional and accountable practice.

STANDARD 1:

All social workers adhere to the relevant [standards of conduct, performance and ethics set out by the HCPC](#) and act consistently with these when faced with ethical dilemmas.

This standard is met when the social worker:
- Shows commitment to meeting professional standards, principles and practice.
- Demonstrates knowledge and takes responsibility for the impact of their own personal strengths, weaknesses and the way that their beliefs and values impact on their practice.

STANDARD 2:

The practitioner demonstrates they have and are developing the necessary skills and knowledge required to work effectively with children, young people, their families and their naturally occurring networks of support.

This standard is met when:
- Practitioners demonstrate understanding of good professional practice as outlined in the relevant skills framework (e.g. The Knowledge and Skills Framework for Social Workers)
- Practitioners understand the relevant legislative framework and show skilful and sensitive use of authority.
- Practitioners establish purposeful working relationships with children, young people and their families.
- Practitioners use the Signs of Safety methodology and can link this to a range of professional knowledge including theoretical frameworks or research findings.
- Practitioners can articulate the model, theory or research they are applying in practice and can demonstrate how and why they are applying that professional knowledge in their practice.
- Practitioners routinely reflect on their practice and maintain a stance of 'critical inquiry'. These reflections will be recorded on the child's file.
- Practitioners demonstrate ability to 'work with' families rather than 'doing for' or 'doing to' families.

That [Safeguarding Competencies](#) are evidenced and met.

STANDARD 3:

The practitioner demonstrates competence in relation to equality and diversity in their work with children, young people and families.

This standard is met when the practitioner:
- Creates honest and respectful relationships with families which are inclusive recognises and responds to diversity and is culturally sensitive
- Demonstrates that all assessments, plans and interventions reflect an understanding of the views, wishes and feelings of the parents, carers and family's wider network of support.
- Can work with young people and their parents/family to engage collaboratively and with sensitivity including on issues such as ethnicity, disability, sexuality, faith for example.
- Understands the impact of marginalisation, prejudice, and inequity on people's lives; can recognise and challenge discrimination.

- Can sensitively use tools in order to work effectively and inclusively.
- Critically reflects on how their own personal values, culture and beliefs may be impacting on those with whom they are working.
- Demonstrates the use of supervision and other development opportunities in practice.

STANDARD 4:

All children have a timely assessment which provides a clear picture of the child's daily lived experience as well as their needs, wishes and feelings.

This standard is met when the practitioner:
- Demonstrates their assessment work is holistic and inclusive
- Provides a good understanding of current need with underpinning evidence clearly articulated.
- Evidences high quality direct work with the child and siblings with routine use of research based tools to understand the child's world and which is reflected in the assessment conclusions.
- The work we do with children and families evidences a commitment to VOICE and that this is reflected in the assessment.
- That all children are observed within their world and that we utilise a range of skills to assess their needs.
- That all practice is underpinned by SOS principles and that the family are aware of what this means for them.
- Adopts an investigative and proactive approach in relation to information gathering and includes all key people.

STANDARD 5:

For all cases requiring assessment, plans and interventions are based on a clear analysis of the information available.

This standard is met when the practitioner:
- Seeks consent to undertake the assessment or explains in language the family can understand why consent is not required.
- Provides a clear analysis of needs which informs the service/intervention offered
- Actively uses a genogram to develop a full understanding of the family network and potential sources of support
- Uses an up to date chronology as part of their analysis
- Involves other teams and agencies in decision making and takes into account all risk factors.
- Identifies and clearly records all strengths and concerns.
- A safety plan is developed with the family that is written in language that they understand and is focussed on outcomes for the child.
- Develops a concrete and explicit contingency plan

STANDARD 6:

All assessed children will have a robust plan which is SMARTER. Where there are concerns relating to safeguarding concerns, the plan will need to address the seriousness of the abuse/maltreatment and sets out how the child will be kept safe.

This plan needs to include:
- A clear description of the danger seen by the professionals in simple clear language (Danger statements)
- The 'bottom line' or minimum expectations of how the plan will operate should be made explicit. For example, the requirement to have a safety network in place, the length of time the parents must comply with the plan for social care to be satisfied, a specific person never to be left alone with the child/ren etc.

- A words and pictures explanation should be created with the parents for them to share with child/ren to help explain the current situation and why services are involved.
- A clear description written in behavioural terms of what needs to happen in the family for the worries to be addressed and for the children to be safe. (Safety goals)
- Specific actions which will be taken by when and by who outlined within a plan that is meaningful and written using plain language.
- Make clear the contingency plan that will apply for particular triggers or stressors which may occur over the life of the plan – e.g. use of drugs or alcohol, deterioration in mental health, incidents of conflict or violence.
- Describe how the plan will be evaluated and reviewed.

STANDARD 7:

The worker will record and manage information appropriately. The worker is accountable and responsible for the accuracy and quality of the information they collect and keep on children and their families, and our carers.

This standard is met when the worker demonstrates that:
- All case recording is up to date and within agreed timescales.
  http://llrchildcare.proceduresonline.com/leicestershire/contents.html#case__manage
- Case recording is written in plain language (so that those accessing records in the future can easily understand their own story and what happened when and why).
- Case recording sets out the purpose of visits/contacts/ interventions.
- Case recording is written in a professional manner.
- Case recording makes transparent the rationale for all decisions made.
- They keep all information secure and manage sensitive information with care.
- They have completed mandatory annual training.
- Clients' views, explanations and third party information in clearly recorded.

3.3 Standards for the management of practice

Front line and middle managers (Grades 12 -15) in Social Care oversee the quality of care and support offered to the children, young people and their carers, with whom we are working and the progress they make in all aspects of their lives.

It is important therefore that these managers are clear on how they can support a culture of challenge and learning in their teams. We want all practice supervisors and managers to promote and model excellent practice and actively contribute to assurance of quality and improved performance.

There are three standards for good practice management specified below. They are applicable to those supervisors and managers responsible for care and education provided directly to children, young people and their families.

STANDARD 1:

All practice supervisors are accountable for making sure that practitioners understand and consistently meet the quality statements and practice standards described in this document. (In addition practice supervisors for social work should adhere to the standards set out in the knowledge and skills statements for practice supervisors DfE: 2015). This document can be found here.

This standard is met when:
- The practice supervisor demonstrates that cases contain evidence of regular and reflective supervision with practitioners, with clear focus on the child's life experience, needs, outcomes and the progress of the plan.

- All cases contain evidence of routine management oversight to ensure both quality and timeliness
- The supervisor demonstrates the routine use of audit and dip sampling to review work in the team and can demonstrate consistent follow through
- The supervisor uses direct observation of staff to ensure they have an in-depth understanding of workers' competencies.

STANDARD 2:

All supervisors have or are developing the necessary skills and knowledge required to deliver the departmental practice framework and the relevant policies and procedures governing work with children and families.
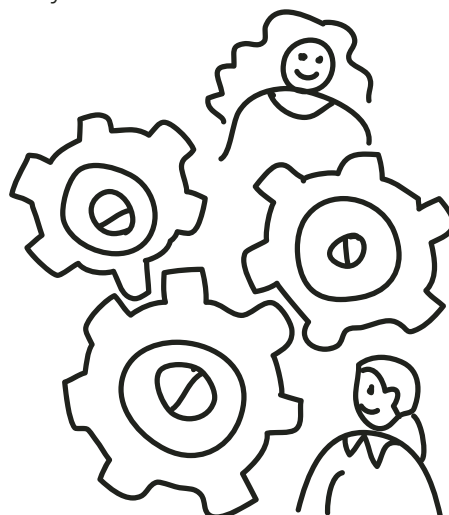
This standard is met when supervisors:
- Demonstrate a strong and clear focus on children's outcomes
- Demonstrate an understanding of how their teams are working within the departmental practice framework and can articulate the action they have taken to promote full alignment with the framework.
- Demonstrate their commitment to their own personal development and learning
- Demonstrate their knowledge and confidence in the Signs of Safety methodology
- Demonstrate their understanding of the key legislative and policy documents governing their area of work
- Adhere to the standards within the supervision policy

STANDARD 3:

Supervisors provide challenge as well as support to practitioners and actively contribute to the education and professional development of their staff.

This standard is met when supervisors:
- Can demonstrate their ability to develop critical and reflective thinking in staff and provide learning opportunities for continual professional development.
- Recognise and value the efforts and achievement of staff to build confidence in practice
- Show evidence of challenging practice which fails to meet the required standards
- Are able to draw on the evidence base to assist in decision making and risk management
- Show a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by staff on a day to day basis.
- Work with practitioners to understand what works well through the use of the SoS methodology and appreciative inquiry.
- Disseminate learning gained from practice elsewhere in the organisation and takes responsibility for the application of that learning in practice in order to drive improvement in their teams and services.
- Identify practice deficits, puts in place remedial action and ensures that key actions occur.

3.4 Standards for senior management oversight

STANDARD 1: Good governance

This standard is met when senior managers:
- Ensure that governance procedures are in place and that policies and practice are reviewed regularly. See Appendix 1 (table 1)
- Ensure there is clarity of responsibility and accountability for chief executive, the director, lead members, Assistant Directors , Heads of Service and operational staff.
- Have a clear line of sight to the frontline, which is enhanced by data and feedback,
- Have strong relationships with staff and partners
- Take decisive action when necessary, set clear and high expectations for staff and inspired them to perform well.
- Are motivational and give regular input about improving performance

STANDARD 2: Service culture and support

This standard is met when senior managers:
- Ensure that staff work in a professional environment that is conducive to delivering good professional practice. This includes having a staff culture that brings support, constructive challenge and professional rigour to daily practice.
- Are open, honest and have a collaborative approach to their work
- Use creative ways of quality assuring practice, managing complex cases and respond to calls for improvement
- Have an open culture when feedback from staff and managers is welcomed and acted on

STANDARD 3: Compliance

This standard is met when senior managers:
- Monitor compliance to ensure that children and young people are protected, receive appropriate services and achieve.

STANDARD 4: A learning organisation

This standard is met when senior managers:
- Enhance opportunities for all employees, carers and service users to have involvement in the organisation.
- Promote openness, creativity, and experimentation among all staff. They encourage members to acquire, process and share information, nurture innovation and provide the freedom to try new things, to risk failure and to learn from mistakes.
- Facilitate rapid acquisition, processing and sharing of rich, complex information which enables effective knowledge management.
- Recognises the provision and support of individual learning. The PDR (appraisal) is used to measure long-term performance and to promote the acquisition and sharing of new skills and knowledge.

4. Quality assurance and performance improvement

This chapter describes the different quality assurance and performance improvement activities. These activities are driven by our shared commitment to deliver the best services possible and make a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable children and their families.

4.1 The cycle of improvement

The cycle of improvement shown below, shows that improvement activity and quality assurance is continuous, is based on self-evaluation and reflective practice, and should be part of our everyday practice across the department.

Appendix A: QAIF Continuous Improvement Cycle

- **Formulate self-evaluation summary (SES)**
- **Utilise improvement tools and other evidence sources to inform SES**
- **Identify priorities for improvement**

Analyse

- **Identify strategies or actions that can lead to improvement**
- **Set SMART objectives with measures**
- **Agree improvement plan**

Plan

- **Assess impact of improvement plan and actions**
- **Assess through use of improvement tools and performance measures**
- **Refresh SES**

Review

- **Implement improvement plan and actions**
- **Monitor impact and take remedial action as necessary**

Do

There is a range of quality assurance activity and performance activity going on across all services. Some services have dedicated roles leading this work, in others this work is led by operational managers. The departmental **QAIT Team** (Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework) promotes and supports teams and services in their improvement activity and the analysis of their findings. There are a range of different tools which can be used by services. The main tools and approaches are described below.

i) Annual self-assessment

Each year Service Managers and Heads of Service are asked to assess where they are in relation to the progress made on key areas of performance. This helps us to identify what is working well, what we remain concerned about and how we want to tackle these issues going forward.

We use a 'story board' format to help us to distil information from the self assessment into a succinct format and describe the immediate next steps required by a team or service. This is reviewed by managers each quarter to help them monitor progress and keep focused on where we want to get to.

Our most recent departmental self assessment was completed in autumn 2016. This is also reviewed annually and is based on the assessment of services across the department.

ii) Service delivery plans

Delivery plans are developed by service managers in quarter 4 each year to set out their plans for the year ahead. This is informed by both their self evaluation and their story board/s. Delivery plans are reviewed and updated each quarter by Service Managers and Heads of Service in supervision.

iii) Practice standards

Services and teams within Social Care are developing specific standards or requirements relating to a specific aspect of practice. For example practice standards relating to timescales and quality for a piece of statutory work. During your induction, your manager should alert you to any standards you are required to fulfil as part of your role. As we develop these for different aspects of practice we will add these to the Local Resources section of the Tri-x procedure manual.

iv) Audit

The purpose of audit is to measure the extent to which standards set are being met in practice. Where practice falls below expected standards, remedial action is agreed. Following intervention a further audit will establish the extent to which the action taken was successful in driving improvements in care/practice.

The case file audit framework for Children's Social Care is based on all practitioners and managers undertaking reflective, collaborative audits (known as 'warm' audits) that identify both good practice and aspects where improvements can be made. The procedural and practice standards for specific aspects of work (e.g. assessment) form the basis for reviewing the extent to which practice is consistently meeting agreed standards. Audits are important as well in identifying learning needs and areas for skill development for teams.

4.2 Governance

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:

i) Overview and Scrutiny Panels

Member scrutiny is carried out through specific committees or panels including:
- Children's Social Care
- Children in Care
- Child Protection

ii) 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.

iii) Leicestershire & Rutland Local Safeguarding Children's Board

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) were established by the Children Act 2004 which gives a statutory responsibility to each locality to have this mechanism in place. LSCBs 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.

iv) 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
- Child Protection Conference Chairs
- CSC Quality Assurance Officers
- QAIF team
- Principal Social worker

v) Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)

The IRO has a statutory role to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are central and given full consideration. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extends the IRO's responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's review to monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's case. The intention is that these changes enable the IRO to have an effective independent oversight of the child's case and ensure that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process. IROs take opportunity to challenge where decisions are not deemed to be in a child's best interest and an effective IRO service should therefore enable the local authority to achieve improved outcomes for children. It is not the responsibility of the IRO to manage the case, supervise the social worker or devise the care plan.

In Leicestershire, IROs take the same quality assurance approach as regards children subject to child protection conferences and child protection plans. They chair child protection conferences and have oversight of child protection plans and the progress of such, challenging as appropriate when performance and practice concerns are identified.

vi) Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

The Agency Decision Maker is the person within a fostering service and an adoption agency who makes decisions on the basis of recommendations made by the Fostering Panel (in relation to a fostering service) and the Adoption Panel (in relation to an adoption agency). The Agency Decision Maker will take account of the Panel's recommendation before proceeding to make a decision. The Agency Decision Maker can choose to make a different decision or ask for further work to be completed before making a decision. The ADM also makes decisions about whether a child is suitable to be placed for adoption without reference to the Adoption Panel, before the Local Authority can put this to Court as the final Care Plan and issue an application for a Placement Order in relation to a specific child. In addition as the Nominated Officer for Fostering and Adoption, the ADM makes decisions about adopters' specific approval as foster carers without recourse to Fostering or Adoption Panels. The ADM is accountable directly to the Assistant Director.

4.3 Hearing the voices of children, young people and their families

Feedback from children who use services has to be a key element of quality assurance and improving our performance. Every worker and manager needs 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:

- Pop up events
- Mystery Shoppers
- Children in Care Council
- Childrens Rights and Participation Officers
- Using tools with children and families
- Complaints & compliments

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 and 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 do better.

The Participation Strategy is an important document which sets out the different ways our services gather the views of children, young people and their families and how you need to be involved in this aspect of work. The strategy and action plan can be found here.

4.4 Improving performance

Improving the performance of services is a pivotal managerial responsibility. However, all staff must understand their role in continuous improvement. We must keep track of how well we are improving children's lives.

i) 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 professionals. It is an assessment of the case made through exploring the detailed evidence using skilful questions in a structured process. This style is good for practicing mapping skills and for new cases.

POD Toolkit & Guidance: https://leicestershiretotara.learningpool.com/course/view.php?id=4443

ii) Data

Using data is one of the ways managers can identify areas of practice where they may need to take action. In Leicestershire we have two types of data which we ask managers to routinely use in their role:

Performance information: this is the data that tells us something about how the service is contributing to improving outcomes for children. Many of these (known as Key Performance Indicators)we use to report nationally and are made public so that local authorities can compare themselves against their statistical neighbours and against national rates.

Management information: is used by front line managers and service managers to keep oversight of the daily running of services. This information helps them to track children through their service and ensure that basic requirements are met.

Our interactive data tool is called Tableau. It provides live data and is easy for managers to drill down to the detail they will need to effectively manage. Managers can use this with staff to help practitioners understand what is working well and the progress that is being made.

Across the department there are regular meetings using data which help to hold managers to account for the performance of teams in their area. For example:

- DKLoE (Data Key Lines of Enquiry) meetings
- Monthly Child Care Managers Performance meetings

However data is only one way to help us improve our performance. Our departmental **Quality Assurance Improvement Framework - QAIF** has a number of tools which can support team managers and service managers to contribute to continuous improvement.

iii) Practice observation

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.

iii) Annual Conversation

An 'Annual Conversation' provides high-level challenge and support on specific themes or work areas The annual programme of conversations commissioned and overseen by the departmental management team

provides a forum that is particularly helpful in identifying and resolving system pressures or blockages adversely impacting on practice.

Further guidance on participating in Annual Conversations is available from the **QAIT** team.

iv) Practice Summits

Practice Summits are planned events which bring together colleagues across the department and may include partners from other agencies where appropriate. Topics are identified through the process of self assessment, peer reviews, inspection and audit activity. Summits are planned to help unpick 'stuck' issues collaboratively, especially when our data (either quantitative or qualitative) does not match what managers see on the ground or progress on improvement has stalled. Each year one of these summits will focus on the learning gained from Serious Case Reviews or Appreciative Inquires completed that year.

Further information on summits is available from the QAIF team.

v) 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[1] 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.

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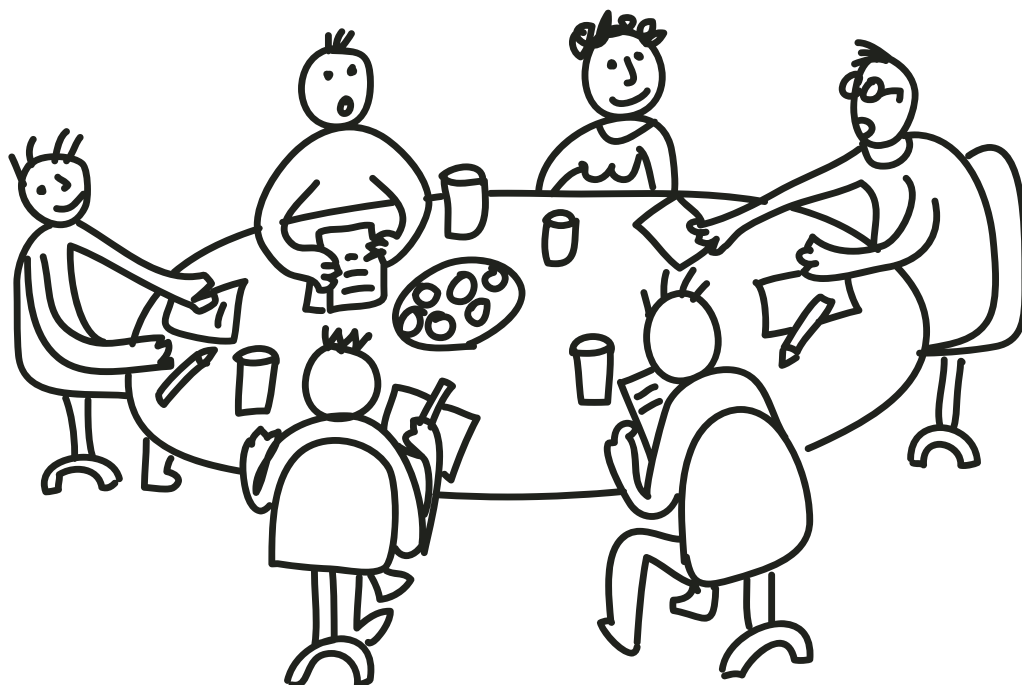
[1] The lead member for Children's services, as a member of the Council, has political responsibility for the leadership and effectiveness of our local services. This role has a support and challenge role to the Director of Children's Services and the senior leadership team.

5. Learning in Leicestershire

Within the Children & Family Services Department we are committed to becoming a learning organisation. We want our workforce to grow and develop their skills and confidence primarily by reflecting together on what works. Whilst we must understand what could be better, learn from our mistakes and understand what needs to be changed, our belief is that 'what we focus on grows'. Therefore we need to be as interested in things that go well and what people have done well to achieve this if we want to replicate good practice. We must develop our processes for disseminating learning –and ensuring this then influences our practice going forward. We call this ' closing the learning loop'. We will only make the progress we need to make if we all put our learning into action by doing something different.

5.1 Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

These are undertaken when a child dies and abuse or neglect is known or suspected or when a child is seriously harmed , and abuse or neglect is known or suspected and there are concerns about multi agency working. Learning from serious case reviews is published by the **Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership (LRSCP)** in a regular newsletter (Safeguarding Matters) on the **LRSCP** website

5.2 Appreciative inquiry

This is a learning approach that uses a reflective inquiry methodology to develop an analysis and draw out the learning. The process is a dialogue which involves all the professionals and identifies what went well and what could have been and will be better in the future. Although the approach is relatively new to Leicestershire it is fully congruent with the SoS methodology and we are keen to build our knowledge and expertise. Currently there is a 'virtual team' drawn from the workforce which undertakes approximately six inquiries annually.

5.3 Using meetings well

Managers set the frequency and nature of the team or service meetings. Whilst meetings may cover a wide range of issues, there is an expectation that **once per month they also need to provide a forum for learning** through the identification of good practice and supportive challenge. Whilst we would expect senior practitioners, team managers and service managers to lead these, we expect practitioners to be actively contributing to shared learning in these forums.

5.4 Research in Practice

As professionals in child and family work access to the evidence base and to good research is vital if we are to do our very best for those with whom we are working.

Research in Practice has a wealth of resources including tools, papers and webinars for example. All of these can be used individually and in team meetings and practice development sessions. Everyone who has an LCC email can register through that email address and create a password for easy access. Please follow this link: www.rip.org.uk/
As part of our subscription, we are entitled to two places at each event /workshop RIP run.

5.5 Workforce development

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. Appendix 1 (table 1) sets out our progress in delivering on these. 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 practise 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.

5.6 Formal learning

All learning opportunities are available to view on the Leicestershire Learning Hub. This is the central mechanism in Leicestershire which allows workers to book on to courses and access e-learning and mandatory training. . The Link to the Learning hub is here, you will need to register/log in with your payroll/employee number. All workers and managers are required to complete mandatory training.

In addition, the hub provides practitioners access to a number of tools and exemplars of good practice.

Over and above the training offer provided by Learning & Development, there is a quarterly learning event led by an external consultant on Signs of Safety practice. All those with a practice leadership role (i.e. senior practitioners, team managers and service managers and heads of service) are expected to attend alongside local practice champions.

During 2017 we have created a dedicated learning & development post. The post holder will be working with middle managers and leaders to further embed the Signs of Safety methodology.

In the wake of the new Children and Social Work Act (2017), there will be a number of changes to the social work profession including:

- The creation of a new organisation, Social Work England, to takeover from the HCPC as the profession's regulator.
- New powers for the education secretary to set 'improvement standards' for social workers, and introduce assessments for practitioners.

The assessment and accreditation of social workers will be a significant piece of work in Leicestershire as we review our progression routes and further develop our training offer to nurture and grow our talent.

Appendix 1: Table 1 - The Employer's Standards

Employer's Standards	Progress to date:
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.	• Practice Framework endorsed by Cabinet • 'Road to Excellence' plan in place • Growing Quality document including departmental quality standards • Range of procedural and practice standards in development for specific aspects of work • Robust participation strategy underpinned by voice of service users • Range of opportunities in place for practitioners to influence and shape practice quality. • Professional behaviours and attitudes are clearly set out and reinforced in key documents.
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.	• Review of resources undertaken in wake of Ofsted inspection. • Range of measures to ensure adequate capacity has been proposed to political leadership
Implement transparent systems to manage workload and case allocation in order to protect service users and practitioners	Implementation of tableau system now providing transparent and robust data to front line managers. Clear communication pathways in place between operational managers and senior leaders. Role of Principal Social Worker will provide ongoing challenge to AD and DCS.
Make sure that social workers can do their jobs safely and have the practical tools and resources they need to practise effectively. Assess risks and take action to minimise and prevent them	Clear practice framework in place underpinned by SoS methodology which has set of disciplines and tools to support effective practice. Approach endorsed by Ofsted during recent inspection. Additionally, Practice Development Group ensuring workers can flag any gaps or deficits where action needed. RiP membership gives access to good range of tools and resources. Managers are required to be explicit and consistent in the way decisions are taken and recorded.

Table continues ▶

Ensure that social workers have regular and appropriate social work supervision.	Policy and templates refreshed in 2016 and will be further reviewed in 2018. SMT routinely monitoring occurrence of supervision. Where there are actions required these will be recorded in the supervision record and be followed up by the following supervision. Quality of supervision and oversight is an area of concern and further development.
Provide opportunities for continuing professional development, as well as access to research and practice guidance.	Access to RiP for all staff. Range of practice guidance documents available. Additional posts to support practice development agreed. Learning & Development offer under review.
Ensure social workers can maintain their professional registration.	Managers expected to routinely ensure that workers are compliant with professional registration requirements. Future assessment and accreditation of social workers is an area for future development.
Establish effective partnerships with higher education institutions and other organisations to support the delivery of social work education and continuing professional development.	This work is under review.

6. Useful links and documents

The following list of documents are useful for both new and existing staff and provide more detail on aspects described in this document. Where electronic links are available these are included below.

At the current time most documents can be found on the local procedures section of the Tri-x site. All staff in Social Care can access these from **Mosaic**. I

- The Practice Framework

- Supervision Policy and templates

- 'The Road to Excellence ' Improvement plan on a page

- Participation Strategy and action plan

- LRSCP

- LRSCP procedures

- Quality Assurance Improvement Framework including Audit tools and Resources

- Workforce Development Strategy

- Learning Hub

- Research in Practice

- Practice Standards