

Practice Standards for Effective Intervention with Children and Families

September 2019

OUR VISION

Together for Children will improve the lives of children and their families, keep children safe from harm and ensure they have the opportunity to fulfil their potential

OUR VALUES

Child
Centred

Transparent

Creative

Respectful

GOOD PRACTICE

Introduction

All staff employed by Together For Children (TfC) or providing services on behalf of TfC, are held accountable for making sure that Practice Standards are met at all times.

Our Practice Standards are informed by statutory guidance and regulations. They are based on evidence about the elements of practice, which are most likely to lead to good-quality services and positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Our Practice Standards should be understood within the context of:

- a) The College of Social Work **Professional Capabilities Framework.**
- b) The Health and Care Professions Council **Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics.**
- c) The Department for Education's **Knowledge and Skills Statement for approved child and family practitioners.**

Together For Children recognises that working with children and families is one of the hardest and most complex tasks carried out within the public sector and requires practitioners to give of themselves both professionally and emotionally in a demanding environment, requiring a high level of emotional intelligence, resilience and fortitude.

The focus of good social work practice is unique and takes practitioners into the heart of the lives of children and their families. To carry out the task practitioners have a right to expect a high level of high-quality support from within the organisation in which they work. TfC uses a Signs of Safety practice model to build resilience within the family and address the core issues leading to difficulties in the family setting. The Signs of Safety practice model provides a framework for all interventions with children, young people and families.

Signs of Safety is a strengths based, solution focused approach to children's social work. It is a questioning model that recognises families' own expertise in their solutions and takes them on a safety planning journey to their own solutions. Using the model, we will:

Work to identify and build on family strengths: we will build on what works well and create the right environment.

Work as an agent for change by building purposeful and respectful relationships.

Work with the whole family and networks, we will build lasting family and community relationships.



To support our practitioners in their work TfC has produced a set of 10 overarching Practice Standards that define good practice and make explicit what is expected when providing a service to children, young people and families in Sunderland.

We have also developed supplementary practice guide to support the ten generic practice standards covering core activities and setting out against each of them standards which are routinely attained across a range of areas as follows:

1. Direct Work & the Voice of the Child
2. Strategy Meetings/Discussions
3. Initial Child Protection Conferences
4. Core Group Meetings
5. Chronologies
6. Case summaries
7. Looked After Reviews
8. Permanency Planning
9. Supervision

By setting out our standards we aim to:

- Increase the use of professional judgement, competence & self confidence amongst a practitioner group who are skilled in what they do congruent with a degree led profession.
- Support practice which is creative and disciplined.
- Ensure staff can be comfortable with ambiguity, evidence curiosity and ready to construct and test out findings as evidenced by analysis.
- Support practitioners to demonstrate confident humility who are both confident & knowledgeable and able to learn, reflect and change.
- Most importantly put children and their families at the heart of everything we do to improve their lived experiences and improve outcomes as a result.



Practice Standards

These standards define good practice and make explicit what is expected when providing a service to children, young people and families in Sunderland. The practice standards should be understood in conjunction the Signs of Safety workbook <https://sunderlandcitycouncil.sharepoint.com/sites/togetherforchildren/Pages/Signs-of-Safety.aspx> (accessible via SharePoint)

1. Risks to children will be identified, responded to and reduced in an effective and timely manner to make a difference to each individual child.
2. Children's assessments will include all relevant information to illustrate what it's like to be this child, will be up to date and involve the child, family and carers.
3. Children's plans will be bespoke, SMART, influenced by the views of the child, family and carers and develop in line with the child's journey.
4. Visits to children, families and carers will have a clear purpose and will progress the plan with appropriate use of direct work and tools.
5. Children's records will detail the child's lived experience and what they would like to be different, with evidence that our intervention is influenced by these views.
6. All aspects of children's identities and significant people in their lives will be routinely considered throughout their involvement with us.
7. All relevant professionals will be involved in the assessment, planning and review process with robust professional challenge in the interests of the child where appropriate.
8. Children in care will be in stable placements that meet their needs and take account of their wishes, will be supported to achieve their outcomes and prepared for independence.
9. Lifestory work will start as soon as the child becomes looked after.
10. Children's records will have evidence of effective management oversight and reflective supervision to drive progression of the case and professional development.
11. Case recording will be timely, clear and reflective of all work undertaken with evidence that our intervention has had a positive impact on the child's future outcomes.



Practice Standards in Detail

1. Risks to children will be identified, responded to and reduced in an effective and timely manner to make a difference to each individual child.

- Risk assessments include input and information from all professionals and partner agencies involved with the child and family.
- Risk assessments consider; Current Risks, Historical Risk, Complicating and Protecting Factors, and the Impact on the child.
- Actions to address risks and safeguard the child are put in place and recorded within timescales proportionate to the level of risk.
- Clear contingency plans are made if our initial response does not reduce the level of risk to the child.
- We understand and record the improved outcomes for the child as a result of managing the risk.
- We continuously review the risks to the child, but a change of circumstances or behaviour will trigger an immediate review.

2. Children's assessments will include all relevant information to illustrate what it's like to be this child, will be up to date and involve the child, family and carers.

Social Care Assessments

- Are child or young person focused and include their views and opinions.
- Draw on a full range of current and historical information.
- Include facts and opinions which are clearly distinguished.
- Identify the needs and level of risks to the child or young person, building on protective factors.
- Consider the parent/s ability to respond to meet those needs.
- Are shared with the child or young person and their parent/s or carer(s) so they can contribute to change.
- Are professional judgements that rely on information gathered and shared with other agencies.
- Clearly indicate the weighting given to pieces of information gathered
- Clearly show management oversight in the decision making.
- Involve information from a range of agencies involved with the child and family.
- Are signed and approved by a team manager.
- Are updated at least annually.
- Are updated each time a significant event occurs.

3. Children's plans will be bespoke, SMART, influenced by the views of the child, family and carers and developed in line with the child's journey.

SMART Plans

- Follow on from the analysis carried out during assessments
- Link individualised SMART actions to identified outcomes required.
- Take account of the cultural background and any disability of the child or young person.
- Are multi-agency in nature and/ or specific to each family member.
- Use resources effectively and delivered as agreed.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have effective contingency planning as risk does not remain static. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are re-evaluated between formal reviews to ensure outcomes are being achieved and are effective. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are reviewed regularly using information from the child or young person, parent/s and carers and other professionals involved. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be communicated to all those involved, understandable to the child or young person and produced with them, their parent/s or carers and other relevant agencies. They include an accurate reflection of agreed service intervention/ support and outcomes required. |

4. Visits to children, families and carers will have a clear purpose and will progress the plan with appropriate use of direct work and tools.

High Quality Visits

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the statutory visit should be clear and linked to the child's plan. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the child alone, unless not appropriate. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the behaviour and demeanour of non-verbal children to ascertain if they are safe and content. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the relationship between the child carer(s). |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at and consider the environment in which the child is living. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take prompt action to address any concern identified. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish between the carers' and child's opinions |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take into account ethnicity, age and disability of the child. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take place within timescales. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record the reason for the visit evidencing the child's lived experiences. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality visits are focused on ensuring that a child's living environment is safe and supportive and identify actions to be taken if a child or young person's needs are not being met. |

5. Children's records will detail the child's lived experience and what they would like to be different, with evidence that our intervention is influenced by these views.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people are central to our work and the assessments and planning process. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case recording details the child's lived experiences • where necessary within the family home. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children's records identify the ongoing outcomes for children and young people. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each child within the family is unique and separate to their siblings. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The voice of the child will be evident throughout case file recordings. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct work will be undertaken in line with the child's • age and stage of development. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young children are engaged in direct work and their own words captured in the assessments and plans. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Babies can be observed with their care giver and form part of the overall assessment including their responses to their environment. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of fathers, estranged parents and any partner living in the home is properly assessed and understood. |

6. All aspects of children's identities and significant people in their lives will be routinely considered throughout their involvement with us.

- The child's ethnicity and religion are captured as a key part of their identity.
- The child's identity and culture will form part of the direct work process and case recording.
- Family Group Conferences are recorded on the child's record.
- There is an accurate genogram on the child's record, which details the household for all cases open for less than three months and the full extended family for all children open to Children's Social Care for longer than three months.
- All significant family members are considered particularly those relatives the child indicates are important to them.
- Relatives who are unavailable are considered and their views sought where possible e.g. parents subject to custodial sentences.
- There is evidence that chronologies and genograms are used to understand the child's journey and relationships e.g. within assessments, intervention and supervision.

7. All relevant professionals will be involved in the assessment, planning and review process with robust professional challenge in the interests of the child where appropriate.

- Input and information is sought from all professionals and partner agencies involved with the child and family throughout the child's journey.
- The concerns of other professionals are listened to, clearly recorded and this information is used in the assessment.
- All relevant agencies are included in relevant meetings and receive a record of the decisions taken.

8. Children in care will be in stable placements that meet their needs and take account of their wishes, will be supported to achieve their outcomes and prepared for independence.

- Placement with siblings will be taken into account when planning a placement.
- When a child needs to come into our care placement with family will be considered and a Connected Person's Assessment completed if appropriate.
- When a child is placed all the information (including family history and a view on the vulnerability of the child) needed to care for the child is shared with the foster carer straight away and a placement meeting is held to agree how the placement will meet the child's needs.
- For older children/ young people the risk of going missing should be considered and a plan agreed to reduce the likelihood of this.
- Lifestory work will commence as soon as a child becomes looked after. Life story work is much more than just completing a book that outlines events in the life of a child or young person, it is a way of working that can help children separated from their birth families maintain a good sense of their life journey and identity. A wide range of people can contribute to the creation of a child's life story. For example, children and young people, foster carers, birth family members, social workers and teachers.

9. Children's records will have evidence of effective management oversight and reflective supervision to drive progression of the case and professional development.

- There is evidence of regular case supervision with critical reflection on the child's record.
- Supervision ensures that cases are progressed in an appropriate timescale.
- Management decisions form a 'golden thread'
- through 'case notes'.
- Management decisions demonstrate a 'guiding hand'
- of professional expertise on key case decisions.
- Management decisions are SMART.
- Management decisions are recorded proximate to the events they apply to in the case record.
- Management decisions for significant or complex actions (such as admission to care, removal of a child or safeguarding decision) include a summary of the key facts, professional opinions and rationale for the action proposed. This could include evidence of consideration of alternative options.
- Management decisions are clear and specific about the actions required of the case holding Social Worker and other staff members including any action the manager will take personally.
- Management decisions are made in consultation with Social Workers and other relevant staff (including Senior Managers) and this should be evidenced in case recording.
- Management decisions provide evidence of escalation for senior management and specialist advice where this is required due to high levels of complexity and risk (such as Legal Advice) or advice from the IRO or CP Chair.
- Management decisions comply with TfC's policy guidance and the guidance set out in TRiX.



10. Case recording will be timely, clear and reflective of all work undertaken with evidence that intervention has had a positive impact on the child's future outcomes.

- Case recording is up-to-date and reflects the purpose of interventions, and visits to the child.
- Case records are updated within 3 working days and urgent incidents or changes to the child's circumstances are recorded within 24 hours.
- Case records are clearly written, in a professional manner that is accessible to children and their families.
- Recording is specific to each child within the family.
- Case recording uses and evidences the child's spoken words and language presented in speech marks and a different colour to make this clear.
- Ensures that it reflects the individual needs of the child taking in to account their specific circumstances around culture and identity.
- Accurately reflects the ongoing assessment and planning for each children or/and young person.
- Is undertaken within statutory requirements around visiting and seeing children and young people.
- Takes full account of the developmental needs of young children and babies including observations of the interactions and responses to their care giver.
- Reflects the views of other professionals including their job role and involvement with the child and family.
- Evidences the use of interpreters where appropriate.
- Considers the ongoing outcomes for children and young people.
- Is part of the overall story and considers the child's lived experiences where necessary within the family home.
- Each case note is concise but coherent individually allowing clarity to anyone accessing the record.
- Case recording provides a 'trail' of the work undertaken with the child and family including; aims and objectives, options considered, reasons why activities/changes did not happen and when they will happen

PRACTICE GUIDE 1

Direct Work and the Voice of the Child

- Children and young people are central to our work and the assessments and planning process.
- Direct work and hearing the voice of the child is considered a key priority within our work.
- Each child within the family is unique and separate to their siblings.
- The voice of the child will be evident throughout case file recordings.
- Direct work will be undertaken in line with the child's age and stage of development.
- Young children can also be engaged in direct work and with their own words captured and recorded in the assessments and plans.
- Babies can be observed with their care giver and form part of the overall assessment including their responses to their environment.
- Observation is particularly pertinent for those children under five and particularly under one who are less able to verbalise how they feel -thus observing the child is critical in understanding how they are, how they feel, their attachments with caregivers and siblings and their development.
- Communicating effectively with children under five contributes to a comprehensive assessment of need and risk. Even very young children can communicate what is happening in their world and how this feels for them.
- Children and young people will be kept updated and informed of the planning for them and the reasons why.
- Children and young people will have information explained to them in a manner that they can understand.
- Direct work with children and young people will be evident throughout case file recordings including work they have completed.
- A range of tools will be used to communicate with children and young people that reflect their individual needs.
- The child's identity and culture will form part of the direct work process and case recording.
- Children and young people will understand their rights including representation and complaints.
- Direct work is undertaken in an environment that is safe for the child and young person.



PRACTICE GUIDE 2

Strategy Meetings/Discussions

- Should take place as soon as the concerns are identified that the child/young person may be at risk of significant harm.
- Where possible this should normally be a sit-down meeting involving a range of agencies.
- Should involve colleagues from Police, Health, Education and any other key agencies involve including adult based services.
- Should consider historical and current information.
- Considers the information from each individual agency.
- Is recorded in a timely manner with clear actions and timescales by each agency.
- Considers the needs of each individual child/young person within the family and their ongoing protection.
- Where it is not possible to have a meeting, it should involve discussions with each agency known to the child and family as part of the information gathering process.
- Clearly records the outcomes for each child and young person and any contingency planning.
- Clearly shows management input and oversight in the decision making and ongoing planning in a timely manner.
- Is child centred and rooted and underpinned in a clear risk analysis.



PRACTICE GUIDE 3

Child Protection Conferences

- Initial Child Protection Conferences are undertaken within 15 working days of the strategy meeting taking place.
- Review Child Protection Conferences take place:
 - 3 months from the ICPC
 - 6 monthly thereafter
- Involve the parent/s and a wide range of agencies involved with the child and family.
- Consider the attendance and participation of children and young people including the use of advocacy services to represent their needs.
- Ensure the conference report is shared with parent/s:
 - At least three working days before the Initial Child Protection Conference.
 - At least 5 working days before a Review Child Protection Conference
- Ensure that appropriate consideration has been given to the use of an interpreter.
- Identify the needs and level of risks to the child or young person, building on protective factors throughout the conference.
- Consider the parent/s ability to respond to meet those needs.
- Use a Signs of Safety approach in order to fully consider what is working well,
- Promotes engagement of parent/s and professionals throughout the conference.
- Ensures there is a clear risk analysis coming out of the conference.
- Identify an outcomes focussed plan for each child or young person.
- Identifies a contingency plan should the concerns escalate.



PRACTICE GUIDE 4

Core Group Meetings

- The first core group meeting should take place
 - within ten working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference and four weekly thereafter.
- Parents should be fully involved in the core group meetings including fathers.
- Children and young people should also contribute where possible to the core group meetings and their views clearly recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- At each core group meeting the child protection plan for each child should be fully considered and discussed and amended and fully updated to reflect the plan moving forward.
- The minutes and updated child protection plan should be reflected and evident on each child's file and fully circulated to core group members.
- The core group will fully consider the specific tasks of the core group members - the timescales for doing so and the outcomes for children and young people.
- The core group will consider and evaluate the assessment findings between core group meetings and the ongoing safety of the child.
- The core group will consider at the core group meeting prior to the next review conference if the child remains at risk of significant harm and the proposals for the child remaining on a child protection plan prior to the review conference.

PRACTICE GUIDE 5

Chronologies

High Quality chronologies

- Should be commenced at the beginning of our intervention
- Are purposeful and tell the child's story.
- Provide a simple list of key events and decisions in each child's life.
- Record events of significance including positives as well as difficulties in the child's life and neutral, factual information.
- Identify important themes and levels of risk for example Domestic Abuse or neglect.
- Are used by practitioners as an analytical tool to help them to understand the impact and risk, both immediate and cumulative, of events and changes on the child or young person's developmental progress.
- Assist in understanding key milestones in a case.
- Provide a way for a worker to quickly see a pattern of events, issues and interventions over

the family history for example transgenerational parenting styles

- Assist understanding of the case when transferring to a new worker.
- Are reviewed every month and updated each time a significant event, decision or milestone occurs.
- Should be quality assured by team managers as part of regular case supervision.

PRACTICE GUIDE 6

Case Summaries

- Provide quick access to information that summarises the key issues regarding the children and their family.
- Ensures clear information is available including details of:
 - Key arrangements, such as contact schedules.
 - Legal Status
 - Health
 - Education
 - Accommodation –
 - Finance Family and Social
 - Visiting Pattern
 - Family Composition
 - Pen Picture
 - Reason for Current Involvement
 - SW Intervention and current Plan
 - Involved Professionals
- Should be updated at least every three months or when there has been a significant event, whichever is the sooner.

PRACTICE GUIDE 7

Permanency Planning

- Permanency planning for children and young people commences as soon as they become Looked After.
- Permanency planning considers the individual needs of the child and young person.
- Lifestory work will commence as soon as a child becomes looked after.
- The Placement Planning Meeting must be held within 3 working days of placement or prior to the placement when it is pre-planned
- Initial Health Assessment to be initiated within 2 working days and completed within 20 days of the child being accommodated
- PEP to be completed within 20 working days of the placement (practitioner to consult with Virtual School), to be available at the first LAC review and subsequently updated before the LAC Review.
- Permanency planning is underpinned by a Family Group Conference at the earliest opportunity.
- By the 2nd Looked After review a permanency plan is in place.
- Placement Plan and Delegated Authority to be completed before or at the latest within 72 hours of the placement.
- Care Plan to be completed prior to placement, where the placement is planned. In an emergency placement situation, the Care Plan must be completed within 10 working days.
- Permanency planning fully considers the child/ young person's legal status in view of the care plan and case law.
- The assessments commence without delay, so decisions can be made in the child's timeframe.
- Assessments consider issues of reunification to parents where it is considered safe to do so.
- Permanency planning fully considers the range of options and Orders available to securing permanency including the use of Child Arrangements Orders, placement with extended family members, Special Guardianship, Adoption and reunification.
- Permanency planning considers the sibling relationships in the overall planning process.
- Permanency planning reflects the child's identity and cultural needs.
- Permanency planning draws and reflects current research.



PRACTICE GUIDE 8

Looked After Reviews

- The reviews are child focussed and where possible take place within the current placement.
- LAC review take place:
 - The Initial LAC review must take place within 20 working days of the start date of the placement.
 - Second LAC Reviews take place at four months (from the date the child became looked after)
 - LAC reviews then take place a minimum of 6 monthly thereafter
- The Initial LAC review social work report must be shared with parent/s:
 - At least three working days before the Initial LAC review.
 - At least 5 working days before any subsequent Review
- The review considers the relevance of the child's legal status linked to the current and proposed care plan and case law.
- The review is informed by an assessment of the circumstances underpinned by evidence from a range of factors.
- The review considers the child's holistic needs and including how the child's culture and identity needs are being met.
- The Looked After review involves the views of parent/s and carer/s and these are clearly established and reported.
- The child and young person is actively involved in the review and is seen by their IRO as part of the review process.
- The review fully considers issues around Advocacy, Independent Visitors and representation for the young person including legal advice.
- The review gives due consideration to the Pledge for Looked After children and young people.
- Escalation is followed up and followed through in line with the concerns emerging from the Review.
- The review fully considers issues of Permanency at the 2nd Review.
- The Review considers issues of vulnerabilities including concerns around Child Sexual Exploitation and missing or absent episodes.
- The review fully considers issues of contact including extended family members, siblings and significant others.
- For children and young people placed at a distance the Review considers how local services are meeting the needs of the child/young person.
- Reunification to birth family subject to assessment is considered within the review process including timescales.
- Outcomes are clear and identifiable and underpinned by high expectations for Looked After children and young people. The review fully considers the visiting arrangements for the child in line with the current plan and statutory guidance and local arrangements.

PRACTICE GUIDE 9

Supervision

- Is the subject of a supervision agreement signed and dated by both parties.
- Takes place monthly in line with the individuals job role and functions.
- Is the subject of an agenda agreed between the supervisee and supervisor.
- Fully considers issues of well-being, training and development and functioning within the team/service.
- Draws on strengths and areas for ongoing professional development using appreciative inquiry.
- Considers the individuals case load at each supervision session.
- Fully considers and reflects on actions from previous supervision.
- Uses elements of reflection on individual cases where possible.
- Involves challenge and support and high expectations.
- Is undertaken in a manner that promotes accountability.
- Is used as a forum to identify solutions.



Continual Improvement

Through adopting our Practice Standards and understanding ourselves through training, performance and audit we will embed a continual improvement cycle across the Children and Families Service to achieve improved outcomes for Children and Young People.

High quality of practice embedded throughout the service will drive improved practice outcomes which will be sustainable in the long term.

We will focus on:

Voice

The voice of the child and family is evident and informs plans and outcomes;

Quality

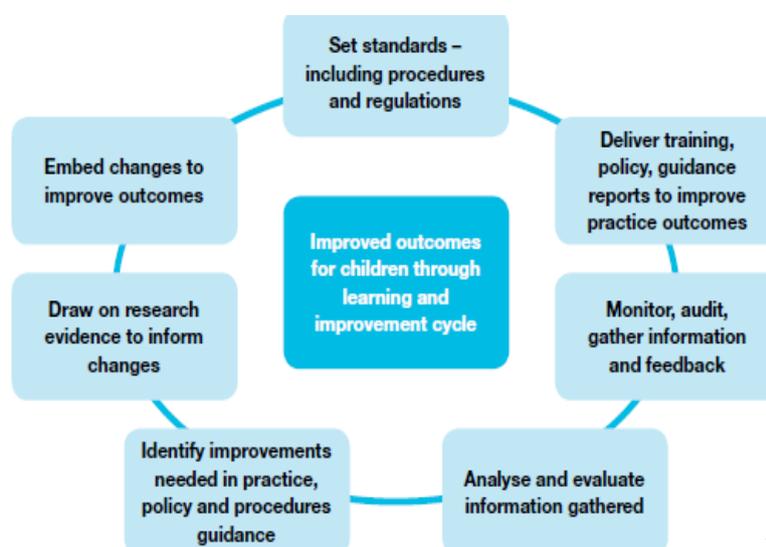
Quality of practice is high and enables achieving the best possible outcome for children;

Practice Outcomes

Data will demonstrate the outcomes delivered by team and identify areas of strength and risk.

This will ensure that we understand the quality of our practice and practice outcomes and have a clear delivery mechanism for building on strengths and responding to areas identified for improvement. We will clearly demonstrate that the voice of the child and family shapes the service we provide and is evidenced throughout practice.

The recently published Research in Practice paper 'Building a quality culture' states that 'quality assurance is often expressed as continual improvement' as outlined below:



The continual improvement cycle will achieve better outcomes for children and young people through:

- Ensuring all staff have a role to play in the improvement of practice and practice outcomes.
- A bottom up approach which will empower staff to bring effective challenge, the ability to inform practice and ownership to drive through improvements.
- Enabling regular review of strategies, policy and practice guidance to respond to issues, with all staff clear of the standards they are required to work to.
- Shaping our workforce development strategy based on recommendations from quality assurance activities.
- Ensuring all staff are clear on our practice standards and how this shapes improvement and outcomes.
- Delivering robust analysis will ensure full understanding of issues affecting practice and outcomes, recommendations and changes will be made from a position of being fully informed.
- Researching the sector and aim to learn from best practice to inform improvement in our practice.