



Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Framework

Children's Services - April 2021



Introduction

This Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Framework applies to all Buckinghamshire Council's Children's Services teams and is a multi-layered approach of quality assurance activity to deliver improved and sustained outcomes for the children and young people of Buckinghamshire. Our approach includes a range of quality assurance activity, including case file auditing, dip sampling, deep dive reviews, observations of practice 'check and challenge' whole service reviews, and visits to commissioned providers of services.

The aim of this framework is to deliver a service wide approach to quality assurance leading to continuous learning and improvement to ensure children and families are being supported in the right way at the right time and to understand the difference this has made. This means that learning must be embedded and evidenced in practice to provide a level of confidence about the impact of service delivery on children and families in Buckinghamshire. A robust feedback cycle which drives a learning culture where problems are addressed openly and honestly is embedded throughout the service.

Our guiding principles in our approach to quality assurance are that:

- 1. Children, young people and their families are at the heart of what we do.** The focus of quality assurance activity must be on impact and outcomes for the child or young person in their journey through our early help, social care, education, SEND, and youth offending service pathways and systems.
- 2. The approach to quality assurance will be underpinned by our model of practice.** There is a desire to examine and capture best practice. This means that quality assurance activity is collaborative and done 'with' staff, rather than 'to' or 'for', in ways that build relationships. This is characterised by respecting each other's perspectives alongside high expectations, high support and high challenge, to enable learning, improving and changing to flourish.



Our Practice Model - Strengthening Families

Buckinghamshire Council Children's Services has adopted the Strengthening Families Framework as the practice approach for early help and social care practitioners and managers to use when working with children and families. The Strengthening Families framework provides a purposeful approach that is:

- Collaborative
- Strengths-based
- Relationship-focused.

Strengthening Families is a way of working with families to prevent child abuse and neglect by building on family strengths, rather than focusing on their deficits. It offers a framework of five research-based protective factors to help parents and carers look after their children effectively, even when they are under stress.

The five Strengthening Families protective factors are:

- Developing parental resilience
- Strengthening social connections for families
- Increasing knowledge of parenting and development
- Providing concrete support in times of need
- Promoting healthy social and emotional development for children.

The Strengthening Families approach provides front line practitioners with a systemic assessment and planning framework from which information can be analysed, risk can be assessed, and a robust plan can be developed to protect children and young people. Confidence in the application of this approach to case work will be supported by training and regular group supervision sessions within teams where case mapping will take place to consolidate and develop practitioners' skills.

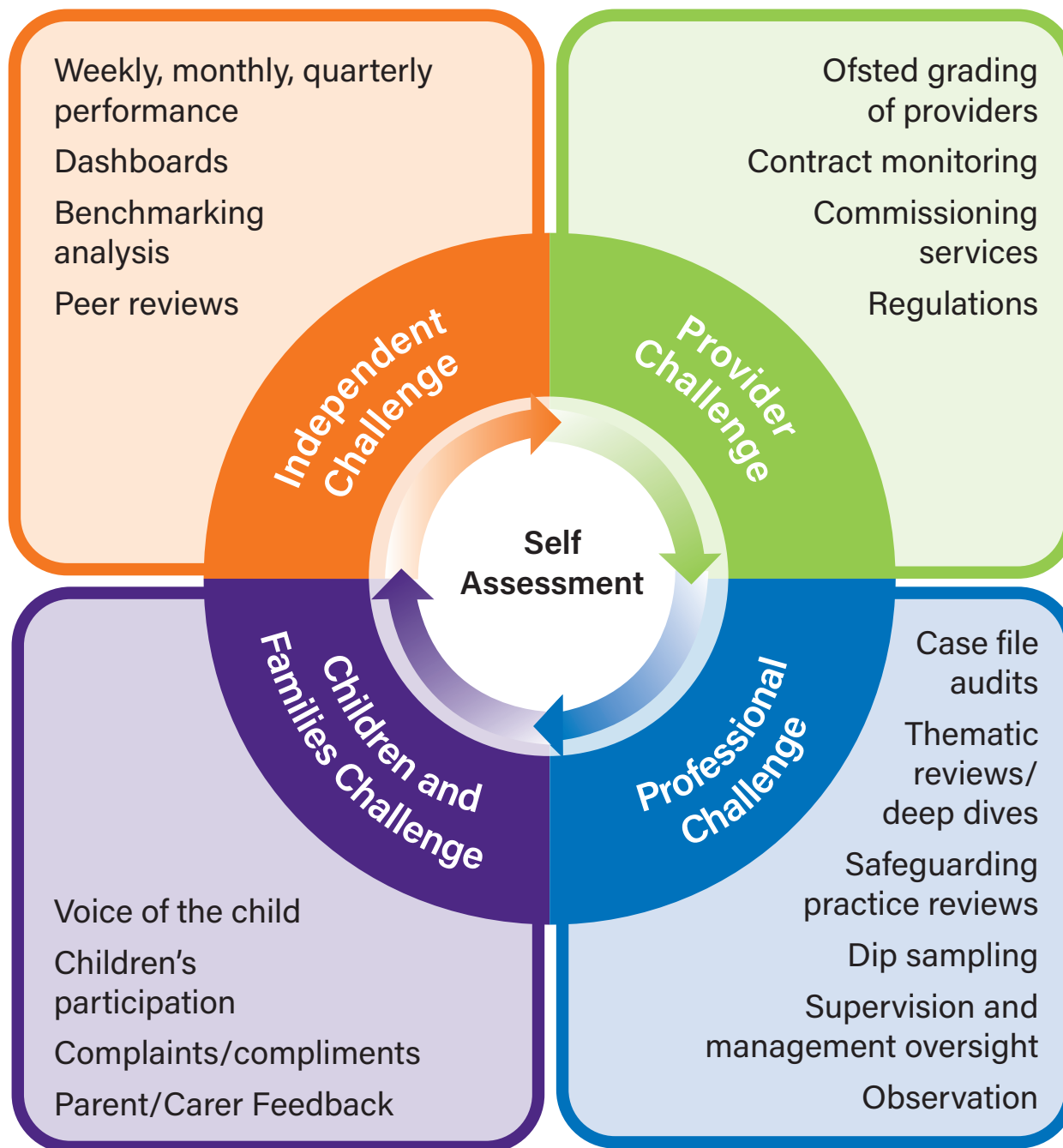


Four Lenses on Quality

In Buckinghamshire a whole system approach to quality assurance and performance management is used to fully evaluate the impact of the services provided to children, young people and their families, and inform the learning and development needs of the service. There are four lenses through which quality will be viewed and assessed. The diagram shows these lenses together with examples of aspects of quality assurance activity that relate to each lens.

At the heart of our four lenses approach is the self-assessment. The service continues to assess and review itself and has an up to date and rigorous self-assessment. This is key to the service knowing itself well and producing realistic and deliverable plans to be monitored using the four lenses approach.

The full Children's Services self-assessment is updated annually in line with Ofsted's Annual Conversation.



Independent challenge

Children's Services is subject to external scrutiny through external inspection by Regulators, such as the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).

Children's Services has a wide range of data that informs the tracking and reporting of performance using key performance indicators. Weekly and monthly management information provides managers with detailed and timely information about progress against referral, assessment, care planning, review processes, and supervision across the service.

Managers have a responsibility to monitor and address performance within their service area or team and with individual staff members where necessary. Effective use of data and performance indicators is an essential element of beginning to understand the quality of practice and services provided. In addition to this effective quality assurance systems need to be in place to determine the story behind the data. Together this enables managers and practitioners to review and take corrective action directly in individual cases as well as target improvements in service design and practice guidance.

Performance data is shared with the Improvement Board at every meeting.

The Corporate Parenting Board receives performance reports in line with the priorities identified in the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Early Help Strategy, SEND and Inclusion Strategy and Youth Offending Service also have data sets that are reported to relevant Boards. Key indicators are included annually in the Council's annual report. Political oversight of performance is achieved through regular Member briefings and scrutiny through various Council Committees. Performance information relating to areas of interest is provided as required.

The service uses national, statistical neighbour and regional benchmarking to ensure that it aspires to achieving the best performance.

Annual reports provided by the Child Protection Conferencing Manager and the Independent Reviewing Officer Manager address the analysis of themes around good practice and escalations of concern in their distinct roles and responsibilities.

The Virtual School also provides an annual review of the impact of their work and, in particular, the work with our partners and the wider local authority to improve progress, outcomes, mental health, well-being and ultimately the life-chances of the children in our care.

The Principal Social Worker annual report summaries the progress in quality assurance activity and the difference this is making in front line practice as well as how the learning culture supports continuous improvement.

- **Weekly, monthly, quarterly performance**
- **Dashboards**
- **Benchmarking analysis**
- **Peer reviews**



Provider Challenge

All commissioned services are tendered using established processes and there are contracts in place to ensure services are delivered as specified. There is regular contract monitoring. Market development activity helps providers to develop and improve the quality of their services.

In relation to residential placements, Ofsted has overall responsibility for the inspection of children's homes. All children's homes are inspected twice a year. In addition, the quality assurance regime involves a range of stakeholders including the commissioning team, procurement service, placements team, social workers and providers themselves. Feedback is also sought in a variety of ways from children and young people.

Buckinghamshire's approach is to place children in provision which is rated good or outstanding. At the point of placement there are a range of checks on provision for example, latest Ofsted reports, regulation 34 reports, references from other Local Authorities, insurance, and statements of purpose. Social Workers also visit provision. If a provider receives an inadequate Ofsted rating, they are required to develop an action

plan which shows how they will address Ofsted's concerns within a given timescale. Social Workers visit the child to review whether it is appropriate for them to remain at the home and ascertain whether their needs are still being met. In the event of the provider not meeting their needs, a decision is made on whether a child is moved from the home based on the type and severity of the concerns.

Educational placements are quality assured through contract management, school improvement activity and, for children with Education, Health and Care Plans, via their Annual Review.

- Ofsted grading of providers
- Contract monitoring
- Commissioning services
- Regulations



Professional Challenge

Good quality assurance activity of children's case work services is vital, and regular monitoring and action planning improves case work practice. In order to address the need for continuous improvement and to ensure measurement of and focus on outcomes, there is a 12-month schedule of regular audit activity that takes place across Children's Services. The timing and scope of each audit activity is shaped by our Improvement Plan priorities, what children and young people are telling us needs to change, and what our performance data is showing.

The professional challenge programme includes:

- Collaborative children's case file audits undertaken by managers at all levels
- Themed audit activity in response to new or emerging issues, performance findings, or changes in demand or where a deep dive is required
- Learning reviews in response to complaints or where practice is a concern in particular cases
- Observations of practice
- Dip sampling activity

- 'Check and challenge' whole service reviews
- Multi-agency audit activity in conjunction with the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Partnership, professionals from across Education, Health and Social Care, including the involvement of parents/ carers, and peer reviews
- Moderation of audit activity.

Case file audits follow a standard approach and are completed in collaboration with the practitioner or manager. A generic audit tool (Appendix 1) has been developed which can be used in most circumstances that is based on judgment, evidence and impact. Audit tools have been created to audit specific areas of work, for example, for Education, Health and Care Plans where the Plan and the supporting appendices are audited. If a specific checklist is required to focus on a particular area, this is developed and shared.

The tools all have the overall purpose of understanding the journey and experience of the child, their voice, whether it is heard, evidence of impact, and what now needs to happen. The auditor will be required to look at the last 6 months of involvement however they can look back further should they have an issue or concern that requires it.

- Case file audits
- Thematic reviews deep dives
- Safeguarding practice reviews
- Dip sampling
- Supervision and management oversight
- Observation



It is a requirement that all auditors scale the case they are auditing detailed within the audit tool itself. It is also expected that any auditor identifying a serious safeguarding issue or significant concern escalates the findings and the corrective action required to senior managers to address immediately. Good practice examples are celebrated and shared across the service.

Managers also undertake some form of observed practice. Examples of observations of practice include, observing a child protection conference, a SEND annual review, early help assessment review, supervision of a staff member, a strategy discussion, or observation of some direct work with a child or young person. This is reviewed with the practitioner so that areas of good practice and improvement can be identified. This also informs more senior leaders of the quality of live practice as it happens.

Briefings about 'hints and tips' are provided to auditors to ensure good quality auditing takes place. Each month sample of the audits are moderated to examine the quality, analysis, themes, observations and any contributions to improved impact. Moderation also supports learning, discussion and actions from the audit action plan.

This regular quality assurance activity is supplemented by themed audits, dip sampling

and other reviews to address specific issues or concerns.

Working with partner agencies through the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Partnership, Children's Services uses audit activity findings from safeguarding practice reviews to assure and improve practice. Relevant representatives from Children's Services participate in multi-agency audits and learning from these is fed back to staff alongside internal audit activity.

Appendix 2 describes what practitioners should expect from auditors if their child or young person is selected for a quality assurance audit.

Buckinghamshire has established 'check and challenge' sessions that examine progress service by service. Each session focuses on key performance indicators and quality assurance findings in relation to improvement priorities. Heads of Service and first line managers are invited to a panel made up of the Senior Leadership Team, chaired by the Director of Children's Services.

The service areas include:

- MASH and Assessment
- Early Help
- Help and Protection and Court
- Children in Care, Care leavers and Children with Disabilities

- Exploitation
- Independent Reviewing Officers, Child Protection Advisors, and the Social Work Academy
- Fostering, Adoption and Placements
- SEND
- Youth Offending Service.

Each service area is required to undertake preparatory work to review their latest performance information and review findings from quality assurance activity. Following the 'check and challenge' session, each service area has a prescribed window to drive forward actions and improve performance before progress is reviewed again.

Children and Families Challenge

Consultation with children, young people and their families should occur at every level. Children's Services has in place a wide range of processes to engage children and young people in service design, commissioning services and wider developments. Vital information can be provided by surveys and feedback through the Children in Care Council, the Shout Out for SEND champions and other participative groups. It is essential that such feedback shapes the services offered and the improvements made.

The views of children and young people, and their families must be heard to ensure that the service provides effective assessment of need, planning, intervention and review. The responsibility in capturing these views and taking these into account in care planning and risk management is with the allocated practitioner, their line manager and relevant chairs of reviews. It is essential that quality assurance activity and supervision emphasises the need for children and young people's voices to be captured and heard and their views considered in decisions made about them.

To support this activity there are a number of performance indicators that are routinely monitored to illustrate how well the voice of the child is being heard. This includes visits being undertaken on time, children being seen alone, participation of the child in their child protection conference or looked after children review, and children and family engagement in early help and Education, Health and Care Plans.

Children and families are heard through the monitoring of compliments and the resolution of complaints. Informal complaints and those made through the Council's complaints procedure are a source of learning. The Children's Complaint Officers creates regular reporting of complaints, timeliness of responses, emerging themes and learning. These are shared across Children's Services.

In addition to this, challenge from elected Members, the Corporate Parenting Board and from the Buckinghamshire parent/carer forum (FACT Bucks) is part of the Children and Families challenge. Political oversight of performance is achieved through regular Member briefings and scrutiny through various Council Committees. Performance information relating to areas of interest is provided as required.

- **Voice of the child**
- **Children's participation**
- **Complaints/ compliments**
- **Parent/Carer Feedback**



Developing a Learning Culture

All the quality assurance activity outlined above only has value if it leads to improvement in services and better outcomes for the child or young person. The learning loop is key to our approach.

There are six practical stages in our Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement Framework in the learning loop.

- Standards
- Tools
- Analysis
- Review
- Learn
- Impact

Each stage is proactive, to inform action and improve outcomes for children and young people, which is at the heart of our work, and is described in the diagrams shown here.



Standards

Buckinghamshire Children's Services Practice Standards (Appendix 3) provide a single set of overarching requirements that apply across all services and focus on impact and outcomes for children and young people.

They are informed by statutory guidance and regulation; the Social Work Professional Capabilities Framework; Social Work England standards of conduct and performance; and the SEND Code of Practice 2015.



Tools

An annual schedule of quality assurance activity is in place. It is collaborative and is informed by improvement priorities, what children and young people tell us need to change and what performance data is showing. Audit tools used reflect the whole journey of the child and focus on impact, evidence and judgment.

Audit findings are integrated onto the child's file so that learning required is transparent, and actions needed as a result of audit activity are rigorously progressed and tracked by managers.



Analysis

Children's case files provide an invaluable perspective on practice. Effective audits can provide insight into the quality of recording, the quality of work, the quality of management oversight, the views, experiences and outcomes for the child, what needs to change, and how the practitioner is being supported.



Review

This stage will make sure there are robust processes in place for turning the findings from quality assurance activity analysis into reflection and improvement planning.

Aggregated findings from the range of audit activity will be reported monthly with headline themes and recommendations and fed back into front line services. This will include the learning from the moderation of audit activity.



Learn

Each audit undertaken includes direct feedback and discussion between the auditor and the practitioner or their manager. Where an auditor does not grade an audit as at least good managers will ensure that corrective action takes place to improve practice in that specific case.

Further reflection and learning takes place in staff supervision that may result in additional training being provided.

Learning with the wider team, service and across Children's Services takes place through consistent feedback and team discussions.

Audit outcomes are tracked to ensure learning is happening and actions are being implemented. Re-audits in some areas are included in the 12-month Quality Assurance schedule.



Impact

Evidencing the impact of learning from quality assurance activity is central to ensuring that it makes a difference to children and families. Mutual accountability for practice that has an impact on good and better outcomes for children and families will be upheld through supervision discussions, meetings and our existing protocols.

Managers should use audit findings to drive plans and ensure there is no drift or delay.

The audit will be part of the child's record, and an integral part of the worker's supervision.

Field	Quality of child's experience Judgement (J) (Exceeds good/meets good/ does not meet good)	Text (please keep this evaluative and succinct) Evidence (E) Impact (I)
<p>Children, young people and families are appropriately involved</p> <p>Is there evidence of impact of the involvement of children and their families in the assessment, planning and intervention. Are the views of significant males effectively gathered?</p> <p>Are children seen, and seen alone, and do they benefit from stable and effective relationships? Do children and parents/carers have an equal voice?</p> <p>Does it evidence individual work undertaken, including appropriate direct work?</p> <p>Is this linked to the plan and the reduction of risk?</p> <p>What is the impact of this for children and their families?</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>
<p>Decision making is effective and timely</p> <p>Is there evidence of effective and timely management oversight and direction on cases, and clearly recorded rationale for decisions being made?</p> <p>Is case recording clear, comprehensive and reflective of work undertaken and focused on the experience and progress of children and young people?</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>
<p>Assessments are timely, comprehensive, analytical and of high quality - and lead to appropriately focused help</p> <p>Do they incorporate historical factors, informed by up to date case chronology? Do they identify risk, needs and protective factors, including parental capacity?</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>

Field	Quality of child's experience Judgement (J) (Exceeds good/meets good/ does not meet good)	Text (please keep this evaluative and succinct) Evidence (E) Impact (I)
<p>Coordination between agencies is effective Is joint working, information sharing in improving and sustaining the experience and progress of children and young people?</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>
<p>Consideration and impact of diversity For example, age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation.</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>
<p>Quality of plans Are they: up to date and updated, timely, comprehensive, specific with measurable outcomes and dynamic? Are they implemented? Consider length of plan or any themes? Do they show quality of management oversight? Are they influenced by views of children and parents/carers and diversity issues?</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>
<p>Permanence is achieved without delay and reflects assessed needs In this context permanence relates to all children. For example, decisions about children on CP Plans which result in children remaining at home should be considered to be a permanent plan. Are plans for permanence, including adoption, in the best interests of children and young people, and achieved without delay? Evaluate the quality of preparation for placement.</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>

Field	Quality of child's experience Judgement (J) (Exceeds good/meets good/ does not meet good)	Text (please keep this evaluative and succinct) Evidence (E) Impact (I)
<p>Children and young people participate in and benefit from effective regular reviews</p> <p>Are reviews scrutinised and challenged robustly to ensure that they support children in making good progress.</p> <p>What is the influence and impact of Independent Reviewing Officer/Child Protection?</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>
<p>The quality of the child's living arrangements</p> <p>Are children's living arrangements consistent with their assessed needs?</p> <p>Evaluate the effectiveness of: matching, stability and maintenance of contact with family/friends support for the child's living arrangements (including adoption support)</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>
<p>Are young people prepared for independence and are they living in high quality accommodation that meets their needs</p> <p>Is it safe, permanent and affordable (children at home or looked after)?</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>
<p>How has the help provided improved outcomes?</p> <p>This domain should record judgements about the impact of outcomes and how they have affected the life of each child.</p> <p>Are children supported to achieve their full potential? Evaluate impact (including education, physical health, and their emotional well-being). Do children have developed networks within their community and are they safe?</p>		<p>Evidence:</p> <p>Impact:</p>

Field	Quality of child's experience Judgement (J) (Exceeds good/meets good/ does not meet good)	Text (please keep this evaluative and succinct) Evidence (E) Impact (I)
Auditors Overall grading This judgement should reflect a judgement based upon aggregated impact on outcomes and in coming to your judgement, you should consider whether progress has been sufficient and appropriately timely. Consider whether other action(s) could have been taken and whether the pace of change was appropriate		Evidence: Impact:
Auditors Additional Comments		
Agreed actions to achieve good outcomes for child	By whom	By when

Appendix 2 – What to expect if your child or young person’s case has been selected for an audit

Buckinghamshire has agreed an annual schedule of quality assurance activity that includes a mixture of **case file audits**, dip sampling, learning reviews, ‘check and challenge’ whole service reviews and thematic deep dives.

Case file audits will take place each month and consider the journey of the child and the quality of work undertaken to assess whether the experience of the child/young person has improved since our involvement, and most importantly what else can be done to make a positive impact.

Audits will be undertaken collaboratively, with you - You will be contacted by the Auditor to let you know that your child or young person has been selected for an audit and a date arranged to meet with you. The Auditor has 3 weeks to complete the audit, so arrange the meeting with the Auditor as soon as possible. At the meeting with the Auditor, be confident and proud of the work that you do.

Review of the child’s record – Auditors may review the child’s record before they meet with you or do this together with you. You know the child best so ensure that the case recording is up to date so that the Auditor can see the impact of the work that you are

doing. Compliance is an important element of our work as it helps to keep us on track. Remember children can ask to see their records at any time. Reflect your professional judgement in the case recording, this is what you have been trained to do!

The Auditor will look back 6 months

– Auditors will focus on the journey and experience of the child through services, that the rationale for decisions made on behalf of the child is evident, that the help offered is planned and purposeful, and that improvement to the child’s life has pace. In some cases the Auditor may need to look back further, but generally 6 months is sufficient. The supervision and managerial oversight provided to you will also be reviewed. Use your time with the Auditor to consider the difference you have made, but also what more needs to be done going forward.

Respectful challenge – Audit activity is about promoting a culture of learning. When there is poor practice, this will be discussed with you and the Auditor will help you rectify this. Be open to this – we all have the same objective, which is to improve the outcome of the child. The actions following the audit will focus on what needs to be done to take corrective action. Some of the actions may be for others,

like your manager, or partners, or other parts of Children’s Services. Embrace this learning and remember this is to help you get back on track.

Good practice – Audits are also about identifying and celebrating good practice and sharing the learning with others. If there is an aspect of your work that you are particularly proud of, make sure that you tell the Auditor about it. Be bold and explain how the work you do has improved outcomes for your child.

No surprises – because the audits are being undertaken in collaboration with you, there should be no surprises with the judgements made by the Auditors or the actions that need to follow. Once the audit is completed it will need to be uploaded onto the child’s file and your manager must enter management oversight setting out how they are going to monitor completion of the actions. We are moderating a sample of the audits completed each month to ensure the judgements made by Auditors are fair and helps to move the work forward positively.

Appendix 3 – Children’s Services Practice Standards

1 Children are spoken to alone and work with child-focused professionals who have the tools to directly engage with them.

Are you speaking to your children alone?

2 All children have an assessment of their needs, reflecting how their experiences, wishes, feelings and needs are known and understood.

Does your assessment reflect this?

3 All children have an assessment reflecting their wishes, feelings, needs and capacity of parents and carers, enabling them to fulfill their responsibilities.

Does your assessment reflect this?

4 All children have a plan which explains what needs to happen, by when, by whom, what outcomes we are seeking together, how risk is managed and what the contingency plan is.

Does your plan explain this?

5 All case records are analytical, well written and timely, so everyone can understand significant events that have happened, what the plan is, the purpose of the actions and contracts and what difference has been made so far for the child.

Are your records well written and timely?

6 Every child is supported by timely management oversight of the professionals working with them. Including reflective supervision, checking that work has been done to agreed standards, seeing what a difference it is making and what happens next.

Have you had reflective supervision? Has your manager checked the quality of your work?

7 Use the Strengthening Families approach to resolve issues and improve children’s outcomes.

Are you using this approach?

8 We will be professionally curious about all families we work with to ensure we know and understand them and their lived experience.

Are you asking questions? Do you know what the child’s lived experience is?

Practice Standards - Visiting Framework

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
<p>Visits to children and young people are to be considered Statutory Visits only when the child/young person has been seen at their home or placement, seen alone, and spoken to meaningfully.</p>	<p>Manager Social Worker</p>
<p>Timescales for visiting children are driven by the child's plan, urgency of their situation or level of risk. Where risk is escalating, there will be clear management oversight to consider increasing the frequency of visits, with these decisions recorded on the case record and in the child's plan.</p>	<p>Manager</p>
<p>Children we are notified about: contacts made to children's services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The decision about the type of response the child needs and feedback to the referrer is made within 72 hours of a referral being received. ▪ If a Section 47 enquiry is triggered, the child is visited according to risk and need, within a maximum of 24 hours. ▪ Where a Child and Family assessment is started for a child under Section 17, the child is to be visited within a maximum of 5 working days of the referral being opened. 	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>Child in Need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least every 4 weeks. ▪ This can be increased, depending on the level of risk/concern. ▪ An unannounced visit should be completed as a minimum of once every 3 months. 	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>Children subject to a Child Protection Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Within a maximum of 5 working days after the Child Protection Plan being made at Initial Child Protection Conference. ▪ At least every 10 working days thereafter. ▪ An unannounced visit should take place at a minimum once every 4 weeks 	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>Children Looked After:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On the day the child is placed, then within 1 week of the beginning of the placement. ▪ Intervals no longer than six weeks during the first year of any placement. ▪ Every six weeks during subsequent years unless formally agreed as a permanent placement and once agreed, at intervals of not more than three months. ▪ Whenever reasonably asked for by a child or foster carer, regardless of placement status. ▪ Where the child has a series of short breaks, they are seen as a minimum twice a year in that setting (at least once unannounced). 	<p>Social Worker</p>

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
<p>Children and young people who are placed in a series of short breaks (short break care arrangements, or short stays with relatives):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Within the first seven placement days then within 3 months of the first placement day. ▪ Intervals of no less than six months after the first visit ▪ Unannounced at least once a year if placements interval is more than six months ▪ At least annually the child's sleeping arrangements will be seen 	Social Worker
<p>Children placed in an adoptive placement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child's Social Worker to visit within the first week of placing the child, and weekly thereafter until the first Adoption review. ▪ Thereafter, the frequency of visits is determined at the child's Adoption Review or, if not specified, every six weeks for the first year and after this, three-monthly. ▪ Additional visits are arranged where there are any concerns. ▪ The adopter's Social Worker visits as per Placement Plan, until Adoption Order made or placement ended. 	Social Worker
<p>Privately Fostered Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Within 5 working days from the date of notification to the local authority of the private fostering arrangement ▪ Intervals of not more than six weeks during the first twelve months ▪ Intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any 2nd or subsequent year. 	Social Worker
<p>Children with temporarily approved foster carers or parents under an Interim Care Order:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weekly until the first review ▪ At the first review, decision to be made in conjunction with a Manager and Independent Reviewing Officer in respect of whether visits can be reduced to a maximum of 10 working days thereafter until the carer is approved or final hearing completed 	Social Worker
<p>Children made subject to a Care Order and placed at home with parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Within the first week of being placed at home under a Care Order ▪ Intervals of no more than 10 days thereafter. 	Social Worker
<p>Children made subject to a Supervision Order as the outcome of Care Proceedings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Within the first week of being made subject to a Supervision Order ▪ Intervals of no more than 10 days thereafter for at least the first 3 months of the Supervision Order. This should be reviewed every 3 months, and only decreased to a maximum of every 4 weeks with agreement from Head of Service. 	Social Worker

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
<p>Children reported missing (including children missing from Care):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visited by allocated worker within 24 hours of the child's return. This is to be considered as a separate visit to the Return Home Interview which should be completed by someone independent of the child's Social Worker within 72 hours of the child's return. 	Social Worker
<p>Children in more than one placement - residential school and foster care or residential home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visited in each living situation, at least every 12 weeks 	Social Worker
<p>Young people aged 18-25:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least every 3 months by their personal advisor. ▪ In addition keeping in touch by phone, text or email based on the young person's preference every 2 months. ▪ The frequency and type of contact is to be agreed with the young person and set out in their Pathway Plan. ▪ Take all reasonable steps to keep in touch with young people leaving care, particularly where they are outside of the Local Authority boundaries. 	Social Worker Personal Advisor
<p>Children remanded into custody:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visited by a social worker at the earliest opportunity, but no later than 72 hours after being remanded. 	Social Worker

Practice Standards - Direct work with children

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
Children and young people are seen alone, in a variety of settings, observed and communicated with according to their age, understanding and developmental needs, as part of assessment or intervention.	Social Worker
Every child knows who their Social Worker is, why they have a Social Worker, how to contact them, how often they will see them and what their plan is.	Social Worker
Practitioners arrive on time and if they are going to be late, they will tell the child/family/carer as soon as possible to apologise.	Social Worker
Practitioners are familiar with and use a variety of direct work approaches appropriate to the child's age, understanding and preferences; and understand that "direct work" includes both play materials/ engagement tools and relationship building conversations.	Social Worker
All children and young people will receive and have explained details on how to make a complaint.	Social Worker
Staff make appropriate arrangements for the use of translators, interpreters and communication tools to meet any specific sensory or language needs including use of braille, sign language, hearing loops etc.	Social Worker
Communication with children is recorded as though the worker is speaking to them, reflects their views and is appropriate to be shared with them.	Social Worker
All key assessment/planning documents reflect the views of the child or young person including where a child declines to share any information. The reason why the sharing of information was declined is recorded.	Social Worker
When children express a desire not to see the social worker, the reason for this and consideration of how to overcome it is given careful consideration and unsuccessful attempts to see a child are recorded.	Manager
Other than in an emergency (e.g. the worker is absent from/leaves work unexpectedly), all children will be notified of a change in worker, the reason for it and have the opportunity to be introduced to their new worker by their existing worker.	Manager
Families and carers will be notified both verbally and in writing and all those involved including the child, family, carers and other agencies will be informed of the new workers contact details and the date of the change in writing/by email. New workers will read the child's file before meeting the child and family. A case discussion will also take place with the manager to ensure that any questions or queries are explored.	Social Worker
New workers will read the child's file before meeting the child and family. A case discussion will also take place with the manager to ensure that any questions or queries are explored.	Social Worker

Practice Standards - Assessment and planning

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
<p>When there are concerns that a child has or is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, a Strategy Discussion/ Meeting is used to determine whether a Section 47 enquiry is required, as well as safety planning. These discussions/ meetings will be attended by Police (statutory requirement), Health and Education. It is good practice to invite any other professional or agency who is known to the family for their contribution and collaboration of assessment of risk. A Strategy Discussion/Meeting will be held within 24 hours of the risk/concern being identified and is chaired by a Manager. Where possible, all efforts should be made for the child's allocated social worker to attend this discussion/ meeting.</p> <p>A safety plan will be formulated as part of the strategy discussion/meeting, if there is a delay in the strategy meeting taking place the safety of the children must be considered during this time and any actions required to ensure their safety implemented immediately.</p>	<p>Manager Social Worker</p>
<p>If a Section 47 investigation is triggered, the timescale for completion is determined by the level of risk and need. The investigation will be completed within a maximum of 15 working days.</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>The child and family assessment will include all aspects of the child's life, including their wishes and feelings. Both parents and other relevant adults will be included in the assessment except for circumstances when this increases the level of risk to the child. The views of partner agencies will be obtained and included in the assessment. The assessment will be based upon the Strengthening Families model and will explore the family strengths and risks, and explore what the grey areas or complicating factors are in order to identify the actions that are needed to ensure that the child is safe. A contingency plan will also be included and based upon the Strengthening Families model.</p> <p>Child and Family assessments for children under the age of 5 will be updated every 6 months.</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>Where an Initial Child Protection Conference is deemed to be required, this will be requested within 5 working days, and held within 15 working days of the initial strategy discussion. The Conference will consider the strengths, risks and grey areas for the family in the Strengthening Families approach</p>	<p>Social Worker Manager</p>
<p>Where it is determined that a plan of support or protection is required for a child, the reason for and purpose of the plan are clearly set out.</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>The plan flows from the analysis made in the preceding assessment, or earlier plan.</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>The plan clearly addresses needs and risks as well as building on strengths.</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>It conveys the views, wishes and desired outcomes of the child, parents/carers and other relevant parties.</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
The plan is based on evidence and research directly relevant to the child's circumstances and stages of development	Social Worker
Plans for children separated from parents/siblings or significant others include arrangements for contact and permanence.	Social Worker
Plans result in action. Actions are agreed by all parties and each person is clear about the part of the plan they are responsible for.	Social Worker
The plan is SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely), clear what needs to change and includes clear timescales that meet the changing needs of the child.	Social Worker
The plan has clearly identified intermediate outcomes that can be used to evidence progress and minimise drift.	Social Worker
It includes a contingency plan should it fail to achieve the intended outcomes to keep the child safe in the event of an emergency or where a carer places the child at risk.	Social Worker
The plan contains clear arrangements and timescales for review.	Social Worker
There is evidence of management oversight of the plan to ensure the practice expectations above are met before the plan is signed off.	Manager
In reviewed plans, the progress in meeting outcomes is clear and evidenced.	Social Worker
Children subject of Child Protection Plans have an outline plan established at the Initial Child Protection Conference which is then reviewed and updated at every core group meeting.	Social Worker Child Protection Advisor
Child in Need plans are reviewed regularly – no longer than 8 weekly intervals. The first and last Child in Need Review will be chaired by a manager to ensure clear management oversight on case closures.	Social Worker Manager
Child Protection plans are reviewed regularly – no longer than 4 weekly. The first Core Group Meeting following Initial Child Protection Conference will be chaired by a manager to ensure clear oversight and drive of the plan and intended actions.	Social Worker Manager
Children subject to a Supervision Order will have a relevant identified plan in place alongside, for at least the duration of the Supervision Order. The Supervision Order plan will be reviewed at regular intervals in line with the plan running alongside it. Where lack of progress is identified, the social worker and manager will consider whether the matter needs to be returned to Court. Every 3rd review will be chaired by a manager to ensure progression of the plan.	Social Worker Manager

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
Children in Care have a Permanence Plan ready for consideration at the 2nd Looked After Review (incorporated into the Care Plan).	Social Worker IRO
Care Leavers have their Pathway Plan reviewed initially within 3 months and thereafter within a maximum of six months.	Social Worker Personal Advisor
Children receiving Short Breaks have their plans reviewed initially within 3 months and thereafter within a maximum of six months.	Social Worker Manager

Practice Standards - Recording

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
Information is written and stored in line with information sharing protocols and the principles of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR): <i>fairly and lawfully processed; for a clearly defined, legitimate and limited purpose; adequate, relevant and not excessive; accurate and where necessary kept up to date; processed in accordance with the data subject's rights; stored with appropriate technical and organisational security.</i>	Social Worker
Social workers ask adults and young people (16+) for written consent in respect of information gathering/sharing and ensure the consent is placed on the child's file.	Social Worker
Children's records are kept up to date, with significant events recorded within one working day of the event occurring. In emergency and significant risk situations, recording is completed on the same day as the event or early next morning.	Social Worker
A chronology is started for every child subject to a Child and Family assessment, completed before the assessment is approved by a manager, and thereafter kept up to date by the allocated social worker. Staff should read, understand and adhere to the procedures and guidance on chronologies set out in the <i>Children's Services Procedures Manual</i> .	Social Worker
The chronology is used as an analytical tool to help understand the impact, both immediate and cumulative, of key events and changes in a child or young person's developmental progress.	Social Worker
Where a child's plan is changed following a review, it is updated on the child's records within 48 hours.	Social Worker

Practice Standards - Expectation of Managers

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
Work is allocated to suitably trained and qualified staff, with the necessary skills and capacity to undertake the task. When allocating cases, complexity and number of cases should be considered to ensure workable caseloads.	Manager
Supervision is held regularly. This means, for newly qualified social workers fortnightly for the first 6 months, and thereafter a minimum of monthly. For other practitioners, supervision will take place on a minimum of a monthly basis. The frequency of supervision sessions is also determined by the complexity of the work. There is a signed supervision agreement in place, reviewed annually.	Manager
Supervision encompasses wellbeing, health & safety, professional development and standards, and casework supervision.	Manager
Casework shows evidence of reflection, impact of intervention and management oversight. It includes clear case direction from the point of allocation, through to any transfers or closure.	Manager
Managers will lead by example and support their staff to embed the Strengthening Families approach into their daily practice. This includes direct and written work.	Manager
A record of supervision is available to both parties in respect of professional supervision, relevant sections of which (casework supervision) are recorded on the child's file within one working day of casework supervision.	Manager
Management oversight is recorded at all stages of work with a child and there is a clear audit trail of decision making.	Manager
Management oversight ensures that timescales for visiting children are driven by the child's situation and plan, and that published timescales are not just "targets to work to".	Manager
Managers check performance data and audit children's records on a regular basis to have ensured that identified action is taken to improve practice where necessary.	Manager
Managers maximise opportunities for training and development, overseeing that staff attend mandatory training, and participate in other agreed professional development as identified in supervision and appraisal.	Manager
Formal observation of practice by the supervising Manager will be recorded in supervision at least once a year. This will inform the appraisal process.	Manager
All staff have annual appraisals and agreed targets are reviewed through the year. Appraisal formally notes achievements in the past 12 months and records any actions needed to address development needs identified during ongoing supervision and case discussions. The appraisal sets goals for the coming year.	Manager

Practice Standards - Professional Culture

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
<p>Preconditions for Good Practice</p> <p>Managers ensure staff work in a professional environment conducive to good professional practice. This includes support, challenge and bringing professional rigour to daily practice.</p>	<p>Head of Service Manager</p>
<p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Managers will lead by example and cultivate a staff atmosphere that is mutually supportive and draws on the professional strengths of all staff. ▪ Managers will provide good lines of communication, ensuring that important service policy and procedures are shared, understood and acted upon. ▪ Managers will provide meaningful supervision and annual appraisals that take account of staff strengths and areas for improvement, and seek to ensure that the service continues to invest in staff's professional development. ▪ Managers will be approachable to staff, and will encourage more experienced staff to support those with less experience to promote peer learning. 	<p>Head of Service Team Manager Assistant Team Manager</p>
<p>Constructive Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Managers will monitor the quality of the service they are responsible for through regularly scrutinising practice and auditing children's case recording, and take steps to rectify poor quality when identified. ▪ Managers will look for opportunities to bring about improvements in practice, and support staff in delivering those improvements. ▪ The Practice Development Team will work to bring about improvements to practice and support senior managers in the development of staff skillset and knowledge. The Practice Development Team will review case files and escalate cases where unacceptable levels of risk are identified, or where the standard of social work practice is deemed to be below the Core practice standards identified within this document. The team will also provide coaching and reflective sessions with workers to aid their development. ▪ Where concerns are identified by a Child Protection Advisor, Independent Reviewing Officer or Family Group Conference Coordinator in relation to practice, care planning, implementation of plans or decision making, they will attempt to resolve the issue with the allocated worker initially in an informal way (i.e. face to face discussion). ▪ Should the concern be significant or not resolved to the point that the plan for the child is likely to drift; the concern will be escalated to the attention of managers using the agreed resolution process. 	<p>Head of Service Team Manager Assistant Team Manager Practice Development Team Child Protection Advisor Independent Reviewing Officer Family Group Conference Coordinator Social Worker</p>

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
<p>Professional rigour</p> <p>Managers keep up to date on research findings in practice and policy documents relevant to their area of work. They will expect staff to develop their professional skills and expertise by keeping up to date with applied research.</p>	<p>Head of Service Team Manager Assistant Team Manager</p>
<p>All staff uphold their professional responsibility to be accountable for their own conduct, development and delivery of a high quality service. This includes being accountable within their own roles and responsibilities, supporting and holding others to account, and seeking appropriate assistance when needed.</p>	<p>All Staff</p>

Practice Standards - Missing

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
<p>Any allocated child who is reported missing will be visited by their allocated worker within 24 hours of their return. This is to be considered as a separate visit to the Return Home Interview.</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>Return Home Interviews will be completed by RU Safe for all children over the age of 10 who go missing within Buckinghamshire. For children under the age of 10, these Return Home Interviews will be completed by a social care member of staff.</p>	<p>Social Worker Social Care Staff</p>
<p>Return Home Interviews for allocated children who are placed (as a Child Looked After) within 20miles of the Buckinghamshire borders will be offered by RU Safe. The Social Work team responsible for the child will refer to RU Safe within 24 hours of the child being found.</p>	<p>Social Worker Manager</p>
<p>All Return Home Interviews will be completed within 72 hours of the child's return.</p>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p>The Return Home Interview form will be read by the allocated social worker and any identified risks acted upon. A safety plan will be formulated to address these concerns and the child's Child In Need/Child Protection/Child Looked After plan will be updated with relevant actions to be taken.</p>	<p>Social Worker Independent Reviewing Officer/Child Protection Advisor/Manager</p>
<p>Strategy meetings will be held as per the missing protocol.</p>	<p>Manager Social Worker</p>
<p>Need to Know notifications will be completed for the high risk missing children, as per the missing protocol.</p>	<p>Manager</p>