



# Performance Management & Quality Assurance Framework

**Priority 2  
Practice**



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# Introduction and Aims

Sandwell Children Trust has high aspirations for our children and young people and is committed to supporting them to be safe, be independent, be ambitious and live the best life they can.

The Trust and its partners strive to enable children to live with their families and aims only to intervene in children's and families' lives to give them the right level of support when they need it. We will deliver our vision by:

- Listening, learning and caring
- Acting with openness and transparency
- Being ambitious and confident
- Encouraging innovation

We acknowledge that we can only achieve our vision through effective partnership with families and across agencies, and a variety of voluntary and community sector partners, placing a family's needs at the centre of everything we do. We recognise the critical importance of early intervention, delivered through integrated services which ensure that families can receive support at an early stage within their locality.



The image shows two overlapping cards from Sandwell Children's Trust. The top card is titled 'Our ethos' and 'Ourselves & our partners'. The bottom card is titled 'Our ethos' and 'Our children & families'. Both cards feature the Sandwell Children's Trust logo and a list of principles.

**Our ethos**

**Ourselves & our partners**

after each other  
connections and collaborate  
der Sandwell family  
understanding of our

other to learn, develop & reflect  
and celebrate each other's

ives – we are advocates for the

**Our ethos**

**Our children & families**

- We have high aspirations for our children, we make a difference and change children's lives for the better
- We place children at the heart of everything we do
- We keep families safe, keeping them together where possible
- We work alongside our families, guided by their needs
- We empower and work with the whole, extended family
- We only use language that our children and young people can understand
- We celebrate our children and enable them to smile, laugh, play and succeed

Sandwell Children's Trust is working hard to embrace and inhabit relationship, strength-based practice and a positive culture, reflected by our ethos, principles and vision and practice model.

**Click the image  
to see our ethos**

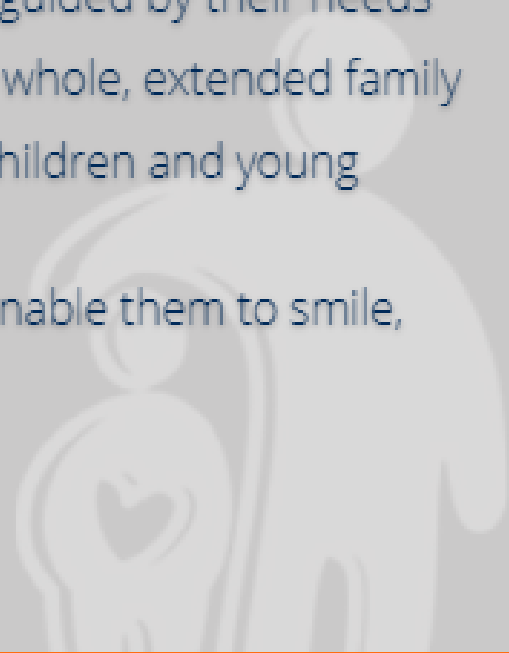
Our common principles are based on:

# Our ethos



## ***Our children & families***

- We have high aspirations for our children, we make a difference and change children's lives for the better
- We place children at the heart of everything we do
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# Why is Quality Assurance important?

To deliver our vision and statutory responsibilities, and improve the outcomes of Sandwell's children, it is important for us to have arrangements in place to evaluate the standard of our practice. Over the last few years our Quality Assurance framework has been developing well; this was noted in our last monitoring visits by Ofsted (November 2021). Work has continued to strengthen it and, following feedback from our staff, we have developed it further. Our approach recognises that a range of Quality Assurance (QA) activities aimed to measure and evaluate the quality of services delivered to children and families.

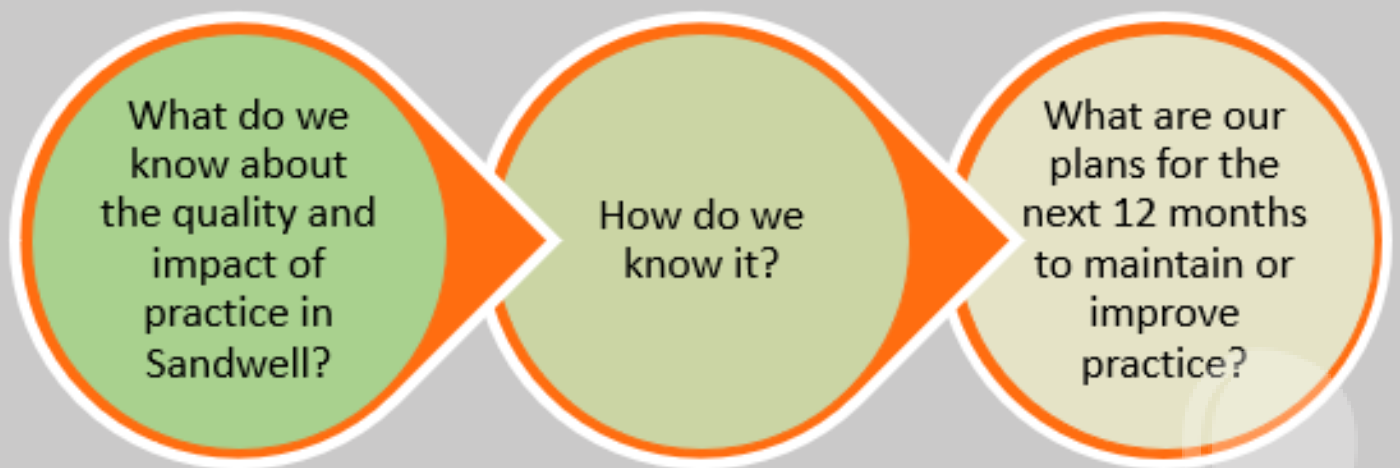
The purpose of our Quality Assurance Framework is to ensure that children, young people and families are achieving their potential through excellent service and practice. We will evaluate and continue to improve our practice through:

- Measuring and monitoring progress against our practice standards. We will benchmark ourselves against the good and outstanding regional and national Children's Services.
- Making sure all our managers have access to effective and accurate performance information
- Clear arrangements for monitoring QA activity where areas of both strength and improvement are identified
- A whole system approach that links individual supervision, training and planning to the findings of quality assurance activity
- Making sure our staff understand their quality assurance roles and responsibilities and that everyone has a role to play in improving quality
- An effective feedback loop that drives a reflective and learning culture, where any issues are considered and resolved openly and honestly.
- A relational and strengths-based approach, working constructively alongside managers who in turn work alongside their own teams to identify good practice and learning points.

# External drivers

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

The core part of the ILACS looks to ensure that leaders maintain an accurate self-evaluation of practice, and that they build environments where good quality social work can flourish. The self-evaluation of social care and early help practice should be drawn from our own QA activity and should answer three key questions:



# Our Approach to Quality Assurance

Our staff at all levels and across partner agencies are responsible for scrutinising practice via robust quality assurance activity, ensuring that our work is undertaken within agreed timescales.

As well as practice needing to meet statutory requirements, it needs to meet that standards we have set across the Trust. We should continually strive to meet each standard, to be consistently good, with high quality assessments and plans driving timely interventions which promote the best possible outcomes for Sandwell's children.

Quality can be defined as the 'degree of excellence' provided, or the positive impact that interventions have had on our children and families. Our Quality Assurance framework is based on assuring ourselves that we meet our practice standards and are improving children's lives. Key questions should be asked:

- What is life like for children and young people?
- Have we listened to what children are saying to us, do we understand their lived experience and impact of trauma?
- What difference are we going to make?
- Have we been ambitious for our children?



# QA Framework: a blended approach

A blended approach to quality assurance is needed to get a complete picture about practice. Our approach has several component parts which means evidence needs to be considered from a range of sources:

## **i. Performance data and intelligence**

## **ii. Bespoke QA activities:**

- Collaborative practice reviews
- Thematic reviews (monthly spotlights)
- Practice Focused Days and Practice Observations
- Multi-agency Practice Reviews

## **iii. Oversight from Independent Chairs**

## **iv. What children and families are telling us about their experience**

## **v. Our workforce and partner feedback (including SCSP reviews)**

## **vi. External reviews (eg peer challenge, Independent Scrutineer)**





## Performance Data and Intelligence

Practice cannot improve without understanding relevant data and managing performance. All our staff and managers are responsible for their own work and their contribution to the work of their team and services.

Managers have additional responsibility to oversee and track performance issues within their service area and all managers need to be equipped with the skills, knowledge and tools to access, understand, interpret and use performance information to drive practice improvements.

Performance management enables practitioners and managers to:

- Use information to help reflect, maintain, analyse, develop and improve services
- Understand the direction of travel and evaluate the impact of activities on children and families
- Enable the analysis of trends so early action can be taken to address any issues
- Hold services and individuals to account for their contribution to improving children's outcomes
- Analyse data to enable us to predict any future issues and developments

The performance management framework includes a suite of daily and time-period reports at different levels of detail relevant to the level and role of those receiving the reports.



## Practice Improvement Board and the focus on practice analysis

Fortnightly Practice Improvement Board meetings chaired by our Chief Executive bring senior leaders together to account for performance and practice quality in their respective service areas. It ensures a strong line of sight from the Chief Executive, through Directors and Heads of Service.

The focus on practice analysis and using performance information to inform scrutiny and challenge should take place at every level to collectively identify good practice and address any issues. Heads of Service need to meet regularly with their service and Team Managers to examine data, pose questions and dip sample to fully understand and articulate practice in their service area. Likewise, Team Managers should do the same with their own teams, constantly analysing data practice, alongside one to supervision with their team.

The range of reports and various levels of accountability and challenge are detailed below:



### Daily (Live dashboards)

- Key KPI's reported daily to the Chief Executive, Directors, Heads of Service and Service Managers to facilitate daily oversight
- Managers take action daily regarding issues of concern
- Key Performance data available to all operational managers eg:
  - Caseload Allocation
  - S47 timescales
  - Single Assessment timescales
  - Children Missing



### Weekly

- Extensive service/ team specific data sent to all managers across the Trust
- Relevant Report content for each section developed through consultation with Managers



## **Weekly Performance Meetings**

- In place across all services within the Trust.
- Performance reports interrogation
- Actions agreed & implemented and to address areas identified from Performance Indicators
- Ongoing support training & development for managers in using data



## **Fortnightly Practice Improvement Board**

- Performance Reports for quantitative and qualitative report scrutiny by Directors and Senior managers
- 1 x Head of Service report (for each individual service) to Director of Performance
- 1 x Head of Service report (collective) to gain cross service insight. The child's voice is captured



## **Monthly**

- Performance reports to Improvement Board, Trust Board and council boards to ensure scrutiny for Senior Managers & Stakeholders
- Key indicators, trends analysis, comparison and targets from:
  - Dashboard of priority indicators
  - Monthly trends and patterns analysis – cHat
  - Performance Book



## **Annually**

- annual self evaluation
- Self evaluation in place for all Trust services



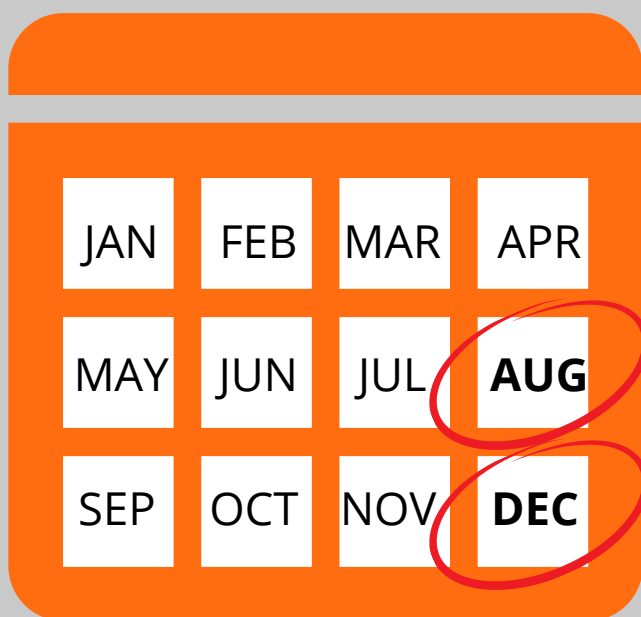
# Bespoke Quality Assurance Activities

## Ten Month Cycle

A range of quality assurance methods and reporting processes are in place to assist our staff to deliver high quality services and drive sustained improvements. These are:

- Collaborative Practice Reviews
- Thematic Reviews (spotlights)
- Practice observations
- Practice Focused Days
- Multiagency Practice Reviews

To ensure these are successful, the Quality Assurance Manager has a critical role in managing the coordination and administration of the overall QA process; as well as collating findings and analysis that inform learning.



Whilst these QA activities operate throughout the year, they are paused in the months of August and December, in effect meaning that activities take place on a **10-month cycle**.

This enables the months of **August** and **December** to be used to reflect and embed the learning from the QA activity, with additional input from children and families to get feedback.

## Collaborative Practice Reviews

Practice Reviews are key in gaining an understanding of the quality and consistency of practice and we use performance data to identify review themes. They are collaborative because they need to be undertaken alongside practitioners to ensure they benefit as much as possible from the experience.

Our approach promotes active involvement from both the practitioner and families in reviews, therefore, they have 3 integral parts:

- Practitioner reflective tool (appendix 2)
- Child's records review (appendix 3)
- Parental and child feedback

Practice Reviews are a learning opportunity with a 'window' into practice. They work in different ways:

- **Individual reflection and learning for the practitioner**

Acknowledging and celebrating good practice and how their practice has led to a difference in a child's lived experience. They also support the practitioner to understand where their practice could be improved and reflect on how they might do this to improve children's outcomes even more

- **Reviewer learning**

Every time a reviewer completes a Practice Review there is a learning opportunity from the findings that can be taken back into their own practice, service and team, particularly where good practice is identified.

- **Service learning**

The collation of all Practice Review findings can help us understand the overall quality and trajectory of practice and the difference being made to children



Practice reviews should be embedded across all teams and integral to everyday practice. It is important that all Managers undertake them as part of daily business, which means they need to take place across all service areas, as part of our blended approach.

To achieve this the QA Service will facilitate and coordinate the requests of Case Reviews across the Trust on monthly basis, using a pre-agreed managers rota.

All Tier managers will alternate Practice Case reviews, Practice Observation and thematic reviews, with the expectation for one QA activity to be undertaken by each manager every month (within the 10 month cycle).

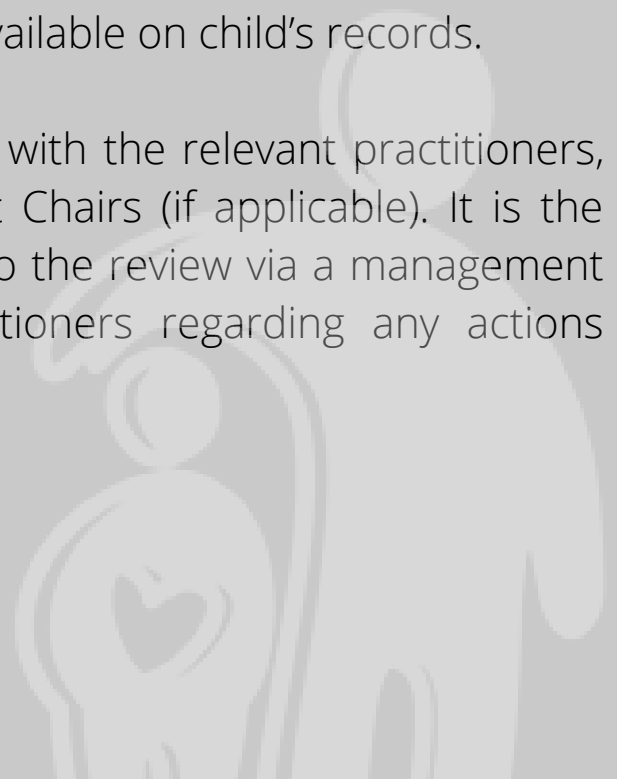
### **Practice Review Moderation**

Every manager needs to understand what 'good' looks like, based on our practice standards; and everyone needs to work to our standards, not just in our practice review process, but in day to day activity.

Moderation of practice reviews are undertaken by the QA Service with feedback being provided to the reviewers. The moderation process examines quality, analysis, themes, observations and any contributions that impact positively on children. Moderation also supports learning, discussion and actions from the action plan.

The final version of the practice review will be available on child's records.

Findings of the practice reviews will be shared with the relevant practitioners, managers, service managers and Independent Chairs (if applicable). It is the responsibility of the line manager to respond to the review via a management oversight and directions given to the practitioners regarding any actions required and timescales for completion.



## **Thematic reviews (monthly spotlights)**

Performance data needs to be used to identify monthly thematic reviews. Once a theme is agreed relevant QA activities will be undertaken, for example, dip-sampling and bespoke practice reviews to gather further understanding and evidence.

The QA manager will maintain a planner for thematic reviews where themes identified can be noted, for example during Executive Management Team, Senior Leadership Team or Practice Improvement Board. Findings from thematic reviews should be collated by the QA manager and included in the monthly and quarterly reports.

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## **Practice Focused days and Practice Observations**

Practice Focused Days and guided conversation add to QA activity and offer opportunities for operational and senior leaders to engage with individual practitioners and observe practice, making the link between strategy and how this impact on practice. They take place on quarterly basis and are coordinated by the QA Service. This approach enables leaders to identify if the links to wider improvement strategies are evident and understood by practitioners

Practice observations should take place monthly with all tier managers being required to complete them. It is the expectation for managers to observe their own practitioners' practice. For example, managers / Independent Chairs can observe reviews, conferences, team around the family reviews, home visits, children centre sessions, youth projects, groupwork programmes or one to one work with children and young people. Co-ordination is at team level with the practice observations being submitted to the QA service on monthly basis.

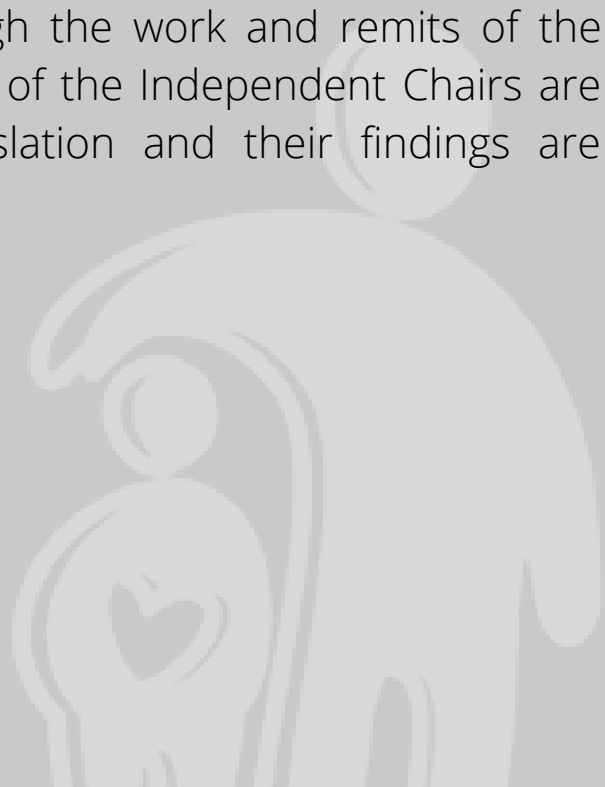
## **Multi-Agency Practice Reviews**

The Trust participates in, and learns from, relevant multi-agency reviews overseen by the Safeguarding Children Partnership. Findings from these should be incorporated into the Trust's QA reports along with any reviews that focus on SEND. Whenever specific issues arise regarding children, the Safeguarding Partnership should undertake a multi-agency review to understand and learn from any concerns that may have arisen from how different agencies intervened.



## **Oversight from the Independent Chairs**

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





## Involving Children and Families

Participation is about ensuring that children, young people and families are given opportunities to be involved in decision making processes on issues which affect them. It is not simply about seeking the views of children, young people and families, but acting on them as part of developing and improving services.

Gaining feedback from children, young people, families and carers is an essential part of the quality assurance process as it is central to understanding the subjective experiences of those accessing services.

Feedback is obtained in several ways and does not need to be formally requested. Feedback can be found in:

- Assessments
- Plans
- Records of visits
- Case notes
- Complaints, comments and compliments



There is an expectation that every child, young person, family and carer who comes into contact with Trust is provided with the opportunity to express their views.

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

- Compliments and complaints are explored in detail, and learning is gathered and shared from them about improvements that can be made to the services provided.
- In addition, we will develop bespoke parents/ carers/ children feedback mechanisms within Trust which is underpinned by our participation strategy.
- We will work with our Participation Team and young people to develop ways to gather meaningful feedback in relation about our practice and service delivery

## Our Workforce and Partner Feedback

It is equally important that our staff can feedback on how we deliver services, as well as policies and processes. This helps us improve the quality of what we deliver in the future.

The **Annual Health Check**, led by the Principal Social Worker, is a specific mechanism for qualified Social Workers to feedback regarding training, development opportunities.

Our **Social Work and Practitioner Forum** gives everyone who works directly with children and families the opportunity to discuss practice issues and share thoughts and ideas regarding wider Trust matters, thereby helping to shape and influence service development and improvements.

Our **Annual Staff Survey** gives all our Trust staff to share their views on all aspects of the Trust, as too do our Whole Trust Engagement events

**Operational Leadership Team** sessions enable managers at all levels to come together to share views and ideas on developments, including policies, service design, strategies etc.

**Service, Locality** and **Team** Meetings enable ideas and issues to be shared on a smaller scale, all of which should be fed into Operational Leadership and Senior Leadership Teams.



## External Reviews

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

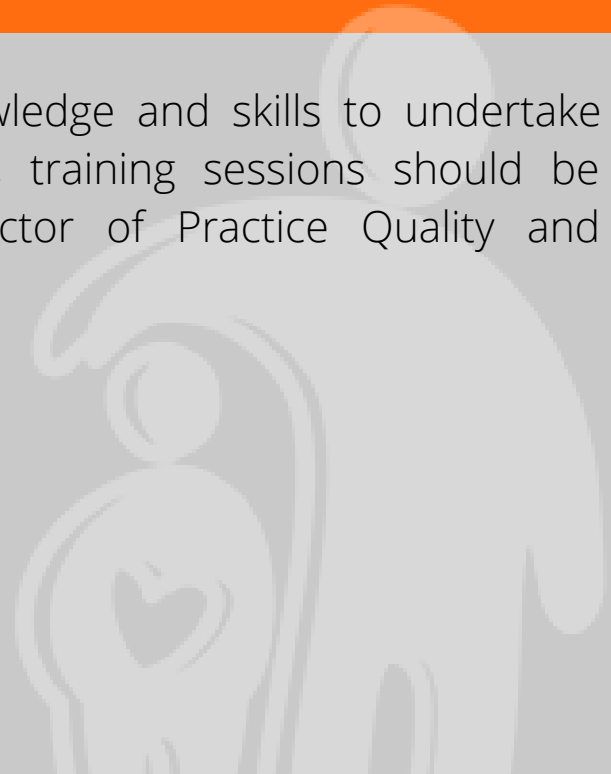
- Ofsted inspections/ focused visits
- DfE advisor reviews
- Youth Offending Service Peer Reviews
- Focused activity by our Independent Scrutineer
- Peer Challenge on a particular theme



This list is not exhaustive - other QA activities will be included and reflected in monthly QA reports.

# Learning & Development

To ensure our managers have the best knowledge and skills to undertake review activities and quality assurance work, training sessions should be organised with the agreement of the Director of Practice Quality and Partnerships.



# Closing the Loop: Learning from QA

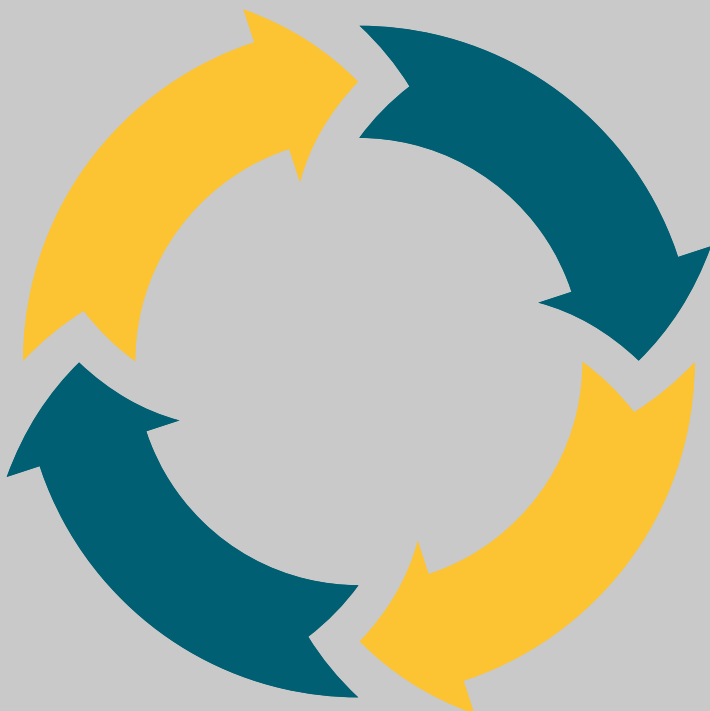
The Trust is a learning organisation, committed to continuous improvement. Therefore, it is imperative that learning from all quality assurance activity is captured, addressed, implemented and monitored.

It is important that this learning is communicated, shared and used in a meaningful way which contributes to good practice; and that services that are always seeking ways to improve. This approach makes sure that we have a strong culture of shared and continual learning at every level.

A whole system approach is required. We need to make sure there is a clear and continuous cycle:

- Undertaking bespoke activities,
- Sharing the learning, both at individual and strategic level
- Implementing actions to address any learning points
- Embed learning and test this out through future QA activity

By doing this we 'close the loop' between QA activity, learning and evidencing improved practice.



Some specific ways to do this include:

Highlighting specific actions arising from individual practice reviews/ observations; progressing these actions and recording them on Liquid Logic; and Team Managers making sure all actions progressed. Actions identified should improve quality and service managers should assure themselves that this is evidenced.

- Quarterly **QA and thematic reports** summarising findings
- **Presentations** delivered to Operational Leadership Team
- Providing **coaching and mentoring** to individuals
- **Seven-minute briefings** in conjunction with Safeguarding Children Partnership Board and messages via PSW communications
- **Reflective spaces**
- **Training** to address specific **practice issues** that have arisen from reviews
- Holding **Learning and Success Reviews** throughout the year
- **Striving for Excellence** weeks to share the learning from QA activities (August and December)



# Links to our Improvement Plan

Any practice themes arising from QA activities should be fed into Improvement Board meetings and consideration should be given to revising our overarching improvement plan where appropriate, with any changes being approved by Executive Management Team (EMT).

## Governance arrangements & reporting

Quality assurance reports need to be shared at EMT and presented to Trust Board for scrutiny and challenge at least every quarter.

