

Children's Services
Quality Assurance
Framework
2024 - 2025



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Introduction

We are committed to delivering outstanding services to children and families. To achieve this, we learn from what works well, understand what we need to do better and put plans in place to continually improve our practice and service delivery.

We work across organisational boundaries and systems to achieve the best possible outcomes for children so that they can be:

- **Happy**
- **Healthy**
- **Safe**
- **In Education**
- **Prepared for Adulthood**



Our Vision

- To keep more children living safely at home with their families
- For those children who cannot live safely at home, our focus is on ensuring high quality care for children, via their wider family or foster family and providing strong relational support for our care leavers

Our Values

- **Collaborative** - Practitioners and families are partners - we do things with people, not to them
- **Strengths-based** - All families have strengths, and we focus on using strengths to support change
- **Purposeful** - Our role is to meet child and family needs and give families the right support, first time
- **Rights-based** - Families have a right to help and support for their children, and the autonomy to make choices. We use our authority to build on family resilience rather than issuing instructions
- **Empathic** - We listen carefully to families and offer a helping hand to create change for children
- **Aspirational** - We want the best for families and to help them to sustain change. Where children cannot stay within their immediate family, children are cared for by skilled carers with high quality care planning that keeps family connections at the heart



The Purpose of Quality Assurance Activity

- To ensure that we protect children from significant harm, provide the help that children and families want, and that meets their needs, we require a way of measuring the impact of what we do with them. We need to be able to demonstrate this to those that are responsible for funding, scrutinising, inspecting, managing and leading services, as well as to families themselves
- As a learning organisation, quality assurance activity gives us the opportunity to know ourselves well, to shine a light on good practice and to put in place plans to use this good practice to make improvements in other areas
- Quality Assurance activity is an integral part of what we do internally and across our safeguarding partnership. It gives us insights into how effective we are in holistically meeting the needs of the families in our communities and identifies any areas for further improvement and innovation
- It gives us an analysis of the effectiveness of our system of support for families that can be used to inform future funding and commissioning decisions

Responsibility for Quality Assurance Activity

- Everyone working within the system of children's services is making a contribution to meeting the needs of children and families, and therefore everyone has a part to play in quality assuring practice. It is activity that must be prioritised because we all need to know whether we are having the impact we aspire to as individuals, teams, services, organisations and partnerships
- Somerset has adopted the Family Safeguarding model and have trust in our workforce to seek to collaborate (rather than 'do to' people) and therefore encourage self-assessment and reflection when evaluating practice. This includes opportunities to reflect on what has worked well in practice with families as well as reflection on what could have been done differently, when outcomes have not improved for the child



Underpinning principles

Listening to the experiences of families

Seeking to understand how families have experienced the service they have received, listening to what they value and exploring challenges is central to any quality assurance activity we undertake.

Building on our strengths

The lives of children and young people are improved through the everyday efforts of practitioners who are supported by their managers and colleagues. We actively share examples of good practice across the organisation so that we have a shared understanding of what families find helpful to improve their lives.

We recognise the complexity of the system that supports families and seek to understand how changes or difficulties in one part of the system are affecting other parts. We recognise and build on the strengths we have to promote a reflective, dynamic approach to conversations about practice.

Creating a learning culture

Quality assurance activity is transparent, with judgements about practice informed by national guidance, local policy and children social care practice standards.

Quality assurance activities are collaborative. They focus on identifying learning so that we know ourselves well and inform our programme of continued professional development offer for our workforce to support knowledge and skill development.



The role of practitioners

Practitioners have a vital role in quality assurance and ensuring that learning from quality assurance activity is acted upon and embedded into practice.

Practitioners are alerted via LCS when a Practice Evaluation has been undertaken on a child who they are involved with.

Practitioners should:

- Use their team action plan to be creative and share suggestions for developing practice and service delivery within their team, in line with the service plan
- Participate in dip reviews under the guidance of the team manager/leader to evidence the progress being made on the team action plan and service plan
- Identify, nominate and celebrate good practice - The good practice nomination process can be found [here](#)
- Discuss the outcome of any Practice Evaluation for children they are working with and agree any actions to be taken forward, with their manager during their next supervision
- Participate in team diagnostics, share examples of some of the good work they are proud of and talk about any areas of challenge and what has happened to overcome the challenges



The role of Consultant Social Workers

Consultant Social Workers (CSWs) role model and promote our positive learning culture. They support practitioners to provide high quality, consistent practice to support good outcomes to be achieved for children and families.

Consultant Social Workers have a lead role in supporting newly qualified social workers and overseas practitioners to develop their practice. They hold lead roles for practice specialisms and work with partners to develop and deliver weekly CPD sessions to support knowledge, skill and practice development.

They provide additional training to support learning needs identified across the workforce, and the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP).

The following quality assurance activities are undertaken by CSWs:

- Regular quality assurance activity, including management oversight, supervision, observations, dip reviews, practice evaluations, team diagnostics and seeking service user feedback
- Identification, nomination, verification and sharing of good practice via the good practice process
- Targeted activity to inform areas of strength and areas of focus for further development
- Sharing of learning from local, regional and National learning reviews with the workforce



The role of Independent Reviewing Officers, Child Protection Coordinators and Fostering Reviewing Officers

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Child Protection Coordinators (CPCs) and Fostering Reviewing Officers (FROs) have an important role in overseeing the effectiveness of planning for children.

The Quality Assurance Issue Resolution Policy supports a collaborative approach to evidence how issues that impact on children are resolved at the right level and in a timely way.

The impact on the child is the focus of any challenge.

Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Coordinators use their knowledge and skills to support planning and service delivery through involvement in:

- Consultations with social work teams prior to strategy meetings, child protection conferences, child looked after reviews and fostering reviews
- Chairing of child protection conferences, child looked after reviews and fostering reviews in a way that actively promotes and encourages children and families' participation
- Midpoint review of care planning for the child between child protection conferences and child looked after reviews
- Using the issue resolution process to address practice that could be improved in order to support the best outcome for the child to be achieved
- Seeking feedback from families and carers about their experiences of using services
- Providing clear advice and feedback about how practice can be developed when undertaking and analysing quality assurance activity



The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The Local Authority Designated Officer is responsible for managing allegations of abuse against individuals who work with children in any setting. The LADO should be informed in all cases in which it is alleged that a person who works with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed the child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- Behaved towards a child in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.
- Behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates that they may not be suitable to work with children

The LADO does not conduct investigations directly, they provide guidance and advice in respect of managing the allegation in a robust and timely way and which is in accordance with Southwest Child Protection Procedures and Safeguarding in Schools Statutory Guidance.

To notify the LADO of an allegation, an Allegations Reporting Form (ARF) will need to be completed and forwarded to: sdinputters@somerset.gov.uk

The LADO service provides a monthly report of progress against key performance indicators. They undertake service specific quality assurance and participate in wider service quality assurance activity. Additionally they undertake outreach work to ensure that practitioners are informed and educated about feedback from quality assurance activity and their role in referring concerns to the LADO.



The role of leaders and managers

Leaders and managers ensure high standards of practice through role modelling, providing oversight, respectful challenge and support. This happens through:

- Creating a culture where quality assurance activity is valued as business as usual
- Participating in regular quality assurance activity, including management oversight, supervision, dip reviews, practice evaluations, team diagnostics and seeking service user feedback
- Observing the practice of each practitioner quarterly and providing feedback about areas of strengths and areas that may need improving
- Promoting shadowing opportunities across all services. Back to the floor (practitioners and managers of all levels shadow practitioners) to ensure a good understanding of practice across the organisation
- Provision of an annual appraisal, that helps practitioners reflect on how their work is helping to improve outcomes for children. Identify themes from appraisals to inform future staff development opportunities
- Nomination of good practice via the good practice process
- Providing constructive feedback when approving reports and documents
- Providing high quality, reflective supervision that offers support, challenge and sets high aspirations when planning for children
- Helping practitioners to understand and interpret performance data through discussions in team meetings and supervision
- Using team action plans as a tool to determine priorities for improvements and to provide clarity about how the improvements can be achieved



Working with Partners

To improve outcomes for children, there needs to be strong multi-agency working across our partnerships. This framework is aligned to complement activity undertaken within the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Local Area partnership.

The core quality assurance activities that focus on partnership working include:

- **SSCP Section 11 Audit** - Reviewing how agencies are meeting their statutory responsibilities to safeguard children. This is a 3 yearly programme involving audit in year 1 and nominated agency workshops in years 2 and 3 (2024 is year 1 of the cycle)
- **SEND Multi-Agency thematic audit** - Quarterly multi-agency reviews of the quality of practice of our work with children with SEND
- **SSCP Multi-Agency Audits** - Thematic reviews of how partners are working together to address areas for development and emerging themes that we wish to explore as a partnership

Themes and learning that emerges from quality assurance activity is discussed at the SSCP Quality and Performance and/or Learning and Improvement partnership groups. This provides the focus for multi-agency action plans.

Where partner agencies need to challenge one another's approach, respectful challenge centres around the needs of the child and their family and is addressed promptly.

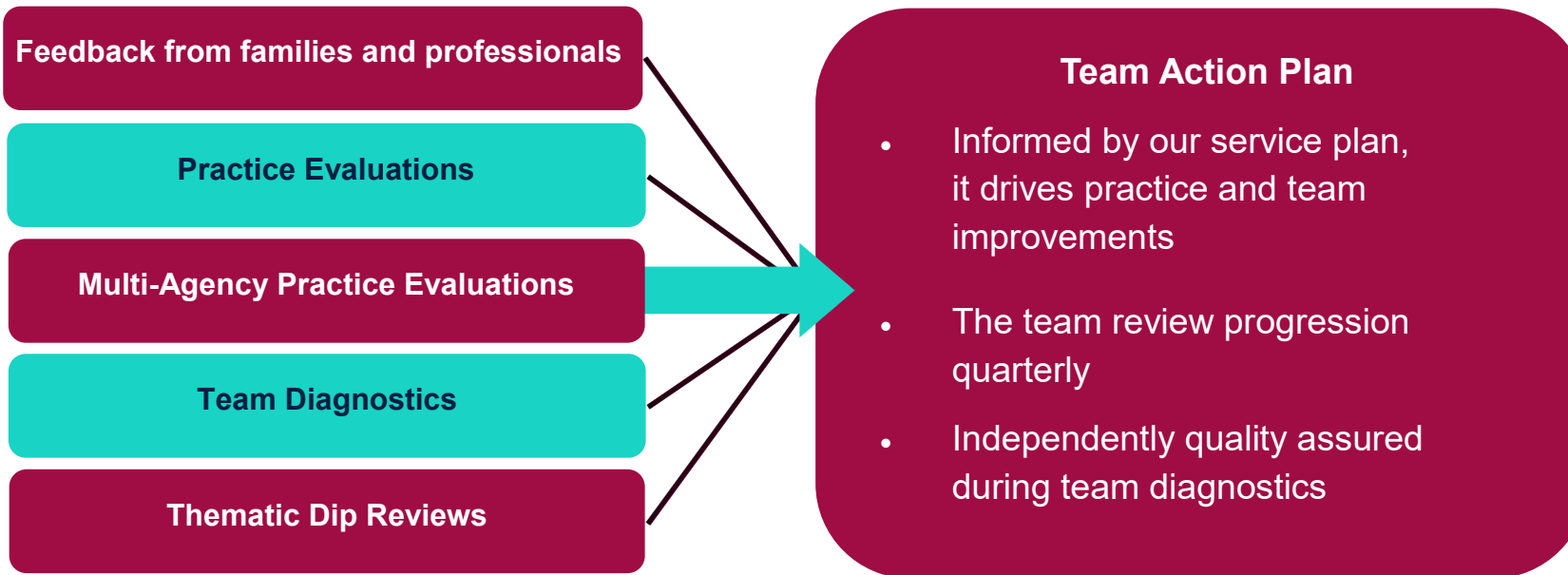
The **SSCP Resolving Professional Differences protocol** is followed when seeking to resolve differences with stage 1 being a conversation between practitioners. For services using LCS or EHM, resolutions are recorded using the "RPD" case-note.



The range of quality assurance activities

We routinely undertake a range of quality assurance activities to explore how practice within different areas of the service is impacting on outcomes for children and families.

These activities inform our understanding of our organisational strengths, as well as helping us to understand where we need to focus improvement work.



There will also be times when we undertake additional quality assurance activity in response to incidents, practice issues/themes, learning reviews or performance data. These activities take place in response to successes and/or concerns.



Practice Evaluations (PEs):

A comprehensive audit to review quality of practice and how practice is supporting good outcomes for children, and families. Completed in collaboration with practitioners and include feedback from children, parents and carers. Ofsted grade descriptors to help evaluators make judgements about practice are available [here](#).

Quarterly, a sample group of children is identified by the Service Improvement Team. The cohort is representative of all of the Children's Services teams and areas across the county.

Practice Evaluation

Evaluators take protected time to complete allocated Practice Evaluation

Collaboration

Evaluators complete the audit collaboratively with the practitioner and gather feedback from families

Moderation

Moderator offers another perspective on the quality of practice and reviews the judgements. They should also consult with the evaluator if needed

Outcomes

The Practice Evaluation is discussed in supervision and actions implemented. Service Improvement team share the learning from all PEs with the workforce

	Social Work (including CwD and Leaving Care)	Family Intervention Service	Fostering and Kinship	Youth Justice Team	CwD Early Support
PEs per cycle	60	10	6	8	5

Practice Evaluations (evaluations and moderations) are completed by Advanced Practitioners, Team Leaders, Team Managers, Operational Managers, IROs, CPCs, CSWs, Heads of Service and Assistant Directors. Evaluations and moderations are allocated on an alternating basis (i.e. first cycle evaluation, second cycle moderation...).



Multi-Agency Practice Evaluation (MAPE): A meeting of all professionals involved with a child to review the quality of multi-agency working and how it is supporting outcomes for children.

On alternate months 1 child from across the Children's Social Care teams is selected for a MAPE with a focus on learning from good practice and positive outcomes. Throughout the year, each child will be selected from a different team to provide an equitable spread of feedback. Allocation, meeting and analysis is led by the Service Improvement Team.

The guidance for undertaking and recording a MAPE can be found [HERE](#)

Thematic Dip Review: Review of practice around a specific area of work; themes are determined by Operations Managers, in collaboration with the Service Improvement Team.

Teams complete at least one dip review quarterly and provide an analysis of the findings to the Service Improvement Team for a county-wide analysis of themes.

The tools to undertake the dip review and analysis can be found [HERE](#)

Good Practice: The sharing of good practice is an essential part of continuous service improvement and supports us to be a learning organisation.

Nominations for good practice can be made by anyone at any time throughout the year and are verified by the Consultant Social Worker group. There are a range of opportunities when good practice might be identified including: within supervision, team meetings, during quality assurance activities, team diagnostics, peer discussions etc. Once nominations have been reviewed by the Consultant Social Worker group, feedback will be provided to the nominator, and if ratified it will be added to the Good Practice Library. The process, guidance, and nomination forms for good practice can be found [here](#).

Staff can access verified good practice examples [HERE](#)



Feedback from children, young people, families, and carers (including complaints and compliments): The perspective of our service users about the service they have received/are receiving is understood by seeking and analysing their feedback.

Team Managers/Team Leaders obtain at least one piece of feedback for each practitioner each quarter. Practitioners should also routinely collect feedback from the children and families with whom they are working. The Multi-purpose feedback form is used to record feedback on the child's record and key themes from feedback should be reflected in each team's action plan, and workers' appraisals. The Service Improvement Team provide quarterly analysis of service user feedback.

Team Diagnostic: Supported by the Service Improvement team, diagnostics are a full day evaluation to explore the team's functioning, review progress since the last diagnostic and the effectiveness of their action plan.

Areas of exploration include:

- **Team Culture**
- **Quality of Practice**
- **Quality Assurance within the team**
- **Management Oversight, Support and Challenge**
- **Systemic Issues**

Diagnostics are led by a Head of Service, Operations Manager or Service Manager and are supported by approximately 5 colleagues (Advanced Practitioners, Team Leaders, Team Managers, IROs, CPCs and Consultant Social Workers).

Tools and guidance for Team Diagnostics can be accessed [HERE](#).



Repeat Child Protection Plan audit: A review to understand the circumstances and previous intervention before repeat child protection planning.

When a child presents for a second or subsequent Child Protection plan within two years of the previous plan ending, the Child protection coordinator will complete a repeat plan audit with the social worker and team manager. For children presenting for a third period of child protection planning, a Head of Service conducts an additional review. A six monthly analysis of themes is provided to the workforce by ChAIRS CP service manager with an action plan agreed to address areas where improvements are required.

Becoming Looked After (BLA) audit : A review to understand the circumstances and interventions in the period prior to children becoming looked after.

When children become looked after, their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) completes an audit. The Service Improvement Team and Quality Assurance Service Manager undertake a 6 monthly analysis to identify themes. Identified learning is shared with the workforce and an action plan is developed to address any areas for improvement.

Supervision audit: A qualitative review exploring the quality of supervision being provided to staff.

The Service Improvement Team coordinate an annual supervision dip review to support our understanding of practitioners experiences of supervision. The review involves a staff survey, a review of a sample of supervision records and some peer observations of supervision being provided.

Learning from endings audit: A review to understand themes when permanent care arrangements end.

When children experience an ending from a permanent home i.e. long-term foster care or a kinship ending, an Independent Reviewing Officer will chair a meeting to understand any learning from this ending. A six monthly analysis of themes is provided to the workforce by ChAIRS IRO service manager with an action plan agreed to address areas where improvements are required.



Fathers Audit: A review to understand our work with fathers (including non-resident fathers).

Analysis is shared by Service improvement team six monthly

ADCS Peer Challenge: Assurance activity undertaken between two Local Authorities, focussed on specific areas of practice identified by leaders at a regional level.

Peer Challenges take place over two days and include audits of children's records with practitioners, data analysis, review of practice evaluations and service plans and feedback to senior leaders.

The findings are summarised in an outcome letter to our Director of Children's Services.

Data Deep Dive: An in depth review of data around a particular area of performance identified by Senior Leaders and/or the Service Improvement Team.

Taking place quarterly, led by the Business intelligence team, data deep dives provide an independent challenge to managers and leaders as a result of a non-practitioner overview and analysis of performance information. They pose questions based on data which prompt a more complex exploration of the reasons behind performance and actions needed to improve practice.

Team Action Plans: Each team should have an action plan, developed collaboratively with team members, reflecting local service improvement priorities, informed by service user feedback and Quality Assurance activity.

Action plans are reviewed and updated regularly, at team meetings.

A copy is sent to the Service Improvement Team quarterly for across service analysis to identify county wide themes. **The Team Action Plan Template is here.**



Learning from Serious Incidents

When children suffer harm from serious incidents or near misses are identified, we respond promptly to learn from what practitioners did well and where we can make improvements.

Managers support practitioners through these learning experiences which provide opportunities for reflection, learning and change. Involvement of partners is key to drawing out learning.

The **case for consideration form** should be used to inform the Service Improvement Team of any serious incidents where there is scope for learning. The **serious incident response process** sets out who should complete these forms and what actions need to be taken by whom. Where a child dies or is seriously harmed and abuse or neglect is suspected the Team Manager should notify the Operation Manager and Head of Service on the same day that they become aware. The Head of Service will then work with the Assistant Director to consider whether the Child Safeguarding Practice Review National Panel and/or Ofsted need to be notified. If a serious incident notification is made to the National panel by the Local Authority, a multi-agency Rapid Review will be arranged by the SSCP and will take place, be recorded and submitted to the National Panel within 15 days of the notification.

The SSCP methodologies toolkit provides other mechanisms for exploring learning:

- Desktop review
- Practice learning review
- Safeguarding conversation
- Root cause analysis
- Single agency learning review
- Multi-agency audit



Quality, performance review and service developments

QPRM (Quality and Performance Review Meeting): A meeting of senior operational managers and leaders to scrutinise performance and the quality of practice.

- A quarterly, strengths based, forum led by the Director of Children's Services or Assistant Director, allowing managers to present (in writing and verbally) a summary of the performance of their service
- Presenters are subject to scrutiny of their service from leaders and peers, in the spirit of appreciative enquiry

Stocktake: A meeting of first line team leaders/managers, IROs, CPCs, FROs, CSWs and LADO to focus on monitoring, assessing and driving the quality of frontline practice.

- Taking place 4 times per year, stocktakes are a strengths based forum led by Heads of Service who facilitate the preparation and presentation of plans for service and practice improvement
- Linking into the quarterly QPRM cycle and are based around the overall service plan



Learning from Quality Assurance to develop practice and improve outcomes

Identifying issues

Areas for exploration identified through:

Data, practice themes, supervision, feedback, incidents of concern, successes

Exploring themes

Quality Assurance Activity involving any of the following:

Practice Evaluations, MAPE, Dip Reviews, Feedback, Team Diagnostics, Peer Challenge

Learning

Areas of strength and areas for development:

Developing an understanding of themes through analysis of the findings of QA activity

Sharing Learning

Service Improvement Team highlight and share findings via:

Principal social worker, Management meetings, Closing the Loop Newsletter, 6 monthly QA summary, Annual report to learning and development team, SSCP learning bulletin

Developing Practice

Areas for development incorporated into:

Team Action Plans, Supervision, Learning and Development Plan, CSW led CPD programme, Partnership training opportunities



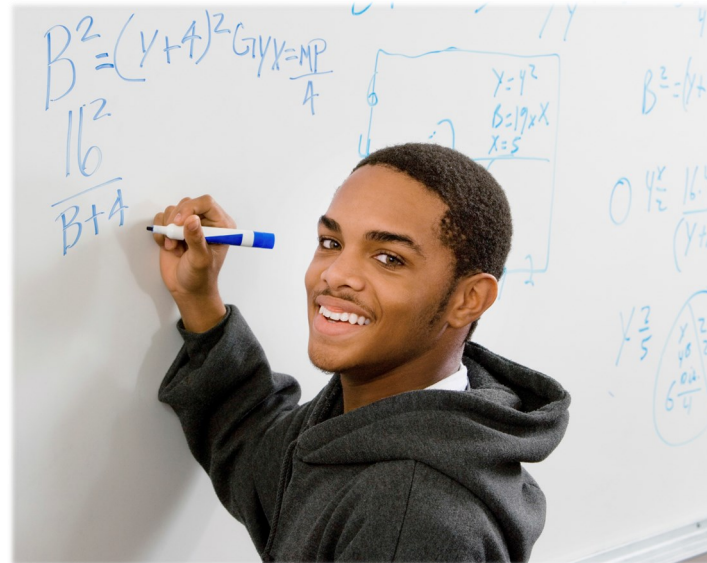
Closing the Loop

The Service Improvement Team support operational colleagues to communicate to the workforce, the findings from quality assurance activity via:

- Quarterly QA newsletter, Closing the Loop, to summarise themes and promote awareness of resources/approaches that may improve practice
- Updates at Operations and County management meetings and area team meetings
- Somerset Safeguarding Children's Partnership newsletter
- Updates directly to teams/managers within Service Improvement Officers' area of responsibility (linked teams)
- Quarterly consultation with the Learning and Development Team; ensuring commissioning and delivery of learning opportunities reflect the service needs
- Regular consultation with the Consultant social worker group; ensuring that themes emerging from QA inform Continuing Professional Development programmes
- 6 monthly quality assurance summary report

Closing the

LOOP



Quality Assurance Calendar January - June

January	February	March	April	May	June
Team Diagnostics (1 per 18 months per team)					
Thematic Dip Review (SIT led)	Practice Evaluation	SEND Dip Review (SIT led)	Thematic Dip Review (SIT led)	Practice Evaluation	
Practice Evaluation Review	MAPE		MAPE		MAPE
		Update Team Action Plans	Supervision Audit		Update Team Action Plans
Stocktake QPRM			Stocktake QPRM		
Repeat CP Analysis		Feedback Themes	BLA Analysis		
Closing the Loop			Closing the Loop		
Good Practice Nominations, Feedback gathering (1 piece per worker per quarter), Team Dip Reviews (1 per quarter)					

PE = Practice Evaluation SIT = Service Improvement Team, MAPE = Multi-Agency Practice Evaluation, QPRM = Quality and Performance Review Meeting, SEND = Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, *Not Front Door (thematic dip review)



Quality Assurance Calendar July - December

July	August	September	October	November	December
Team Diagnostics (1 per 18 months per team)					
Thematic Dip Review (SIT led)	Practice Evaluation*	SEND Dip Review (SIT led)*	Thematic Dip Review (SIT led)	Practice Evaluation*	
	MAPE		MAPE		MAPE
		Update Team Action Plans			Update Team Action Plans
Stocktake QPRM			Stocktake QPRM		
Repeat CP Analysis		Feedback Themes	BLA Analysis		
Closing the Loop			Closing the Loop		
Good Practice Nominations, Feedback gathering (1 piece per worker per quarter), Team Dip Reviews (1 per quarter)					

PE = Practice Evaluation SIT = Service Improvement Team, MAPE = Multi-Agency Practice Evaluation, QPRM = Quality and Performance Review Meeting, SEND = Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, *Not Front Door (thematic dip review)



Service Improvement Team Offer

Service Improvement Team Link:

Each service area has a named colleague from the Service Improvement Team to link with regarding Quality Assurance and service improvement activity. The Service Improvement Team offers quarterly meetings with Operational Managers as an opportunity to identify any support required from the Service Improvement Team

Practice Evaluations: A cycle of Practice Evaluations to be allocated every quarter

Allocation

Evaluators receive their allocation
Moderators notified

PE Support

SIT provide support and guidance around completion of PE

2-3 weeks

Moderators receive allocation

5-6 weeks

SIT complete final checks and analysis on completed PEs

PE on a page

SIT create PE on a page to share at relevant Team Meetings

Team Diagnostics: Dates are agreed with the relevant Operation Manager Diagnostic Lead by the end of the year for the following year. Service Improvement team provide guidance, tools and facilitate the day

Pre-meet in advance of Diagnostic

For OM and TMs/TLs of team being visited and Diagnostic Lead

Sharing diagnostic folder 1 week ahead of diagnostic

Containing relevant documents and information for Diagnostic Team

Dedicated SIT support on day of diagnostic

Usually relevant SIT link officer for the team being visited

Support to Diagnostic Lead in completing report

Including deadline reminders, advice and guidance as needed

Opportunity to provide feedback

To both the diagnostic team and the team being visited

The Service Improvement Team:

Support with thematic dip reviews (this may include support in deciding themes, developing tools and with analysis as required), produce a quarterly QA newsletter outlining themes from QA activities (Closing the loop), provide training on core QA activities twice a year and respond to emails received by the QA Mailbox promptly

