

Quality Assurance Framework

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Introduction

Sandwell Children's Trust holds high aspirations for every child, striving to make a profound and positive impact on their lives. Placing children at the core of everything we do, we are dedicated to their well-being and growth. We prioritise safety, working diligently to keep families together whenever possible. Our approach is collaborative, as we actively engage with children and families, guided by their unique needs.

We are dedicated to achieving this through our collective commitment to upholding our practice standards, values, principles, and the [ST*R Practice model](#), guided by the voices of children and young people thoughtfully articulated in our [Working Together Strategy](#). Our practices and interventions are firmly rooted in statutory guidance and legislation, as outlined in our [safeguarding policies and procedures](#), and our [multi-agency partnership arrangements](#). We are ambitious for our children and families in Sandwell, as well as for our carers, team members, practitioners, and managers. We expect them to know what they need to do, when they need to do it and how well they need to practice. It is essential that the ST*R Practice Model, our values and ethos, practice standards and policies and procedures run through the heart of their practice.

In realising our vision, we are supported by our Quality Assurance Framework, which evaluates the quality and impact of our practices on children and families, with our team members and carers and across all services. This framework leverages our learning culture to enable continuous improvement in the support we provide to babies, children, and families across Sandwell.

Throughout this document we use “children” to refer to babies, children, and young people.

What is Quality Assurance and why is it important?

Quality Assurance (QA) is an umbrella term encompassing all activities that contribute to service improvement. These activities highlight strengths and best practices, identify gaps and areas for development, promote learning and positive practices, and monitor compliance with regulatory guidance, policies and procedures. Importantly, this allows us to assess the impact on children and young people and identify ways to enhance and strengthen outcomes.

Our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) enables leaders, senior managers, and those with oversight/ scrutiny responsibilities to assess how effectively Sandwell Children's Trust (including the Independent fostering Service) delivers services to ensure the safety of children, promote

positive outcomes, and identify and target areas for improvement. It also supports our workforce development and identifies key individual and services' strengths and key areas of improvement. At both the strategic and operational levels, our QA activities inform us whether we are making a difference and improving outcomes for the children and families and carers we work with, as well as how we measure this impact. Through our QA activities, we seek assurance that:

- Our practices and services consistently meet good standards and regulatory guidance.
- The experiences, voices, and perspectives of children, young people, and families (including carers) are central to our work.
- Our plans and interventions lead to improved outcomes for children.

How are we going to achieve this?

Within Sandwell, we encourage and support our staff and carers to be reflective, innovative, and proud of their work and contributions. To facilitate this, our quality assurance activities promote a range of principles, with our reviews and moderations demonstrating:

- Curiosity by maintaining a child and family/carer focus in all activities.
- Collaboration at all stages, fostering understanding and empowerment through discussion and reflection.
- A strengths-based and relational approach through our ST*R Practice Model.
- Meaningful and purposeful practice recommendations that make a difference.

Our QA framework's starting point is being clear about 'what good looks like' for children and families.

- All children will have a high-quality assessment in which they have been involved, reflecting their and their families'/carers experiences, wishes, feelings, and needs. This assessment will be written in a way that is understandable to the child and family, enabling them to fully understand their situation, and what needs to change. Direct work intervention and evidence-based tools will be used to inform our assessments and analysis.
- All children will have a SMART plan which explains what needs to happen; by when; who by; what outcomes we are seeking together; how any need or risk is being managed; and what the contingency plan is. Plans should be simple and easy to understand by families and children and written with them.
- Every child will receive purposeful wraparound evidenced based support and a plan of direct work intervention delivered by the right service and by the right person. We are committed to working collaboratively with our partner agencies to enable collective and sustained support to children and their families, and where needed their carers.
- All children's records will be purposeful, well-written, and timely, ensuring everyone can understand significant events, the plan, the purpose of actions and interactions, and the

progress made for the child and family/carer.

- Every practitioner and carer involved as a key professional with the child and family should use the Partnership ST*R Practice Model in their approach to assessing, intervening and planning (or caring) for children.
- Every practitioner and carer involved as a key professional with the child and family will receive management oversight including reflective supervision, monitoring, and quality assurance of the work.
- We will review and evaluate the impact, tracking progress toward agreed outcomes, and determining the next steps.

Evaluating our practice

In January 2018 the framework for the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) was implemented by Ofsted promoting a more focused approach to assessing the quality and impact of social work practice for children and families:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018

We have aligned our evaluation scaling/ratings for our Quality Assurance work, based on the Ofsted outcomes.

Inadequate	The planning and intervention are failing to protect the child from experiencing harm or continuing to be risk of harm. The planning and intervention are not meeting the needs of the child or young person or improving their outcomes
Requires Improvements	The child or young person is not being harmed or left at risk of being harmed. The impact of intervention is not yet consistently delivering the support which is of a good standard and is improving the child or young person's outcomes.
Good	There is good support for the child and their family, protecting the child from harm and resulting in measurable improved outcomes for them
Outstanding	There is consistently good and better support for child or young person and family. This is protecting the child or young person from harm and resulting in significant and measurable improved outcomes for them

In addition, our quality assurance work within our Fostering Services follows the Fostering Regulatory framework and National Minimum Standards.

Quality Assurance – our blended approach

Our blended approach to QA recognises that we require a range of information to fully and holistically understand the quality of practice and services delivered to children, families and where needed their carers, and know the impact we are making. It is important that our findings

of the QA activities are being reported through an outcomes-based approach to enable us to evidence:

- How much did we do? Was it timely? (quantity)
- How well did we do it? What was the standard? (quality)
- What difference did it make? What was the impact? (impact)
- How are we continuing to make improvements? (actions and plans)



Quantitative Data

Performance and Intelligence Information

Practice cannot improve without understanding relevant data and managing performance. Quantitative data aims to measure an area using numbers that can be counted or compared on a numeric scale. This includes performance and statistical data and is a way to quantify our activities. It helps us to understand if we are timely in the services that we provide to children and families, and where needed carers.

Through access to Power BI and various performance reports (Key Performance Indicators, CHaT, SCT Outcome based Framework, regional and national analysis and benchmarking etc), managers and leaders at all levels have the responsibility to oversee and track performance within their service/ directorate area and identify where practice is good and sharing this, as well as where practice falls short, with a clear plan to improve. All managers need to be equipped with

the skills, knowledge, and tools to access, understand, interpret, and use performance information to drive practice improvements within their service area.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data is information that cannot be counted, measured, or easily expressed using numbers. This could be reading and reflecting on children's and carer's records, having conversations, undertaking observations, and seeking feedback. This all provides rich analysis for understanding the quality of the services that we provide to children and families, and where needed carers.

In Sandwell, we employ various Quality Assurance activities and reporting to gather qualitative evidence about the quality of our practices and services provided to children and families. These include:

- Practice Reviews (PRs) and Thematic Reviews (TR).
- Practice Observations (PO).
- Practice-focused activities e.g. Group Supervision
- Feedback from children, families, carers, team members and stakeholders.

Practice Reviews (PR), Practice Observations (PO) and Thematic Reviews (TR):

In Sandwell, we aim to ensure that our reviewers and managers dedicate time and resources to Quality Assurance activities, while also emphasising the dissemination of learning and the implementation of necessary practice changes. To support this, we have established a bi-monthly cycle for Practice Reviews (PRs) and Thematic Reviews (TRs). Each bi-monthly cycle will include Practice Reviews, Practice Observations and Thematic Reviews being completed in the first month, followed by the second month focused on reporting activity, as well as facilitating reflections, discussions, and forums to integrate and embed the learning from these QA activities.

Additionally, in April and October, we will incorporate insights from national and local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, as well as SCSP Multiagency Practice Reviews.

Practice Reviews (PRs)

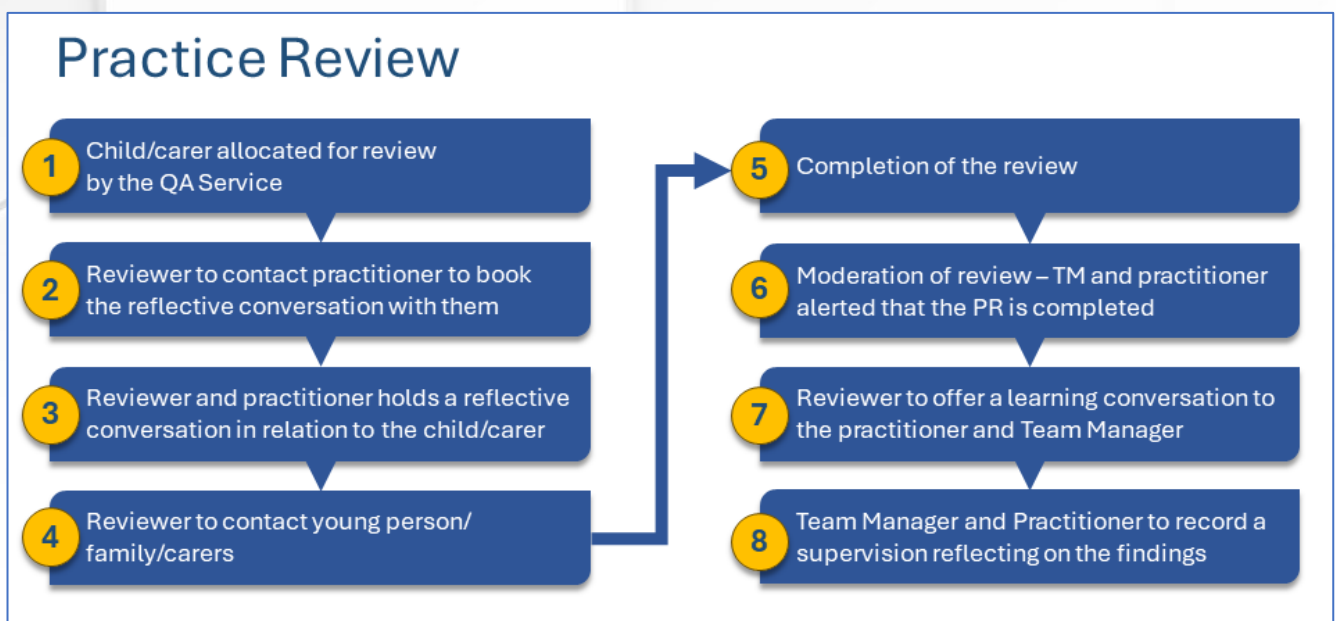
Practice Reviews (PRs) are crucial for evaluating the quality and consistency of practice. They are collaborative. This means that in addition to exploring the child's file that they are:

- Conducted in partnership with practitioners and carers to maximise evidence of practice, as well as enhance the practitioners and carer's own learning.
- Feedback about the intervention is sought from the children and their families (or carers) regarding their experiences with our services and the impact this has had on their lives.

In Sandwell, our cohort of reviewers—including Advanced Practitioners, Practice Education Assessors, Team Managers (including other frontline managers and the Intervention Hub), Independent Chairs, Directors, and the Chief Executive—conduct Practice Reviews across service areas. Our QA Manager and the Social Work Academy will provide support to Reviewers through training and workshop opportunities. First-time reviewers will receive additional assistance from their line managers to successfully complete their initial Practice Review (PR).

Reviewers will:

- Evaluate and reflect on the child / care experienced young person/ foster carer/adopter's/ foster carers records.
- Directly obtain feedback from the child and parent/care giver. Feedback, suggestions, and recommendations should be actively sought.
- Meet with the lead practitioner to discuss the child and young person's journey and reflect on the practice and the impact on the child/young person and their family, and carers. Good practice should be highlighted and shared, as well as reflecting on where practice could improve, and what that would look like to lift it up to good.



Moderations

Our moderation process ensures that all Practice Reviews (PRs) are completed to a high standard, and that there is consistency of PRs, before they are finalised on the child's record (Liquid Logic). Service Managers, Heads of Service and Registered Manager (Fostering Service) are Moderators and are responsible for moderating all PRs within their respective services. They should use reflective discussions and feedback to communicate their findings to Reviewers.

The moderated grade will be the final accepted grade, but both the original and moderated grades will be reflected in the PR.

Thematic Reviews (TRs)

Each of our Thematic Reviews are centred around a specific focus that aligns with our [Annual Review Plan](#). This plan is informed by our Self-Evaluation Form (SEF), Ofsted recommendations, and other practice areas identified for further exploration following quality assurance activities. For each Thematic Review, a tailored tool is developed and used to guide our Reviewers in focusing on the particular area of practice/service area/ or group of children to be reviewed.

Our cohort of Thematic Reviewers include Advanced Practitioners, Practice Education Assessors, Team Managers (including other frontline managers), Independent Chairs, Directors, and the Chief Executive—conduct Thematic Reviews across service areas. When there is a focus on the fostering Service, the Fostering Team Managers, Registered Manager and Responsible Individual will join the cohort of Reviewers.

Practice Observations (POs)

Observing practice provides the opportunity to look differently at the way we work, celebrating what we are doing well alongside understanding individual learning needs; all practice observations are learning opportunities. They enable us to get a real sense of the way in which a practitioner/ manager communicates with children and families and others. It enables us to understand the quality of the approaches that they take with a child and family/carer, how they build and sustain relationships, using relational, strengths based and trauma informed practices. The Practice Observations allow us to appraise the quality of their practice experience, knowledge, and skills, and gives us the opportunity to provide specific feedback about the quality of practice. The process of preparing for an observation and then reflecting afterwards gives an opportunity for the observer and practitioner to gain a clear picture of both their strengths and areas for development, which can be a highly supportive and motivating process.

Our cohort of Practice Observers include Advanced Practitioners, Practice Education Assessors, Team Managers (including other frontline managers, and the Fostering Service), Independent Chairs, Directors, and the Chief Executive—conduct practice observations across service areas.

Findings from the Practice Reviews (PR), Thematic Reviews (TR) and Practice Observations (PO) are included in the Quality Assurance Report.

- All PRs, TRs and POs are compiled and analysed to understand the quality of practice. This includes the moderations, overall grading and feedback from children, families, practitioners and carers, which are triangulated as part of the analysis.
- The key findings highlighting the good practice and the areas for focus and improvement, alongside a plan of actions is produced by the QA Manager.
- The SW Academy through its Advanced Practitioners, and the Fostering Service through the Registered Manager will review all 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate' Practice Reviews (PRs) and track practice recommendations and assurance to close the loop. This is to ensure that we can assure ourselves that the PR has sustained and delivered the

required improvement for the child or carer.

- The findings are shared with the senior leaders and inform service and strategic plans.

(For further details, please refer to page 12 of the framework - Closing the loop)

Escalations

If a Practice Review, Thematic Review or Practice Observation is rated as 'Inadequate' by a Reviewer or Moderator, the findings must immediately be shared with the responsible Service Manager, and Head of Service, including where applicable the Registered Manager for the Fostering Service. The child's Service Manager (Registered Manager for carers) must review the child's records (carers records for the Fostering Service) and record their assurance on the safety of those it relates to, what has been put in place to mitigate any known risk, and what action is needed. Any urgent actions must be undertaken swiftly to ensure any child/ren are safe. If there is any dispute regarding the level of concern, the Head of Service (Responsible Individual for the Fostering Service) will provide the final decision.

Feedback from the enablers

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/Quality Assurance Service and Intervention Hub. A series of qualitative data focusing on specific areas to evidence our adherence to the Partnership ST*R Practice Model will be summarised and included in a bi-monthly Enabler QA Report, including notice of good practice and escalations.

In addition, part of our QA framework includes the findings from:

- Compliments and complaints received from other stakeholders.
- Compliments and complaints received from children, young people and carers
- Learning Reviews
- Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- Other learning from Reflective Spaces (e.g. Group supervisions, Managers Reflective Sessions & Leadership Hub)
- Intervention Hub

These are all explored in detail, and learning is gathered and shared within a bi-monthly Enabler QA report.

Benchmarking Reviews (BRs) Peer Reviews (PeRs)

Our QA Framework will include twice yearly Benchmarking Reviews (BRs) and an annual Peer Reviews (PeRs).

The purpose of twice-yearly Benchmarking Reviews (BRs) will be to ensure that there is consistency of our QA work, and that Reviewers are experienced, knowledgeable and skilled in producing consistent high quality Practice Reviews, Thematic Reviews, and Practice Observations. A programme of Benchmarking Reviews is available in the [Annual Review Plan](#).

When a Benchmarking Review is undertaken all nominated Reviewers review the same file/service/child/carer. Following the review being completed, there is a Reflective Session, led by a Lead Reviewer (to be determined when the BR is commissioned) where all Reviewers come together to discuss their findings, and why they rated the Review as they did. Following the Benchmarking Review a short BR Report will be written by the Lead Reviewer, highlighting good consistency of Review practice, as well as where improvements need to be made to how we quality assure consistently.

The purpose of the annual Peer Reviews (PeRs) is used as one of the different ways that we seek feedback from each other and will be used to inform self-assessment, service plans and the drive for continuous improvement. A Head of Service (including Responsible Individual for the Fostering Service), alongside a Young Ambassador (where appropriate) will lead a small team of their Reviewers, who will be tasked with going into one part of the service and review the practice of another area. The Peer Review should include as many team members/carers as possible from the service being reviewed. The approach of the PeR should be based on the ST*R Practice Model principles and be reflective. Following the PeR a report is written based on the review, and presented to the service/s involved. The report will highlight good practice and where necessary improvements are needed. These will be detailed in a service/ cross services action plan. A programme of Peer Reviews is available in the [Annual Review Plan](#).

Feedback from children and families and carers

It is critical that we create opportunities to hear the voices of the children, young people, families, and carers that we work with. The Guide to Working Together is a key component of the ST*R Practice Model and provides a framework within which the Trust and its partners can ensure that voices are not only captured, but the intelligence and insight we gather is used to continuously improve the service we provide.

Where can you hear our voice?

There are lots of ways that you can use things we tell you to make things better.



Using our voice to make things better

1

Take all of the information that you have, put it together and pick out the main things we are saying

2

Bring it to our forums and talk to us about what you have found out

4

The Trust and other organisations can use this information to help make decisions in the future

3

We will then have a really good idea of what children and young people in Sandwell are saying

influence

A man in a green jacket with 'PWR' and 'Sandwell' logos is holding a white sign that says 'influence'. He is standing in the center of a circular flow of four arrows (two blue, two yellow) that connect the four numbered steps of the process.

Young Ambassadors and other children, young people, families, and carers will be supported to engage in further activities to gather and champion the voice of the child:

- Mystery customer & young inspector exercises including telephone calls, online/email contacts, and visits to buildings.
- Supported to co-conduct Peer Reviews (PeRs) with QA Reviewers.
- Children, young people, families, and carers who participate in surveys and interviews following interventions.
- Parent/Carer Forum and Support Groups

Fostering Service Quality Assurance

The Fostering Service are part of the wider quality assurance work of the Trust. However, it is essential that the Fostering Service have good quality assurance measures in place in their own right that meet the Fostering Regulatory requirements and National Minimum Standards.

The Fostering Service participate in the Practice Reviews, Themed Reviews, Benchmarking and Peer Reviews within the Trust. However, the focus of this quality assurance work always has a fostering focus.

In addition to the wider Trust quality assurance, the Fostering Service have service specific quality assurance. This includes:

- QA of key documents through management/panel oversight
- Reflective supervision
- Feedback from children and young people (including compliments/complaints)
- Feedback from carers - Forum and Patch Based Support Groups
- Fostering Panel QA and feedback
- Emerging themes eg. placement disruption, sufficiency, stability
- Allegations against carers
- Bi-monthly QA Communication Meetings
- External benchmarking/peer support

The Fostering Service have a bi-monthly Quality Assurance Report that is completed by the Registered Manager. This is shared with the Fostering Service so that close the loop activity and learning can be shared with the Fostering Service in the cycle of learning. The Fostering Service bi-monthly Quality Assurance Report will also be incorporated into the SCT bi-monthly QA Report to ensure that the Fostering Service is included, and connected to, the wider learning of the Trust.

Resources Directorate Quality Assurance

The Resources Directorate are included as part of the wider quality assurance work of the Trust. There are many different roles within the Trust, all with the sole aim of delivering good quality

services to children, families and carers, without necessarily being at the frontline. Each member of staff at all levels has a role to play in quality assuring the services we deliver.

The Resources Directorate have quality assurance activities that meet the needs of their respective services, but also ensure that this is part of the wider Trust quality assurance.

Included in this are:

- Bespoke Resource Reviews
- Resource dip samples
- Mystery shopper quality assurance
- Feedback from team members

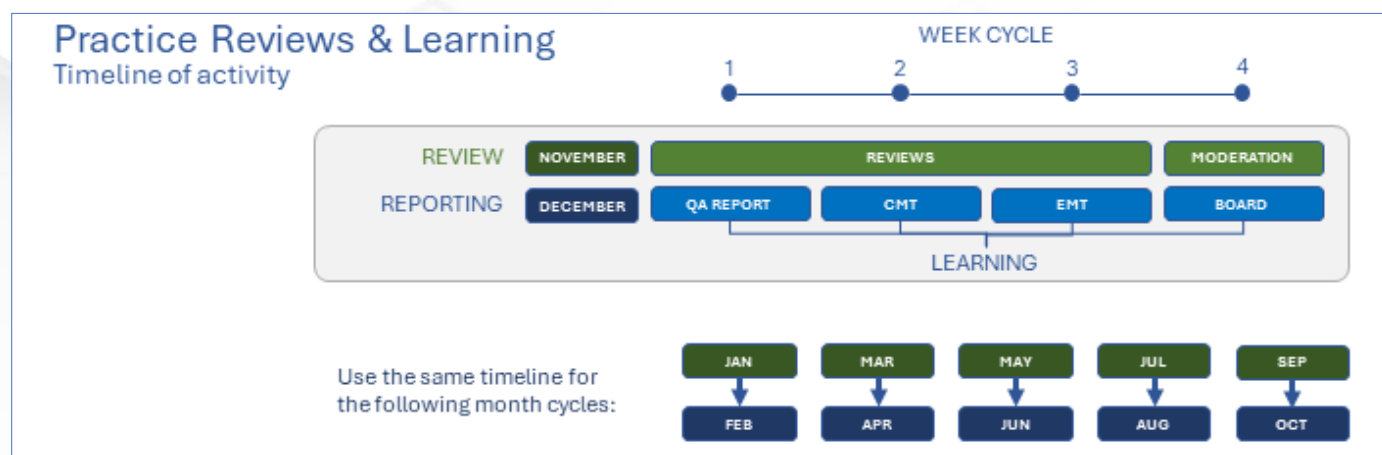
In addition, the Resources Service participate in the annual Peer Review (PeR).

The Resources Service have a bi-monthly Quality Assurance Report that is completed by a Resources Head of Service. This is shared with the Resources Directorate so that close the loop activity and learning can be shared with the Resources Directorate in the cycle of learning. The Resources Services bi-monthly Quality Assurance Report will be incorporated into the SCT bi-monthly Enabler QA Report to ensure that the Resources Service is included and connected to, the wider learning of the Trust.

Closing the loop: disseminating and implementing the learning from QA

The Trust aims to be a ‘learning organisation’ that is committed to continuous improvement through learning. A Quality Assurance report is produced every two months, and it is crucial that we address the learning outcomes and monitor progress.

Effective communication and sharing learning is essential to fostering good practice and driving service improvements. A timeline for reporting QA reviewing, reporting and findings for Practice Reviews and Thematic Reviews is available (see below).

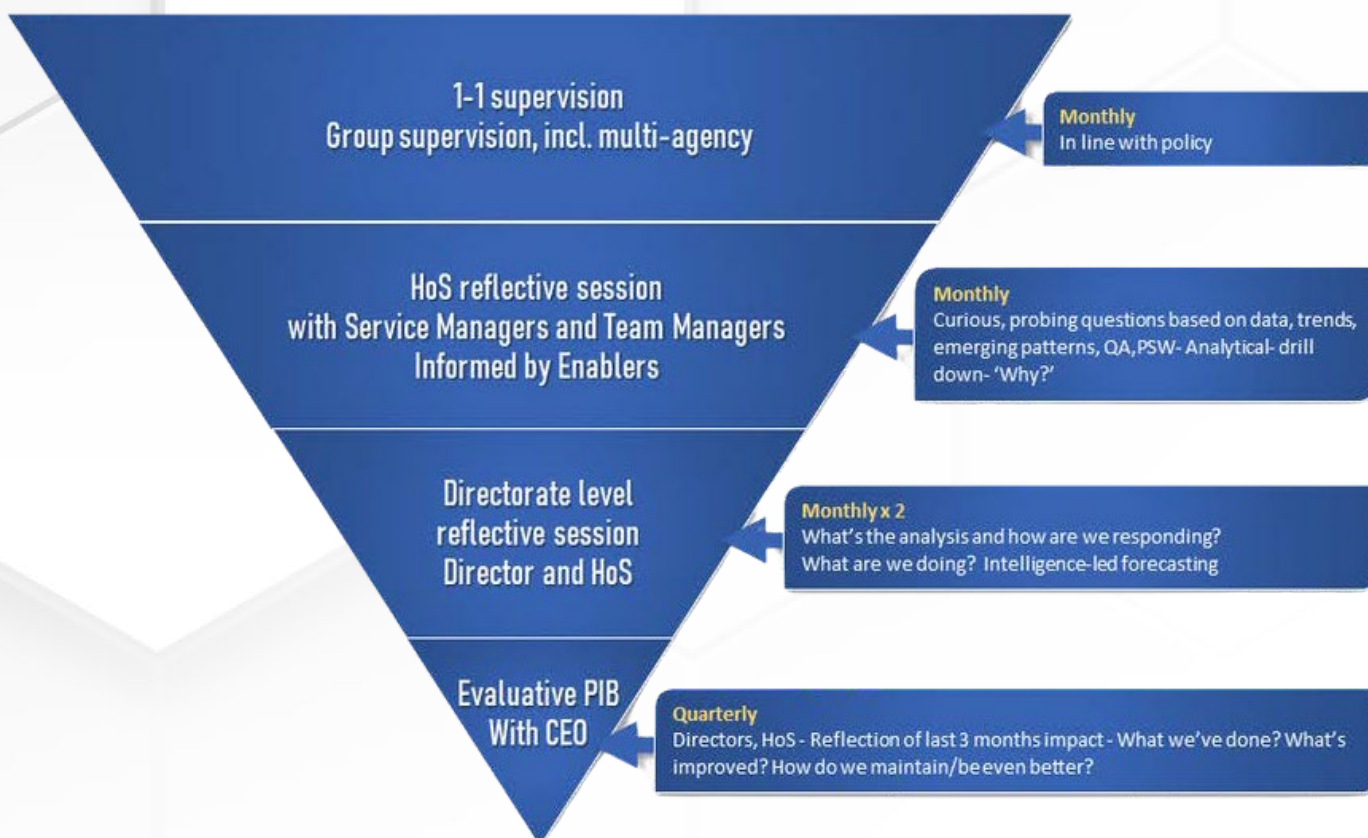


The quality assurance calendar year is in 6 x 2 monthly cycles of quality assurance activity.

In the first cycle every other month (November, January, March, May, July, Sept) we will undertake a series of quality assurance activities including Practice Reviews, Thematic Reviews, and Practice Observations, and moderations. At set time during the Review year this will also include the twice-yearly Benchmarking Reviews and annual Peer Reviews.

In the second cycle every other month (December, February, April, June, August, October) our focus will be on writing the QA Report and on implementing the learning from QA activities through established mechanisms, ranging from the individual and operational levels to the strategic level, in line with the Transformation Programme, ST*R Practice Model and Outcomes Framework for improvement.

A Quality Assurance Action Plan will be drawn up and held by the Quality Assurance and Practice Service Manager. The QA Action Plan will include input and oversight from the Heads of Service (including the Registered Manager and Responsible Individual for the Fostering Service). Updates on the QA Action Plan progression will be included in the QA report and presented to the Executive Management Team.



The QA action plan is shared with the Trust's Social Work Academy to facilitate practice improvements. The Head of Practice, supported by the SW Academy (and for the fostering Service the Registered Manager), will oversee the development and commissioning of learning opportunities through existing forum and reflective spaces, including:

- Practitioner Forum
- Managers' Reflective Sessions
- Leadership Hub
- Bespoke Workshops
- Group Supervisions
- Carer Forum/Support Groups

The [QA webpage](#) will host all QA reports and findings providing links to examples of good practice, guidance, tools, and information on training available to enhance practice.

Additionally, Advanced Practitioners, Service Managers, and the Registered Manager for the Fostering Service play a vital role in supporting frontline practitioners and managers in addressing practice needs through:

- Bi-monthly group supervisions conducted by Advanced Practitioners (Team Managers for the Fostering Service and other services)
- Individual, targeted support for staff/carers with Requires Improvement (RI) or Inadequate (I) ratings from Practice Reviews (PRs) or Thematic Reviews (TRs). This includes support from Advanced Practitioners for frontline practitioners, Service Managers for team managers, and Independent Chairs (Principal Independent Reviewing Officers for children's work that is graded as Requires Improvement or Inadequate. For the Fostering Service this will be the Registered Manager for carers.

Governance arrangements

Quality practice improvement is everyone's responsibility. We are committed to ensuring that everyone fully understands the roles and responsibilities they have and are effectively supported to carry out this commitment to our and children and families.

The bi-monthly QA Report and the bi-monthly Enabler QA Report ensure that we are reporting on our quality assurance and improvements made, on a monthly basis; but the difference between the two reports ensures that focus on reviewing and learning through enablers and reflection is firmly embedded in our organisation. All Quality Assurance reports are shared with the Childrens Management Team, Executive Management Team and presented to Sandwell Children's Trust Board and Operational Partnership Board for scrutiny, challenge, and reflections monthly.

The responsibility for the implementation of learning and practice improvements sits with the Practice Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive of the Trust ([link to PIB ToR](#))