
ST HELENS
CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE
QUALITY ASSURANCE
FRAMEWORK



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Section 1: Purpose and Principles of the Quality Assurance Framework

1.1 The purpose of this Quality Assurance Framework is to

- Provide an accurate understanding of the quality of practice and the experiences of children who receive a service in St Helens.
- Create a cycle of learning to ensure continuous improvement in practice. To support delivery of consistently good practice that leads to improved experience and outcomes for children and families.

1.2 The key principles for Children's services are that quality assurance is :

- **Child Centred.** The focus of quality assurance will be on the experiences, progress and outcomes of the child or young person on their journey through our social work and safeguarding system
- **Restorative.** Quality assurance will be restorative. Quality assurance work will be based on working *with* staff and managers and building relationships. As a restorative process quality assurance will be characterised by both high support and high challenge
- **Outcomes and Impact Based.** In line with the key behaviours for children's services, the proper focus of quality assurance will be on impact and outcomes rather than processes
- **Positive.** Our approach to quality assurance will be positive - looking at informing and encouraging improvement and supporting the development of staff and services
- **Reflective** Our quality assurance framework is designed to be about promoting reflective discussion and practice and shared learning.

1.3 The framework sets out quality assurance and learning informed by the Signs of Safety strengths-based approach to practice, which is adopted across St Helens Children's Social Care and more broadly as across the Children's Safeguarding Partnership. The overall aim of the framework is to support practitioners to reflect on the quality of their work and the impact on children and families. The findings from our quality assurance work will be used to inform Signs of Safety training and learning going forward

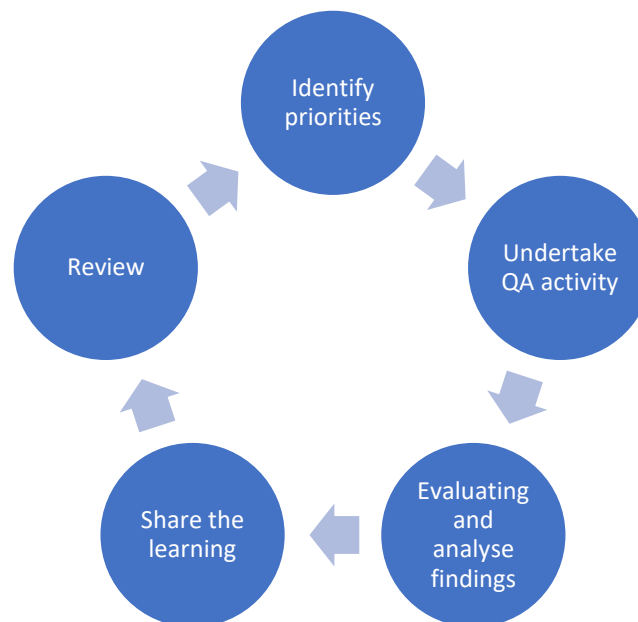
1.4 St Helens Children's services recognises the diversity of the children and families that we work with. All children and families have their individual needs, and the use of the practice model supports the provision of a range of services to build on the strengths of families to deliver improvement in childrens' lives.

1.5 Quality assurance work will be undertaken in a way that supports delivery of the councils wider Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy (2022-25) [2022_02_2100441 EDI Strategy 2022-25.pdf \(sthelens.gov.uk\)](https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/2022_02_2100441_EDI_Strategy_2022-25.pdf)

- 1.6 All quality assurance activity requires an evaluation of the quality of practice in relation to equality and diversity as well as the identity needs arising for children and young people. This will be an evaluation of the understanding and response provided to children and families in respect of their needs.
- 1.7 In moderating quality assurance activity, managers will themselves be evaluated as to their understanding and evaluation of practice in respect of equality diversity and the identity needs of children and families.

Section 2 The Quality Assurance Framework

- 2.1 The framework is based on a cycle of quality assurance activity that identifies priorities, routinely collects information, evaluates that information, identifies learning, and reviews the impact of this learning on practice to analyse improvement.



- 2.2 The schedule of work within the quality assurance programme will be informed by
- the current practice priorities identified within the improvement plan and current directorate and service planning.
 - feedback from children and families
 - analysis of performance data
 - feedback from compliments and complaints
 - learning from wider quality assurance work in children's services and the wider partnership
- 2.3 The framework will utilise a variety of methods to provide quality assurance that both ensures compliance with basic requirements and practice standards, and also evaluates the quality of practice, and the quality of experiences of children and families.

Quantity and compliance	Quality	Experience and feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of performance data • Dip Sampling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit work • Collaborative case review • Observation of practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From children and young people • from families • from staff

2.4 The elements that contribute to the framework for Children’s Social Care are

- Evaluation of performance data
- Reporting of findings from routine quality assurance activity by senior managers and leaders across childrens social care.
- Dip sampling of case work
- Direct observation of practice
- Audit of Supervision
- Thematic Case audit
- Collaborative case review
- Feedback from children and families
- Feedback from staff



- 2.5 The framework will also integrate key findings and learning from the range of quality assurance undertaken across childrens service and the safeguarding partnership.
- 2.6 The responsible Head of Service will produce a brief written report each quarter that outlines the quality assurance activity that has taken place, and the key findings and learning about the experiences of children and young people in that service area. *(Template at appendix one)*
- 2.7 These reports will be shared within their own leadership team on a quarterly basis. These reports will be compiled by the responsible Assistant Director who will then report to a designated Departmental Leadership Team (DLT) meeting. The findings will be incorporate into the wider learning for that quarter.
- 2.8 The range of quality assurance activity that will be reported includes:
- a) The early help quality assurance framework
 - b) The SEND quality assurance framework
 - c) The Youth Justice Service quality assurance framework [Quality Assurance Framework 2021.pdf](#)
 - d) Virtual school review of the quality of all personal education plans
 - e) Safeguarding Unit quality assurance activity
 - a. Independent reviewing officers review of children we look after
 - b. CP chair review of children subject to a child protection plan
 - c. Feedback from children and young people and their families
 - f) St Helens safeguarding partnership (SCP)
Key findings and learning from practice learning reviews, child safeguarding reviews and multi-agency audits which are conducted and overseen by the SCP.
 - g) Learning from complaints and compliments
The complaints team will provide a summary report that outlines the findings from complaints and compliments. This report provides an analysis of all complaints and compliments made to children's services each quarter and highlights any themes for learning. DLT will then direct further quality assurance activity to explore any identified issues.
 - h) Annual reports provided by independent panel chairs for fostering and adoption panels.
- 2.7 In addition, learning provided by Ofsted visits and inspections will be incorporated into the broader picture of quality assurance and incorporated in learning and improvement activity.

Section 3 Evaluation of performance data

- 3.1 The evaluation of performance data by senior leaders and managers will be used to identify areas of practice and service delivery that require further investigation and inform the thematic audit programme.
- 3.2 Monthly performance support meetings chaired by the Assistant Director for Children's Social care will routinely identify areas that require further investigation.

Section 4 Reporting of findings from routine oversight by senior managers

- 4.1.1 Senior managers and leaders across children's social care will provide regular reports of their findings from routine quality assurance activity. This to include learning from a range of activity including
- their oversight and decision making of individual case work
 - their supervision of managers in the service
 - their oversight through routine chairing of meetings such as Placement panel / Legal gateway meeting / Permanence panel/
 - decision making by assistant director and DCS, for example ADM decisions/ out of area placements
- 4.2 Each head of service will provide an analysis about the quality of practice seen as a result of their routine QA responsibilities, once per quarter. This will be short report summarising their QA activity, and providing good practice examples, AFI, learning etc. *(Template at appendix two)*
- 4.3 These reports will be shared within their own leadership team on a quarterly basis. These reports will be compiled by the responsible Assistant Director who will then report to a designated Departmental Leadership Team (DLT) meeting on a quarterly basis. The findings will be incorporate into the wider learning or that quarter and disseminated via regular learning and development sessions.

Section 5 Dip Sampling

- 5.1 Routine dip sampling will take place at a minimum of reviewing at least ten children once per quarter to ensure compliance with practice standards and procedures.
- 5.2 This will be undertaken by heads of service and team managers. Findings will be recorded on a template (created for the specific purpose of the sample) and submitted to the quality assurance unit to be collated and evaluated.

Section 6 Observation of practice and meetings

- 6.1 Observation of staff in their everyday work is an important element of quality assuring front line social work. Supervision and case file audits on their own

are useful but cannot fully assess the way workers work, support, and build relationships with children, young people, and families. Observation of practice provides a complementary alternative, offering an opportunity to gain a picture of the way that workers work with children and families, their behaviours, outlook, and approach.

- 6.2 All staff will experience direct observation of their practice, but there will be particular focus on those with additional developmental needs, such as new staff or those taking up new roles or responsibilities.
- 6.3 Managers and senior leaders will also routinely observe key decision-making meetings to evaluate their effectiveness in delivering services for children. They will focus on the leadership of meetings, multi-agency working and the involvement of children and families.
- 6.4 The Children's Social Work Service approach to staff observation will be closely linked to supervision ([insert link to supervision policy](#)) and appraisals. Issues to assess at observation will be informed by Appraisal priorities and, in turn, observation findings will be a key source of information for staff appraisals.
- 6.4 Every practitioner and team manager will be observed at a minimum of once every year by their line manager. This will be written up and form the basis of a reflective discussion that is recorded as part of formal supervision.
- 6.5 In addition, the assistant director for children's social care will observe practice once per quarter and the DCS will undertake one observed practice every 6 months. In these cases, feedback will be provided to the social worker and team manager.
- 6.6 All observations will also be shared with the Quality Assurance team on a Quarterly basis, this will be triangulated against other Quality Assurance and reported on in the reporting schedule
- 6.7 The purpose of the observations is not to make judgements about the practice but to provide an opportunity to reflect with the practitioner on skills and development. *(Template at Appendix three)*

Section 7 Audit of supervision

- 7.1 Supervision will be assured by routine review of the quality of supervision by all managers.
- 7.2 Each manager will review the supervision undertaken by each of the people they manage annually. This will involve a review of the personal supervision file and, where appropriate, examples of management oversight and supervision within case records.
- 7.3 For example, each assistant director will select a team manager and review the quality of the supervision that has been undertaken by their head of

service. Each head of service will select a team manager and review the quality of supervision undertaken with a member of their team.

- 7.4 Each review will be written up and form the basis of a reflective discussion that is recorded as part of formal supervision of the supervisor.
- 7.5 The findings will also be shared with the quality assurance unit and will be evaluated as part of quarterly reporting.

Section 8 Thematic Audits

- 5.1 A programme of thematic audit on key issues or concerns will be undertaken to enable the Local Authority to focus on specific areas that they require further assurance on, either due to findings from the reflective discussions, performance data or complaints.
- 5.2 Thematic audits will be undertaken by a team of auditors who are managers within the service and led by the principal social worker. They will take place at a minimum of four times per year. The subject or theme of the audit will be determined by findings from other quality assurance activity. The intention of a thematic audit will be to provide more detailed knowledge of a specific area of practice or service area, or to review work undertaken with a particular group of children.
- 5.3 When a theme is identified, a template will be written to guide managers about the focus of work they will review and how this will be recorded.
- 5.4 Evaluation and findings from this audit work will be moderated by the principal social worker and/ or head of service for quality assurance as part of the evaluation process.
- 5.5 Findings will be collated by the principal social worker and/ or head of service for quality assurance and be presented as part of the quarterly reporting to DLT.

Section 9 Collaborative Case review

- 8.1 Collaborative case reviews (CCR) are more detailed reviews of practice with children. Reflective discussions with practitioners about their work with a specific child, supplemented by a review of the written work on the child's file provides an invaluable perspective on front line practice. CCR provide insight into the quality of work with the child, the quality of management and support for the worker and, importantly, the views, experiences, and outcomes for the child.
- 8.2 CCRs should be a joint enterprise and learning experience. Wherever possible it should include the feedback from the family, observations and reflections with practitioner, Conference Chair, IRO, and Team Manager.
- 8.3 The Lead reviewer will provide time to explore outcomes and impact, to support problem solving and the identification of good practice. CCRs provide

an opportunity to celebrate our achievements and to develop as practitioners whilst driving outcomes for children and families.

- 8.4 These will take place on a quarterly basis. Reviews will be undertaken with front line practitioners and will assess the quality of practice and the experience and outcomes of children and young people.

(Further detailed guidance and templates are at Appendix four)

Section 10 Feedback from children and families

- 10.1 Feedback from children and families is essential as part of the continuous improvement of services. Feedback is gathered in a number of ways to contribute to the quality assurance of practice and inform future service delivery.
- 10.2 Individual feedback from children will be considered in several ways. .
- a) St Helens has clear practice standards and expectations about children being spoken to alone and their views being clearly sought and recorded as part of their assessments s of need and on-going care planning.
 - b) Evaluating the quality of this work and of the ability of workers to evaluate the experiences of children is a core part of all quality assurance activity.
 - c) IRO's routinely seek the views of children as part of their work.
 - d) During the completion of CCR, feedback will be obtained from individual children and families as part of the process.
- 10.3 Group feedback is obtained through consultation with children and young people through the use of existing forums.
- a) Children in care council
 - b) Care leavers forum
 - c) corporate parenting
- 10.4 Regular feedback will be obtained from these forums and reported quarterly as part of the framework.

Section 11 Feedback from staff

- 11.1 Similarly, feedback from staff will provide important information to contribute to the understanding of the service and its effectiveness.
- 11.2 Individual feedback from practitioners will form part of observations of practice, supervision audits, thematic audit, and Collaborative case reviews. Feedback will be collated and reported as part of the routine quality assurance framework.

- 11.2 The practitioner's forum will also provide regular feedback about the experiences of workers and their views about practice and the quality of services for children. Each quarter they will provide a summary of feedback from their routine monthly consultation work. In addition, each quarter they will survey workers about their involvement in quality assurance activity and learning.
- 11.3 The annual survey of staff within childrens services will also provide valuable information about their experiences and how these impact on their practice.

Section 12 Reporting and Governance

- 12.1 The Quality Assurance activity must inform both a good understanding of the quality of practice but also the planning to improve service delivery. In order to do this, the learning from the Quality Assurance activity will be coordinated by the Principal Social Worker and supported by the Head of Service (QA and Safeguarding)
- 12.2 All findings from quality assurance activity will be compiled into a series of quarterly reports which will be presented to DLT. Each quarter DLT will hold a quality assurance meeting to review all findings from quality assurance across children's services. *(See structure at Appendix five)*
- 2.3 Reports will then be presented to senior and political leaders via the existing governance structure including to
- Chief Executive Senior leadership team meeting
 - Meeting with lead member
 - Scrutiny
 - Childrens Improvement Board

Section 13 Learning and development

- 10.1 There is an emphasis on ensuring that learning from quality assurance work leads to:
- A better experience for children and families
 - Learning for the worker
 - Learning for the organisation
- 10.2 To ensure this takes place a range of methods are used to support implementation of learning.
- 10.3 For every piece of quality assurance undertaken the practitioner involved will receive verbal and written feedback about the quality of practice including things that are going well (areas of strength) and things we are worried about (areas for development.) In all review of individual case work there will also be actions identified that need to take place to improve the experience of the child and their family.
- 10.3 Audits and CCRs will be placed on the child's file once completed. Workers and managers must then review the findings within supervision and ensure

action is taken to address any areas of development or actions that require completion within the timescale given. Further dip sampling and/ or audit will be undertaken to ensure that actions are being followed up following quality assurance work taking place.

- 10.4 To support wider learning the Principal Social Worker will lead on the dissemination of the findings from quality assurance work. They will compile summaries of key findings and learning and disseminate these through a range of methods. This will include
- holding quarterly/ six monthly learning events
 - develop / source specific training.
 - offering individual support to teams and individuals
 - challenging/supporting managers and HOS to make the required improvements.
- 10.5 The impact of this work will be further evaluated through follow up quality assurance activity. Progress will be reported on a quarterly basis within the Quality Assurance report and on an annual basis in the Principal Social Workers annual report.
- 10.4 Whilst implementing a Quality Assurance Framework helps the organisation understand the quality of service provision, what happens to the learning will drive practice changes and improved outcomes for children. All strands of the Quality assurance framework and supervision will be used to ensure that support is targeted at the right place, at the right time and is understood and implemented.

APPENDIX 1:CHILDRENS SERVICE SUMMARY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

AREA OF SERVICE	
QA PERIOD	
DATE OF DLT	

QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITYT UNDERTAKEN IN THE PERIOD**WHATS WORKING WELL****WHAT ARE WE WORRIED ABOUT?****ACTION NEEDED**

APPENDIX 2:HEAD OF SERVICE SUMMARY OF ROUTINE QUALITY ASSURANCE

HEAD OF SERVICE	
QA PERIOD	
DATE OF SUMMARY	

QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN IN THE PERIOD**WHATS WORKING WELL****WHAT ARE WE WORRIED ABOUT?****ACTION NEEDED**

APPENDIX 3: TEMPLATE FOR OBSERVATION OF PRACTICE

OBSERVED PRACTICES

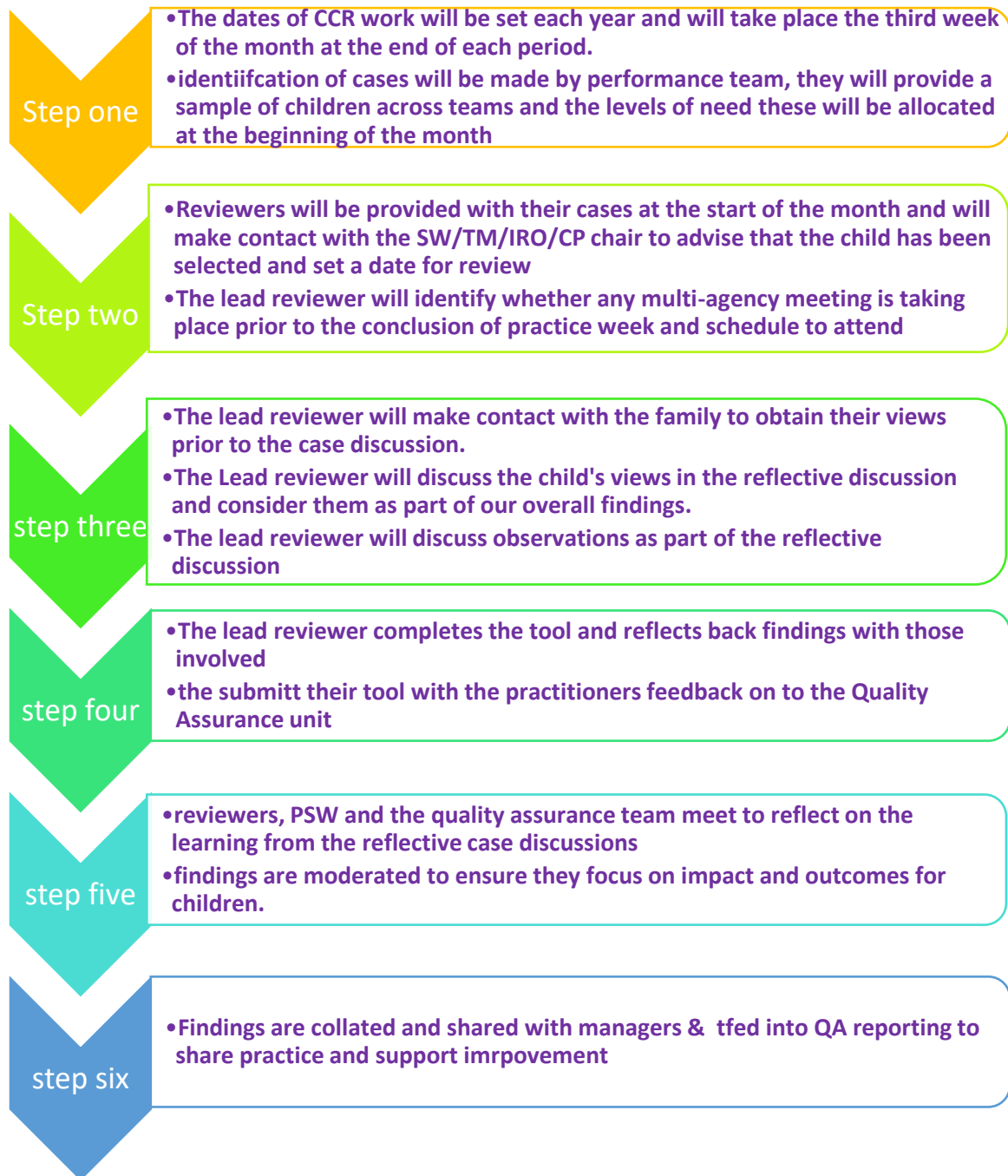
Name of Observer:	Date of Observation:
Child ID:	Level of Need:

Nature of the Observed Practice	
Meeting	
Supervision	
Visit	
Other (Please specify)	

Identified Strengths
Areas for Development
Reflections with the Practitioner
Other Comments

APPENDIX 4 COLLABORATIVE CASE REVIEW GUIDANCE AND TEMPLATES

Collaborative Case review Process Map



Rationale

Collaborative case reviews (CCR) are reflective discussions that provide an invaluable perspective on front line practice. They provide insight into the quality of work with the child, the quality of management and support for the worker and, importantly, the views, experiences, and outcomes for the child.

CCRs should be a joint enterprise and learning experience. Wherever possible it should include the feedback from the family, observations and reflections with practitioner, Conference Chair, IRO, and Team Manager. The Lead reviewer will provide time to explore outcomes and impact, to support problem solving and the identification of good practice. CCRs provide an opportunity to celebrate our achievements and to develop as practitioners whilst driving outcomes for children and families.

CCRs will be completed as follows:

- Every quarter a minimum of 20 children will be the subject of a CCR.
- The children will be selected to provide a cross sample across level of need and teams. The sample will include cases previously identified as Inadequate and Requires Improvement but where they were determined to be bordering Good. This will support the understanding of whether learning from audits is understood and actions taken to improve service delivery and improve children's outcomes.
- The lead reviewer will arrange for a CCR with the social worker, IRO or CP chair if involved and where possible the team manager
- The lead reviewer will seek to obtain the views of the child/family about what they feel has gone well or could go better.
- The reflection will focus on outcomes and impact
- The discussion will highlight good practice and will provide an overview of what needs to happen and what the priorities and timescales are.

Following the CCR the lead reviewer will:

- Discuss the findings with the team manager for the social worker
- Will record the reflective case discussion and the impact for the child and outcomes achieved
- Will grade the quality of our involvement based on the experience and outcomes for the child

What happens next

- The Quality Assurance team will undertake direct sessions with the lead reviewers, exploring together the findings from their case discussions, gathering the main themes around practice, both positive and areas for development.
- The direct sessions will offer moderation of findings ensuring a focus of outcome and impact not compliance
- The findings will be shared with HOS and Team Managers for inclusion in supervision and team plans.
- The PSW/ Quality Assurance service will evaluate findings and report these as part of the quarterly quality assurance report.

- The learning will, in conjunction with findings from other quality assurance work, inform service and improvement planning and learning and development work for the following quarter.

Collaborative Case review Template

Child / young person 's information

Child / young person 's ID	
Child / young person 's Name	
Social Worker / PA	
Team manager	
Level of need	

Who undertook the review?	
When and where?	
How long did the conversation take?	
What additional work did you undertake and how much time did this take?	

The child / young person

Please provide a short pen picture of the child / young person and their circumstances and needs taken from the case summary.

Collaborative case review

		Think about evaluating the quality of work- not the form ! Think about the impact on children.	Grade the quality of the work in this area
1.	Assessment (For care leavers this is the pathway assessment)		
2.	Planning		
3.	Multi-agency review		
4.	Voice of the child/young person		
5	Parents/ Carers Engagement. (For care leavers consider their support network e.g., friends, former carers, wider family)		
6	Management Oversight and supervision (including scrutiny by IRO/ CP chair where these are in place)		
7	Case recording		

Overall evaluation of the quality of case work for this child	
What has gone well and made a positive difference for the child?	
What needs to happen to support further improvement?	

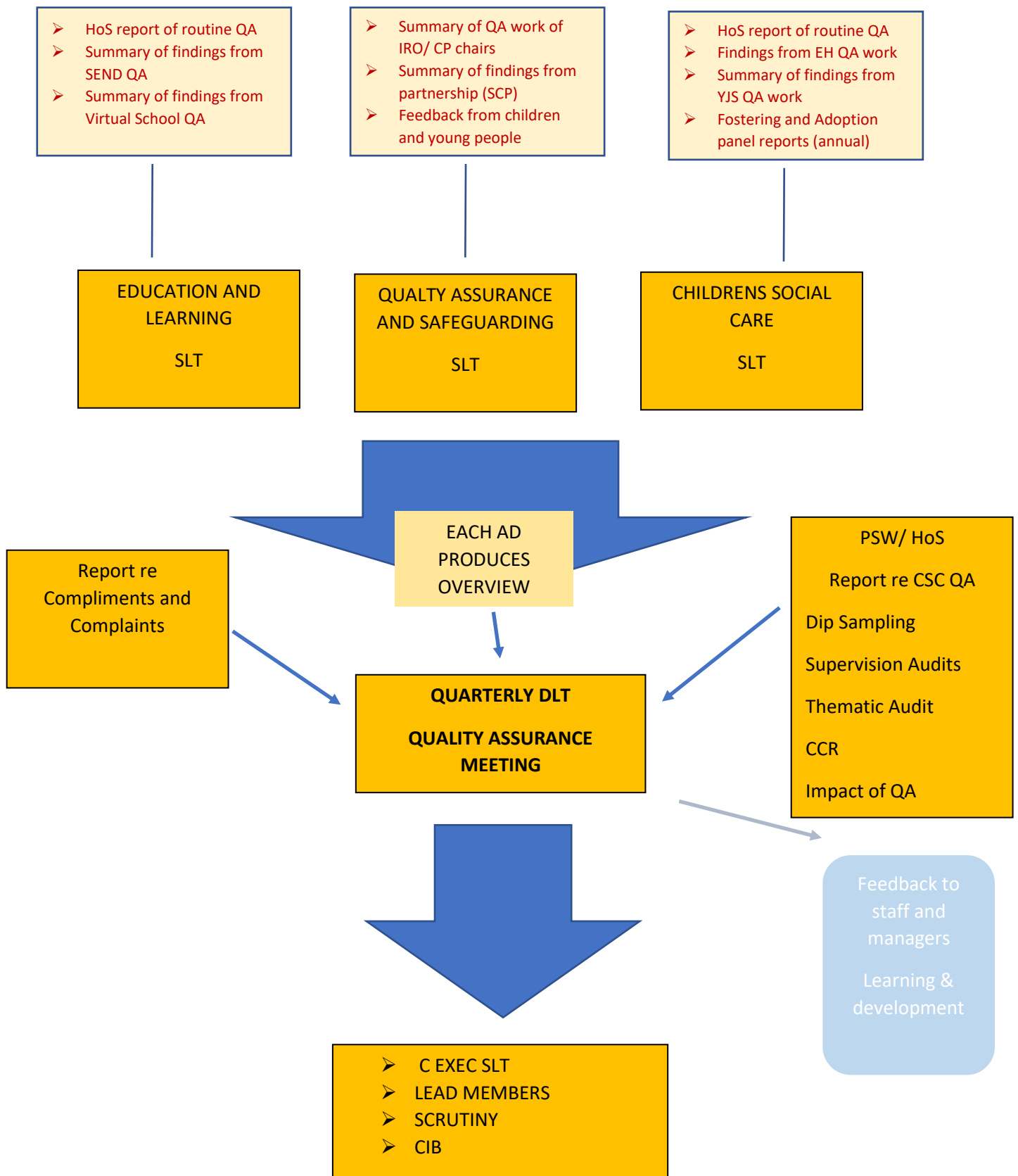
Overall grade in respect of the quality of work	
Outstanding	
Good	
RI	
Inadequate	
Rationale	

ACTIONS		

Moderation

Moderation completed by Independent Auditor
What has gone well and made a positive difference for the child?
What needs to happen to support further improvement?
In summary

APPENDIX 5 REPORTING AND GOVERNANCE



APPENDIX 6 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

People	Routine QA activity	DIP SAMPLING	Thematic	CCR	Observations of practice/ meetings	Supervision audit
PSW		Quarterly	Minimum quarterly	Quarterly		Dip sample ASYE x3 each month
IMP TEAM 2 X AP			Minimum quarterly	Quarterly		Dip sample ASYE x 3 each month
IRO/CP CHAIRS	Quarterly report re IRO/ CP QA work			Quarterly		
All managers		quarterly	Minimum quarterly		Observe each team member 1x year	
All Heads of Service	Quarterly	Quarterly		Quarterly	Observe each manager 's practice minimum of 1 x year	Review each TM work 1 x year
AD			Quarterly		Observations of SW practice 1x quarter	Review each HoS work 1 x year
DCS			Quarterly		Observations of SW practice 1x quarter	Review each AD work 1 x year

APPENDIX 7: QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEDULE Q3

MONTH	ACTIVITY	DATES	ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY	DATES
OCT	Dip Sampling HoS/ TM/ Ind auditor Dip Sample on Networks and contingency planning	Wk. BEG: 10 October 22 Managers to book 11 October	Supervision Audit AD/HoS/ TM / PSW/IMP team To be timetabled and managed by HoS and TM Report at end of quarter	Formal reporting of Q2 Evaluation and sharing of learning from Q1 Learning Event	 DLT:19 October 2022 Learning TBC
NOV	Thematic audit Team managers/ Imp team/ Ind auditor Theme: Quality of visits / VOC	Wk. beg 7th November Managers to book 8 th November	Supervision Audit AD/HoS/ TM/ PSW To be timetabled and managed by HoS and TM Report at end of quarter		
DEC	Collaborative case review (Including observation) HoS/ PSW/ Imp Team	Wk. beg 5th December	Report re routine audit HoS / AD To be timetabled and managed by HoS /AD Report at end of quarter		

APPENDIX 8 : QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEDULE Q4

MONTH	ACTIVITY	DATES	ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY	DATES
JAN	Dip Sampling HoS/ TM/ Ind auditor	Wk. beg. 16 January 2022	Supervision Audit AD/HoS/ TM / PSW/IMP team To be timetabled and managed by HoS and TM Report at end of quarter	Formal reporting of Q2 Evaluation and sharing of learning from Q1 Learning Event	SLT : wk. beg 9th January To then be reported to DLT:25 January Learning event: TBC
FEB	Thematic audit Team manager/ Imp. team/ Ind auditor Theme: Thematic danger / worry statements and Safety / success goals	Wk. beg 20 Feb 2022	Supervision Audit AD/HoS/ TM/ PSW To be timetabled and managed by HoS and TM Report at end of quarter		
MARCH	Collaborative case review (Including observation) HoS/ PSW/ Imp Team	Wk. beg 20 March 2022	Report re routine audit HoS / AD To be timetabled and managed by AD/ HoS Report at end of quarter		