



## **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date**      **Friday 7 February 2020**

**Time**      **9.30 am**

**Venue**     **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham**

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### **Business**

#### **Part A**

**Items during which the Press and Public are welcome to attend.  
Members of the Public can ask questions with the Chairman's  
agreement.**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Declarations of Interest, if any
4. Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties
5. Signs of Safety Implementation
  - a) Report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services (Pages 3 - 10)
  - b) Presentation of the Strategic Manager for Safeguarding and Professional Practice (Pages 11 - 16)
6. Children's Social Care response to ILACS inspection
  - a) Report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services (Pages 17 - 24)
  - b) Presentation of the Strategic Manager for Safeguarding and Professional Practice (Pages 25 - 34)
7. Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework
  - a) Report of the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services (Pages 35 - 60)
  - b) Presentation of the Strategic Manager for Safeguarding and Professional Practice (Pages 61 - 68)

8. Pre-Birth Service Update
  - a) Report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services (Pages 69 - 76)
  - b) Presentation of the Strategic Manager Children and Families South and East (Pages 77 - 84)
9. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration

**Helen Lynch**  
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall  
Durham  
30 January 2020

To: **The Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor H Smith (Chair)  
Councillor C Potts (Vice-Chair)

Councillors P Atkinson, B Bainbridge, A Batey, D Bell, J Blakey, J Charlton, B Coult, R Crute, S Durham, N Grayson, D Hall, C Hampson, K Hopper, I Jewell, L Kennedy, L Mavin, M Simmons, A Willis and M Wilson

**Faith Communities Representatives:**

Mrs C Johnston

**Parent Governor Representatives:**

Mrs J Norman

**Co-opted Members:**

Ms R Evans and Mrs P Parkins

**Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

**7 February 2020**



**Signs of Safety Implementation**

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**Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the progress made in the first year of the implementation of the Signs of Safety Practice Framework in Durham.

**Executive summary**

- 2 Significant progress has been made implementing the Signs of Safety Practice Framework across Children and Young People's Services. Large numbers of staff and partner agencies have received briefings and training and there is a good awareness of the framework across the partnership. The quality of practice continues to improve across services and the Signs of Safety framework is a key driver of this improvement. The focus of the ongoing implementation is now to ensure that systems and process are aligned to support all aspects of the framework becoming embedded in practice. The recent appointment of a Signs of Safety Co-ordinator is very positive. The post holder will work across Children and Young People's Services to support practitioners and managers embedding the framework.

**Recommendation**

- 3 Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are recommended to:
  - Note the contents of this report

## Background

- 4 A decision was made in early 2018 to embed the Signs of Safety practice framework across Durham Children’s Services. At the time it was acknowledged that the quality of social work practice was inconsistent and that a practice framework would provide a key driver for improvement.
- 5 The Signs of Safety practice framework was initially developed in Western Australia in 1993 and is now being used in jurisdictions in North America, Europe and Australasia. It is a strengths-based and safety-focused approach to child protection work that is grounded in partnership and collaboration with families. It expands the investigation of risk to encompass strengths and Signs of Safety that can be built upon to stabilise and strengthen a child’s and family’s situation.

## Summary of 3-year implementation strategy

- 6 The Implementation in Durham has been supported by a licensed Signs of Safety Trainer and Consultant, Tracey Hill. The overarching implementation strategy in Durham was for the Senior Management Team to access the advanced practitioner training in the first instance allowing them to gain a collective understanding of the Signs of Safety approach and lead the implementation. Following this the focus has been on rolling out training to practitioners and managers, and briefings to partner agencies. The learning from this training is then embedded by a number of identified “Practice Leads”. The Practice Leads have received additional bi-monthly workshops throughout the implementation. Having developed a breadth of knowledge and understanding across the workforce the focus of the implementation is now on aligning our policies, procedures and IT systems to support the practice model. As this alignment work continues, we have identified six frontline teams to work intensively with in order to ensure that the model is used skilfully and consistently. As these teams embed the model throughout their practice there will be a phased approach to targeting the remaining teams across the service.

## Key Milestones

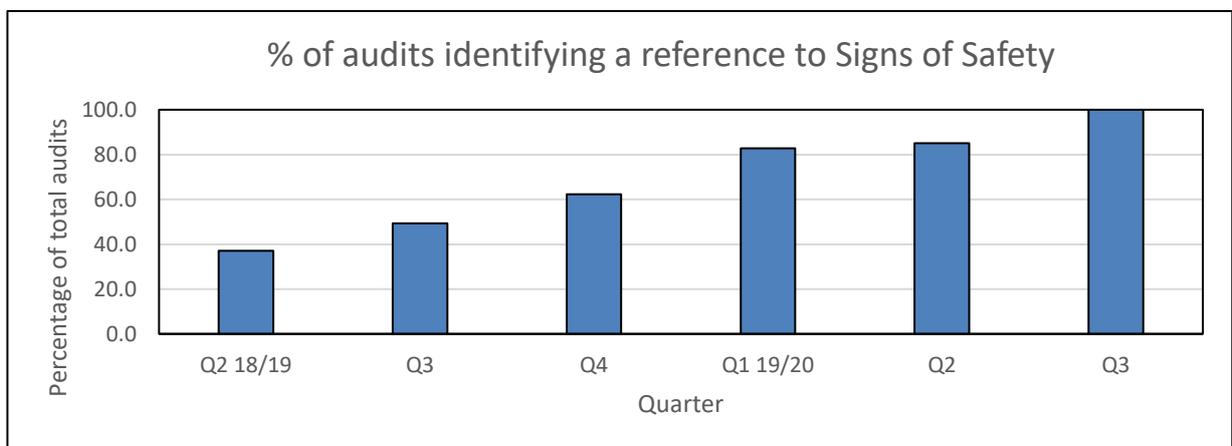
- 7 A number of key milestones have been achieved and are summarised below:

Key Milestone	Date achieved
6 Senior Managers attended Advanced Practitioner training	April 2018
Governance Structure established to manage the implementation.	May 2018

2-day training courses commissioned and delivered to 491 practitioners	
5-day training courses commissioned and delivered to 73 practitioners	
76 Practice Leaders identified	31.06.18
8 Bi-monthly Practice Leader workshops delivered	
Partner Briefings commissioned and delivered to 778 partners	
DSCP commissioned 2-day training course to 25 partners	04.06.19
Implementation of Group Supervision model within teams	
Elected Members briefing	06.06.19
Regional Judiciary briefing attended by the Judiciary, CAFCASS and solicitors	29.07.19
1-year on Conference attended by 126 staff and partners	22.11.19
Appointment of Signs of Safety Co-ordinator	Dec 2019

8 During the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the implementation we have tracked the use of various elements of the Signs of Safety model within children’s case files. Graph 1 below shows the steady increase in the use of the model over time.

**Graph 1**



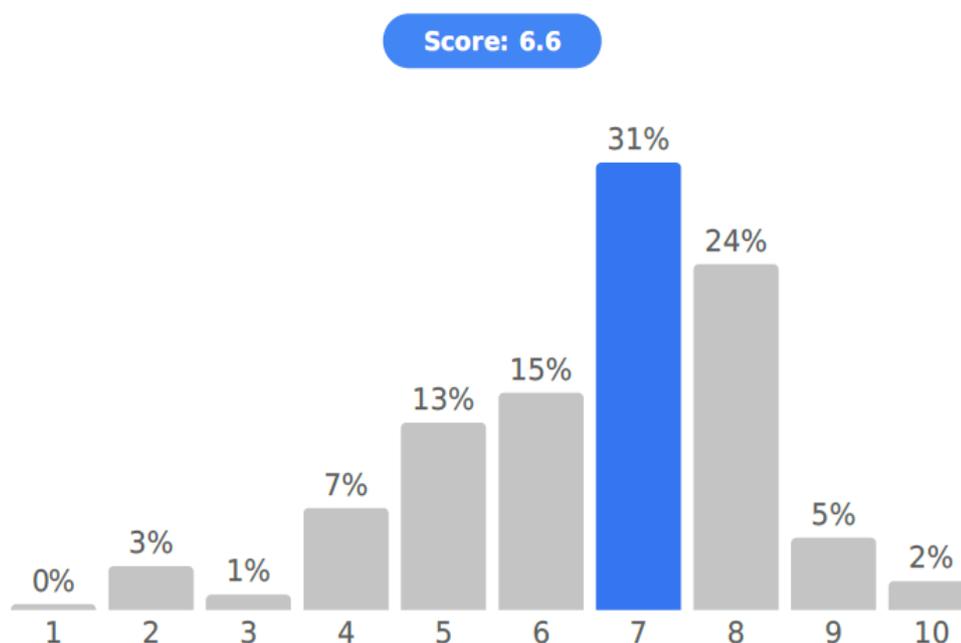
## 1 - year on Conference

- 9 A Signs of Safety 1 – year on Conference was held for Children’s Services staff and partner agencies. As part of the Conference we sought feedback from delegates. A summary of responses below shows the progress of implementation:

*Have you used Signs of Safety in your practice in the last 3 months?*



*Thinking about the Signs of Safety Practice Framework as a whole how confident do you feel about using it in your practice where 0 is "I would not know where to start" and 10 is "I am confident in using it in all parts of my practice"?*



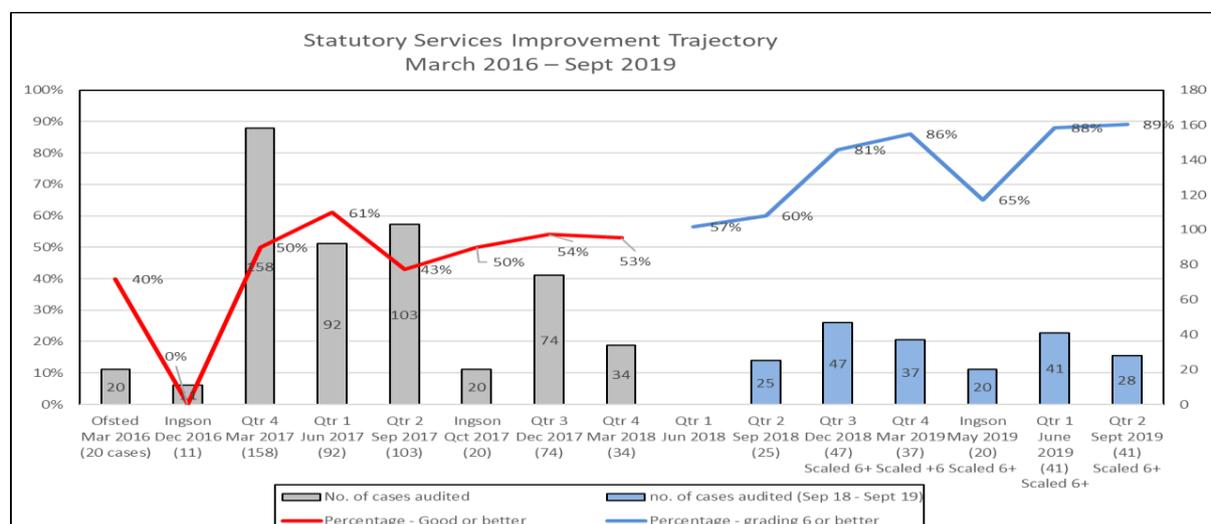
*Since we started implementing Signs of Safety in Durham what has been your proudest moment?*

- When family were able to say something positive about their son despite lots of worries.

- Helping a child to resume contact with her dad after a long time.
- Conversations with team managers has been positive and solutions to complex cases have been great.
- Safety planning with 15 family members to keep a child with her mum.
- Using it to write a risk assessment to highlight all the positives about a young boy, to help potential foster carers understand there's a lot more to him than the risks he presents with.
- Seeing a real difference in conferences, families being more engaged, and empowering families to find their own solutions and involved in the planning.
- Repairing relationship between young person and mother which resulted in her returning home to live.
- When I am honest with families and they are honest with me and we can work from there to make a positive change.
- Getting a child home safely.
- Hearing from a child what is working well by asking the right questions.
- Helping families see their strengths and working with us to make things better for their family.
- Influencing internal and external colleagues to create a shift in the way they had been thinking about a family, moving towards a more strengths based, solution focused view.
- A mum in conference feeling confident enough to admit that the thing she was most worried about was losing her kids.

## Impact

10 The overarching outcome of this implementation is to improve the quality of practice across children's services so that the outcomes for children and young people are consistently good. The graph below shows the continuous improvement seen through our case file audit programme.



## Complaints and Compliments

- 11 The number of complaints and compliments reflects the quality of practice across the service. During quarter 2, Children and Young People’s Services received 21 statutory complaints, a substantial decrease from the previous quarters. Table 1 (below) provides a comparison over the rolling year.

**Table 1**

	Stage 1 complaints received by quarter					
Quarter	Q1 18/19	Q2 18/19	Q3 18/19	Q4 18/19	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20
Number of Complaints	32	38	26	41	34	21

- 12 During quarter 2, Children and Young People’s Services logged 50 compliments about social care services. Table 2 (below) shows that this is a small decrease from quarter 1 but is still much higher than the number recorded in quarter 2 of 2018-2019.

**Table 2**

	Compliments received by quarter				
Quarter	Q2 18/19	Q3 18/19	Q4 18/19	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20
Number of Compliments	21	43	10	61	50

- 13 Two examples of compliments received are shown below to illustrate good quality relationship-based practice which is a fundamental principle underpinning the Signs of Safety framework.
- 14 For a newly qualified social worker in Families First Crook & Bishop Auckland:
- From a parent and child: “My children’s Social Worker is [name]. At first I wasn’t keen on her but now she is sound .....I can actually trust her and I don’t trust anyone.... She is a tip top Social Worker and goes the extra mile for me and my children .....My youngest son really likes her and asks if she is coming every day ..... I am very grateful for everything she has done for us ....she is a good Social Worker, she bang on !!”
- 15 For a social worker in Looked After & Permanence team 1:

- From a young person:” We may have had a wobbly start but since then you have had my back in everything. You’ve been such an amazing help, not only with issues I’ve had but with socialising more. Honestly couldn’t be happier, [name] and the boys have you in their corner. Thank you for everything you have done for me and by far one of my favourite social workers. Lots of love”

## **OFSTED Feedback**

- 16 In both the Focused Visit and ILACS inspections the progress of the Signs of Safety implementation was acknowledged:

*“A model of social work practice is being implemented and staff have been trained to strengthen the analysis of risk within assessments. There was evidence of an increasing use of the framework in the assessments seen during this visit.”*

***Ofsted Focused Visit Jan 2019***

*“While the local authority is still in the process of rolling out its preferred model of social work, social workers are beginning to make good use of it to identify risks and protective factors.”*

***Ofsted ILACS Oct 2019***

## **Conclusion**

- 17 Significant progress has been made implementing the Signs of Safety framework across Children and Young People’s Services, and this was recognised in both OFSTED inspections in 2019. It has been a key driver in continuing to improve the quality of our practice. A Signs of Safety Co-ordinator has been appointed and the focus now is to work intensively with teams to ensure that the full framework is being used consistently and that our systems and processes are aligned to support this way of working.

## **Background papers**

- None

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**Contact:** Chris Ring

Tel: 03000 268657

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Implementation of the Signs of Safety Practice Framework will ensure consistency of practice in carrying out the Council's statutory functions under the Children Act 1989 to support children in need and to carry out safeguarding investigations and where necessary, issue care proceedings to ensure that children are protected from harm.

### **Finance**

The 'Signs of safety' Coordinator post is Funded within the CYPS base Budget. On-going training costs are funded from the Services Learning and Development Training budget.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

None.

### **Climate Change**

None.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None.

### **Staffing**

None.

### **Accommodation**

None.

### **Risk**

None.

### **Procurement**

None.

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**GREAT THINGS**

# **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**7<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

**Signs of Safety Implementation**



# Overview of Implementation Strategy

- Decision 2018 to embed Signs of Safety Practice Framework
- Key driver to improve quality of practice
- Implementation supported by licensed Signs of Safety Trainer and Consultant, Tracey Hill
- Training for Senior Management Team
- Training for workforce
- Briefing for partner agencies
- Identification of Practice Leads to embed practice
- Organisational alignment
- Measurement of impact

## Key Milestones

Key Milestone	Date achieved
6 Senior Managers attended Advanced Practitioner training	April 2018
Governance Structure established to manage the implementation.	May 2018
2-day training courses commissioned and delivered to 491 practitioners	
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Implementation of Group Supervision model within teams	
Elected Members briefing	06.06.19
Regional Judiciary briefing attended by the Judiciary, CAFCASS and solicitors	29.07.19
1-year on Conference attended by 126 staff and partners	22.11.19
Appointment of Signs of Safety Co-ordinator	Dec 2019

## 1-yr on Conference

- 89% delegates had used Signs of Safety practice
- Developing confidence evident
- Proudest moments:
  - Safety planning with 15 family members to keep a child with her mum.
  - Repairing relationship between young person and mother which resulted in her returning home to live.
  - Hearing from a child what is working well by asking the right questions.
  - A mum in conference feeling confident enough to admit that the thing she was most worried about was losing her kids.
  - Conversations with team managers has been positive and solutions to complex cases have been great.

# Impact

- All case files audited in last quarter had evidence of Signs of Safety practice
- Improving practice evidenced within case file audits
- Reduction in complaints over past year

	Stage 1 complaints received by quarter					
Quarter	Q1 18/19	Q2 18/19	Q3 18/19	Q4 18/19	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20
Number of Complaints	32	38	26	41	34	21

- Increase in compliments over past year

	Compliments received by quarter					
Quarter	Q2 18/19	Q3 18/19	Q4 18/19	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20	
Number of Compliments	21	43	10	61	50	

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**GREAT THINGS**

*“A model of social work practice is being implemented and staff have been trained to strengthen the analysis of risk within assessments. There was evidence of an increasing use of the framework in the assessments seen during this visit.”*

**Ofsted Focused Visit Jan 2019**

*“While the local authority is still in the process of rolling out its preferred model of social work, social workers are beginning to make good use of it to identify risks and protective factors.”*

**Ofsted ILACS Oct 2019**

**Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



**7 February 2020**

**Children's Social Care response to  
ILACS inspection**

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**Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young  
People's Services**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 This report provides Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the activity and strategic planning that has been undertaken since the ILACS inspection of Children's Social Care in October 2019.

**Executive summary**

- 2 Ofsted undertook an inspection of children's social care services in Durham between 9 September 2019 to 20 September 2019. The overall judgement was that services require improvement to be good. The pace of change and firm foundations to continue to strengthen services were recognised and services for Looked After Children and Care Leavers were judged to be good.
- 3 In summarising the inspection findings Ofsted found that since the focused visit in January 2019, "the local authority has taken swift and decisive action to strengthen services. Pace has increased since the focused visit, and solid improvements can be seen in many service areas, including at the front door and for children in care. Firm foundations are in place to sustain and build on the improvements made."
- 4 Children's Social Care in partnership with the wider Children and Young People's Service are well placed to continue to build on the improvements in social work practice that have already been made both before and after the ILACS inspection.

5. We are committed to delivering consistently high-quality services for every child and young person and remain ambitious that they all achieve excellent outcomes. We know that there are a number of key areas that are fundamental to delivering high quality services: a highly skilled and stable workforce; a well embedded practice framework which is consistently used by practitioners and is based on high quality relationships with children and families; a robust quality and performance assurance framework which includes meaningful engagement with children and families.
- 6 The ongoing relentless focus on recruitment, retention and development of the workforce continues to be a key strategic priority for the service as it underpins all the work that we do. Our ongoing implementation of the Signs of Safety practice framework is described in a separate report, "Signs of Safety Implementation". We have strengthened our Quality Assurance Framework and this is also described in a separate report, "Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework." We have invested in our workforce to strengthen the participation and engagement of children and families within our services and these developments are summarised in this report.
- 7 There is a well-established governance structure in place to support and monitor the improvement activity following the ILACS inspection. The primary mechanism for this is the Social Care Quality Improvement Board, chaired by the Head of Children's Social Care.
- 8 The current inspection framework itself ensures that there is continuous oversight and monitoring by OFSTED of improvement activity via the requirement to produce an annual self-evaluation and take part in an annual engagement conversation as well as at least two further inspection visits within every 3 year ILACS inspection cycle. These will either be focused visits or a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI).

### **Recommendation(s)**

- 9 Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny are recommended to:
  - (a) Note the contents of this report;
  - (b) receive an annual update on progress within the service

## Background

10 Ofsted undertook an inspection of children's social care services in Durham between 9 September 2019 to 20 September 2019. The judgements are set out below:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement

11 The following areas were identified as areas for improvement:

- The quality and impact of management oversight, including that of child protection chairs.
- The timeliness of assessments and support for children who return home
- The quality of children's plans, so that they are timebound, and include clear actions and contingency plans
- The response to disabled children, children in private fostering arrangements, and children who are homeless aged 16 and 17
- The timeliness of foster carer's reviews
- The tracking and monitoring of children missing from education

## Response to ILACS inspection

12 There is a well-established Children's Social Care Quality Improvement Board chaired by the Head of Children's Social Care. This Board meets monthly and ensures that there is a robust quality improvement plan that drives improvement in the quality of practice throughout the service. The effectiveness of existing leadership was acknowledged within the

- inspection and therefore this Board continues to be the primary mechanism to drive improvement across the system.
- 13 The improvement plan has been updated to reflect the outcome of the inspection and there are actions and key milestones linked to each area of improvement. The paragraphs below highlight key actions that have already been undertaken or are planned with a specific focus on the areas identified in the inspection that require improvement.
  - 14 The board has identified two strategic priorities over the next six months which will impact on a significant number of the improvement areas:
    - a) Improving the quality and consistency of Care Planning;
    - b) Reflective discussions with managers and supervisions which are targeted at improving outcomes for children.
  - 15 A 'key-principles' in good care planning document has been developed and two workshops with Team Managers and Independent Reviewing Offices (IROs) have been held to begin embedding these principles in practice. There is an existing plan of work with our Partners in Practice, South Tyneside Council, focused on improving Care Planning. The second phase of the work will be delivered to Managers and IROs in February and March and will build on the workshops that have taken place in January.
  - 16 A realignment of resources has enabled us to create a second Operations Manager post within our IRO service. This will ensure that all IROs receive high quality supervision but will also create additional capacity to support the necessary improvement activity across the service and specifically the ability of the IRO's to increase their level of scrutiny and oversight of planning for children subject to a child protection plan.
  - 17 We have commissioned a training consultancy called Strengthening Practice to deliver supervision training to all our front-line managers that will improve the quality of our reflective discussions. We have established a working group to ensure that the learning from this training is aligned with our existing supervision procedure and that the Liquidlogic electronic record system supports the effective recording of these conversations. A development programme for managers is currently being planned, that will include continued support to embed good quality reflective supervision. Additionally, our Practice Lead from the ASYE academy has been identified to develop peer support activity for managers to share their experiences and learn from each other.
  - 18 Our practice in relation to young people aged 16 and 17 who are homeless was reviewed during the inspection. The protocol supporting

this practice has been amended and is being implemented. The capacity of the Young People's Service has been reviewed and increased in order to ensure we are able to meet the current demand within this area of the service.

- 19 A steering group has been established and is chaired by the Head of Social Care to review how we effectively respond to disabled children and young people. The work of this group will continue to inform the quality improvement plan.
- 20 The IRO Operations Manager in partnership with the Strategic Manager for Resources has addressed issues in relation to timeliness of Foster Carer reviews and there are currently no outstanding reviews out of timescales. There is a robust performance monitoring system in place to ensure this good performance is maintained.
- 21 Children missing from education are now tracked and monitored via the Synergy electronic system.
- 22 A strategic manager has been identified to lead the improvement required in relation to Private Fostering. Our Performance Management Framework is continually being reviewed and improved to ensure appropriate levels of scrutiny on key areas of performance and this will include Private Fostering within the next three months.
- 23 The timeliness and assessment of children returning home from care is now being scrutinised by Strategic Managers via an existing panel process. There is planned activity to develop the operational procedures to ensure that this practice improves.

## **Participation and Engagement**

- 24 We know that the participation and engagement of children, young people and their families is critical in continuing to deliver and develop outstanding services. We have a thriving Children in Care Council, we continue to have a strong partnership with Investors in Children, we successfully commission NYAS to deliver advocacy, and most recently we have recruited a Participation and Engagement worker to co-ordinate the many strands of this work across Children's Social Care.
- 25 The work programme of the Participation and Engagement worker focuses on the following areas:
  - a) Developing champions across the workforce to ensure participation and engagement remains a priority:
  - b) Broadening participation and engagement mechanisms to hear from a wider range of children, young people and families;

- c) Improving feedback and communication mechanisms to ensure we are regularly communicating with those who had provided feedback;
- d) Ensuring that the voice of children and young people is heard throughout all our work.

## **Scrutiny**

- 26 The current OFSTED framework requires each Local Authority to produce a self-evaluation document on an annual basis setting out what is known about the quality of social work practice and detail plans for improvement where necessary.
- 27 The self-evaluation forms the basis of an Annual Engagement Conversation that takes place between the DCS and Ofsted. In Durham it is expected that this conversation will take place in Spring 2020.

## **Conclusion**

- 28 Children's Social Care in partnership with the wider Children and Young People's Service are well placed to continue to build on the improvements in social work practice that have already been made both before and after the ILACS inspection. There is a well-established governance structure in place to support and monitor these improvements. The current inspection framework ensures that there is continuous oversight and monitoring of the improvement activity via the self-evaluation and annual conversation.

## **Background papers**

- None

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**Contact:** Chris Ring

Tel: 03000 268657

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Framework, evaluation criteria and inspector guidance for the inspection of local authority children's services updated in August 2019 contains the framework for inspections of local authority Children's Services by Ofsted.

### **Finance**

No direct financial implications.

### **Consultation**

No implications

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

No implications

### **Climate Change**

No implications

### **Human Rights**

No implications

### **Crime and Disorder**

No implications

### **Staffing**

No implications

### **Accommodation**

No implications

### **Risk**

No implications

### **Procurement**

No implications

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**GREAT THINGS**

# **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**7<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

**Children's Social Care response to ILACS  
inspection**



## Background

- Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) took place between 09.09.19 and 20.09.19

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement

**“the local authority has taken swift and decisive action to strengthen services. Pace has increased since the focused visit, and solid improvements can be seen in many service areas, including at the front door and for children in care. Firm foundations are in place to sustain and build on the improvements made.”**

**OFSTED 2019**

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## GREAT THINGS

- We are committed to delivering consistently high-quality services for every child and young person and remain ambitious that they all achieve excellent outcomes.
- Key areas that are fundamental:
  - Workforce
  - Practice Framework – Signs of Safety
  - Quality Assurance Framework
  - Engagement with children and families

## **Response to inspection**

- Well established Quality Improvement Board is primary mechanism to drive improvement.
- Existing improvement plan strengthened and aligned to Ofsted recommendations
- No requirement to produce an action plan for Ofsted

## Areas for development

- The quality and impact of management oversight, including that of child protection chairs.
- The timeliness of assessments and support for children who return home
- The quality of children's plans, so that they are timebound, and include clear actions and contingency plans
- The response to disabled children, children in private fostering arrangements, and children who are homeless aged 16 and 17
- The timeliness of foster carer's reviews
- The tracking and monitoring of children missing from education

## **2 Strategic Priorities**

- Improving the quality and consistency of Care Planning;
- Reflective discussions which are targeted at improving outcomes for children.

## Participation and engagement

- Developing champions across the workforce to ensure participation and engagement remains a priority;
- Broadening participation and engagement mechanisms to hear from a wider range of children, young people and families;
- Improving feedback and communication mechanisms to ensure we are regularly communicating with those who had provided feedback;
- Ensuring that the voice of children and young people is heard throughout all our work.

# Inspection framework

- Annual self evaluation document
  - What do we know about the quality of social work practice?
  - How do you know?
  - What are your plans for the next 12 months
- Annual engagement conversation
  - DCS and Ofsted
  - Spring 2020

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**Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



**7 February 2020**

**Children's Social Care Quality  
Assurance Framework**

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**Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young  
People's Services**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework.

**Executive summary**

- 2 In 2017 a Quality Improvement Framework was presented to Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Since this time there have been significant developments in relation to how we use our performance management information and to our collaborative case file audit programme. These developments have been underpinned by the implementation of Liquidlogic electronic social care record system and as a result our knowledge of the quality of social care practice is continuing to improve. We know that there is an overall improving trajectory in the quality of our practice and we know where we need to target our improvement activity.

**Recommendation**

- 3 Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:
  - (a) Note the contents of the report

## Background

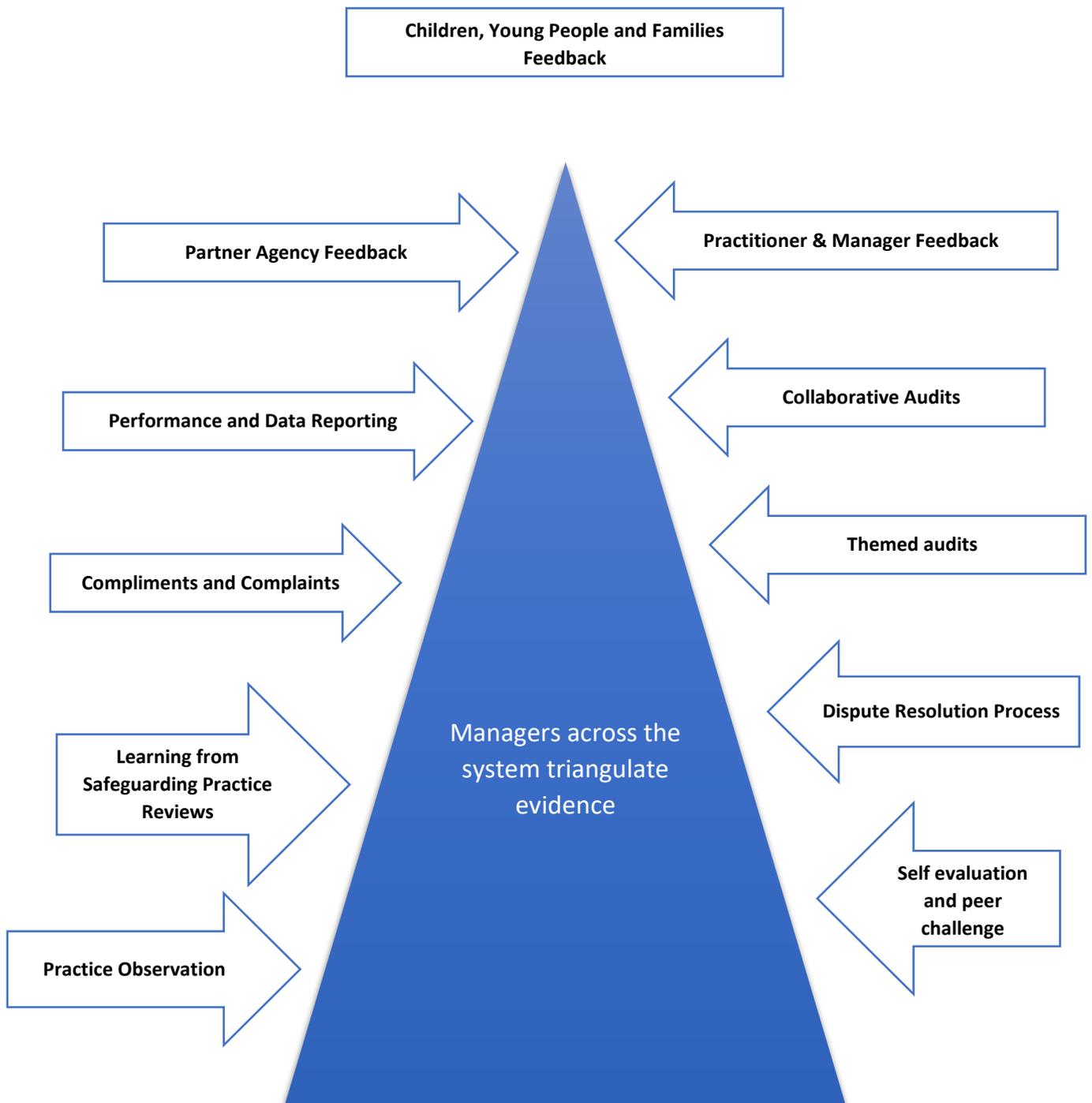
- 4 In November 2017 a presentation was given to Members of the Children and Young People’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee providing an overview of the Quality Improvement Framework and associated audit programme that was implemented at that time.
- 5 Since this time this framework has been strengthened and now evolved to integrate our Performance Management Framework and Audit Framework.

## Quality Assurance Framework

- 6 The Quality Assurance Framework sets out how Durham Children’s Social Care Services will ensure a focus on a single framework that continuously drives improvement in the quality of practice which in turn leads to improved outcomes for children and families in Durham.
- 7 We understand that improvement is a continuous process and this framework sets out mechanisms that support the improvement cycle that is shown below.



- 8 The ultimate aim is to accurately understand what the quality of practice is in Durham and what difference this is making to outcomes for children and families. The framework below illustrates the key sources of information that we use to do this.



- 9 The Quality Assurance Framework document attached at appendix 2, sets out how each of these sources of evidence is gathered. Since the last report to Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny there have been some significant developments in relation to our use of performance management information and our collaborative case file audits.

## **Performance Management**

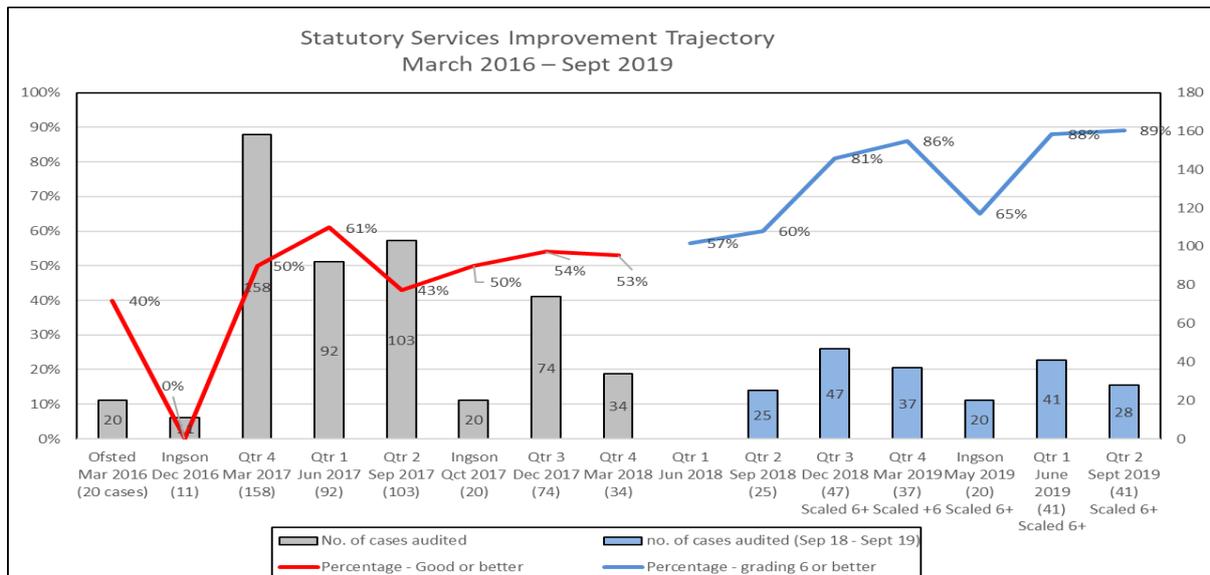
- 10 The implementation of Liquidlogic electronic social care record system has been transformational in our ability to accurately record information and subsequently report it.
- 11 All managers at every level of the organisation now have access to electronic dashboards that provide them with real time performance management information.
- 12 The ability to report performance information efficiently has supported a revised structure of monthly performance meetings. At the beginning of each monthly cycle Team Managers are supported to respond to key performance questions and performance exceptions and are given the opportunity to provide additional information about the quality of practice within their respective teams. This information is then presented to the Children's Social Care Performance and Outcomes meeting which provides a forum for effective scrutiny and challenge.
- 13 This scrutiny and challenge by senior managers is then continued as the outcomes of the Children's Social Care Performance and Outcomes meeting are presented to the CYPS Senior Management Team and subsequently to the Chief Executive Performance and Outcomes meeting.
- 14 The effective challenge and scrutiny on a monthly basis ensures that performance issues that are specific to individual teams can be addressed and supported in a timely way. It also provides a forum to identify potential systemic issues that require further exploration via a themed audit, or that need a service wide response. Additionally, it creates a forum to identify areas of best practice that need to be celebrated and shared widely to support the continuous improvement of practice.

## **Collaborative Audits**

- 15 The collaborative case file audit tool used within Children's Social Care has been revised so that it is aligned to our Signs of Safety framework and is now integrated into the Liquidlogic system, enabling audits to be attached to individual children's records in real time.

16 Having introduced the audit programme and continued to strengthen it we have been able to effectively target our improvement activity. Graph 1 below shows the numbers of collaborative audits that have been completed since the introduction of the Quality Improvement Framework and a summary of outcomes.

**Graph 1**



17 The improvement trajectory is clearly positive and was recognised by OFSTED during the ILACS inspection. However, we know that there continue to be areas of practice that require improvement and we want to ensure that our audit practice is consistent and accurate. Ofsted found that, “audit activity is at times over optimistic and needs to be more sharply focused on the experience of the child”. In response to this, we have reduced the number of auditors and have established a training programme for them to ensure that the quality of our audits is consistently high. We currently have 29 auditors who will complete 50 audits each quarter. The audit process has been strengthened so audits are now completed in the same location and at the same time which provides peer support and challenge to auditors and will increase consistency.

**Themed audits**

18 In addition to the collaborative audits we have undertaken Themed Audits over the past 12 months focusing on the following areas: Chronologies; Core Groups; Private Fostering; Supervision; Strategy Meetings.

- 19 These audits have allowed us to either develop a greater understanding of a particular issue or measure the impact of targeted improvement activity. The programme of thematic audits for 2020-21 is currently being developed and it will be one of the key mechanisms by which we measure the impact of the improvement activity identified within the Quality Improvement Plan.

### **Multi-agency audits**

- 20 A programme of multi-agency audits has been developed and is co-ordinated by the Embedded Learning Group which is a sub-group of the Durham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (DSCP). The learning from these audits is disseminated back out to all agencies. The focus of this activity in 2019-2020 includes our response to children missing from home and the effectiveness of our response to safeguarding non-mobile babies.

### **Feedback**

- 21 The feedback from children, young people and families that we seek via a survey, via the collaborative audit programme and the compliments and complaints we receive, is all now shared at the Social Care Quality Improvement Board so that the learning can be used to target our improvement activity.

### **External Moderation**

- 22 Throughout 2019 we have encouraged external scrutiny and challenge to ensure that our internal quality assurance mechanisms are accurate. We have worked with North Yorkshire and South Tyneside Councils as Partners in Practice. We have also been part of a peer audit programme which has involved Hartlepool Council undertaking a small peer review of Durham and Durham undertaking a small peer review of Gateshead Council.
- 23 We have commissioned an independent consultancy, Ingson, to provide some specific input in relation to moderating our auditing practice. We have commissioned them on four occasions now, first in late 2016 and then at intervals since then. They have been able to provide a consistent external view of the progress that we have been making. Most recently they have provided training to our pool of auditors and we have commissioned them to work with this group twice yearly to ensure the quality of our auditing remains high.

## Conclusion

24 The Quality Assurance Framework itself and the improvements made to both the performance reporting arrangements and the collaborative case file audits has meant that leaders have an increasing oversight of the quality of social work practice. OFSTED acknowledged this in concluding, “A new quality assurance process is increasing the oversight of the quality of social work practice”. This increasing oversight has enabled us to target improvement activity appropriately and achieve the rapid pace of change acknowledged by OFSTED in October 2019.

## Background papers

- Quality Assurance Framework 2019

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**Contact:** Chris Ring

Tel: 03000 268657

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Quality Assurance Framework will assist CYPS to comply with their statutory duties under the Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

### **Finance**

The report has no direct financial implications.

### **Consultation**

No implications

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

No implications

### **Climate Change**

No implications

### **Human Rights**

No implications

### **Crime and Disorder**

No implications

### **Staffing**

No implications

### **Accommodation**

No implications

### **Risk**

No implications

### **Procurement**

No implications



**DURHAM CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE: QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK**

## **CONTENTS**

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**Appendix 1: Quality Assurance Meetings Framework**

**Appendix 2: Key Performance Questions**

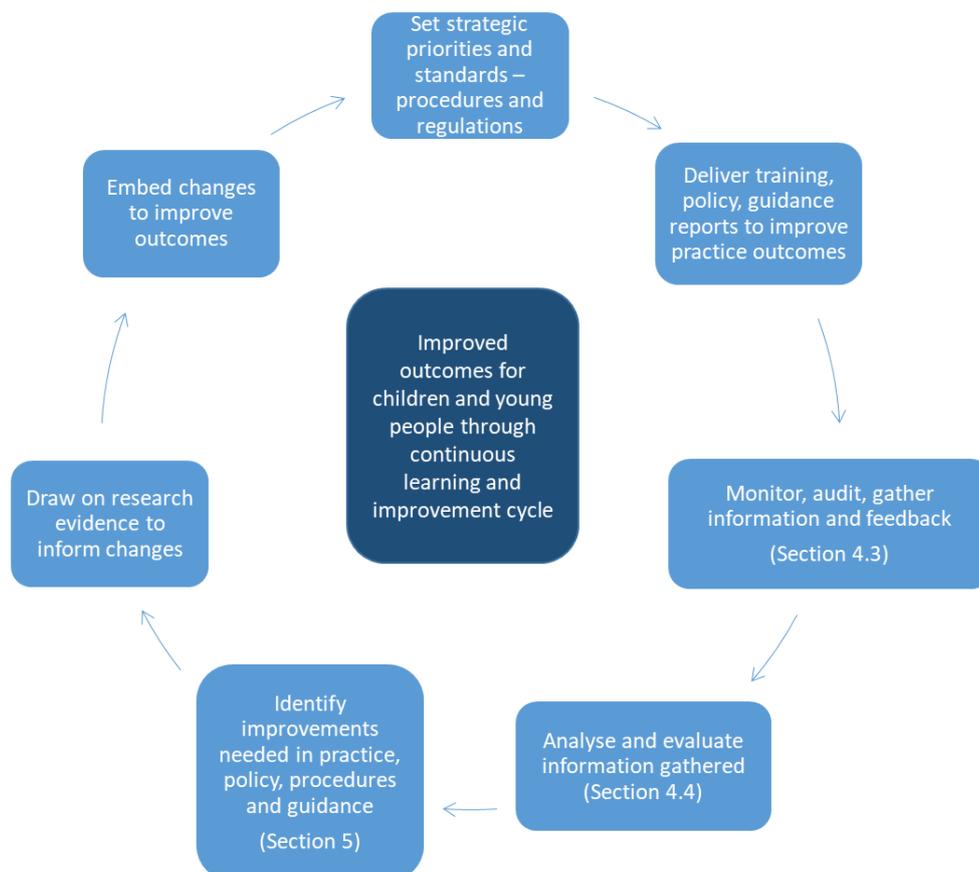
**Appendix 3: Proforma for Performance and Outcomes meeting**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Quality Assurance Framework sets out how Durham Children’s Social Care Services will ensure a focus on a single framework that continuously drives improvement in the quality of practice which in turn leads to improved outcomes for children and families in Durham. We believe that every child and young person should have a safe, loving and stable home so that they can explore the world around them safely and become the young adult that they want to become.
- 1.2 This document describes how we have integrated our Performance Management Framework and Audit Framework. It builds on the work described within the Research in Practice paper “Building a quality culture” and the learning from a number of Local Authorities who have effectively used this approach to drive improvement and achieve better outcomes for Children and Young People.

## 2. CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

- 2.1 We understand that improvement is a continuous process and this framework sets out mechanisms that support the improvement cycle that is shown below.



2.1 The continual improvement cycle will achieve better outcomes for children and young people through:

- Ensuring all staff have a role to play in the improvement of practice and practice outcomes;
- A bottom up approach which will empower staff to bring effective challenge, the ability to inform practice and ownership to drive through improvements;
- Enabling regular review of strategic, policy and practice guidance to respond to issues, with all staff clear of the standards they are required to work to;
- Ensuring all staff are clear on our quality of practice process and how this shapes improvement and outcomes;
- Delivering robust analysis will ensure full understanding of issues affecting practice and outcomes, recommendations and changes will be made from a position of being fully informed;
- Researching the sector and aiming to learn from best practice to inform improvement in our practice.

### 3. THE PRACTICE SYSTEM

3.1 The way in which we work with families has a direct impact on the outcomes that they achieve. Our chosen Practice Framework in Durham is Signs of Safety and the diagram below sets out our values and principles of best practice.

## Children and Young People's Service - Principles of Best Practice

"Every conversation matters, every day counts"

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#### Our Values



**Outcome Focused**

We work together to achieve the best for people



**People Focused**

We put people and communities at the heart of everything we do and value our employees



**Empowering**

We value, trust and support each other



**iNnovative**

We embrace change and look for better ways to deliver services

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#### Our Principles

- **The Best For Our Children:** We want every child to be safe, have the best start in life, good health and access to good, quality education, training and employment. We will strive to be a good parent when children are looked after in our care.
- **Think Family/Think Inclusion:** We will work with other agencies to deliver good outcomes for all children and young people through childhood, into adulthood and independence. Wherever appropriate, there will be one lead practitioner to coordinate a whole family plan.
- **Timeliness:** We know that childhood is precious and that every day counts. We will work hard to ensure there is no delay for children and young people's plans as a result of our work.
- **Stability:** We know that moving placements or schools can be hard for children and young people and can affect their progress and wellbeing. We will work hard to minimise moves for children and support smooth transitions.

- **Working With:** We will work with children, young people, families and each other with compassion and humility and in a context of high support, high challenge. We will try to ensure everyone receives the right support at the right time.
- **Child Focused:** We will ensure that we spend time with every child and young person so that we understand what life is like from their perspective, what 'good' looks like for them and to help prepare them for their next steps.
- **Relationships Matter:** We will take responsibility for creating and maintaining effective relationships with children, young people, families and each other using language that everyone can understand. We will strive to provide consistency of workers as we know this is important in building trusting relationships.

- **Strengths Based:** We will discuss with children, young people and families what we are worried about, ensure that we understand what is going well in their family and help them find their own solutions. We will adopt an evidence-based approach to assessing need and managing risk.
- **Supporting Families And Communities:** We believe that children and young people should remain living in their families and local communities with support where it is safe to do so. We want communities to be confident that our services safeguard and protect when they need to.

- **Transparency And Accountability:** We will work with partners to make sure there is clarity in who makes decisions for and with children and young people and why these decisions are made. We will regularly review situations to ensure that decisions and support remain appropriate and ensure that we spend public money wisely.
- **Creative:** We will be creative in finding the best way to support every individual child and family to achieve good outcomes as soon as issues are identified as well as working to reduce their reliance on services.



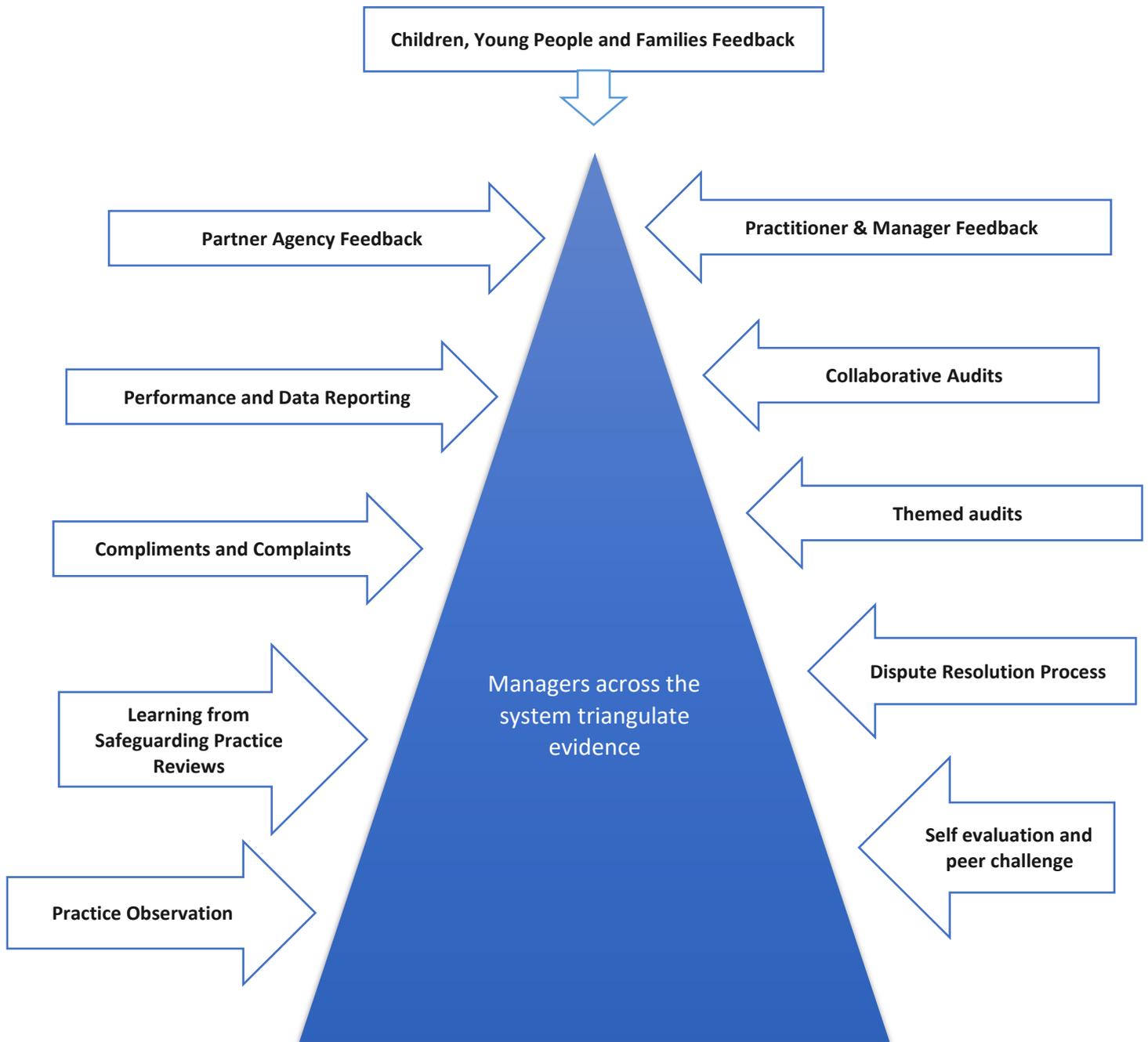
#### 4. THE QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

4.1 This Quality Assurance Framework combines both the quantitative performance data that we collect and the qualitative evidence that we gather from a range of sources across our Social Care system. The key components of this data are described below:

<b>Quantitative</b>	How much?
	How many?
	How often?
<b>Qualitative</b>	How did we do?
	What did children, young people and their families think and feel about it?
	What did the front line think about it?
	What do frontline practitioners and managers think about it?
	What feedback have we had from partners?
<b>Impact/Outcomes</b>	What difference have services, strategies, interventions, and individuals made to the lives of children and young people?
	Is anyone better off and how do we know?
	How can we improve?

4.2 The ultimate aim is to accurately understand what the quality of practice is in Durham and what difference this is making to outcomes for children and families. The framework below illustrates the key sources of information that we use to do this.

## Framework for a whole-system approach to assurance and performance management



4.3 The table below shows how each of the sources of information will be gathered and used to inform practice improvement.

Information source	How does this inform practice improvement?	Frequency
<p><b>Children, Young People and Families Feedback</b></p>	<p>We have a range of mechanisms across services to capture feedback from Children, Young People and their Families. Our Participation and Engagement worker is pivotal in ensuring that this work is strengthened and that we effectively use this feedback to influence practice and service development.</p> <p>Key themes from this feedback are captured in the monthly Performance and Outcomes meetings and reported quarterly in the Quality of Practice report that is presented to the Quality Improvement Board.</p>	<p>Monthly and quarterly</p>

Information source	How does this inform practice improvement?	Frequency
<p><b>Practitioner &amp; Manager Feedback</b></p>	<p>Feedback from practitioners is captured formally through the annual Organisational Health Check and DCC Staff survey.</p> <p>The Principal Social Worker hosts a forum with practitioners every 8 weeks where feedback is gathered. The Principal Social Worker takes responsibility for ensuring that this feedback is fed into the Raising the Bar Board so it can be acted upon.</p> <p>Practice Weeks are held bi-annually and consist of all Senior Managers undertaking visits and observations of practice to all areas of the service to hear about challenges and celebrate good practice. The feedback is reviewed by the Senior Management Team and agreed actions are communicated to staff via Team Manager and Practitioner Briefings.</p> <p>Head of Service Team Manager Briefings are held quarterly which provide an opportunity for Team Managers to feedback directly to the Senior Management Team.</p> <p>Head of Service Practitioner Briefings are held bi-annually which provide an opportunity for practitioners to feedback directly to the Senior Management Team.</p> <p>Key themes relevant to practice improvement are considered at the fortnightly Children’s Social Care Management Team business meeting.</p>	<p>Annual</p> <p>Bi-monthly</p> <p>Bi-annually</p> <p>Quarterly</p> <p>Bi-annually</p> <p>Fortnightly</p>
<p><b>Partner Agency Feedback</b></p>	<p>The Multi-agency audit programme provides an opportunity for partner agency feedback. The learning from these audits are discussed at the Embedded Learning Sub-Group of the DCSP and actions to improve practice are agreed and monitored.</p>	<p>Monthly</p>

Information source	How does this inform practice improvement?	Frequency
<p><b>Performance and Data Reporting</b></p>	<p>Regular, routine performance information is shared with managers at all levels of the organisation to encourage the timely and proactive identification of issues and ensure oversight of any challenges faced. Data is benchmarked and trends, existing and emerging, highlighted. Practice improvement actions taken to address these issues are agreed and communicated. The Key Performance Questions provide a framework for performance reporting across the service, from the front door to care leavers. These questions are listed in appendix 2.</p> <p>Senior Managers within the service are held to account and face challenge from colleagues, both within and outside of CYPS. Further areas for analysis are identified which also enable targeted practice improvement.</p> <p>Bespoke performance and data reporting also exists for specific aspects of the service and key partnerships as well as real-time information dashboards providing day-to-day management information.</p>	<p>Monthly</p>
<p><b>Compliments and Complaints</b></p>	<p>A summary of the learning from Compliments and Complaints are reported to the Quality Improvement Board where decisions are made about what actions need to be taken to improve practice or celebrate good practice.</p>	<p>Quarterly</p>
<p><b>Safeguarding Practice Reviews</b></p>	<p>Safeguarding Practice Reviews will be led by the DSCP and all learning will be taken into the Embedded Learning Sub-Group.</p>	<p>Monthly</p>
<p><b>Practice Observation</b></p>	<p>All practitioners are observed by their line managers twice yearly. The learning from the observations is discussed directly with the practitioner and provide a rich source of feedback, both in terms of celebrating good practice and identifying areas of improvement.</p>	<p>Bi-annual</p>

Information source	How does this inform practice improvement?	Frequency
<b>Collaborative Audits</b>	There is a comprehensive programme of collaborative audits across the service. Case file audits are undertaken with the practitioner and it is expected to be a strength based process, highlighted both good practice and areas for improvement. The outcomes of these audits are analysed by the Service Improvement Manager and reported quarterly the QIB in the Quality of Practice Report. They are also shared with Team and Operations Managers so that they can be triangulated with performance information at the Performance and Outcome meetings.	Quarterly
<b>Themed Audits</b>	There is a programme of themed audits that is informed by performance information or feedback suggesting further understanding of practice is required, or where improvement activity has taken place and we want to understand whether or not it has had the desired impact. Learning is shared at the Social Care Quality Improvement Board and disseminated through Management meetings, Practitioner Briefings and the Raising the Bar Newsletter.	Quarterly
<b>Dispute Resolution Process</b>	This process is well embedded and is used by the IRO service to ensure that there is effective challenge where necessary and that this challenge is ensuring that care planning for children and young people is effective, timely and making a difference to the quality of practice and that the experience of children and families is improved.	Monthly
<b>Self evaluation and peer challenge</b>	<p>The Strategic Manager for Professional Practice and Safeguarding is responsible for the continuous review of the Self-Evaluation document. This is shared with OFSTED on an annual basis and used to inform our strategic planning process.</p> <p>A range of Partners in Practice and Regional peer challenge activity is undertaken to provide an external view of our practice. The learning from this activity is reported to the Senior Management Team and practitioners and managers through management meetings, practitioner briefings and the Raising the Bar Newsletter. Any improvement activity arising from it is tracked by the Quality Improvement Board.</p>	Continuous

#### 4.4 Method of triangulating evidence

4.5 The above sources of information are all valuable and many will lead to direct actions being taken to improve the quality of practice. However, it is also important that there are opportunities for these sources of information to be viewed together so that we get a holistic and accurate understanding of the quality of practice.

4.6 Appendix 1 illustrates an overview of the meeting structure that has been designed to achieve this. The meeting structure has been designed to facilitate a “bottom-up” conversation about the quality of practice from front-line managers to the Chief Executive and to enable the triangulation of a range of both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Meeting	Frequency	Who
LAC & Permanence Performance and Outcomes	Monthly	Team Managers Operations Managers Strategy
Families First Performance and Outcomes	Monthly	Team Managers Operations Managers Strategy
Children’s Social Care Performance and Outcomes Clinic	Monthly	Head of Service Strategic Managers Operations Managers Strategy Systems and Data
CYPS Senior Management Team Performance and Outcomes Clinic	Monthly	CYPS senior leadership team: Corporate Director and Heads of Service Strategy
Chief Executive Performance and Outcomes Clinic	Monthly	CYPS Senior Management Team Director of Transformation and Partnerships Director of Resources

Meeting	Frequency	Who
		CEO  Head of Strategy

4.7 Appendix 3 shows the pro-forma that is used to structure the conversation through this cycle of meetings. At the beginning of each monthly cycle Team Managers are supported to respond to the Key Performance Question Analysis Reports and performance exceptions and are given the opportunity to provide additional information about the quality of practice within their respective teams. Operations Managers are then asked to present this information to the Children’s Social Care Performance and Outcomes meeting which enables them to maintain accountability for the quality of practice in their respective services and provides a forum for effective scrutiny and challenge.

4.8 This scrutiny and challenge by senior managers is then continued as the outcomes of the Children’s Social Care Performance and Outcomes meeting are presented to the CYPS Senior Management Team and subsequently to the Chief Executive Performance and Outcomes meeting.

4.9 The effective challenge and scrutiny on a monthly basis will ensure that performance issues that are specific to individual teams can be addressed and supported in a timely way. It also provides a forum to identify potential systemic issues that require further exploration via a themed audit, or that need a service wide response. Additionally, it creates a forum to identify areas of best practice that need to be celebrated and shared widely to support the continuous improvement of practice.

## 5. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

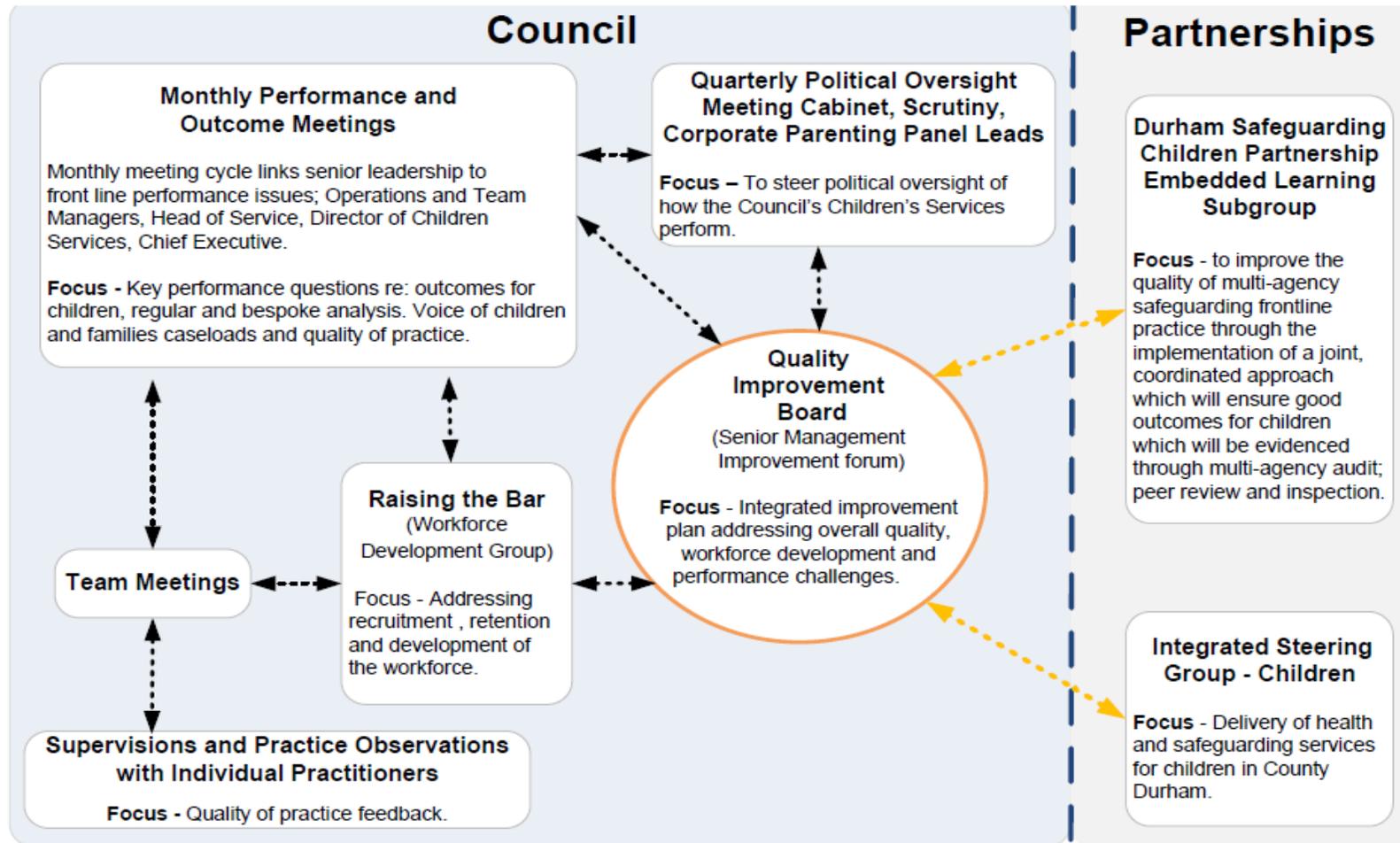
5.1 The **Social Care Quality Improvement Board (QIB)** is chaired by the Head of Service for Social Care and is the primary mechanism for ensuring that the learning from the Performance and Outcome meetings is captured and that both the audit programme and improvement plan are aligned to what we have learnt about the quality of practice.

5.2 In addition to the learning from the Performance and Outcome meetings, the learning from the below sources of information will be collated and reported on a quarterly basis to the QIB by the Operations Manager, Professional Practice:

- Themes from Audits (that have not been discussed at the Performance and Outcome meetings)
- Children, Young People and Families Feedback (that has not been discussed at the Performance and Outcome meetings)
- Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- Peer Challenge activity
- Dispute Resolution Process

- 5.3 There is a single Quality Improvement Action plan which brings together all improvement activity across Children's Social Care. This plan is routinely monitored by the QIB to ensure that it is driving improvement in the quality of practice and improving outcomes for children and families.

## Quality Assurance Meetings Framework



## **Appendix 2 – Key Performance Questions**

These key performance questions reflect the core performance framework within children’s social care. A range of performance and outcome data are used to evaluate our position against each question and initiate regular discussions about the impact of our social care work. The questions are;

1. Are referrals allocated in a timely manner and are children seen in accordance with timescales?
2. Does every child have an assessment of need without drift and delay which results in the right outcome?
3. Are the right children in the child protection process and are they receiving a robust and timely child protection response?
4. Are social work caseloads manageable and do they meet our quality standards?
5. Are children seen often enough and alone?
6. How do we respond to different abuse types
7. Do children involved in care proceedings receive good and timely outcomes?
8. Are the right children in care and are they there for the right amount of time?
9. Do we achieve good outcomes for our children in care and care leavers?
10. Are supervision taking place in a timely manner and are staff being effectively managed?

To supplement these core key performance questions, additional performance reporting is used within specific areas of social care.

## Children's Social Care Performance Exceptions

Name	Operations Manager
Locality	Locality Name

This briefing should be completed and forwarded to your Strategic Manager and Head of Service before the HoS monthly performance clinic. Where relevant please refer to any actions from previous performance discussions. This briefing will be used to shape performance discussions in your next performance clinic with your Head of Service and you will be asked to respond to these issues.

### Data Exceptions

- Pre-populated with some key points about team level performance
- E.g. Assessments, ICPCs, Referral within five days, child seen alone, caseloads, supervisions etc
- Focus should be on inequality of outcome for children i.e. highlighting any areas of significant poor (or excellent) performance

### What's Working Well?

- Briefly summarise what you think is effective practice in your team
- What improvements have you made recently?

### What are you worried about? What are you most proud about?

- Briefly summarise what you are worried about/proud of

**What Actions are you taking and what are your leadership priorities?**

- Briefly summarise current priorities for your teams

**What are collaborative practice reviews showing?**

- Pre-populated with locality results from the quarterly Collaborative Evaluation report

**How else do you know practice?**

- Pre-populated with number of stage 1 and 2 complaints for locality (from Gill Horsfield)

**How do you know how practitioners are feeling and what is your response as leader?**

- Staff morale

Together we can do

**GREAT THINGS**

# **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**7<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

## **Children's Social Care Quality Assurance Framework**



## Quality Assurance Framework

*“A new quality assurance process is increasing the oversight of the quality of social work practice”.*

*Ofsted 2019*

- Integrated Performance Management Framework and Audit Framework
- Aim to accurately understand what the quality of practice is in Durham and what difference this is making to outcomes for children and families

# Whole system approach

- Children, Young People and Families Feedback
- Partner Agency Feedback
- Practitioner & Manager Feedback
- Collaborative Audits
- Performance and Data Reporting
- Compliments and Complaints
- Learning from Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- Practice Observation
- Collaborative Audits
- Themed audits
- Dispute Resolution Process
- Self evaluation and peer challenge

Managers across  
the system  
triangulate  
evidence

# Performance Management

- Liquidlogic – transformational
- Dashboards at every level
- Monthly meetings cycle
- Issues addressed in a timely way
- Systemic issues identified

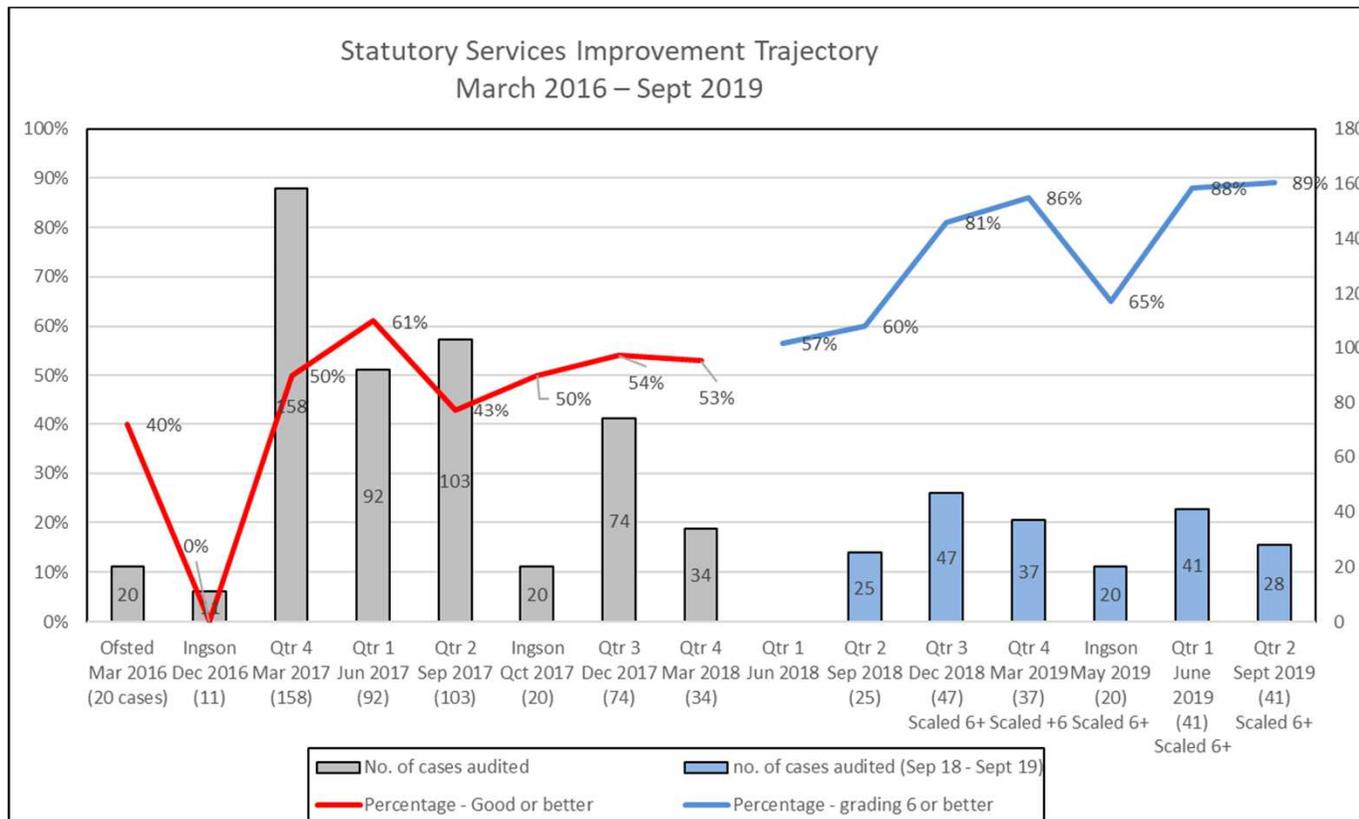
# Auditing

- Collaborative audit tool strengthened
- Integrated into Liquidlogic
- Reduced numbers of auditors
- Programme of themed audits
- Programme of multi-agency audits
- Learning from audits informing targeted improvement plan

Together we can do

**GREAT THINGS**

# Improving trajectory



# External Moderation

- NYCC Partners in Practice
- South Tyneside Partners in Practice
- Sector Led Improvement
- Independent consultants, Ingson

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**Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



**7 February 2020**

**Pre-Birth Service Update**

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**Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work being undertaken within the Pre-birth intervention team.

**Executive Summary**

- 2 The Pre-Birth team was re-established in Durham's Families First Service in May 2018. The pre-birth team works with families where either parent has previously had a child removed from their care through public care proceedings. The model and ambition is to enable babies to remain with their parents, or at least within the birth family where it is safe to do so. This is achieved by completing as much work as possible before the baby is born and by ensuring that the parents receive intensive support to help them to achieve sustainable change. Where this is not in the best interests of the child, then the ambition is to ensure that the baby is permanently placed with alternative carers as soon as is possible after birth and to reduce the number of carers the child experiences.
- 3 The report reflects a lot of positive work undertaken by the Pre-Birth team, which has resulted in good and timely outcomes for children which was acknowledged in the recent Ofsted report.

**Recommendation**

- 4 Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to:
  - (a) Note the content of this report

## **Background**

- 5 The Pre-Birth team was re-established in Durham's Families First Service in May 2018. The criteria are a referral prior to 21 weeks gestation where either parent has had a previous child permanently removed from their care through care proceedings and does not currently have a child in their care.
- 6 The team profile consists of a team manager, a social work consultant, 4 full time social workers, 1 part time social worker and a part time team co-ordinator.
- 7 To ensure early and intensive intervention and support the agreed maximum social worker caseload within the Pre-Birth team is between 10-12 with the aim of giving parents the best possible opportunity to effect positive change and enable them to successfully and safely parent their newborn child.
- 8 Unlike their colleagues in the other Families First teams, the social workers in the pre-birth team work with children throughout their journey within children's statutory social care services, whether this be a successful placement with parents, early permanence with an alternative family member or friend or within an adoptive placement.
- 9 Social Workers work alongside Early Help practitioners from the One Point Service. Together they deliver intensive assessment and support, with the aim of enabling parents to safely care for their children or gather evidence to make timely decisions in relation to permanence plans. Where children remain in the care of their parents, they have established relationships with professionals based within local Children's Centres to ensure that support can be sustained and readily accessible to parents.
- 10 The pre-birth team have received praise from Ofsted for their good practice and the positive outcomes they achieve, both within the focused visit which took place early in 2019 and within the more recent inspection which was conducted under the ILACs framework. This recently published inspection report highlighted that "The work of the pre-birth service is strong and effective".

## **Outcomes for Children**

- 11 From May 2018 to December 2019 the Pre-Birth team have received 92 referrals. Of these referrals 76 families were deemed to be appropriate referrals and progressed to open cases. Nine families did not receive a service as the pregnancies did not progress, 6 did not meet the criteria and were transferred to the relevant Families First team.

- 12 Since May 2018, 55 children have been born following a pre-birth assessment being completed by the Pre-birth Assessment Team:
- (a) 8 children have gone home to live with parents on CP/CIN plans, without legal intervention;
  - (b) 1 child is at home on a Care Order
  - (c) 10 children have a plan of adoption and have been made subject to Placement Orders;
  - (d) 8 have secured permanency with family or friends via Special Guardianship Orders;
  - (e) There have been 2 children who are now adopted who were in foster to adopt placements. There is currently a further child who is living within a foster to adopt placement;
  - (f) 11 children who were removed from parental care at birth were placed with possible long-term carers within 2 months of their birth;
- 13 Due to some staffing vacancies in the team, 14 were transferred to different teams having had a pre-birth assessment completed.
- 14 At the time of writing this report, the Pre-Birth team are currently working with 38 families. Of these, 16 are unborn and are in the pre-birth assessment stage, with one unborn child being subject to a child protection plan. There are 22 babies who have post-birth assessments ongoing. Of these,
- (a) 2 babies are in their parents' care and 4 are placed with family or friends;
  - (b) 12 are living in foster care, and 4 are in adoptive placements;
- 15 There are currently 13 children who are subject to care proceedings, of these children, 7 have plans of adoption ratified, rehabilitation plans are progressing for 2 children and 4 children are living within their extended family

### **Performance data**

- 16 Assessment work in the team is timely and the majority of pre-birth assessments are completed by 29 weeks gestation to allow sufficient time for planning for the baby prior to birth. At this point, a multi-agency planning meeting explores all options for the safe and appropriate care of the baby at birth and makes recommendations to this effect.

- 17 There have been 3 cases where Care Proceedings were concluded within 14 weeks of being issued as a result of good planning and thorough assessment which has meant no delay for the baby once born.
- 18 All Initial Child Protection Conferences, Review Child Protection Conferences and child Looked After Reviews have been completed within timescales.
- 19 Children's Services introduced a new children's electronic case recording system in February 2019 called Liquid Logic. The introduction of a live dashboard has transformed the performance information available and helped to improve managers' line of sight and social workers' compliance in relation to performance and practice. There are plans in place to develop a dashboard specifically for the pre-birth team.
- 20 All staff are currently working within the agreed caseload parameters. There has been a number of vacancies over the past 3 months within the team. Following a recruitment drive, we have successfully appointed a team manager and 2 experienced social workers. There is currently 1 social worker vacancy within the team which we are actively recruiting to. These staffing issues have temporarily had an impact on the number of families in receipt of this service but these are now resolved.

## **Governance**

- 21 The Pre-Birth operational group meet on a bi-monthly basis. The group includes representatives from internal services such as fostering, First Contact, One Point and Public Health and external services such as housing, midwifery, substance misuse services, domestic abuse services to ensure a high quality multi agency response to these vulnerable parents and their children. The group is also responsible for disseminating best practice in working with pre birth work across the safeguarding partnership.

## **Interface between Pre-Birth Team and Pause Programme**

- 22 The Pause program works with mothers who have had 2 or more children removed permanently from their care, before they become pregnant again. The aim of the service is to help mothers address their own individual issues before they become pregnant, so that they stand a better chance of keeping their babies. This may be supporting them to access services to address their mental health issues, self-esteem, relationship issues, substance misuse issues, housing etc.
- 23 Barnardo's were commissioned to deliver this service within the east of County Durham over an 18-month period with non-recurrent funding

from Adult Services as part of a regional commissioning arrangement. The funding ceases on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020. The service worked with 23 women within the first 12 months of the project and 12 women were considered to have successfully engaged with the project. The Pre-Birth team has worked alongside this service to identify mothers to access the program so that they receive ongoing support where children have been removed from their care and stand the best chance of breaking the cycle of having children removed repeatedly.

- 24 Children's Services are currently exploring alternative ways to support these families post proceedings and achieve a longer-term reduction in the number of repeat pregnancies and referrals leading to care proceedings and removal of children. We are exploring the option of locating some additional support workers within the Pre-Birth team, as an extension of the current team and its remit, to work and support families where they no longer have their children in their care. This work is in the early stages of development.

## **Conclusion**

- 25 There is a lot of positive and effective work being undertaken within the team, and practitioners are committed and passionate about achieving good outcomes for children. Outcomes for children continue to be positive. Plans for 2020 include ensuring that best practice is embedded across all of the services working with vulnerable parents who are pregnant as well as developing the model to provide a continuation of support to parents in situations where they are unable to safely care for their babies with a focus on reducing repeat pregnancies until sustained change has been achieved.

## **Background papers**

- Previous Cabinet reports

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Children Act 1989 sets out the legal requirement on the local authority to support children in need and to carry out safeguarding investigations and where necessary, issue care proceedings to ensure that children are protected from harm.

### **Finance**

One off funding for this initiative expires on 31 March 2020. Finance is being actively sought to continue with a 'pause' type initiative.

### **Consultation**

No implications.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

No implications.

### **Climate Change**

No implications.

### **Human Rights**

No implications.

### **Crime and Disorder**

No implications.

### **Staffing**

No implications.

### **Accommodation**

No implications.

### **Risk**

No implications.

### **Procurement**

No implications.

# Pre-Birth Team

## Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**7<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

Jac Tyler, Strategic Manager Children and  
Families South and East

*Altogether better*



# Pre-Birth Team

- To enable babies to remain with their parents, or within the birth family where it is safe to do so OR identify quickly that parents cannot meet their babies needs and ensure children achieve permanence without delay and numerous moves.
- The Criteria is that either parent has had a previous child permanently removed from their care through care proceedings.

*Altogether better*



## Performance

- All but 3 pre-birth assessments have been completed by 29 weeks
- All Child Protection and Looked After Review meetings have been held within timescales
- 2 children's plans have been ratified as adoption within 4 weeks of their birth
- Care proceedings have been issued with final plans for 2 children, with a further 13 sets of care proceedings concluding within 14 weeks.

## Outcomes for Children

- 76 appropriate referrals, of which 55 progressed to assessment and intervention.
- Planning and thorough assessment have lead to timely outcomes which has meant no delay for the baby once born.

*Altogether better*



## Working with others

- The Pre-Birth operational includes representatives from Early Help, Housing, Midwifery, Substance Misuse and domestic abuse services.
- The Pre-Birth manager role is to also provide a level of management oversight on all pre-birth cases open to the Families First teams and share best practice.
- Barnardo's were commissioned to deliver the Pause model for an 18 month period working closely with Pre Birth team with non recurrent funding - ends April 2020

*Altogether better*



## Next Steps

- Contribute to improvements in early permanence planning for all babies across the service
- Support the increase in Foster to Adopt placements
- Share best practice across the safeguarding partnership
- Explore alternative ways to support families who are unable to safely care for their children to reduce the number of repeat pregnancies and referrals leading to care proceedings and removal of children.
- Develop a performance 'dashboard' to support management oversight
- Undertake a review of the Pre-Birth criteria to ensure as many families as possible benefit

*Altogether better*



**Ofsted**

**“The work of the pre-birth service is strong and effective”.**

ILACs 2019

*Altogether better*



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