QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK (QAF)

December 2020

Contents:

December 2020

1.   Introduction

1.1   Our *Vision* is that every child in Northamptonshire will live in a safe, stable, permanent home, nurtured by caring and responsible families and strong communities.

1.2   Our *Mission* is:

- Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) wants the best for all of Northamptonshire's children and young people and is specifically dedicated to supporting vulnerable children and young people.
- Northamptonshire Children's Trust values our highly skilled workforce who are passionate about making a difference for children and young people.
- Families are the best place for children and young people to develop. Northamptonshire Children's Trust will support families to understand and consider children and young people's needs and put them first.

1.3.   Our *Values* are:

- Child focussed
- Trust and integrity
- Solution focussed and forward thinking
- Inspiration, energy and motivation
- Good communicators

1.4   Our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is built on these values and seeks to help us achieve our vision and mission. Quality assurance provides windows into our practice, helps us to understand the quality of our work and the impact it has, and to identify areas for continuous improvement and learning and development, with the aim of making a positive difference for children and improving their outcomes. Our focus is on the child's experience, the progress children make when they receive help from us and whether what we do makes a positive difference.

1.5   The QAF sets out the means of gathering and analysing information to provide a comprehensive picture of the quality and effectiveness of our practice and shows us whether we are making a difference and where to focus improvement. Our measure of quality is the impact we have on children's lives, therefore our focus is on children's experiences and outcomes.

1.6   The voice of the child, family, advocates and our workforce are essential elements of the QAF. They help us to understand the difference we make and ensure that we are delivering child centred support. Quality assurance and improvement is everyone's business and should be part of our day to day work. We aim to embed a robust feedback cycle which drives a learning culture where problems are addressed openly and honestly.

1.7   The QAF uses the following mechanisms to gain feedback from children and families:

- Compliments, Comments, Complaints and Advocacy
- Feedback from Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs
- Participation groups
- Feedback from partner organisations that we work with, including the voluntary sector
- Identifying the voice of the child within case audits and how this has informed practice

1.8   Quality assurance and improvement is everyone's business and should be part of our day to day work. All staff are responsible for the quality of their own work and their individual performance. Managers have an additional responsibility to monitor and address performance within their service area or team and with individual staff members where necessary. The QAF sets out how our workforce is involved in quality assurance at a number of different levels, including:

December 2020

- Individual, case and reflective supervision
- Practice observations
- Management oversight and feedback
- Auditing
- Performance Clinics

Figure 1

Levels of Quality Assurance Activity

Individual Children and Families and Individual Workers

- Management and peer support
- Management oversight
- Case Reflective Supervision
- Group Supervision
- Practice Observations
- Performance data at case and worker level
- Children's and families' views
- Advocate, IRO and CP Chair views
- Complaints, compliments, comments
- Individual case audits
- Individual staff appraisal
- Individual staff continuous professional development

Teams, Services and the children and families they support

- Aggregation of individual level quality assurance to team and service level
- Tracking activity
- Performance data at team and service level
- Performance clinics
- Thematic audits and themes from case audits
- Team and Service level analysis of complaints and compliments
- Team and Service learning and development needs analysis
- Staff surveys
- Improvement Partner feedback
- Inspection findings
- Learning visits
- Research and best practice
- Feedback from partner organisations

CFN Early Help & Social Care and the children and families we support

- Aggregation of service level quality assurance
- Performance data at whole population level / whole service level against comparators
- JSNA
- Themes from audits
- Whole service learning and development needs analysis
- Themes from complaints, compliments and comments
- Staff surveys
- Improvement Partner feedback
- Inspection findings
- Learning visits
- Research and best practice
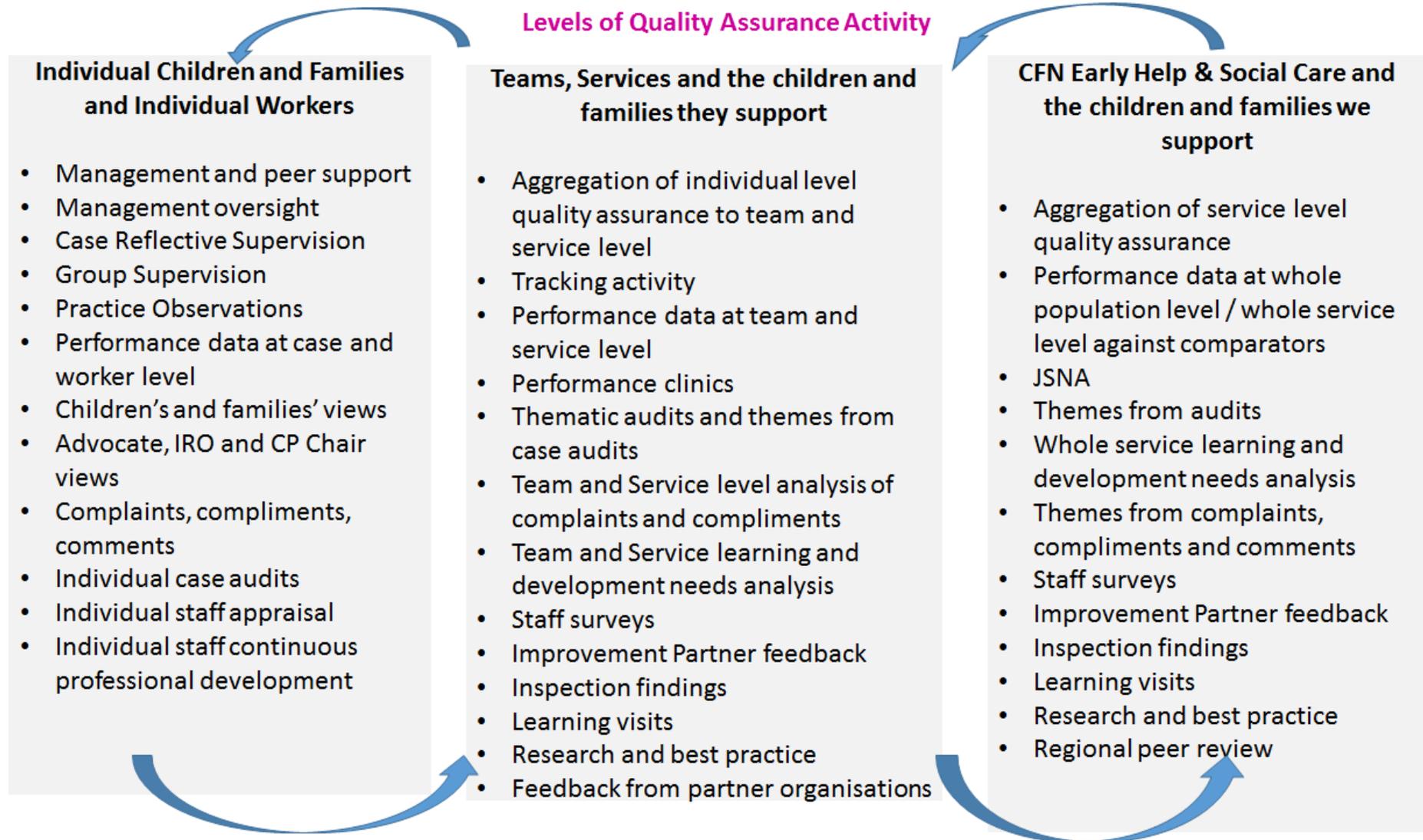- Regional peer review

December 2020

Figure 2

Our Quality Assurance activity at the three levels will help us to answer the following Outcomes Based Accountability (Friedman) questions

	QUANTITY	QUALITY
EFFORT	How much did we do?	How well did we do it?
EFFECT	Is anyone better off – what difference did we make to the lives of children and their outcomes? Where do we need to focus our improvement efforts?	

1.9   The next section provides further detail on quality assurance activity.

2.   Supervision

2.1   Case supervision should be carried out on a regular basis, in line with the supervision policy, by all operational team managers and comments and decisions should be recorded on the child's case file.

2.2   Managers must ensure that staff are regularly supervised and that all cases are discussed regularly with evidence of consideration of the child's needs and how effective our support is in improving outcomes. Supervision should include:

- Reflection and challenge
- Clear guidance and support
- SMART actions which are followed up
- Use of Signs of Safety practice model alongside other relevant evidence informed practice models and interventions
- Views of child, family, advocates, the child's experiences and how this has informed practice and interventions
- Quality of practice, decision making, assessments and plans
- Timeliness and appropriateness of support
- Impact on outcomes for the child

2.3   Supervision files will be audited by Service and Strategic Managers within their own service on a bi-monthly basis.

For Supervision File Audit Template ctrl+click here: QAF Employee Supervision File Audit Template

2.4   Findings will be fed back to individual managers as part of their continuous development. Service level themes will be identified by the Service Manager and fed into service development plans.

2.5   Supervision files may also be audited across the service as part of a Thematic Peer Audit (see audit section below). Findings, recommendations and actions will be included within a quarterly report to SLT by the Quality Assurance Manager.

6

3. Practice Observations

3.1   Team Managers will observe the practice of each team member on a bi-monthly basis by accompanying them as their deliver direct work to families. They will provide feedback to the individual worker on strengths, good practice and any areas for development and will review this as part of their supervision and annual performance appraisal.

For Practice Observation tool ctrl+click here QAF Observation of Practice Template

3.2   Team Managers will provide summary feedback on practice observations to Service and Strategic Managers to inform service plans.

3.3   Service or thematic practice observations to be carried out by all leaders, from Team Managers to DCS will be developed to take place on an annual basis.

3.4   The Quality Assurance Manager will receive copies of service and thematic practice observation reports to identify any workforce development themes and inform service improvement planning. This will be included within a quarterly quality assurance report to SLT.

4. Performance information

4.1 Case Tracking

Case tracking is used by managers to:

- monitor the impact of our services on progress being made in individual cases
- identify and challenge drift where it occurs
- support improvements in practice both at case level and across a team or service.

4.2 Performance data

4.2.1   Performance and management information reports are key tools that leaders use to inform their analysis and improvement activity. Performance measures allow the volume of activity to be understood, alongside achievement of timescales and targets at individual, team, service and directorate levels. Comparison with statistical neighbours, where available, helps us to understand how well we are doing and to identify any areas of concern.

4.2.2   Reports are produced for Team and Service Managers to identify and address areas for improvement.

4.2.3   Performance clinics are held within services to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement; and to identify and monitor necessary actions.

4.2.4   The Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Social Care Improvement Board, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees receive regular performance information to scrutinise and monitor performance and improvement.

4.2.5   NCT is part of the East Midlands Regional Improvement Alliance. This provides us with access to comparator performance information and peer review and support.

5. Audits

5.1   Case file audits are the cornerstone of the QA process – a systematic and on-going litmus test on how well services are being provided, the quality of practice and whether we are making a difference for children. In order to address the need for continuous improvement and to ensure measurement and focus on outcomes, there is a schedule for regular case file audits – all services are targeted within this.

December 2020

5.2   Wherever possible the file should be audited alongside the practitioner. This gives the worker the opportunity to reflect on their practice and the impact of their work on the child; and will help auditors to understand the context and the actions and decisions taken. It will also provide the opportunity for a mutual understanding of the findings and recommendations of the audit to be achieved.

5.3   The auditor is responsible for ensuring the practitioner's Team Manager is also aware of the findings and recommendations of the audit. It is the Team Manager's responsibility to ensure that appropriate actions are taken, or the Service/Strategic Managers' responsibility in the case of a thematic peer audit.

5.4   Any immediately identified concerns are recorded by the auditor using the IRO and CP Chair escalation process in Care First for social care cases. A summary of findings from each audit and any actions required will be recorded by the auditor on the child's care first record. Any immediately identified concerns for Early Help cases should be escalated to the relevant Service Manager.

5.5   If concerns raised during an audit are serious enough to require immediate attention then the concerns are recorded by the auditor using the IRO and CP Chair escalation process in Care First.

Currently NCT has a pool of 66 auditors made up of Team Managers, Service Managers, Strategic Managers, IROs, CP Chairs, and Senior Leaders. This pool has been configured in order that every 6 weeks we undertake:

- 33 thematic peer audits
- 22 practice observations
- 22 supervision file audits

5.5   Management Audits

5.5.1   Team Managers and Service and Strategic Managers undertake regular audits of cases and supervision as part of their day to day management and leadership of the service, in order to support staff and identify good practice, areas for improvement and learning and development needs.

5.5.3   Findings and themes from Management audits will be reviewed in service Performance Clinics. Any areas of improvement relating to a wider service area will be fed back to the Quality Assurance Manager for inclusion in the quarterly report to SLT.

5.6   Thematic Peer Audits

5.6.1   A specific theme will be selected for audit. Cases from across the relevant service/s are selected by the Business Intelligence Team and allocated to managers in Children's Social Care and Early Help who will complete audits as part of the six weekly cycle. They will audit cases with which they have not been involved nor had management oversight. During Practice Weeks any Practice Week Team members, including SLT members, will not complete thematic peer audits.

5.6.2   Themes will be agreed on a six monthly basis by SLT and will be identified from the following sources:

- NCT Improvement Plan (incorporating inspection and self-assessment recommendations)
- Themes from complaints
- Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Rapid Reviews
- Performance information
- Feedback from staff and partner organisations

5.6.4   Findings from thematic peer audits will be analysed by the Quality Assurance Manager and discussed at the relevant Senior Management Team (SMT) meeting to agree recommendations and actions. It is the responsibility of SMT to ensure that actions are monitored and completed.

5.6.5   The Quality Assurance Manager will include agreed recommendations and actions within the quarterly report to SLT.

5.7   *Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership – multi-agency audit*

5.7.1   Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) will carry out audits to evaluate the impact of specific areas of practice across the children's services network, related to the Partnership's priorities. This will be led by the Quality and Governance sub-group. Learning from NSCP audits will be reported to the Partnership Executive and disseminated to partner agencies. The audit reports will include a set of concise and appropriate recommendations that focus on what will make a difference to single or inter-agency practice. The Quality and Governance sub-group will monitor the impact of learning on single agencies and partnership working.

5.8   *Individual cases causing concern*

5.8.1   There may be individual cases that are causing concern as a result of practice, drift, delay, or other reasons. In these circumstances, a case audit or review will be commissioned by SLT, Service or Strategic Managers or the NSCP for an operational manager or member of SQAS to undertake. Findings and lessons learnt will be fed back to the Quality Assurance Manager for inclusion in the quarterly report to SLT.

6.0 Safeguarding Quality Assurance Service (SQAS)

6.1   SQAS plays a key role in quality assuring the work of children's services. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Child Protection (CP) Chairs are in a unique position to observe and assess the quality of case planning and assessment work carried out by the wider department and partner agencies.

6.2   SQAS will provide a quarterly report on escalations (serious concerns notifications from IROs and alerts CP Chairs). This will provide useful information on themes and practice issues to be fed back to services and included in the quarterly report to SLT.

7.0 Practice Weeks:

7.1 The Purpose of Practice Weeks within our Quality Assurance Framework

7.2 Quality assurance provides windows into our practice, helps us to understand the quality of our work and the impact it has, and to identify areas for continuous improvement and learning and development, with the aim of making a positive difference for children and improving their outcomes. Our focus is on the child's experience, the progress children make when they receive help from us and whether what we do makes a positive difference.

7.3 Practice Weeks will be an important aspect of NCT's Quality Assurance Framework. The purpose of Practice Weeks is to gain a richer understanding of the quality of our practice and greater opportunity for reflection and learning, as reviewers from outside of the service come alongside practitioners as they carry out their work and engage with families and other professionals. Practice Weeks therefore provide the opportunity for a deeper and more qualitative

review than case auditing and complement practice observations that we expect managers to undertake within their own service. Regular Practice Weeks throughout the year are likely to assist in creating and embedding a positive learning culture across NCT.

7.4 We expect Practice Weeks will also create the additional benefits of improving understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different services; cross service learning; networking between services and senior leadership visibility and connection with the front line.

7.5 Views and feedback from children and young people is an integral part of the NCT Quality Assurance Framework. The Young Inspectors scheme will be part of the practice week with Young Inspectors being part of the Practice Team. This will enable young people to be part of the Practice Week design, the assessment processes and to be involved in recommendations for action planning. The principle of the Young Inspectors scheme is:

For young people to quality assure the services and provisions available/provided for children and young people and to be able to provide positive feedback and areas for improvements, highlighting and sharing good practice.

8.0 **Whole Service Improvement**

8.0 The purpose of all quality improvement activity is to provide a basis for whole service learning and improvement. The Quality Assurance Manager will ensure that across Children's Social Care:

- good practice is showcased and promoted
- learning from quality assurance activity, including from the NSCP, is disseminated
- findings from quality assurance activity are shared in a quarterly update to SLT

Figure 3 below shows the improvement loop from quality assurance activity:

December 2020
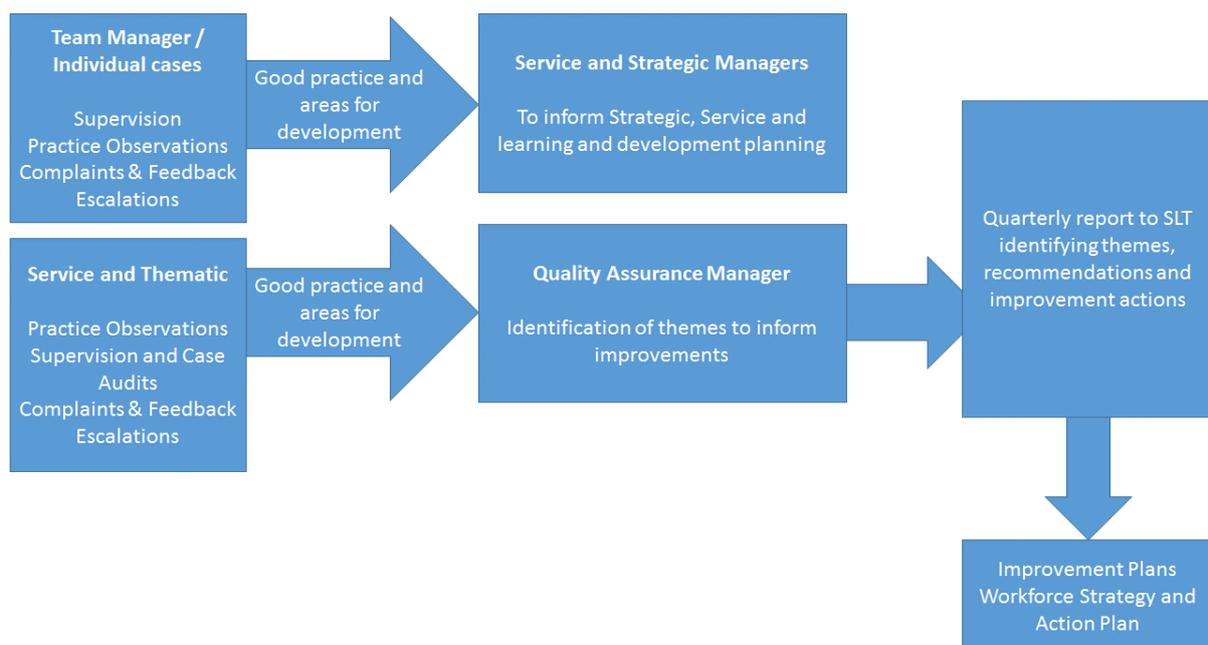
8.1 Learning from Quality Assurance Activity

8.2.1 As a learning organisation that is committed to continuous improvement we understand it is imperative that learning from all quality assurance activity is captured, addressed, implemented and monitored. It is important that this learning is shared with the right people and used in a meaningful way which will contribute to improvements in service and practice, leading to improved outcomes for children and families.

In order for QA activity to deliver improvement it is essential to "close the loop" to ensure learning informs practice.

Each audit undertaken includes direct feedback and discussion between the auditor and the case holder. This provides an immediate opportunity to discuss good practice and improvement opportunities. Where the case does not meet "Good" there are processes in place to ensure appropriate corrective actions are taken to improve.

Audits also lead to general learning and a regular briefing note/monthly report has been established to share generic learning.

8.2.2 Once final reports from quality assurance activity have been ratified by SLT, SLT will agree arrangements for addressing the learning highlighted and supporting improvement; this may be through the NCT improvement plan and/ or Workforce Action Plan.

8.2.3 In addition to learning captured from specific QA activity it is vitally important that other sources of information are considered when developing ways in which to improve practice. A whole system approach to QA and performance management as shown in Figure 1 above and overseen by SLT is required to fully understand the learning and development needs of the service.

Findings from quality assurance activity by way of themes and identified areas for learning will be considered alongside data provided by colleagues in the Social Work Academy and Learning and Development in order that one can inform the other. Our Principle SW, our SOS Lead, and our Partners in Practice will pick up the themes from QA reporting allowing them to consider this in their support of the workforce to meet the requirements of our Practice Standards.

8.3 Impact of Quality Assurance

8.3.1 Evidencing the impact of learning from audits is central to ensuring they make a difference to children, young people and families. An annual survey will be developed for Northamptonshire Children's Trust staff, to help evidence the effectiveness of the audit programme, dissemination and embedding of learning and improvement to practice across teams. To make sure the QA Framework is truly child and family centered and follows the journey of the child, the impact of the Framework will be judged on the following factors;

- Is quality assurance activity being carried out in partnership with service users and professionals?
- Are we continually seeking to improve performance and demonstrate the impact of help for children and their families in improving their outcomes?
- Are the findings from all quality assurance activity driving service improvement and creating better outcomes for our children and our workforce?

8.4 Quality Assurance Governance

8.4.1 The quality assurance reporting and governance structure has been established to ensure clear sign off of recommendations and actions that are a result of QA activity to promote continued learning across Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

December 2020

8.4.2 SLT is responsible for not only endorsing findings, recommendations and future development work but also for ensuring that information is disseminated effectively to teams and all staff. SLT will provide assurance to the Social Care Improvement Board in relation to the quality assurance processes that are in place, their effectiveness, the impact on services and improvement, and ultimately ensuring that children of Northamptonshire are receiving high quality services and good experiences when receiving support from us.

8.5   *Celebrating Good Practice*

8.5.1   Good practice does not exist in isolation and therefore NCT's Quality Assurance Framework needs to reflect this, with everyone in the service taking responsibility for quality assuring their own practice as well as supporting the practice of others. We want to encourage constructive dialogue between all colleagues and services and make sure there is active reflection and learning at all levels, as this will improve our practice, help us to do things better and ultimately improve outcomes for children.

8.5.2   We are working together across NCT to achieve our vision for every child in Northamptonshire to live in a safe and permanent home, nurtured by caring and responsible families and strong communities. Identifying and sharing good practice helps to build our confidence, as well as a supportive, encouraging environment with children at its heart.

8.5.3   In line with Signs of Safety, NCT has adopted an appreciative inquiry approach to quality assurance. We will share examples of good practice, celebrate positive outcomes and invite practitioners and managers to help in the development and implementation of our Improvement Plan, enhancing creativity, encouraging innovation and making positive contributions to our collaborative learning.

8.5.4   Examples of good practice will be captured in a Good Practice Evidence Record (see embedded document below). This document will be shared with the practitioner, their line manager and the QA Manager. Anyone in our workforce can share a colleague's good practice in this way, from any part of the service. The QA manager will share these examples with the Senior Leadership Team in order that good practice is recognised and celebrated through a personal 'Thank you' from the practitioner's senior leader. Examples of Good Practice will also be shared across the workforce to support and celebrate the difference made for children.

For Good Practice Evidence Report ctrl+click here QAF Good Practice Evidence Record