

Quality Assurance Framework Promoting and supporting excellence in practice

April 2024

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Overview

The Peoples Directorate in the City of London is situated within the Department of Community and Children's Services and is responsible for delivering the whole range of children's services in the City of London including Children's Social Care and Early Help, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, and the work of the Virtual School. This Framework covers the quality assurance work that takes place within children's services, including commissioned services, such as care and accommodation providers and youth services.

The City of London is committed to providing services that support the best possible outcomes for children, families and young people. This quality assurance framework sets out the ways in which we test and understand the impact of our services, maintain, and build upon good practice and seek to improve any areas of development.

Principles and Purpose

This framework is focussed on the added value of planned and specific practice evaluation activity across the whole system to identify development needs at a system wide level, changes that may need to be made or good work showcased so others can learn from it. This is in addition to the quality assurance activity that the deputy team manager, team managers and Heads of Service and the relevant accountable Director performs as part of their general management sign off and oversight.

The principles of this framework are underpinned by our core professional values that guide our Children's Social Work and Early Help Services.

- **Focused on experience:** the daily lived experience of children and young people is clear in the work, making sure that they are safe and protected from harm, and supported to meet their full potential. That their voice is heard clearly and informs their Plan. Their voice is central to the quality assurance process and informs any recommendations made.
- **Systemic:** practice focuses on the key relationships around children, young people, and their families, to build on strengths and resources and create lasting change. Families and individuals are worked with and not 'done to', each conversation being a vehicle by which change can be achieved. Quality assurance processes seek to highlight these relationships and the impact this is having on the lives and outcomes of children and families. The relationship between the reviewer and the worker/team is also a relationship which can create change and build upon strengths.
- **Collaborative:** there is an engaged and purposeful professional network around children, young people, and families, who are clear on their roles and responsibilities, and provide timely support which progress positive outcomes. The quality assurance process is able to evidence collaborative working and the impact of this, identify any barriers to this and make targeted recommendations to address this where required.
- **Reflective:** interventions, support and approaches are considered within reflective discussions and supervision, creating, and maintaining curiosity, and continuous re-evaluation of dynamics and potential. Families and contexts are responded to dynamically, workers and services can demonstrate flexibility to meet changing needs. Quality assurance processes are also reflective and flexible in their approach, acknowledging the wider systems and taking time to discuss with workers, managers and children and families.
- **Creative:** the work is flexible and creative, not rigid or stuck in procedural processes. Children and young people's needs are at the heart of decision making and innovative approaches are taken to ensure that they receive the services and support that will help them thrive. Quality assurance processes reflect this creativity in terms of offering imaginative recommendations to address any barriers to achieving excellent outcomes.

Collaborative Practice Evaluation

Collaborative practice evaluation is completed alongside practitioners to support their professional development, providing the opportunity to engage practitioners, and enabling them to understand the importance of the process and how it can help improve practice and children's outcomes. The practice evaluation is a participative learning process giving an opportunity to reflect and receive feedback between the reviewer, the practitioner, and managers. With the aim of enabling and supporting helpful conversations about practice, considering practical tips to improve outcomes and develop excellent services. This supports recommendations to be specific, achievable, and purposeful in supporting the development of excellent practice.

The quality assurance process also works to engage with different levels of leadership and multi-agency partners and ensure a system wide collaborative practice evaluation.

1. Multi-agency audits are carried out bi-annually through the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (CHSCP). Partner agencies from Social Care, Education, Health, Police, and community and voluntary services are involved. Learning from these audits is picked up through multi-agency action plans and tracked through the monthly Quality Assurance Recommendation Tracking meeting process internally as required, and the CHSCP Quality Assurance Sub Group which meets monthly.
2. Scrutiny sessions between Children's Social Care and City of London Police are held on a 6 monthly basis, to ensure that the procedures in place are working, being implemented effectively, and to create a culture of shared learning. This is in addition to any internal audit and review procedures which take place in each agency. A mixed sample of contacts from the City of London Police to Children's Social Care and Early Help made in the past 6 months will be reviewed. These are critically analysed by the group considering; the quality of information initially provided, communication between agencies, the appropriateness of the decision making, feedback from Children's Social Care and Early Help around decisions made and next steps, and any lessons learned.
3. Additional Quality Assurance of commissioned care arrangements will commence from April 2024. These are already monitored through commissioning processes, social work visits, feedback from children and young people, and the oversight of the Independent Reviewing Officer. An additional level of supervision and scrutiny to these commissioning arrangements will be added via a yearly plan of visits to the most frequently used care providers by Senior Leaders. The purpose of the visits are to enable Senior Leaders to engage with the daily lived experience of our children in care and care leavers, to assess the quality of the care being provided, ensure contractual obligations are being met, evidence how we are fulfilling our responsibilities as Corporate Parents, and enable us to respond honestly to the questions 'as a Corporate Parent would this be good enough for my own child?'

Hearing Living Experience

Whilst quality assurance needs to evidence and measure adherence to statutory and local practice guidance expectations in relation to policy and procedure, the fundamental purpose is to ensure the children, families and young people feel they are receiving the services they need in a timely manner, in a way which positively impacts their day to day lives and improves their future life outcomes. Therefore, it is essential that their voices and experiences are at the heart of the quality assurance framework. However, it should be noted that some children and families can struggle to share their views and

feelings through the usual mechanisms or can experience 'feedback fatigue' when they are asked to repeatedly share their views, and subsequently feel little is done to act on this and change the systems which they are experiencing.

As such all plans and interventions should be coproduced with children, subject to their age and understanding, and their parents/care givers. It is a challenge to quantitatively measure how/if this is done but there is ongoing work in relation to Mosaic reporting to develop this. Further work also needs to be done to collate feedback at specific points where this can/is gathered such as post Looked After Review/Child Protection Conference, case closure or transfer etc.

The Annual Survey provides a rich and substantial source of feedback from children, families and care leavers at a specific point in time, which is used to inform service development plans. This will continue alongside other efforts to ascertain feedback at various points of individuals journeys through our services. The fact that this is undertaken by an independent service increases the number of contributions received as does having someone reach out and contact people directly via a phone call to talk through their experiences.

Evidencing Anti-Racist Practice, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Anti-Racist practice is a priority area for the City of London with a clear position statement and Anti Racist Practice Standards in place;

"City of London People Directorate is committed to eradicating systemic racism, discrimination, injustice, making anti-racism a foundation of our practice. We will be a voice and force for change, for every child and family, adult and older person that we work for and with, to recognise and address the impact of racism on them within our practice, to apply our anti-racist principles in all of our interactions with and decision-making about them and to determinedly and actively, demand the same from our partners. We will be committed to calling out racism, discrimination, microaggressions and will ensure that this is addressed at all levels in the council to ensure that children and their families, adults and older people and the workforce are supported and valued.

Within City of London People Directorate, we acknowledge the harm and impact of racism and that the experience of our Black staff and those from other global majority ethnic groups, is not the same as that of our white staff and we are committed to ensuring that all voices are represented and heard at every level providing support to staff who experience work-based racism and microaggressions. To that end, making sure that our workforce reflects the community we serve, especially at a leadership level".

[Anti-Racism-Practice-Standards-FINAL](#)

Quality assurance activity needs to ensure that; direct work, interactions with children and families, engagement with partners, supervision, case management and decision making, are operating in a way which openly acknowledges the impact of racism and discrimination and takes proactive action to address this.

Templates (see Appendix 1) and prompts ask direct questions about racism and discrimination, [Social GRACES](#) and inclusion. Encouraging reflection on issues of racism, discrimination, equality and diversity, which may be impacting decision making or access to resource or services for children and families. Specifically asking reviewers to reflect on the quality of supervision in supporting staff to consider implications of the above and supporting reflective thought in this area. To enable individuals to take different and creative approaches to working with children and their families, or partners and other professionals.

All quality assurance process should be able to clearly ascertain the ethnic and religious backgrounds of children and their families and any specific additional needs, where this is not the case the reasons for this are clearly evidenced on the record or are raised as a recommendation.

Quality Assurance activity needs to demonstrate if there is evidence of challenge as appropriate both internally and externally when issues of racism, discrimination or equality arise, and decision making is clearly based on the needs of the child and family considering their ethnic, cultural, or religious origins and requirements. Specific services and allocation of workers are considered, where available, which best meet the needs of the child and/or family and will promote engagement.

Collaborative Practice Evaluation with workers seeks to evidence workers understanding of the Anti-Racist Practice Standards, and how they are utilising this in their work with children and families. Where this is not well evidenced, clear recommendations should be made as to how to address this. Should a reviewer find evidence of racism or discrimination that has not been addressed either internally or externally, this should be raised without delay with the Head of Safeguarding & Quality Assurance so immediate action can be taken.

Knowing Ourselves

In order to know ourselves and our performance we must consider a range of information, covering both quantitative performance indicators and qualitative feedback and review. Quality assurance is a continuous process and therefore activity needs to take place across the year to monitor progress and respond to any emerging practice needs or trends.

We hold a monthly Children's Performance Meeting where the monthly performance dashboard is scrutinised to ensure that data is accurate, makes sense, and a narrative is added to any outlying data to demonstrate the reasons why an action may have taken longer than expected, or is not in line with practice standards [Children's Social Care Practice Handbook 2022.docx](#).

Once we understand what our operational practice is telling us about;

- How much?
- How many?
- How often?
- How quickly?
- How does this compare with last month, last quarter, last year?

We can then think about the impact of this;

- What did children, young people and their families think and feel about it?
- How has this improved outcomes and for who?
- What do team members think and feel about what they do and why they do it?
- How are partner agencies involved and contributing to the work?
- How can we improve?

Evidence gathering and measuring of the above takes place through a range of methods. The below outlines the activity undertaken outside of the usual management supervision, oversight, and guidance mechanisms in place to test and understand the impact of the work on the daily lived experiences of children, families, and care leavers. .



Within the planned activity there are also opportunities for bespoke pieces of quality assurance work such as;

- Participation in the East London Peer Audit Group whereby neighbouring Local Authorities Quality Assurance Services come together to offer independent review, scrutiny and advice about chosen pieces of quality assurance work or process.
- Undertaking Peer Reviews with support from the London Councils Network focusing on specific areas of practice, with a lense on Inspection readiness.
- Ad hoc opportunities as they arise.
- Or specific activity identified in relation to an emerging need or trend.

Moderation and Monitoring

To make certain that the way in which quality assurance activity is undertaken and the findings drawn from it are accurate, relevant, and achievable, clear systems of moderation and monitoring need to be in place. Moderation methods are being trialled to see which would best fit the needs and structures of the City Quality Assurance process. It is proposed that all Case Reviews will be moderated by the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance to ensure that evidence cited in the review is accurate when compared to the Mosaic record. This moderation would support; all elements of the review template to be completed, ensure that any issues identified are addressed in a recommendation, and that recommendations are clear and linked to impact for children and young people.

It is then proposed that a Senior Leadership Moderation Panel is implemented comprising of the Independent Chair of the Achieving Excellence Board, Executive Director, Assistant Director of People's Services, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, and the Head of Children's Social Care and Early

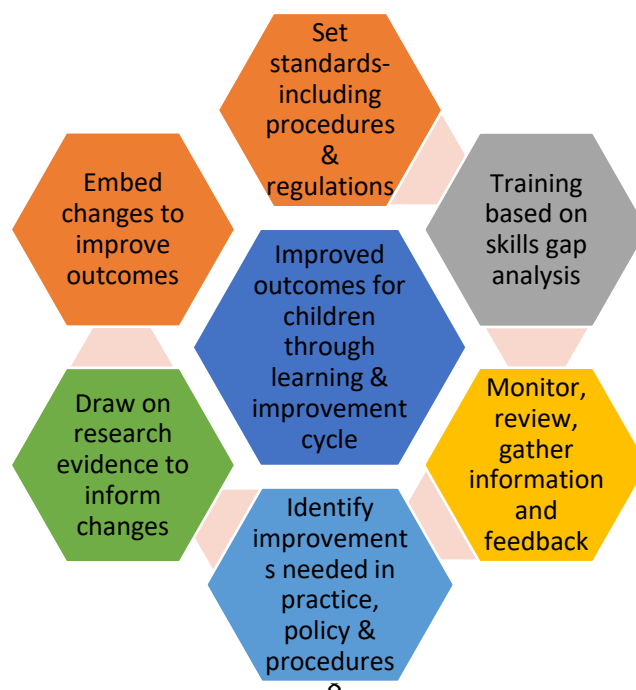
Help. The Independent Chair of the Achieving Excellence Board will Chair the Panel. If a Practice and Impact Review has been completed by one of the Panel members and is being moderated, they will be exempt from the Panel. Each Moderation Panel member will individually read each Practice and Impact Review to be moderated within the meeting. The Panel will then meet for a period of 90 minutes, in person, to discuss their reflections together with the reviewer, to agree on a final grading and set of recommendations for each moderated Practice and Impact Review. One Moderation Template (See Appendix 2) will be completed for each Practice and Impact Review discussed within the Panel.

Should there be any significant disagreement between Moderation Panel Members and/or the reviewer, the Independent Chair of the Achieving Excellence Board will have the deciding say. The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance will be responsible for collating any themes arising from the moderation process and either taking action to address these with the reviewer and/or their agency, amending or adapting any quality assurance tools to support the Practice and Impact Reviewing process, or working with the Head of Children’s Social Care and Early Help to develop and improve operational procedure or practice as required.

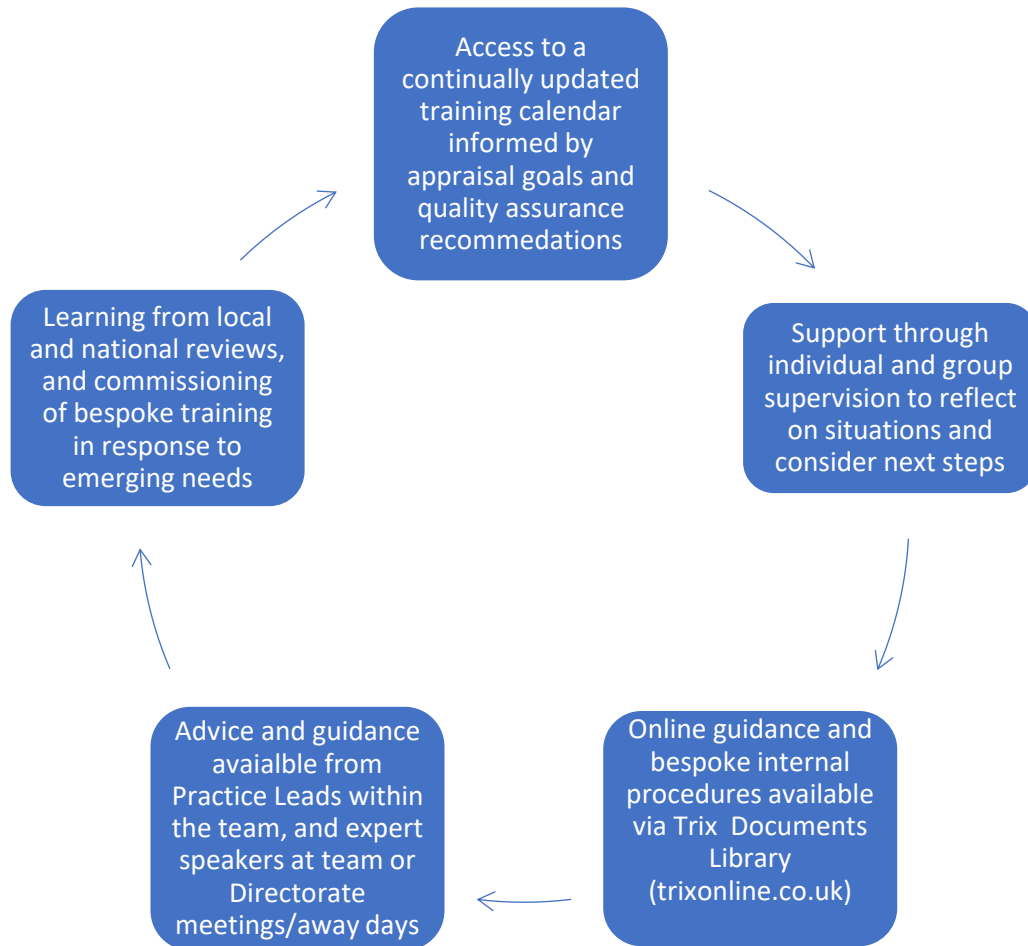
Monitoring of recommendations made through any quality assurance process will be tracked through the QA Recommendation and Impact Tracker, this is split into Child Level Recommendations and Service Level Recommendations. Monthly meetings are held with operational managers to receive updates on progress of recommendations and to clarify the impact this has had for the child(ren) involved. Service Level Recommendations are tracked through the same method, recognising that some recommendations may move into other Plans to be progressed and monitored such as the Service Development Plan, or Workforce Development Planning. Through this process we can ensure all recommendations are acted upon.

Learning Culture

Quality assurance is a continuous improvement cycle using a range of interdependent methods to measure prevalence, monitor practice, listen to people’s experiences, identify areas of improvement, and enact change as a result. An effective model will identify both “what is working well and why” and “what we need to do better”. A key aspect in sustaining continuous improvements in practice is a learning and development programme that is responsive to the skills analysis of the workforce in meeting the needs of the service.



The Workforce Development Lead role sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service, so any training needs arising from quality assurance work is fed directly into the lead. However, it is important that recommendations do not focus only on staff members attending training, there needs to be creativity around how learning needs and development of practice can be supported and improved. Given the make-up of City Services and the small number of workers means that enacting mandatory training can mean taking a whole service out of action for the duration of that training session. Therefore, a range of learning and development methods are used to support staff development, and access to information and guidance as and when needed.



Governance

Effective governance provides an extra layer of scrutiny to guarantee that quality assurance processes are robust, evidence based, and efficient. The governance hierarchy for the Corporation is set out

below.



This enables there to be effective and robust scrutiny of the quality assurance work, to ensure that it is demonstrating effectiveness and impact in supporting excellent practice and outcomes for children and families.

Appendix 1

Practice Review Template

The City of London is committed to providing excellent services to children and their families. Everything we do should have a positive impact and improve the day-to-day experiences of children and their families. This practice and impact review form is designed to focus not only on compliance and provision of services, but the impact of services on the lived experience of the child.

Reviewers should focus on the last 6 months of practice when reviewing files and speaking with workers and service users. However, there may be wider findings from interactions predating the last 6 months which are relevant to comment upon in relation to current service delivery and service user experience.

Grading indicators are taken directly from the Ofsted framework and evaluation criteria for the inspections of local authority children’s services (ILACS).

Status:	Choose an item.	Mosaic ID:	
Name:		DOB & Age:	
Gender:	Choose an item.	Ethnicity:	
Religion:		Any Additional Needs:	
Name of allocated worker:		Name of Line Manager:	Choose an item.

The Practice Review theme/focus is:
Deadline for submission of Practice and Impact Review:
Date of submission:
Name of Reviewer:

Practice Standards	Outcome	Any action required
Basic Details are up to date on the system	Choose an item.	
Visits are undertaken in expected/statutory timescales	Choose an item.	
Child(ren) are seen alone where required	Choose an item.	
Is the recording updated on the file in line with Practice Standards	Choose an item.	
Supervision is provided in line with expected frequency	Choose an item.	
There is evidence of management oversight and supervision driving positive	Choose an item.	

outcomes for children		
There is an up to date (within the last 3 months) Chronology on file	Choose an item.	

1. Journey of the Child

<p>Is it clear how the child, young person or family came to be supported by the service? Does the assessment and plan provide a clear history for the child, young person or family and an understanding of the current risks and strengths? Does the recording and interactions describe the ongoing assessment of the child/young person's needs? Where allocated, does the Independent Chair ensure that plans address children's needs appropriately and are progressed in a timely manner? In the recording is the practitioner and wider network observing the child(ren)'s physical and emotional presentation and interaction with others? Is this analysed/acted on? Is the worker able to describe the child(ren)'s views and understanding of their situation? Is there evidence of age appropriate direct work to engage the child/young person and to provide an intervention as required? Is there evidence that children and young people are listened to. Practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings. Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate. Feedback from children and their families about the effectiveness of the help care or support they receive informs practice and service development.</p>
Grading: Choose an item.

2. Identification of needs, provision of support, and outcomes

<p>Are assessments and plans dynamic and updated in the light of emerging issues and risks? Do they balance positive strengths alongside development / challenge areas? Are the details set out on the MARF proportionately and accurately reflected within the assessment? Are Assessments (including early help assessments) timely and proportionate to risk. Are they informed by research and by the historical context and significant events for each child/young person. Do they result in direct help for families where needed and are focused on achieving sustainable progress for children? Is the help given to families is proportionate to the level of need. Is information-sharing between agencies and professionals is timely, specific, effective, lawful and fully evidenced in assessments and plans? Are allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by parents, professionals and carers are taken seriously. Are steps taken to protect children and young people and the management of allegations against staff is robust and effective?</p>

Are the holistic needs of children considered including their education/learning, physical and emotional health, ability to participate in their wider community and achieve and enjoy?

Grading: Choose an item.

3. Management oversight, influence, and direction

Are decisions are made by suitably qualified and experienced social workers and managers?
Are actions clearly recorded and acted upon in a timely manner?
Is there evidence of systematic and high-quality management oversight that drives child-centred planning and actions within the timescales appropriate for the child?
Is there effective and timely planning, support and decision-making taking place which supports appropriate case closure or escalation as required?
Where requires is the local authority acting as an active, strong and committed corporate parent – in line with the corporate parenting principles?
Where an Independent Chair is allocated, are they ensuring that there is timely progression of actions, a suitable permanency plan in place, and they undertake appropriate escalation internally and externally as needed?

Grading: Choose an item.

4. Understanding of Identity and impact on practice

There is a clear sense of the child, young person, or families' individual characteristics and identity throughout the work, which leads to tailored and specific interventions which meet their individual needs?
Do workers recognise the factors that can make children more vulnerable and tailor their interventions appropriately?
Is anti-racist practice evident in the file and in intervention - is identity and culture explored as a strength/protective factor? Are there consideration ad exploration of the [Social GRACES](#) through the assessment and work? Does the work embed the aspirations of the [Anti-Racism-Practice-Standards-FINAL](#)

Grading: Choose an item.

5. Impact and quality of multi-agency work, involvement of partners and community services

Is there evidence that children and young people are protected through effective multi-agency arrangements? That key partners attend multi-agency meetings, which are effective forums for timely information-sharing, planning, decision-making and monitoring and actions happen within agreed timescales to reduce risk and meet need.

Looked after children and care leavers make good educational progress at school or other provision and are able to access health and emotional wellbeing services. They receive the same support from their carers and Corporate Parent as they would from a good parent.

Children, young people and their families are supported to access local community services, develop support networks and connections, including Independent Visitors as appropriate.

Children, young people, and their families are supported to have access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities, to increase their social and emotional wellbeing.

Grading: Choose an item.

6. Feedback

Experience shared by child (dependent on age and understanding), young person, family, or carer

Date:
Method: Choose an item.

Discussion with the allocated worker

Date:
Method: Choose an item.

Feedback from the line manager

Date:
 Method: Choose an item.

7. Summary of findings and grading

When considering your overall grading, reviewers should consider the grades for each individual area, and should be determining the extent to which:

- the help provided has improved outcomes.
- other agencies have contributed to improving outcomes.
- the voice of the child has been gained and used to good effect (e.g. through direct work, in planning and through their feedback.)
- good practice is evidenced.
- professional curiosity is evidenced.
- areas for improvement impact upon the child, young person and/or family.
- systemic thinking and practice has been applied.
- management grip is demonstrated.

Grading: Choose an item.

8. Child Specific Recommendations

Please ensure that these link to the findings outlined above and demonstrate how they would improve the outcomes for the child, and the overall grading of the work where appropriate.

Action	Impact on the child	By whom	Date for completion

9. Service Specific Recommendations

Action	Anticipated Impact on children/families	By whom	Date for completion

To be completed by Head of Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

Date sent to the allocated worker and line manager:	
Date uploaded to Mosaic:	
Date Recommendation Review Tracker Meeting to be held:	
Was this audit reviewed by the Moderation Panel?	Choose an item.

Appendix

[Ofsted Evaluation Criteria & Grading Descriptors](#)

**Appendix 2
 Moderation Template**

Child's Name	
Mosaic ID	
Name of Reviewer	
Date of Practice and Impact Review	
Overall Grading	Choose an item.
Date of Moderation Panel	
Do you agree with the overall grading given?	Choose an item.
Based on the evidence and analysis provide in the Practice and Impact Review, and recommendations made, what grade would you rate the practice	Choose an item.

10. Journey of the Child

Do you agree with the grading of this section?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

11. Identification of needs, provision of support, and outcomes

Do you agree with the grading of this section?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

12. Management oversight, influence, and direction

Do you agree with the grading of this section?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

13. Understanding of Identity and impact on practice

Do you agree with the grading of this section?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

14. Impact and quality of multi-agency work, involvement of partners and community services

Do you agree with the grading of this section?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

15. Feedback

Were appropriate attempts made to elicit feedback and to discuss the child, young person or family with the worker and manager?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

16. Summary of findings and grading

Do you agree with the grading of this section?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

17. Child Specific Recommendations

Do you agree with the recommendations made?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

18. Service Specific Recommendations

Do you agree with the recommendations made?	Comments:
Choose an item.	

19. Any Actions Arising from Moderation

Action	By Who	Timescale

