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### PURPOSE AND APPROACH:

Within Central Bedfordshire, our aim is to put children and families first in everything we do, work closely with our communities and partners and be great corporate parents to children in care and care experienced adults. We want all children to lead happy, safe and healthy lives and achieve their potential.

Our quality assurance processes help us to achieve these goals by systematically monitoring and evaluating our practice and developing a learning culture. In doing so, we aim to improve services, to achieve better outcomes for children and their families and develop a better understanding of their needs, by listening to the voices of those who we support.

Practice evaluations (also known as audits) form part of the quality assurance process. This reflective process helps us to learn about what we are doing well, evaluates the impact of support provided to families and enables us to take accountability for our practice. A fundamental part of this process is our consultations with children, families and carers, who help us to identify whether the support provided works for them and whether they feel our support has made a difference.

Our focus is on analysing the impact of interventions and understanding whether they have resulted in positive, timely services for children, leading to an overall improvement in their circumstances. The practice evaluation considers statements from OFSTED ILACS that demonstrate what good looks like, therefore we measure ourselves against this benchmark. Our overall focus is to provide a consistently good service to our children and families and support the continuous improvement and development of practice.

We also value highly the thoughts and reflections of our frontline staff, who are involved in our practice evaluation process. Through collaboration and consultation with key workers, we are able to further develop our culture of learning, building confidence and holding ourselves accountable for our practice.

This guide aims to support those who complete monthly practice evaluations and to develop a consistent approach to learning from audit activity.

### OUR AUDITING FRAMEWORK

We follow a number of strands of auditing, as follows:

- ⇒ Monthly practice evaluations – completed by team managers, practice managers, IRO's, consultant social workers, the audit manager and senior leaders, to aid learning, measure quality and impact.
- ⇒ Moderation auditing – to create consistency in our monthly practice evaluations, and support learning.
- ⇒ Thematic auditing and dip sampling – completed by our conference and review service, consultant social workers and audit manager, to support quality improvement and focus on particular themes/key lines of enquiry.
- ⇒ Multi-agency thematic auditing – Led by the Safeguarding Children Board, to consider a key line of enquiry and promote multi-agency learning and improvement.
- ⇒ Peer auditing – at key stages, to consider a particular area of practice and to support team development of practice.

### KEY THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN COMPLETING YOUR PRACTICE EVALUATION

- Set enough time aside to complete the evaluation. When we are considering a case and giving feedback it needs to be based on sound judgements that have been carefully thought through.
- Prioritise contacting parents, carers and young people – they may work or only be available on certain days of the week, so please allow time for this.
- Use the commentary boxes in each section to provide justification to the statements you have selected. Consider what stands out as good practice, identify areas for improvement and acknowledge if there are any gaps which need further exploration. This will help the team to understand how you have reached your conclusions.
- Identify good practice examples that can be shared across Children's Services. This might include a specifically well written plan, visit or supervision record.
- If there are identified areas for improvement, offer solutions where possible.
- During the process, if any child or young person is judged to be at risk of significant harm, or there is evidence that their outcomes are significantly impacted as a result of identified failures in practice or service delivery, it is important that escalation takes place immediately by contacting the responsible Head of Service, to ensure that the issues identified are addressed promptly.
- Encourage other workers to get involved with auditing work – we can all play a part in quality assurance and it is a good skill for senior practitioners to develop. If you do get support to complete your practice evaluation, it is still your responsibility to have this completed on time and all managers should be completing at least 50% of their practice evaluations each year.
- Use the save function if you need to take a break and come back to the practice evaluation at another time. When using the 'save' function – save the link that it generates to your notes or a word document, to avoid any loss of work.
- If you accidentally click 'not relevant' for a page you needed to complete, click 'reset' at the bottom of the page. This will only reset the page you are on (you won't lose the whole document).
- Use the Ofsted inspections guidance to help you in making an overall judgement on impact for the family <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services>

## GATHERING FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

When you first receive your practice evaluation, it is important to contact the social worker to identify whether there are any things you need to know before contacting the family for feedback. It is important to carefully consider the circumstances for the family and whether gathering feedback would put anyone at risk. Having said this, in the majority of cases, families can safely be contacted and this should be prioritised in auditing.

The young people's feedback form within our monthly practice evaluation was created by two experts by experience, during their apprenticeship with Central Bedfordshire. Within the form, they have identified several key qualities that are valued in social workers, reflecting on their own personal experiences.

Gathering feedback assists service delivery in many ways; it helps us to learn about areas for improvement, it helps us to celebrate good quality social work practice and it enhances the voice of our communities. It also enables us to identify opportunities to collaborate with families on projects which will improve service delivery.

We also analyse feedback from other areas of our service, to support our understanding of good practice and areas for improvement. This includes feedback from our family meeting, advocacy and mediation service, Children in Care Council (CICC) and feedback received by our customer relations team. We are always looking for more opportunities to gather feedback from children and families, which will further enhance our understanding of service delivery and impact.

## MONTHLY PRACTICE EVALUATIONS

Monthly practice evaluations take place for all teams within statutory children's services and also within the Young People's Support Team, Early Help, Fostering and Adoption teams.

Practice evaluations are those which take place monthly by managers, IRO's, practice managers and consultant social workers. These practice evaluations involve randomly selected cases and those which fall into a distinct category, for example 'most recently looked after' or 'most recently subject to CPP'. There may also be occasions where senior practitioners within teams are asked to complete practice evaluations, as well as peer to peer audits completed by social workers themselves.

Your role as an auditor is to read and consider the last six months of work with the family, analyse the case information and to then reach a judgement based on the statements that you have provided in each section. Judgements are based on the service we provide and the outcomes for children, young people and families. Children, families, carers and social workers should routinely be contacted as part of the practice evaluation.

During the course of the evaluation, the auditor is responsible for addressing any immediate concerns regarding a child/young person's safety or wellbeing with the allocated worker and team manager and the audit manager should also be notified.

Following completion, the practice evaluation document is shared with the social worker and their team manager by way of an e-mail from the audit manager. It is the responsibility of the audit team to ensure that the audit is recorded on the child's file, with a summary in case notes and a saved PDF of the full audit on the child's box file.

The allocated worker and their supervisor should ensure that the practice evaluation is discussed at the next case management supervision to review the feedback, recommendations and the learning outcomes. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that remedial tasks are carried out and regularly reviewed through supervision, please see section below.

## ACTIONS ARISING FROM PRACTICE EVALUATIONS AND RECORDING

Actions arising from practice evaluations should be recorded clearly by the auditor and shared with the allocated team at the point of completion, or during the reflective audit discussion with the team during the practice evaluation process.

All practice evaluations and their actions should be discussed and referenced in the next case management supervision between the allocated social worker and team manager. A case note should then be added by the allocated team to outline the progress on actions, within one month of the case audit being received. This should be added under the 'case audit' tab on case notes.

This case note can then be used to inform discussions within the monthly area QA meetings, where all audits are reviewed. Within the QA meeting, any actions relating to audits graded 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' will be reviewed and further deadlines for completion will be set, in cases where the actions have not been implemented. It is the responsibility of the case holding team to evidence progression on all audit actions.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A NORMAL PRACTICE EVALUATION AND A MODERATED PRACTICE EVALUATION?

Auditors will have approximately one month to complete a standard monthly practice evaluation. This is completed in full by the allocated auditor, in collaboration with the allocated worker and team manager.

The moderated practice evaluation process has two stages. The first auditor has a three-week period to complete their practice evaluation and this is then moderated in the following week. The moderators are members of the Senior Leadership Team. The purpose of these audits is to ensure that grading is consistent across the service. The moderator may identify learning for the auditor who has completed the initial audit, or for the team where the case sits.

If there is a discrepancy in the overall grading for a moderated practice evaluation, the final grade will be that of the moderator.

**Please see appendix one and appendix two for a copy of the process map for first auditors and moderators.**

## WHEN MIGHT I WANT TO REQUEST A PRACTICE EVALUATION?

There are some occasions where you may wish for a case to be added to the monthly audit cycle and requests can be made directly to the audit manager via e-mail. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Occasions where a child has been on a CIN or CP plan for a longer period of time
- To provide an outside view on a particularly complex situation for a family or young person
- To review the ways in which we are working with a family or look for new ideas in our approach
- To support a member of staff who is newly qualified

## FINDINGS FROM MONTHLY PRACTICE EVALUATIONS

The audit manager collates and analyses the findings from the practice evaluations, by way of a quarterly report, which is distributed to all managers for sharing with their teams. The audit manager also produces an easy to access summary of key findings and recommendations within a PowerPoint presentation. These are presented at performance management meetings and senior management team meetings before distribution to all social workers.

The summary of findings and full report provide details of all audit findings, an analysis of areas of strength and areas for improvement. A clear action plan is defined per service area to support practice improvement.

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It is important to note that each subsequent audit report seeks to make comparisons, where possible, with the previous audit report. This is to measure the impact and outcome of audits and evidence whether they are helping to drive improvement across teams.

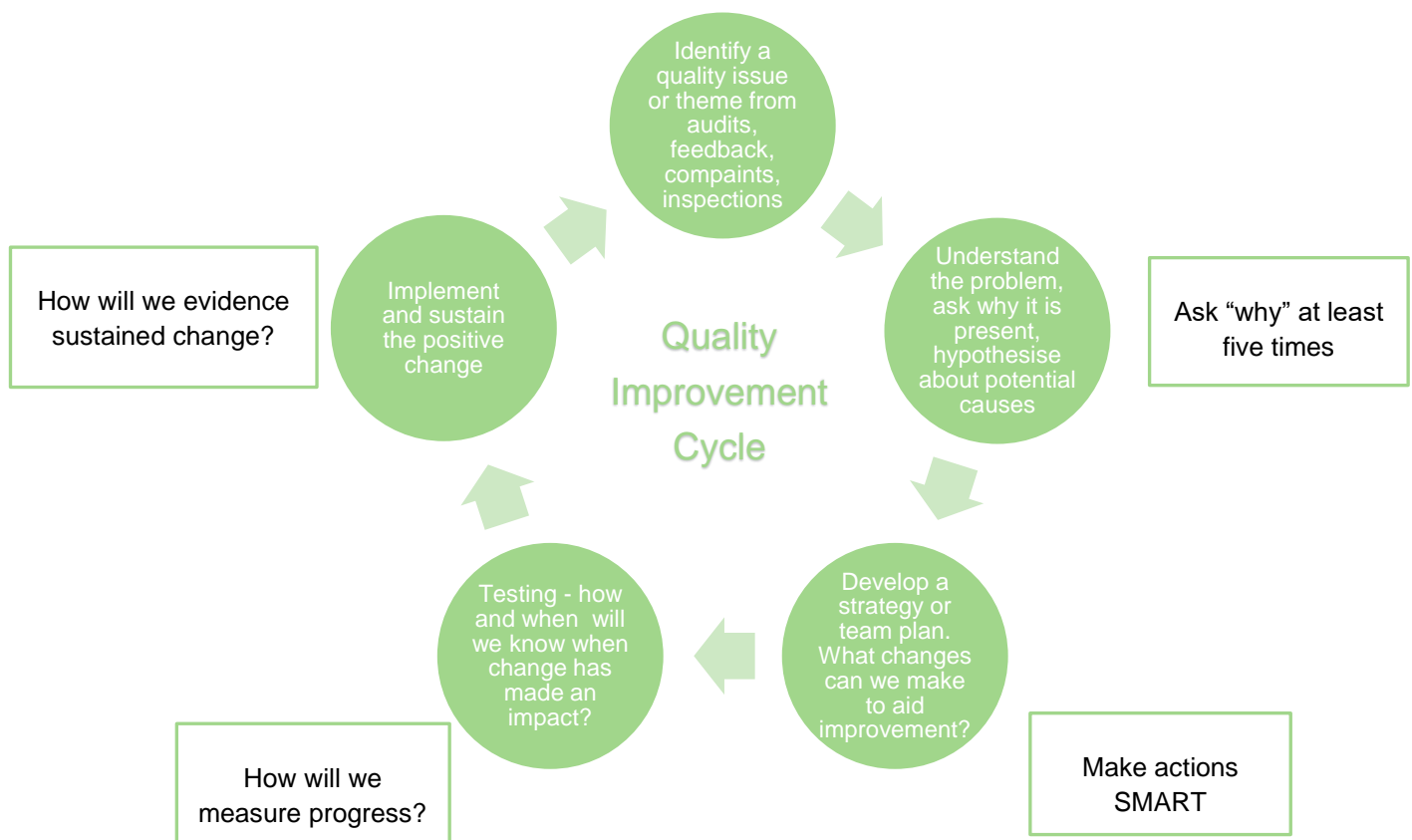
Audit reports should be used within teams/services to:

- ⇒ Identify what works well and identify areas for development
- ⇒ Consider themes that they may like to be addressed in detail in a thematic audit
- ⇒ Assist reflection amongst social care colleagues within team meetings
- ⇒ Support the effective supervision of team members
- ⇒ Assist with the development of team plans
- ⇒ Build a learning organisation within Central Bedfordshire Council

Following audit reporting, the audit manager will identify three key themes for teams to work on. These themes should be discussed regularly in multiple forums, including managers meetings, team meetings, QA meetings and supervision.

Our next steps are to develop a programme of meetings, which will be hosted by the audit manager, to systemically discuss audit themes which have been identified, with representatives from across the service. The aim of these focused reviews will be to invite the group to consider the theme in detail and develop a team or service plan to drive improvement in the identified area. It may involve process changes, team learning, targeted learning or other creative actions.

The cycle below outlines the quality improvement process which will be used within these focused reviews of practice. In future, the aim is for teams to identify their own themes for discussion at these sessions, based on their learning from audits.



## LEARNING FROM PRACTICE EVALUATIONS AND EMBEDDING PRACTICE

Quarterly meetings are held within the professional standards team to review findings from performance management information, audits, quality assurance meetings and service user feedback. These meetings are led by the Head of Service for Professional Standards and attended by the Practice Manager for CRS, the audit manager, consultant social workers and the learning and development manager. The purpose of these meetings is to develop plans for improvement, alongside the consultant social workers, who will be responsible for embedding any learning and raising practice standards.

All quarterly reports are shared with the learning and development manager to ensure that findings from audit are incorporated into the Learning & Development programme. Bespoke workshops may also be held on emerging themes from audit, either arranged by the Learning & Development manager, or the consultant social workers.

Within each practice evaluation, training and development needs are identified through discussions with the allocated team. The audit manager provides a summary of these identified learning needs to the Learning & Development manager and consultant social workers, on a bi-monthly basis. It is the responsibility of team managers to ensure that the needs identified by their team are supported. This may involve making a learning request via the Learning and Development team.

When supporting your team to develop and evidence their learning from practice evaluations, consider the following questions:

- ⇒ What practice evaluations have you received recently?
- ⇒ What were the key learning points you took from them?
- ⇒ What individual/team discussions have taken place as a result? Where is this evidenced?
- ⇒ How is the team learning then fed back into a service plan/action plan? Who is taking responsibility for this?

## AUDIT CHAMPIONS

We have recently developed the role of 'audit champions'. These are social workers, senior practitioners or family partners who have nominated themselves to support development and learning through audit. Their role is to engage in collaborative discussions with the audit manager, support in the development of audit processes and assist their teams to make best use of learning from audit.

Our audit champions represent different teams within children's services to ensure we have representation across each service area.

## UNDERSTANDING PRACTICE AND IDENTIFYING LEARNING WITHIN SPECIFIC PARTS OF THE SERVICE

When analysing and evaluating practice evaluation data, the audit manager may identify areas for improvement within particular teams or service areas. One of the key indicators may be the frequency of that team receiving audits with an overall grading of requires improvement or inadequate.

In this scenario, the team manager and practice manager will be invited to a review meeting to look at the learning from these audits. This may also include the consultant social worker or team/pod, where appropriate. These are collaborative discussions which explore the circumstances relating to the audits, identify individual and team learning needs and create an action plan to drive practice improvement.

## PRACTICE EVALUATIONS WHICH ARE GRADED INADEQUATE

In cases where a grading of 'inadequate' is given, the auditor completing the practice evaluation should speak directly to the team to inform them of the outcome and next actions. An e-mail should also be sent to the audit manager, advising them of this grading. When auditing, we should always strive to use a 'no surprises' approach, with kindness being central to our challenge.

Upon receipt of an 'inadequate' practice evaluation, a copy will be sent to the social worker(s) and team manager(s). Separately, the audit manager will also e-mail the practice evaluation to the practice manager(s) and Head of Service for the necessary service area, Head of Service for Professional Standards, plus the IRO/conference chair, where applicable.

Practice managers will be asked to oversee the progress on the actions identified within the audit, to ensure that appropriate safeguarding action is taken. A summary of progress on these actions should be sent to the audit manager within one week of the audit notification.

Within one month of the audit, the responsible team, their practice manager and the auditor will be invited to a collaborative audit discussion to review progress on the actions identified and to ensure that a collaborative and supportive approach is taken to drive improvement for the family.

The progress on the plan should then be reviewed by the practice manager at monthly intervals thereafter, until a re-audit of the case signifies that improvements have been made and sustained. An update on the outcomes of these reviews should be provided to the audit manager following each meeting.

Re-audits are undertaken of all inadequate cases within three months, or at agreed intervals, in respect of themed or service specific audits, to ensure that there has been a sustained improvement of practice. These audits should take on board the findings from the previous audit, consider any progress since the audit and evaluate where the case is at now. Social workers and team managers should continue to be involved in reflective discussions and parents/children should be contacted again to see if there have been marked improvements in the support offered.

Please see the 'cases of concern' flowchart for an accessible guide on this process.

## WHERE THERE ARE DIFFERENCES IN OVERALL GRADING OF A PRACTICE EVALUATION

In circumstances where there are differences in the gradings identified by the first auditor and the moderator, the final grading will be of the latter.

Where there is a difference in opinion between the auditor and allocated team manager/social worker, the two parties should initially have a reflective discussion to consider the grading and record this on the child's file as a 'case audit' case note. Where there continues to be a difference in opinion and no resolution can be found, the audit manager may be invited to complete a review of the audit and a final decision will be made regarding the grading of such cases.

## THEMATIC AUDITS

Thematic audits are those which focus on a particular area of practice or cohort of young people. The themes may be developed in a variety of ways, for example, learning from monthly audit outcomes, emerging situations regionally or nationally, identification by the senior management team or following a case review. Some of these audits are led by the audit manager and others are led by the consultant social workers or conference and review service.



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We also participate in local thematic auditing which is coordinated by the Safeguarding Children's Board. These audits offer a multi-agency perspective on a particular theme and the findings are shared with the local authority and local partners. Within Central Bedfordshire, these findings are also shared at our performance management meetings and disseminated through area team meetings.

### AUDITS AT THE POINT OF CASE TRANSFER/CLOSURE

Managers are required to undertake audits at the point of transfer and/or closure. Central Bedfordshire Council's transfer protocol provides more detailed information about this process.

### WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE ADVICE AND GUIDANCE?

Please contact the audit manager, Kirstie Baughan, if you require any further advice or guidance. A key part of quality assurance and improvement is participation, so your suggestions and queries are always welcomed.

On the following pages are the practice evaluation process maps for your reference.

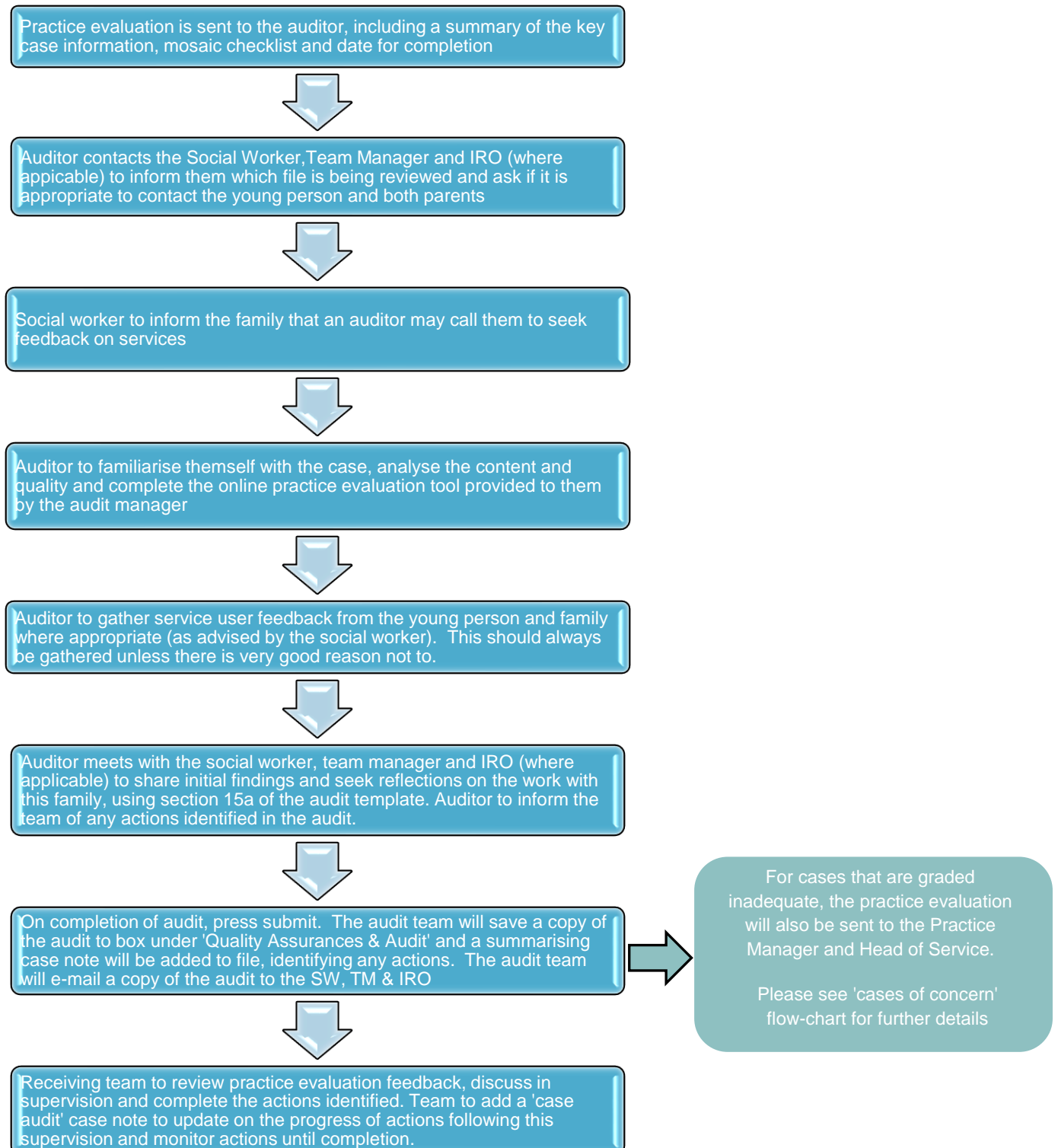
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### PRACTICE EVALUATION PROCESS MAP FOR FIRST AUDITORS [MODERATED AND UNMODERATED]



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### PRACTICE EVALUATION PROCESS MAP FOR MODERATORS

Practice evaluation is sent to the auditor and moderator, including a summary of the key case information, mosaic checklist and date for audit completion



Moderators will have the first 3 weeks to review the case information/file. This will provide time to be familiar with the case before reviewing the first audit. It may be helpful to record initial findings/thoughts on a word document or on the practice evaluation tool.



Moderator reviews the first practice evaluation and completes the moderation practice evaluation form, considering both the findings from the first audit and their own interpretations.



Moderator then contacts the first auditor and the team to discuss thoughts on the case. This discussion can also be recorded in section 15a of the moderators practice evaluation tool.



On completion of audit, press submit. The audit team will save a copy of the audit to box under 'Quality Assurances & Audit' and a summarising case note will be added to file, identifying any actions. The audit team will e-mail a copy of the audit to the SW, TM, first and second auditors, plus the IRO (where applicable)



Receiving team to review audit feedback, discuss in supervision and complete the actions identified. TM to add a 'case audit' case note to update on the progress of actions following this supervision and monitor actions until completion.



For cases that are graded inadequate, the practice evaluation will also be sent to the Practice Manager and Head of Service.

Please see 'cases of concern' flow-chart for further details

### CASES OF CONCERN [INADEQUATE PRACTICE EVALUATIONS] PROCESS MAP

For all practice evaluations which are graded inadequate, the auditor must notify the audit manager, social worker and team manager immediately and outline the remedial actions which are needed.



Once received, the full practice evaluation will be sent to the team, practice manager, Head of Service and IRO, by the audit manager and uploaded on to mosaic and box.



Within one week of receiving notification of the inadequate practice evaluation, the practice manager for the allocated team will e-mail the audit manager, outlining any actions taken as a result of the practice evaluation and their response to the practice evaluation findings.



Within one month, a meeting will be held between the auditor, audit manager, allocated team and practice manager to review completion of the remedial actions and ensure progress is being made



Three months after the initial audit, a re-audit of the case will be completed via the monthly audit cycle with particular reference to any progress that has been made. Any revision of the grading will be recorded on mosaic and box, as with the standard monthly practice evaluation process.