GUIDANCE FOR MULTI-AGENCY AUDITS IN SOLIHULL

Contents

Preface

The use of audits to understand how well local agencies protect children, is essential to our purpose as Solihull's Local Safeguarding Children LSCP (LSCP). Systematically seeking information about the impact of practice and the experience of practitioners and service users will enable the LSCP to measure effectiveness.

This procedural guidance document is intended to help partner agencies to understand what is required of them, when conducting multi-agency audits of local practice.

As the three safeguarding partners in the LSCP, we acknowledge the time commitment and resources required to complete this essential task, and we are committed to freeing up staff time for this vital improvement work.

Intelligence about services is provided from a range of quantitative and qualitative sources. This informs the LSCP about 'quantity', 'quality' and, importantly, 'outcomes'. Audit activity can help us understand these issues at a granular level.

Learning derived from audit activity will be monitored by the Assurance and Review Group and reported into the Executive Group of the LSCP..
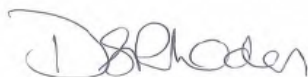
Audits are just one strand in the efforts of the LSCP to quality assure local safeguarding practice. The effectiveness of learning and improvement work is dependent on, not just good information, but effective feedback loops between performance review, frontline practice, service development activity and workforce development.

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1.   Introduction

1.1   A key objective of Solihull's LSCP is to ensure the effectiveness of what is done by member agencies for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

1.2   The effectiveness of Partnerships in meeting this objective is assessed by Ofsted. Within inspections Ofsted seeks evidence of:

- mechanisms to monitor effectiveness of local arrangements
- practice challenge between partners and casework to identify where improvements can be made
- robust evaluation and analysis of local performance that influences and informs planning and delivery of high-quality services.

1.3   In addition to the above, features which the inspection framework identifies as 'Good' and which are therefore likely to increase effectiveness are:

- the use of case file audits, including joint case audits to identify priorities for improving practice
- involvement of practitioners and managers in audits and in identifying strengths, areas for improvement and lessons to be learned
- the experiences of children and young people being used as a measure of improvement.

1.4   While audits are not ends in themselves, the translation of their findings into sustainable service improvements is aimed at preventing death, serious injury and harm to children.

2. The effective use of single and multi-agency audits

2.1 Audit benefits

2.1.1 Given the multi-agency nature of the LSCP's remit, audits that scrutinise the individual case work of a number of key agencies in relation to the same cases can provide:

- a coherent picture about how well they have worked together, or not
- quantitative and qualitative information
- a measure of change and effectiveness, including whether or not practice has met required standards
- information about trends and the underlying reasons for them
- an assessment on the quality of outcomes for children and families
- information about thresholds; their impact on children and how they are being applied
- information on gaps and priorities for improvement
- evidence on what works and aspects of practice to showcase
- an understanding of the lived experience of children and their families who require services.

3. Planning and conducting multi-agency audits

3.1 Principles

3.1.1 Auditors should seek to understand practice from the viewpoint of the individuals and organisations involved at the time, rather than using hindsight'. This includes understanding who did what and the underlying reasons that led individuals and organisations to act as they did.

3.1.2 Auditors must not be directly involved in the practice or management of the specific cases being audited.

3.1.3 Auditors should identify good practice (and get at the details of this), in a spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, as well as identifying gaps/anomalies.

3.1.4 Every audit should consider what efforts were made by services to obtain the views, wishes and the authentic voice of the child, as opposed to that of their parent or caregiver.

3.1.5 Each audit will seek to identify factors that impact positively or negatively on local practice, such as size of caseloads, the effect of COVID restrictions and organisational 'churn'. This allows the LSCP to have an informed response to findings with a recognition of the context of practice.

3.2 Leadership

3.2.1 Audit activity is commissioned by and reported to the LSCP's Assurance and Review Group, which is comprised of people able to drive the process within their own agencies.

3.2.2 The Chair of the LSCP's Audit Group will be responsible for co-ordination of individual audits with support from the LSCP QA and Performance Officer.

3.2.3 The Chair of the LSCP's Audit Group will hold partner agencies to account in terms of their contribution to multi-agency audits and for feeding back identified learning from their single agency audits back to their respective organisations.

3.3 Establishing the audit team

3.3.1 Partner agencies will be asked to identify audit team members that have a good understanding of what 'good' practice looks like and an

understanding of the complex circumstances in which professionals work together to safeguard children. Auditors should not have case management responsibility for the cases to be audited.

3.3.2   Partner agencies might want to nominate frontline practitioners/managers who are new to auditing, in order to add fresh thinking and challenge.

3.4   Data protection/confidentiality

3.4.1   Single-agency and multi-agency audits are essential quality assurance methods. When planning auditing, organisations should consider and take account of what the data protection, confidentiality and information sharing issues might be.

3.4.2   A useful myth-busting guide to information Sharing[1] is included at Appendix A.

3.5   Preparation for the audit

3.5.1   The theme for each audit will be identified by the LSCP's Assurance and Review Group.

3.5.2   The Chair of the LSCP's Audit Group will be responsible for the production of terms of reference which include:

- the scope of the audit
- the responsibilities of auditors (including their duty to communicate the purpose, process and focus of the audit to teams whose cases are being audited to help alleviate anxieties about the process and a potential fear of being named or blamed for any problems identified).
- Draft timescales for completion, that:
  o take account of competing demands
  o identify any barriers such as differing expectations around consent and information-sharing that could potentially hinder the auditing process.

3.5.3   The LSCP's Audit Group will meet prior to the audit to:

- Review the planning undertaken so far
- Endorse the terms of reference for the audit
- Agree what 'good' looks like against the questions in the audit tool to enable a standard approach to be taken to rating the quality of practice being audited
- Agree timescales

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[1] Extracted from Working Together to Safeguard Children - A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (July 2018), HM Government.

- Ensure everybody understands the audit tool(s) and how to apply it to their organisation's 'cases'.

3.6   The timing of when audits are undertaken

3.6.1   Audits form part of the LSCP's Quality and Assurance Framework and are a regular part of a cycle of evaluation, learning, development and reviewing. The regularity with which they occur is determined by the LSCP's Assurance and Review Group.

3.7   Selection of sample cases

3.7.1   The selection of sample cases will depend on the nature of the audit (i.e. whether it is general or more specifically focused on a particular aspect of multi-agency practice.

3.8   Number of sample cases

3.8.1   Audits will use a relatively small number of cases (no more than ten cases initially). Further audits can always be undertaken, if necessary, to test out a finding or to undertake a deeper dive into a specific practice issue where further interrogation is required.

3.9   Timeframe of practice being audited

3.9.1   The timeframe of casework practice being looked at, will be agreed in the planning stage, and should reflect current practice as far as possible.

4 Audit types and methodologies

4.1 Single-agency audits

4.1.1 Single agency audits will be undertaken by partner agencies as part of their own quality assurance frameworks. Areas of practice to be audited will be agreed by respective agencies according to those single agency issues which have been identified for scrutiny and suitable single agency audit tools will be developed accordingly. The LSCP requires partner agencies to report to the partnership by exception any findings from single agency audits which represent risk to the safeguarding of children in Solihull. This should be raised with the LSCP Business Manager in order that a report can be scheduled to the LSCP Executive Group in a timely way.

4.1.2 Single agency audits which are completed as part of a multi-agency audit co-ordinated by the LSCP's Audit Group need to be completed in line with the terms of reference for that audit and to an appropriate standard. Quality of single agency audits will be monitored by the Chair of the LSCP's Audit Group and any issues raised with strategic leads as necessary to ensure that findings from the multi-agency audit are not compromised.

4.2 Multi-agency audits

SECTION 11 AUDITS

4.2.1 Solihull LSCP is required to undertake a S.11 Audit at agreed intervals to evaluate the compliance of partner agencies with their safeguarding duties under S.11 of the Children Act 2004. Solihull is now a constituent member of a wider West Midlands approach to S.11 Audits where a single agreed audit tool will be used to standardise questions and partner agencies who deliver services for those LSCPs who part of this approach will only have to produce one audit return.

ANNUAL AUDIT OF TRAINING IMPACT

4.2.2 The LSCP undertakes an annual audit to evaluate the impact of its multi-agency training which is based on the reports of course attendees and their managers.

S157/175 AUDIT OF SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

4.2.3 Education settings carry out an annual audit of compliance with the safeguarding requirements as set out in the statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education 2015 (updated May 2022)'.

4.3 Themes and specific issues for audits

4.3.1 Themes and specific issues to be audited on a multi-agency basis will be identified at the beginning of the LSCP business cycle by the LSCP's Assurance and Review Group and approved by the LSCP Executive Group.

4.3.2 It will be recognised that some flexibility will need to be built into the annual audit schedule to respond to important issues which may emerge during the course of the year.

4.4 Case file auditing

This is the systematic analysis of case records by staff with relevant professional expertise, to glean the required information from a sufficient sample of cases to provide a picture of what is going on through aggregating the case findings. This may be undertaken as part of a thematic case audit where cases are identified specifically to audit the multi-agency response to a particular type of issue, e.g. domestic abuse or exploitation, or as part of a dip sampling approach to look at a very focussed practice issue, e.g. partner agency engagement with core groups.

5   Audit tools

5.1   Types of audit tool

5.1.1   The type of tool used for audit will be dependent upon the type of audit taking place and will be developed specifically to meet the needs of the audit and agreed as part of the audit planning process.

5.1.2   Audit tools will need to:

- promote reflections on specific aspects of practice but not be purely process driven;
- enable conclusions to be drawn about the lived experiences of children and their families;
- provide commentary/analysis regarding those factors which may have impacted on practice;
- promote a standardised approach to evaluation of practice through the use of ratings and guidance as to how the ratings should be applied;
- adapt to suit the needs of different partner agencies dependent upon the type of services being delivered by them;
- provide an indication of outcomes or impact measures for the intervention being audited.

5.1.3   Audit tools will need to be designed to meet the specific needs of each audit. They should be proportionate to the task and enable the production of both quantitative and qualitative data which is sufficiently rich to help the partnership to maintain a line of sight on the quality of frontline practice.

5.1.4   Audit tools will require auditors to identify factors that impact positively or negatively on local practice, such as size of caseloads and organisational 'churn'. Such intelligence will provide a context in which to judge the practice that is being audited.

6. Audit stages

6.1 Stage One: Planning for the audit

6.1.1 Section 3 of this report provides detail on the planning that should be undertaken for each individual audit and overseen by the Chair of the LSCP's Audit Group.

6.2 Stage Two: Gathering information and completion of the audit tool

6.2.1 This stage applies the audit tool to agency case recording. Auditors may be required to undertake this task separately (thematic case file audits) where they are auditing their own organisation's records, or as a designated team working together to audit a sample of cases to review a specific aspect of multi-agency practice (dip sampling).

6.3 Stage Three: Moderating the evidence and agreeing findings

6.3.1 The Chair of the LSCP's Audit Group is responsible for co-ordinating a review of initial findings from the completed audit tools - identifying questions, gaps, inconsistencies and emerging themes.

6.3.2 The auditors then meet to exchange learning, clarify and debate emerging themes. This process enables group and individual agency ownership of the findings.

6.3.3 An important function of this meeting is to consider and explain the context in which practice took place. For example, what has been the impact of issues relating to workforce stability, organisational restructuring, working arrangements and access to supervision/ professional development for the children's workforce?

6.3.4 Further learning may occur about the quality of working together at this stage resulting in individuals reviewing their initial findings.

6.3.5 This meeting is also used to learn about the audit process itself, from the auditors themselves, in order to make future adjustments

6.3.6 Following audits, auditors should give initial feedback within their own agencies (including informing relevant managers immediately if any urgent/safeguarding issues need addressing). This will keep the audit 'live'

by enabling immediate adjustments to practice for the benefit of the child/family concerned and will aid practice learning.

6.3.7   In line with Ofsted inspection methods, highly valuable insights can be added into the learning by an appropriate person consulting in a sensitively planned way with the CYP/parents/ carers involved in the cases audited. Audits should test how evident CYP voices and views are within the records.

6.4   Stage Four: Reporting the findings

6.4.1   Once the audit has been carried out and the findings have been moderated by the auditors meeting together, the Chair of the LSCP's Audit Group will co-ordinate the production of a summary report of the audit.

6.4.2   The report should highlight (in quantifiable ways with qualitative illustrations) what was found to be working well, emerging concerns, overall judgements and recommendations about the most significant areas in which change is needed.

6.4.3   The report should also reflect on any learning arising about the process of the audit itself.

6.4.4   The report should contain the plan for dissemination of the findings.

6.4.5   Devise a SMART (S-Specific, M-Measurable, A-Achievable, R-Relevant, T-Timely) action plan to address recommendations and embed learning. This may include a decision to undertake further investigation such as widening the audit sample or drilling down in a more focused audit to gain greater understanding.

6.5   Stage Five: Disseminating the findings

6.5.1   The findings of case file audit, and other audit processes, will be fed back to staff by their own agency's auditor, so they can respond and share ownership of the change required.

6.5.2   Further discussions with key people who particularly need to understand and influence practice will also need to take place.

6.5.3   It is important to feed findings into other learning cycle activities and training plans and agree a process (for example through future audits) to assess implementation (and impact) of the recommendations.

6.5.4   The LSCP Executive Group will task the LSCP Learning and Development Group with developing action plans to disseminate learning generated from audit activity across the partnership to include measures to evaluate the impact over time. The LSCP Assurance and Review Group will monitor single agency actions and report by exception into the LSCP Executive Group any blockers or barriers to implementation.

Myth-busting guide to information sharing

Sharing information enables practitioners and agencies to identify and provide appropriate services that safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Below are common myths that may hinder effective information sharing.

Data protection legislation is a barrier to sharing information

No – the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR do not prohibit the collection and sharing of personal information, but rather provide a framework to ensure that personal information is shared appropriately. In particular, the Data Protection Act 2018 balances the rights of the information subject (the individual whom the information is about) and the possible need to share information about them.

Consent is needed to share personal information

No – you do not need consent to share personal information. It is one way to comply with the data protection legislation but not the only way. The GDPR provides a number of bases for sharing personal information. It is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child provided that there is a lawful basis to process any personal information required. The legal bases that may be appropriate for sharing data in these circumstances could be 'legal obligation', or 'public task' which includes the performance of a task in the public interest or the exercise of official authority. Each of the lawful bases under GDPR has different requirements.15 It continues to be good practice to ensure transparency and to inform parent/ carers that you are sharing information for these purposes and seek to work cooperatively with them.

Personal information collected by one organisation/agency cannot be disclosed to another

No – this is not the case, unless the information is to be used for a purpose incompatible with the purpose for which it was originally collected. In the case of children in need, or children at risk of significant harm, it is difficult to foresee circumstances where information law would be a barrier to sharing personal information with other practitioners16.

The common law duty of confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 prevent the sharing of personal information

No – this is not the case. In addition to the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR, practitioners need to balance the common law duty of confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 against the effect on individuals or others of not sharing the information.

IT Systems are often a barrier to effective information sharing

No – IT systems, such as the Child Protection Information Sharing project (CP-IS), can be useful for information sharing. IT systems are most valuable when practitioners use the shared data to make more informed decisions about how to support and safeguard a child.

Proposed Audit Schedule for 2022/23

July 2022
Thematic Deep Dive – Domestic Abuse

Specific focus: multi-agency response to children where DA is a concern/understanding of coercive control/use of DVPNs and DVPOs/Early Help/thresholds/ VOC/outcomes

Rationale: DHR6 recommendations and need to benchmark to demonstrate progress against actions taken by LSCP to raise awareness of DA

Sample to be taken from Childrens Services

Auditing to be completed between: 4th July – 5 August 2022

Deep Dive date: 19 August 2022

Sign off by Case Audit: 6 September

Report to ARG: 13 September 2022

September 2022
Dip sampling (1) - Strategy Meetings (open cases)

Specific focus: timeliness/attendance/decision making/recording/actions/outcomes

Rationale: JTAI recommendation

Sample size TBC

Date of audit: TBC September 2022

Sign off by Case Audit Group: 11 October 2022

Report to ARG: 15 November 2022

October 2022
Thematic Deep Dive – Physical Abuse

Specific focus: application of physical abuse procedures/early help/thresholds and decision making/assessments/plans/VOC/outcomes

Rationale: new physical abuse procedures were launched in Solihull in January 2022

Sample: To include EH/CiN/CP

Auditing to be completed between: 23rd September – 21st October 2022

Deep Dive date: 11 November 2022 (TBC)

Sign off by Case Audit Group: 22 November 2022

Report to ARG: 17 January 2023

December 2022
Dip Sampling (2) - partnership engagement with meetings
Specific focus: attendance at meetings/reports/decision making/recording/actions/outcomes

Rationale: JTAI recommendation

Sample: Include Early help/CiN/CP Conferences/Core Groups/MAACE/LAC reviews

Date of audit: TBC December 2022

Sign off by Case Audit Group: 10 January 2023

Report to ARG: 17 January 2023

January 2023
Thematic Deep Dive – Sexual Abuse
Specific focus: application of sexual abuse procedures/early help/thresholds and decision making/assessments/plans/VOC/outcomes

Rationale: new sexual abuse procedures were launched in Solihull in June 2022

Sample: To include EH/CiN/CP

Auditing to be completed between: 4th January – 3rd February 2023

Deep Dive date: 10 February 2023 (TBC)

Sign off by Audit Group: 21 February 2023

Report to ARG: 14 March 2023

March 2023
Dip Sampling (3) - Voice of the Child
Specific focus: application of practice standards and benchmark progress against previous audit findings (January 2022) and progress against practice standards

Rationale: JTAI recommendation

Sample: TBC

Date of audit: TBC March 2023

Sign off by Audit Group: April 2023

Report to ARG: May 2023