

## Multi-agency and Inter-agency Audit Framework v1.0

### **1. Context**

Multi-agency audit is central to the partnership's learning and improvement work and the continuous cycle of improvement. A robust audit programme of multi-agency audits will make a significant contribution to service improvement.

The purpose of conducting audits is:

- To provide a stringent and consistent approach to assessing work undertaken on a multi agency or single agency basis with a child/young person and their family through an audit of case records, particularly in relation to the safeguarding role of both specialist and non-specialist practitioners;
- To enable identification of learning points from areas which are working well and those which need improvement;
- To identify learning which can then be disseminated through the partnership;
- To focus on outcomes for children;
- To enable the partnership to carry out its function of monitoring the effectiveness of what is done to protect children and promote their welfare;
- To promote service improvement through identification of key practice issues so that recommendations can be drawn together and action plans implemented;
- To inform policy and practice protocols and learning and development activity.
- The safeguarding partners are also required to regularly audit the progress on the implementation of recommended improvements arising from case reviews.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (chapter 3) requires the safeguarding arrangements to specify how multi-agency and interagency audits will be undertaken and this framework provides that information.

### **2. Commitment**

It is acknowledged that undertaking multi-agency audits is a resource intensive activity and the partnership will take into account the demands on organisations when setting the audit programme. The Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group is responsible for agreeing a rolling three year audit programme which addresses core safeguarding multi-agency functions and more specific areas of work.

All audits will be solution-focused and conducted in a spirit of open learning with the intention of further improving outcomes for children.

Multi-agency audits can also provide a useful opportunity for those taking part to develop their understanding of the issue and the roles of other agencies. Certificates are

issued so that participants can record their contribution in Continued Professional Development files.

### **3. Audit programme**

The rolling three year audit programme will be reviewed at least annually by the Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group. The programme will reflect the priorities for safeguarding children in Nottinghamshire and will be informed by:

- Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews;
- Performance indicators;
- The need to further explore issues that have caused of concern, including those highlighted through previous audits;
- Feedback from learning and development, management forums or policy implementation; or
- General audits within a category of case to establish a baseline assessment of performance.

### **4. Audit processes**

Various audit processes will be used depending on the activity to be audited. These will include but not be limited to the following:

- Themed multi agency case file audits supported by a meeting of multi-agency practitioners;
- Dip sampling
- Feedback of single agency auditing activity.

### **5. Themed multi agency audits**

#### *Terms of reference-*

There will be a clear plan for each audit, which will set out the purpose of the audit. The plan will be outcomes focussed and will be guided by the issues which led to its inclusion within the multi agency audit programme. Clarity about the purpose of the audit will assist in identifying how to select cases for audit. The Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group will appoint a 'Lead Auditor' for each audit. Members of the Group will also be responsible for identifying appropriate auditors within their respective agencies for each audit as necessary.

The audit plan will set out the timescale for the completion of the audit and the methodology to be used.

#### *Audit tools-*

An audit tool will be developed for each area of work being audited. The tool will be retained to allow future repeat audits/ impact evaluation. The tool will be devised by drawing on good practice in auditing and on the standards within Joint Targeted Area Inspections. The audit may involve multi agency themed case file audits, direct observations and reflective group reviews, or a combination thereof.

The audit tools should require judgements to be made about different areas of work within each case. This will enable both a quantitative and qualitative assessment to be made. Identifying good practice should be as important as identifying areas for

development. Each area of work will be graded separately by the auditor. This will allow comparative, evidenced judgements to be made between the various agencies working together on a particular case. In addition, it will enable the overview report writer to identify which areas of work are effective and which need attention, on both a single and a multi-agency basis.

#### *Audit sample-*

The selection of the audit sample will be specified within the audit plan. In general cases should be selected to cover the range of work in a particular category of case. Different ethnicities should be represented in proportion to their representation in the area or in accordance with proportions of children subject to a child protection plan. Another factor may be to select across the range localities.

The cases selected should represent a random, stratified sample that is to say a sample from each layer of the 'population', in proportion to the size of that layer.

Management information will also prove useful in identifying the criteria for sample selection and the size of sample required. It may be helpful for the cases to be selected by a neutral person.

Conducting an audit for a baseline assessment lays a useful foundation for further, more specific, audits which can drill down into identified areas of concern. Audits of this baseline type should not include too many cases (approximately 10). A small number of cases will successfully identify questions to be asked and themes to be pursued. The case work timeframe should also be limited so that the auditors look at the most recent practice.

#### *Lead Auditor -*

An appropriate 'Lead Auditor' will be identified for each audit and their role will be: -

- To provide a briefing at the start of the audit to ensure that each auditor/agency understands the terms of reference of the audit; how to use the audit tool and the timescales for completion of the audits;
- Following the completion of the audits, the Lead Auditor should review each of the audits from different agencies relating to each of the cases audited in order to identify inconsistencies, gaps or questions to be asked about any of the individual audits and to begin to identify emerging themes from the audits as a whole;
- An Audit Moderation day will then take place to review the audit returns for each case, consider inconsistencies across agencies, assess the practice from a multi-agency perspective and agree any learning from the audit. An overall grade will be agreed for each case. This is an important part of the learning process, as auditors exchange issues and learning points as a group; begin to take ownership of the emerging issues; develop ideas about more effective ways of working and start to take the emerging issues back to their own agencies;
- The Lead Auditor should also use the Audit Moderation Day to gain feedback about what worked well and not so well in conducting the audit, in order to make any amendments for future audits.

### *Overview report -*

The Lead Auditor should complete an overview report. The purpose of the overview report is to:

- Highlight in a quantifiable way which aspects of practice and management are working well and which are causing concern, through analysis of the grades given at the end of each section within the audit;
- Evidence the key issues with examples which provide a qualitative analysis of the issues which led to the grades;
- Identify learning from good practice, not only from concerns;
- Draw together themes and make recommendations;
- Provide overall judgements on the quality of the work.

It is anticipated that most reports will be able to be structured as follows:

- Executive summary
- Context
- Objectives of the audit
- Methodology
- Key findings of the audit
- Conclusion
- Recommendations
- Next steps

The use of the above headings will provide consistency in the reports.

The overview report will be circulated to representatives from organisations involved in the audit for quality assurance prior to consideration by the Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group.

## **6. Dip-sampling**

This will take the form of a paper based audit of records related to a particular issue. An audit tool will be used to assess a specific aspect of safeguarding practice with a narrower focus than thematic audits. Typically this type of audit will involve a review of a greater number of records but in less detail than thematic audits and without an Audit Moderation Day. This option will be useful for obtaining a quick understanding the current situation in relation to a straightforward area of practice rather than a more in depth qualitative analysis available through a themed audit.

The findings from such audits will be reported back to the Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group.

## **7. Single agency audits**

Feedback from relevant single agency audits will be provided to the Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group in order to identify good practice, areas needing improvement and to inform future audit programmes. Partner agencies will be asked to identify what audits are scheduled for the forthcoming year: in order to maximise flexibility, feedback can be provided via a standard template or the audit summary document.

## **8. Views of children and their families**

Many audits can be effectively supplemented by obtaining the views of the children concerned in the cases and their families. Professionals from a range of agencies could assist in this process and the most appropriate person should be identified on an individual basis to speak to each of the children involved in the audit about the service they feel they have received and the impact it has had on their lives. Their views should be fed into the audit process and offer a potentially different and more vibrant perspective to the audits which can influence the lessons to be learned.

Feedback can also be sought in other ways, for example by way of a questionnaire or through seeking the views of the Young People's Board: the appropriate means of obtaining feedback will depend on the type of audit being conducted but consideration should always be given to whether it would be appropriate to seek feedback and, if so, the most appropriate means of doing so.

## **9. Confidentiality**

Auditors will not usually be required to share their agency records directly with others within the process. Auditors will complete the audit tool in relation to their agency's involvement prior to any planned multi agency discussion.

All auditors attending Audit Moderation meetings will be required to ensure that confidentiality of all personal and identifying information is preserved.

## **10. Feedback mechanisms**

If any safeguarding concerns are identified at any point during the audit process, these will be taken up with the relevant manager immediately by the Lead Auditor.

Individual audits will be passed to the practitioner concerned and their manager so that they receive detailed feedback about their work.

## **11. Impact of audits**

The Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group have responsibility for ensuring that recommendations arising from audits are considered and actions identified and agreed as appropriate. Any improvement work will be drawn into themed work streams to avoid unnecessary and potentially duplicative action plans. The progress of improvement activities will also be monitored by the Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group to ensure that action taken has had the desired impact. In this way, audits will make a direct contribution to the quality of services to families within Nottinghamshire.