

MULTI-AGENCY AUDIT FRAMEWORK 2024-25

Introduction

The Halton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) has a duty to evaluate multi-agency working through case file audits which involves professionals from across the children's workforce. These case file audits help to identify themes and trends in order to share learning and recommendations for improvement regarding the quality of practice and service provision.

Audits enable the partnership to monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding practices, recognise areas of good practice that can be shared and built upon and identify areas in which there may be policy, training and developmental needs.

Thus, the purpose of auditing as part of a wider quality assurance process is to improve practice and the quality of the service we provide, with the intention of improving outcomes for children and young people through a process of continuous learning.

Audit Principles

The following will underpin the HSCP multi-agency audit process:

- An expectation that all agencies commit to the audit procedures
- Focus on current practice, considering interventions that have occurred within the last 12 months
- Auditors should seek to understand practice from the viewpoint of the individuals and organisations involved at the time, rather than using hindsight'
- Consider interventions that are within the remit and work of local agencies
- Include a focus on the welfare of the child, other children living in the household, timeliness, communication and engagement with families or other significant adults.
- Auditors must not be directly involved in the practice or management of the specific cases being audited.
- Auditors should identify good practice (and get at the details of this), in a spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, as well as identifying gaps/anomalies.

- 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.
- 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.

The intention of the audit process is to carry out audits in a spirit of appreciative inquiry to “shine a light on what is working well in organisations and potentially engage all stakeholders in building conditions for best practice”

(Bellinger and Elliot, 2011)

Therefore, HSCP audits will provide opportunities for the following:

- For each agency to audit their own practice
- To create a culture of constructive challenge
- To share expertise
- To gain an understanding of the lived experience of children and their families
- To identify elements of good practice
- To ensure identified areas for improvements are followed up
- To ensure lessons from audits inform and enhance frontline practice
- To gain a coherent picture about how well agencies have worked together, or not
- To obtain information about trends and the underlying reasons for them
- To obtain information about thresholds; their impact on children and how they are being applied

The Audit Cycle

In terms of auditing, the HSCP completes two significant annual activities:

- The Section 11/175 audits. These are self-assessment audits completed to provide assurance to the HSCP that agencies are meeting their duties and responsibilities under Section 11 of the children act. The audits include action

plans and the key findings that result from these audits help to shape the Partnership's future training offer.

- Multi-agency audits. The HSCP will complete 4 multi-agency audits in 2024-25 as part of the function of the Quality and Impact Group. Each round of audits focuses on front-line, multi-agency practice. The theme of each audit will change dependent on national/local issue or priority areas for the partnership.

Section 11 Audits

Section 11 (s11) of Children Act 2004 puts a legal duty on a range of organisations to ensure that their functions – and any that they contract out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The HSCP has developed a safeguarding audit tool to help organisations undertake their own quality assurance process in regard to safeguarding and child protection. The audit programme runs across two years and its outcomes help to inform the strategic direction of the partnership.

Section 175 Audits

Sections 157 and 175 of the Education Act 2002 places a statutory duty on independent and maintained schools to make arrangements to ensure that in discharging their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and that any services they contract out to others are provided having regard to that need.

In fulfilling its statutory objectives under Section 14 of the Children Act 2004, the HSCP is required to ensure that schools are meeting these duties effectively. Therefore, the HSCP has developed a safeguarding audit tool that educational providers complete online. A deep dive analysis is completed for a sample of returns, with individual feedback provided to these settings. A summary findings report is shared with all educational provisions. This s175 audit programme runs across two years.

Multi-Agency Audits

Methodology

The precise methodology adopted for any multi-agency audit will be determined on a case by case basis. The decision on which methodology to adopt will be determined by the Quality and Impact Group and such decisions will be predicated on the audit approach that is likely to be most impactful. In some instances an audit might involve a

deep dive analysis of a small number of cases, whereas other audits may scrutinise a larger sample of cases but at less depth.

However, 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.

The HSCP Business Unit will be responsible for notifying agencies of cases to be audited and there will be an obligation on all agencies to review their involvement and where involved, complete the HSCP multi-agency audit tool provided. On completion, audits will be quality assured by the HSCP Business Unit and returned to the agency lead if they are not sufficiently robust, or comprehensive.

Meetings will be scheduled to review practice and agree findings and recommendations. The decision on who will chair a multi-agency audit will be determined on a case by case basis to ensure scrutiny, rigor and challenge of all partners.

The timing of when audits are undertaken

Audits form part of the HSCP'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 HSCP's Quality and Impact Group.

Timeframe of practice being audited

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

Themes and specific issues for audits

Themes and specific issues to be audited on a multi-agency basis will be identified at the beginning of the HSCP business cycle by the HSCP Quality and Impact Group and approved by the HSCP Executive.

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.

Lessons and Actions

Once the audit has been carried out and the findings have been moderated by the auditors meeting together, the Chair of the respective audit will co-ordinate the production of a summary report of the audit, with the support of the Business Unit.

This report should highlight what was found to be working well, emerging concerns, overall judgements and recommendations about the most significant areas in which change is needed. The report should also reflect on any learning arising about the process of the audit itself.

Case specific actions will be progressed by single agencies, however, if during the course of an audit there are any concerns about the immediate risk to a child/vulnerable adult or unsafe practice is raised, this information will be escalated to the respective agencies for a response and assurance.

The multi-agency audit findings will reflect a balance of good practice and areas of improvement. Moreover, the efficacy of each multi-agency audit will be reviewed to help identify the methodology that garners the biggest impact; this review will also consider the duration in which the multi-agency audit was conducted and the demands made on staffing. The Quality and Impact Sub-Group will monitor this review of methodologies.

Disseminating the findings

The findings from audit activity will be fed back to staff by their own agency's auditor, so they can respond and share ownership of the change required. Further discussions with key people who particularly need to understand and influence practice will also need to take place.

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.

Finally, the outcome of each audit will be disseminated through the HSCP website and Partnership briefings and quarterly newsletters.

Approved: Sept 2024

Review date: Sept 2025

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