**Hints and tips for effective case file audit completion**

* Audits are about continuous learning and improving. Effective audits are those which provide a reflective opportunity to the practitioner to enhance the outcomes for children.
* In Buckinghamshire our model is based upon focused and sometimes challenging conversations with those front-line professionals so that we can come to a shared view about what can be done to secure a good experience for the child/young person who is receiving services. Our focus will not be on what has not been done (though we will identify and understand the relevance of these features), it will be on what now needs to happen.
* Statutory, policy and procedural requirements are important to get right but an auditor’s task is to identify the impact of those shortcomings on the child and young person’s experience. Sometimes there will not be any adverse impact or you will find that the perceived shortcoming occurred as a result of a conscious and thought through decision by the front-line practitioners and managers. For example, a short delay in completing an assessment which tips the process beyond the laid down timescales might be justifiable if the workers can specifically identify why the over-run was necessary and show how any risk to the child was minimised, mitigated or managed.

***What are things we can do to make this audit process effective?***

1. Book a meeting with the worker as soon as an audit is allocated to you to hold a reflective discussion on your casefile review findings. If a worker is not available, book a meeting with their line manager. Do this by way of an initial phone call or email to introduce yourself and explain your role and why you are requesting some time. Think about when its best to do this with the worker and avoid where possible feedback being given on a Friday afternoon.
2. Think about the language you use when recordings findings of audits and when communicating the feedback to the frontline worker. Think about using open ended questions to enable a reflective discussion and avoid language that could impact the confidence of the worker. E.g instead of “The social worker did not engage mother in assessment” you could say “there was evidence that mother had not been included within the assessment process..” followed by your impact statement (see under “Audit Tool Headings” for more information on impact statements)
3. Look back only 6 months unless there is a pressing need to look back further in order to understand the current position.
4. Focus on looking sparingly at documents. For a starting point these should include:
* most recent referral
* assessment
* plan
* review
* court documents
* chronology.

These will give you what you need to follow through on. If you can’t find the information, stop looking and be confident that if the worker or team manager can’t locate it, you can conclude that either it does not exist or it is not written up and you will have to make an informed decision about what that means to the judgement you are to make.

1. When you fill in the audit document be clear that the first thing you will fill in will be the judgement box. You will then turn to the narrative box where you are asked to write succinctly and evaluatively. You will find both of these requirements easier to fulfil if you construct your thinking under the two headings **evidence** that supports the judgement and its **impact** on the child and young person.
2. You should re-read what you write and take note that if shortcomings are numerous and/or significant you will need to work hard to be confident that a good judgement is justified.
3. Equally if you can’t identify the impact of work you will find a ‘good’ judgement illusive. However, a cautionary note. If you don’t find impact evidence at first then go back over the material. Because professionals may not write impact material explicitly (although that is changing with the practice models), it is sometimes ‘hidden below’ the actual words on the page.
4. Finally have confidence in your professional skills. What we are asking here is for you to exercise your judgement over and beyond assessing whether work is simply compliant. Enjoy the challenge and be confident that what you will find on an individual case will help children have a better experience and the aggregated findings from all cases will help the service improve and give senior managers evidence about the capacity and capability of the service. It crucially provides practitioners the opportunity to pause and think about the families circumstances

***Audit Tool Headings***

**Areas** - Research undertaken tells us that if these things go well, it is a good experience for the child. Features from the Eileen Munro review and the research base found that there are 12 distinct stages of the child’s journey – these are the areas in the audit form.

The areas under each heading below are only illustrations on what you should cover. Don’t be constrained by the boxes. Put issues where you think it fits best. Be confident.

**Judgement box** - Notice that it doesn’t include inadequate. It was a conscious decision. Inadequate stops people. What do you need to do to make it good? Tough messages are okay, make a judgement about the impact of this involvement on the child’s experience.

**Evidence -** Succinct and evaluative, don’t have to describe every event.

**Facts** related to the judgement field, e.g. ‘*There have been two recent assessments, and both were completed within timescales set out in the initial plan’*

An auditor’s overview demonstrating **professional analysis**, e.g. ‘*Both assessments were shared with mother which is positive. However, the benefit is diminished as the mother played little part in the assessment and subsequent CiN planning process…..’*

Demonstrate how you came to the substantive judgement for the field under consideration e.g. *‘Although the assessments contain some good detail…………they do not provide an analysis of the relevance of this information to Jo’s development, safety or to the parents’ ability to provide safe care’*.

**Impact** – Succinct and evaluative. Impact statement should bring the child to life – start sentence with the child’s name. Convey what the **evidence** and the associated **judgement** means for the child.

Demonstrate an understanding of consequences e.g. ‘*For Jo the impact of mother’s lack of involvement in the assessment process is that she is likely to have limited ‘buy in’ to the planned work* **(this is what it means for the child)** *which increases the risk of the plan failing and the likelihood for Jo to experience further harm’*. (**this is the consequence).**

It is critical that the auditor captures and reports on each of these dimensions of evidence and impact. Writing style is key.

**Actions** - For audits to have maximum impact, the actions should address explicitly what is required to ensure that the child’s experiences of services are improved to good or better.

They should be ‘big ticket’ items and workers and team managers should be able to ‘lift them’ virtually unamended into the relevant case plan. Actions should be SMART and therefore deliverable and measurable.

Auditors should be shaping and agreeing actions with the worker and manager in the conversations that take place within the audit process. The team manager and worker need to be aware that these actions should be being worked on as agreed but that they may need to be revised pending the moderator’s feedback. The actions should be built on evidence located within the file and through reflective discussions with frontline worker.

***The role of the Moderator***

The moderator is acting as the final gatekeeper within the audit exercise on behalf of the children and young people that are subject to audit. The moderator is responsible to ensure high quality audits are accurately evaluating the quality of services and promoting the safety and positive outcomes of children and young people. They are also supporting the improvement journey of auditors and ensuring the recipients of audits are supported and challenged to deliver service excellence. Key points when moderating:

* Does the narrative contain the evidence that matches the judgement?
* Is the style of writing going to be helpful for the recipient of the audit for learning?
* Does the audit clearly set out what needs to happen next?

***The difference between escalation and review***

* *If you review a casefile and identify a child is at risk of immediate harm, or you do not know if the child is safe, it is your responsibility to escalate this immediately to PSW, Assistant Director for QA, Team Manager, ATM and SW within the team. This should not wait until you have completed your audit – the question to ask yourself is “does immediate action need to be taken to keep a child safe from harm?”. If you need to clarify your thinking, do not hesitate to pick up the phone to the PSW to have this discussion in the first instance, however it must be immediate discussion and not delayed to agree next steps.*
* *If a casefile requires some actions to take place to improve quality of practice, you may wish to alert the PSW alongside the audit that you have practice concerns and the case would benefit from a review (in addition to what you may have already identified through your audit).*