

Sheffield City Council
Children and Families Service

Audit
Requirements and Guidance

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About this Document

Title	Audit Requirements and guidance
Purpose	To set out how Sheffield City Council People Portfolio Children and Families Service requirements and guidance for auditing
Replaces	Quality Case File Audit Requirements and Guidance – January 2018
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1. Rationale

Case File audits provide an invaluable perspective into practice. Our philosophy incorporates that effective audits can provide insight not only into the quality of recording and the management and support for the worker, but importantly the views, experiences and outcomes for the child/young person and the quality of the work being undertaken with the family. It is with this understanding as to how we impact upon children/young people and their families, that we can truly then understand our own role within the auditing process.

Below is the virtuous circle which demonstrates how the different parts of the audit process interlink and affect each other.



Sheffield Children and Families Service audit framework gives a structure and schedule for the process of audit and review. This provides a clear process for the routine examination of cases to be audited and reported on. The framework outlines -

- Where the tool/guidance references child, it is understood that this also includes young people

- Auditors are required to consider in every section the impact of practice on the child, how well does the auditor understand their lived experiences, how well are the child's views sought and represented in assessment, plans and decision making, does the child understand why we are involved and can the auditor evidence positive outcomes for the child
- Issues of race, culture, diversity, identity, language, disability and gender should be considered in every section of the audit

Further documentation to support audit can be found in the Quality Assurance Framework, Sheffield Practice Standards, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, Tri-x Social Care Procedures¹.

¹ The Quality Assurance framework can be found at -

<G:\SSD\Public\ChildrenandFamilies>

Sheffield Practice Standards can be found at -

<G:\SSD\Public\ChildrenandFamilies>

Working together (2018) can be found at -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

TriX Social Care Procedures can be found at -

<http://sheffielddcs.proceduresonline.com/index.htm>

2. Quality Audit Requirements

- All auditors will be identified by the Audit and Policy Officer and given a specified number of case file audits per month. For individuals this will be one per month, however for area teams they will be given a reflection of their management number
- All auditors will use the Quality Case File Audit Tool and follow the guidance provided
- Auditors will be provided with a random case file that they are required to audit. The case will be provided by the 1st Monday of every month
- Auditors are required to complete the audit by the date provided (usually within 4 weeks from the receipt of audit)
- Auditors should ensure that they add an Audit Outcome and the Audit Tool to the child's electronic file and send to the Manager for consideration and action
- Audit findings must be shared with the keyworker and their Manager

2.1 Rules for good Quality Auditing

- Prepare for the practice conversation by looking at the child's file
- Open up dialogue with the worker as soon as your case is identified to ensure you can book a suitable time to be together and allows them preparation time for the audit as well
- Sit with the worker and complete the audit with them
- If there is missing recording which the worker can easily upload, give them till you have written your audit to add this. It sometimes can make all the difference
- Focus on the last 12 months (if you need to mention something outside of that timeframe make sure it is relevant and linked to evidence to the current period of intervention)
- Audits should take no longer than 3 hours to complete (this includes the discussion with the worker)
- Focus on the child's journey/experience and voice - was this good practice? If not why and what could we have done differently? Having focus reduces drift when undertaking an audit
- Always answer the prompts on the audit tool and fill in every section to demonstrate it has been considered
- Explain the use of abbreviations so they are clear to the reader
- Use dates (e.g. dates of core group meetings, supervisions) and numbers (e.g. times child visited in a set period) to support your evaluation
- Check dates are accurate and your evidence is clear
- State clearly what the gaps are (e.g. visits not in timescale, SSCA out of timescale)
- Some description is necessary but you need to develop a succinct evaluative style of writing
- Use definitive evidence based narrative and avoid conjecture and words like 'appears' and 'seems'
- You don't need to write about everything but use the strongest evidence to support a judgement
- Make sure one piece of evidence does not contradict another without this being reflected in the judgement
- Ensure issues do not appear for the first time in the summary section/action plans – findings should stem from the main evidence sections of the audit
- Always state clearly who will be responsible for completing actions and the timescale required
- Use the Practice Standards as a guide to shape any action plan
- Step back before you complete the audit and reflect on your findings – have you completed all sections, are your judgements clearly backed by the strongest evidence, have you pulled through all actions into a clear action plan, and lastly will your audit findings stand up to scrutiny and challenge

2.2 Practice Conversation

A practice conversation which is reflective should be completed face to face with the worker and where appropriate with their Manager. Sheffield City Council uses Signs of Safety which should be reflected in the conversation and audit. The practice conversation should be beneficial to both the auditor and the worker. Through the discussion the auditor will gain an understanding of -

- What does the keyworker think has been working well
- What have been the challenges
- Quality of multi-agency working in this case
- Quality of management oversight, supervision and support
- Does the worker feel that the outcome and quality of life for this child has improved
- What do they think needs to happen next

A summary of this conversation will be shared with the worker and entered onto the audit tool under practice conversation.

2.3 Quality Audits that require immediate escalation

If you have an immediate concern that a child is at risk of harm and actions to mitigate are not evident, this case must be brought to the immediate attention of a Service Manager and if appropriate an Assistant Director. This escalation should occur within the same working day.

2.4 Process for Actions from Quality Audits

- Actions must be recorded by triggering the Audit Outcome form on the child/young person's electronic file
- The Audit Tool should be added in to the Audit Outcome as an attachment so it is visible on the child/young person's file
- Actions need to be clear in the Audit Outcome with a responsible person and timescale
- Once the Auditor has added their information to the Audit Outcome on the child's file, send this to the responsible Manager
- The Manager is responsible for having a discussion with the Auditor if there is any disagreement
- The Manager is responsible for agreeing the actions and action planning within the audit outcome on the child's file within the Responsible Manager section in the Audit Outcome form
- The Manager should then finalise the Audit Outcome form
- Any audits where the overall judgment is Requires Improvement or Inadequate, will be re-audited by the Audit and Policy Officer to ensure progress is made

3. Compliance Audit Requirements

- Compliance Audits should be undertaken by Managers on child's electronic files as routine practice – but certainly at a point of case transfer or closure after an assessment lasting longer than 10 days
- The Compliance Audit Tool should be used and the guidance provided followed
- Managers should ensure that they add an Audit Outcome and the Audit Tool to the child's electronic file and ensure actions are addressed and completed

3.1 Process for Actions from Compliance Audits

- Actions must be recorded by triggering the Audit Outcome form on the child's electronic file
- The Audit Tool should be added in to the Audit Outcome as an attachment so it is visible on the child's file
- Actions need to be clear in the Audit Outcome with a responsible person and timescale
- Once the Manager has added their information to the Audit Outcome on the child's file, send this to the responsible Manager
- If the Manager completing the Compliance Audit is the responsible Manager they will need to send this to themselves for completion
- The Manager should then finalise the Audit Outcome form
- Any audits where the overall judgment is Requires Improvement or Inadequate, should be re-audited by the Manager prior to transfer/closure to ensure remedial actions are completed

4. Thematic Audit Requirements

- Thematic Audits should be undertaken on child's electronic files on particular themes as to improve and ensure practice is appropriate and can shape policy and practice development
- A Thematic Audit Tool should be devised and used for consistency throughout the thematic audit and the guidance provided followed
- Auditors should ensure that they add an Audit Outcome and the Audit Tool to the child's electronic file to evidence the audit undertaken

4.1 Process for Actions from Thematic Audits

- Actions must be recorded by triggering the Audit Outcome form on the child's electronic file
- The Audit Tool should be added in to the Audit Outcome as an attachment so it is visible on the child's file

- The Auditor completing the Thematic Audit is the responsible Manager and should therefore send this to themselves for completion
- The Auditor should then finalise the Audit Outcome form
- If any issues are noted of significant harm for the child/young person, this needs to be highlighted with clear actions in the Audit Outcome with a responsible person and timescale – this can then be sent to the responsible Manager for action as with a Quality or Compliance Audit
- For a Thematic Audit a report will then be required to be produced with the outcome of the Audit and recommendations of any improvements

5. Specific Audit Requirements

- Specific Audits can be undertaken within specialist areas to ensure their own standards of specific practice are appropriate. Specific audits are to ensure practice is appropriate in areas and can shape policy and/or practice development
- A Specific Audit Tool should be devised and used for consistency throughout the specific audit and the guidance provided followed
- Auditors should ensure that they add an Audit Outcome on to the electronic records if the Specific Audit is exploring electronic files, for example, Foster Carer audits require an Audit Outcome on the Foster Carers electronic record

5.1 Process for Actions from Specific Audits

- Actions must be recorded by triggering the Audit Outcome form on the appropriate electronic file
- The Audit Tool should be added in to the Audit Outcome as an attachment so it is visible on the file
- Actions need to be clear in the Audit Outcome with a responsible person and timescale
- Once the Auditor has added their information to the Audit Outcome on the electronic file, send this to the responsible Manager
- The Manager is responsible for having a discussion with the Auditor if there is any disagreement
- The Manager is responsible for agreeing the actions, and action planning within the audit outcome on the electronic file within the Responsible Manager section in the Audit Outcome form
- The Manager should then finalise the Audit Outcome form

6. Executive Audit Discussion Panel Requirements

Social Workers can be invited to the Executive Audit Discussion Panel to discuss a child. A background briefing of the case will be prepared for the discussion by the Audit and Policy Officer and the practice conversation will be held with the worker by the Executive Director.

The aim of the panel is to provide a 'direct line' from Sheffield City Councils executives to Social Workers to further understand the rewards and challenges of Social Work with children and young people in Sheffield. It is a two way practice conversation with the opportunity for constructive feedback on Social Work practice in Sheffield to inform council policy and strategy.

Separate Panel Advice and Guidance is available at –
<G:\SSD\Public\ChildrenandFamilies>

A separate Executive Audit Discussion Panel outcome will be completed and shared.

7. Group Audit Requirements

- Group Audits will be undertaken to ensure consistency across auditors and to explore good practice
- All Auditors will be identified by the Audit and Policy Officer and invited to a group audit session
- A Group Audit tool will be devised for the session to encourage conversation as to the specified topic
- If deemed appropriate from the Audit, an Audit Outcome and attached Audit Tool can be added to the appropriate electronic file

8. Completing Audits

Where audit outcomes are added to electronic files, the audit remains the responsibility of the Manager and worker until all actions on the audit have been completed.

The Manager and worker will follow up any outstanding actions in the first supervision after the audit has been completed and ensure there is no drift in the actions being completed.

If actions are not completed within the agreed timescale, the Manager needs to offer management oversight for why this has not occurred.

9. Judgements

For each section you are required to provide an evaluative judgement using the four judgement criteria alongside a statement providing the rationale and evidence for your outcome. You must provide evidence that is balanced and proportionate to the judgement. Overall judgements must be underpinned by the evidence drawn from the audit tool being used, which is assisted by practice conversations and scaling.

Guidance for the differing judgements are below -

Outstanding:

Case exceeds the Sheffield Practice Standards requirements. To judge a case as outstanding there cannot be any requires improvement or inadequate judgements. No actions can be identified that need to be undertaken.

Good:

Case meets the required Sheffield Practice Standards. You can still judge a case as good if you identify a weakness/section that is requires improvement but you must clearly evidence that there are more good areas of practice than there are weaknesses. There may be an action for a case judged as good.

Requires Improvement:

Case meets minimum statutory requirements. Cases that are recorded as requires improvement must have actions. If there is no evidence that the involvement of Sheffield City Council improves the outcomes for the child then the judgement cannot be more than requires improvement. The case can still be requires improvement if some areas of the case are judged 'good' but it is not yet consistent across the case.

Inadequate

The case does not meet statutory requirements. The Auditor must ensure actions are listed in an inadequate case. Non-compliance is always inadequate unless there is a valid reason for it which can be demonstrated (this must be clearly evidenced within the audit). Any inadequate section judgements must lead to an inadequate overall judgement unless there is a valid and evidenced reason why not.

10. Audit standards for best practice

Audits are used to improve outcomes for Sheffield children, and audited cases will be read and re-audited by Senior Managers and they are also a key tool for Ofsted. Therefore it is essential that all audits are able to be

used to inform service improvement and development. Children and families are also able to request to see their files, and this includes audits.

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