

Children's Social Work Audit Guidance

August 2023

Audit is intrinsic to the quality assurance arrangements in the Bradford Children and Families Trust to support improving positive outcomes for children. Audits assess what we are doing well and how we are making a difference for children and families.

Audit activity is undertaken by identified roles in the service as part of a shared commitment to understanding the quality of practice and providing support to front line staff and is a mandatory element of core business.

Audits make a significant contribution to practice improvement and provide an opportunity for practitioners to pause and reflect on the quality of practice and the direct impact that assessments, interventions and support have on positive outcomes for a child or young person and their family. Audits examine social care practice against the practice standards, guidance, policy and procedures.

Auditing outcomes are shared to inform our workplace development programme and tell us whether our learning and development opportunities are having a positive impact on the services our children and families receive. The audit process in Bradford is underpinned by a coaching model, with audits being completed alongside practitioners to reflect on learning and service improvement.

Auditing will provide a quality grading of practice - outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate - and reports of audit outcomes are collated. This helps us understand how well we are doing against national standards and what we need to do to improve the service we are providing to our children and families.

Process

Practice Supervisors, Advanced Practitioners, Court Consultants, Quality Assurance and Improvement Officers, Family Support Co-ordinators, Learning and Development Officers, Team Managers, Service Managers, and Heads of Service will be required to undertake one audit per month. All auditors, except for Heads of Service and Service Managers will audit children's records from teams that they are not directly responsible for. Wherever possible, Court Consultants will be assigned children who are subject to Court processes.

Audits are coordinated by the Quality Assurance Team. At the beginning of each month, you will be sent details of the child's record to be audited. All audits need to be

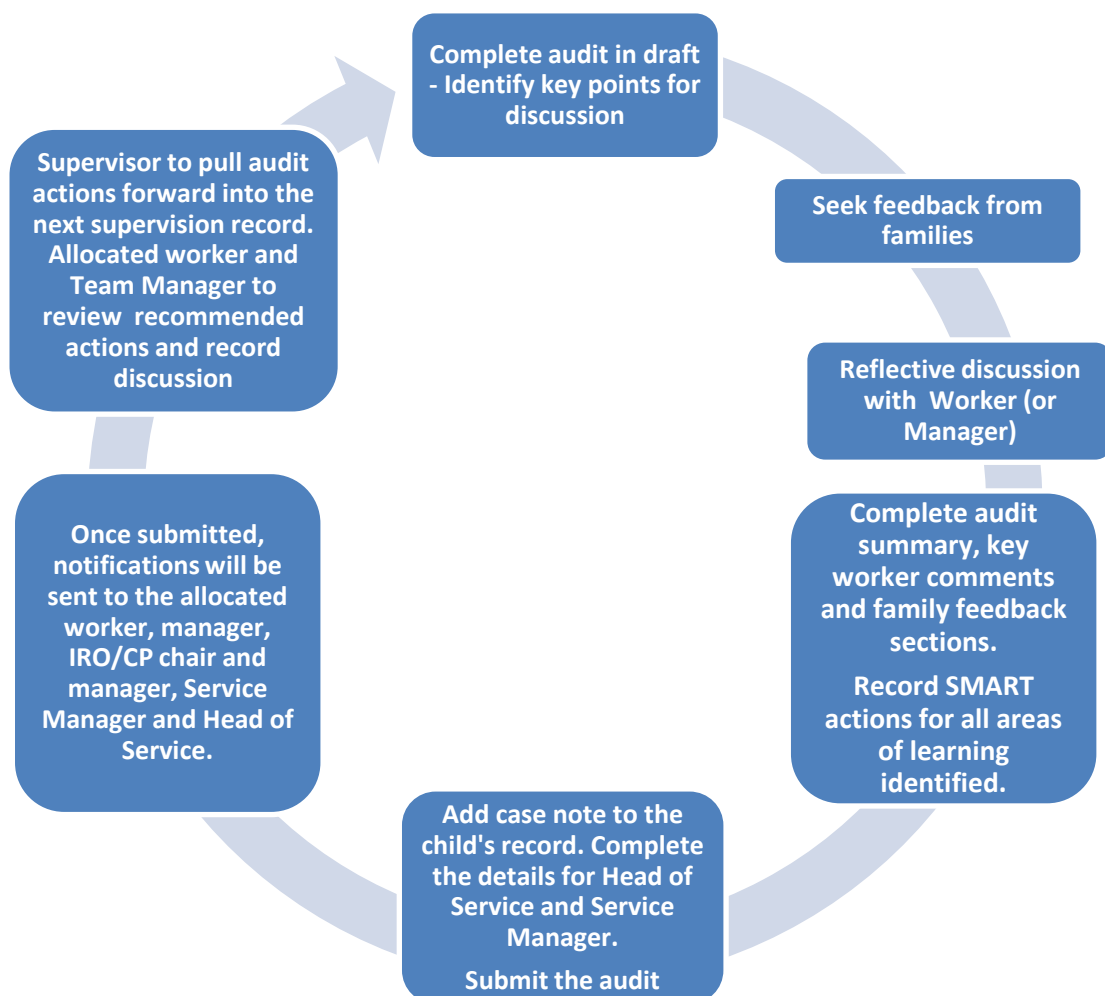
completed by the end of the month. Heads of Services are responsible for ensuring that audits are completed by managers in their respective areas.

It is important that the worker is given every opportunity to participate in the audit and it is recommended that you contact the worker in plenty of time before the audit is due, so a meeting (teams /face to face) can be arranged.

You should also ask the current allocated worker to advise the family that the child's record is being reviewed and that you would like to speak to parents/carers and the child if age appropriate and ask them to confirm that phone numbers are up to date.

Social Work auditing is undertaken using the Audit Tool Children's Social Care located in Forms in LCS.

Currently, other audit tools remain on the Supervision & Audit database but there is a programme in place to transfer them all to the LCS or EHM case management systems.



Once you have submitted the audit on LCS, the allocated worker, CP chair/IRO (if applicable) Line Manager, Service Manager and Head of Service will receive a notification and can read the audit on the child's record.

Other audits (and historical audits) can be read on the Supervision & Audit Database. [Home Page - Supervision and Audit \(bradford.gov.uk\)](https://bradford.gov.uk)

Actions from the audit will need to be reviewed and any immediate safeguarding issues will need to be addressed on receipt of the information.

The audit should be discussed in supervision to support further learning.

The actions should be pulled through to the supervision record at the next supervision and all subsequent supervisions until the actions have been completed. It is the responsibility of the Team Manager to assure and then record the completion of audit tasks (including tasks to be completed by people other than the allocated worker). This data will be collected and will be used to evidence that audit actions have been addressed.

The Head of Service will arrange to have a case planning discussion for all audits graded inadequate to reflect on the audit outcome and ensure that the plan and arrangements for the child are safe and in accordance with their needs. This will be recorded on the child's record.

It is the responsibility of the Head of Service to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to track the completion of actions: supervision and audit performance data will be available through Sharepoint to support managers to do this.

Moderations will be completed on the Supervision & Audit database and recommended actions for auditors will feed into their personal supervision. A case note will be added to the child's record indicating the moderated grade and any additional actions identified for service, followed up with an email to the allocated practitioner, team manager, and service manager responsible for the child. On receipt of the moderation, managers should discuss any additional actions with the allocated worker.

The Quality Assurance Team will report on audit outcomes, completion of audits and actions for each service.

Completing an audit – guidance principles

The fundamental question that audit seeks to explore is whether our involvement is making a difference. Do we understand the lived experience of this child or young person and have we made things better? Are we delivering a safe, timely and child focussed service?

Using the evidence from the child's record, the audit needs to reflect on the compliance with policy, practice standards and procedures because these are an essential framework for delivering the good practice that ensures positive outcomes.

The audit should analyse the quality of what you see rather than re-tell the child's story, and information copied into the audit from the child's record should be brief and only used to evidence a point.

The focus of the audit should be the most recent 6 months of work, but where the case has a substantial history, you will need to take into consideration whether needs and risk have been recognised and responded to over time and whether the legacy is impacting on current outcomes.

If you identify immediate concerns regarding a child's safety and wellbeing you must ensure that the allocated worker, Team Manager, Service Manager and Head of Service are notified as a matter of urgency. Action should not wait until the audit has been completed or for the audit tool to be finalised. It is critical that the child's safety and welfare are prioritised.

Each audit has sections, each to be graded separately, that explore the areas of practice on the child's record.

Each section has key standard descriptors that should be answered Yes or No. The key standards describe practice that would be graded as Good. Some standards contain several statements, and you must agree that all of them are evidenced on the child's record to answer Yes. Unless all standards are answered Yes, the section overall cannot be graded as good.

However, the section overall may still be Requires Improvement even if most standards are answered No. Your decision on section grade must be based on the extent to which you consider the gaps in each standard have impacted on outcomes for the child. See Appendix 1 Audit Grade Descriptors for further guidance on grading.

A clear assessment regarding the quality of the practice needs to support the grading and should be recorded in the audit. It can be helpful to separate your comments into strengths and learning. Rationale with supporting evidence should be provided to explain the judgments made for each of the standards. Avoid bland phrases and be clear regarding what was done well and what the learning is. When citing specific documents, you should include the date.

Recording must be professional and respectful. The audit becomes part of the child's record going forward.

Ideally, you should speak to the family after you have completed your draft audit and before your conversation with the practitioner.

When you plan your audit, discuss with the allocated worker which family members/carers it is most appropriate to speak to. The purpose of the family feedback is to understand whether things are improving for the child or young person, and this principle should guide you in deciding who is best able to provide that information. Ensure that you only speak to parents/carers who have parental responsibility. This will include foster carers for children subject to legal orders. The Audit form currently allows only one respondent. If you have feedback from more than one parent/carer, you can record the other responses in the comments section.

It is not the role of the auditor to provide information to the family from the case record. You should advise the family that you will feedback any questions, concerns or compliments to the allocated worker, and they will respond.

You should seek consent to speak to the child or young person directly from the parent or carer.

Record your conversation with the practitioner and include their assessment of the child's journey and response to the audit outcomes.

Learning should be focused and succinct and should explain what needs to be done to bring the practice up to a standard of Good. If immediate safeguarding has been identified, be clear what was done and how this was managed. The detail in this section will be important in informing practice development.

Ensure all your learning points have a SMART action that is child-focussed rather than process focussed. If you consider that the chronology needs updating, be sure to explain why this will benefit the child or young person.

Refer to the grade descriptors described in Appendix 1 below to determine your overall grade. Use the grades in each section to guide you. It is likely that the overall grade will reflect the majority of your section grades. Exceptions to this might be where there is one significant issue that is of particular concern that pulls down the overall grade.

As a rule of thumb, it is not usually appropriate to give an overall grade that is more than one grade higher than your lowest section grade i.e., if one section is graded 'requires improvement', the overall grade cannot be higher than 'good'. Give the most weight to the grades of the sections on Risk, Management Oversight and Impact. Grade the information in the child's record rather than your knowledge of the practitioner, or the changes in workers and managers.

Appropriate time should be booked to complete the audit to ensure that it is given the time required to make it a purposeful exercise.

After moderation, if there is a disagreement regarding the grade, the child's record will be reviewed by the Head of Service for Quality Assurance. If there is disagreement

regarding the actions identified, this will be reviewed by the Head of Service for the relevant area (case holding) as this relates to practice.

Organisational learning and reporting

Audit outcomes will generate themes and learning about how effective social care involvement and multi-agency working makes an impact on the lives of children and families and on their outcome. The evidence will be collated in by the QA service.

Each Head of Service is responsible for ensuring that the identified strengths and learning identified in the audit report is disseminated to their service area.

Audit reports will be shared with the Learning & Development Service so that identified strengths and learning are incorporated into training and development opportunities.

Appendix 1: Grade Descriptors

The quality of practice should be measured by compliance to the practice standards and the impact of our involvement with the child.

The aim is for our practice to reach a good/outstanding standard.

Diversity should be captured throughout the audit; the child or young person being seen, and their voice heard needs to be at the centre of all the work that we do.

The child's experience and their uniqueness should be considered throughout our practice to ensure that our involvement is effective and is making a difference.

<p>Outstanding</p> <p>The best possible outcome for the child or young person has been achieved.</p> <p>There is evidence that these outcomes can be sustained over time.</p> <p>Imaginative, effective and timely interventions positively impact on the child, young person and their family.</p> <p>There are high standards of professional competence and case work.</p> <p>Audits with a grade of outstanding may still have minor learning points identified that do not affect the best possible outcome being achieved for the child or young person.</p>	<p>Good</p> <p>Good outcomes have been achieved for children and young people.</p> <p>There is evidence of good practice throughout case planning, direct work with children and young people, professional decision making and case recording.</p> <p>The child or young person's experience is understood, and the analysis of their experience drives the assessment and plan.</p> <p>Audits can be graded good overall even if there are some sections that still require improvement, if this does not compromise the good outcomes that have been achieved.</p>
<p>Requires Improvement</p> <p>Recognises that work meets our basic safeguarding responsibilities.</p> <p>There may be minor examples where the practice does not meet the practice standards, but these are not impacting significantly on outcomes for the child or young person.</p>	<p>Inadequate</p> <p>Significant improvement is required to ensure minimum standards are met.</p> <p>Drift and delay is impacting on outcomes. Immediate review of arrangements may be required to ensure children and young people are safe.</p>

Outstanding

In addition to meeting the “Good” criteria the file would evidence: -

- Impact and adherence to the practice standards has achieved the best possible outcome for the child or young person at that time.
- Action has been taken swiftly to ensure outcomes are achieved within appropriate timescales for the child or young person.
- Long term outcomes for children and young people have been considered and plans are in place.
- Family and community have been fully explored to build a network of support around the child or young person and their family that will continue beyond involvement by children’s social care.
- Recording of the child or young person’s lived experience is detailed, compassionate and reflects their emotional complexity. This lived experience is at the centre of assessment, planning and review.
- The work has increased the child or young person’s resilience and emotional well-being.
- There is innovation in practice and the use of imagination to meet the needs of the child or young person.
- Collaboration between partner professionals has challenged ‘silo’ working and is driven by a commitment to achieve best outcomes; individual workers have advocated effectively.

Good

- Good outcomes have been achieved for children and young people; their lives have already been improved by our intervention.
- Intervention has been timely, avoiding drift and delay.
- Assessments identify strengths, risk factors, needs, impact of history and past harm and include information from other agencies.
- Assessments are succinct and understandable to parents and the child or young person (dependent on age and ability). The child, young person and family have been engaged in the assessment and kept informed of what is happening.
- Assessments review quality of parenting and capacity of parents and carers to change and sustain change.
- Assessments have been reviewed and quality assured by the Manager.
- Children and young people are differentiated from their siblings in assessments plans and recordings and individual needs and voices are clear.
- Children and young people are enabled to make choices where appropriate. The voice of the child or young person is evident.
- Children are regularly asked about the progress of the plan
- Direct work with child or young person is planned and is in line with their age and level of understanding.
- Clear communication with the child or young person is evident, specialist communication methods have been used where appropriate.

- There are observations of relationships and interactions for young children that provide a clear picture of the child.
- Attempts to engage the family are clearly evident with all avenues being explored to support an effective working relationship.
- Professional relationships have been collaborative and effective.
- Plans are individualised, clear, and evidence progress. They are reviewed and change in the light of emerging issues and risks.
- Multi-agency meetings are effective forums for timely information-sharing, planning, decision-making and monitoring.
- Recording is up to date, meets the required standards, is child centred and reflects the current activity on the case.
- Decision making is clearly evidenced and appropriate to the case.
- Supervision has been undertaken in accordance with policies and procedures. It is reflective, analytical, evidences a review of previous actions, sets clear timescales and evidences discussions that have taken place.

Requires Improvement

- There is evidence that the practice meets the practice standards in all areas that impact on the safety and progress for the child.
- The child is safe although the basis of the assessment is not clear or logical; decision making does not include detailed rationale.
- Key risk factors are identified but not properly assessed such as the risk of mental health, substance misuse, domestic violence.
- Indicators of physical and emotional abuse are not identified, assessed and linked to impact on child development.
- Limited evidence of the child/parents/carers or other professionals being involved in the assessment and planning process.
- The Child or young person has been seen but there is a lack of evidence of any planned direct work with the child.
- File recording is not consistent and does not reflect all activity undertaken
- Supervision is taking place in line with practice standards but there is limited evidence of reflection; actions are recorded but not routinely tracked and timescales slip.
- Evidence of minor drift and delay.

Inadequate

- Children or young people are not safe: either there is evidence that they are being harmed or at risk of harm; or the quality of recording/compliance is such that the auditor cannot establish the level of risk.
- There is no evidence of timely intervention and protection.
- Significant drift and delay is impacting on outcomes for the child.
- Assessments lack depth and analysis of risk.
- The child or young person's journey, voice and lived experiences are not evident.
- Limited evidence that the child or young person has been seen or spoken to.

- Limited evidence of progressing plans to improve and sustain outcomes for children and young people.
- The practice does not meet the practice standards. There are gaps in compliance with policy and procedure. Basic information is incomplete or not up to date.
- Recording is limited and does not reflect the up-to-date circumstances of the child or young person.
- The lack of information and detail in the chronology, genogram or case summary prevents a proper understanding of the child or young person's history.
- Recurring patterns are not challenged by management oversight at any level.
- Supervision is not reflective and regular and does not add value to improving outcomes for children or young people in a timely way.