

Case File Audit Guidance

Case file audit is an essential part of the quality assurance arrangements in Bradford to support improving outcomes for children. Audit is an activity that is undertaken by managers at all levels in the service as part of a shared commitment to understanding the quality of practice and providing support to front line managers.

Auditing provides an opportunity to pause and reflect on the quality of case work and on the impact our assessments and interventions make towards positive outcomes for a child or young person and their family.

Audits are an intrinsic part of the quality assurance process and their completion is a mandatory element of core business. Audits examine social care practice against the practice standards, guidance, policy, and procedures.

The audit process in Bradford is underpinned by a coaching model, with audits being completed alongside social workers.

1. The purpose of case file audit

Auditing will assess the compliance of case files and quality of outcomes for children and young people in order to inform social work practice.

Social workers will be provided with an opportunity to reflect on their practice and develop professional competencies to improve their work. This will be supported by auditing informing learning and development.

Auditing will provide a quality grading of practice (outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate) to provide a measurable assurance as to the quality of social work in Bradford.

The auditing process will provide performance data to track our improvement journey as well as assess the impact of identified intervention.

2. The audit process

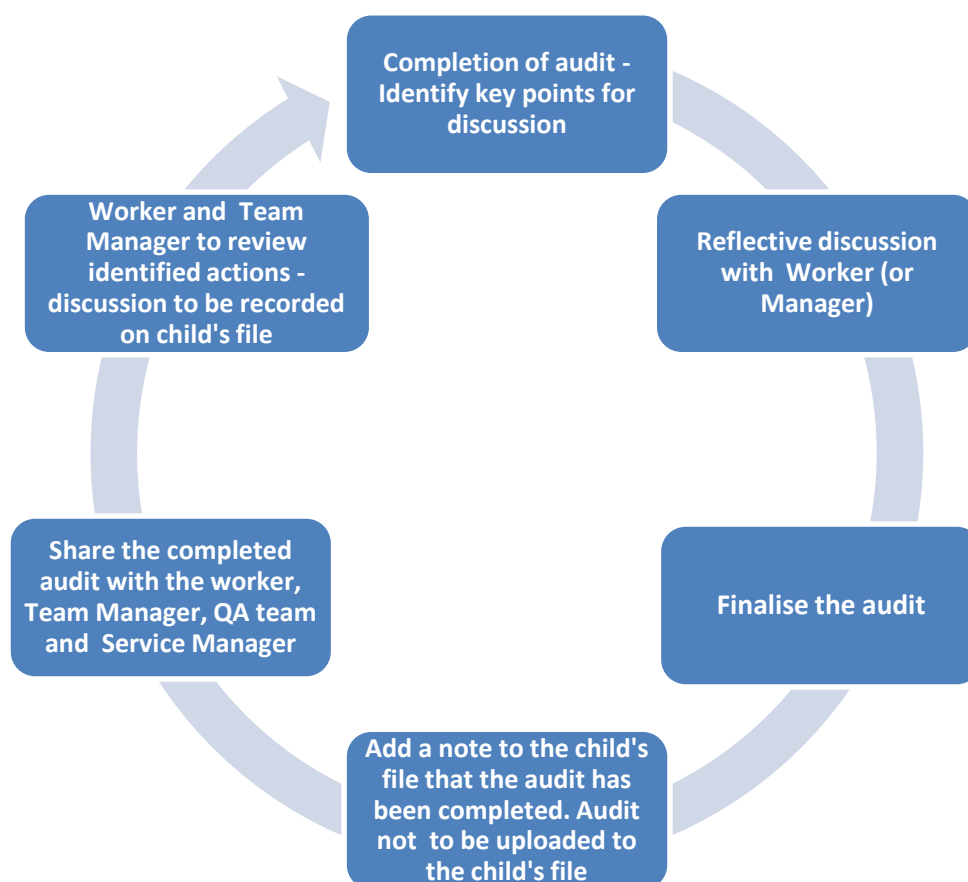
All Team Managers, Practice Supervisors, Service Managers, Principal Social Worker, Heads of Service, Assistant Directors and the Strategic Director will be required to undertake one audit per month. Team Managers, Practice Supervisors and Service Managers will audit cases from teams that they are not directly responsible for.

All audits are coordinated by the Quality Assurance Team. At the beginning of each month, details of the case to be audited will be sent to the allocated auditor and to the allocated Social Worker and Team Manager. All audits need to be completed by the end of the month. A reminder will be sent to auditors, with managers being copied in, a week before the end of the month for those who have not completed their case file audit.

Auditing is undertaken using the case file audit form.

It is important that the social worker is given every opportunity to participate in the audit and it is recommended that the auditor contact the social worker in plenty of time before the audit is due, so a meeting (or phone call) can be arranged.

If the case has been recently re-allocated (within 1 month) and the original worker is still with the authority, the auditor should attempt to arrange a three way meeting with both workers to discuss the audit.



On receipt of the audit, the Team Manager should discuss the audit with the Worker, recording this as supervision on the child's case file, identifying the actions that need to be completed with clear timescales. Updates to actions should also be recorded as supervision, reflecting on the learning.

It is the responsibility of the Team Manager and Service Manager to track the actions; Service Managers will be responsible for ensuring that identified actions have been completed within required timescales.

When audits have been moderated, the outcome will be shared with the auditor and the Team Manager responsible for the case. On receipt of the moderation form, Team Managers should discuss any additional actions with the Social Worker, recording this as supervision on the child's case file. All actions should be identified with clear timescales.

The Quality Assurance Team will monitor and report on rates of compliance with auditing and completion of actions on a monthly basis and this will be shared with Heads of Service. The Quality Assurance Team will also monitor Service Manager oversight of actions.

3. Completing an audit – guidance principles

The fundamental question that audit seeks to explore is whether our intervention 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?

The audit needs to reflect on evidence of compliance with policy, practice standards and procedures because these are an essential framework for delivering the good practice that ensures positive outcomes.

Auditors should complete the case file audit without re-telling the story of the case and without cutting and pasting from the case file.

The main focus of the audit should be on the most recent 6 months of work, but where the case has a substantial history, the auditor 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.

A clear assessment regarding the quality of the work needs to support the grading. A strengths based approach should be used to assess elements of good practice and evidence impact and added value through Children's Social Care involvement in the case.

Learning should be focused and succinct in order to be useful to take forward and apply to future practice.

If there are immediate concerns regarding a child's safety and wellbeing the auditor is responsible for ensuring that the allocated worker, Team Manager and Service Manager 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.

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 case file needs to be reviewed by the Head of Service for Quality Assurance. If there is disagreement regarding the actions identified, this needs to be reviewed by the Head of Service for the relevant area (case holding) as this relates to the conduct of the case.

See Appendix 1 for points to consider when completing the audit.

4. Organisational learning and reporting

Auditing will generate themes and learning about how effective social care intervention and multi-agency working evidence positive outcomes for children, which will be collated reported in a Monthly Case File Audit report.

Each Head of Service is responsible for cascading the identified strengths and learning to their staff.

The Monthly Case File Audit report will also be shared with the Principal Social Worker so that identified strengths and learning are incorporated into training

Appendix 1: Points for considerations when completing audits

These points are for guidance and auditors should use their professional discretion to ensure all the issues on the case file are addressed.

Audit analysis

The audit has 9 subsections, each to be graded separately, that explore the key elements of good social work practice on the case file.

- 1. There is timely identification, response and reduction of risk and need*
- 2. Assessments are timely, comprehensive, analytical and of good quality*
- 3. Plans and reviews drive progress towards positive outcomes*
- 4. Children and young people's voices and lived experience are at the centre of everything we do*
- 5. Families are appropriately engaged in the work*
- 6. Partner professionals around the family work collaboratively to improve children and young people's lives*
- 7. Management oversight ensures decision making is effective, proportionate and timely, and standards of work are good.*
- 8. Case records are correct and up to date*
- 9. Impact: how have we made a difference to the child or young person's life?*

At the end of each section there is a question to assist the auditor to reflect on how the work has changed the life of the child or young person. The auditor should summarise their findings and use evidence from the case file to support their argument. The auditor should The detail in this section will be important in informing practice development.

Overall grade

- Refer to the grade descriptors described in Appendix 2 below to determine your grade;
- Use the grades in each sub section to guide you. It is likely that the overall grade will reflect the majority of your subsection 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'.
- Grade the information in the case file and not your knowledge of the practitioner;

Reasons for grading

- Use a strengths based approach: endeavour to identify at least one area of good practice
- Avoid bland phrases and be clear regarding what was done well and what the learning is

- If immediate safeguarding has been identified, be clear what was done and how this was managed;

Recommendations

- Ensure your recommendations are child-focussed. If you consider that the chronology needs updating, be clear what outcome this will achieve for the child or young person.
- Organisation learning points are a valuable way of raising areas of practice that need work and issues raised in this section will be included within the audit report.

Sharing the audit

Audits should be sent to:

- The allocated Team Manager; it is appropriate to send jointly to the Social Worker if the audit was completed with them and you have already shared the learning.
- The Service Manager
- The allocated Child Protection Co-ordinator or Independent Reviewing Officer
- The Quality Assurance and Audit Officer
- If you wish to highlight practice learning for the previous social worker, there is discretion to send the audit to the relevant Team Manager as well.

Appendix 2: Grade Descriptors

The quality of casework should be measured by compliance to the standards and impact of intervention for the child.

The aim is for work 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 work to ensure that are intervention is effective.

Outstanding	Good
<p>The best possible outcome for the child or young person has been achieved.</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>The child or young person's experience is understood and the analysis of this experience drives the assessment and plan.</p> <p>Cases graded as 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 outcomes have been achieved for children and young people.</p> <p>There is evidence of good practice and impact throughout case planning, direct work with children and young people, professional decision making and case recording.</p> <p>The case file is fully compliant and learning is minimal in terms of quality. The standards set out in the audit are met.</p>
Requires Improvement	Inadequate
<p>Recognises that work meets our basic safeguarding responsibilities.</p> <p>There may be minor examples where the case file does not meet the practice standards but these are not impacting significantly on outcomes for the child or young person.</p>	<p>Significant improvement is required to ensure minimum standards are met.</p> <p>Drift and delay is impacting on outcomes.</p> <p>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 compliance 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's timescales.
- 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.
- 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

- Minimum practice standards have been met; the case file is compliant in all areas that impact on the safety and progress for the child.
- Outcome is safe though 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 toxic trio.
- 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.
- Child or young person has been seen but no evidence of planned direct work with the child.
- Case recording is not consistent and does not reflect all activity on the case.
- Supervision is regular but there is limited 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.
- 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 case file 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.
- No up to date chronology, genogram or case summary on the system.
- 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.