



## **Undertaking an Audit as part of the LSCB Audit Programme**

### **1. What is the purpose of audit?**

#### **1.1 What is audit?**

Audit is a quality assurance process. It provides a means of finding out whether the service is following guidelines and/or applying best practice in a particular area. It is a systematic process that involves defining standards and criteria, collecting data and implementing change.

#### **1.2 Why conduct audit?**

Audit is undertaken to ensure that policy/procedure is being followed. It provides evidence of best practice and can demonstrate the quality of our work to external bodies and inspectors. It also allows areas of weakness to be identified and acted upon.

The actual process of carrying out an audit can sometimes be as beneficial as the outcomes. It provides staff with the time and space to reflect critically on practice. Where different agencies are involved in an audit, there is an opportunity to learn about different roles and responsibilities.

#### **1.3 Who should be involved?**

It is helpful to have people with a variety of different perspectives within the audit group. The group should therefore include staff from different levels/roles or, where appropriate, different agencies. It is best practice for an audit to be led by someone other than the manager for the area under consideration.

### **2. The LSCB audit programme and the role of the LSCB Performance Sub Group**

#### **2.1 The Audit Programme**

The LSCB Performance Sub Group has agreed an annual programme of audits that seeks to assure quality in key areas of safeguarding activity. The topics for inclusion within the audit programme have been selected to allow further exploration of issues/questions raised by:

- Inspection and review processes
- Discussion in the LSCB Executive Group and at Board meetings
- The monitoring of the Integrated Data Set

- Complaints
- The implementation of a new policy or procedure e.g., child sexual exploitation, missing children
- Serious case reviews
- The LSCB Business Plan

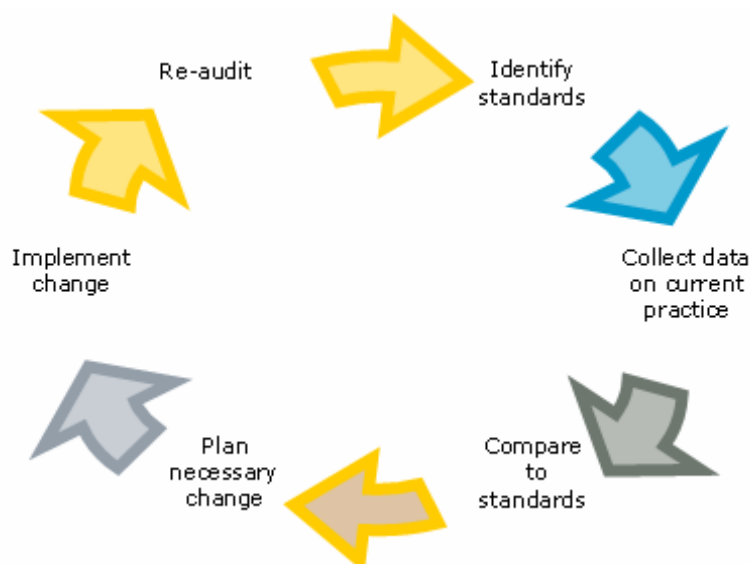
A lead officer (a member of one of the agencies forming part of the LSCB) will be agreed for each audit to be undertaken. A joint lead may be agreed as a learning process for those new to undertaking audit work.

## 2.2 Overseeing audit activity

The LSCB Performance Sub Group will oversee each audit by:

- Commenting upon and approving the scope for each audit to be undertaken
- Commenting upon and approving the report for each audit, before submission to the LSCB
- Quality assuring the action plans arising from audits to ensure that they are 'SMART', and that there is a clear understanding about what actions will be taken forwards, by whom and when
- Agreeing whether a re-audit is needed and a reasonable timescale for this re-audit
- Reviewing progress against the actions resulting from audits
- Maintaining a record of all audits undertaken, the actions arising from these audits and proposed dates for re-audit if applicable

## 3. Undertaking an audit – Step by Step



**Step 1: Clarify the Scope:** The scope for each of the LSCB audits is outlined on the audit plan for the year. However, it is often at quite a high level and discussion with key personnel is needed to gain a clear understanding about what is required. The scoping stage is about ensuring absolute clarity from the

outset about what the study is trying to achieve. In many respects, this is therefore the most critical stage in the process. Every scope needs to be discussed and approved by the LSCB Performance Sub Group before the audit commences.

**Step 2: Develop the audit standards:** At the outset, the auditors will need to decide upon a set of standards to audit against. The LSCB has published a set of core safeguarding standards and other standards are likely to be set out in policy documents. Standards are simply statements that set out our expectations in a particular area. For example:

- All staff should receive supervision on a monthly basis
- The supervisor and supervisee will have a supervision agreement
- Supervision notes will be signed by both parties

To keep the audit manageable there should be a limit to the number of standards and auditors should be clear about the main things they want to check. Every aspect of practice does not need to be checked.

**Step 3: Meet with the Audit Group:** Once standards are agreed, the wider audit group should meet. This group needs to:

- Understand the scope of the audit and the standards
- Decide on the best means of carrying out the audit. This is usually a case audit, but could be a survey or data analysis
- Agree who will design and pilot the audit tool
- Agree which cases you will look out. The LSCB audit programme is multi-agency so it may be appropriate to look at Police, Health Visiting or Social Care records.
- Agree a timescale for carrying out the audit work. Most of the LSCB audits involve auditors from different agencies working in pairs
- Decide what sample is needed (size, key characteristics, time period etc). An information officer for the relevant IT system should be able to help to extract a random sample if provided with a clear set of criteria.

**Step 4: Design the Audit Tool:** With a clear set of standards, developing the audit tool should be a straightforward task. Normally just one question per standard is needed. You are trying to form a judgement about whether each of the standards is being met. What question will give you the information you need to know this?

Provide a number of options for auditors to select rather than providing a blank response box for each question. This makes analysis easier. It also sets a clear marker against which progress can be assessed (e.g. 70% of young people were engaged in the CAF process).

Free text boxes should be included so that auditors can provide an explanation for responses provided. These usually help clarify why performance is good or poor in a particular area.

The audit tool should always be piloted before use. One or two cases may be sufficient to see whether the tool will work in practice.

**Step 5: Carry out the Audit:** Make sure your auditors know which cases from the sample they need to audit and the timescale they have for carrying out this work.

**Step 6: Analyse the Results:** The easiest way to analyse the results is to first calculate the performance (usually a percentage) for each of the standards. With a large sample, the only practical way to do this is to enter the data into a spreadsheet. With a smaller sample, manual counting will suffice. The percentages give the overall picture of performance against standards. For example,

90% of staff said that they had supervision every month  
40% of staff had a written supervision agreement  
60% of supervision files contained a record signed by both parties

Once the percentages are calculated, go through each of the questions individually and look at the comments that auditors have made. These will usually add some 'context' to the statistics and may help to work out why performance is good/poor in a particular area.

**Step 7: Write a report:** The following headings provide a suggested structure for an audit report. Adopting this standard format will give a consistent style to audit reports. It also allows the reader to easily access the information they need.

Remember the final report needs to go to the LSCB Performance Sub Group for discussion/approval before going to the Board itself.

**Introduction:**

This should give a brief introduction to the audit being carried out and the background to this work. Is there a particular reason for carrying out the audit at this time? If this is a re-audit, when was this area last considered? Are there any relevant statistics that set the context for the study?

**Method:**

This section should provide further details about what the audit group actually did. If a different set of staff carry out a re-audit of this area in the future, they should be able to use this section to replicate the study.

How large was the sample, and how was it selected?

Who were the auditors? (agencies/roles held)

What process did the auditors follow in carrying out the work?

Any audit tools/questionnaires used should be referred to in this section and attached as an appendix to the report.

**Results:**

The simplest way to report on the results of an audit is to structure it in to headings that reflect each of the agreed standards (see step 2). You can provide one or more key statistics under each of these headings and then give details of additional qualitative information provided by the auditors. If thoughts/suggestions arose out of discussion within the audit group, make sure that these are documented separately. They are not audit findings as such.

**Discussion:**

This section should summarise the results of the audit drawing out both areas of strength and areas for development. It normally builds on the results section by providing possible interpretations of the findings and identifying areas for further consideration.

Do the results of the audit suggest that the set of standards agreed by the auditors are being met?

If a re-audit is needed, this can be flagged up in the discussion section.

**Action Plan:**

This is simply an agreed list of items that will be taken forward as a result of the audit. A named individual needs to be assigned for each of the actions with an agreed timescale for taking that action forward. The following format should be followed when developing the action plan:

Make sure that those named on the plan know that they have responsibility for following this action through – and by when.

**Step 8: Recommendations paper:**

Once your report has been approved by the LSCB Performance Sub Group, a standard template (identifying key issues and actions) needs to be prepared for the LSCB. The template is attached as Appendix 1. Complete this template, attach the audit report and send it to the LSCB Manager.

**Thanks to Alison Roe, Research and Information Manager, West Berkshire Council**

**Appendix 1: The LSCB template identifying key issues and actions  
Report to North Yorkshire Local Safeguarding Children Board**

*The purpose of this brief report is to keep the LSCB updated and informed on the achievements of your agency/group. It can also highlight any issues where action by the LSCB may be helpful in achieving your goals. The intention is to keep the work required to compete this to minimum so please aim for a few brief bullet points.*

**1. Name of Agency or Working Group**

**2. Purpose of report (please indicate)**

**3. Brief summary of safeguarding activity/ specific objective of your group/  
service**

**4. Key outcomes in relation to safeguarding /keeping children safe**

**5. What has presented difficulties for the group/ how can the LSCB assist?**

**6. Please attach any data analysis or report that already exists and would help  
the LSCB understand the issues in your area.**

**Report Author:**

**Date:**