

Title:	Children Service's Audit Activity		
Report to:	Children's Partnership Executive Board		
Agenda Item No.	4		
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1. Purpose To advise the Partnership Executive of the audit activity within Children Services and the actions taken in response			
2. Background <p>Over the last 14 months Children Services has used case auditing to support, inform and evidence its improvement journey. In 2012/13 Children Services audited in excess of 1,500 cases. The expectation to complete case auditing has been established as a formal part of the management role for over a year and the development of the new structures will see the creation of an infrastructure to support a wider learning culture based upon a quality assurance and audit process.</p>			
3. Summary <p>Children Services has been committed to the use of case auditing as an integral part of its improvement journey. A list of major highlights in the developing picture of case auditing and the learning and actions following it include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The auditing of all open CP and CIN cases. SLT commissioned a wide scale audit of all open cases following a TSCB sponsored external audit of Children on Plans over 2 years (May – June 2012). Social care staff responded positively to the learning from these audits and the audit process itself was central to informing a step change in the management of CP cases. The net result of these changes has been a 37% reduction in the total numbers of children on plans. Today, more decisive action is being taken where a family on a plan is not making any or little demonstrable progress. This wide scale audit also helped SLT clearly identify those managers and practitioners that were performing better for children. This intelligence was used to inform SLTs internal promotion of staff at a time when Children Services was facing its greatest recruitment challenges. Auditing of cases held by the Children with Disability service. Following a number of alerts and cases of concern that were audited by SLT, the management team commissioned an external agent to start the audit of all cases held by this team. This report confirmed the need for all cases to be audited and the service to be reorganised. The transformation of this service is now well underway. SLT's knowledge of the 			

weaknesses and issues (informed by audit) in this team did have a significant bearing during Ofsted's last inspection.

- **Spot auditing of early help cases.** SLT regularly audit cases in order to keep both informed and aware of practice standards across the child's journey. A series of these audits looked at open CAF cases. The learning from these audits helped inform the drive to make early help much more targeted at children on or about the threshold for assessment. The next TSCB audit will also look at the degree of partnership engagement in CIN cases some of whom would have been subject to CAF.
- **Auditing to evidence progress on Ofsted recommendations.** Case auditing has been used to assure compliance with the Ofsted recommendations in particular looking at supervision standards, the allocation of workers once CP plans cease, the ongoing review of longer term CP plans and the coordination and management CIN plans. A full and detailed report against the Ofsted recommendations is currently being prepared for a meeting with the Dfe and will be presented to the next Partnership Executive.
- **Monitoring of all statutory assessments.** During the summer, over 500 statutory assessments were proactively audited to review and monitor the progress being made. Information from the audit process was used to:
 - target and prioritise the work of staff,
 - make improvements to key operational reports
 - shape the proposed future structure and resourcing of the assessment team

As result of the actions taken in response to the audit process, the team's morale and confidence in dealing with the demands has improved significantly.

- **External scrutiny and challenge.** Children Services is nearing the completion of an external research project by the NCB into children in care. This project has reviewed over 50 cases and is due to report back by early December. Torbay has also taken a lead role in development of peer support across the SW region. This includes gaining valuable benchmark information ahead of Dfe published statistics, the completion of a self assessment shared with other authorities and the commissioning of a further peer challenge on CLA in March 2014.

Performance management reports are also being remodelled to align the presentation of data with the outcomes from audits.

- **Children's Services Audit loop.** During these last 14 months the case auditing approach and materials has been adapted to the operational realities that managers and workers are facing. The Children's Services audit loop clearly identifies how the learning from audit flows throughout the whole organisation and across to partners. For example, SLT continues with its plan for auditing cases and it also uses performance data to regularly check if the volumes of case audit meet expectations and for any other issues that would be better understood through case audits. SLT hold monthly meetings to review the learning from audits and review performance. The themes raised in the latest session included:
 - The speed and approach to case planning – the degree to which we are using a concurrent planning approach
 - The need to explore and better understand the increasing number of children aged under 5 coming into care and the decision making and circumstances that led to a small number of 17 year olds entering care
 - The electronic recording of decision making by managers
 - The CIN planning process and engagement of partners
 - The relative high volumes of CAF
 - The degree of practitioner understanding of the longer term impact of domestic violence on children and potential of being over optimistic about

rehabilitation on some cases

- The relationship with the family court and judges and the impact on cases within the PLO

SLT's latest monthly review also noted a good range of strengths that included:

- Continued positive impact of the hub and commitment from workers to work through the increases in demand
- Ongoing decisiveness in the response to children at risk and the management of CP
- Sustained and further improved levels of compliance with supervision amongst front line teams
- The development and retention of social workers that is driving down the potential for inconsistent practice and changes in social workers

- **The Future - embedding a learning culture.** Having established a pattern and expectation for case auditing, Children's Services new proposed operational structures have been developed to further improve embed a quality assurance / learning culture. The aim is to make auditing and learning from cases an everyday working reality across Children Services.

The new structures will include:

- The creation of a dedicated Quality Assurance Manager to lead on the development of peer reviewing, case observations and professional development. This role will pick up on the ongoing audit themes already established by SLT which include a focus on the following core practice issues:
 - Quality of assessments and planning
 - Quality of supervision – the degree to which it is reflective and offering support and challenge
 - The voice of the child
- The creation of Principal Social Worker roles based within each team that will audit cases and provide peer support and challenge to front line staff.
- The integration of the Principal Social Worker responsibilities (as defined by Munro) into the strategic responsibilities of a Service Manager. This will ensure the voice of practice is heard and shared with SLT.

4. Recommendations

To note the progress made by the Children's Services and its ongoing commitment to develop a learning culture. It should be noted that this work complements the developments taking place within the LSCB.