

Report Title: Here

Date of meeting:	28th January 2025		
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children Services and Safeguarding)		
Report of:	Report- Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement		
Portfolio:	Children , Schools & Safeguarding		
Wards affected:	ALL		
Is this a key decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

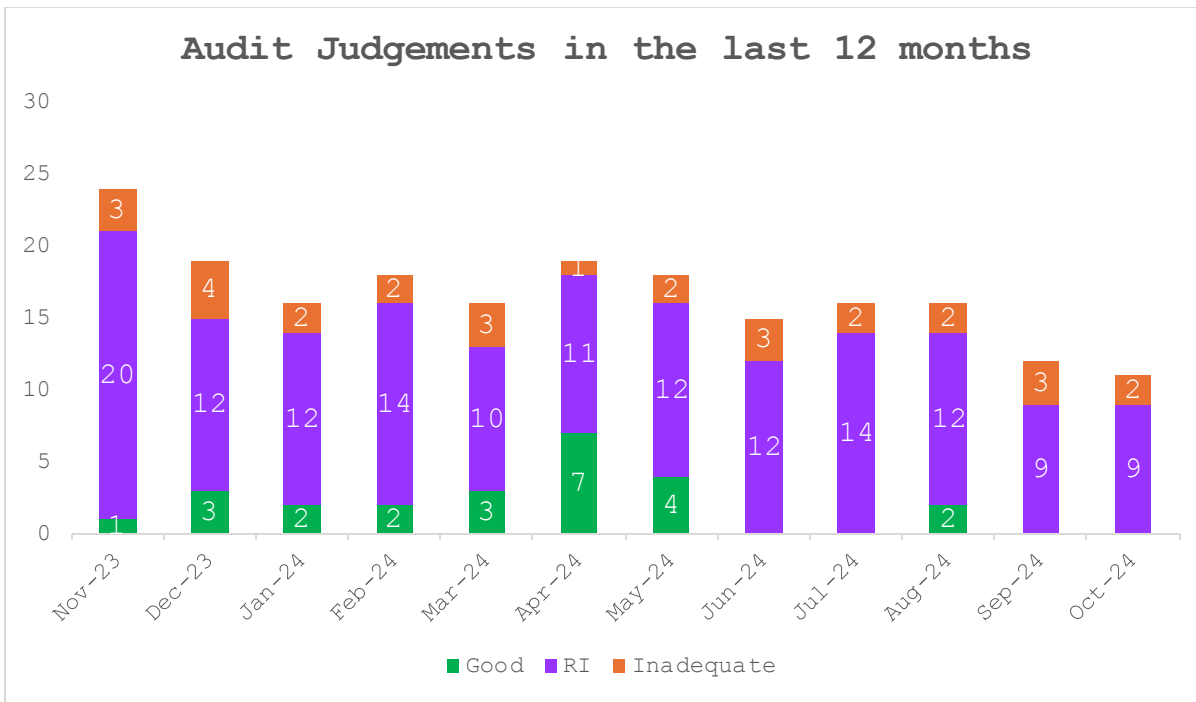
Summary:

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

This report will provide an overview of Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement activity during October 2024 in Sefton Children’s Social Care. In addition to this, it will set out audit performance over the last 12 months offering a view of direction of travel.

Key highlights and direction of travel

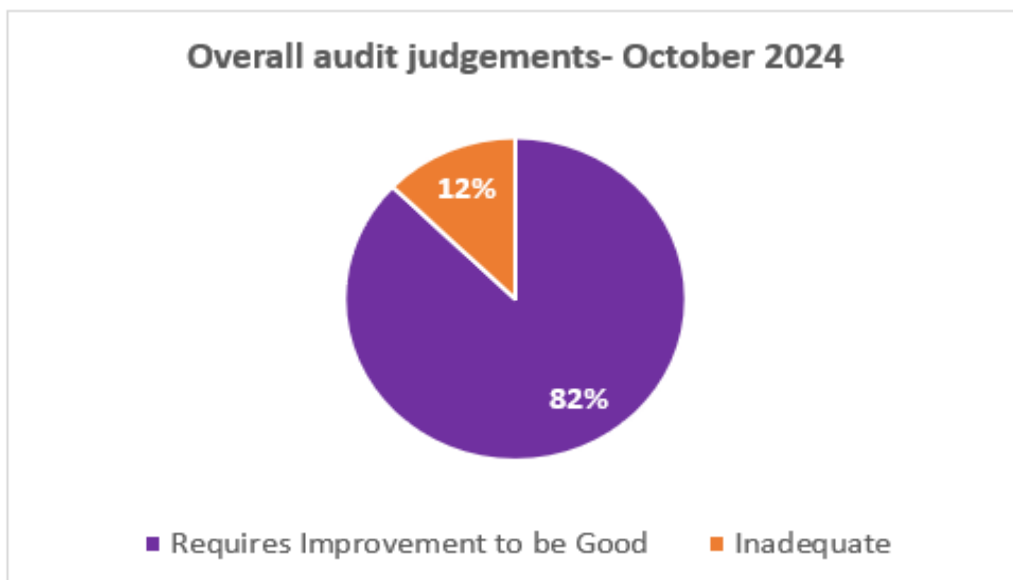
The chart below summarises activity over the last 12 months. **Most work audited across the service continues to be considered ‘Requires Improvement to Be Good.’**



Current picture - October 2024

11 deep dive audits have been completed in October 2024. 5 of the 11 audits were moderated (45%) and the overall judgement was upheld in all 5 audits showing consistency in the quality of audits. As noted in the previous report, this is a reduced audit sample to allow for intensive improvement work to be undertaken in respect of children subject to child protection planning for over 12 months.

October's audits include 4 cared for children, 3 children who are privately fostered, 2 children in the assessment stage, 1 child in the complex needs team and 1 care experienced young adult. Both audits graded inadequate in October were in the help and protect service with 1 who was privately fostered.



Overview of Key findings- October 2024

Relationship based practice remains a strength in Sefton, all children in this cohort were visited regularly and in audits judged 'good'; children/young people/ care experienced young adults are benefitting from consistent and trusting relationships with professionals which is positive.

Where there was scope to improve relational practice, this linked to communication with parents, the involvement of fathers and professional endings with families. Endings are one of our Make A Difference Group's key priorities. To this end, we continue to remind staff at all opportunities of the significance of planned endings and other transitions. E.g. during Good Assessment Training, during reflective audit conversations, sharing feedback from families and children and during Practice and Performance meetings where good examples of professional endings have been shared.

There was evidence in October audits, that fathers were not consulted during the assessment period or being invited to meetings despite having Parental Responsibility. A bespoke session 'Working Effectively With Fathers' was delivered by Research In Practice to 17 practitioners from across Children's Services in September 2024. A Practice Improvement Manager and Learning and Development Partner have begun to role out this training further with 11 workers attending on 3.12.24 and further sessions planned for the new year. It was positive to see practitioners from our CHAT service attend the session on the 3.12.24 as it is vital that from the first contact with families, information from the whole family is gathered.

For some children, direct work and life story work is helping them understand their experiences and inform planning to improve their outcomes. There was 1 example of a Pathway Plan that was considered 'Good' by the auditor, this plan was detailed and outlined the young adult's voice throughout with regular review and management oversight. This plan has been saved to our good practice library and will support practice improvement manager's work with practitioners this month. However, it is recognised that we need to do more work on evidencing the voice/wishes and feelings of young people. Within the Immediate Response and Help and Protect services we had created additional service manager capacity following the creation of 2 Head of Service post and direct work children will be a key priority for progress.

For 4 families in this cohort, delays in decision making and delays in progressing Special Guardian Order arrangements was a feature. In 2 out of 4 audits for cared for children, care planning meetings were not regular to enable families and professionals to track the progress of the plan and share information. A care planning video made to support previous learning events will be shared again in the December Sefton Scoop newsletter to promote care planning between cared for review meetings and there will also be discussions about this during any 1:1 reflective learning conversations.

Most plans were judged 'Requires Improvement to be Good,' and would benefit from being more specific around how the multi-agency partners are contributing to improving outcomes for the individual child and include timebound actions which are regularly tracked to minimise delay in achieving permanence. More reflection in supervision and testing of hypothesis would also support improved outcomes for the child/young person as well as tracking of actions set in previous supervision and challenge when meetings are not taking place, or the elements of the plan are drifting. The management oversight action learning sets allow peers to show, share and reflect on their own practice. The improvement work being undertaken with plans and inadequate audits will drive messaging around the importance of SMART planning, review and management oversight and sign off.

In audits judged 'inadequate', 1 child and family experienced significant delay in receiving the identified support. In the other audit judged 'inadequate', the young person experienced instability in the last 6 months and despite intervention and specialised support, delays in decision making meant that risk did not reduce in a timely way. Also, there was no evidence of a private fostering assessment or DBS checks being sought when the young person was living with family members. This has since been addressed.

There is a dedicated Social Worker, Team Manager and Child Protection Chair responsible for private fostering for children/young people. The new Social Worker has recently attended BAAF specialist training on private fostering. A review of all privately fostered children/young people is currently underway as inadequate work should not be identified for this cohort of children. The Private Fostering Action Plan, on individual young people, is updated weekly and the HoS signs off all PF assessments.

Practice Improvement

There is dedicated practice improvement underway to target improvements with individual Team Managers and social workers which will focus on 3 specific areas.

- Social workers with children open to children protection for more than 12 months
- Social workers and team managers who have overseen inadequate audits in the past 6 months
- Social workers with children open to child in need for more than 12 months.

This approach is intended to address the variable quality of assessment and plans including ensuring that the plan is progressing to support positive impact and outcomes. Coaching conversation will be used by practice improvement officers with social workers where they will work alongside social workers to support improvements including updating assessments, plans and any other activity that is required to support a positive impact and improve outcomes.

As part of the review of children open to child protection plans for over 12 months, 45 children were reviewed via a panel which included a preparatory reflective discussion between practice improvement officer and the relevant Team Managers and practitioners to focus on children's outcomes and identify focussed work to progress the child's plan. The focus of the panel was intended to provide a reflective space for the practitioners to support them to identify solutions to any barriers and to support them to identify how they can further develop the child protection plan to enable and promote positive outcomes. The review of these children has identified several themes which include

- partner anxiety in managing risk
- a need for more purposeful planning to respond to complex family environments
- an ongoing need for senior leaders and managers to apply scrutiny to safety planning to ensure that safety planning considers the full set of circumstances within a family network.

As part of the ongoing work to support improvements in child protection planning the practice improvement officers will continue to work alongside the social workers in progressing all the actions identified of the cohort that they have been involved in. There will continue to be a panel held monthly to review all children subject to a children protection plan for more than 15 months. This will support focussed activity in ensuring that CP plans are progressing purposefully with the input of the practice improvement officers.

Over the past 6 months, (May-October 2024) there have been 14 audits graded

inadequate with 13 of these sitting in the Help and Protect service area. There is additional dedicated practice improvement work underway to increase support to those 6 social workers and 6 team managers who were involved in inadequate audits and who remain working in Sefton Children's Services. This involves the Practice Improvement team reviewing the assessments and plans of these workers/managers alongside the practitioner and coaching and mentoring them to update assessments and plans of children allocated to them to a good standard to support improved outcomes. Following an SLT held in December 2024 it was agreed that the DCS will chair a monthly Practice Panel, attended by core SLT, which will focus on inadequate audits and tracking of improvements.

The Principal Social Worker has also increased the frequency of action learning sets to monthly until July 2025 for Management Oversight and Supervision and has added an additional session in January 2025 to target managers where inadequate and requires improvement grades have been seen.

2. Financial Implications

None

3. Legal Implications

None

4. Corporate Risk Implications

None

5 Staffing HR Implications

None

6 Conclusion

None

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.
Impact on Children and Young People: Yes Any implications on the impact on children and young people is set out within the appendices attached to this report.
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will have a Negative impact.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Services & Commercial (FD.7917/25.....) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.6017/15.) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

Not applicable

Implementation Date for the Decision :

Immediately following the Committee meeting

Contact Officer:	Nabeel Chaudhry
Telephone Number:	07773844494
Email Address:	Nabeel.chaudhry@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

There are no appendices to this report

Background Papers:

Attached