CASE STUDY

Using Enable Audit to help improve safeguarding effectiveness

A Virtual College Case Study

WIRRAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

The **background**

The Wirral Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) is the statutory agency in Wirral responsible for ensuring agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The WSCB is also responsible for testing and reporting on the strength of safeguarding arrangements across partner agencies.

The WSCB multi-agency partnership includes the local authority, children's services, the health economy, nurseries, schools and colleges, youth services, police, probation, housing and voluntary, community and faith organisations.

The WSCB tests the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in partner agencies through a variety of ways which focus on how confident and competent partners are to safeguard children. For example, the WSCB will test whether all staff in partner agencies fully understand what they should do if they have concerns about a child's welfare.

In order to fulfil its duties under the 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015' statutory guidance, the WSCB undertakes two major audits: the Section 175 audit specifically for schools and colleges and the Section 11 audit for partner agencies. Both audits aim to test the effectiveness of safeguarding provision.

The **challenge**

At WSCB, the audit used to take the form of a postal, paper-based questionnaire.

This was sent to partner agencies who would be asked to respond to the questions and submit supporting evidence. David Robbins, business manager for WSCB, explained: "I would work through the responses, creating an Excel spreadsheet to help me analyse the results."

"Evidence would come back in different formats, some with illegible handwriting, so it was really difficult to administer."

"Sometimes the evidence provided was huge. One partner sent 10 parcels which must have weighed 60 kilos! "

"Even when we moved to email, some of the responses were extremely lengthy."

Overall, the task was onerous and it was especially difficult to keep track of who was responding and who was not on track.

The result was that, from the questionnaire being issued, it would take 18 months before David could produce his reports for the Board which would make a series of recommendations from which action plans would be derived.

The **solution**

WSCB now uses Enable Audit from Virtual College to operate its Section 175 and Section 11 audits.

This is an online auditing system designed to simplify the process of any audit. A selection of ready-made templates is available or unique audits can be created using a simple visual editor.

The browser-based interface allows log on access from mobiles and any computer at any time.

Information can be gathered in a central system where documents, photos and reports can be uploaded for everyone to access. Every action can be recorded to create a precise audit trail with visual indicators to show scores and progression.

Multiple audits can be created, extensive information captured and detailed reports generated - quickly and easily.

At a glance, users can see a snapshot of their progress and the actions that need to be completed.

These action plans can be shared in seconds with individuals, organisations or partner agencies. Comparative reports can be produced to view progress of the whole or segmented parts of the audit.

In 2015, WSCB was a partner in the pan Merseyside audit arrangement which published single Merseyside Section 11 and Section 175 audits.

The pan Merseyside approach benefitted cross border agencies such as Merseyside Police who previously would have had to complete 5 audits for 5 different LSCBs; they now do just one - using Enable Audit.

"When we acquired Enable Audit, we did a series of multi-agency briefings so everyone would understand how to use the system, followed by a campaign to get partners logged on," David reported.
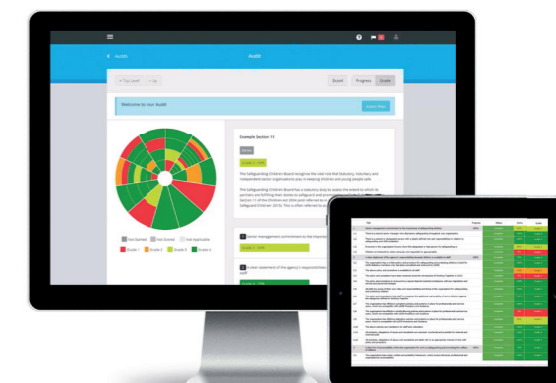
The **results**

The audit process is now much shorter. This year the audits were launched on 1st March and closed on 31st July.

David said: "During this period we can run reports to see who has not logged on and alert them with email reminders."

"The tool makes it much easier for us to support our partners."

At the end of each month, David makes a presentation to the partner agency representatives, highlighting those who have not made progress on their audit with a clear RAG rating to show where there are other concerns. This allows their representatives to go back and have conversations with their colleagues.

Now action can be taken on a more immediate, ongoing basis rather than waiting until the end of an 18 month audit process. Over half of the partners now put action plans in place on a continuous basis, as the system makes it easy to do this. Early intervention is likely to have a positive impact on the quality of safeguarding provision.

There are 130 schools which come under the WSCB area so they are the greatest users of Enable Audit.

David can use the quieter summer period, when schools are on holiday, to analyse the responses and get the report ready for publication on 1 September. Once the information is on the system it provides much more flexibility for reporting and focus.

"We have been able to reduce the audit programme period so significantly because we are using Enable Audit," said David.

"Getting safeguarding audit responses from our partners was one of the board's biggest challenges but Enable Audit has allowed us to achieve a full report for the first time."

"Partners used to have to do the whole audit in one go, locking themselves in a room and surrounding themselves with paper work. The process is now much more manageable enabling users to dip in and out of the audit quickly and easily. Our partners say they find it much easier now that they can simply upload the information online."

WSCB is now able to do shorter Section 11 and Section 175 audits, complemented by smaller audits focussed on specific topics.

For example, in March there may be a 5 question audit around child sexual exploitation followed by a short domestic abuse audit in June. This allows WSCB to focus and prioritise around specific issues.

David concluded: "Enable Audit has saved us a lot of time and I am much more confident in our ability to assess the effectiveness of our partner agencies."

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Phone
01943 885083

Email
info@safeguardingchildrenea.co.uk

Web
www.safeguardingchildrenea.co.uk