



**Phew!**

# NATIONAL AUDIT SURVEY REPORT 2023

An insight into children's safeguarding audits



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# Introduction

In October 2023, Phew launched a nationwide survey on children's safeguarding auditing, inviting children and joint safeguarding partnerships to provide their insights. This initiative was in response to the number of clients eager to understand diverse approaches to safeguarding audits across organisations.

The survey delved into key aspects, including the frequency of Section 11, Section 157/175, and Case Audits, the tools used for distribution and analysis, and the primary challenges faced.

The following pages detail the survey results. I hope that you'll be able to use this report to better understand how your safeguarding auditing practices compare to other partnerships, and use it to implement best practice methods. Thank you to all participants for their valuable contributions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Burgess', with a long, sweeping underline.

**Matthew Burgess**

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Phew

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If you'd like to add your voice to the next survey, please get in touch as we'd be delighted to have your contribution.





# Executive Summary

This executive summary provides an overview of audit practices based on respondent insights. Focusing on Section 11 Audits, Section 175/157 Audits, and Case Audits/Rapid Reviews, it highlights general trends in frequency, distribution, and tool usage.

## Section 11 Audits

The survey revealed distinct patterns in the approach to Section 11 audits, with the majority of respondents opting for a biennial frequency, while the most common months for distributing them is September, May, and June.

Software tools are prevalent in the audit process, followed by the use of Excel or Google Sheets.

Challenges encountered with conducting Section 11 audits include issues of capacity, communication, timeliness, and buy-in from stakeholders.

## Section 175/157 Audits

In the realm of Section 175/157 audits, the majority conduct them on an annual basis, with September being the predominant month for issuing them. Similar to Section 11, software tools are the favoured method.

## Case Audit and Rapid Reviews

Case Audits and Rapid Reviews present a varied landscape, with responses indicating frequencies range from 1 to approximately 50 per year.

Manual paper-based methods are prominent, followed by the use of software tools.

Safeguarding Partnerships most commonly take the lead in managing Case Audits.

# Methodology

The survey aimed to comprehensively assess child safeguarding practices across the UK. Conducted online between 10th October and 22nd December 2023. The target audience included children and joint safeguarding boards, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive perspective on the state of child protection practices.

A strategic and inclusive stratified sampling approach was adopted to capture diverse demographics and regional nuances. The survey was distributed via email to all relevant stakeholders, encompassing individuals actively engaged in child safeguarding activities.

This method ensured a broad representation within the sample, enhancing the survey's ability to reflect the varied landscape of child protection efforts across the nation.

The survey incorporated a mix of question types to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, which were dropdown, open-ended and single-answer. Reminders were periodically sent to maximise participation during the survey period, which spanned over two months, allowing flexibility for busy schedules.





# Analysis of Section 11 Audits

## The frequency of Section 11 Audits

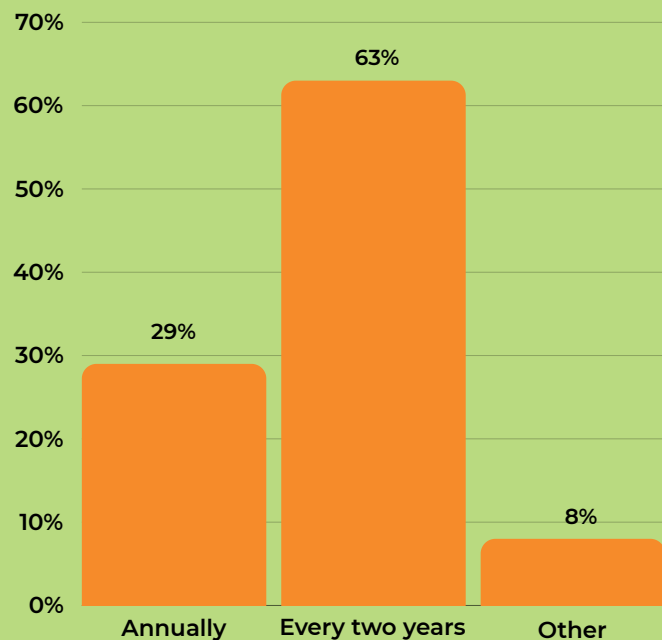
### Outcome

The majority of respondents (63%) conduct Section 11 audits every two years.

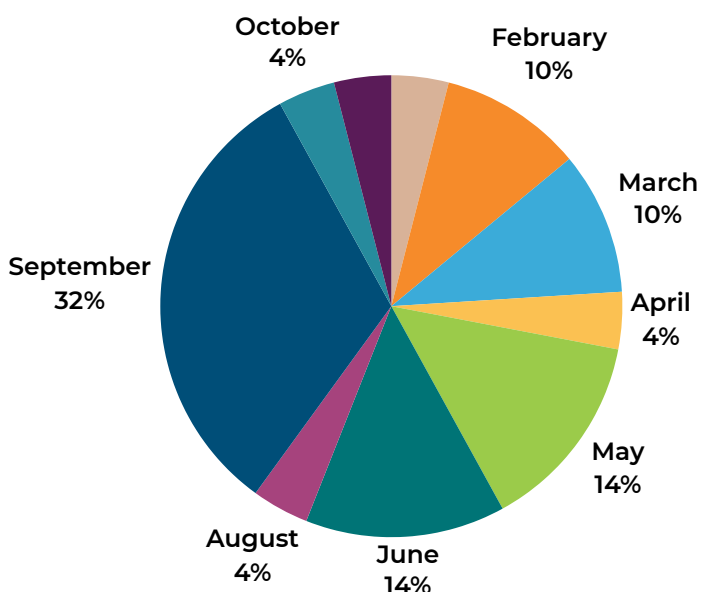
29% conduct Section 11 audits annually.

8% provided an "other" response:

- One organisation has not completed a Section 11 since 2017. An audit was launched in June 2023, however they will not be completing them after this one.
- A different approach was taken for the last one in 2021, and it was practitioner based, but they anticipate a new Section 11 audit will be conducted in 2024.



## The month the audit is sent out



### Outcome

The most common month for sending out Section 11 audits is September, taking up 32% of the total responses, followed by May and June, each representing 14%.

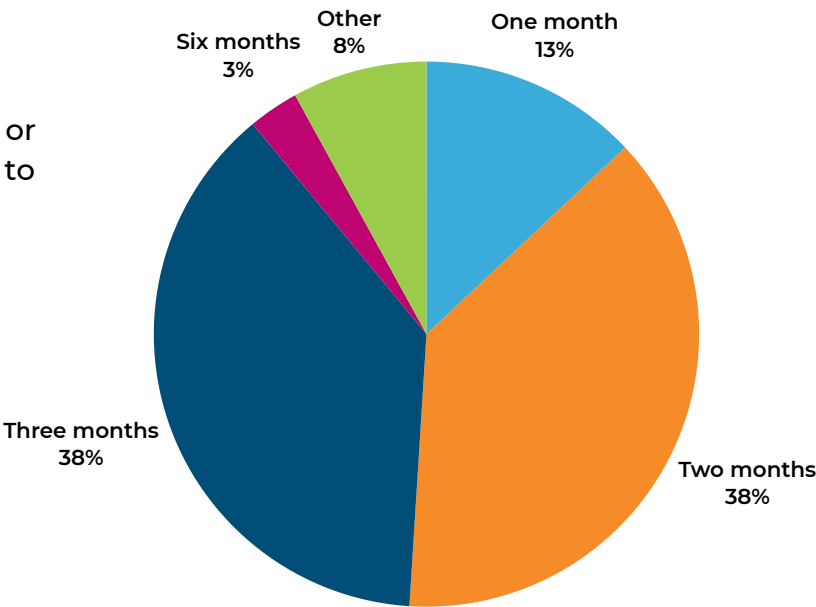


# The length of time given for responses

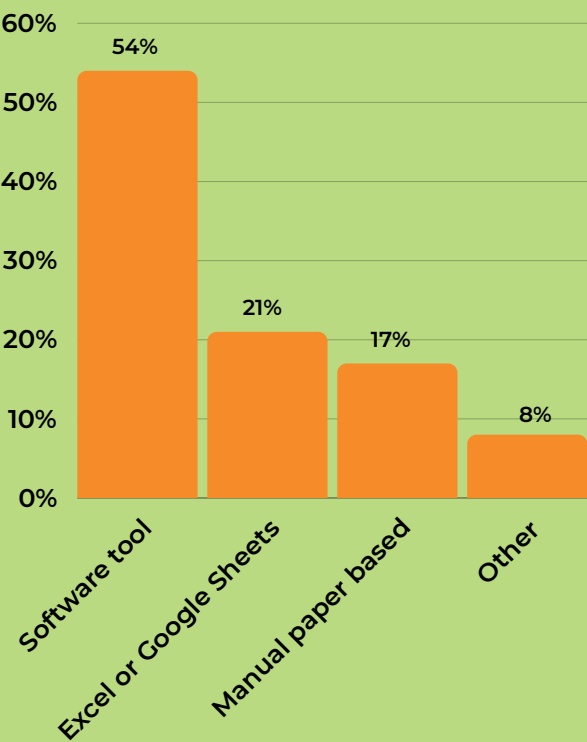
## Outcome

The majority of respondents (76%) give partners either two or three months to respond fully to the Section 11 audit.

There are variations, with 13% providing one month, and 8% providing other durations (5 months and 6 weeks).



# The method used for distribution



## Outcome

The majority of respondents (54%) use software tools to carry out Section 11 audits.

A significant portion (21%) utilises Excel or Google Sheets for the audits.

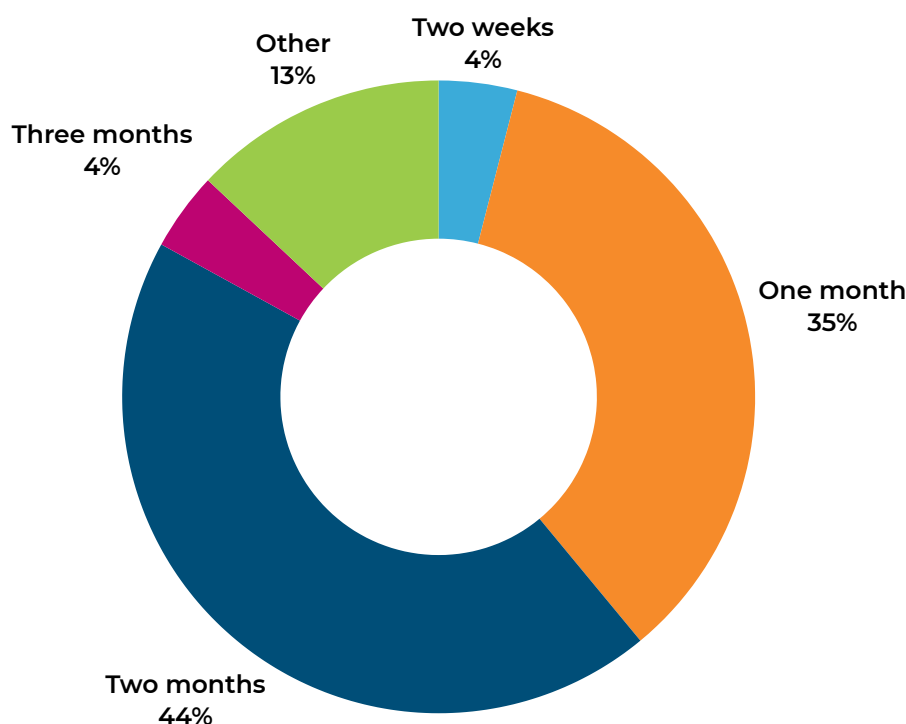
Around 17% still use manual paper-based methods.

“Other” responses included:

- One organisation engaged the services of a private survey company.
- Another used a web-based survey tool but will no longer be using it.



# The length of time to report on the audit



### Outcome

The most common response is that it takes two months (44%) to report on the Section 11 audit.

Further responses include one month (35%), two weeks (4%), and three months (4%).

For “other”, the responses were:

- Almost immediately due to using the Phew Audit System.
- Reporting is completed once a moderation day has been held so that it can be incorporated into the report.
- It varies from contributor to contributor, and the organisation spends the whole year evaluating and scrutinising reports over a rolling period.



# Key challenges faced when conducting the Section 11 Audits

### Capacity

- Capacity issues within agencies for completing audits within specified timeframes.
- Challenges in managing the workload, especially when there is a high turnover of staff.

### Communication and engagement

- Difficulty in getting everyone on board to complete the audit.
- Communication and response challenges from agencies that do not regularly engage with the partnership but have a statutory duty under Section 11.

### Timeliness and timing

- Challenges in avoiding clashes with other safeguarding audits.
- Difficulties in finding the right balance in terms of timings, especially with agencies experiencing different pressures in different months.

### Process and system issues

- Challenges in implementing new systems or processes.
- Learning curve associated with new audit tools or systems.
- System issues and the need for ongoing support for professionals using the system.
- Standardisation and consistency:
- Inconsistencies in responses from agencies.
- Challenges in standardising questions to make sense for all organisations completing the audit.

### Buy-in and engagement

- Difficulty in gaining buy-in from all stages of the process, particularly in new processes with multiple stages.
- Challenges in engaging frontline practitioners and senior management from partner agencies.

### Data analysis and follow-up

- Challenges in the analysis of data.
- Difficulty in doing follow-up work in the interim year.
- Constant chasing of partners to engage and follow up on learning and actions resulting from the audit.

### Collation and gathering of responses

- Manual collation of responses, especially when dealing with a large number of agencies or schools.
- Challenges in collating data from multiple sources.

### Inter-partnership coordination

- Clash with neighbouring boroughs, where partners have to complete audits for multiple partnerships.
- Coordination challenges in gathering returns and assurance from agencies for completion of the audit.

### Quality of responses

- Challenges related to the quality of responses, including difficulties in standardising questions.





# Analysis of Section 175/157 Audits

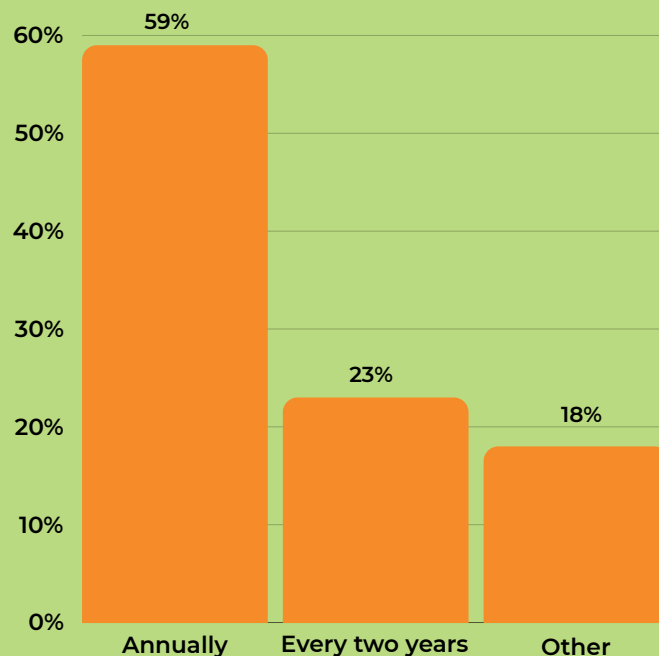
## The frequency of Section 175/157 Audits



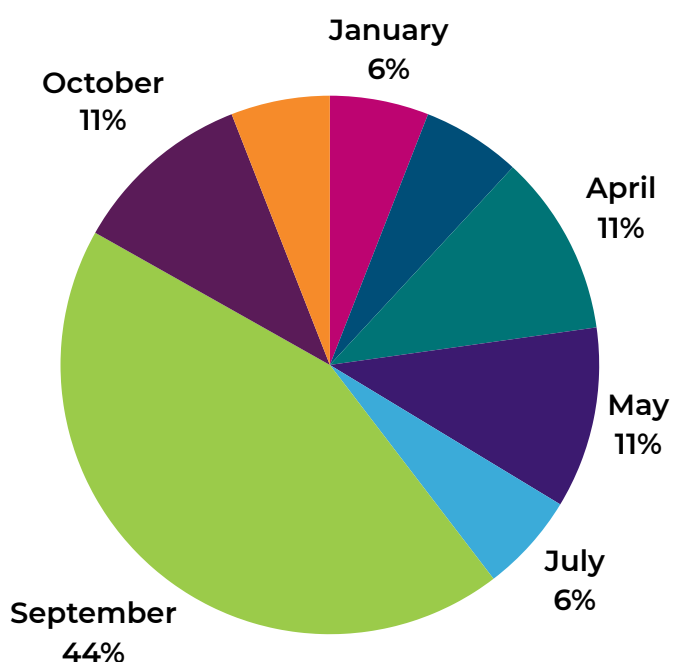
### Outcome

The most common response is that Section 175/157 audits are conducted annually (59%).

A significant portion (23%) conduct these audits every two years.



## The month the audit is sent out



### Outcome

The most common response for sending out Section 175/157 audits is September with 44% of respondents selecting the month, followed by April, May and October at 11%.



# The length of time given for responses

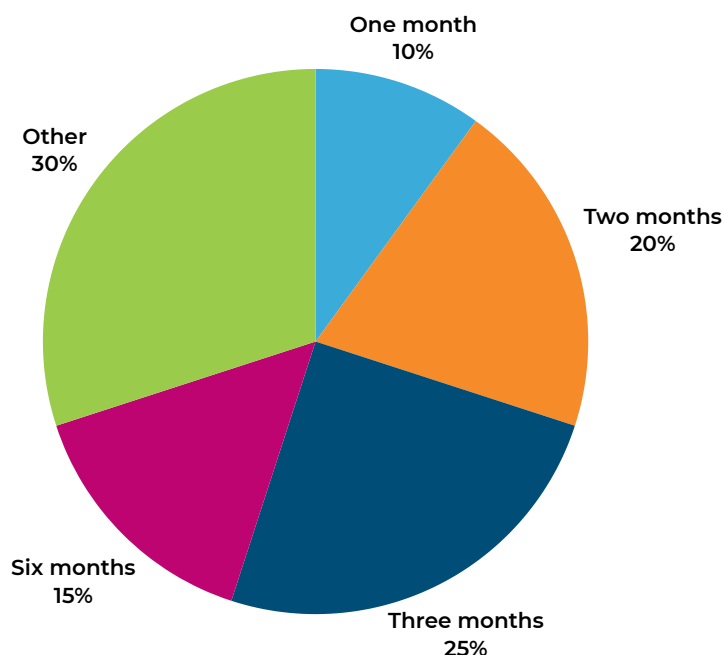


## Outcome

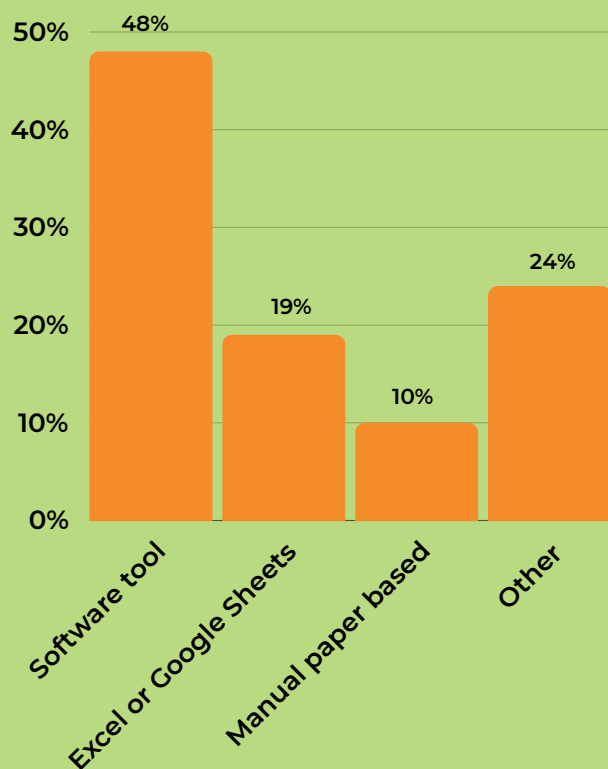
The most common response was "other," indicating variations in the duration given for schools/settings to respond fully to the Section 175/157 audit (30%). These answers included:

- Six weeks.
- Four months/term and a half.
- 10 months.
- Approximately six to eight weeks.
- Education manages this so unsure.

The following frequently occurring duration is three months, representing 25% of the responses.



# The method used for distribution



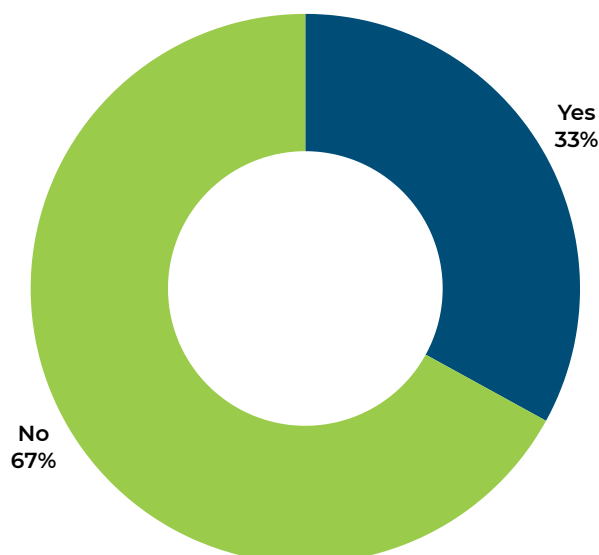
## Outcome

The most common method used for Section 175/157 audits is a software tool (48%).

"Other" was the next most popular response (24%) and these consisted of:

- Use an internal system.
- Use a private survey company.
- Forms.
- Email submissions.
- Education colleagues use a tool and the survey was passed to them for their input.

## Identifying whether numeric data collection is used in the audit



## The rationale for this decision

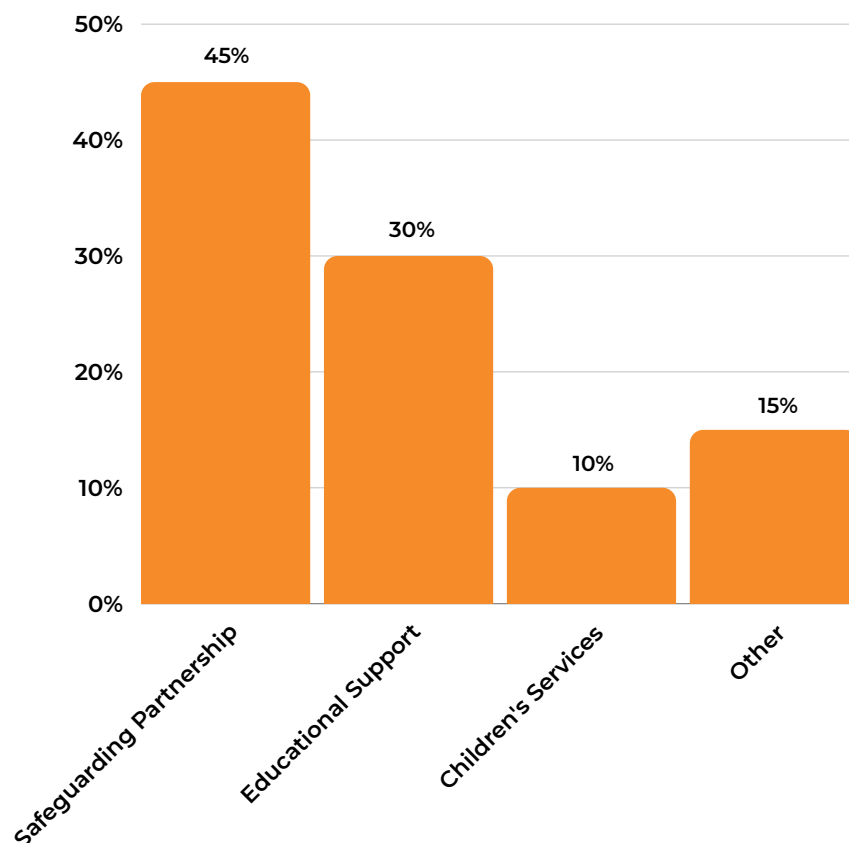
### Numeric data collection used (Yes):

- The region is a huge authority and we want statistical data as well as qualitative.
- To gain intelligence of how many children are identified with EHCP/SEND CP/CIN.
- To report against themes and trends in each school area. Also ensure each setting has the appropriate policies, procedures and training in place in their setting in order to support the volume of children with specific safeguarding needs.
- To align the audit tool with "Keeping Children Safe in Education" criteria.

### Numeric data collection not used (No):

- This level of data is collected and held by our colleagues in Education.
- Not required for this audit.
- Have previously found this method to be inaccurate.
- We report on that data through other mechanisms in the partnership.
- Review of current process is required.
- There would be no requirement to collect data to demonstrate compliance with Section 175/57 audits under Keeping Children Safe in Education.

## The team that manages the audit



### Outcome

The majority of responses indicate that the Section 175/157 audit is managed by the safeguarding Partnership (45%).

Educational Support is the next for who manages the audit (30%).

“Other” represented 15% and the answers for these were:

- The Quality Improvement and Safeguarding Strategy Manager.
- The Partnership Business Office and Safeguarding in Education Service jointly.
- There is an agreement for the Safeguarding Partnership team to assist. This is under review as suggested it should be Education Support.



# Key challenges faced when conducting Section 175/157 Audits

### Responses and evidence challenges

- Ensuring responses from all schools/educational settings by the deadline.
- Ensuring responses have a sufficient level of evidence to support rating judgments.
- Triangulation of information/data.

### Operational challenges

- Capacity and time constraints to create and update audits aligned with statutory guidance.
- Analysing patterns, trends annually and over time.
- Obtaining "buy-in" from schools/academies due to their internal audit schedules.
- Balancing quality over quantity to avoid a tick-box exercise and not requesting too much information/evidence/documents.
- Conflict with academies working across multiple local authorities.

### Scale challenges

- Managing a large number of schools.
- Auditing early years settings (approximately 1700) and needing a more efficient approach.

### Engagement challenges

- Support and engagement with the private and voluntary sector.
- Responses from non-maintained schools.
- Schools finding the audit tedious and lengthy.
- Ensuring schools understand the purpose of the audit and reaching a majority decision on the most effective time for reflection.

### Timing challenges

- Aligning the audit with new Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) publications.
- Fitting analysis into partnership work programs and activities, considering the misalignment of the school year and fiscal year.
- The length of time it takes to complete, chase up answers, and analyse the data.
- Timing challenges, possibly related to the scheduling of the audit.

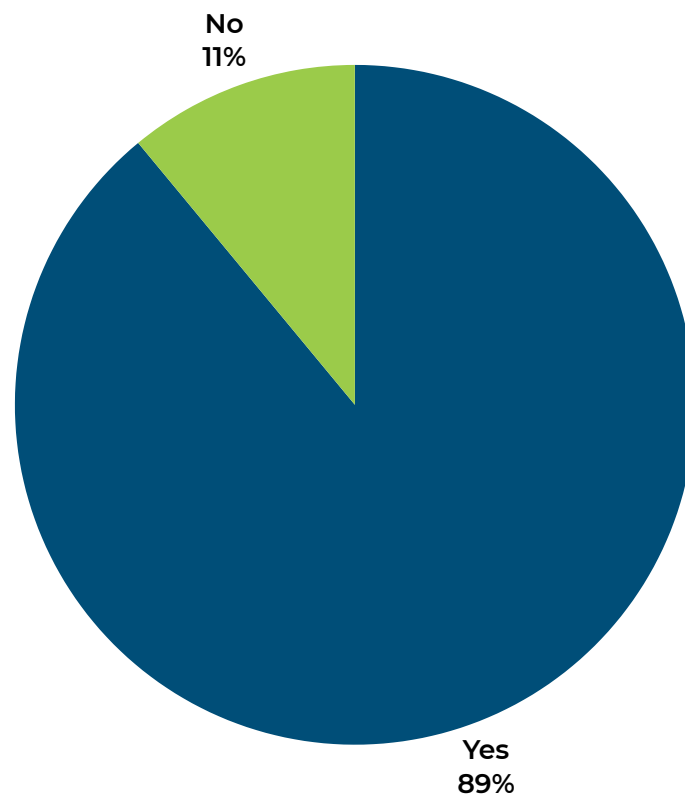
### Tools and quality assurance challenges

- Finding a tool that enables quick analysis of all the data (tool selection challenge).
- Quality assuring the responses, including dip sampling/blind visits.





## The consideration of using the audit as a tool for settings to update progress if there was an audit trail of the changes



### Outcome

89% of respondents answered 'Yes' to being open to using the Section 175/157 audit as a tool for settings to update progress if there was an audit trail of changes, which was significantly more than 'No' (11%).



# Analysis of Case Audits and Rapid Reviews

# The amount of Case Audits/Rapid Reviews conducted on average per year

### Outcome

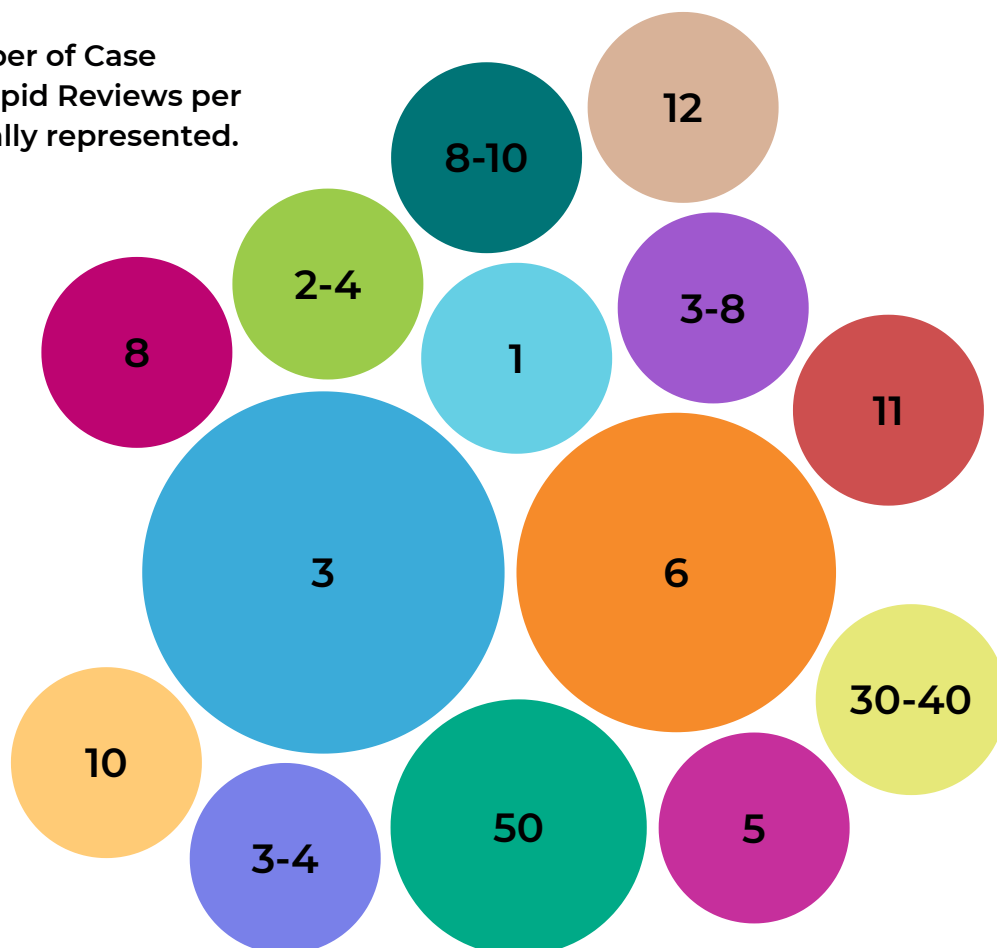
The responses to this open-ended question vary widely, with most falling within the range of one to 12 audits/reviews per year. The most answered amounts were three (18%) and six (14%).

A couple of respondents stated higher than average numbers, which were 30 to 40 and approximately 50.

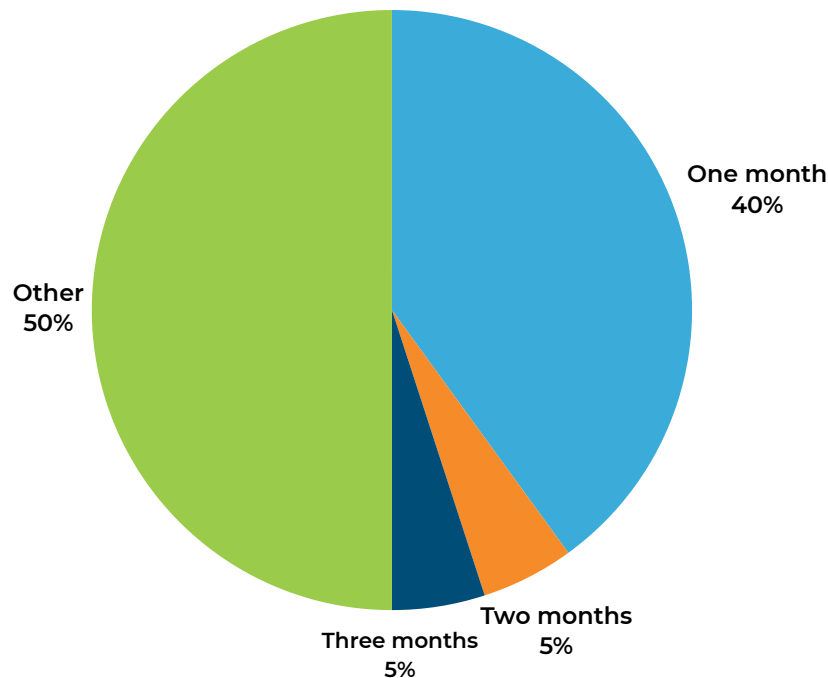
There was some elaboration on answers, which included:

- One deep dive per year and a revisit of a previous deep dive the following year, four themed multi agency audits and four per Local Authority Rapid Reviews
- One deep dive Case Audit but from 2024/25 will increase to quarterly. Rapid Reviews on average three to four, but variable.

The number of Case Audits/Rapid Reviews per year visually represented.



# The length of time given for responses



### Outcome

40% of responses state a one-month response time, whilst “other” was 50%.

Under “other”, the answers showed that Rapid Reviews have varying response timelines, with mentions of five days, 10 to 15 working days, and 15 working days.

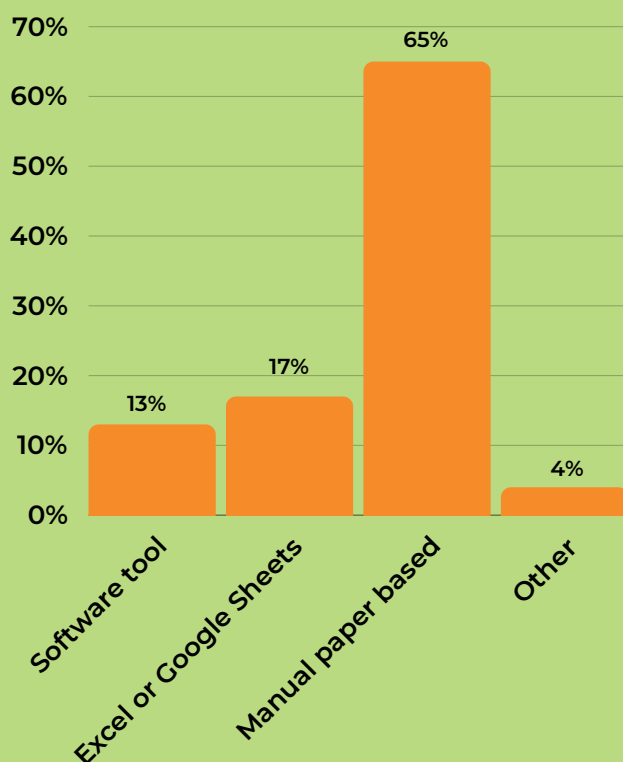
Some responses highlight statutory requirements for Rapid Reviews to be completed within specific timeframes.

Answers specifically for Case Audits include two to three weeks, four weeks, six weeks, and around a month.

Other variations include four to six weeks, 10 working days, and one to two weeks for the audits/reviews.



## The method used for distribution



### Outcome

The most common method for distributing Case Audits/Rapid Reviews is via paper (65%), which is very different to answers for the same question regarding Section 11 and Section 175/157 (software tools are predominantly used).

The “other” answer stated:

- For Rapid Reviews we follow the national guidance.

## The team that manages Case Audits

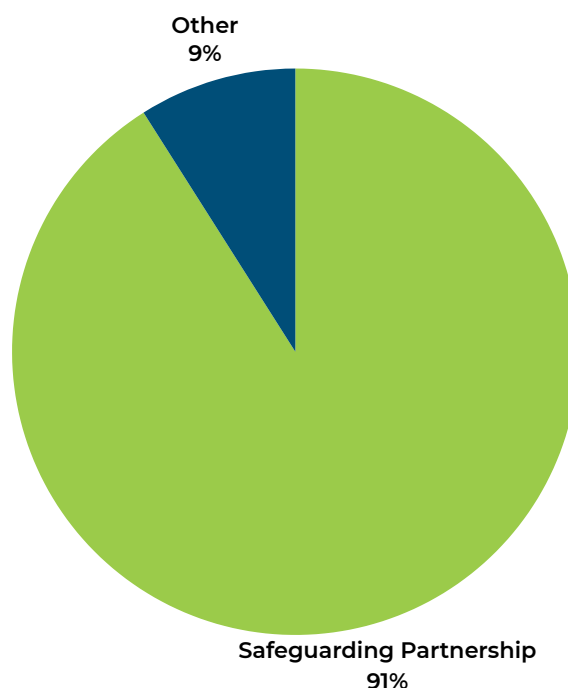


### Outcome

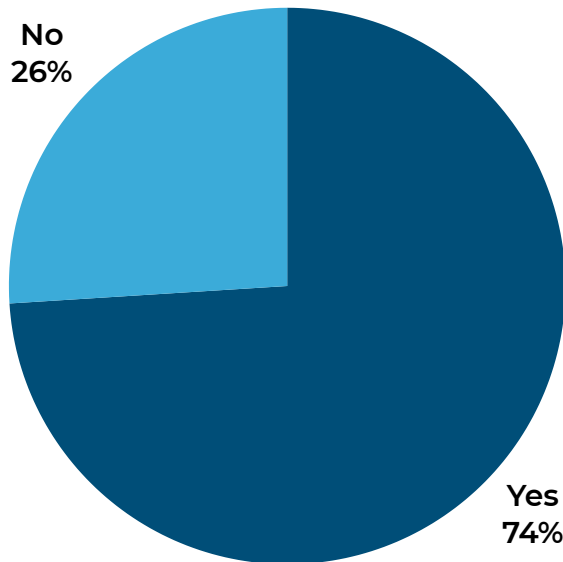
It is clear to see that the Safeguarding Partnership manages Case Audits, with 91% of responses.

The “other” answer was:

- Quality Assurance Manager or Quality Assurance Assistant



## Organisations are asked to complete chronologies within Case Audits



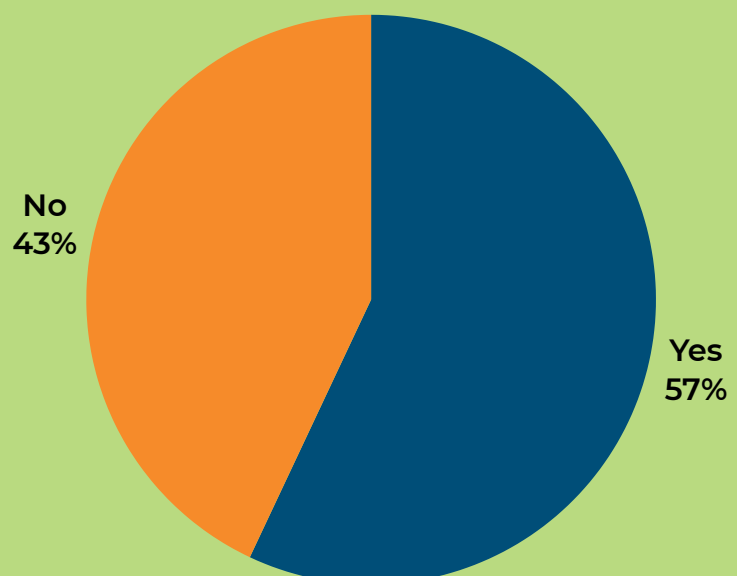
### Outcome

The majority of respondents (74%) stated that they ask organisations to complete chronologies within Case Audits.

## Whether there is a dedicated QA staff in the Partnership

### Outcome

Just over half of the partnerships surveyed have dedicated QA staff (57%).



# Phew!

If you'd like to add your voice to the next survey, please get in touch as we'd be delighted to have your contribution.

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