

# **Supervision and Line Management Policy**

Bedford Borough Children's Services

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## Introduction

1.1 This policy outlines the shared approach to supervision and line management (including case management and performance management) for social workers and other social care staff across Bedford Borough Children's Services. The overall purpose is to define the key accountabilities of the supervisee and supervisor/line manager, outlining what needs to be addressed through line management arrangements. It also aims to ensure that both parties are aware of what constitutes professional supervision, its importance and what contribution they need to make to create a mutually positive and effective supervision process.

## Definitions

2.1 Supervisors in their role as line managers are responsible for a broad range of management activities with supervisees including quality assurance of practice, management of service delivery, teaching and enabling of professional development. Such features and functions hold both the case holding supervisee and supervisor to account for their practice by being aligned to organisational values, professional standards of conduct and statutory guidelines and regulations.

2.2 In addition to these activities, this policy emphasises the need for effective professional supervision to be provided for all case holding social workers and other social care staff. Professional supervision is defined as a process that allows the supervisee to explore and reflect on their direct work and plans for children and families, considering what is happening for those children and families, to reflect on the effectiveness of interventions and invite critical challenge.

2.3 Whilst professional supervision, as outlined in this policy focuses on the individual one-to-one meeting between supervisor and supervisee, it should also be acknowledged

that a range of wider supervision opportunities are available and take place, including the professional support available between formal supervision, including case consultation meetings and peer support from within the team and the multi-agency network.

## **Applicability and scope**

3.1 The Supervision and Line Management policy applies to all social workers and social care practitioners in Children's Social Care at Bedford Borough Children's Services. It also applies to the Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance teams, staff employed on a temporary (including agency staff) basis and supervisors employed by other agencies with responsibility for the supervision of children's social care staff.

## **The importance of professional supervision**

4.1 Supervision within the context of children's social care can include multiple purposes and priorities. However, it has been acknowledged that the "common experience amongst social workers is that the few supervision opportunities are dominated by a managerial need to focus on performance, for example, throughput, case closure, adhering to timescales and the completion of written records. This leaves little time for thoughtful consideration of what is happening in the lives of children and their families...Critical challenge is needed to help social workers catch such biases and correct them – hence the importance of supervision".<sup>1</sup>

4.2 While line management and professional supervision involving thoughtful consideration and critical challenge may be undertaken by the same person, it is important that supervisors are clear about the distinctions between these elements. Supervisors must ensure that the demands of line management do not happen at the expense of supervision as outlined in 2.2 above. A main focus of supervision should be the generation of ideas to develop practice. It is not the same thing as the management of risk, although these aspects may overlap. Thus the key functions of management oversight and professional supervision may, where appropriate, available and formally agreed, be undertaken by different people or in groups.

## **The supervisory relationship: power and difference**

5.1 There are many areas of difference between individuals and groups of people where unequal power or access and social prejudice are well known to be active. These are likely to affect the supervisory relationship, and in turn relationships with families and the different meanings that we might attribute to behaviours and ideas. John Burnham (1993) introduced the acronym GRRRAACCEESS (Gender (Sexism), Geography; Race (Racism), Religion; Age (Age-ism), Ability, Appearance; Class, Culture; Ethnicity, Education, Employment; Sexuality, Sexual orientation, Spirituality) as a tool to use within supervision. It is important that supervisors and supervisees are conscious of these differences and attend to the prejudices and biases we all bring to the work we undertake and that these should continuously inform the development of practice that takes place within professional supervision.

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<sup>1</sup> Munro, 2011: 115: *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report: A Child-Centred System*. TSO: London.

## Roles and responsibilities

6.1 **The Director** is responsible for ensuring that the Directorate meets its legal responsibilities corporately and so has overall responsibility for the supervision and line management policy in Children's Services.

6.2 **The service areas** are responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place for their members of staff to have regular one-to-one supervision meetings with their manager and others as appropriate. They have a particular responsibility for ensuring that supervisors are supported and provided training opportunities to facilitate effective supervision and line management, and that the requisite frequency and quality of these meetings are monitored.

6.3 **The Head of Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance Service** is responsible for ensuring that all relevant members of staff in this service have regular supervision and line management. The Service also has a role in monitoring the frequency and quality of supervision.

6.4 **Managers/Supervisors** are expected to provide regular meetings with staff that they manage and/or supervise which:

- Are well-structured, allowing both parties to contribute to the agenda
- Are provided in an appropriate setting and free of interruptions
- Reflect the emotional impact of work to ensure safe practice and the well-being of the supervisee
- Include sufficient time and space for professional supervision as defined in this policy, either as part of wider line management meetings or on separate, defined occasions
- Focus on the evidence base for assessment, planning and decision making
- Are targeted to identify and address training and development needs to support effective practice
- Focus on organisational priorities and target setting for performance reviews
- Incorporate professional development discussions based on the professional capabilities framework and professional standards
- Are accurately and appropriately recorded and agreed by both parties. Any differences should be noted.

6.5 There may be situations where two or more managers or supervisors can agree to take responsibility for different elements of supervision in consultation with the supervisee. In these cases, regular three way meetings should be arranged at a frequency agreed between both managers to ensure everyone is clear about the case direction. For example when children are known to Fostering or in Private Fostering arrangements; the Youth Offending Team; Early Help; and age differences across teams.

6.6 **Supervisees are expected to:**

- Prepare for each supervision meeting
- As part of professional supervision, adopt a reflective approach and be prepared to critically analyse their own practice, and the impact on service users and the organisation

- Openly share thoughts and ideas, and accept the influence of others to find solutions to issues and reach sound professional judgments in cases of assessment
- Be aware of professional standards, organisational priorities, policies and procedures and how these relate to the supervisee's own performance
- Be ready to identify professional development needs, plan and undertake training and other development activities as agreed with their supervisor
- Check and read the notes of supervision meetings and follow through and complete any actions against agreed timescales

## The policy context

7.1 Staff are expected to update themselves on national policy developments and organisational procedures to maintain knowledge and skills essential to their work and social work practice. This extends to applying evidence of best practice, lessons learned from public inquiries and serious case reviews, inspection reports and knowledge about evidence based interventions to promote better outcomes for children and families.

7.2 Supervisors in their role as line manager will need to understand and refer to the Councils' codes of conduct, and other relevant procedures on good conduct to address any performance issues that are a cause for concern. For those supervising registered social workers, they need to apply knowledge and monitor compliance with professional standards issued by Social Work England.

## The frequency, structure and documentation of professional supervision

8.1 Decisions about how supervisory discussions are documented, where and when professional supervision takes place and how and what is discussed should be negotiated and agreed within the supervisory relationship. The arrangements should be meaningful, appropriate and purposeful according to the individual circumstances of the supervisee.

8.2 At the start of a new supervisory relationship, a collaborative agreement is discussed and recorded in professional supervision. This can be revisited at any time in the supervisory relationship.

## Case Management and Performance management

9.1 Managers and supervisors have responsibilities to ensure the local performance management system is applied effectively to social workers and other social care practitioners including:

- a) **Individual performance:** this includes setting work objectives and monitoring the supervisee's capacity to carry out the functions in the job description. It provides the space for setting appropriate and challenging targets that are reviewed within the context of the annual performance appraisal process. It should also identify the individual's professional development needs, and actions to address these should be agreed within the process.

- b) The case management and care planning:** The overall objective of this process is to monitor and evidence that services users receive a high quality service. It ensures compliance with professional standards and statutory regulations to fulfil organisational responsibilities. It forms part of the performance monitoring system and national indicators that are linked to internal service standards and Ofsted inspection frameworks.

9.2 Documentation of management oversight of case work should be recorded on the child's file and available to both the supervisor and supervisee, the supervisor's manager or any other person with a reason to access. This might include senior managers and performance staff for audit and quality assurance processes, investigation officers and inspectors. Professional supervision documentation should also be available to both supervisor and supervisee, using the agreed pro-forma.

## Monitoring and Quality Assurance

10.1 In order to be effective, the general provision of professional supervision and case management should be monitored and quality assured. The key processes to carry out these functions is the Collaborative Learning Discussion, six monthly analysis and Practice Weeks. People providing supervision will be provided with opportunities for feedback on their supervision.

10.2 The annual Social Work Health Check (LGA) will provide independent feedback from social workers on their experience of supervision.

10.3 The manager auditing the case and work carried out will consider and assess what happens in supervision, how often the case is discussed, opportunities for critical reflection (including through formal supervision and in other ways) and what else practitioners think they need to assist in working effectively with the family concerned. Auditors will consider the following in assessing the quality of supervision:

- Does the worker feel they are getting good direction about how to work with this family? (in the guidance for completing CLD's there are some suggested questions for eliciting reflective discussion on the quality of management oversight).
- Is there evidence of line management accountability and oversight on file?
- Is supervision taking place at the required frequency?
- Is there evidence of supervision on the case record?

10.3 An assessment of the quality of the casework including the role of supervision will be made for each case, based on a conversation with the practitioner and review of evidence on the case file. Areas for improvement on individual cases will be relayed to the allocated practitioner and manager.

10.4 Common themes identified across the service, including in relation to the effectiveness of supervision will be addressed through the six monthly analysis of CLD's. Any action plan derived from this will be reviewed at the monthly Quality Assurance Board. Supervision will also be a theme in Practice Weeks.