

Practice Briefing 01/2009

Supervision in Social Care.

The purpose of this Practice Briefing is to set out how supervision is to be delivered to all social care staff and explains the requirements and processes for supervision whether you are a supervisor or a practitioner.

1. The Importance of Supervision:

- 1.1 Effective supervision is a core component of performance management and staff development within the Isle of Wight Council. Supervision helps to ensure we are fulfilling our statutory duties and responsibilities as a safeguarding agency, supporting children and families across the Isle of Wight and working to improve outcomes for the children and young people we work with. Supervision forges a line of accountability between our service users, the employee and the organisation.
- 1.2 For supervision to add value it needs to ensure that both supervisors and practitioners across the whole Targeted Intervention Division are clear about their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities. An effective supervision system has benefits for service users because it will have a direct impact on the quality of the work we undertake and is therefore able to contribute to better outcomes for children and young people. For staff it needs to encourage professional development and provide support in managing the complex demands of the work.

2. Supervision and what it consists of:

2.1 Supervision is defined as

A process by which one worker is given responsibility by the organisation to work with another worker. The objective is to meet certain organisational, professional and personal objectives in order to promote positive outcomes for the children and young people we work with.

2.2 The approved model of supervision covers four distinct functions which are:

Performance Management ~ ensuring competent accountable practice
Development ~ ensuring continuing professional development
Support ~ providing personal support
Mediation ~ ensuring that staff are engaged with the organisation.

2.3 This model applies to all staff at all levels of line management. It does not mean that all functions will be given equal time and importance in every session, but over time all should be visited and none should dominate unduly.

2.4 Appendix 1 of this Practice Briefing gives more details of the different functions of supervision identified by Wonnacott.¹

¹ Wonnacott, J - 2003 – “The Impact of Supervision on Child Protection Practice- A Study of Process & Outcome”, University of Sussex MPhil, in Morrison, T - 2005 – “Staff Supervision in Social Care”- London. Pavilion

- 2.5 Looking at the approaches to supervision described in appendix 1 of this Practice Briefing an '*active-reflective*' approach is likely to be the appropriate to most staff in most situations. Dependant on individual needs at any given time a more '*active-intrusive*' approach may be required. In either event, the supervisor should encourage the practitioner to use supervision as an opportunity to reflect on each case under discussion.
- 2.6 The laissez-faire approach to supervision - although common in social care settings in the past - is not recommended. Decisions as to the approach required should be formed by the evidence gathered by the supervisor. Appendix 2 of this Practice Briefing details approaches to supervision.*
- 2.7 If another colleague is contributing to the overall supervision process e.g. a Practice Assessor, peer mentor or practice supervisor then this should be clarified and recorded on the supervision contract.

3. Challenge and addressing risk in supervision:

- 3.1 Recent research has indicated that assessments are fallible and the contexts (within which our clients live and we operate) are constantly changing; and also that the single most important factor in minimising errors is to admit you might be wrong (Munro 2008)².
- 3.2 Key messages from research show that it is difficult for front line staff, when working with high risk families, to remain open to constructive challenge and be willing to revise their initial views. Some people find it very difficult to change their assessment of a situation, despite new or conflicting evidence; on the other hand, other practitioners respond to new information by switching from one item or theory to the next, never reaching a coherent conclusion or co-ordinated response³.
- 3.3 In this context, supervision is crucial, as it can provide a safe but challenging forum in which cases can be overseen and reviewed with the help of a fresh, experienced pair of eyes.
- 3.4 Managers at all levels should work to ensure a "learning culture, with an ethos in which reflective practice and self-questioning are accepted and actively promoted"⁴ and supervision provides one of the best opportunities to deliver this.

4. Timing, planning and access to support:

- 4.1 Formal face to face supervision meetings must take place on a monthly basis and should usually last for a minimum of one and a half hours.

² Munro, E "A systems approach to investigating child abuse deaths", British Journal of Social Work, 35, 4, pp 531 - 546

³ Safeguarding: The oversight and review of cases in the light of changing circumstances and new information: how do people respond to new and challenging information?" Sheryl Burton, NCB (on C4EO website)

⁴ *ibid*, quoting Lord Laming's 2003 report

4.2 In the case of a newly qualified Social Worker (NQSW) as defined by the General Social Care Council, supervision must take place fortnightly and usually last for a minimum of one and a half hours.

4.3 Supervision should be planned, in accordance with an annual schedule of meetings.

4.4 Supervision sessions should be un-interrupted.

4.5 In addition, supervisors must complete a Development Review Record on an annual basis with each practitioner and the Personal Development Plan page should then be forwarded to the Workforce Development Team. This Development Review Record should be reviewed after six months.

4.6 All staff will also have access to their supervisor on an unplanned basis for urgent matters.

4.7 The supervision agenda should be jointly agreed at the start of each session and include a review of the action points from the previous session.

5. Recording of Supervision.

5.1 A written supervision agreement is to be agreed on an annual basis between the practitioner and supervisor with each retaining a copy.

5.2 All supervision discussions must be written up as soon as possible after each session, typed or written clearly and be signed or endorsed by both parties who will each retain a copy. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to record supervision but on occasions of not more than twice a year if it is agreed as a development activity the task may be designated to the practitioner. *This would usual be the case for prospective supervisors or student social workers.*

5.3 The write up must be explicit in recording any actions to be taken, by whom and by when around each agenda item.

5.4 Any actions/decisions that relate specifically to individual children and young people/cases must be recorded on the Integrated Childrens System (ICS) record by the supervisor.

5.5 The records of supervision remain the property of the Isle of Wight Council and may be subject to internal or external inspection.

6. Joint Responsibilities of Practitioner and Supervisor: ~

6.1 Ensure clarity of purpose when negotiating and agreeing the supervision contract

6.2 Locate individual supervision within the context of the wider working relationships between the practitioner, supervisor and the Isle of Wight Council

6.3 Be open to learning, feedback and challenge within a professional environment

6.4 Arrange dates in advance, including for the completion of the Developmental Review Record.

6.5 Within supervision discuss and plan how the variety of needs identified may be addressed outside the individual session.

6.6 Implement any agreed actions within the agreed timescales.

7. Supervisors' Responsibilities: ~

7.1 Maintain a balance between reflection and accountability; between positive feedback and constructive challenge; between celebrating strengths and identifying issues to be addressed.

7.2 Record supervision sessions promptly and clearly including recording all casework decisions on ICS.

7.3 Include workload considerations.

7.4 Ensure casework practice meets and complies with defined professional standards and certainly with statutory requirements.

7.5 Ensure compliance with safeguarding procedures

7.6 Ensure issues arising from case planning process are addressed.

7.7 Ensure a child-centred approach to all case work discussions.

Appendices.

Appendix 1 – The four functions of Supervision.

Appendix 2 - Approaches to Supervision.

Appendix 1 ~ The Four Key Functions of Supervision.

There are four key functions which support the Supervision and Development Review process. They give a balanced approach to the process through relying on one another. You cannot perform one element effectively without the others. This does not mean that they will all be given equal time and importance in every session but over time all should be visited and none should dominate unduly. As a result of any supervision session actions may be required by either party in relation to any of the key functions. These actions should be recorded appropriately.

Management ~	ensuring competent accountable practice
Development ~	ensuring continuing professional development
Support ~	providing personal support
Mediation ~	ensuring that staff are engaged with the organisation

Within the **management** function the supervisor should address:

- Overall management of the quality of the practitioner's work,
- Overall management of workload and priorities
- Provision of resources
- Provision of a safe working environment
- Professional discussion of practitioner's performance against individual, service and organisational objectives and national standards.

Within the **support** function the supervisor should:

- Support the practitioner both as a professional and as an individual person in their own right
- Support the practitioner to reflect on each case and think about what is going on – what is happening and why?
- Support the practitioner's well being at work

Within the **development** function the supervisor should:

- Identify the practitioner's individual strengths
- Identify areas for development (both generally and in respect of specific assessment, case management and practice issues) in order for the practitioner to progress and carry out the job to the required standard
- Identify development opportunities
- Plan how development needs could be met
- Ensure the practitioner has received all mandatory and necessary training required to fulfil the job function
- Log training and development activities undertaken

- Evaluate the impact of development opportunities undertaken

Within the **mediation** function supervisors should:

- Act as a key link between the practitioner and the Isle of Wight Council
- Help the practitioner contribute to the development of the organisation
- Assist the practitioner to implement organisational policies and procedures
- Mediate in any conflicts between the practitioner and the Isle of Wight Council
- Act as a conduit for relevant information that needs to be shared between the practitioner and the organisation
- Deal sensitively but clearly with complaints about staff.

Appendix 2 ~ Approaches to Supervision.

Active-Intrusive – *‘The Supervisor operates in a largely directive role to ensure that the practitioner carries out key agency requirements. Its benefit is that the supervisor has a good knowledge of the practitioner’s cases and can ensure that practice is carried out in accordance to agency procedures. On the other hand there is little attention to the practitioner’s feelings or to practitioner-client interactions such as mirroring or parallel processes’*

Laissez-faire – *“This describes the collusive alliance in which the supervisor regards the practitioner as being competent and leaves it up to him/her to decide if and when supervision is required. Although this leaves the worker in control at one level, the supervisor has effectively abandoned him/her and therefore the agency cannot take responsibility for the work that is undertaken.” If things go wrong the practitioner, supervisor, service users and the Isle of Wight Council are all vulnerable.*

Active-Reflector – *“The supervisor is proactive and knows about the work being undertaken and seeks to engage in a collaborative and reflective process. Attention is paid to the practitioner’s feelings and to the practitioner-client dynamic as an additional source of information. When the practitioner is struggling or has lost focus, the supervisor helps the practitioner focus on what is going on, using challenging and client focused questions rather than resorting to proscriptio. The supervisor also creates opportunities to observe the practitioner’s relationship with clients as a basis for gaining an accurate assessment of the practitioner’s competence and limitations.”⁵*

⁵ See ref 1 - Wonnacott, J - 2003 – “The Impact of Supervision on Child Protection Practice - A Study of Process & Outcome”, University of Sussex MPhil, in Morrison, T - 2005 – “Staff Supervision in Social Care” - London. Pavilion