

## Caseload Policy

This policy aims to ensure caseloads enable social workers to put children, young people and families at the centre of their work, so that they can deliver consistent, high-quality services which achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

## **RELATED STANDARDS AND DOCUMENTS**

Supervision Framework for Social Work Practitioners and Managers

<https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/10416/supervision-framework-7122020-2.pdf>

### **Contents**

1. Context
2. Standards
3. The Role of Supervision in Caseload Management
4. Responsibilities

#### **1. Context**

The Standards for Employers 2014 set out expectations of employers which will enable social workers to work effectively, and support high quality outcomes for children, young people, their families and carers. Standard 3 “Safe Workloads and Case Allocation” aims to ensure that social workers have safe and manageable workloads.

#### **2. Standards**

Within Children’s Social Care it is likely that there will be variations in caseloads between teams reflecting the differences in the nature of the work being undertaken and the risks being managed.

In light of this it is important to define some clear standards:

- a) A case is defined as one child or young person.
- b) Cases will be allocated at the discretion of team managers, based on the skills and experience of the social worker in being able to respond to the needs and characteristics of the child or young person and their family, the complexity of the case and the complexity of other cases currently being held.
- c) Each social worker should be satisfied that they have the capacity, knowledge and skills to manage the cases allocated to them, and this should be reviewed at every supervision.
- d) Before independently undertaking child protection enquiries, social workers should have completed the "Good Practice in Undertaking Section 47 Enquiries" course (or an equivalent where the social worker has worked in another local authority).
- e) Caseloads should enable each social workers to build a relationship with the children, young people and families they are working with and undertake the statutory tasks required.

### *Social Work Students*

- Student social workers should have a small caseload during their placement. This should not exceed half of the caseload of social workers within their host team.
- Student social workers should not be allocated cases directly. Their cases should be allocated to their practice educator/link worker (as appropriate).
- The practice educator/link worker will identify cases based on the experience, competencies and learning needs of the student.
- The practice educator/link worker retains responsibility for the work done on the case and supervision of the student.

### *Practice Educators/Link Workers*

□ Practice educators and link workers will normally supervise 1 student at a time. While a student is on the placement the number of cases held by a practice educator or link worker may increase reflecting the cases the student is working.

□ Where a team manager is a practice educator a link worker must be in place, and should hold the cases worked by the student.

### *Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) in their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)*

- NQSWs should have a reduced caseload throughout the ASYE.

- NQSWs should start the ASYE with half of the caseload of their team (usually 8-12 cases) and this should increase gradually over the course of the year to 90% of the caseload of a second year social worker with appropriate complexity and risk as the NQSW gains confidence, knowledge skills and experience.

□ A NQSW should hold no more than 18 cases at any point during the ASYE.

□ The number of cases held by a NQSW may be reduced if the NQSW feels this would support them and will not be of detriment to services for children, young people and their families.

□ NQSWs undertaking the ASYE will hold a different level of work to experienced social workers, reflecting their inexperience as qualified social workers and stage of learning.

□ Consideration should be given to co-working cases with more experienced social workers to create opportunities for learning.

□ NQSWs should not lead child protection enquiries independently during the ASYE, however depending on individual levels of knowledge, skills and experience, may co-work or undertake specific tasks or parts of child protection work. This agreed in supervision and recorded on their personal supervision record.

### *Social Workers*

- Social workers should normally hold a maximum of 22 cases.
  
- Where a team manager wishes to allocate more than 22 cases to a social worker this should be discussed with the relevant operations manager. Before additional cases are allocated the team manager should have clear agreement from the relevant operations manager, and there should be clear timescales in place for the social worker's caseload to return to no more than 22 cases.

### *Social Work Consultants*

- Social Work Consultant caseloads should be kept to a minimum in order to allow them to focus on their wider quality assurance and improvement role within their teams.
  
- Where this is a need for a Social Work Consultant to carry a caseload, this should be no more than 8 cases.

### *Team Managers*

- Team Managers should not carry a caseload or any cases.
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

### *Independent Reviewing Officers*

When allocating cases to IROs the Operations Manager should take into account:

- Anticipated requirements set out in primary legislation, regulations and guidance;
- Caseloads in comparable local authorities;
- Outcomes of quality assurance audits;
- Capacity to support developments within the service, especially in relation to increasing the active participation of children in the review process.

### **3. The Role of Supervision in Caseload Management**

Providing high quality supervision is at the heart of our efforts to improve the quality and consistency of our practice. Children's Social Care is committed to ensuring every social work practitioner receives effective supervision which supports them to deliver high quality services to children, young people, their families and carers. Further information can be found in the Supervision Framework for Social Work Practitioners and Managers.

Supervision is a core part of caseload management. It is through supervision that the team manager can assess the complexity of the case to be allocated, the skills and experience of the practitioner, and the capacity of the practitioner given other cases that they hold. The following standards have been set to support this process:

- Caseloads should be discussed at every supervision. This discussion should include any issues relating to the extent to the time available to work directly with children, young people and families, undertake statutory visits, and any issues in meeting other demands.
- Where the practitioner has concerns about capacity, knowledge, skills or experience at the point of allocation, the line manager retains the right to allocate the case. The line manager must explain the reason for this action to the practitioner, clearly record the reason for allocating the new case in

the practitioner's personal supervision record, and take responsibility for ensuring sufficient support is provided to the practitioner, or re-prioritising their workload as appropriate. Such allocation must have a clear, maximum timescale clearly recorded and be subject to regular review.

#### **4.Responsibilities**

*Individual practitioners should:*

- Ensure they prioritise attendance at supervision in line with the Supervision Framework for Social Work Practitioners and Managers.
- Engage with supervision in which caseloads are discussed.
- Be clear with their line manager about their capacity, knowledge, skills and experience to manage the cases that they are allocated, and any support which may be needed.
- Raise concerns with their line manager when caseload or a particular case complexity limits their ability to manage cases effectively.
- Raise their concerns with the relevant Operations Manager if they feel concerns are not dealt with swiftly and robustly.

*Line managers should:*

- Ensure they prioritise attendance at supervision in line with the Supervision Framework for Social Work Practitioners and Managers.
- Ensure cases are allocated appropriately given the available resources within the team and the skills of individual practitioners.
- When allocating new cases the line manager should review the current caseload of the practitioner who will be receiving a new case.
- Ensure the practitioner has the capacity, knowledge, skills and experience to respond to the needs and characteristics of the child or young person and their family, undertake the statutory visits required, and to manage the complexity of the case and the complexity of other cases currently being held.
- Ensure to adequate support is provided where there are concerns about the capacity, knowledge, skills, or experience of the practitioner.
- Ensure caseloads are discussed openly and collaboratively at every

supervision.

Regularly access and use performance information about all of the cases held within their team and the individual cases held by each practitioner so that they can monitor caseload and to take appropriate action as required.

Operations Managers should:

- Ensuring caseloads are managed at a safe and appropriate level.
- Access and use performance information at least weekly, to monitor caseload information by team and where necessary, reallocate work or capacity across teams as possible.
- Ensure Strategic Managers are alerted to caseload related issues; including number of cases for individual practitioners and teams, as well as concerns raised by individual practitioners about their caseloads.

*Strategic Managers should:*

- Access and use performance information at least monthly, to maintain an overview of caseloads across the whole social care system.
- Work collaboratively to ensure that resources are targeted in the most effective way, and wherever possible there is an equity of caseloads across the system.

Children's Social Care Management Team should:

- Receive reports on caseload levels and related workforce information on a monthly basis.
- Ensure that caseloads are at a safe and reasonable level across the system.
- Have contingency plans for when the system is at capacity.

The Head of Children's Social Care should:

- Ensure the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services and the Chief Executive Officer are regularly informed of caseload related issues.
- Where caseload data shows that it is becoming difficult to safely deliver services within existing resources this should be discussed with the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services and the Chief Executive Officer.