The Somerset Children's Services Supervision policy

Document/version control

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Table of Contents

1.   Introduction and Purpose

1.1.   This policy sets out why and how we use supervision for practitioners who work in Children's Services in Somerset. It provides a framework of reference for the underlying principles, theory and approach to supervision. The document also provides the templates for recording supervision and other activities related to supervision.

1.2.   This policy will help managers and practitioners understand how they can make supervision as effective as possible in improving outcomes for children and supporting practitioners to carry out their roles to the best of their abilities. It will also help everyone understand their responsibilities around the provision and recording of supervision.

2.   Scope of Policy

2.1.   This policy applies to all practitioners within Children's Services:

- **Advanced Practitioners**
- **Child Protection Coordinators**
- **Consultant Social Workers**
- **Social Workers**
- **Family Intervention Workers**
- **Family Time Workers**
- **Heads of Service**
- **Independent Reviewing Officers**
- **Leaving Care Workers**
- **Youth Justice Workers**
- **Operations Managers**
- **Professional Practitioners**
- **Residential Care Workers**
- **Senior Professional Team Leaders**
- **Senior Social Work Assistants**
- **Service Managers**
- **Students**
- **Supervising Social Workers**
- **Team Managers / Team Leaders**

3.   Context

3.1.   Working in Children's Services care is a demanding and challenging job. So, whatever your role, effective supervision helps you to do your job well. For us

to really understand the context of the child's daily lived experience we need to think about many complex and competing issues.

3.2.   Professor Eileen Munro's 2011 Review of Child Protection championed the use of effective case supervision as a means of improving decision-making and outcomes for children, young people and their families.

'Child protection professionals are constantly making judgments that impinge on the rights of parents to be with and relate to their children and the parallel right of children to their parents. The stakes are high and child protection decision-making needs to be as explicit as possible and be available for review and scrutiny' (Munro, 2011, p92).

3.3.   Furthermore, the 2012 Ofsted report 'High Expectations, High Support and High Challenge' emphasises the key role that supervision can have in delivering high performing services leading to better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

3.4.   Supervision involves talking through the impact the work has on you personally, as well as exploring decision-making. It is vital for practitioners' well-being, and professional development, as well as for providing management oversight.

'Workers' state of mind and the quality of attention they can give to children is directly related to the quality of support, care and attention they themselves receive from supervision, managers and peers' (Ferguson, 2011, p214).

4.   Principles and Standards

4.1.   Supervision in Somerset takes place in the context of our Practice Framework. As an activity, it must reflect the key principles and standards that govern all our work with children, families, colleagues and other professionals. As such, it will be:

- **Systemic** – supervision will consider relationships and patterns within the different systems around a child; it will maximise the potential of the system to ensure the best outcomes for children
- **Strengths based** – supervision will reflect that we work best when we recognise and build on strengths

- **Relationship based** – supervision, like all our work, will be based on the foundations of excellent relational practice – empathy, warmth, respect and reliability.

4.2.   Supervisors oversee the work and decision-making of child and family practitioners and help develop the skills of individuals and teams within child and family services. This requires experience of working with a high level of social complexity and risk of harm as well as substantial experience of working within the statutory system. The Professional Capabilities Framework sets out the crucial role that Supervision plays across the different levels in social work. Students should use supervision to reflect on their work and sustain their practice and wellbeing, then throughout their career Social Workers should take increasing levels of responsibility in using supervision to ensure effective practice, reflection and continuing professional development. This includes recognition and management of conflicting values and ethical dilemmas. Strategic leaders have a clear role in creating and promoting a culture of high-quality supervision which covers practice, organisational and management issues (as appropriate to the role) as well as, promoting critical reflection throughout the organisation. (BASW, 2018)

4.3.   The Knowledge and Skills Statement for Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors (DfE, 2015) recognises the importance of a culture of 'focused thinking' to support confident analysis and decision-making, and the role of supervisors in helping to build that culture. They explicitly recognise that supervisors can promote different and equally important kinds of thinking by:

- Using focused questioning to identify whether practitioners need to adopt a more reflective and curious approach or respond with greater pace
- Consistently exploring a wide range of contexts (including family and professional stories, the chronology of critical events, social and economic circumstances)
- Generating multiple hypotheses that make sense of the complexity in which children and families are living
- Ensuring family narratives are sought and listened to, and that all relevant family members, including fathers and absent parents, are engaged in shaping plans and supported to carry them out
- Helping practitioners to make decisions based on observations, analysis and considering the wishes and feelings of children and families

- Promoting reflective thinking to drive more effective discussions so that reasoned and timely decision-making can take place

4.4. Within their practice, Social Workers should be aware of how they are meeting the professional standards set out by Social Work England. The Professional standards highlight that Social workers should use supervision to inform assessments, to analyse risk, and to make professional decisions. The Professional Standards also make it clear that Social Workers should use supervision and feedback to critically reflect on, and identify their own learning needs, including how they use research and evidence to inform their practice.
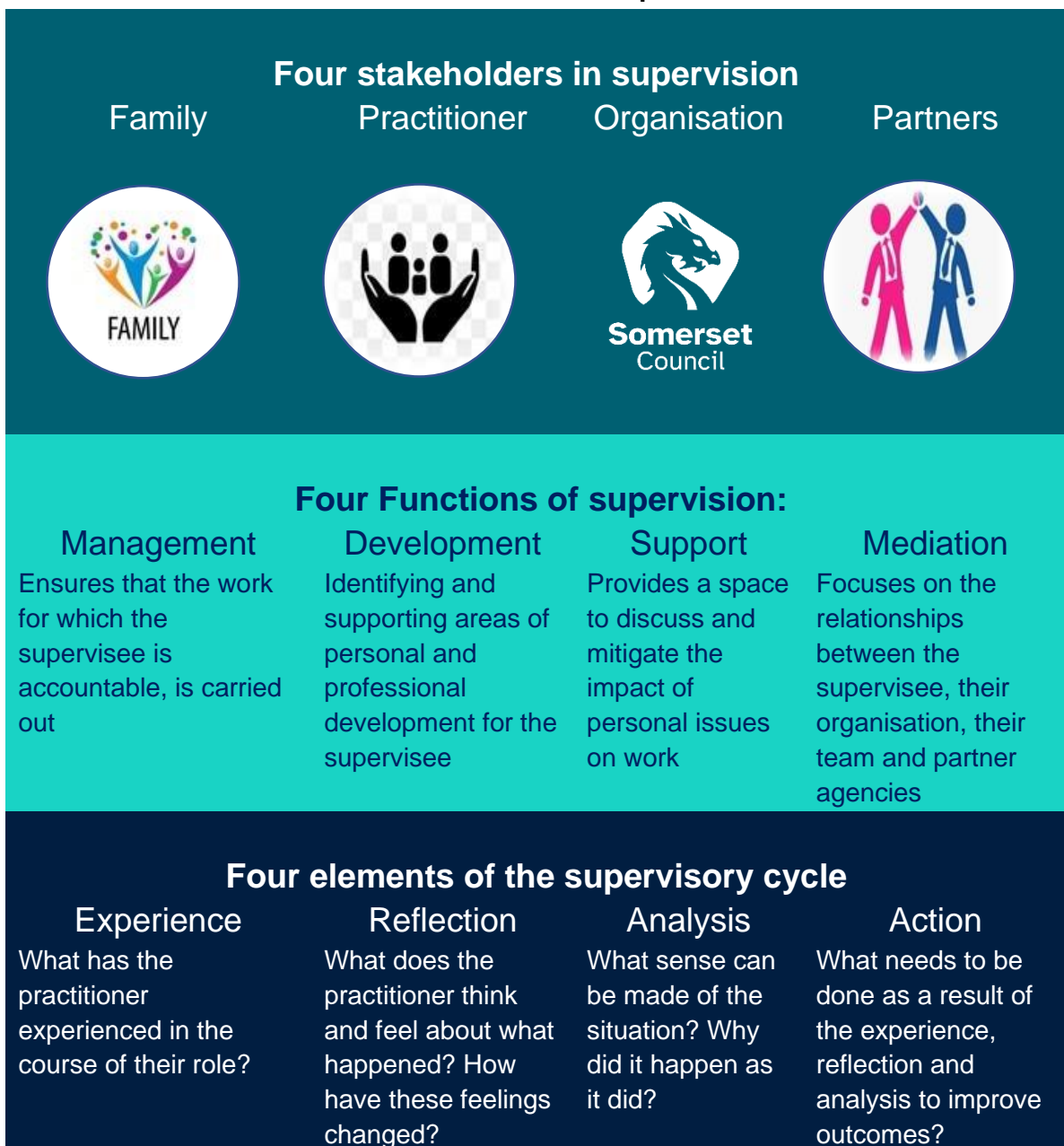
5. Purpose and benefits of supervision

5.1. Supervision has a number of different benefits for the child, family, practitioner, manager and the organisation, as set out in the 4 x 4 x 4 model:

4 x 4 x 4 Model of Supervision

Four stakeholders in supervision

Family	Practitioner	Organisation	Partners

Four Functions of supervision:

Management	Development	Support	Mediation
Ensures that the work for which the supervisee is accountable, is carried out	Identifying and supporting areas of personal and professional development for the supervisee	Provides a space to discuss and mitigate the impact of personal issues on work	Focuses on the relationships between the supervisee, their organisation, their team and partner agencies

Four elements of the supervisory cycle

Experience	Reflection	Analysis	Action
What has the practitioner experienced in the course of their role?	What does the practitioner think and feel about what happened? How have these feelings changed?	What sense can be made of the situation? Why did it happen as it did?	What needs to be done as a result of the experience, reflection and analysis to improve outcomes?

5.2. For children and families, these benefits include:

- Providing a safe space to reflect on what work has been done with a family, consider what impact this has had and plan next steps
- Providing a safe space to focus on the child, explore the child's life, their feelings, experiences and voice
- Drawing on shared knowledge and skills to agree plans to improve lives
- Reflecting on the needs of other members of the family such as parents or carers and how they impact on the child
- Promoting anti-oppressive practice by safely offering challenge, exploring the dilemmas, hypotheses and discussing bias
- Ensuring that partners work together effectively to meet the needs of the child

5.3. For the practitioner, supervision gives an opportunity for:

- Exploration of the practitioner's skills, workload, capacity and resources
- Exploration of risks and hazards to help practitioners stay safe
- Learning from successes and mistakes through giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Encouragement to try something new
- Support for career development
- Reflection on how they are working with partners to support children and families

5.4. For leaders and managers, supervision can:

- Provide an opportunity to develop a supportive relationship with practitioners that has clarity and shared understanding of expectations
- Provide an opportunity to monitor the welfare and development of their staff
- Ensure that staff work safely and that hazards are addressed
- Ensure that we consider proportionality and whether our intervention is purposeful and making a difference
- Ensure that everyone is accountable for their work

5.5. For the organisation, supervision can:

- Contribute to workforce stability by making sure that practitioners feel happy, motivated, supported and valued.

- Provide an opportunity for exploration and development of the culture of the organisation and the team
- Provide space to share and discuss key organisational issues and messages

6. Recording

6.1. Accurate records of supervision are important for a number of reasons, including:

- They provide a record of why decisions were made and evidence of reflection on risks and need. This is helpful when the professional group changes. It also provides a record for the child to look back on in the future.
- Supervision records enable scrutiny of practice by others such as senior managers and Ofsted.
- They enable the organisation to fulfil its responsibilities under the Data Subject Access Request (DSAR) process

6.2. All supervision discussions should be written up within three working days Practitioners need to agree that the recording represents an accurate record of the discussion, the practitioner should be provided a copy of the recording and the manager should retain an electronic copy of the notes. The following forms should be used for different supervision types:

- Group Supervision is written up using the Group Supervision Record – the lead will need to clarify if this should be saved on the child's record
- Personal Supervision is written up using the Personal Supervision Record
- Case Supervision is recorded using the Case Supervision Discussion Form on the child's/foster carer's file.

7. Frequency

7.1. All practitioners should have supervision with their line manager at least once per calendar month. The specific arrangements will be set out in the supervision agreement. For part time practitioners, supervision should take place at the same frequency, except in some residential care settings, where

shift patterns may make this impractical. In this situation, supervision should take place once every two months as a minimum.

7.2. A supervision agreement should be completed within one month of starting in post or a change in supervisor and reviewed annually thereafter. The Supervision Agreement should set out what the practitioner finds helpful or unhelpful within the supervisory relationship

7.3. The agenda for discussion will vary month to month, with the practitioner and manager agreeing which families should be discussed each session. The Somerset Practice Standards set out the frequency that children with different case statuses must be discussed in supervision.

7.4. Supervision for Newly Qualified Social Workers will take place more frequently with this alternating between the Consultant Social Worker and the Team Manager:

- weekly for the first 6 weeks
- fortnightly thereafter

7.5. The allocated worker for children that are working with students should still have supervision with their line manager at the usual frequency for the case status. This will be in addition to the supervision that the student receives from their placement supervisor. Team Managers should consider including students and Practice Educators/ Practice Supervisors together in supervision discussions to give a holistic picture of the work being undertaken with the family and the student's progress.

8.   Types of Supervision

8.1. Practice tools are available which can be helpful to support reflection and discussion in supervision, for example, via Research in Practice. Somerset County Council (SCC) offers practitioners a range of training opportunities which can support good quality supervisory practice. These can be accessed via The Learning Centre

Personal Supervision

8.2. Personal supervision is usually conducted face to face (between the practitioner and supervisor) but can be conducted by phone or video call. The

supervisor is usually the supervisee's line manager but may be an advanced practitioner or professional from another part of the organisation.

8.3.   Personal supervision includes discussion and reflection on things that have gone well; positive feedback and good practice examples. It will also include things that have gone less well; areas of concern and plans to improve practice. The supervisee and supervisor will also discuss personal support such as physical and emotional wellbeing, annual leave and health and safety.

8.4.   Sessions should be pre-arranged, regular and take place in a confidential space. They should be prioritised and only moved or cancelled in exceptional circumstances.

Case Supervision

8.5.   Reflective case supervision can take place one to one or in a group setting. Both approaches provide opportunities for reflection, challenge, exploration of what has been achieved and any worries. It is also a place to test out hypotheses and increase a practitioner's confidence in their own judgement (Brown and Turney, 2014:77).

8.6.   Curious questioning and critical thinking provide the opportunity for the practitioner to reflect on their direct work with the child. It enables the child's lived experiences to be better understood, facilitates discussion of how parents' lives are impacting on the child, and considers proportionate and timely plans to improve outcomes.

"Good social work practice requires forming a relationship with the child and family and using professional reasoning to judge how best to work with parents. The nature of this close engagement means that supervision, which provides the space for critical reflection, is essential for reducing the risk of errors in professionals' reasoning" (Munro, 2011).

Group Supervision

8.7.   The Knowledge and Skills Statements for Practice Supervisors encourages 'group case consultation to help identify bias, shift thinking and the approach to case work in order to generate better outcomes for children and families' (DfE, 2015: 6).

8.8. Group supervision can be supervisor or peer led. The make-up of the group depends on the goals of supervision, but it can be used within a team (including multi-agency teams) or a group of peers. Some of the benefits of group supervision include:

- Enabling practitioners to build relationships and reduce isolation
- Developing individual and group confidence and energising practice
- Sharing and challenging approaches and perspectives - the acronym 'social grraaccees' (gender, race, religion, age, abilities, culture, class, education, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) is a framework to represent some of the unique differences that influence our thoughts and shape how we interpret what we see (Burnham et al, 2008)
- The opportunity for reflection on complex problems
- Developing reflexivity and deepening practitioners' understanding of themselves and the families they work with
- Helping practitioners to develop hypotheses and next steps
- Promoting an organisational learning culture

8.9. There are a range of models and approaches to group supervision that highlight the importance of a mutually agreed purpose, focus and structure, trusting relationships between participants and facilitator and strong facilitation. Group supervision should ensure:

- The aims of the discussion are achieved in a manner that is respectful for the child/family/client and practitioners
- Collaboration is promoted and critical reflection is enhanced
- The facilitator models curiosity, respect, clarity and authority (Gibbs et al, 2014)

8.10. Research in Practice have a range of tools to support group supervision approaches and provide guidance on two models. The tools and guidance along with a short video demonstrating group supervision in practice can be found here:

8.11. As group supervision can be used to discuss general practice issues or to specifically discuss a family care needs to be taken to ensure everyone present is clear on the purpose and function of the session. It can be helpful to set out some simple terms of reference for the group and detail these within the Group Supervision Record. This should include details around:

- Frequency or specify if this is a one-off session
- Who will lead/ facilitate
- Expectations around confidentiality
- How the theme or focus will be determined
- How the session will be recorded, where notes will be stored and whether it is necessary to record any information on the child's record if a specific family is being discussed

Discussions outside of Supervision

8.12. Managers and practitioners should try to hold important discussions in supervision wherever possible so that there is time and space to reflect, make balanced decisions and record them appropriately. However, it is recognised that at times there may be the need to hold more urgent discussions with practitioners outside of supervision. If such discussions relate to personal circumstances or career development, then this should be followed up in email and recorded in the next supervision session. Any urgent or unplanned discussions or decisions about case work that cannot wait till the next supervision must be clearly recorded on the service user's electronic record (LCS, EHM, Careworks) using the Managers Decisions and Actions case note.

9. Direct Observations/ feedback

9.1. For supervisors to properly understand the quality of practice, practitioners should be observed and receive feedback directly from professionals and families. Line managers should do both activities at least once per quarter for each practitioner.

9.2. The direct observation should be planned so that the practitioner and manager are clear on the purpose of the observation and so that family consent can be sought. Line managers may use the direct observation as an opportunity to get feedback from the family or professional. The Direct Observation of Practice Record (in tools) should be completed by observers following an observation, this should highlight areas of good practice that were observed as well as any learning points of areas for improvement. A signed copy of this document should be held on supervisor's electronic supervision file.

9.3. The Multi-Purpose Feedback form on Tri X should be used when feedback is obtained, and this should also be recorded on the Team's Feedback Record.

9.4.   The outcome of observations and feedback should be discussed in supervision and the annual appraisal.

10.   Induction/ Probation/ Appraisal Cycle

10.1.   Induction, probation reviews, supervision and appraisals are integral to practitioner support and development, lead to raised standards of service delivery and improve outcomes for children and families.

10.2.   **Induction** – Every new employee should have a comprehensive induction which helps them learn how to do their job. The progress and impact of this induction should be discussed in Supervision. For further information on the induction process please see the [HR OD SharePoint](#)

10.3.   **Probation** – Every new employee to Somerset County Council will be subject to a formal probationary period of up to 6 months from date of commencement. During this time, the employee will receive regular supervision and will have three probationary review meetings with their manager at the end of months 1, 3 and 5. For further information on the probationary process please see the probation policy available on [HR OD SharePoint](#).

10.4.   **Appraisal** – Discussions held and recorded during supervision will form part of the appraisal process. Appraisal involves an annual meeting; the aims of which are for the practitioner and their supervisor to:

- Identify what has gone well, and what could have been done better over the last year
- Set measurable objectives in line with their team/service/organisational objectives for the coming year
- Have the opportunity to identify learning and development to help the practitioner carry out their job, now and in the future.
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- For further information on the appraisal process go to the Learning Centre on the Intranet

11.   Making Supervision work

11.1.   The supervisory relationship should be developed in such a way that everyone can speak openly about the effectiveness of supervision and address any

challenges. It is recognised that there may be rare occasions where supervision may not meet the needs of the supervisee, and they feel something needs to change for supervision to work better for them. In these circumstances the difficulties should be discussed openly. It may be useful to revisit the Supervision Agreement to ensure that it sets out clearly how supervision can be made to work for both parties.

11.2. If the challenges cannot be resolved and practitioners remain unhappy with the standard or frequency of supervision that they are receiving, then they should discuss this with their supervisor's line manager. The supervisor's line manager should offer support to explore and resolve the difficulties involving both the supervisor and practitioner in these discussions.

11.3. If the situation is still not resolved to the satisfaction of the supervisee, then they can seek support under Somerset County Council's Grievance Procedure (SCC Grievance Procedure) or, ultimately, via the County Council's Whistleblowing Policy (SCC Whistleblowing Policy)

11.4. It is important for the organisation to understand the quality of supervision that practitioners are receiving. In order to have some independent oversight around the quality of supervision being delivered and understand the consistency of supervisory practice across the county there will be an annual audit of supervision.

11.5. This audit will involve:

- Supervisors having the supervision they deliver observed by a colleague
- A review of the quality of a sample of Case Supervision records
- A review of the quality of a sample of Personal Supervision records
- A review of the timeliness of supervision.

11.6. The Quality Assurance Team will lead the planning of this audit and will produce a summary of findings. This will allow for the service to develop understanding around any themes, areas of strength and areas for improvement as well as any barriers in the delivery of supervision.

11.7. The quality and impact of supervision will also be considered within diagnostic activity.

12. References

12.1. The following sources have informed this policy; staff may wish to refer to them for further information.

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13. Tools

13.1. Below are the tools that will be needed to record supervision and associated activities. These tools are available to download from SharePoint:

- Supervision agreement

- Personal supervision record

- Group Supervision record

- Record of direct observation

- CPD Record

Children's Services Supervision Agreement

Supervisee:	
Line Manager/Supervisor:	
Team:	

General Principles
- Supervision can be face to face or as a virtual meeting as agreed between both parties   - Supervision should take place at least once every calendar month   - Cancellation or interruption should only occur in the event of an operational or personal emergency. If supervision is cancelled it should be rearranged as soon as possible   - Supervision should take place in a private confidential space   - Any disagreements or disputes should be openly discussed between the practitioner and supervisor. If they cannot be resolved, then the supervisor's line manager, should be asked to assist in resolving the differences between both parties   - Previous supervision notes should be brought to each supervision.   - Where supervision records are typed by someone other than supervisor, this needs to be discussed and agreed

What I would find helpful from you as my supervisor and what I will contribute as a practitioner:

What I would find helpful from you as the practitioner and what I will contribute as a supervisor:

Anything either the practitioner or supervisor should try to avoid:

Signature of practitioner:	
Signature of Line Supervisor:	
Date agreement completed:	
Review date: (to be reviewed annually)	

Personal Supervision Record

Name of Supervisee:	
Name of Line Manager/Supervisor:	
Team/Area:	

Support
(Personal safety, wellbeing, sickness absence and leave)

Things that have gone well since the last supervision session
(Positive feedback, good examples of practice, workplace relationships that are supportive etc)

Reflection
(Dilemmas, practice issues and workload)

Learning and development
(What are the priorities to further develop skills and knowledge? What progress has been made on the actions agreed at appraisal? What feedback has been obtained from service users or via direct observation recently?)

Review of actions from previous session	
Action	Progress made

Actions to take forwards

Action	Person responsible	Timeframe
Signature of practitioner:	
Signature of Line Manager/Supervisor:	
Date supervision completed:	
Date of next supervision:	

Group Supervision Record

Date of session:	
Team:	
Names of people involved in the group supervision:	
Lead person for this session:	

General terms of reference for the group supervision:

Focus of discussion:

Any dilemmas or practice issues discussed:

Review of any actions from previous session

Action	Progress made	

Actions to take forwards

Action	Person responsible	Timeframe

Direct Observation of Practice Record

Name of Practitioner:	
Name of Observer:	
LCS Number:	
Date, venue and nature of observation:	
What worked well, including any good practice observed:	
What could have been done differently:	
Service user feedback: (If possible, seek feedback from the service user about how they experienced the observation and their relationship with the practitioner)	
Practitioners reflections on how the observation went:	
Learning points and actions: *(To be discussed in subsequent supervision session)*	
Signature of Supervisee:	
Observer's Signature:	

Record of Continued Professional Development (CPD)

Name of practitioner:	

CPD activity (Training / learning opportunity)	Duration and Date(s)	What difference this has made to my practice with children and families

Case Supervision Record (available on LCS and EHM)

What is life like for the child/ young person?
(Consider - what is the child's lived experience? How does it feel to be this child/ young person in the family? How are the lives of the parents impacting the child? Consider siblings separately.)

What are the risks/ needs and strengths and what is the impact upon the child?
(Consider- what changes are being made and how will these be sustained and built upon?)

What do we want our involvement and the plan to achieve?
(Consider - reviewing the plan to make sure things are progressing and it is SMART. Discuss any barriers and how partner agencies are contributing. What is the child/ family's understanding of the plan and reasons for our involvement?)

Progress on previous actions
(LCS to pull through previous actions and add column for an update)

Actions needed to improve this child's life moving forwards

Action	Person responsible	Timeframe