



## LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Social work is a profoundly complex and challenging role. Social workers should be given all the support they need to consistently achieve high standards of practice. Whilst there is no place in our profession for a practitioner who does not take individual responsibility for their own practice, our core principle should be that **we are a learning organisation** and we will work together to improve our practice. Colleagues who struggle to achieve the standards that the families we work with deserve will be treated fairly and no one will be blamed for a conscientious mistake. The important thing is to own mistakes and to learn from them. We are working to build and sustain a culture based on openness, honesty and integrity that values the workforce and encourages and nourishes growth and learning.

It is the professional responsibility of individual practitioners to achieve those professional standards consistently. Please see the [DfE Knowledge and Skills Statements for Approved Child and Family Practitioners](#) and the [DfE Knowledge and Skills Statements for Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors](#). Each one of us is responsible for the quality of our own practice, for doing what it takes to improve our competence and for meeting the standards expected of us. As ethical professionals, we expect to be held accountable when our practice falls short, especially if, through carelessness or negligence on our part, a child's welfare or safety is compromised. This is enshrined in our professional code of conduct and forms the basis of our registration as qualified social work practitioners.

As social workers and social care practitioners, along with frontline supervisors and managers, you will be pro-actively supported to do your job and to achieve those expectations. This policy explains how we, as a "whole" service, make sure we know who is doing the job well, when and why there are shortfalls in the quality of practice and what we can do to support practitioners, address the shortfalls and achieve the standards consistently.

A key part of our strategy is to "grow our own" talent, to harness the potential of all our staff by offering social work qualifying apprenticeships, acting up positions, research opportunities, "aspiring manager" or Practice Educator training opportunities, a range of post-qualifying academic opportunities via Bournemouth University.

We are looking at how we can harness our potential, innovate and create a climate of effective and continuous learning that improves our professional practice and develops social workers and managers who are strong and valued.

### 1: Learning

The starting place for achieving good quality practice consistently is learning. Under the terms of your employment and for our professional registration, we are expected to show an ongoing commitment to our own continuous professional development. This comes in the form of access to appropriate training courses designed to increase our competence and confidence.

You should discuss your learning needs regularly within supervision and appraisal and put in place a plan to meet those needs. If BCP Council is to be a learning organisation, then this can only be achieved if appropriate training is identified and attended. Staff will be supported by managers to attend the training that has been identified and will ensure that teams are adequately covered to allow regular attendance without cancellation. Your learning needs and feedback will inform the shape of the core training offer and the annual training plan. If your learning needs are not being met you should speak up, because not to do so potentially puts children at risk and jeopardises your own career development. Learning is not only about attending training. **It is about putting what you have learnt into practice**, consolidating learning.

Your manager/supervisor should be asking you how you are applying your learning to specific cases. You should also be accessing research and best practice websites to test your own understanding of the complex issues you face in individual cases and to enhance your wider understanding of social work and social policy. You all now have licences to the **CC Inform** website and the Research in Practice website, which are easy to use, offering up to date and informative online resources and guides that gives you social policy and legislative updates, research findings and best practice guides: [www.ccinform.co.uk](http://www.ccinform.co.uk) and [www.rip.org.uk](http://www.rip.org.uk)

Signs of Safety is our Practice Framework and a key part of our training offer. You will also have access to the Signs of Safety Knowledge Bank which shares best practice examples from our international Signs of Safety Network.

Remember - you should be **sharing your learning** with your colleagues and with wider partners. For example; undertaking briefings or presentations at team meetings, ASYE days, internal staff forums, wider multi-agency forums or lunchtime learning workshops and coaching and mentoring of new staff.

## 2: Policies and Procedures

The best procedures, of course, are those that practitioners and frontline managers actually use because they find them helpful. They should simplify complex tasks, adhere to national policy and be easy to follow. They should give you a clear local picture of what is expected of you and the standards you are expected to achieve in key areas of practice. These are the success measures we will use when we review our guidance and procedures. This will mean feedback from you and your help in formulating/updating our procedures in future on **Tri X**, our electronic Policies and Procedures database. This database is accessible via the link on the Children's Social Care Intranet page, as is the link for practical **resources** for direct work with children, young people and families and the link for the Local Safeguarding Children Board website.

## 3: Supervision

Team Managers and Practice Managers will be given the opportunity to attend specialist supervision training in the internationally renowned approach devised by the late Tony Morrison. There are standards and guidance for supervision. If you are not getting the supervision you need you must say something. Without the right supervision it is not possible to practice safely. The role of professional casework supervision is vital:

- It should be a safe space to explore your feelings, how a case or the work generally is affecting you and how you are. Self-care and good quality support are essential for frontline practitioners to stay well and maintain emotional resilience and emotional intelligence at work.
- It is a safe space to help you reflect on your understanding of a case and to challenge your thinking – your analysis. It is this process, done well, that reduces the risk of biased thinking and error in judgement. This protects the child and it also protects you.
- It provides your supervisor with an insight about your strengths and areas for development as a practitioner, not to catch you out but to work with you to identify your learning needs and meet those needs.
- It is an opportunity to check that you have done everything that you should have done and to the required standard on your cases and to identify next steps for your case work **with the aim of achieving the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families**. Supervisors who fail to do this become vicariously responsible for any shortfalls in practice. If your professional supervision is not of this standard you need to speak up and talk to your supervisor about it, because not to do so increases risk of error or burn out.

#### 4: Appraisal

Annual appraisals and half-year reviews are undertaken for three reasons; to ensure that you understand what is expected of you in that year (your appraisal targets should be about the quality of your practice and outcomes for the children you work with), to give you honest feedback on how you are doing (drawn from your supervisor's own experience of you in supervision and from management oversight and observation of your practice) and to agree your learning needs (**where you need to develop your knowledge and skills**). Appraisal should take into account feedback from other colleagues (such as partner agencies, legal teams, child protection chairs, independent reviewing officers and children, young people and families). It should also take into account any note of concern about your practice, gaps in knowledge and any complaints.

**Most importantly** it should recognise and celebrate your strengths and formally acknowledge any compliments you have received about your work and of course your achievements throughout the year.

#### 5: Quality Assurance

We have revised the Quality Assurance Framework This will provide a learning feedback loop direct to you and your supervisor and pod/team. This is how we will demonstrate openness and professional accountability. Whilst receiving feedback about the quality of our work can be an uncomfortable experience, it is important to restate that the starting point is always **learning**. It is about making sure that you understand the standards expected of you, that you are getting the right help to achieve these standards (like good quality supervision and training), that there are no exceptional barriers to achieving the standards and to identify what learning can be undertaken to address areas for development in the future. Persistent shortfalls or professional negligence will be dealt with proportionately and fairly through corporate HR procedures.

#### 6: Performance Data

Performance data is a useful early warning system to identify potential emerging problems for teams and individuals, inviting us all to ask questions, sometimes urgently. Regular reports are produced from our Case Management system and Management Information Team in respect of local and national performance indicators, like timescales for starting and completing assessments for example. A range of these are reported regularly to the Senior Management Team. Performance is reported to the Corporate Leadership Team, the Children's Trust Board and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, where the Director and Heads of Service are held to account for the performance of the whole service. A monthly management information report is produced showing levels of activity and performance against targets – by team in critical areas.

#### 7: Practice Learning Reviews

Practice Learning Reviews are undertaken to look at the quality of practice and the progress a child is making. Cases can be sampled randomly (to check standards common to all cases, like risk assessments, chronologies, SMART plans, recording, etc) or focussed on a particular element of practice (like the quality of decision making in respect of s47 enquiries) or focused on a particular type of case (like child protection cases or cases featuring neglect) or on a particular issue or theme such as voice of the child, children who go missing or child sexual exploitation. There are two important things to remember about Practice Learning Reviews. Firstly, the findings need to be reported widely in a positive way so that everyone can learn from them. Secondly, we need to be able to demonstrate that appropriate action has been taken in the light of audit findings and that action has led to an improvement. Practice Learning Reviews will also be embedded in our Grade Progression process.

## **8: Service User Feedback**

We already receive helpful reports arising from complaints and compliments. We need to establish and embed a range of systems for seeking the views of our service users about our approach, practice and helpfulness. Whilst it could feel like we are inviting criticism from potentially disaffected service users, given the nature of statutory social work, the results can be very different and go to show that even within child protection processes for example, people can feel that they have been listened to, that things have been explained properly, that they have been treated fairly and with respect. We need to hear what it is like to receive our services if we are serious about improving the quality of our practice.

### **Summary**

The more we, as individual practitioners take full professional responsibility for the quality of our own practice, commit to achieving best practice quality standards consistently, share learning and best practice models and ideas with our colleagues and back that up with continuous professional development opportunities and post qualifying training and learning; the more we safeguard and **improve outcomes** for vulnerable children, young people and families in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. The framework is there to support you by providing you with feedback and positively challenging you to demonstrate that you are a competent and confident professional practitioner. The quality of your practice, learning and performance is the basis of progression within your profession and your career and qualification pathway in BCP.

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