

**BASW/CoSW England
research on supervision in
social work, with particular
reference to supervision
practice in multi disciplinary
teams**

England Document

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1.0. Introduction and background

The job of a social worker is a challenging one which takes place in a complex adaptive environment where the role of professional judgement is paramount. Social workers need to be confident, articulate, and professional with highly developed listening, oral and written skills. They also need stamina, emotional resilience and determination. Research and practice demonstrate that social workers will be more effective if they receive good quality supervision, both on a one to one basis from a manager and also from peer supervision in teams and via networks.

This document is designed to develop a BASW policy on supervision. It has been based on research into the history of supervision, information about current practice and the views and experiences of members. A draft Code of Practice is detailed. (Section 13).

Research of the experience of supervision from BASW/CoSW members found that many social workers receive good supervision, however a significant number do not. (These findings are in line with those of other surveys and research). There have also been particular concerns raised by social workers who work in multi disciplinary teams. Their concerns express a lack of, or insufficiency of supervision, poor quality supervision and in some cases a lack of supervision given by qualified experienced social workers.

The Social Work Taskforce recommended clear, universal standards for employers, including standards on supervision. (Building a Safe and Confident Future, 2009)¹. These have now been developed into a social work employers' standards and supervision framework.² These standards will be referred to in the policy.

1.1 What is social work supervision?

Social work supervision is a process by which an organisation provides support and guidance to social workers. Supervision should be made up of a variety of components. BASW supports the following definition of supervision:

“Supervision must enable and support workers to build effective professional relationships, develop good practice, and exercise both professional judgement and discretion in decision-making. For supervision to be effective it needs to combine a performance management approach with a dynamic, empowering and enabling supervisory relationship. Supervision should improve the quality of practice, support the development of integrated working and ensure continuing professional development. Supervision should contribute to the development of a learning culture by promoting an approach that develops the confidence and competence of managers in their supervision skills. It is therefore at the core of individual and group continuing professional development”, (Skills for Care 2007).

¹ Building a Safe and Confident Future (2009) The final report of the social work task force

² Employers' standards and supervision framework. In One Year on Report <http://www.education.gov.uk/swrb/>

2.0 BASW/CoSW England members experience of supervision

An on line survey of BASW members was conducted in November 2010³ The results of the survey are detailed in this section.

In which sector do you work? (Please answer one choice only)	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Social work with adults	15.4%
Social work with older people	5.6%
Social work with people with mental health problems	16.1%
Social work with people with a learning disability	2.8%
Social work with children and families	53.8%
Youth Justice	0.7%
More than one of the above	14.7%

Which type of organisation best fits the organisation that you work in?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Local authority	81.1%
Voluntary sector	4.9%
Private sector	3.5%
Social enterprise	0.0%
Health	14.7%

9% of respondents were newly qualified

77% say that if manager is not a social worker that they are offered professional supervision from a qualified social worker

How often to you receive supervision?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Approximately once a week	0.7%
Approximately once a fortnight	3.5%
Approximately once a month	58.7%
Approximately once every two months	16.1%
Approximately once every three months	7.0%
Less than once every three months	5.6%
Rarely or never	9.8%

Are you satisfied with the frequency of supervision that you receive?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	55.2%
No	44.8%

³ The survey was sent to BASW members and was targeted at members who are front line social workers. 143 members responded. The sample does not purport to be a representative sample.

Are you satisfied with the frequency of supervision that you receive?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	55.2%
No	44.8%

Overall how do you rate the quality of your supervision?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Excellent	9.8%
Good	30.8%
Fair	35.0%
Poor	25.9%

How often do you feel that you should receive supervision?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Weekly	3.5%
Fortnightly	16.8%
Monthly	70.6%
Two monthly	8.4%
Three monthly	1.4%

Does your supervision adequately cover case work issues?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	58.0%
No	42.0%

Does your supervision adequately cover management accountability issues?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	44.8%
No	55.2%

Does your supervision adequately cover emotional issues that arise from your social work practice?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	30.8%
No	69.2%

Does your supervision adequately cover personal development and training?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	38.0%
No	62.0%

2.1 Summary of main findings from the survey:

- 23% of respondents say that they receive supervision three monthly or less, with 10% rarely or never. Only 10% of respondents stated that they want supervision on a three monthly basis
- 45% say they are not satisfied with the frequency of supervision that they receive
- 40% rated the supervision they received as excellent or good, 65% as only fair or poor
- 62% state that personal development is not adequately covered in supervision
- 70% state that supervision does not adequately cover emotional issues that arise from their work
- Only 58% report that case work issues are adequately dealt with
- Only 45% report that supervision adequately covers management accountability
- 77% say that if their manager is not a qualified social worker they are offered professional supervision from a qualified social worker

3.0 The development of supervision over the last century

The theory of supervision has developed over many years. Stephenson (2005) cites Dawson (1926) who defined the purpose of supervision as administrative, educational and supportive. (Stephenson, 2005). Munson, (2002) gives a very comprehensive history of supervision, going back to the precursors of the models developed in the 1920's. Donald Schön (1983) has had a significant impact on the theory and practice of social work in relation to supervision. Schön acknowledges the complexity inherent in delivering professional practice and provides models of theory to support practitioner's knowledge and understanding regarding the benefits of reflection. He states that evidence exists that the use of reflection results in more effective patient care.

Kadushkin identified three main functional elements of supervision - education, administration and support (Kadushkin, 2002, cited in Beddoe, 2010). Proctor (1991, cited in Beddoe 2010) proposed a framework that is inclusive of the formative, normative and restorative dimensions of development to assist staff in their understanding of clinical supervision. The 3 functions may be predominant at different times during a supervision session but are clearly interrelated and overlapping.

The Normative Function

This ensures that staff work within a safe framework for practice and maintain trust and professional standards, by exploring options within the supervision session. This is not to be confused with being instructed or managed, but will focus the practitioner on seeking advice from an experienced practitioner to develop their own plan of action.

The Formative Function

This is the learning component of supervision and promotes the development of the supervisee's skills and knowledge within the area of clinical practice and the boundaries of their own professional organisation.

The aim is to support practitioners to:-

- Develop an understanding of their skills and ability
- Assist with understand their clients better
- Develop awareness of feelings about patient interactions and reflect upon interventions
- Explore alternative ways of working.

The Restorative Function

It acknowledges that practitioners can be affected by the nature of the work they are undertaking and can be constantly working with stressful situations. The opportunity to share this through structured reflection during a clinical supervision session is held to be beneficial to both practitioners personal wellbeing in addition to supporting their practice. This is not to be confused with counseling, as this is an opportunity to acknowledge success and nurture good practice.

The restorative function aims to ensure that clinical staff function within a safe framework for practice thus maintaining their professional standards.

Morrison (2003) added the mediative function to the Management, Professional, and Developmental aspects in recognition of the role of supervisors as the conduit for information between front line workers and management.

4.0 Supervision practice in the last 15 years

In the mid 1990's there were serious concerns expressed about the role and effectiveness of supervision. The two main criticisms were that supervision:

- had acquired a bad reputation as a semi-private activity, focused on the individual supervisee's needs and not on the outcomes for the service user
- had become procedurally driven, checking compliance rather than positively challenging accepted custom and practice. The relationship between practitioner and supervisor is therefore likely to be a prescriptive one, as managers oversee compliance with procedural and fiscal requirements. (NISW, 1995).

The NISW report found that many social care organisations did not have a supervision policy and if they had it was not necessarily implemented and the effectiveness of it monitored. It also found that there was often a breakdown of understanding of the functions of supervision between managers and supervisees, with supervisees emphasising the personal development aspects of supervision, that did not include a focus on ensuring client outcomes, whereas managers were increasingly focusing on procedures and processes. "Organisational maintenance has become the department's primary task at the expense of the management and support of practice. Furthermore "Uncertainty, complexity and distress, ever-present in practice, will become difficult to acknowledge, tolerate or articulate. This will mean that practitioners and managers will become unable to work in partnership with users and carers and will hinder, not help them". (NISW 1995).

Clare, M. (1988) recognises the managerial and developmental side of supervision by stating that supervision is an essential component in the monitoring of client service and the maintenance of practitioners engaged in stressful forms of practice. Supervision needs to recognize the managerial and administrative tasks necessary to protect the agency and the client from poor quality practice, while also respecting the emotional and educational needs of newly qualified and experienced practitioners exposed to the demands of high-risk judgment and practice.

BASW/CoSW England recognise that the managerial function of supervision is an essential part of the supervision process. However this should not be to the detriment of the other functions of supervision, particularly the functions of reflective practice and personal development.

There is evidence that more recently qualified social workers do not recognise to the same degree as experienced social workers the essential nature of reflective practice. (Baginsky et al. 2009).

5.0 Current definitions of supervision in social work

Supervision in social work is an activity that has been embedded in practice for many years. Early definitions (see section 3) concentrated on the aspects of supervision that concern reflection about professional practice in relation to social work interventions with clients. (Although managerial – described as “administrative” aspects go back 50 years or more). In more recent years the managerial component of supervision has come more to the fore.

The following definition is widely supported by social workers as identifying the main components of supervision:

- Line management, which is about accountability for practice and quality of service. This includes managing team resources, delegation and workload management, performance appraisal, duty of care, support and other people-management processes.
- Professional supervision (sometimes described as case supervision) with workers or groups of workers to enable and support quality practice. A key aspect of this function is reviewing and reflecting on practice issues. This may include reviewing roles and relationships, evaluating the outcomes of the work and maximising opportunities for wider learning.
- Continuing professional development of workers to ensure they have the relevant skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes to do the job and progress their careers. Constructive feedback and observation of practice should be part of the learning process for workers and supervisors, (Skills for Care and CWDC 2007).

BASW/CoSW supports the Skills for Care and CWDC recommendations on supervision, detailed in section 1.0

The Skills for Care document states that “effective supervision is one of the most important measures that organisations can put in place to ensure positive outcomes and quality services for the people who use social care and children’s services”. Effective supervision supports:

- effective workload management
- management of individual performance and quality of service
- reflection on the focus of work and methods of intervention
- commitment to positive outcomes and effective working with others
- motivation and job satisfaction through clarity on work objectives, positive feedback, critical reflection, personal support and continuing personal and professional development
- has a positive impact on staff retention and continuity of service (Adapted from Skills for Care 2007).

The General Social Care Council states that supervision is essential for effective practice. BASW/CoSW England supports the General Social Care Council Code of Practice for Employers, which states that employers must “Effectively manage and supervise staff to support effective practice and good conduct and to support staff to address deficiencies in their performance” (GSCC Code of Practice for Employers 2.2).

The GSCC also state that “To ensure the conditions for good practice, and fulfill their duty of care, employers must provide social workers with good quality supervision, realistic workloads, access to learning support and continuing development, enabling IT and management systems, and a suitable working environment. Social workers are responsible for updating their knowledge and practice, and contributing to research, student learning and briefing for other professions”. (GSCC 2008). With the pending transfer of regulatory functions for social work from the GSCC to the Health Professions Council (HPC) social workers must ensure that the HPC adapts the same principles and standards.

6.0 Informal and peer supervision

The report for the Social Work Task Force on the state of social work recognised the importance of informal and peer supervision, but also stressed the central role that one to one supervision plays.⁴ (Baginsky, M., et al).

Tsui, in a comprehensive account of supervision, states that supervision contributes to the maintenance of strong professional identity, to 'convey the mission and vision' of social work (Tsui, 2005, p. 11, cited in Beddoe) and to develop practitioners' self- management in a complex environment.

Informal supervision occurs when the culture of a team enables social workers to share ideas and concerns about practice. The importance of this approach should not be underestimated, but should not be a substitute for effective one to one and formal peer supervision.

Peer supervision is a formal process whereby social workers meet and discuss particular cases and advice and any decisions are recorded.

7.0 Supervision in practice

There are positive reports that social work supervision has enjoyed a recent renaissance. In no small part this is as a result of the strong representation to the debate by BASW/CoSW England, complemented by the views of the General Social Care Council, Skills for Care, Children's Workforce Development Council, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and others.

Beddoe (2010) reports a revitalisation of supervision in recent years. She records however that not all of this revival may be positive. She states that there are reports that at least part of the revival of supervision is in the use of supervision as a tool to manage risk, with 'the sole goal of supervision in danger of becoming the elimination of risk through the micro-management and surveillance of practitioners and their outcomes' (Peach and Horner, 2007, p. 229 cited in Beddoe 2010). Beddoe reports however that from the small survey she undertook that to a major extent supervisors rejected a risk-focused, procedural role for supervision and favoured the maintenance of a reflective space as crucial to effective practice.

Four major themes emerged from her survey:

- (i) that, if allowed, risk obsession stifles professional growth
- (ii) good supervision is determined more by process, not content
- (iii) balancing the functions of supervision is required
- (iv) that separation of managerial and professional aspects of supervision is ideal, with a sub-theme emerging concerning risk and the management of external supervision relationships. (Beddoe, L. 2010)

The BASW/CoSW survey cited in section 2 is not however so encouraging, with significant concerns expressed about a number of issues including the lack of time in supervision for personal development and learning.

The Baginsky (2009) report for the Social Work Task Force reported that all surveyed social service departments had supervision policies, or guidance in place and all departments surveyed had monitoring policies in place. A survey of these policies indicated that both the management functions and professional development functions of supervision were included in the policies.⁵ The Baginsky report also stated that two thirds of respondents received supervision at least once every four weeks. (The converse of this of course is that a third of social workers in adult social service departments were not receiving supervision at least every four weeks.) The figures concur with the BASW survey on supervision reported in section 2 above).

Another caveat to the idea of a renaissance in supervision is the report that experienced social workers expressed concern on the over emphasis on the managerial aspects of supervision. The experienced group:

⁴ This point is expanded on in section 10 below.

⁵ Having a policy of course does not mean that it is implemented

“..regretted the fact that their supervision was dominated by case management, action planning and targets and they were more likely to be amongst the group calling for a process which included the opportunity to reflect, develop, learn and unburden”.
(Baginsky, M. et. al).

8.0 National Standards and the Social Work Reform Board

The Social Work Taskforce recommended that a clear national standard should be developed for the support social workers should expect from their employers in order to do their jobs effectively. (Recommendation 6). It was stated that the new standard should be supported by clear national requirements for the supervision of social workers. (Recommendation 7) (Building a Safe and Confident Future Dec.2009)

In the first annual report of the work of the Social Work Reform Board the it was recommended that employers should “Ensure that social workers have regular and appropriate social work supervision”.

The Standards for Employers are supported by a Supervision Framework which sets out the four key elements of effective social work supervision. The framework also provides guidance for undertaking supervision of social workers in different settings.

Supervision should:

- Improve the quality of decision making and interventions
- Enable effective line management and organisational accountability
- Identify and address issues related to caseloads and workload management
- Help to identify and achieve personal learning, career and development opportunities.

The SWRB recommend that supervision sessions last at least “an hour and a half of uninterrupted time”. These should be weekly for the first six weeks of employment for a newly qualified social worker, fortnightly for the next six months, and at least monthly after that. All social workers should be supervised by another registered social worker, including those whose line managers are not social workers. They should also be encouraged to learn from current cases and draw on the experiences of peers. (Building a Safe and Confident Future One Year On, Dec.10).

It is notable that the Social Work Task Force recommended that there should be binding standards for employers, including supervision. The One Year On Report has in effect withdrawn that recommendation.

9.0 Roles and functions of social workers and personalisation

Within adult social care there is currently a strong debate about the roles and functions of social workers, fuelled partly by the “personalisation” agenda and critically by the financial cut backs. The situation is changing quickly. The ADASS, (2010) in a joint statement with BASW identified roles of adult social workers to include: adult protection, intervention where there may be human rights and civil liberties issues, working through conflict and supporting people to manage their own risks. All these tasks necessitate a high level of skill and knowledge. Supervision, which includes time to reflect and learn from practice, is an essential part of the process of ensuring that a good quality service is provided to very vulnerable people. (ADASS, Feb. 2010).

10.0 The international dimension

There is widespread agreement among professional social work bodies across the world about the role and importance of supervision.

The British Association of Social Workers' code of ethics includes the statement *“.. the supervisor's role is educational, supportive, developmental and work-focused”* (BASW Code of Ethics 4.4.2)

The American National Association of Social Work states that social workers should receive supervision from those who are competent in the techniques of social work. NASW Code Of Ethics 1.04(b)

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers Education and Training Standing Committee outlines helpful headings for the purposes of supervision:

- to ensure the worker is clear about roles and responsibilities
- to encourage the worker to meet the professions objectives
- to encourage quality of service to clients
- to encourage professional development and provide personal support
- to assist in identifying and managing stress
- to consider the resources the worker has available to do their job and discuss issues arising where they are inadequate
- to provide a positive environment within which social work practice can be discussed and reviewed.

11. Supervision practice in other professions - Nursing and Psychology

In nursing, midwifery, health visiting and clinical and educational psychology there is a requirement for professional supervision by someone from the same discipline.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (2000) state that "*Clinical supervision is a practice-focused professional relationship involving a practitioner reflecting on practice guided by a skilled supervisor*" (Stephenson 2005). It is notable that within the nursing profession there may be a separation of roles from the clinical or professional practice elements of supervision and the management function. It is accepted practice that nursing professionals can have a "clinical" supervisor and a line manager. This separation has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that the clinical supervision sessions will devote dedicated time to reflective practice and coaching and mentoring and updating knowledge and skills from the clinical supervisor. The disadvantage is that clinical supervision can become divorced from the operation realities of practice, including risk management.

Milne, (2007) writing about supervision in clinical psychology is critical of many of the definitions of supervision as too vague and therefore too imprecise to evaluate in terms of outcomes. He proposes the following definition:

"The formal provision, by approved supervisors, of a relationship-based education and training that is work-focused and which manages, supports, develops and evaluates the work of colleague/s". Milne, D.(2007)

This definition differentiates coaching and mentoring from supervision.

12.0 Multi disciplinary working and supervision

The General Social Care Council (GSCC) recognises that in recent years there has been a trend, reinforced by government policy, towards blurring role differences and loosening boundaries between professional disciplines. Unduly rigid boundaries are thought to cause problems to people trying to find their way round the system, and to make for inefficiency in the use of professional resources. Social work roles tend to be more elastic than those of many other disciplines, for a variety of reasons, which include the fact that social work has to take account of people's needs, circumstances and relationships as a whole, rather than focusing on a particular condition or delivering a defined service. Increasingly, social workers are working in partnership with people to co-produce solutions matched to their strengths and preferences, and jointly securing the best possible outcomes. It can be difficult for social work to draw hard and fast boundaries round its roles. (GSCC, 2008).

The Department for Schools and Families (DCSF) state that supervision is the process of reflecting on the practice issues that arise in the course of everyday work. It can help practitioners do their job more effectively by developing their capacity to use their experiences to rethink their practice and take action. They state that there are distinct advantages for separating out line management and professional supervision. (DCSF, 2009).

CWDC have published a guide to developing an integrated approach to supervision in Children's Trusts. The guide promotes the use of supervision as a crucial aspect of achieving outcomes for children. It is notable that the history and practice of supervision in social work is a key driver for the development of supervision policies and strategies in Children's Trusts. This echoes similar experiences of supervision in Mental Health Trusts and other multi disciplinary teams in adult services. (CWDC, 2010).

Adult Mental Health Services in Bradford, in common with many localities in England, are provided by a single agency, the Bradford District Care Trust. It is stated in the Bradford Care Trust Policy that Health and Social Care staff should continue to work together "as we incrementally move towards one integrated structure". The report recognised that for social work/social care staff this meant that arrangements for line management and supervision had to be reviewed because the model applied in the local authority social services department i.e. of combining line management and professional supervision does not fit when their line manager within the new integrated organisation does not share the professional social work/social care background.

Bradford Mental Health Trust state that professional supervision for social workers deployed within Adult Mental Health Services will be provided by a manager who has a professional social work qualification. Where the immediate line manager holds such qualification then they will provide both line management and professional supervision to the member of staff. Where this is not the case the line manager will hold the line management responsibilities and a manager who has a social work qualification will be identified to provide professional supervision for social workers.

The policy within Bradford Care Trust is not one that applies to all mental health trusts.

A SCIE report on research in practice notes that the question of social workers' professional identity in multi-professional teams, and restructuring service delivery around multi-agency teamwork has profound implications for professionalism and professional knowledge and practice. (SCIE 2008)

A fundamental challenge to agreements between social services and health is the historical and cultural development of supervision in nursing and health professionals. Generally the culture within health is that "management supervision" is split from clinical or case supervision where in social work the functions are integrated within one model. The failure to recognise and work with these fundamental differences has been to the detriment of joint working and caused significant cultural differences as each professional is trained and socialised within their own model with a view never the twain can meet despite examples in some areas of some well worked examples of joint practice.

13.0 Reports on the positive impact of social work supervision on service user (client) satisfaction.

It is beyond the scope of this policy to comprehensively document the positive impact of social work supervision on service user satisfaction and outcomes. However it is worthy of note that a study in 1991 demonstrated a significant degree of enhanced client satisfaction from those social workers who had received supervision that focused on improving client outcomes. (Harkness D & Hensley H (1991) Tsui, (2005) devotes a chapter of his comprehensive book on supervision to client outcomes, although he and others report that research on outcomes for service users is limited.

14.0 Summary and recommendations

Supervision has developed as an essential part of providing effective services to service users. There is evidence that good supervision improves both practice and the health and well being of social workers. Social work is a demanding profession and supervision plays a central part in supporting and motivating social workers to undertake their job effectively. Good supervision is an aid to both recruitment and retention of social workers.

Employers of social workers must ensure that a supervision framework is in place, including arrangements for good governance to ensure that effective supervision takes place.

Supervision to be effective must include three functions:

1. Management
2. Professional supervision
3. Continuous professional development

A fourth function can usefully be added

4. A communication tool between management and social worker on organisational issues

BASW/CoSW has found that although there are examples of good practice that there are many social workers who do not receive adequate supervision.

BASW/CoSW are developing a Code of Practice to address concerns of members and to support the drive for effective supervision of social workers. See section 14.0

BASW/CoSW England Draft Code of Good Practice for Supervision in Social Work, with special reference to social workers working in multi disciplinary teams

Principles of supervision

1. The prime purpose of supervision is to support social workers to provide good quality services. Social work is a complex and demanding profession. Effective supervision of social workers enables social workers to maximise their effectiveness
2. BASW/CoSW believe that it is essential to base social work decisions on ethical principles. The BASW/CoSW Code of Ethics provides an effective framework for social workers to support decision making in supervision.

The supervision process – code of good practice. Draft

1. BASW/CoSW believes all social work practitioners have the right to receive regular and good quality one to one supervision from registered and experienced social workers.⁶

2. BASW/CoSW believes that all organisations that employ social workers need to make a positive, unambiguous commitment to a strong supervision culture. This culture needs to be supported by good governance arrangements to ensure that good quality supervision is actually provided. Good supervision within organisations will be achieved through:

- a clear supervision policy, with practice that supports the policy. Where there are partners, for example local authorities and mental health trusts there needs to be a multi agency agreement regarding the content of the supervision policy
- supervision agreements or contracts
- effective training of managers in the skills of social work supervision
- a strong lead and example by senior managers
- performance objectives for supervision practice in place for all managers. For example systems in place to monitor the frequency and quality of supervision that takes place
- Supervision for the chief executives or lead managers of organisations

3. BASW/CoSW believe that effective supervision needs to be based on research.

Research into the effectiveness of supervision shows that supervision needs to cover three functions and all these functions are important in order for supervision to be effective:

1. Line management, which is about accountability for practice, governance and quality of service. This includes managing team resources, delegation and workload management, performance appraisal, duty of care, support and other people-management processes
2. Professional supervision (sometimes described as case supervision, or clinical supervision) to enable and support quality practice. A key aspect of this function is reviewing and reflecting on practice issues. This may include reviewing roles and relationships, evaluating the outcomes of the work and maximising opportunities for wider learning
3. Continuing professional development to ensure social workers have the relevant skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes to do the job and progress their careers. Constructive feedback and observation of practice should be part of the learning process for workers and supervisors

⁶ Front line managers of social work teams also require a similar model of supervision as described in this Code of Practice

In addition organisations need to have good processes to communicate, the supervision process can be an effective format for facilitating that communication.

4 BASW/CoSW recognise and support arrangements to ensure that there is good governance in place to support social workers. Governance arrangements are needed for supervision to be effective.⁷

There needs to be an agreed balance within organisations regarding governance of the organisation and the essential principle that social workers need to be able to exercise informed professional autonomy and judgements. The over emphasis on the managerial aspects of supervision, with the concomitant reduction in the reflective aspects of supervision and continuous professional development has led to a loss of professional autonomy in decision making. This loss of professional autonomy has contributed to poor decision making and a poorer service to service users. Applying the 3 aspects of supervision as detailed in point 3 above will ensure a balance between governance arrangements of the organisation and the effective support of social workers.

5. BASW/CoSW recognise that providing effective social work supervision is a highly skilled task. Managers require training and support to undertake this role.

Managers require a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience in order to provide effective supervision. In order to be effective managers must have received quality training to equip them for these roles and tasks. Managers also need ongoing support to enable them to further develop their skills and competence.

6. BASW/CoSW supports the right of social workers in multi disciplinary teams to receive supervision in relation to professional practice and personal development from a registered and experienced social worker.

Many social workers work in multi disciplinary teams where the managers are not registered social workers. These managers will be able to provide the management and communication functions of supervision, but will not be able to fully provide the functions that relate to professional practice and personal development. In these situations social workers must be given an unrestricted right to receive supervision from an experienced registered social worker.

Social workers work closely alongside other social care professionals. These social care professionals should also receive high quality and timely supervision.

7. BASW/CoSW support the identification of specialist supervision where this is required.

There will be times that a line manager will not have all the expertise to support and advise a social worker, particularly on certain complex cases. In these circumstances supervision from a specialist should be provided. If this occurs it is vital that the supervision agreement records the arrangements.

8. BASW/CoSW recognise that informal supervision and peer supervision are important types of supervision that need to be fostered by employers.

Informal support and advice from colleagues can play an important role in supporting social workers. This sort of support should not be a substitute for formal supervision. Peer supervision is a more formal process, whereby structured discussions are set up to discuss cases. Any decisions made that affect the outcome of the case need to be recorded.

⁷ See Appendix 1

Appendix 1 Governance agreements

While these will vary from organisation to organisation a helpful framework would cover:

An agency policy for supervision which should include:

- *Agency expectations of the purpose of supervision*
- *Intervals of supervision*
- *Location*
- *Recording – notes must be made and it needs to be clear that the notes are property of the agency that can be used as a record of good governance. Where case decisions are made these must be cross referenced to case files. How the notes are recorded, where they can be accessed and for how many years they must be kept*
- *Arrangements for clinical or case supervision*
- *Content of supervision*
- *What the supervisee wants from the supervisor*
- *What the supervisor wants from the supervisee*
- *What each will contribute*
- *Permissions agreed*
- *How any difficulties will be dealt with in working together*
- *Access to supervision records*
- A link back to the line manager if elements of supervision are “contracted out”. This is to keep the line manager aware of issues and of concerns on practice /performance
- What supervision is not i.e. counselling for the worker in relation to private issues.

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Appendix 1 Governance agreements

While these will vary from organisation to organisation a helpful framework would cover:

An agency policy for supervision which should include:

- *Agency expectations of the purpose of supervision*
- *Intervals of supervision*
- *Location*
- *Recording – notes must be made and it needs to be clear that the notes are property of the agency that can be used as a record of good governance. Where case decisions are made these must be cross referenced to case files. How the notes are recorded, where they can be accessed and for how many years they must be kept*
- *Arrangements for clinical or case supervision*
- *Content of supervision*
- *What the supervisee wants from the supervisor*
- *What the supervisor wants from the supervisee*
- *What each will contribute*
- *Permissions agreed*
- *How any difficulties will be dealt with in working together*
- *Access to supervision records*
- A link back to the line manager if elements of supervision are “contracted out”. This is to keep the line manager aware of issues and of concerns on practice /performance
- What supervision is not i.e. counselling for the worker in relation to private issues.