

# STAFF SUPERVISION POLICY

## Statement by Director of Community Department

*“A sound supervision policy is the cornerstone of good practice, and provides a framework for each member of staff to have their contribution to the service recognised, evaluated and supported, and to have their professional development and learning needs identified and met, to ensure continuous professional development and service improvement.”*

### 1. Statement of intent

- 1.1 Supervision is an essential activity for those involved in any aspect providing housing and related services.
- 1.2 Supervision is a formal process in which the role, responsibilities, workload and performance of each worker within the department is reviewed, evaluated and reflected upon, so that where necessary, learning and change can take place.
- 1.3 At its simplest, supervision is about ensuring that the department's aims are met through the actions of its staff. Supervision is therefore critical to the quality of services, achieving departmental objectives and targets, and the development and retention of staff.
- 1.4 The details contained in the policy are the minimum expectations for all staff within Housing Services.
- 1.5 All supervision activity within the department must be conducted so as to comply with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy.

### 2. Aims and objectives of the supervision policy:

- 2.1 This policy aims to ensure that:
  - the quality of the service to the service user is assured, and enhanced;
  - supervision is a positive process for the supervisee and supervisor, which enables them to develop a common understanding of how they shall work together;
  - a regular dialogue is maintained between the staff member and the department regarding job objectives, personal achievements, and problems encountered;

- where necessary communication is improved;
  - the staff member understands his/her role, his/her responsibilities, and what is expected of him, including performance measures s/he is expected to achieve or contribute to;
  - the staff member understands how his/her role relates to departmental and statutory aims and objectives;
  - the staff member is helped and supported in carrying out their duties;
  - the staff member's professional development is facilitated;
  - the staff member feels that his/her experience, expertise, and contribution to the service is acknowledged.
- 2.2 This policy must be read in conjunction with any other policy or procedure governing supervision arrangements for staff working within Housing Services, including arrangements which apply only to specific officers within the department.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Introduction to supervision**

- 3.1 Both supervisor and supervisee need to be clear of their individual responsibilities as Council employees. Each employee is accountable through their line management arrangements to the Director, and ultimately to local members.
- 3.2 Too often supervision is perceived as a process merely driven by checking compliance against procedures. Reviewing performance and ensuring the team member is carrying out his/her duties in accordance with departmental requirements and statutory requirements is an important, indeed essential, element of supervision. However, supervision must go beyond this. Formal supervision should constitute a meaningful two way process that is positive and helpful to both supervisor and staff member.
- 3.3 The supervision process may be varied where appropriate to meet individual or workplace needs. Any variation to the prescribed structure must be agreed between both parties, and a record of that variation placed on the staff member's file.
- 3.4 It is the line manager's responsibility to ensure the member of staff is provided with the conditions and tools to enable them to effectively carry out their duties, and develop key skills and competences.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, there are additional supervision procedures for Housing Options Officers, contained in the Housing Advice and Homeless Application Procedure.

- 3.5 Supervision is not the same as consultation. Neither is ongoing informal 'on-the-job' supervision a substitute for formal and regular structured supervision, in the manner set out in this policy.
- 3.6 All members of staff within Housing Services have a legitimate expectation to formal supervision, whatever their post or status. A failure to hold or facilitate adequate formal supervisions is unacceptable, and may lead to institution of the Disciplinary Procedure.
- 3.7 Each staff member must be afforded an opportunity to participate in agreeing the content of each supervision session.
- 3.8 Ideally supervision should last no longer than one hour per month (or the equivalent, if the supervision session does not occur on a monthly basis).
- 3.9 Supervision should normally occur between the staff member and their line manager. However, where this is not possible or practicable, supervision may need to be undertaken by another officer, of an equivalent or higher seniority as the staff member's line manager.
- 3.10 Supervision complements the staff appraisal process. Supervision provides an opportunity for ongoing evaluation, and review of a staff member's well-being, performance and development.
- 3.11 Supervision is not a forum for dealing with disciplinary matters, although concerns around such issues as work performance, personal competence and conduct may, where appropriate, be raised during supervision. Where a formal disciplinary measure is under consideration the matter should be dealt with in accordance with the Council's corporate Disciplinary Policy.

#### **4. Content of supervision sessions**

- 4.1 Supervision has a number of interrelated functions. This section does not provide an exhaustive list, but the supervision session should ordinarily be conducted so as to address the following key elements:
- 4.2 *Provide opportunities for exchange of information, and a genuine dialogue*

This supervisor should act so as to:

- establish channels of communication;

- encourage feedback from the member of staff on his/her own work, the team setting, and organisational issues;
- pass on relevant information, e.g. corporate policies or requirements, information that needs to be disseminated from the section heads meeting, senior officers meeting, staff meetings etc.;
- provide an opportunity, so far as possible, for the staff member to comment on or participate in the department's work. For example, constructive consideration of current practices with a view to amending procedures, or with the aim of improving internal administration and service delivery.

#### 4.3 Helping the staff member feel encouraged, empowered, and supported

The supervisor should act to so as to:

- encourage an open, honest and constructive discussion of views and feelings;
- treat the supervisee with respect, and act in a non-discriminatory manner;
- actively listen, and adopt a supportive and encouraging approach, which enables the staff member to feel able to voice their own opinions and feelings;
- provide the staff member an opportunity to communicate his/her accomplishments;
- acknowledge the staff member's achievements;
- enable the staff member to communicate his hopes and needs, regarding his/her role, and future professional development;
- consider factors impacting upon the staff member's well-being, performance, and competency;
- facilitate a constructive discussion of how any work-related concerns and pressures may be dealt with, and progressed;
- consider and progress any training needs;
- explicitly recognise that training and development is beneficial to both the Council and the staff member;
- discuss, where appropriate, possible external sources of assistance.

#### 4.4 Helping the staff member to understand and apply departmental policy and procedure

The supervisor must ensure:

- the staff member understands his/her role and responsibilities, if necessary with reference to relevant documents, e.g. job description, legislation, policy, procedure, protocols, strategies etc.;
- work is being undertaken by the staff member in accordance with statutory and procedural requirements, if necessary by checking written records, case files etc.;
- that the staff member has the appropriate tools required to undertake his/her role and those specific work tasks s/he is responsible for undertaking.

#### 4.5 Helping the staff member analyse and prioritise his workload

The supervisor must:

- check that the staff member's workload is appropriate and manageable;
- help the staff member reflect on his/her priorities, and how they relate to the department's objectives and priorities;
- focus on enabling the staff member to identify solutions to work related problems;
- refer specifically to those targets and objectives which are relevant to the staff member (see appropriate section on 'Supervision Record' form);
- provide guidance and instruction on how the staff member should achieve the requirements of his/her role;
- where necessary, identify alternative arrangements for the undertaking of specific tasks.

#### 4.6 Helping the staff member resolve issues arising from his/her work

The supervisor should:

- relay to the staff member any positive feedback received regarding his/her work;

- respond positively and constructively where the staff member requires advice and support to enable him/her to deal with their responsibilities, and realise his/her potential;
- help the staff member reflect on and develop strategies for dealing with pressure, stress, or situations s/he finds particularly difficult or challenging;
- debrief the staff member on particularly difficult or significant situations, complaints or poor outcomes;
- proactively identify and agree any support or assistance the staff member requires;
- address any environmental issues affecting his/her ability to undertake their role, e.g. need for reasonable adjustments or physical workplace alterations;
- support the staff member, where appropriate, to feel more comfortable and/or safe in his/her work.

#### 4.7 Helping the staff member achieve targets

The supervisor must:

- review and agree priorities, targets, and action plans with the staff member, so that s/he is actively engaged and involved in reviewing aims, targets and performance;<sup>2</sup>
- ensure the staff member is familiar with those plans and targets which are relevant to his/her role and responsibilities;
- review the staff member's performance, with specific reference to relevant plans, targets etc.;
- identify progress made against existing priorities and targets, and/or where are causes for concern, or the need for active review of particular aspects of the staff member's performance and/or tasks s/he is responsible for;
- identify and agree the resources the staff member requires to carry out his/her role.

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<sup>2</sup> The Supervision Record should, where appropriate, be used to confirm the relevant departmental objectives, briefly record a summary of the discussion relating to how the staff member's performance has contributed to the achievement of those objectives, and to record any related agreement as to future actions.

#### 4.8 Provide opportunities for learning and professional development to promote competence

The supervisor may promote such opportunities by:

- auditing current skills and competencies;
- acknowledging strengths;
- helping the staff member reflect on which of his/her skills and competencies need active consideration, with a view to promoting competence;
- encourage self-appraisal and reflection generally, in order to promote learning and professional development;
- helping the staff member transfer and adapt existing knowledge and skills to new situations;
- identifying training needs, and discussing how they may be met;
- provide opportunities for the staff member to develop their knowledge and skills in connection with specific job tasks;
- help the staff member set professional goals for him/herself;
- provide ongoing and constructive feedback to the team member on his/her progress;
- provide information on external sources of advice and support, where appropriate.

### 5. Supervision agreement, supervision file, and related records

5.1 The line manager will need to maintain a supervision file for each member of staff for which s/he is responsible.

5.2 The line manager will need to provide the employee with:

- a copy of this policy;
- a supervision agreement for him/her to consider, sign, and return.

#### Supervision file

5.3 The secretary to the Head of Service shall securely hold a file in respect of each operational staff member within Housing Services.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Which is separate to the file held for staff members by Human Resources.

- 5.4 On that file the following documents shall be held:
- Job description;
  - Signed supervision agreement;
  - Copies of all supervision records;
  - Appraisal records;
  - Training record (to be updated by the staff member's line manager);
  - Record of any professional courses funded by the Council (where applicable).
- 5.5 The staff member's line manager is responsible for ensuring that his/her file is kept fully up to date.
- 5.6 No unauthorised person is allowed access to staff members' files.
- 5.7 No unauthorised person will have access to another person's file or supervision records. Work and supervision related materials are ultimately the Council's property. In some circumstances it might be necessary for supervision records to be viewed by other persons (e.g. Human Resources, Council solicitors).
- 5.8 Records shall be kept for 12 months following a staff member terminating his/her employment with the Council.

*Supervision agreement*

- 5.9 The supervision agreement explicitly sets out essential information for the staff member. For example, the agreement includes details of:
- the identity of the person who conduct supervisions;
  - how often supervisions shall occur; and
  - the various formal requirements relating to how supervisions shall be conducted.
- 5.10 The line manager shall complete the supervision agreement form, and must ensure that the staff member signs and returns a copy of the agreement. The signed version must then be placed by the line manager in the staff member's file (see above, at paras 5.3 to 5.8, for details of the supervision file).
- 5.11 Where appropriate, the standard agreement form may be altered so that it adequately meets the staff member's individual needs.



5.12 The line manager should consider the following issues when negotiating the supervision agreement:

- Frequency of formal supervision meetings – this will depend on a number of issues e.g. experience, role requirements, level of expertise required, and statutory requirements relating to the role. For many staff a supervision session will need to be held on a monthly basis (see ‘Guidelines to Supervision Frequency’), particularly where the job tasks undertaken by the staff member involves the mitigation of corporate risks (e.g. a Housing Management Officer’s tenancy enforcement duties, an Allocations Officer’s responsibility to allocate properties in accordance with the Council’s Allocations Policy, a Housing Options Officer’s role in ensuring housing duties towards homeless persons are lawfully discharged);
- Normal duration of each supervision session;
- Venue – wherever possible a venue should be chosen which promotes privacy and discourages interruptions;
- Interruptions;
- Cancellation arrangements;
- Confidentiality, holding of records, and access to records by staff member;
- The purpose of supervision sessions;
- Content of sessions;
- The respective individual roles of the supervisor and supervisee, and each person’s legitimate expectations.

5.13 A record of each supervision session must be made by the supervising officer, using the ‘Supervision Record’ form (or where appropriate the relevant alternative form).<sup>4</sup>

5.14 A copy of the completed form shall be given to the staff member shortly after the supervision meeting, and a copy placed on the staff member’s file.

5.15 Where the supervision involves consideration and review of individual cases<sup>5</sup> the supervisor will record the discussion by using a separate ‘Supervision Record Case File’ form or (where appropriate) the alternative form specifically created for the particular role.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. for Housing Options Officers, the ‘Housing Options Officer Supervision’ form.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. for Housing Management Officers, a review of individual rent arrears and tenancy enforcement issues.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. for Housing Options Officers, the ‘Homeless Application Case Review’.

- 5.16 Supervision records must be accurate, concise and provide a clear record of significant discussions and decisions.
- 5.17 It is acceptable for supervision records to be hand written, providing the entire contents of the form are easily readable. Indeed, contemporaneous recording of the supervision by hand will often be preferable, given that the record can be simply photocopied and given to the staff member/placed on his/her file.

*Requests for training and personal development*

- 5.18 All requests for training and activities relating to the staff member's personal development must be documented by the supervisor. When considering such requests the supervisor must consider:
- (a) the impact on current workload and other staff members of agreeing the request;
  - (b) any potential adverse effect on service delivery;
  - (c) the financial implications for the department.

**6 Group supervision**

- 6.1 Formal supervision may be undertaken in a group format in certain circumstances, with the Head of Service's agreement. For example, group supervision may be suitable for secretarial and clerical staff. However, it remains essential to ensure clarity in purpose, planning and structure, as set out in this policy.
- 6.2 Where a group format has been approved for supervision, the supervision agreement will need to consider issues such as how the group needs to work together, and how each individual will have the opportunity to have his/her needs met. Matters of confidentiality and recording will need to be agreed. Each individual should be made aware that they can, if required, raise matters with their supervisor on one to one basis.

**7 Absence of supervisor**

- 7.1 If the supervisor is absent from work for such a period that the relevant minimum supervision frequency period is exceeded, the supervisor's line manager must make alternative arrangements for the supervision meeting. It is essential that the staff member's expectation to regular supervision in line with his/her supervision agreement is met.

## **8 Valuing and supporting supervision**

- 8.1 The department will ensure that supervision is given its due priority by:-
- ensuring that all new Housing Services staff are informed about their right to supervision, and given a copy of this policy;
  - providing training and support to line managers on how supervision should be conducted, where necessary;
  - periodically monitoring and reviewing the implementation of this policy;
  - ensuring that the training and development needs of staff are fed into the Housing Services review of training needs, and the setting of the annual staff training and development budget.

## **9 Monitoring**

- 9.1 In order to ensure that supervision is effective and complies with this policy each senior manager<sup>7</sup> will monitor the standard and practice of supervision within their section. This should be routinely addressed via the managers' supervision of the managers and team leaders for whom they are responsible.
- 9.2 Any staff member concerned about any aspect of the supervision process should in the first instance attempt to resolve that issue with their line manager/supervisor. Where this is not possible, or where the issue remains unresolved, the staff member should ordinarily use the existing line management hierarchy, by raising the matter with his/her supervisor's line manager.
- 9.3 It is suggested that the following measures are undertaken by managers/supervisors to promote the effectiveness of formal staff supervision:
- ensure supervision is a regular agenda item in team meetings, senior officer meetings, and section heads meetings;
  - share experiences with other supervisors/line managers, and compare practice (ensuring confidential issues are not disseminated);
  - proactively check with staff members undergoing supervision how they perceive the usefulness and effectiveness of their supervision. Consider feedback on issues such as what the staff member has found of particular value and benefit.

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<sup>7</sup> Housing Manager, Technical Manager, Finance Manager.

9.4 The Head of Service or a member of the senior management team<sup>8</sup> may require each supervisor to confirm that supervisions of staff members have been carried out in accordance with this policy. Supervisors may, for example, be required to confirm the dates on which supervisions were undertaken and/or to provide copies of the documentation referred to in this policy.

## **10 Accountability**

10.1 Each partner within the supervision relationship is responsible for ensuring that effective and meaningful supervision takes place, and for ensuring the quality of their own contribution. Each person should prioritise the supervision process, and ensure they are adequately prepared for the session. Each party is responsible to communicate any difficulties and problems in an open and constructive manner.

10.2 The Head of Service or a senior manager<sup>9</sup> may monitor compliance. This may involve such measures as:

- checking samples of supervision minutes and documentation;
- periodic management reports to section heads meeting.

## **11 Associated documents**

11.1 The following documents accompany this policy:

- Guidelines to supervision frequency;
- Supervision agreement\*;
- Supervision Record.

11.2 Supervisors should ensure that those documents asterisked in the previous paragraph are accessed electronically in Word format, so they may be amended as required.

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<sup>8</sup> See footnote 7.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 7.