Children and Family Services

Departmental Supervision Policy 2019

Reviewed March 2021

Leicestershire County Council

Section A

Introduction

In order to achieve consistently high quality outcomes for service users and their families, our practitioners must have and be able to maintain a good skill level and current knowledge. Effective supervision is a crucial component of this goal.

The departmental mission is that:

> 'Children and young people in Leicestershire are safe, and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health, wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities'.

All parts of the department contribute to the delivery of this mission and have responsibility in assuring the quality of work provided. Alongside the Council's Personal Development Review (PDR) process the supervision of staff forms an integral part of the overall performance management process within the department.

These elements work together to ensure that all aspects of our collective work are completed to a high standard. These elements also support the development of a learning organisation which routinely identifies good practice and seeks to disseminate this across teams and services. However we must also pay attention to and pro-actively manage any concerns, identified deficits and risks in a way that promotes growth and learning from negative experiences. In short: - high support with high challenge.

Supervision is the focal point of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee (regardless of role) and a key tool in delivering high quality services which improve outcomes for children and young people living in Leicestershire. It should not be seen as an isolated activity but part of a culture that promotes reflective practice and learning from experience.

The department has committed to a common methodology to underpin its work with children and families. The approach is commonly known as the 'Signs of Safety' approach. However it has been adapted to be more inclusive and in some areas is known as Signs of Wellbeing or Success or Stability – depending on the nature of the work. The methodology is a strength based / asset based approach that fits well with the ethos and philosophy of teams across the department and the way in which the department is seeking to work with others (be they colleagues or families or partners) in delivering its mission. In relation to staff supervision we have therefore chosen to adopt a supervisory approach that is also strength based. This is applicable for all our staff regardless of who they work with or where they work.

Purpose

This policy defines supervision and describes elements of good supervision for all our staff teams. All staff members are required to receive supervision which complies with this policy. Part A of this policy is therefore applicable to all.

Part B of this policy is concerned with supervision in specific areas which work directly with vulnerable children and their families – specifically those working in Social Care and Early Help teams. This policy should help to ensure that expectations on both supervisors and supervisees are clear and can be systematically audited to capture learning and areas for development.

Scope

This supervision policy applies to all staff, within the Children & Family Services Department. It includes staff undertaking administrative business support or any 'back office' roles. It includes all temporary, casual or agency staff utilised by LCC who are subject to the same standards and expectations as directly employed staff. The principles below are applicable to all.

Legislative Framework

This policy must work for all of our workers across the department. However for specific groups of staff we need to take account of the legislative framework for their profession. Additional attention is given to the supervision of some professional groups (social workers, psychologists) in Section B, where there are specific requirements defined by regulation and/or professionals standards. Where Assistant Directors agree that distinct standards for other specific service areas are required these should be included as appendices but do not replace this policy.

Therefore, this supervision policy is very specifically guided by the standards set out by the Health & Care Professions Council www.hcpc-uk.org.

Core Principles

- Managers throughout the department have responsibility for supervising and developing their staff effectively. Every member of staff working within the department has the right to regular planned supervision.
- Supervisors and supervisees have a joint responsibility to constructively contribute to the supervisory process and must be familiar with this policy and be aware of the accompanying guidance and tools where these are relevant to the role. Individuals must take responsibility for their own performance and learning. Learning should be part of everyday practice.
- Supervision will reflect on what is working well, what we are worried about, and what needs to happen to address or progress the concerns/ issues discussed.
- Supervision should be approached in a positive, constructive and open way. It is an opportunity to recognise good performance and identifying how good results were achieved so that they can be replicated. The use of appreciative inquiry is an ideal tool to model this kind of self - reflection.
- Supervision must be a safe and confidential space which is based on a 2-way dialogue.

Defining Supervision

Formal Supervision: Formal supervision is a pre-arranged meeting with an agreed agenda which is recorded.

In areas of the business that have a caseload (working directly with vulnerable children, young people and their families) it is important that sufficient time and attention is paid to individual children's circumstances. Whilst it is not feasible to discuss a full caseload at each supervision session, the manager and worker must be clear as to how they will ensure that the progress of each child is fully considered. Given the dynamic nature of family work and work with young people, additional ad hoc sessions with a manager providing guidance, direction and support may well be required (see section B).

Unplanned/Ad hoc supervision: Happens in the course of normal business. Staff may approach managers to seek clarification or decisions. It may or may not be useful to keep a record of any decisions made in these ad hoc meetings. Where this relates to specific children, young people, or families the response should be recorded on the casework file to provide a clear record of when and how decisions were reached. These sessions do not replace the formal monthly supervision.

Management Oversight: This most usually applies to areas of the business that have a caseload (working directly with vulnerable children, young people and their families). This does not replace formal supervision. Throughout the time a child and family is known to the department there are multiple opportunities to provide managerial oversight and direction. These are set out in the guidance booklet for managers and include panel meetings. Management oversight is recorded on the case file (management decision) by the manager (or as agreed by arrangement).

Group Supervision: A group of people (often members of a team) come together in an agreed structured format to reflect on their work by pooling skills, experience and knowledge to improve capacity at both an individual or group level. In Leicestershire in Social Care and Early Help teams these have become known as 'pod meetings'. Again these do not replace formal supervision. A template to log the activity is included at the end of this policy.

Professional Supervision: This is currently integrated within line management arrangements. The key aspect of professional supervision is to review and reflect on issues relating to the profession. It also supports adherence to the requirements of professional bodies relating to the expected standards of care. In circumstances of multi-disciplinary teams where different professionals work together, line management arrangements will be adapted to ensure professional supervision can be provided.

(For social workers supervision must be based on an understanding and appreciation of the **Knowledge and Skills Statements** for both Approved Child and Family Practitioners and Practice Supervisors. It must challenge practitioners to reflect critically on their practice and foster an inquisitive approach to social work. **Educational psychology**[1] has their own guidance for professional supervision. **Teachers**[2] also have clear professional standards that should be adhered to). Residential workers must comply with the Children's Homes manual and relevant regulations (reg 33).

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[1] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/educational-psychology/resources/DECP%20Supervision%20report%20Nov%202010.pdf

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards

Elements of Good Supervision

There are a number of different aspects to effective supervision. Although it is not necessary to have a complete balance of the functions in each supervision session, it is important that one element does not dominate the process. The methodology of 'signs of safety, stability & success' which seeks to identify what is working well, areas of concern and next steps helps to ensure that a balanced and focused approach is adopted. To ensure there is time for meaningful supervision duration is likely to be for 1 hour. For those undertaking direct work with children and families, approximately 60 to 90 minutes of uninterrupted time each month will be sufficient to reflect in depth on specific pieces of work.

Managerial & Accountability: This element is concerned with ensuring that the work undertaken is carried out to the expected standards.

Examples of issues covered may include:

- Monitoring and checking the progress of work to prevent drift – ensuring that objectives, timescales and expected outcomes are clearly recorded
- Assessing and reviewing decisions to ensure risk is managed effectively and proactively
- Ensuring professional boundaries and standards are understood and maintained; all statutory obligations are met.
- Ensure that work is congruent with corporate and departmental policies and procedures
- Discussing methods of engagement and effective working practice with key stakeholders. This will vary for different parts of the business (schools/settings/ other agencies/children/parents/ carers/service providers.
- Providing challenge to ensure that all aspect of our business is informed by the current evidence base, latest analysis or most recent national guidance or policy
- Providing challenge to assumptions and judgements (including personal bias and prejudice) which may adversely impact on the quality of service or outcomes achieved.
- Regulating and monitoring workload, establishing priorities and actions to tackle barriers to effective practice.

Developmental: The supervisory process is a key element in the continuing professional development of staff. The role of the supervisor is to support the worker's ongoing professional development.

- Giving feedback on performance including acknowledging and appreciating good performance to ensure workers feel valued and to build confidence.
- For frontline workers, giving focus on the quality of practice and the challenges of work with families. It includes reflection on what work has been done, plans for future interventions and actions, and discussions on improvements in practice. There should be a reflection on the relationships that have been formed with children, adults and families, Barriers to effective working on particular cases, should be explored in depth.
- Identifying gaps in knowledge, experience and skills of the worker and agreeing a plan to address these. Whilst this often takes place within the PDR process, any issues should be identified and addressed as part of the supervision process through mechanisms such as shadowing or mentoring, peer supervision, informal discussion, reading/research, demonstration/joint working as well as specific formal training.
- Enabling supervisee to reflect upon their personal style of presentation or communication with others (including service users, partners, staff, managers or Members) to build emotional intelligence, develop productive working relationships and secure high performance.
- For particular professions including registered social workers and educational psychologists it is crucial that supervision is used as a forum to consider and record CPD as evidence of compliance with the requirements of registration.

Support & Wellbeing

The nature of the work carried out in the Children & Family Services Department can mean that staff are faced with difficult situations, uncertainty and distress. The supportive function of supervision is extremely important to help staff cope with these challenges and build resilience. This element is central to the health, safety and wellbeing of all workers, providing an opportunity to discuss any concerns of a personal or general nature in order to:

- Ensure that personal or professional issues which may be currently impacting upon performance are reacted to and responded to with care.
- Allow staff to raise and discuss any current stressful situations, either at work or home and consider with their manager the impact of these for their work and agree actions.
- Give consideration to any risks at work including risks to personal safety. http://intranet.leics.gov.uk/ internal _ services/hr/hr _ wellbeing.htm
- Where staff feel that their concerns about feeling 'at risk' are not being dealt with effectively by their supervisor, then staff have the option to take their concerns further through line management or through the whistle blowing policy: http://lccedrms4:8087/Intranet%20File%20Plan/Document%20Store/ Document%20Repository/Documents/Whistleblowing%20Procedure.do

Standards for Supervision

The quality of supervision for all staff can be assessed using the following generic standards:

Discussion should include a focus on outcomes

- Supervision sessions should have a clear and persistent focus on expected outcomes.
- Supervision should monitor the progress of work against the expected outcomes, helping workers to identify the specific actions required to create progress.

There is high quality decision making

- Decision making is visible
- The rationale for decisions is easily understood as the 'working out' or weighing of options is visible

Supervision should be regular with a planned frequency
- The supervision procedure sets out our standards and definition for the frequency and provision of timely high quality supervision.

Section B: Practice Depth

Introduction

This section of the policy is aimed specifically at those managers in Social Care and Early Help teams who are supervising casework. Some elements may have relevance for managers in other services where practitioners who are working directly with children, young people and their families. This element of the policy revision has been led by the Practice Development Group. A group of mangers recently undertaking training in supervision were also consulted on their learning experience. The Practice Development Group felt that currently overall:

- supervision tends to be task oriented and mostly used to monitor progress on cases
- managers concerns can often take precedence
- there is sometimes a lack of analysis and critical thinking skills in workers and supervision needs to be better used to develop these skills in workers.

Our own local viewpoint is reflected nationally with a national survey of social workers undertaken by the University of Bedfordshire and Community Care in 2017 indicating that nationally those working with children and families wanted more time to reflect on their practice and develop their skills.

The practice development group is made up of practitioners from across social care and early help teams. They have reviewed our approach to supervision and developed a guidance document for managers based on their thinking and exploration of what works well. In doing so the group has researched a range of materials and tools and has been significantly influenced by the work of **Research in Practice** (RIP)[3] and the materials included in their resource pack (some of which are collated and shared with managers in a separate booklet).

Although focused on supervising staff working with families, nonetheless the group felt that much of this could be useful for practitioners in other parts of the business or could be easily adapted. The policy will be reviewed in 2020 to allow for development and revisions by staff using it.

Scope

The section below of the policy applies specifically to those people working in Social Care teams and Early Help teams who work directly with children, young people and their families. Other services, such as teaching, SENA and educational psychology may well find this section useful but need to be guided by any specific professional processes and standards. Whilst these will be specific to the needs of that profession they do still reflect the aims and commitment to high standards set out in this document.

Social Workers

As a result of the specific needs of qualified and registered Social Workers they are subject to additional attention within this policy document. There is a specific legislative framework which governs social work practice. Additionally this policy takes full account of

- Social Work Care Standards Act 2000.
- Regulation and requirements for supervision set out in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) Order 2003.
- Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England (which provide a framework for supervision of all qualified Social Workers).

The Vision for Practice Depth

Within the department the drive for practice excellence when we work with families is embedded in our **'Growing Quality'** documents. The ambition is for practice to be grounded in relationships with strong critical thinking, analysis and decision–making. This means that practitioners need to be confident moving beyond gathering information to be confident in forming professional judgements. The role of practice supervisors is key in promoting confident analysis and critical thinking. This is endorsed by Eileen Munro who says that 'reflection is the key to well evidenced decisions and recommendations' (2011).
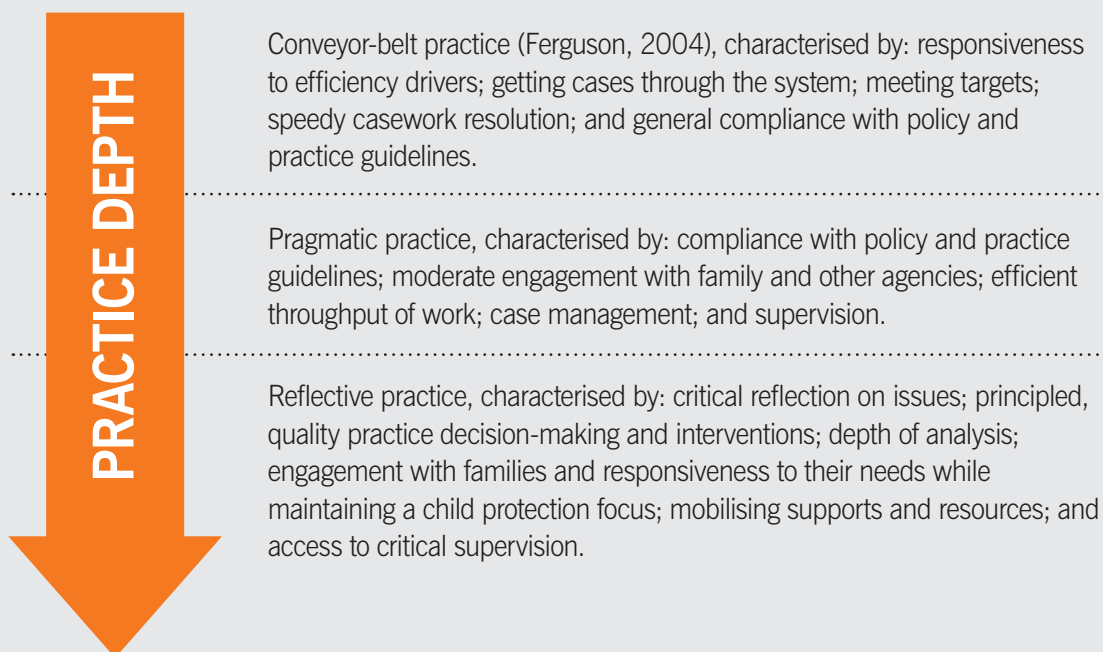
It is the quality of thinking that dictates the quality of practice and ultimately the effectiveness of any support provided to children and their families.

(Brown & Turney 2014)

The diagram below describes the concept of 'practice depth' in casework.

Figure 1: Understanding practice depth

PRACTICE DEPTH

Conveyor-belt practice (Ferguson, 2004), characterised by: responsiveness to efficiency drivers; getting cases through the system; meeting targets; speedy casework resolution; and general compliance with policy and practice guidelines.

Pragmatic practice, characterised by: compliance with policy and practice guidelines; moderate engagement with family and other agencies; efficient throughput of work; case management; and supervision.

Reflective practice, characterised by: critical reflection on issues; principled, quality practice decision-making and interventions; depth of analysis; engagement with families and responsiveness to their needs while maintaining a child protection focus; mobilising supports and resources; and access to critical supervision.

Adapted from work by Megan Chapman and Jo Field

Secondary and Vicarious Trauma

Research tells us that Secondary and Vicarious Trauma is experienced by professionals who are regularly exposed to other people's distressing experiences, and by empathising with them, are themselves affected by the trauma. This is a common condition among frontline practitioners, and can affect stress and anxiety levels. As Babette Rothschild says: "All emotions are contagious … both the ones that are pleasant and the ones that are unpleasant".

Work-related stress and anxiety can impact on a practitioner's health, personal life, their work and can contribute to feelings of burnout and lead to absence from work. Exposure to trauma and other stressors is unavoidable in our work, however supervision has been identified as a primary strategy that supports resiliency in workers and mitigates against the impact of these stressors.

Specific standards of care for oversight and supervision of casework

These standards are based on the six principles of reflective supervision described by Research in Practice (RIP) and provide a framework for evaluating the quality of oversight and supervision in Leicestershire.

Recommended quality assurance methodology includes observation, interviews and case note audit.

Any evaluation of management oversight and supervision is designed to identify:

- Practice that may need to be challenged
- Good practice that should be promoted more widely

Six standards of reflective supervision:

1. **Supervision is helping to deepen and broaden workers' knowledge and critical analysis skills. This standard is met when the supervision:**

- identifies the worker's learning needs

- poses questions that encourage critical analysis

- gives consideration to power differentials and wider social factors

- supports the worker to learn from their experiences

2. **Enables confident, competent, creative and independent decision-making. This standard is met when the supervision:**

- Has supported the worker to make appropriate decisions independent of supervision (reducing supervisor dependency)

- Acts as a critical friend' – both supporting and challenging worker's decision making ideas

3. **Helps workers to build clear plans that seek to enable positive change for children and families. This standard is met when the supervision:**

- Has enabled a focus on the impact of issues – personal or societal (such as gender, ability, ethnicity sexuality) which may act as barriers to families delivering plans.

- Has resulted in clarity on specific actions or outcomes for the child or family

- Has ensured all the child's needs are properly considered and there is a clear link between the expressed views and wishes of children and young people and plans and decisions.

- Explores the views of other professionals

4. **Develops a relationship that helps staff feel valued, supported and motivated. This standard is met when the supervision:**

- Explores the worker's health and well-being

- Has maintained or increased the workers job satisfaction

5. Supports the development of workers' emotional resilience and self-awareness. This standard is met when the supervision:

- Explores how the worker's thoughts and feelings may unconsciously shape their judgements and decision making

- Explores the impact on the worker of their own gender, ethnicity, ability, religion, childhood experiences for example which may be having a bearing on their professional identity or approach to work.

6. Promotes the development of a learning culture within the organisation. This standard is met when the supervision:

- Results in specific actions or outcomes for the organisation – e.g. sharing of good practice more widely.

- Makes use of tools to assist in the reflective process

Standards for case management oversight

Robust case management oversight is more than countersigning. At its most basic it helps to ensure that children and young people are sufficiently protected from harm. Whilst there must of course be a focus on those cases of medium and high risk, managers must also be aware of and actively be monitoring those cases that have the potential for risk to increase.

Practice Standards

Robust management oversight is achieved when there is evidence that:

- Assessment and planning is effective (in reducing risk of harm or vulnerability)
- Practice is focused on children and understanding their lived experience.
- Actions in plans are clear with time frames
- The rationale for decisions is evident.
- Work undertaken is timely and responsive to changing circumstances
- Recording is clear and up to date and accurately reflects the circumstances of the family
- There is a clear focus on improving outcomes for the child
- There is follow up by managers ensuring that previously identified tasks have been completed

Quality Assurance

Compliance with this supervision policy is part of our collective work to improve the outcomes for families across Leicestershire. The implementation of this policy across the department will be monitored through a routine process of audit work. In terms of compliance with the regularity of supervision teams across Early Help and Social Care provide a monthly return to QAIF@leics.gov.uk

All managers are expected to seek assurance as to the quality and consistency of supervision for all staff. Within each service area, service managers should ensure that:

- supervision is carried out at the required frequency
- supervision is of good quality
- both good practice and areas of improvement are identified and learning and good practice disseminated in the wider service.

Heads of Service and service managers will agree the quality assurance activity which will form part of their annual delivery plans. It is recommended that at least one of these is focused on the quality of staff supervision. As well as audit, the direct observation of supervision may also provide good learning of what works well in teams. An evaluation of the quality of supervision provided to front line workers should be made using the categories set out below as recommended by RIP to provide some standardisation from a range of quality assurance activity:

Challenge: The identified practice is detrimental to children/families/practitioner/organisation and needs to be changed.

Support: The current practice is not meeting all the standards and the supervisor/supervisee requires support in terms of training, practice, policy (individual/organisation).

Maintain: This is good practice - ensure that the current practice is embedded and able to continue/develop.

Promote: The current practice is excellent and should be promoted across the organisation for everyone to learn from.

Key Processes

i) Supervision Agreement

All staff members must have an individual agreement. A standard template is provided and should be retained. The limits and boundaries of supervision should be made clear here along with the frequency of sessions depending appropriate to the individual - such as ASYE and new starters.

Sessions cancelled for any reason must be rebooked as close to the original data as possible. Cancelled sessions should be an exception.

ii) Responsibilities of Staff

The different responsibilities of staff are summarised in the following table:

Understanding your responsibilities

Manager	Staff
Managers should ensure supervisors are familiar with this policy, the guidance and the tools and resources booklet.	Supervisors should familiarise themselves with this policy, the guidance and the tools and resources booklet
Managers should ensure that new casework supervisors must undertake supervision training during probation period and no later than six months from the date of their appointment unless their line manager is satisfied that they have already completed an equivalent course.	Supervisors must book onto a course during probation period and no later than six months from the date of their appointment unless their line manager is satisfied that they have already completed an equivalent course.
Ensure a supervision agreement has been negotiated and agreed within the first week of employment and is reviewed annually. Discuss and agree the boundaries of confidentiality Provide access to this policy for the supervisee	Agree contract for supervision during induction. Understand the standards of good supervision.
Supervisor to make contract with all supervisees and organise and ensure a monthly supervision session is set up throughout the year ensuring suitable venue.	Engage constructively with the supervision process as part of individual performance and personal development
Supervisor to prepare for sessions to ensure key elements of supervision are included to support workers continuous development.	Prepare for sessions by reflecting on work areas to clearly identify what is going well, areas of worry/concern.
Supervisor to maintain accurate and clear records written in plain English on agreed documentation including disagreements and decisions.	Review notes produced and ensure records reflect accurately the content and outcomes discussed
Identify and agree key actions now required to address areas raised.	Take action as agreed in supervision to progress work, improve performance and/or address the quality of work/desired outcomes
Supervisor to ensure all decisions or actions discussed relating to a child or family are recorded on appropriate electronic systems.	Ensure that decisions or actions agreed within supervision are logged onto the child's electronic record. Report on progress made.
Supervisor ensures staff meets the requirements of the Safeguarding Children Competency Framework and identifies any gaps in knowledge and understanding relevant to their role.	Provides evidence that they can undertake their safeguarding roles and responsibilities in line with the competency required for their role and identifies any gaps in knowledge and understanding
Where possible when a change in line manager occurs, a hand over process is arranged with supervisee and new manager.	Reflect and learn from work experience and training and development opportunities
Manager to identify an alternative for workers where a supervisor is away from work for a prolonged period to ensure cover arrangements are in place.	Meet any professional and/or corporate standards

Dissatisfaction and Disagreements

If a member of staff does not feel that supervision complies with the standards set out in this policy, they should in the first instance raise this with their supervisor. If the concerns are not resolved this should be escalated to the next level of management.

Similarly managers should seek to resolve quickly any areas of disagreement – where this is not possible the matter should be dealt with by the next tier of management.

Other relevant policies

- Records of staff will be kept for the appropriate period of time in line with corporate retention policy after leaving the authority. Supervision files should be retained in accordance with the corporate policy on personnel files.
- The supervision standards, policy and procedure should be used in conjunction with other corporate policies e.g. disciplinary, capability or grievance.
  http://intranet.leics.gov.uk/internal_services/hr/hr_conduct.htm
- All supervision arrangements must comply with the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy.
  http://lccedrms4:8087/Intranet%20File%20Plan/Document%20Store/Document%20Repository/Documents/Employment%20Equality%20Target%20Setting%20-%20Paper%208x.doc
- All supervision arrangements should be congruent with the LSCB procedures and Council polices linked to safer recruitment
  https://leics.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/intranet/HDI/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7B835849DF-D24C-4640-8819-62481BDE4309%7D&file=recruitment-and-selection-of-county-council-employees-guidance.doc&action=default&mobileredirect=true&DefaultItemOpen=1

A guidance booklet for managers of family facing services is also available to support managers and guide supervisees. This information draws heavily on the national work compiled by Research in Practice. In addition, there are templates and tips, tools and resources located on the learning hub which have been compiled for managers to use. It is hoped that people across the department can build on these resources and share their learning.