

NIGALA

NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency

*A voice for Children and Young People
in Family Courts*

NIGALA SUPERVISION POLICY

MARCH 2017



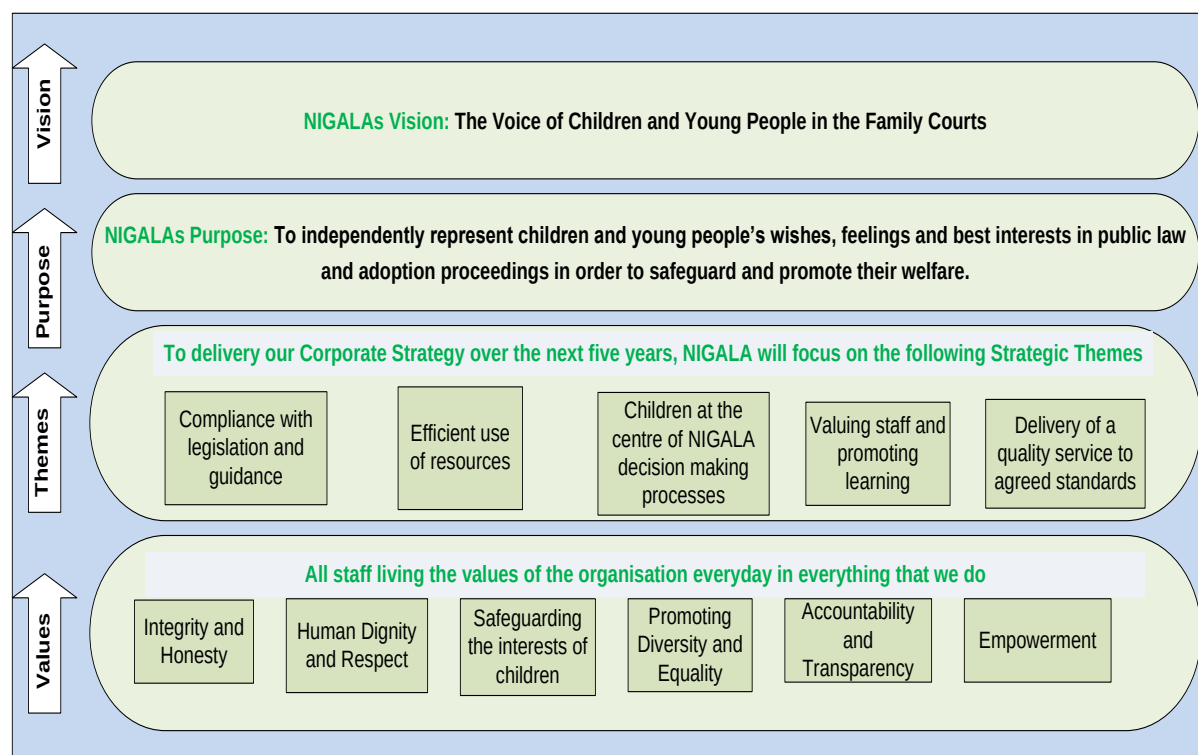
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Guardian Ad Litem Agency was established under The Children (NI) Order 1995. The role of the Guardian, which has developed and become embedded in the wider socio-legal context, is of critical importance in assisting the courts make timely decisions in respect of children and young people that can have lifelong implications. While Guardians exercise professional independence in making a recommendation to the court, premised on their assessment and analysis of the child/young person's needs and their wishes and feelings, they are accountable to the Agency for the quality and standard of their work.
- 1.2 Guardians are required to be registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) the regulatory body for the social care workforce in Northern Ireland and comply with the NISCC "Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers" (November 2015). Standard 6 specifies "As a social worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills". **The NISCC Reflective Practice: A Model for Supervision and Practice in Social Work (May 2015) clearly identifies how improved standards of reflective practice enhance the worker's competence and confidence and consequently contribute to better outcomes for service users.**
- 1.3 It is imperative that the Guardians professional judgement, performance and professional development are aligned to the NIGALA vision, values and strategic themes as outlined in the strategic map (Figure 1).

Figure 1: NIGALA Strategic Map



1.4 This policy sets out how supervision will be undertaken and the complimentary support mechanisms to achieve the supervision functions. The supervision policy is aligned to the Agency's overarching quality assurance mechanisms and should be read in conjunction with the NIGALA Professional Accountability Framework 2014 and the NIGALA Professional Standards 2015. The Professional Accountability Framework sets out the accountability arrangements to ensure consistent quality of Guardian Ad Litem practice and performance which will be monitored and assessed through the mid-year review and annual appraisal undertaken by the Assistant Director. The Professional Standards relate to the day to day work of the Guardian in their role as the independent representative for the child or young person in court proceedings. The aims of the Professional Standards are:

- To provide a professionally competent service for children/young people.
- To outline what the courts can expect through an efficient and effective service.
- To provide an independent voice for the child in court proceedings.
- To present measurable criteria by which the service can be monitored, reviewed, appraised and inspected.
- To adopt a consistent and standardised approach to the role of the Guardian ad Litem whilst ensuring that innovation and creativity are allowed and encouraged.

The Agency's Supervision arrangements which align accountability, staff support and development and governance arrangements are mapped within Appendix 1.

2. Definition of Supervision

- 2.1 Within NIGALA supervision is defined as "an accountable process which supports, assures and develops the knowledge, skills and values of the individual and group" (Skills for Care 2007).
- 2.2 It is acknowledged that Guardians deal with complex, emotionally charged cases and are required to make judgements in high risks situations whilst managing the child/young person and their families often competing Art 6 & Art 8 rights. Collectively Guardians have a wealth of experience, knowledge and expertise that can be utilised to provide formalised peer support, facilitate reflective practice and safeguard against professional bias. Sharing of knowledge and experience will lead to enhanced understanding and decision making and ultimately support good outcomes for children.

3. The Functions of Supervision

1. Agency accountability/assurance for practice and duty of care/support – meeting KPI's and practice complying with Professional Standards

2. Reflective discussion and peer support to address case related and general professional and practice issues
3. Ongoing professional and practice development -contributing to and availing of training and development and involvement in non-case related activity to ensure that staff have the relevant skills and knowledge to undertake their role

4. Mechanisms for achieving the supervision functions (Appendix 1)

4.1 Agency Accountability/Assurance

4.1.1 Guardian's achievement of annually agreed key performance indicators (KPI's) and compliance with the six professional standards areas below:

- a) The Welfare of the Child
- b) Guardian Conduct of a Case
- c) Report Writing
- d) Records Management and Recording Practice
- e) Participation of Children in Court Proceedings
- f) Continuous Professional Development

4.1.2 These will be captured within the Guardian Case Information System (GCIS) and will be monitored and kept under review within the mid-year review and annual appraisal conducted by the Assistant Director. Guardians will be enabled to track and reflect on their performance (throughput of cases, range and number of interventions, active involvement of the child/young person, review Solicitor feedback) relative to Agency professional standards and KPI averages.

4.2 Reflective discussion and support on case related and general professional and practice issues

4.2.1 Guardians will be enabled to avail of situational supervision/consultation on an open door basis with an Assistant Director to address case specific issues. Case-related supervision/consultation discussions will be facilitated via phone and in person and each contact event will be recorded by the Assistant Director within GCIS.

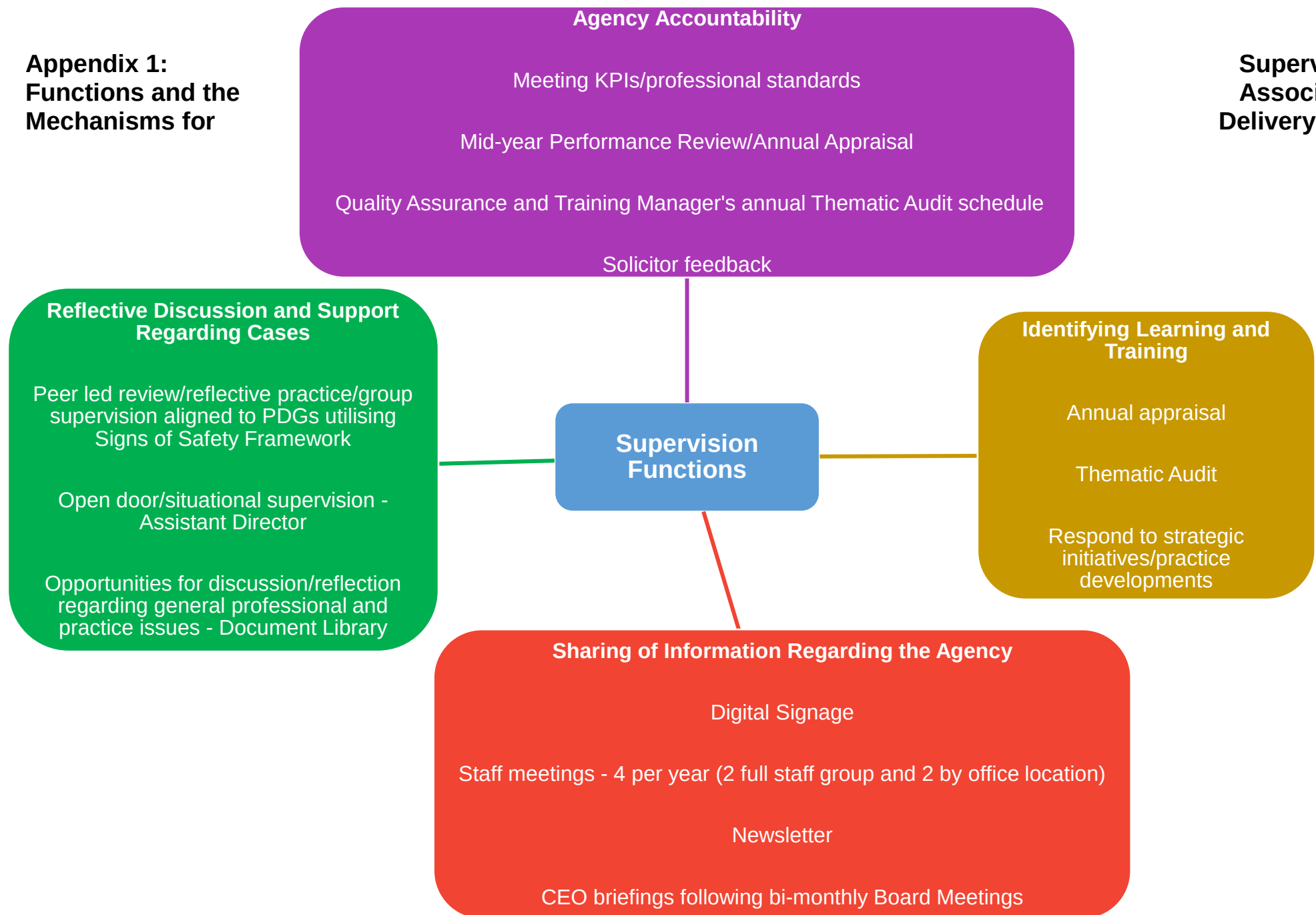
- 1.2.2 Monthly Peer Review/Reflective Practice forums will provide formalised mechanisms for peer support and group supervision by promoting knowledge exchange and facilitating reflective practice. Protected time will be designated to engaging in peer review/reflective practice forums. **Guardians are required to attend a minimum of 3 group supervision sessions per annum. New staff will continue to have monthly structured one to one supervision with a designated manager for the duration of their probationary period.**
- 1.2.3 Guardians are experienced practitioners who can draw upon each other's knowledge and skills to address and discuss case related and practice issues as informed by case judgements, literature and research. **Reflection on the learning from attendance at group supervision will be discussed at the mid-year review meeting and annual appraisal.**
- 4.2.4 Peer led reflective practice and professional review forums will harness and cascade the wealth of experience and knowledge within the Guardian group. The benefits of reducing professional isolation and the potential for professional bias (practice based on subjective biases and perspectives) and facilitating reflective practice and peer support will be realised. A group contract will define the expectations of group members and the format for group supervision in order to achieve a safe, reflective space to address case dilemmas, share knowledge and skills and consider practice issues. The mapping framework tool from the Signs of Safety Model will be utilised. (Appendix 3)

4.3 Ongoing professional development

- 4.3.1 Guardians are qualified social workers, (Principal Practitioner grade), who are responsible for maintaining their ongoing learning and development in line with the requirements for registration with the NISCC. Increasingly the emphasis is on evidencing the application of the knowledge and skills and the difference that it makes to the service provided. Knowledge exchange and information sharing are central to promoting collaboration and a learning culture where the wealth of Guardian knowledge, experience and skills are fully utilised.
- 4.3.2 Guardians are required to become involved in non-case related activity ranging from e.g. one off consultations, committees/sub-committee, working groups all of which will receive points within caseload weighting. Active staff involvement will support NIGALA as a learning organisation with a competent and engaged workforce able to inform and influence regional multidisciplinary working.

Appendix 1: Functions and the Mechanisms for

Supervision Associated Delivery



Appendix 2: Supervision Arrangements to Align Accountability, Staff Support and Development and Governance Arrangements

Accountability	Valuing Staff and Promoting Learning	Governance
<i>Compliance with Legislation and Guidance</i> <i>Delivery of a quality service to agreed standards</i> Achieving qualitative KPIs (caseload weighting, case closure, children's feedback, Solicitor feedback) Quality assurance aligned to evidencing quality standards Development of templates, standardised tools to benchmark and promote consistent standards of practice Currently: supervision 4 times per year one to one Annual appraisal Move to: mid-year review (performance management aligned to agreed objectives/standards) • Case duration • Case throughput • Interventions • Enquiries • Solicitor usage • Training and development • Attendance at group supervision • Utilisation of situational/open door supervision • Involvement in non-case related activity Annual appraisal incorporating file audit Thematic audits – quality assurance (QA&TM)	<i>Efficient use of resources</i> Peer support/reflective discussion/knowledge exchange Designated Assistant Director/Case Co-ordinator continuing to provide situational supervision/consultation on an open door basis – recorded on GCIS (available for requisite support – case related and staff care/wellbeing) Existing Professional Development Groups alignment to group supervision/knowledge exchange Designated group membership Meet on a monthly or six weekly basis (between 6 and 8 times per year) Two hours duration PDGs will accommodate the peer supervision/knowledge exchange remit to enhance reflective practice Importance of a consistent model Training on group supervision utilising Signs of Safety framework aligned to regional roll out of the model linked to the Social Work Strategy Contracting and agreeing responsibilities and expectations • Confidentiality • Attendance minimum of three per annum • Rotating facilitation to support case presentation, to promote insight, generate options, relative to the challenges faced • Managing conflict and issues relating to professional practice Group attendees and brief synopsis of issues addressed will be inputted by the Group Facilitator (rotated role) on GCIS	The Guardian Ad Litem (Panel) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 • Regulation 3 “provide adequate management supervision and training for Guardians ad Litem <i>NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers November 2015</i> Standard 6 “As a Social Worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills” • 6.17 – “Undertaking relevant training and learning to maintain and improve your knowledge and skills and meeting NISCC Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements in line with your job role” (Principal Practitioner) • 6.18 – “Contributing to the learning and development of others” Corporate and Business Plans Timely and accessible information to inform Service Development and Practice Initiatives Digital Signage CEO Briefings four times per year following Board Meetings Staff Meetings four times per year (2 by office location, 2 whole staff group) Newsletters Staff Forum

Appendix 3: Mapping Framework (Signs of Safety)

