

# Managing Poor Performance in Social Work Teams

Community Care Live

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# What is poor performance?



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# Defining poor performance

- Whose definition?
  - The council's
  - Service users'
  - Families'
  - The profession's
  - Yours



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# Learning Together

“The crux of a systems approach... is that it examines human performance in its context and recognises that people’s competence in carrying out tasks to a high standard is influenced by the whole system around them”  
(Munro, 2012)



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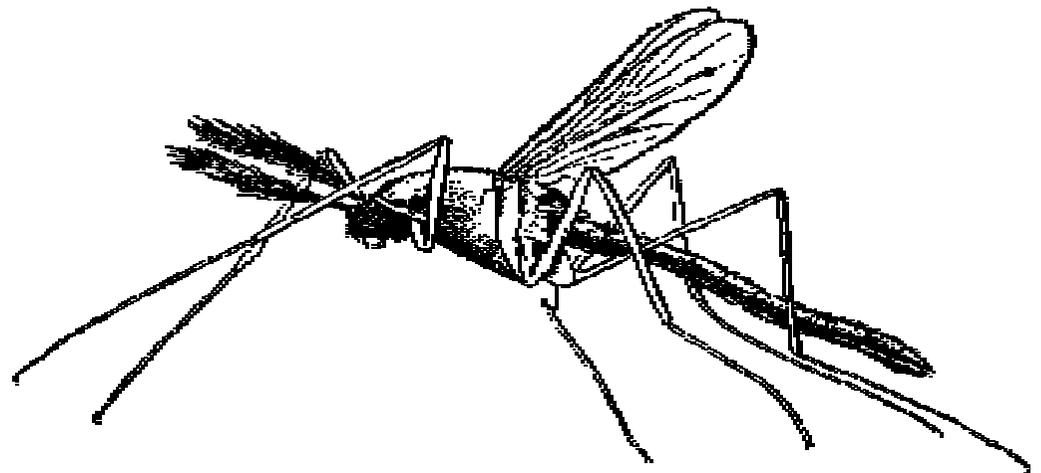
# “Latent conditions”

- Active failures are like mosquitoes. They can be swatted one by one, but they keep coming
- Better to create more effective defences and to drain the swamps in which they breed
- The swamps, in this case, are the ever present latent conditions

James Reason



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# What are your latent conditions?

- Systemic issues
- Organisational issues



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# Individual issues

- Interpersonal skills
  - Insight and self-awareness
  - Boundary setting
  - Volume - Ability to plan and structure work
  - Paperwork
- but*
- Anything else going on?
  - Social work is hard – no-one does all of it well



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# Preventative measures

- Probation
- Induction
- Clear expectations
- Supervision
- Team meetings
- Learning culture
- Shadowing



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# Prevention vs Cure



- All new starters receive a thorough induction and probation period
- Everyone in my team pretty much has monthly supervision
- We have a team meeting at least monthly
- Managers regularly see social workers in action
- My team makes systematic use of research and learning opportunities



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# Hammersmith & Fulham Learning Disability Team

- 50 standards – five key ones
- Team measured against these: 12 sources of evidence, including user and carer surveys, finances, case analysis – one case per social worker (including interviews with users and carers)
- Team action plan



# Managing poor performance

- Witness the worker in practice – can't be done via a casework management system
- Tell the worker what aspect of their practice you are concerned about
- Do this in supervision – and note it down
- Be explicit: what constitutes acceptable practice
- Be flexible: different people, problems and solutions



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# Managing poor performance

- Agree how they'll get there – and what help you can give them
- Witness practice – both ways
- Allow reasonable time for improvement
- Be clear of about the consequences of not improving
- Seek support from your manager and HR – and a colleague



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# Supporting someone out

- Not right for social work, but...
  - Housing
  - Occupational therapy
  - Front-line work
  - Counselling



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# Formal capability processes

- Tyranny of SMART – you're going to have to measure something
- How can you quantify poor interpersonal skills; sloppy assessments; poor boundaries etc.?



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# Formal capability processes

- Recognise that the informal support was always potentially going to end up here
- No shortcuts
- Be rigorous – don't miss deadlines
- Remain optimistic – or at least fake it
- It is hard – but you owe it to everyone



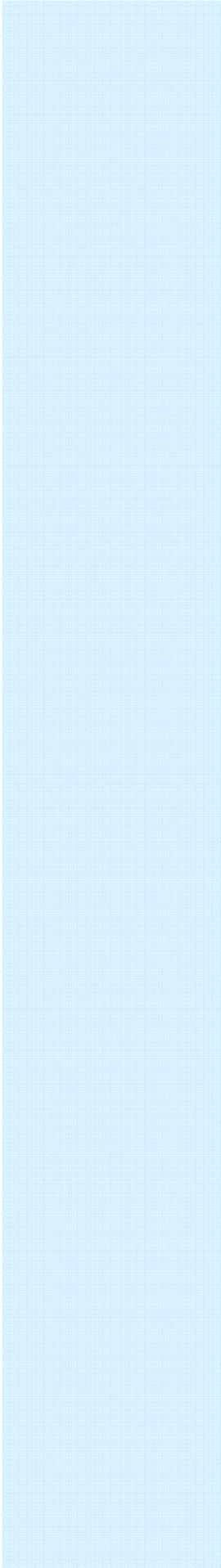
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# Conclusion

- Collaborative standard-setting: you, your team, your managers, and your clients and families
- Support people to reach the standards
- Recognise and factor in the real obstacles to achieving them
- Target your efforts on genuine individual weaknesses



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# Thank you



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