

POLICY NO AND TITLE	3.1.4	Children's Services policy
PROCEDURE	3.1.4 (x)	Brighter Futures Program
VERSION AND DATE ADOPTED	1	December 2008
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER		Coordinator Cultural and Community Services

1.1 Background

Brighter Futures Early Integration Program is a joint initiative between Department of Community Services (DoCS), Bega Valley Shire Council and Far South Coast Family Support Service. It is a voluntary targeted program designed for families encountering problems that impact on their ability to care for their children. The Program provides families with the necessary support and services to help prevent an escalation of the problems they are facing. This will be achieved through: case management, home visiting, quality children's services, parenting programs and brokerage.

1.2 Brighter Futures Vision & Mission

Vision

To create safe, supported and healthy environments allowing children and families to develop strong relationships, enhanced skills, growth and positive outcomes free of abuse or neglect.

Mission

We aim to assist in the development of stronger families, create healthy development in children and reduce the incidence of abuse and neglect. This will be achieved through teamwork, initiative and commitment.

1.3 Service Objective

To reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect and promote a community where families are well supported.

1.4 Target Group

The Brighter Futures target group is families who are expecting a child or have children up to and including 8 years of age. Priority of access will be given to families with children less than 3 years of age.

To be eligible for the Program families must present with at least one of the following vulnerabilities:

- Domestic violence
- Parental drug and alcohol misuse
- Parental mental health issues
- A lack of extended family or social supports

- Parents with significant learning difficulties and/or intellectual disability
- Child behaviour management problems
- Lack of parenting skills/adequate supervision

5 Service Requirements

Brighter Futures implements the following strategies directed at achieving its Service Objective:

1. The use of strength based, family focussed early intervention strategies to achieve better outcomes for families.
2. Improved access to services and support mechanisms.
3. Utilising sound management practices covering the following components:
 - The use of strategic and operational plans;
 - Maintain collaborative working relationships between DoCS (funding body), BVSC (Lead Agency, Far South Coast Family Support Services (Partner Agency) and Bandara and Eden Child Care Centres
 - Responding to referrals in a timely manner.
 - Accessibility for targeted client groups;
 - Documented data management procedures;
 - Leadership
 - Staff entry-level standards;
 - Supervision of practitioners;
 - Training and development for staff;
 - Staff appraisal;
 - Client and staff safety;
 - Client feedback mechanisms;
 - Continuous quality improvement; and
 - Monitoring and assessing service delivery performance.

1.6 Principles of Good Practice

Set out below are the underlying principles of good practice for Brighter Futures which are implemented in compliance with the DoCS Early Intervention Program Specifications.

Provision of accessible services

Maximising access to Brighter Futures for families assessed as being eligible for service.

Key features of accessibility to be maintained by Brighter Futures include:

1. Equity of Access to service. by addressing access criteria and available capacity;
2. Timely response to referrals;
3. Removing barriers that may restrict access to services;
4. Clients are aware of their rights and responsibilities including complaint processes.

Services and program designs

In the development of service and program design the focus will be on positive outcomes for families. This will be consistent throughout:

- Assessment
- Review
- Integration
- Documentation
- Exit and transition

Implementation

Families will receive a range of services in an integrated manner; when they need them; in response to their individual needs and changing circumstances; in a reliable and respectful manner; with sensitivity to their cultural beliefs; delivered in a manner that promotes self-determination and autonomy and is derived from evidenced based models of practice.

Promoting Services

The way an early intervention service is promoted is an important factor in whether or not families will participate in the program. Brighter Futures promotional materials will use simple language - in plain English or relevant community languages. All material will be in accordance with the DoCS Specifications.

Promotional material will focus on the program being about partnerships, existing strengths within families and resilience.

How potential clients and referring agencies find out about services can be quite varied. A diverse range of outlets for promotional materials is required. Word of mouth is a significant promotional tool. It can be important to use community activities to advertise services more broadly.

Immediacy of Response

Timely responses are recognised as being a critical element of the Brighter Futures program effectiveness.

Lead Agency and Partner Agency will work within appropriate time frames in accordance with Brighter Futures Service Provision Guidelines from first point of contact until family is exited from program.

Initial Family Contact

For those families referred to the Brighter Futures Program via the Lead Agency, initial contact with the family will always be made by an Early Intervention Worker from the Lead Agency or Partner Agency.

For those families entering the Brighter Futures Program through the DoCS Community Service Centres, a case transfer will be forwarded to the Lead Agency or the Partner Agency for Case Management. That agency will be responsible for undertaking initial contact.

Participation in Program

It is important that the parents understand the voluntary nature of the Program. They should also be willing to be involved in the various stages, such as the:

- Strengths and needs assessment
- Case planning
- Participation in services, and
- Need to consent for disclosure of personal information.

It is expected that when parents live in the same household, both parents should be willing to participate in the assessment and planning processes. If one parent does not agree however, this should not exclude the family from the program. This situation is most likely to occur in families where domestic violence is an issue.

Initial family visit/s may take place in a range of venues, such as in the family's home, a neutral location like a coffee shop, park or community centre, at the Lead Agency or the Partner Agency. Whichever location is decided upon for the visit, Early Intervention Workers must ensure that they are sensitive to the needs and preferences of individual families whilst maintaining their own safety and security.

1.7 Holistic Approaches to Service Delivery

Linked to developing a client driven focus is the need for Brighter Futures to take a holistic approach to service delivery, working from an understanding that problems are not isolated from other aspects of their families lives. Working with a family on an immediate issue of gaining access to a parenting program or quality child care may also involve supporting the family to set goals, find suitable accommodation, linking into specific mental health support and dealing with domestic violence issues.

Although initial contact regarding entry into Brighter Futures may originate from an individual it is considered that a holistic approach involving the whole family may have better outcomes. It is recognized that the definition of family is broad and includes all significant adults and children. Only those family members who voluntarily agree to participate in Brighter Futures will be included.

To achieve this holistic approach, Brighter Futures staff will need a good range of skills and the ability to communicate well with both adults and children. They need to be experienced case managers and have a range of skills that will allow them to provide the key service components to families.

1.8 Working Collaboratively

The Brighter Futures Lead Agency and Partner Agency are committed to involving a range of core services in an early intervention network, including:

- Child care centres;
- Schools;
- Community agencies,
- Women's and children accommodation and support services;
- Health services;
- Specific Indigenous services; and
- Department of Community Services.

The Brighter Futures program should be adequately staffed to devote a proportion of their time to networking and developing sound working relationships with other community and government agencies.

Brighter Futures will maintain and strengthen a clear organisational commitment to working collaboratively with other agencies to facilitate better outcomes for families.

1.9 Culturally and Contextually Appropriate Service Delivery

Flexibility to respond to the different needs of different communities, both cultural and contextual, is another element of good practice adopted by the Brighter Futures Program. Brighter Futures acknowledges the particular needs of local Indigenous children and families. Brighter Futures endeavours to be consciously sensitive to cultural and contextual differences in how services are promoted, how needs and issues are assessed, and how support is provided.

Contextual considerations may include:

- Geographical location (urban, rural or regional);
- Distances to be traveled and availability or otherwise of public transport;
- Availability or otherwise of related services in a community; and
- The key issues affecting families in the area served (such as high levels of substance abuse).

Cultural considerations may include:

- Language issues, potentially requiring bilingual staff, translation of information and use of interpreters;
- The effects of migration on families, such as children's inability to speak the first language of their parents and the breakdown of extended family networks;
- The effects on families of previous welfare policies, for example child protection;
- Different values within diverse ethnic or indigenous cultural groups and between different generations; and

- Differences between the culture of young people and that of their parents.

Indigenous organisations are often concerned about the appropriateness of services provided to their communities by non-Indigenous organisations. Brighter Futures is committed to building relationships and involving indigenous communities in developing strategies and joint initiatives.

1.10 Performance Monitoring and Framework

Ongoing review and evaluation is critical to keeping Brighter Futures effective and responsive to the needs of its clients, meeting its obligations to DoCS and in securing any future DoCS Service Agreements.

The monitoring management cycle comprises the following:

- Planning and review
- Performance monitoring
- Performance improvement.

1.11 Data collection and Evaluation

Brighter Futures will utilize the DoCS Data Collection system that will contribute to performance monitoring and overall evaluation of the program.

1.12 Other Linked Documents

As a Council service, Brighter Futures operates within Bega Valley Shire Council's policy framework.

Documents relevant to the operation of Brighter Futures include:

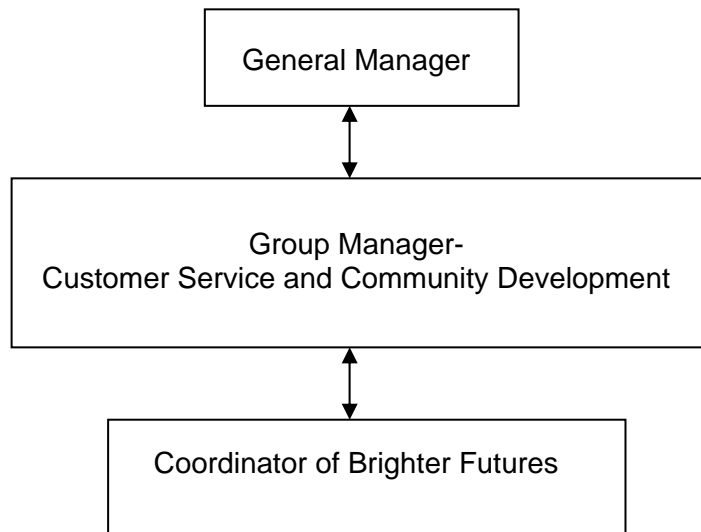
- Bega Valley Shire Council's Policy Document
- Bega Valley Shire Council's Code of Conduct
- Bega Valley Shire Council's Management Plan
- Bega Valley Shire Council's Annual Budget
- Brighter Futures Procedure Manual
- Bega Valley Shire Council's Staff Policy
- Bega Valley Shire Council's and Department of Community Services (DoCS) Early Intervention Program Service Specifications; Early Intervention Program Service Provision Guidelines and DoCS Good Practice Guidelines.
- The Local Government Act 1993
- NSW Child Protection Legislation (see CHILD PROTECTION POLICY)

2.1 Organisational Structure

Bega Valley Shire Council manages Brighter Futures via its Community Services section. The Brighter Futures Coordinator is responsible for the day to day operations of the

Brighter Futures Program. The Coordinator reports directly to Council's Group Manager Customer Service and Community Development.

The following chart details the organisational hierarchy within Council which Brighter Futures operates.



2.2 Coordinator's Responsibilities

The role of the Brighter Futures Coordinator is to manage the Program within the approved budget, in accordance with Council's policies and with the Brighter Futures Funding Agreement. This includes responsibility for:

Service Management

- Develop, review and improve internal systems, policies and procedures to enhance the effective delivery of Brighter Futures Program (Brighter Futures Program (Bega Valley Integrated Family Services)).
- Develop and maintain policies, procedures and protocols for the operation of the Brighter Futures Program (Bega Valley Integrated Family Services).
- Oversee case review and professional supervision processes for all Brighter Futures Program (Bega Valley Integrated Family Services) staff.
- Establish and maintain data collection and reporting systems.
- Provide appropriate and timely reports to the Department of Community Services and meet all Early Intervention Program reporting and accountability requirements contained in the Performance Management Framework, Early Intervention Program service agreement and service specifications.
- Provide liaison between Brighter Futures Program (Bega Valley Integrated Family Services) partners and other service providers to ensure the timely and effective resolution of service system issues, including service specification, reporting and data collection requirements.
- Responsibility for some direct service provision to family members participating in the Early intervention Program.
- Prepare reports and correspondence.

- Organise meetings, developing agendas, ensure minutes are circulated.

Staff Management

- Participate in the recruitment, selection and induction of new staff.
- Facilitate staff decision making and problem solving, including regular team meetings and Program Leadership Group meetings.
- Facilitate staff training and development.
- Monitor staff performance.
- Ensure appropriate clinical and management supervision for Brighter Futures staff.

Financial Management

- Administer and monitor the expenditure of Brighter Futures funds.
- Assist with the preparation of financial reports for Council and Brighter Futures Integrated Family Services and DoCS.
- Maintain relevant records and statistics.
- Contribute to budget preparation and monitor income and expenditure for the Bega Valley Integrated Family Service partners including liaising with relevant financial staff and preparing financial reports as needed.
- Authorise payments in accordance with financial delegations.

2.4 Planning and Evaluation

Bega Valley Shire Council has a commitment to the provision of high quality services to the community which remain relevant and responsive to local needs. Council will use the Brighter Futures planning and evaluation processes to ensure the service remains appropriately targeted whilst operating effectively within the DoCS Brighter Futures Service Provision Guidelines and Good Practice Guidelines.

2.4.1 Planning

Service planning occurs on an annual basis in compliance with Council's Integrated Family Services Agreement and Council's internal Management Planning processes. The responsibility for the development of the Annual Management Plan lies with the Manager of Community Service. Annual Management Plans will be developed in consultation with the Brighter Futures Coordinator and partners.

Progress towards objectives identified in the Annual Management Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis. Reporting on the outcome of service planning and service provision will be provided to the funding body on a quarterly basis via or as required by the provisions of Council's funding agreement.

2.4.2 Data Collection and Evaluation

The Brighter Futures Program will use the DoCS Connect Portal as its main data collection and reporting system. It will also utilize the BVSC designed Data Base for client management and recording.

The Brighter Futures Program will participate fully in the DoCS Brighter Futures/Social Policy and Research Centre of the University of NSW Family Survey.

2.5 Child Protection Policy

2.5.1 Objectives

Brighter Futures has a strong commitment to the safety, welfare and well being of children. Bega Valley Shire Council has a responsibility to ensure that the service responds appropriately to ensure the protection children involved in the program.

These policies and procedures have been implemented within Brighter Futures program to ensure that:

- The protection and well-being of children remains paramount.
- All allegations of child abuse by employees are appropriately investigated, reported and responded to.
- All steps are taken to ensure the prevention of child abuse and neglect and all persons working with children undergo a 'Working with Children Check'.
- All concerns regarding the well-being or safety of children and young people are appropriately reported.

2.5.2 Related Agency Documents

- BVSC Code of Conduct
- BVSC Staff Policies

2.5.3 Legislative Requirements

Brighter Futures child protection policy operates within the legislative framework of five key pieces of legislation. These legislative requirements and the obligations they create for both employees and employers is detailed in the table below.

Legislation	Effects	Obligations for Employers	Obligations for Employees
<i>Ombudsman Act 1974 (Child Protection & Community Services Amendment)</i>	Requires BVSC to respond to allegations or convictions of child abuse against Brighter Futures Program employees & report to the Ombudsman	Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development must report allegations or convictions within 30 days Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development must conduct an investigation & take appropriate action	Brighter Futures staff, must inform Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development of any allegation or conviction against an BVSC employee within or outside the workplace
<i>Child Protection (Prohibited Employment) Act 1998</i>	Prohibits persons with convictions for sexual offences from becoming a Brighter Futures employee.	BVSC must ensure Brighter Futures staff are not 'prohibited' persons	Brighter Futures must disclose if they are a 'prohibited' person and not seek to be or remain a Brighter Futures employee

<i>Commission for Children & Young People Act 1998</i>	BVSC is required to screen people who apply to work within the Brighter Futures program.	BVSC must complete a 'Working with Children Check' for all prospective staff. BVSC must notify the Commission of any allegations or convictions of abuse of employees or prospective employees	
<i>Children & Young Persons (Care & Protection) Act 1998</i>	Mandates Brighter Futures employees to report to DOCS any children or they consider to be at risk of harm	BVSC must ensure Brighter Futures Program employees are aware of their obligation to report children or young people at risk	Brighter Futures Program employees must report any concerns that a child or young person is at risk of harm

2.5.4 Definitions

Head of Agency

For the purposes of the *Ombudsman Amendment (Child Protection & Community Services) Act 1998* the “Head of Agency” is defined as being the Bega Valley Shire Council’s Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development . Where an allegation or conviction of child abuse is made against the Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development then the “Head of Agency” in relation to this Child Protection policy will be the General Manager.

Employer

Bega Valley Shire Council is the employer of all Community Services staff, including those employed through Brighter Futures Program.

Employee

For the purposes of this Child Protection Policy employees are defined as being any person who is employed by BVSC, whether or not they are employed to work directly with children.

Child Abuse

Child abuse is defined as being any maltreatment inflicted on a child aged between 0-18 years. Child abuse may include:

- Physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, throwing, pushing, shoving, pinching, grabbing, poking, use of excessive force, inappropriate restraint, use of an object or threatened use of an object.
- Sexual abuse such as indecent touching, intercourse, obscene language/gestures, deliberate exposure to sexual behaviour/sexual exhibitionism or sexually explicit material such as pornography.
- Psychological or emotional abuse such as persistent hostility, rejection, ‘scapegoating’, humiliating or belittling.
- Ill treatment or neglect of a child.
- Exposing or subjecting a child to behaviour that psychologically harms the child.

- Misconduct such as inappropriate touching (not indecent), inappropriate comments/jokes or an inappropriate relationship with child. (An allegation of misconduct may or may not involve child abuse.)

Allegation of child abuse

An allegation of child abuse is defined as being an assertion or concern that a current employee has engaged in activity which meets the above definition of child abuse. An allegation includes an alleged offence or description of offending behaviour relating to a current employee committed against a child or a person who was a child at the time of the offence or behaviour.

Conviction of child abuse

A conviction of child abuse is any criminal conviction gained by an employee in relation to abuse, neglect or misconduct towards a child.

Child/Young Person

The Ombudsman Amendment (Child Protection & Community Services) Act 1998 defines a child as being any person aged between 0-18 years. However the Children and Young Persons Care and Protection Act 1998 defines a child as being any person aged under 16 years.

Risk of Harm

A child or young person is at risk of harm if current concerns exist for the safety, welfare or well-being of the child or young person because of the presence of one or more of the following:

- a) The child's or young person's basic physical or psychological needs are not being met or are at risk of not being met.
- b) The parents or other caregivers have not arranged or are unable or unwilling to arrange for the child to receive necessary medical care.
- c) The child or young person has been, or is at risk of being, physically or sexually abused or ill-treated.
- d) The child or young person is living in a household where there have been incidents of domestic violence and, as a consequence, the child or young person is at risk of serious physical or psychological harm.
- e) A parent or other caregiver has behaved in such a way towards the child or young person that the child or young person has suffered or is at risk of psychological harm.

A "current concern" means that at the time of making a report the worker is worried about the safety, welfare or well-being of a child or young person. Workers may also have concerns about a class of children, ie. other children or young people who have current contact with an alleged abuser.

Current concerns may also exist for a child or young person where abuse has happened in the past and the child or young person may be at risk because of their current reaction to the abuse. Sexual abuse of a child should be reported to the Department of Community Services to enable referral to appropriate services and consideration of criminal issues.

2.5.5 Allegations or Conviction of Child Abuse against Employees

Introduction

The *Ombudsman Amendment (Child Protection & Community Services) Act 1998* which was incorporated as part of the *Ombudsman Act 1974* creates clear obligations for Bega Valley Shire Council where allegations or convictions of child abuse are made against Brighter Futures Program employees. These obligations include that:

- The head of the agency reports to the Ombudsman, within 30 days of becoming aware, any allegations or convictions of child abuse made against employees.
- The head of the agency is required to conduct investigations (which can include preliminary or other inquiries and assessment) into child abuse allegations or convictions and to take appropriate action as a result.

The role of the NSW Ombudsman in relation to child protection is to:

- Scrutinise systems in place are adequate to prevent and respond to allegations and convictions of child abuse against employees.
- Monitor and undertake direct investigations of an agency's response to allegations or convictions of child abuse against an employee.
- Respond to complaints made about an agency's handling of or response to an allegation or conviction of child abuse.

Procedures

Bega Valley Shire Council's Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development is responsible for ensuring systems are in place for reporting and responding to an allegation or conviction of child abuse against an employee. To ensure these system work effectively within Brighter Futures Program the following procedures, to be monitored by the Group Manager, have been put in place for the reporting & responding to allegations or convictions of child abuse against an employee.

Reporting

1. All employees are required to report allegations or suspected incidents of child abuse or misconduct involving other employees (or themselves) to the Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development.
2. The Community Service Manager is responsible for recording the allegation and notify the Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development of any allegation or conviction of child abuse against an employee via the Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development
3. The Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development is responsible for ensuring employees and clients are aware of their rights and the procedure to report allegations of abuse by employees under this Child Protection Policy.
4. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development is responsible for notifying any to allegations or convictions of child abuse against an employee to the Ombudsman within 30 days of becoming aware of the allegation or conviction.

5. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development is responsible for notifying the Commission for Children and Young People about any relevant disciplinary proceedings taken as a result of an allegation or conviction of child abuse by an employee.

Responding

1. Following an allegation or conviction against an employee of child abuse the Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development is responsible for conducting an initial risk assessment of the safety of children concerned and other children using the service. This risk assessment will include consideration of whether or not the child is still at risk of harm and what steps need to be taken to prevent further abuse. The risk assessment must also identify and minimise the risk to the employee, Bega Valley Shire Council and the proper investigation of the allegation.
2. Where a child is found to be still at risk of harm an immediate report to the Department of Community Services must be made.
3. The Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development will immediately forward the initial risk assessment to the Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development who will use it to determine whether to investigate further and what immediate action should be taken. Immediate action will be guided by the child's or other children's needs for protection from further potential abuse or victimisation. Examples of immediate action may include suspension of an employee with or without pay or deployment to another work area. A decision to take immediate action on the basis of the risk assessment has no relevance to the eventual findings of the matter and is not an indication that the allegation has been substantiated.
4. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development is responsible for the conduct of an investigation into the allegation of child abuse against an employee. At the Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development's discretion instances responsibility for carrying out the investigation may be delegated to the Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development, except where conflict of interest issues exist.
5. An investigation into the allegation will include the gathering of relevant information, interviewing witnesses and reviewing the initial risk assessment to see if further action to address concerns is required. The investigating officer will prepare a written report on the investigation and provide this to the Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development for consideration.
6. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development will put the allegation to the employee at an interview and give them the opportunity to respond, both during the interview and in a written response.
7. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development will then consider all the information gathered and make a finding as to whether or not on the balance of probabilities the allegation is sustained or not sustained. The rationale for the finding will be clearly documented and communicated to all relevant parties. The avenues of appeal for the person making the allegation or the employee will also be provided, including the right to appeal to the Ombudsman.
8. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development will make a decision about what subsequent action, if any, will be taken as a result of the investigation. This includes any disciplinary action, amendments to policy and

procedures, action to be taken against a vexatious or malicious allegation and a final review of risk.

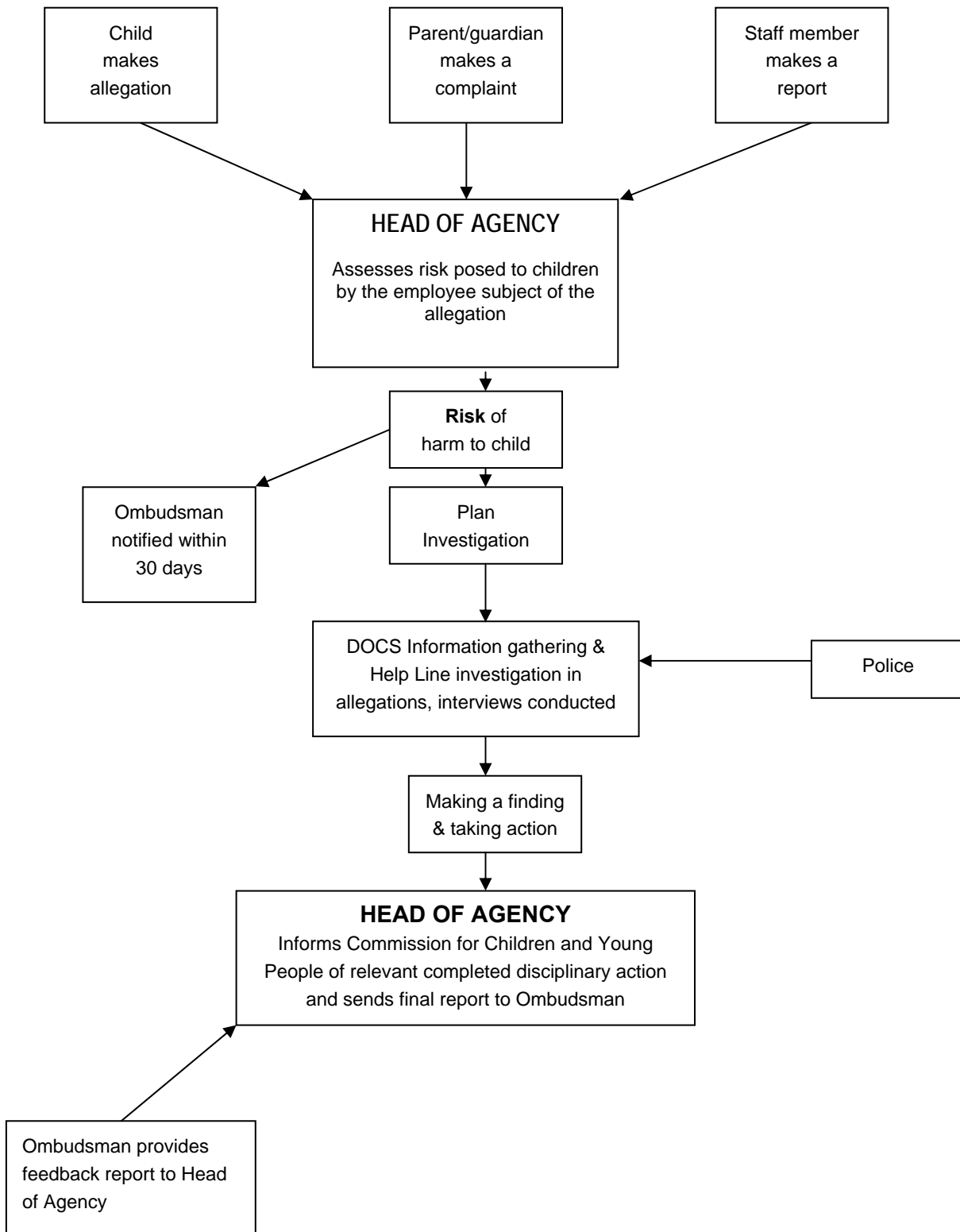
Recording

1. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development is responsible for preparing a final report on the matter and forwarding to the Ombudsman. In addition the Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development must inform the Commission for Children & Young People of relevant completed disciplinary matters.
2. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development is responsible for ensuring all allegations, investigations, meetings, contacts, discussions and reports are adequately documented and that information is stored securely according to Council policies and that confidentiality is maintained.

Procedural Fairness

1. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development is responsible for ensuring that confidentiality for all persons affected by an allegation or conviction of child abuse against an employee is maintained.
2. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development will follow all Council policies to ensure procedural fairness in responding to an allegation of child abuse. This includes ensuring that employees are made aware of their rights, including the right of appeal, representation and external complaint. Policies ensuring procedural fairness are outlined in more detail in Council's Grievance Policies.
3. The Group Manager of Customer Service and Community Development will ensure that appropriate support is put in place for the child who is alleged to have been abused.

Flowchart for allegations of child abuse against an employee and notifying the NSW Ombudsman



2.5.6 Working with Children Checks

A 'Working with Children' check will be conducted on all Brighter Futures Program employees.

No one defined as a 'prohibited employee', that is a person with convictions for sexual offences will be permitted to be associated with Brighter Futures Program as a paid staff member, volunteer or student on placement. The Manager will notify of any applicants who have not been offered employment or placement at Brighter Futures Program as a result of the outcome of a the Working with Children check to the Commission for Children & Young People.

All prospective or existing staff, volunteers or students on placement must notify the Coordinator if they are a prohibited person. Such employees must not apply for or remain in employment or in involvement with Brighter Futures Program.

2.5.7 Reporting Children at Risk

Becoming Aware of Risk of Harm or Abuse

If a child tells you about abuse

1. If a child or young person tells you about abuse, record the time and date you spoke with them and their exact words (as far as possible). Do not ask them to give you details about the abuse. This is the role of the Department of Community Services or the Police. Call 13 DoCS (13 3627) immediately as practical.

Working with an adult

2. Workers may become concerned that a child is at risk of harm in many ways other than through direct disclosure by a child or young person. Examples may include:
 - Where an adult discloses abuse of a child or young person.
 - Where the parent of a child or young person discloses abuse of their child.
 - Where a worker forms the view that an adult client is not capable of caring for their children at that time, for example, due to physical or mental health problems, intoxication or distress.
 - Where a worker forms the view that a pregnant woman may not be able to care for her child when born.

Safety issues

3. The worker to whom a disclosure of sexual abuse is made must not confront the alleged perpetrator as this may lead to further risk to the child. This is the role of the DoCS or the Police.
4. The DoCS should be contacted for advice about how to handle a situation where a child cannot be kept separate from an alleged perpetrator eg. alleged perpetrator due to arrive before DoCS worker.
5. If there are concerns about the immediate safety of the child or a worker, contact the Police.

6. If a worker is threatened with or fears personal violence as a result of making a report to the DoCS then the threat should be reported to the Police. The Police or worker may obtain an apprehended violence order (AVO).
7. As part of good practice, workers should inform the Manager when working with children or young people at risk and report on issues of concern during Team Supervision sessions.

Informing children, young people and families of a report

1. The limits of confidentiality should be made clear at the first contact with all children and their families as part of any explanation of the service that can be provided. (See CONFIDENTIALITY policies)
2. Where it is safe to do so children and families should be engaged in making decisions if the need to report risk of harm arises. However, if the worker assesses that informing the child, young person or their family may place them or the worker at risk, they should not be informed.
3. It is important not to inform alleged offenders of sexual assault or domestic violence that a report will be made as they may pressure the child or young person to retract their disclosure. The non-offending caregiver should also not be informed, except where they have provided the information and the worker assesses it is safe.
4. Where a worker is unsure they should consult the Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development before informing a child, young person or parent/caregiver of the decision to report.
5. All child protection reports will be documented by the notifying staff member and stored securely in a separate Child Protection Reports file. Copies of reports are not be kept as part of the individual client's file and clients will not have automatic access to child protection report records.

Workers Responsibility to Report

All employees are required under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* to report to the DoCS the name, or a description, of a child suspected at Risk of Harm and the grounds for suspecting risk of harm.

Workers and volunteers must be familiar with their obligations under the legislation. The Youth Project Officer is responsible for ensuring that all volunteers are familiar with the legislation and their roles and responsibilities under it. At initial assessment interview a clear statement will be made to the client informing them of the service's obligation under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and how this limits confidentiality.

Legal obligations in relation to pre-natal reports

A worker may report that an unborn child may be at risk of harm after its birth to DoCS.

Pre-natal reporting may be helpful for pregnant women in domestic violence situations, with a mental health problem or who abuse drugs and/or alcohol during pregnancy.

Protection for Workers Who Report

Workers making reports are protected under the Act. The identity of a person making a report cannot be disclosed except where the person gives consent. Grievance proceedings cannot be initiated or allowed to progress against a worker making a report in relation to that worker's report.

Making a Report

How to make a report to the DoCS Helpline

A worker makes a report of risk of harm by phoning the DoCS Helpline 13 36 27 (13 DoCS). You should identify yourself by name, position and service. The DoCS Helpline operates 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.

You should document the report on a separate page under the heading 'Report to the Department of Community Services'. Notification documentation should include a copy of the report, the call reference number allocated by the Helpline, the name of the Helpline worker and documentation of any follow up by DoCS known. All child protection report documentation will be stored securely in a separate Child Protection Reports file. Copies of reports are not be kept as part of the individual client's file and clients will not have automatic access to child protection report records.

Information that may be required when making a report to DoCS includes:

- The name or description of the child or young person, or class of children or young people
- The current whereabouts of the child or young person
- When the child was last seen
- The name and address, if known, of the person suspected of abusing the child or young person and, if possible, their occupation
- All available information relating to the safety, welfare and well-being of the child or young person
- Reasons for concern about risk of harm
- Information about the parent, family or caregivers.

Responsibility to provide information to the DoCS.

Under the Act, workers may be required to provide information to the DoCS. It is a legal obligation to comply with a request for information. Maintaining the confidentiality of a client is not a sufficient reason for failing to respond.

The request must be made using the DoCS 'Information Request' form. The information requested can only be related to the safety, welfare and well-being of a particular child or young person or a class of children or young people. Any request for information should be reported to the Manager.

In urgent situations workers may provide information to the DoCS by telephone. This information should then be confirmed in writing. Any urgent request for information should be discussed first with the Manager wherever possible.

Children's Court Orders

If approached to provide services that may become part of a court order, the staff should obtain information on the proposed terms of the order and period for which the order is made with DoCS. The matter is then to be referred to the Manager for consideration, usually via the next available team supervision or general team meeting. Brighter Futures Program will then negotiate steps to take if an order has been made and either the child or family discontinue contact with the service or service unable to continue providing the service.

2.6 Insurance

Brighter Futures Program enjoys insurance coverage as a service of Bega Valley Shire Council. This includes:

- Public liability insurance
- Workers' compensation
- Property, fire and theft and burglary
- Volunteer insurance coverage - personal accident and public liability
- Vehicle insurance for all Council vehicles
- Professional indemnity
- Fidelity guarantee insurance

Details of Council's insurance policies can be obtained from the Council's insurance Officer on 02 6499 2222.

2.7 Staff Supervision

The Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development is responsible for the day to day management and supervision of all Brighter Futures Program staff employed by BVSC. Individual staff will also attend direct supervision and performance review sessions with the Manager as directed. The Brighter Futures Coordinator will be accountable to the Brighter Futures Program (Bega Valley Integrated Family Services) partners. The Brighter Futures coordinator will meet with BVIFS partners on a fortnightly basis.

Council recognises the specialised and demanding work of Brighter Futures Program and the need to ensure that staff are appropriately supported. To this end Council has enhanced its supervision framework through the provision of external clinical supervision. External supervision will be purchased by Council where:

- Choice of supervisor is approved by the Manager of Community Service in consultation with Brighter Futures Program staff.
- External supervision occurs for one hour every month at a cost approved in advance by the Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development, subject to the availability of funding.

2.8 Worker Security on Home Visits.

The referring agency (DoCS or Community organisations) is required to provide all available information, including a past history any vulnerabilities – particularly those relating to violence.

In situations where safety is an issue, the initial client visit should take place at a neutral venue. This should not be in an isolated environment.

If the worker feels unsafe that worker has the right to leave that situation. The worker has the right to refuse to meet with a client.

Worker has a mobile phone with them on all home visits.

Worker will inform office staff/supervisor of home visit itinerary prior to leaving the office.

Initial contact with a family will be made by telephone or in writing. Worker will attempt to determine who will be present at first interview and may decide to do a joint visit with a case worker from the Partner Agency – Far South Coast Family Support Service.

2.9 Financial Management

Responsibility for the management of Brighter Futures Program funding is the responsibility of the Group Manager Customer Services and Community Development. At all times the Manager and all Brighter Futures Program staff must operate within Council's financial management policies. Financial management must also occur within the parameters set by the Brighter Futures funding agreement.

An annual budget will be recommended by the Manager for Community Services to Council in consultation with Brighter Futures Program staff. This budget will be reviewed on a monthly and quarterly basis in accordance with Council's budget policies.

The Manager of Community Services is responsible for ensuring that all financial and other accountability requirements of funding bodies are met.

For further information on Council financial policies refer to Council's Policy Manual – Financial Management and Control.

2.10 Privacy and Protection of Personal Information

Bega Valley Brighter Futures Program (Bega Valley Integrated Family Services) will adhere to the DoCS Brighter Futures Guidelines 2008 – Section 6, with regard to all aspects of client's right to privacy and confidentiality.

2.11 Brokerage

Bega Valley Brighter Futures Program (Bega Valley Integrated Family Services) will manage Brokerage in accordance with the DoCS Brighter Futures Guidelines 2008 – Section 4.5.