



Portsmouth Children and Families Workforce Strategy

2023 - 2026

Foreword

We value our workforce as our most important resource. Our aim as a council is to improve the lives of children, young people and families, to keep them safe, and to fulfil their potential.

This aim can only be achieved through a confident, competent and highly skilled children and young people's workforce that understands its responsibilities and works together to deliver relevant, responsive and high-quality services for children, young people and their families.

This strategy sets out how we will work over the next three years to attract the skilled workers we need, to support their development in ways which match our strategic priorities, and to ensure that their management and leadership is as skilled as possible.

The strategy takes account of our learning about the strengths and weaknesses of our service over recent years, and our ambition to develop "Outstanding" front line services, culture and leadership so that families in Portsmouth receive the best possible restorative support and challenge.

It takes account of the ambitious, comprehensive safeguarding strategy which is a key element of our Children's Trust Plan for Portsmouth for 2023-2026.



Human beings are happier, more productive and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things with them rather than to them or for them

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Portsmouth Approach to working with children and families



10 Service Standards

1. Explain to children and families why we are working with them and what we can and cannot do.
2. Listen to children and families and take into account of their wishes and feelings in everything we do.
3. Take care to ensure children and families understand what we are saying, by using clear and straightforward language.
4. Do everything we say and when we say we will do it.
5. Be on time for meetings and appointments.
6. Keep children and families updated on their progress.
7. Keep children and families personal information safe and explain how we are going to use it.
8. Try to answer any questions from children and families or find someone who can.
9. Work collaboratively with the other services and professionals working with children and families.
10. Treat people with respect and dignity.

10 Underpinning Principles

1. Our relational approach to working with families and each other will be about listening, nurture, compassion AND boundaries, accountability and challenge.
2. We will prioritise the building, maintaining and repairing of relationships.
3. We will be intentional about our priority to keep families together safely by understanding and addressing past experience and/or trauma (including those of parents).
4. Working with... co-production of effective support plans.
5. We will recognise the impact of unconscious bias and privilege on the way we work with families and each other.
6. We are strengths focused - with clarity of risks to child.
7. We work restoratively with families and within the multi-agency partnership.
8. We take time to reflect and learn.
9. We encourage professional curiosity and tenacity (including appropriate escalation).
10. We will seek to and co-ordinate professional intervention through the Team Around the Worker approach

10 Practice Standards

1. All families understand the reason for involvement from Children and Families Services and have given appropriate consent.
2. Children are spoken to alone and worked with by professionals who have the skills and resources to directly engage with them.
3. Impact chronologies, genograms and sociograms will support our understanding of the child's family and networks.
4. Assessments will consider the lived experience of the child and their parents/carer.
5. Assessments will consider the past experience and trauma of the parent/carer and the impact of this on the current situation.
6. We will take into account cultural heritage and equality factors and reflect on the impact of unconscious bias and privilege.
7. All children have a plan which explains what needs to happen; by when; by whom; what outcomes we are seeking together; how risk is managed; and what the contingency plan is.
8. All case records are analytical, well written and timely, so that everyone can understand significant events that have happened; what the plan is; the purpose of our activity and intervention; and what difference has been made.
9. Every case contains evidence of bi-monthly supervision that is reflective in nature.
10. Every case will be supported by good quality management oversight. This will include reflective supervision; quality assurance of work being undertaken and a consideration of the impact of intervention.



Introduction and summary

The new Children's Trust Plan for Portsmouth outlines six priorities for improving outcomes for children and families, 0 - 25 in the city. A critical element of this is our investment in the learning and development of our workforce and this strategy has a specific focus on our Children and Families workforce. At the heart our vision for Portsmouth Children and Families Service is the concept of Family Practice.

- 1. Working whole family** – Strong families are the bedrock of good outcomes for children. Being child - centred means understanding the whole family dynamics, in terms of need and protective factors. We are there for all members of the family and seek to address adult's issues to help them care for children.
- 2. Restorative** – Working with the family - and with each other - to co-produce solutions for that family.
- 3. Relational** – Developing and sustaining strong intra-familial relationships through strong relational practice with families, supporting families to stay together as a bonded unit. Always striving to listen, understand and take into account families wishes and feelings.
- 4. Trauma-informed** – Understanding the impact of past and current trauma on child and adult behaviours, the capacity of families to make and sustain relationships and their ability to make changes.
- 5. Strengths** – Based and compassionate: We seek to understand the need and reaction behind the behaviour, as this is often fear based. All people have value and inherent worth, and they are deserving of our time, attention and care.
- 6. Holistic** – Understanding all aspects of a family's life using the Assessment Framework and recognising societal impacts such as poverty and racism.
- 7. Hopeful** – We expect and enable change to keep children safely living at home wherever possible. We remain ever confident of the capacity of the family to make changes, while continually testing all possible narratives against the evidence to ensure we are sufficiently protecting children.
- 8. Informed by difference** – We recognise the significance of difference and the role difference and language plays in structuring the meaning and experience of the world.

In 2016, Portsmouth chose restorative practice as 'the way we work with families'. The city continues to be committed to embedding the language, practice and principles of restorative practice: working with, fair process, high support: high challenge. Restorative practice also reflects and informs the way we work together as professionals within and across agencies.

In our Children and Families Service this approach is supported by a Family Safeguarding-based approach, which provides a solid evidenced based foundation on which to develop our workforce by giving them the opportunity to work as part of a multi-disciplinary service, aimed at supporting parents to change so children can remain living safely within their families.

The Family Safeguarding based approach is rooted in the Children Act 1989 and its commitment to promote the upbringing of children within their families, rather than gathering evidence to remove children into care, providing their care is not causing significant harm to the child's health or development.

It does so by providing child in need, child protection and children we care for on a multi-disciplinary basis where the teams are comprised of children and family social workers, adult substance abuse specialists, adult mental health practitioners and domestic abuse specialists.

To drive this ambition we have changed and are changing the way in which we deliver services to children and families by:

- Empowering and equipping our workforce to develop the skills to better engage families in changing their behaviour. We do this by undertaking purposeful interventions with families.
- Ensuring our organisational culture, systems and tools support the delivery of high-quality child and family interventions.
- Retaining, attracting and growing a workforce of effective practitioners/staff who are well supported and focused on meeting family needs so children's lives are improved.

This workforce development strategy has been developed to ensure we deliver professional development opportunities to all of our staff, which champions 'The Portsmouth Model for Family Practice'.

Scope

This strategy sets out the expectations of our professional development programme (on which we continue to consult) and the varied ways we support our workforce to get there. The key to the success of this strategy is to offer learning opportunities in different ways, which will suit different individuals learning styles, the delivery methods include:

- Formal learning and development (e.g. training)
- Informal learning and development (e.g. workshops, seminars and action learning approaches)
- Self-directed learning and development.
- Reflective Sessions

This strategy has six key objectives:

- Objective 1** Further improve our recruitment and retention
- Objective 2** Build on our quality ASYE Programme
- Objective 3** Establish a well understood “deal” with all our staff: clear expectations of them and a clear learning offer to support those expectations
- Objective 4** Develop our learning culture
- Objective 5** Develop the skill base of all our staff around the Portsmouth Model of Family Practice
- Objective 6** Develop our Managers and Leaders

These objectives and the key actions through which we propose to achieve them are described in turn below.



Objective 1 - Further improve our recruitment and retention

1. We have looked at how we attract the right people to work with us in Portsmouth. We have a dedicated Stronger Futures recruitment web site which complements our parallel website for teacher recruitment, Teach Portsmouth.
2. Our marketing is designed to:
 - Position Portsmouth as a restorative and progressive city that will challenge and develop our workforce to make sure we deliver for children and families
 - Demonstrate that services in the city are integrated and take a restorative approach, looking at young people and families holistically
 - Promote Portsmouth as a learning authority that invests in and values its workforce.
3. We will make the most of opportunities to attract newly qualified social workers through our involvement in the Step up to Social Work Programme, apprenticeships and also our offer to local universities in the form of student placements.
4. We have been using 'values-based' interviewing to strengthen and target social work recruitment where we consider the applicants responses against the following criteria:
 - Values and behaviour
 - Dignity and respect
 - Commitment to quality care and support
 - Learning and reflection
 - Working together
5. We have implemented the 'Earl Probing Model' to get the very best out of candidates ensuring the right person is recruited into the right service. We will continue actively to involve young people in the recruitment of all staff at all levels and will seek to involve parents where possible.
6. We will act with intent to create a working environment that is truly inclusive, where employees can be themselves irrespective of sex, race, religious or philosophical beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership status, age, gender reassignment status, pregnancy and maternity status.
7. We have developed our induction into the service and supported it through the Portsmouth Induction Handbook. This is kept under review and updated regularly with the feedback we gain from staff.

Objective 2 – Build on our quality ASYE Programme

1. Our Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for newly qualified social workers is designed to ensure every newly qualified social worker is equipped with the knowledge and skills to practice. Portsmouth City Council has developed a comprehensive programme of support and training for Newly Qualified Social Workers. The focus throughout the Stronger Futures Academy is to see what the journey is like 'from the voice of a child' and giving young people and care leavers the opportunity to come and tell their story of their journey through the social care system; what has been good practice and what we can do better for the future.
2. The Academy approach is to have the 'right specialism', in the right place throughout the child journey to share their skills and knowledge, ensuring that we promote positive outcomes for children and their families.
3. We have added to our ASYE programme by also developing a second year in practice training programme, which enables practitioners to consolidate their skills and continue to receive support through action learning sets. This will be evaluated in the summer of 2023 to understand how this can be developed further.

Objective 3 – Establish a well understood "deal" with all our staff: clear expectations of them and a clear learning offer to support those expectations

1. All of our professional development for social workers and social work managers are linked to the Professional Capabilities Framework and increasingly the Knowledge and Skills Statements for Child and Family practitioners ensuring our workforce are well equipped to deal with not only the local context but the national one when undertaking any type of development.
2. We have a clear prospectus which sets out both our expectations of staff, including their commitment to continuous professional development, and our offer to staff in terms of development. The "deal" set out in the prospectus is promoted through our recruitment portal, the Principal Social Worker newsletter and through regular bite size reminders to staff about both expectations and support.
3. We find huge value in enabling staff to share their good or challenging experiences of using the models and ways of working we have introduced and this 'appreciative enquiry' approach shares the learning in a powerful, proactive and very cost effective way.
4. Staff will be supported through:
 - Good quality supervision (including multi-disciplinary supervision)
 - Direct work tools
 - Reflective practice groups
 - Quality assurance framework
 - 2 hours protected professional development time per month
 - Access to learning resources (e.g. Research in Practice)

Objective 4 – Develop our learning culture

1. We want our staff to be continuously learning and sharing that learning with their colleagues and the wider service. To do that we recognise the need to provide mechanisms that will enable and encourage our staff to be curious, grow within the roles, aspire to become specialists or managers and stay with us for a long and rewarding career.
2. To encourage curiosity and sharing we will:
 - Continue to develop a resources portal to support practitioners to develop practice toolkits to inform evidence-based assessment and intervention
 - Embed the use of reflective practice sessions, Action Learning Sets and multi-disciplinary supervision.
 - Continue to use and promote impact reviews to support embedding of learning and development
 - Provide access to resource such as Research in Practice
 - Embed an expectation of a minimum of 2 hours protected professional learning and development time per month
 - Continue to promote learning from success exercises
 - Further development of champion roles across the service

Objective 5 – Develop the skill base of all our staff around the Portsmouth Model of Family Practice

1. We have developed a clear model of family practice for the city and the implementation of this model across all agencies is a critical element of our Children's Trust Plan.
 - professional and a multi-agency approach to support positive change.
2. Family Safeguarding is key to this vision and we have had success in this approach in respect of our interventions with children in need of help and protection, and supporting children to return to the care of their families through the 'Going Home' project. Our ambition is to embed this further at all points of the child's journey. We have close ties with the 'The Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice' and will seek support and guidance where necessary.
 - High quality assessment, analysis of risk and protective factors, SMART planning and purposeful intervention.
 - Co-production of family plans
 - Aligned and integrated planning: Some families will be subject to multiple plans from different agencies. The expectation is that the lead professional enables clarity and integration of planning, review and achievable objectives for the family so as not to bombard the family and make unachievable asks.
3. Within Children and Families the critical areas of focus will be as follows:
 - Family Lead Professional. Each family at Tiers 3 and 4 of the Portsmouth Thresholds has a named lead
 - Restorative conversations and circles to build relationships, maintain community and repair harm
 - Developing the capacity to change in families – for example using Motivational Interviewing

- Use of the Social GRRRAACCEEESSS (Burnham, 2012) and culturagrams to support recognition of difference into our work and challenge inequality and discrimination
- Strengthening the role of family and community networks through family group conferences, lifelong links and community conferences.

Objective 6 – Develop our Managers and Leaders

1. We ensure that anyone who undertakes a management or supervisory role is given the appropriate guidance and professional development to become a competent leader. All our managers are advocates for the professional development of their staff and will be responsible for ensuring their teams feel supported in using innovation and the very best up to date research to form their everyday practice.
2. Managers across the service, including senior leaders, service managers and team leaders, have overall responsibility for ensuring that a good quality service is provided, which includes the following:
 - Overseeing good quality decisions about the type of response needed, and ensuring the skills, competences and capacities are in place for a quality service.
 - Ensuring child and parent voices are heard and fully considered when developing and implementing plans.
 - Scrutiny to ensure good quality recording, analysis of need and report writing.
 - Providing good quality supervision and supporting practitioners to achieve the learning and development goals identified in annual Performance Conversations.
 - Making sure staff work within a supportive and relational team culture, with good communication, and routine commitment to rigorous professional practice.
3. We recognise that strong and compassionate leadership is fundamental to achieving our vision for Portsmouth. We therefore prioritise the development of leaders and the identification of those who have the talent and desire to be our leaders of the future. We have adopted a more blended approach to our offer, and at present we have at our disposal the apprenticeships standards from level 3 to level 7 in Leadership and Management which enable us to use the apprenticeship levy to fund individuals through these routes. We also have the social work leadership programme funded by the Department for Education. However, before we recruit to those programmes, we provide a sound induction and introduction to management which we deliver through our 'Manager Essential's' programme. This programme of support provides the foundation on which to build the skills and knowledge of managers as follows:
 - Demonstrating effective multi-agency collaboration and working
 - Have a strong value base displaying care, compassion and respect for others.
 - Manager Essentials Programme
 - Apprenticeship standard at appropriate level and/or Social Work Leadership Pathways programme
 - Action learning / Peer support / Reflection / Coaching / Mentoring
 - Specialist leadership development

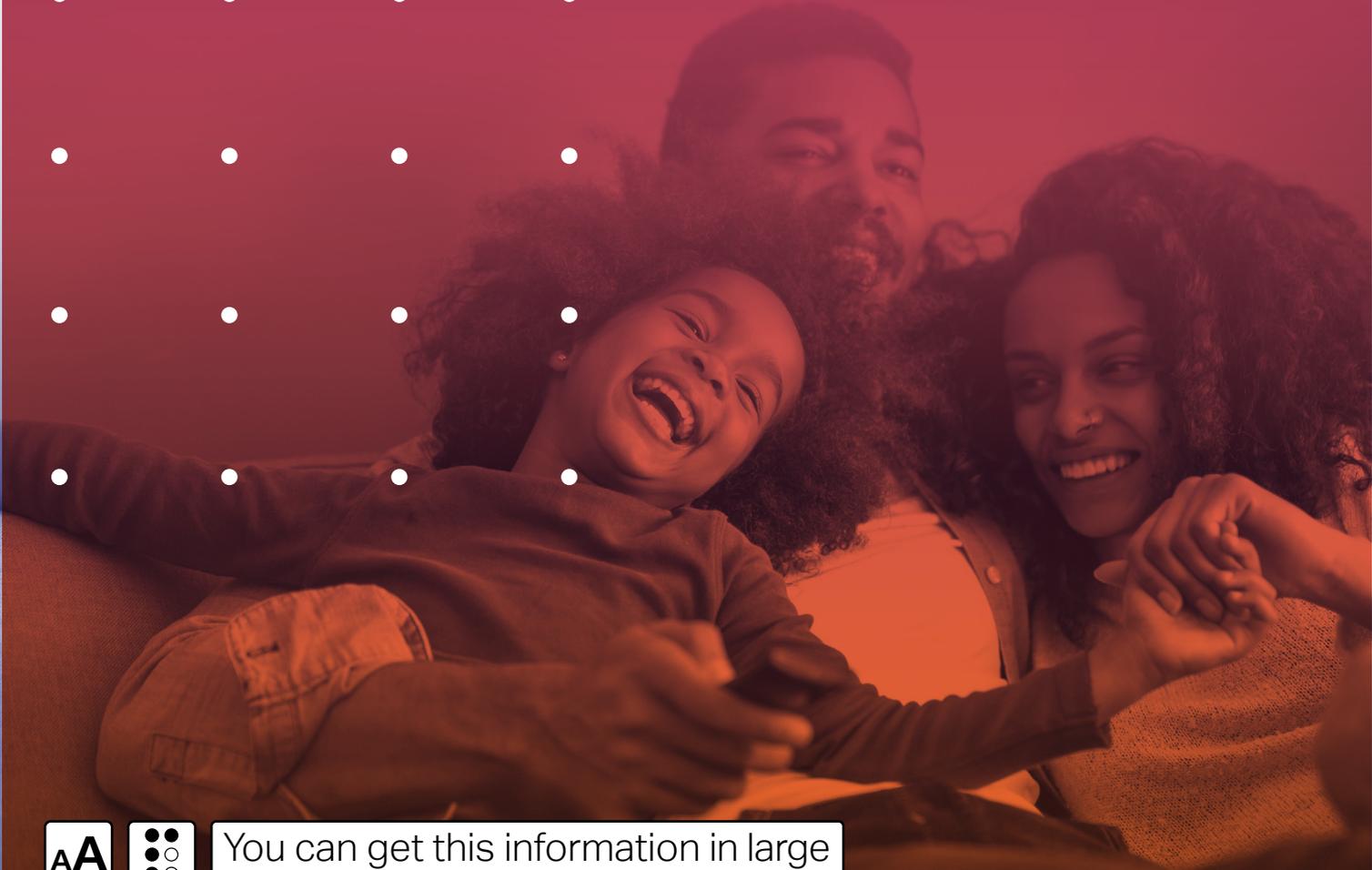
Monitoring and Review of this strategy

This strategy is reviewed annually by the Workforce Development Strategy Board.

Progress will be reported to the Board on the 7 objectives and will include a focus on the following:

- Recruitment, retention and learning from exit interviews
- Impact of learning and development
- ASYE progress
- Quality of staff supervision
- Identified training needs analysis for staff
- Staff feedback
- Outcomes for children and families

An annual report on the Children's Workforce Development Strategy will be prepared by the Principal Social Worker and presented to the Workforce Development Strategy Board.



You can get this information in large print, Braille, audio or in another language by calling 023 9284 1193

