



HARTLEPOOL
BOROUGH COUNCIL

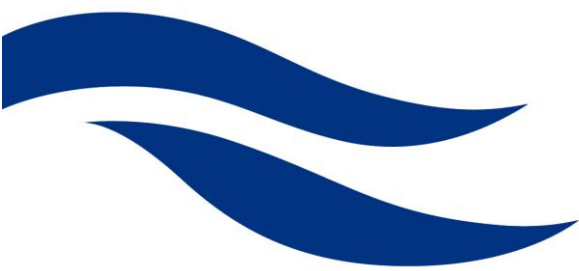
Better Childhood in Hartlepool:

Hartlepool's approach to children and family social work



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Background

We are focused on practice that supports our vision for a Better Childhood in Hartlepool

Mission statement:

“To enable all children and families¹ in Hartlepool to have opportunities to make the most of their life chances and be supported to be safe in their homes and communities.”

The Vision is underpinned by our Obsessions:

- Life Chances (Health, Wellbeing, Education)
- Being and Feeling Safe
- Relationships and Resilience

Our Vision and Obsessions are rooted in our values:

- We will work to protect children from significant harm;
- We will keep children and their families at the heart of everything we do; we are child-focused/person-centred.
- We will promote individual human rights.
- We recognise and promote diversity.
- We understand that every child and every family is different. We will assess each child and their family so that we can offer services to suit their needs. We will do this using an approach called the ‘team around the child’ model;
- We will respect each child and their family and always treat them with dignity. We will not make changes to the services we provide without good reason;
- We promote choice.
- We will always try and maintain positive relationships through not changing social workers and promoting choice through service provision.
- We will listen to children, young people and their families and always try and understand what our services feel like to them.
- We believe we can make the biggest difference to a child’s quality of life by providing a service as soon as we find out that the child needs support from us; However, we will only intervene when appropriate.
- We will check our services often to make sure they are as good as they can be. We will make changes to our services if we need to;
- Our workers will be skilled and will do their jobs well. Managers will give support and guidance to the staff in their teams. All workers will get high-quality training as part of their job;
- Our services will work together to make sure we make each child’s quality of life better.

We will support the workforce to:

¹ ‘Families’ includes wider family members and carers including foster carers.

- Have an approach based on intervention based practice.
- Own, intervene and take action to meet the needs of children and families and assumes their responsibilities as agents of change.
- Be reflective workers who are skilled and knowledgeable and draw on the latest research and evidence based practice.
- Build effective relationships with the families we work with to ensure they receive the help and support they need.
- Support families to develop their own plans making sure that all support networks available to them are used. This includes wider family networks and also workers from other organisations.

Summary of our approach

- We will honour and respect families regardless of their circumstances.
- We value the importance of direct social work and family support work with families as a means of enabling change. Our workforce will be skilled in intervention based practice.
- We believe families are where children thrive and we support children to remain within their family wherever possible.
- We are focused on the absolute priority to make it a safe journey for the children and families we work with.
- We work openly with families and children to bring about change, building on strengths and solutions, so that parents and carers are able to provide good parenting, consistent boundaries and emotional warmth, allowing children to develop life skills and resilience.
- We know that this work requires the right conditions/environment for social workers to practice well. We will aim for our teams to be small with manageable caseloads and with staff supported by a team manager and assistant team manager.
- We will balance the need for evidence based practice to promote time available for direct work with families.
- We consider and respond to the diverse emotional, cultural and material needs of each child and their family. We promote the appropriate use of advocacy and accessible information to help people understand the work we are doing.
- We understand that building resilience and bringing about change in families who face disadvantage can be difficult and challenging. This requires skilled, confident and resilient social workers and the right environment/conditions. To achieve this we will provide good leadership, good management oversight, good supervision and good learning and development opportunities.
- We are led by an inspirational and experienced leadership team including Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning, Assistant Director Children's Services, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Chair of the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board.
- We are committed to regular and effective supervision on a one to one basis as well as regular group supervision in each team.

- We use feedback gathered from children, young people and families to learn lessons, understand issues and inform practise and workforce development. Feedback is gathered as part of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) process for newly qualified social workers, service user engagement in Practice Week, Family Leadership courses and complaints and compliments.
- We have in place dedicated administrative support for each of the teams to free up social workers to spend more time with children and their families and advanced practitioners to co-work our most complex cases.

While we feel that our vision is clear and we have made progress, we do not take that for granted and know that our improvement journey will be hard work, challenging and sometimes frustrating. We want our social workers to feel supported in their development to provide an excellent service for the families they are working with and want to carry on working for Hartlepool Borough Council.

A Better Childhood in Hartlepool – Child focused practice

A Better Childhood in Hartlepool sets out the vision and values that guide social work practice in Hartlepool. Our framework is designed to be flexible so that it can work to support every family and their different needs. We know what might be right for one family or child may not be right for another. It has been developed to support social workers to use their professional judgement and to spend their time undertaking relationship-based social work with children and families that truly transform lives.

The role of a social worker is an incredibly difficult one, requiring a range of skills and a firm knowledge base. For us, child focused practice is about ensuring our social workers are compassionate and “tread lightly” with families regardless of the outcome of our involvement. We want our social workers to:

- Look at the bigger picture; understand the impact of social problems on families and the root causes of those issues.
- Take responsibility for families. Get to know the child and the family.
- Establish and maintain positive relationships with families and other professionals.
- Work purposefully so not allowing drift, with a clear and constant focus on children’s need and experiences.
- Understand the physical, social and emotional development of children and young people, and the context and circumstances of their lives (the wider system).
- Provide evidence-based interventions with families that improve children’s lives in a timely and compassionate way.
- Have the skills and knowledge to complete high quality and effective assessments and plans. This includes having strong report writing skills and good analytical and communication skills. It requires an ability to reflect and make good use of supervision.

- Develop bespoke packages of care dependant on individual need. Be led by the needs of the individual child and outcomes we hope to achieve, not service plans.
- Encourage children, young people and families to own the plan.
- Ensure plans are outcome focused with the social worker being confident and understanding their key role in making the plan work.
- Spend time helping families to identify or develop natural networks in order to effect sustainable change which does not purely rely on the local authority services.
- Use a strengths based solution focused approach without losing sight of valid concerns and areas requiring change for better outcomes for the child.

Our Practice

Hartlepool Social Workers

- Are HCPC registered and take responsibility for their own conduct, practice and learning.
- Are knowledgeable and use relevant research and tools to promote good outcomes.
- Are curious, sensitive and reflective as well as being authoritative, professional and tenacious in improving life outcomes for children.
- Approach families with empathy, compassion and creativity developing relationships for positive change.
- Work purposefully, openly and compassionately with the whole family system.
- Use reflective critical thinking and analysis to evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence to create meaningful assessments and plans which promote good outcomes.
- Separate complicating factors from 'harm'.
- Build skilful and influential working relationships with other professionals and agencies for the benefit of the family to provide a co-ordinated approach.
- Have high quality, child focused, person-centred planning and decision making skills.
- Draw on a range of approaches, used proportionately and regularly reviewed. We are conscious that one 'size' does not fit all and promote strengths based solutions focused systemic approach hence skilling staff up in Signs of Safety, solution focused practise and person-centred planning.
- Make good and emotionally intelligent use of supervision.
- Demonstrate understanding and skill in working as a member of a team and organisation.
- Understand their legal and statutory responsibilities and execute these in children's best interests.
- Use administrative support appropriately to create space for direct work.
- Take time out, consider their own wellbeing, eat lunch and put their pen down and reflect.
- Attend Practice Lead sessions which create a safe place to celebrate achievements and discuss worries and concerns.
- Use peer support when trying out new innovative ways of working.

- Showcase work to others.
- Use impact assessments and follow up with reflective supervision following training.

What methodologies do we use in our Better Childhood in Hartlepool framework?

- Our practice is solution focused. We collaborate with families assuming they want to do well, have or can develop a goal or goals and have the capacity and personal resources to move towards them, even in small steps.
- We are child focused/person-centred and take for granted that families are the experts in their own lives and learning.
- We are curious, ask appropriate questions and assist progress, while being clear about professional boundaries.
- We work directly with families drawing on the skills our workforce have but commission specialist services where necessary.
- We use Signs of Safety to organise, articulate and structure our work with children and families.

How are social workers supported to work within our Better Childhood in Hartlepool child focused practice framework?

- We expect our social workers to have the practice expertise to be able to assess and identify what needs to change and offer supportive, creative and effective interventions that help families solve their problems, enabling children to live safely at home. When this is not possible, our social workers take timely and appropriate decisions to ensure children are safe and there is permanence in alternative care arrangements: - plan and pursue the best possible options for children and young people, including returning home where possible.
- We expect our social workers to provide a proportionate level of assessment and use specialist assessments when relevant.
- We expect our social workers to understand what produces good outcomes and use their imagination to develop bespoke interventions that make a difference to families.
- We expect our social workers to have the confidence and skill to judge when and how to apply different approaches and interventions; and when it is more appropriate to draw on the families own natural resources and Hartlepool's wealth of community based support services as opposed to a social work intervention.
- We expect our social workers to understand pathways and thresholds for services and know when to escalate whilst not creating dependency.
- We expect our social workers to challenge families and have difficult conversations with them whilst advocating for families with other professionals.
- We expect social workers to take responsibility for their own wellbeing and safety and to mentor and support other workers in their teams and the wider department.
- In Hartlepool we support our social workers to both understand the methods (described above) and have the confidence and skills to know when to apply them in a range of ways:

- Social workers are trained and supported in Signs of Safety, Solution Focused Practice, Person Centred Planning, Listening to Children and in specific areas of specialist practice as required.
- We are aware that training alone will not create the environment and confidence in skills and are therefore working hard to create this by allowing staff to practice elements of this work in a safe way via group supervision.
- Our advanced practitioners provide hands-on support and guidance to help social workers reflect on the most appropriate interventions;
- There is regular team-based group supervision as well as individual supervision which allows social workers the time and space to reflect on their casework;
- Case load size and complexity is managed to allow workers to work with the tools/training we have provided.
- Six monthly practice weeks are designed to give senior managers the opportunity to spend time on 'hands-on' reviews and support on cases. Practice Weeks include: direct observations of practise, one to one time with social workers to discuss case work strengths, areas for development and outcomes achieved via our involvement. Senior Managers have conversations with children and young people and parents/carers to understand their perspective on the work and relationships. Learning from practise week is used to improve our practice/services.
- Regular performance clinics, and an ongoing audit programme are in place through an enhanced Quality Assurance Framework to ensure we remain focused on practice quality.
- All workers are familiar with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) and their evidence to support progression focuses on this.

How have we structured our service?

- Our social work teams are small to enable regular individual and group supervision, manageable caseloads and hands-on support and guidance.
- The social work teams have Assistant Team Managers who provide reflective supervision, support and modelling for social worker. They also have a lead role in mentoring and developing newly qualified social workers as part of the ASYE programme.
- Service Managers are located with teams providing leadership, direction and support to Team Managers and Assistant Team Managers.
- Each team is supported by a business support officer to ensure social workers are spending their time on things only a qualified social worker can do.
- We have experienced advanced practitioners throughout the service who co-work our most complex cases and provide hands-on support and guidance to others.

What about career development?

We are committed to developing our staff and ensuring Hartlepool is a great place to work. There are staff in Hartlepool who have worked their way up from social workers to advanced practitioners, team managers and service managers. However, for us, career progression is not just about 'moving up' and into management but also continuous development to improve and develop better practice skills with families.

In addition to the training in the social work methods outlined above, we have joined Firstline, the new national management support programme for first line social work managers.

There are structured opportunities for career progression in place. We have a robust Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme with regular mentoring and portfolio building meetings. Newly qualified social workers automatically progress after concluding their ASYE. There is then a programme of support in place to help social workers progress to Experienced Social Work level which focuses around showing how they have met the KSS/PCF at the appropriate level.

We are promoting social work and constantly seeking models of best practice via local, regional and national networks.

Learning Resources

We have in place a wide range of learning resources to support social workers.

- A comprehensive training programme designed to respond to individual and departmental needs.
- Access to high level legal training.
- Access to the Hartlepool Children's Safeguarding Board multi agency training programme.
- Regular staff briefing sessions that keep staff informed of Corporate and departmental developments.
- A programme to support the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment social workers and onward progression.
- Training courses are regularly evaluated and impact assessments completed by participants.

We know however, that training only contributes towards just 10% of learning so have in place other resources to support the programmes.

- An online Practice Manual providing up to date policies and procedures and a wealth of resources to support social work practice.
- An Effective Intervention Toolkit that provides a wealth of resources to support everyday practice.
- Children’s practice toolkits in every team to support direct work with children.
- A range of person-centred planning tools that can be used to help facilitate child-focused work.
- Community Care Inform licences that allow social workers to remain up to date in national policy developments and research.
- Reflective supervision and annual appraisals giving social workers the opportunities to reflect on their own performance and identify training needs.
- Practise lead sessions with the Assistant Director where worries and achievements can be shared.
- Membership of the ASYE regional partnership where good practice is shared.
- Presentations from family leadership programmes to social workers.

We issued this document in January 2018. We will check the information is up to date in January 2021.

