

# Commissioning case study

## Positive Family Futures in Portsmouth

# early intervention # systems method # service redesign # neighbourhood management # co-production  
# troubled families

## The headlines

- Using the Vanguard Method, Portsmouth has redesigned the way it works with families, by identifying and engaging with them at the earliest point of concern. Following a comprehensive analysis of contacts and interaction with a family across the whole system, multi-agency navigators pull on existing services and resources to meet its specific needs.
- Promising data is emerging about the impact on families and about the improved cost effectiveness of the system – for example, reducing the number of professionals involved in working with a family, resolving difficulties earlier, and improving health, education, wellbeing and financial outcomes for the families involved.
- The key challenge has been in helping professionals to understand and identify the earliest point of concern, and to change ways of working based on thresholds and eligibility criteria to an approach focused on providing the right support at the right time. This has been achieved through the patient nurturing of relationships with professionals and through one-to-one coaching by the Positive Family Futures team.
- Portsmouth is participating in the Department for Communities and Local Government's Delivering Differently in Neighbourhoods programme.

“Understanding the earliest points at which we can support and help families before the issues escalate has helped us create the innovative approach in Paulsgrove. With Department for Communities and Local Government support we can sustain and roll out the new way of working into other parts of the city. The work fits in well with our ambition to continue to look at approaches that support families when issues first emerge.”

Councillor Donna Jones,  
Leader of Portsmouth Council

## What is the context?

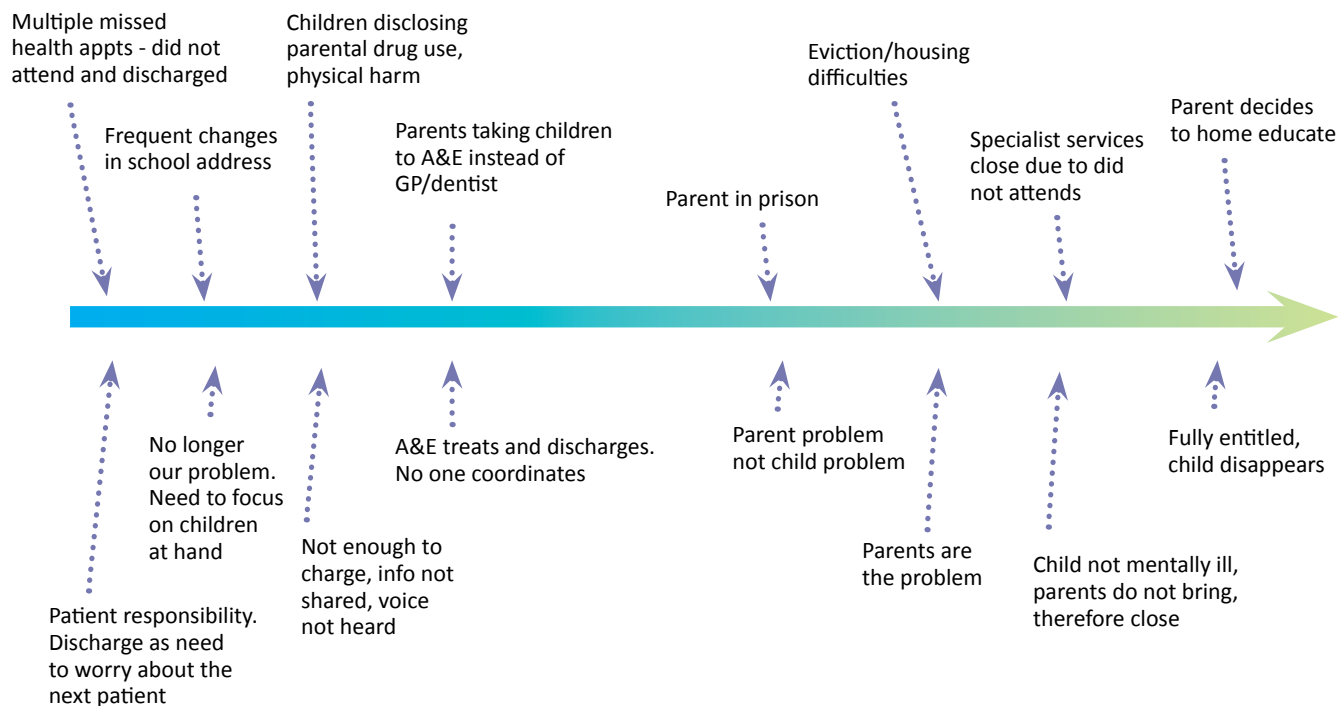
Portsmouth is an island city on the south coast, with a population of approximately 207,000. Despite the city being one of the world's great ports and having many advantages, there remain some serious challenges to tackle. Employment levels in Portsmouth are low, particularly in some wards. The people living in these wards often have lower than average incomes and suffer more from other social problems, such as poor health, than residents in other areas of the city. There are generally lower levels of education and skills in these areas, and barriers to accessing opportunities. Many of the problems have been established over several generations, or are a result of decline in traditional places of employment, such as the Naval Base, resulting in cycles of low aspiration and low achievement.

The Public Services Board, which is chaired by the leader of Portsmouth Council and brings together the chief executives of the main partners in the city, saw the Troubled Families programme as an opportunity to address these challenges. In particular, it wanted to understand why families become 'troubled' in the first place and developed the hypothesis that a focus on earlier points of intervention could prevent families reaching the Troubled Families threshold. The board therefore sponsored a review in 2013 in which a multi-agency team worked with consultants and used the Vanguard Method to look at services from a family perspective.

## What commissioning and delivery model has been adopted?

The first phase of the review, 'check', was a six-week period during which the team looked at families' journeys through the system in order to understand how services responded. Guided by the consultants in the application of systems thinking, the team plotted the journeys of eight actual families. The exercise identified a plethora of missed opportunities or points at which actions could have been taken that would conceivably have prevented

## A common journey of missed opportunities



issues from progressing or escalating. Each contact with services was plotted and costed. In one case, the cost of contacts alone amounted to £300,000 over two years. In addition, the team drew up 'genograms' for each of the families to understand significant individuals in the family's life and the extent and nature of their support or influence.

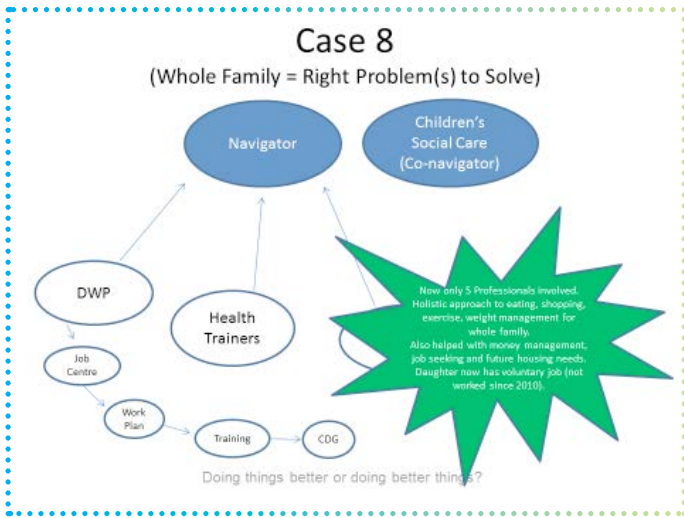
The exercise found that most of the families had been in contact with numerous agencies and professionals often over a long period of time. In one family, where the youngest child's weight was felt to be a concern, a minimum of 50 professionals had been involved. Often, though, families did not reach the threshold for any one service and were unable to gain access to support. In most cases, no single professional or agency understood all the information about a single family. The prevalent culture was one of 'refer and assess' rather than one of meaningful interventions that would effect a genuine change. Families often went through a revolving door of being referred, assessed, and then either being told they were not eligible for a service or being offered a service that had only a short-term impact. The costs of these contacts and interventions was high with no discernible improvement for the family.

The second phase of the review, which ran from September to November 2013 and involved the team working with families, was to redesign the service in

one area of the city. The redesigned service comprises three elements. First, it aims to identify and work with families at the earliest point of concern. Second, it uses 'wobbles' or triggers from data and information held in current systems to proactively identify at the earliest opportunity families who require help. Such triggers might, for example, be a missed health appointment or unexplained absence from school. Third, it has introduced the role of navigator whose function is to act as a single point of contact and support for families, ensuring that the right service is offered to the family at the right time. The navigator is the single case holder for a family and will 'pull' on other services when their expertise is needed. The initiative is firmly rooted in the community, making use of existing resources in order to co-produce a different way of working together. The point of intervention generally occurs at a point well below the normal 'thresholds' that typically trigger a multi-agency approach.

The new way of working was branded Positive Family Futures and started operating in the Paulsgrove area of the city in summer 2014. Paulsgrove is the third most deprived ward in the city and has both a defined geography and a strong community spirit. Being based in the Paulsgrove area provides the team with the opportunity to understand how the community works and functions, as well as identifying the key community





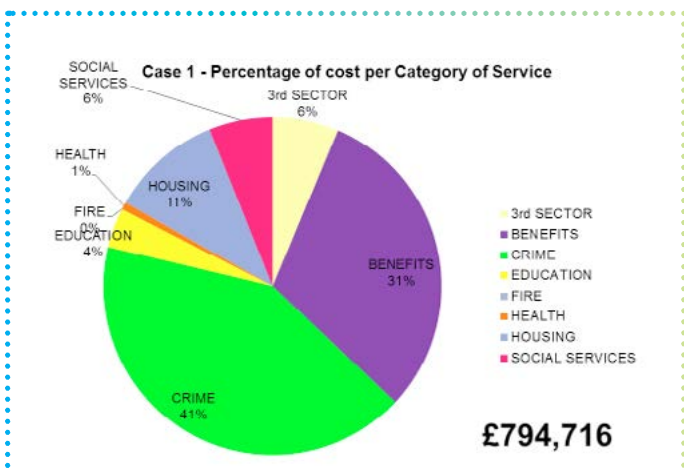
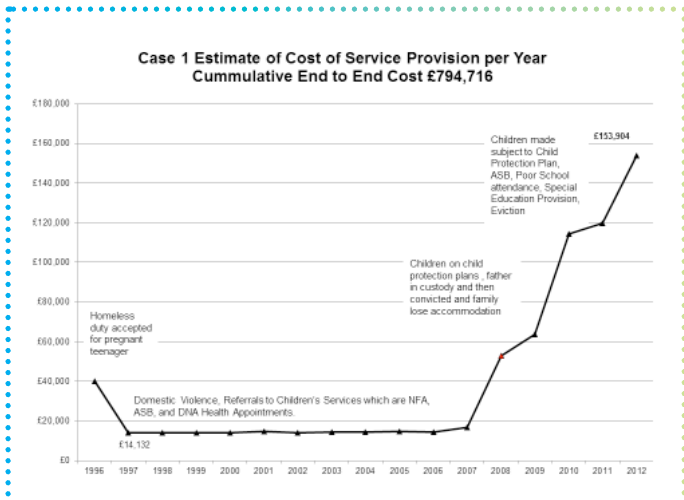
The team is now beginning to focus on the evaluation of outcomes and impact at three levels: the family, the geographical area, and the city. Key areas of focus are to develop a cost–benefit analysis model and a model that can quantify or provide evidence of capacity to change and actual changes in behaviour. Based on the initial costing work, the savings accruing to a range of agencies as a result of resolving issues early could be significant. In the case illustrated, for example, the costs to the criminal justice system were estimated as £325,833 and to the benefits system as £246,362.

For professionals, the primary outcomes have been in helping them to understand the signs and signals that mark the earliest point of concern and the triggers or ‘wobble points’. A practical example of how practice has changed as a result of this work are the visits now made by professionals to all new families in Paulsgrove to tell them about local health facilities. This arose from analysis that showed that families, and new families in particular, were tending to use Accident & Emergency on the estate rather than registering with and visiting a GP.

### Case study, Louise

In July 2014, 18-year-old young mother Louise and her 2-year-old child Sophie moved out of her parents’ home to a new home in Paulsgrove with her partner David. The couple were housed by Portsmouth City Council. Louise and Sophie were not registered with the local GP or children’s centre in the area and without registering with a GP families cannot gain access to other health-related services such as health visiting. The Paulsgrove area was completely unknown to Louise, and she felt isolated and detached from the community. David had a job and was paying full rent for the family home. However, his work was not always steady meaning that his wages fluctuated, affecting their tax credits.

The housing officer completed a moving-in questionnaire with the family which identified these issues. The housing officer agreed to act as the family’s navigator and was able to prompt Louise to register herself and Sophie with the local GP, children’s centre and health visitor. Louise was encouraged to contact local colleges to improve her education and build relationships in the area. The navigator helped the family to identify the things that were important for them and developed a suite of measures to ensure that rent payments and tenancy were maintained, that Sophie underwent all development checks and immunisations, and that Louise had access to education, training or work. Louise is currently attending a local college, Sophie is registered with the appropriate services for her age and the family are taking advantage of community facilities together. In the existing system the family would not have come to the notice of any services unless they had put their tenancy at risk and it is unlikely that they would have gained access to any community facilities.



‘I’ve had services for years, it was all about the child. The whole family need help and that is now being offered.’

Quotation from Dad, Case 8



## What have been the key elements of success?

Recognition by the Public Services Board, and its preparedness to take a risk with an untried way of working, were critically important. The board has continued to be supportive throughout. The leader of the council chairs the board which has brought political support; with the team being based in the community, relationships have developed quickly with the community and key stakeholders including ward councillors.

Sharon George of the Positive Family Futures team believes that one of the reasons why the project has been successful is because people at all levels understand the concept of early intervention. There has been no real resistance on the part of professionals or families, in her view because people can see that intervening at the first point of concern makes sense and can genuinely make a difference.

However, it has been important to appreciate that early intervention can mean different things to different agencies and services. Sharon continues to champion the emphasis of this work on intervening at the earliest point of concern, as opposed to the 'early interventions' that occur when there are already multiple issues that trigger a multi-agency response below the statutory intervention thresholds.

As well as support from senior leaders, it has also been important to have middle management and front-line staff on board too in order to produce lasting change to the organisational and delivery culture.

Finally Sharon believes that it is critically important to understand all the circumstances of the family before starting to work with them. At the beginning of each intervention, the team does a piece of work to understand all the contacts and interventions that have taken place across the system and to gather together all the information available about the family. Portsmouth has not experienced any significant difficulties with sharing data across agencies, mainly because it has families' consent and because an effective data sharing protocol is in place. However, IT systems have proved a barrier which the team deals with by bringing information and data together through professionals rather than systems.

## What has been learnt?

Implementing a new way of working and thinking has required both time and a commitment from the team to talk with professionals on a one-to-one basis, helping them to recognise wobble points and the earliest point of concern. The team has invested in developing relationships on the ground in Paulsgrove and believes it has been critically important to be visible within the community. A real in-depth understanding of the community and how it works has been essential and can only be developed over time.

“ **This is a great achievement for Portsmouth and with the Department for Communities and Local Government support we can sustain and grow the work currently focused in the Paulsgrove area to other areas of the City. We know that dealing with issues at the earliest opportunity is the right thing to do and the work in Paulsgrove continues to show us that despite the financial pressures on public services there is still much we can do in communities to support families at the earliest point of concern.** ”

Councillor Donna Jones, Leader of Portsmouth City Council

## Who can I contact?

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