

ASC Assurance Stakeholder Feedback Report 2023



Research and Engagement Team
PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

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1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive summary of the feedback received from stakeholders on Portsmouth City Council's Adult Services.

2.0 Background

From April 2023, a new duty has been introduced for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to independently review and assess the performance of local authorities in delivering their adult social care functions, as set out under part 1 of the Care Act 2014. Following pilot assessments with five local authorities starting in May 2023, a report was produced with indicative scores for all quality statements and an indicative overall rating. CQC will begin their full assessments of local authorities from the end of 2023. As part of their self-assessment, Portsmouth City Council has held engagement sessions with key stakeholders to gather their feedback and sense check whether their self-assessment is an accurate reflection of 'how we are doing'.

3.0 Research

3.1 Objectives

- Sense check Portsmouth City Council Adult Service's self-assessment
- Gather feedback from stakeholders on how effectively Portsmouth City Council's Adult Services are working within the vision of their strategy
- Gather feedback from stakeholders on their organisation's experience of Adult Social Care in Portsmouth

3.2 Methodology and response rates

In order to meet the research objectives, a focus group was proposed to all of the council's Adult Services stakeholders. The group took place on Tuesday 17th October 2023, with 12 stakeholders attending the event. In an attempt to capture the feedback of stakeholders unable to attend the original event, another virtual event was proposed on Tuesday 5th December. One additional stakeholder attended this session making the total number of stakeholders engaged with 13 out of 33 invited to take part.

Attendees included representatives of Hampshire Police (MASH), Age UK Portsmouth, HIVE Portsmouth, the ICB, the Society of St James, health-related directorates within Portsmouth City Council, South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS), and Healthwatch.

4.0 Summary of findings

Overall, stakeholders feel positively about Portsmouth City Council Adult Social Care, feeling that they strive to provide an effective service and productive working relationships with their partners. There is also a general consensus that partners are working within the same priorities as Portsmouth. However, participants identify areas where there are gaps in the service and where Adult Services could be improved. Whilst these gaps are often understood as external issues relating to funding and resources, or persistent problems existing in the system (outside of Portsmouth's remit), there are areas where Portsmouth could improve their provisions in the way they work.

Communication is a really key area in which Portsmouth Adult Services could improve, providing a greater depth of understanding amongst stakeholders and Adult Services alike about what everyone's roles and expectations are and opening up a multi-way dialogue with partners to ensure everyone is working on the same path to provide services. Although engagement and co-production is something that stakeholders

identify as Portsmouth working well towards, they also feel that more could be done to ensure providers are given a voice at the top level of strategy, opening up discussions to ensure all levels of service provision are reflected.

5.0 Analysis of findings

This report presents the findings from the engagement events, ordered chronologically by theme, as discussed in the events. Those themes were:

- Vision and strategy
- Engagement
- Governance
- Sector leadership
- Communication
- Presence in systems around the city
- Strengths-based approach
- Moving forwards

5.1 Vision and strategy

To begin the session, attendees were shown Portsmouth Adult Social Care's 'Strategy on a Page' which lays out their vision, the outcomes they work towards, the associated activities for 2023/2024, and the values they feel will get them there. The strategy can be found in appendix 1. Participants were asked:

In your/ your organisation's opinion are PCC Adult Services working within the spirit of the vision and strategy?

Alongside feedback about how effectively Portsmouth Adult Services works within the set-out strategy, participants also discussed the strategy in general, as well as how they feel about how Portsmouth are delivering their services. Overall, stakeholders feedback that they feel that Portsmouth is doing well in working towards this strategy, although they also acknowledge areas in which Portsmouth could improve and where it is limited by systemic issues. Generally, they particularly focus on the specific strategy outcome - 'We work across the city with partners providing support where needed in a safe, supportive community and home' - the outcome most relevant to and experienced by this group.

5.1.1. The strategy itself

Several stakeholders express that they like the layout of the strategy as presented, feeling that it is familiar to them, and the format is easy to read in the way it is set out. Participants describe this initial reaction as comforting to know that "we're all speaking the same language". They also appreciate being able to see how each element of the strategy feeds into other elements and to understand how Portsmouth envisions the strategy to flow.

However, acknowledging their positionality as staff working in the realm of care, participants proceeded to discuss the extent to which this strategy is accessible to all, particularly focusing on the language used. They feel that terminology and language is a vital part of the strategy and should be articulated in such a way that anyone should be able to pick it up and correctly interpret its meanings and intentions. They acknowledge that, even within the realm of health, there are some discrepancies in what organisations and individuals will understand by certain words.

An example given was the use of the word 'prevention', which carries different meanings across various organisations within healthcare. For example, in public health they would likely understand this to relate to the promotion of general 'healthy living', however, in the realm of Adult Social Care this is often more related to the concept of a 'strengths-based approach'. They argue that this is clearly present in the strategy but may risk not being recognised or understood by certain partners or users due to difference in language used. They suggest using more stripped back language to ensure meaning is correctly conveyed, such as using a different term for 'strengths-based'.

Several stakeholders also feel that the strategy has failed to weave in 'safeguarding' as a key term throughout the strategy, as they largely feel that this is the 'golden thread' at the heart of the work that partners and Portsmouth Adult Services do. They note that the notion of 'feeling safe' is included in the over-arching vision but feel that this is not clear enough throughout the strategy, and should be explicitly signposted in the flow of outcomes, actions, and values. Participants acknowledge that finding a common language is often an issue in partnership work, but that finding common and accessible terminology is empowering.

5.1.2 Successes of 'working across the city with partners'

Overall, stakeholders generally feel that they have a positive working relationship with Portsmouth Adult Social Care. They express an appreciation and recognition of Portsmouth's engagement with its partners, establishing strong, collaborative, and effective relationships with Portsmouth, particularly noting that Portsmouth clearly excels over other local authorities in this area. For example, Hampshire Police (MASH), in particular, express that they have none of the same issues with Portsmouth that they have in other local authorities. In some cases, participants attribute this success to individual relationships, where staff are enthusiastic and reliable in attending meetings. They describe a particular willingness in Portsmouth to pursue a strong level of engagement and co-production with its partners and find this crucial and effective in feeling cohesive. They also note that, as a result of these integrated relationships, Portsmouth Adult Social Care is reliable and efficient at responding and feeding back to stakeholders.

"So we can say 'as a sector, this is what we think is best'."

Several stakeholders express that Portsmouth should not take this collaborative working for granted and ensure that they make it clear that this is how they work, and that it works effectively.

"I'm not sure we always sell it well enough, it's so obvious to us that it's taken for granted as we've been here so long, but if we don't spell it out, people won't see it. CQC will also be coming to the ICB...so we've got to be careful that if someone in the central team is doing it, will it showcase what's happening in Portsmouth."

As also expressed in their assessment of the overall strategy, stakeholders generally feel that there is a consistent alignment of priorities between partners and Portsmouth Adult Social Care, reflecting those of the NHS and, more locally, Health and Care Portsmouth. They feel that this alignment of values enables more practical and considered decision-making, approaching issues from the same starting point.

5.1.3 Suggested areas of improvement to 'working across the city with partners'

Although stakeholders generally express the sentiment that Portsmouth fosters effective working relationships with its partners, participants also identify areas for improvement to aid Portsmouth in fulfilling the goals of their strategy. Stakeholders note, particularly, that although engagement is reliably strong from Portsmouth Adult Services, partners are often missing a seat at the 'strategic table', limiting the effectiveness of these co-productive and collaborative relationships.

Acknowledging that this is not Portsmouth-specific, several stakeholders feel that they do not have the power to put things on the agenda, as they are not part of the initial conversations taking place. This means that by the time they are receiving this information, it is often too late to have any kind of co-productive conversation and make any suggestions or amendments. They feel that the trickle-down by having partners effectively represented from the very beginning or including representatives from providers on boards like Health and Care Portsmouth, for example, would be invaluable, building a stronger level of trust and engagement amongst partners. They would strongly value the opportunity to be an equal partner at a higher level.

"Where are the providers? And that's not something that's Portsmouth's fault, I think it's a structural issue in the system."

"What it can mean, as a social care provider... there's a lack of trust from the different services... you have to climb over a lot of mountains to get there."

Stakeholders also raise the point of effective communication with and within partnerships as something that could be improved by Portsmouth Adult Services to achieve more effective co-production. This was especially raised by several stakeholders in terms of effective case-management, both in terms of preventative actions and follow-up or feedback between agencies. They express that being more proactive and ensuring better sharing of information between organisations would be very beneficial to improving case-management. They also feel that this would improve safeguarding in the system as they find that important information can often be found out too late, for example, when individuals are in the hospital and seemingly ready to be discharged. Another improvement would be providers being able to ensure that assessments have been carried out at hospitals by a trusted assessor, as they raise that a proportion of assessments being undertaken at hospitals are inaccurate. They would also like the process smoothed by providers being in contact with NHS staff. Having that contact and guarantee of correct assessment at the start of the process could be greatly beneficial for providing appropriate care.

Better communication would also be appreciated during or after cases have been completed, both from the perspective of evidencing where there are strengths in the strategy and partnerships, and from enabling partners to use examples for training purposes to improve future services. They say that it is usually apparent where something has not gone well in a case, but where they do not hear anything about a case this is usually a suggestion that things are being handled effectively, although they do not have evidence to support this. From a personal perspective, also, they suggest that providing examples of where staff have made a positive difference to someone's life can help boost morale and ensure providers are on the right track. A two-way communication between organisations and Portsmouth Adult Social Care is expressed as being beneficial, and an area for improvement.

In some cases, stakeholders also feel that there is a disconnect between Portsmouth Adult Services and their partners, particularly in terms of providing specialist support and care. An example given was from providing housing in cases where people need more complex or specialist support with their mental health or with issues like chronic heavy drinking, and providers do not have the appropriate places to support and treat people. This disconnect raises further issues with safeguarding for partners, where relevant and appropriate care is unable to be provided to specialist cases.

Throughout their suggested improvements, participants acknowledge the constrained position of Portsmouth Adult Services in relation to budgets and systemic barriers. Where budgets are consistently being cut and Portsmouth Adult Social Care does not have the resources to provide certain support to partners

"Portsmouth City Council itself, I would say, is doing the best they can with a bad situation."

Although stakeholders generally express that their priorities are aligned with Portsmouth Adult Services, instances are raised where partners work to different frameworks, creating a barrier when trying to deal with particular situations effectively. An example given is the requirement of consent, a particular issue for adult services, as this topic is not as present in children's services. Friction can be created for organisations like the police, where they feel they are more likely to just go and help people, but the consideration of consent can create a restriction to providing support, particularly where people have capacity and decisions cannot be made in their best interest for them.

5.1.4 Other areas of the strategy and vision

Approaching this strategy from a user's point of view, several participants feel that access can be an issue for Portsmouth Adult Services, as it can often be difficult to find the right person to talk to, both from the perspective of users and providers. Several participants comment that the system feels disjointed and unclear, relating it to being bounced around between areas, creating issues for accessing relevant information and support, and also making it unclear where providers would be best placed to have the best influence. One participant suggested the idea of a mystery shopper, approaching the system as a user to understand the process that they go through in order to improve services.

"Because you hear what people say - 'I get bounced around, people aren't listening'."

Participants also suggest improving how users access support by making this process as clear and transparent as possible, empowering individuals by ensuring they understand how the assessment works and how that impacts the choice of what support they are entitled to. It should be clear to the individual how they have control over what they can choose to access, what is out there and available to them, and what is free and commissioned to ensure that they receive the most appropriate and relevant support.

Participants also express concern for ensuring that Portsmouth is meeting the outcome of 'carers feel recognised and valued for the contribution they make to our city'. They ask whether, as a collaborative partnership, enough is being done for carers to ensure they feel supported and know where to go or who to speak to. They also recognise the need for the strategy and its actions to be flexible and responsive, understanding where their audiences may change, particularly in the instance of carers where people may suddenly fall into this category, having not been part of the audience beforehand.

5.2 Engagement

Participants were asked to what extent they agree that Portsmouth City Council Adult Services behave in the following way:

'We actively seek out and listen to information about people who are most likely to experience inequality in experience or outcomes. We tailor the care, support, and treatment in response to this.'

Overall, participants did not feel that Portsmouth was effectively working to this statement in all areas, although they acknowledged that the barriers were external, systemic or financial. For example, they highlight that pursuing this goal can become very wearing for providers to go through when they are aware that the answer will be that there are not enough funds or resources to support schemes and outreach.

Some stakeholders raise the point that certain services are can do this, but that it is not entirely the norm across the system. Several participants do feel that Portsmouth employs a strong focus on supporting the most vulnerable.

"We do, but it's fleeting, and for a specific purpose."

Stakeholders highlight the Learning Disabilities team within Portsmouth Adult Services as an example of where this engagement is successful. Acknowledging that this is one small part of the service, they feel that it is easier to achieve this goal, feeling that they are able to make promises to users about the kind of dedicated support they can receive and know that it will be fulfilled; something that does not spread to other services. Participants question what we can learn from services like Learning Disabilities who have got it right, or in what ways they differ from other services that make this achievable.

5.2.1 Identifying people in need

Several stakeholders feel that a barrier to achieving this is the inability to identify individuals who are in the most vulnerable positions to experience inequality in experience or outcomes. They express that there are many pockets of groups who are difficult to engage with, which is made harder by not knowing who the people are. They acknowledge that the system is flawed here, in that those who need to be identified for this purpose are often less likely to have engaged with or sought out services, for example, they won't have visited the GP.

Cultural observations were raised as a possible reason for not being able to identify and engage with particular groups who are most likely to experience inequalities in experiences, with several stakeholders agreeing that they primarily see White individuals coming through the system, which does not accurately reflect the community of Portsmouth. They question what barriers exist in the system that prevent this engagement, unsure of where Portsmouth's involvement fits into this. Several stakeholders feel that these barriers could be effectively broken down through sufficient and dedicated engagement and communication.

Identifying those in need may also be restricted through engagement with the system for groups such as the LGBTQ+ community. A few stakeholders noted that they rarely get a referral through for someone identified in this group, acknowledging that there must be something in the system discouraging individuals from disclosing this information. They speculate that this could come from particular experiences with carers, or from pre-existing perceptions of the tolerance of those in the systems, making individuals afraid to share this information. One systemic solution suggested to attempt to combat this is by implementing simple and subtle signals, such as asking if they have a 'partner' instead of a 'wife' or 'husband' and using pronouns. Ensuring that an environment is fostered where individuals can feel comfortable and secure to disclose personal information such as their gender identity or sexuality can enable services to ensure relevant support is given to individuals who need it.

Overcoming these barriers, several stakeholders discussed how well Portsmouth prioritises inclusivity in its approach. For example, they question whether Adult Social Care would benefit from having a specific

Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy which could effectively target their users. Language was also discussed as a step towards inclusivity, such as improving translation services, although they acknowledge that this is a particularly complex issue for Portsmouth, being a densely populated area with a wide range of languages spoken.

An area in which one stakeholder felt Portsmouth is well-suited to identify particular instances of people most likely to experience inequality in experience or outcomes is in identifying people on the streets. This is due to Portsmouth being a small city, making this outreach easier for different services and teams to target relevant individuals.

5.2.2 Transitions between children's and adult social care

Stakeholders find that there is a gap in the service in provisions for younger people (under 25), who may not fit into a service but are still vulnerable and at risk of inequality in experience and require more specialist support. They particularly highlight a challenge in the partnership between children's and adult social care, in the space of children becoming adults and switching to this service. Participants express that there are some holes in the system for specific situations, such as where care leavers may be well signposted to support at age 18 but may not be interested in accessing that support until they are in their early twenties and do not know where to go.

This area of transition was described as a 'forgotten' service, without sufficient links between services, both within Portsmouth City Council and with organisations outside of the council. Improvements are suggested in this area with capturing relevant individuals, managing expectations as they transition out of children's services (such as with parents), and potentially engaging with services like GPs to track individuals and signpost back to Adult Social Care where vulnerable individuals need support.

5.2.3 Accessibility- physical disabilities

Several stakeholders feel that providers are not effectively supporting individuals with physical disabilities, feeling that the lack of dedicated support and care creates a barrier to these individuals accessing services and treatment. They highlight that, rather than a systemic or cultural barrier, physical access issues may prevent certain individuals from accessing services. They particularly discuss transportation as an area for improvement in Portsmouth, although acknowledging that the cost and responsibility of this does not fall to Adult Social Care. However, they find difficulties with referrals for individuals who need more accessible patient transport for example, noting that it feels impossible to meet these needs.

5.3 Governance

Participants were asked the following question about Portsmouth Adult Social Care's governance:

Based on your/your organisation's experience do you consider that we have good governance; and do you find us accountable for the service we provide?

Overall, stakeholders generally feel that Portsmouth City Council is committed to trying to build accountability and good governance, but some feel that still has a long way to go in this regard. Portsmouth's working relationship with its partners was commonly viewed as intertwined when considering governance and accountability amongst stakeholders.

Several stakeholders express that they see good governance and accountability in action by Portsmouth and feel that this is particularly important to achieve as a local authority, and the same for its partners, due to the spending of public money. They believe that Adult Services and its partners are largely already being

transparent in their spending and being explicit in where the money goes, however, there is still room for improvement.

"From a strategic perspective, I think as a partnership yes because ultimately, I think through the way we work in the council, and the way we work in Health and Care Portsmouth, it's very clear what the statutory functions are and how you manage those from both within the partnership as well as in the council. It's clear and I think it works well and I've never heard anything to suggest otherwise."

However, some participants feel that Portsmouth still has information gaps, suggesting that the council could be more transparent with certain information, such as partnership roles and involvement.

Some stakeholders discuss engagement (with partners) as part of the governance process, in which there is general agreement that Portsmouth is doing fairly well in this regard, enabling providers to be more involved in processes. However, participants feel there was room for improvement, such as through the inclusion of providers at the strategic tables at the top, to implement accountability to providers at every stage of the process. For example, Hampshire Police (MASH) express that they would like to see more investment and better service from Adult Social Care for Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC), which employs the assumption that no one agency or person can see the complete picture, but may all have insights that are crucial to a victim's safety.

Considering Portsmouth's relations with its partners, as well, several participants feel that governance and accountability could be viewed differently from the position of the council's Adult Social Care, fostering a more shared environment. For example, a few participants feel that although Portsmouth does express an understanding and sympathy with the difficulty and pressure of the situation providers are in, their expectations of accountability from providers are not always reflective of this.

"There's those unrealistic expectations baked into the system."

They also feel that the fact that they are all held accountable by common organisations and institutions, such as the CQC, is not fully appreciated or acknowledged by Portsmouth, potentially restricting their success in this area.

"We need to smash down a few barriers there and feel like we are on the same team."

5.4 Sector leadership

Participants were then presented with the following declaration and asked to what extent did they feel that this is how Adult Services operate, and whether they achieve this:

'We inspire positive change by empowering those around us to work toward common objectives, with a focus on effective communication to gain trust and align efforts in the pursuit of goal'.

Overall, stakeholders agree that they have common goals with Adult Services that are clear and feel that Portsmouth is really trying to achieve this. However, some participants feel that Portsmouth Adult Services still have a way to go in achieving this goal, repeating earlier expressions that there is still a need to break down some barriers between partners and feel as though they are on the same team to achieve common

goals. Several participants also recognise, again, that a lack of resources present a barrier to achieving this, an issue that falls outside of the council's control.

Some participants mention instances where empowerment for partners could be improved, such as strategic meetings where staff feel that they either did not understand the content and objectives laid out, or they did understand it but did not feel they had the position to raise their hand and contribute within the meeting. Others discuss the terminology of 'empowerment' and feel this could be changed to working jointly 'with' partners, rather than using the word 'empower' here.

Some participants also feel that, although we are currently 'trying' to achieve this, we should be striving to 'lead' this effort. One participant suggests that Portsmouth, as an island, could be leading innovative goals, for example, linking their strategy and goals to the green agenda and net zero. They suggest that Portsmouth Adult Services could set themselves apart by pursuing small and achievable goals within their service, such as how they light residential homes, reducing their travel, or expanding the food waste scheme, as an example. Participants feel that it is achievable for Portsmouth Adult Services operate within the above declaration in certain areas.

5.5 Communication

Considering how Portsmouth communicates with their organisations in more detail, participants were asked:

'Do you see and/or hear communications from Adult Services?'

Overall, stakeholders are not certain that they receive distinctive and relevant communications from Portsmouth Adult Services, with the general consensus being that there is room for improvement. Generally, participants suggest communications need to be distributing dedicated and effective information for particular groups, minimising the need for partners to sift through or translate information to pass on and avoid duplication. A few participants feel that communications from Adult Services were best during the pandemic, when there were clear, new developments that required effective distribution. They understand the uniqueness of this type of information, however, feel that this is a model Adult Services could look to and understand what works well for services.

"Certainly, over Covid I thought the information was very forthcoming, and it was timely, it was relevant."

5.5.1 Communications between partners and information sharing

Participants feel that communication with and between partners could be improved in Portsmouth Adult Services. For some partners, this relates to the way in which Adult Social Care communicates what their role and responsibilities are, to improve effective and smooth collaborative working, particularly in distinguishing their role from Children's Services. This point was reiterated by participants from Hampshire Police (MASH), relaying the example of mental health referrals. Once questioned, Adult Services were efficient in explaining that they were not the appropriate organisation for police to send referrals, and also helped inform them of where these referrals should go instead. By opening up this dialogue, Hampshire Police were then able to implement training for front-line teams to manage this, as well as managing expectations about other organisations' roles too. Adult Services' quick communication in resolving the issue was praised, but the consensus amongst the group is that information like this should be clearly disseminated from the outset, to avoid either service creating more work to solve these issues.

"The level of expectation is something that could be managed earlier."

Several stakeholders feel that setting up expansive and inclusive dialogues with partners will be most effective in improving communications. They suggest, particularly, setting up all-encompassing meetings with partners, in which communications could be agreed upon and information shared more effectively. Participants give the example of a monthly Health and Care meeting, questioning whether this could be expanded to be more inclusive of other partners and make it more about a wider-sector development. They suggest that the breadth of these meetings could be widened to discuss changes relevant to services, as well as early intervention, or sharing experiences in order to improve and adapt processes to work more efficiently in partnership.

They also feel that expanding the scope of meetings, ensuring that they are not always attended by the same small selection of voices, could help avoid duplication of communications for partners. A longer meeting which allows networking time for conversations could enable partners to sit together and map out upcoming information dissemination and communication. They did, however, talk about barriers to ensuring that a variety of organisations are adequately represented at these meetings, given that the same people are likely to attend each one.

5.5.2 Communications with staff

Participants also comment on the issue of disseminating information from Portsmouth Adult Services to their staff. Several stakeholders feel that a gap exists around communications to staff, such as providing specific staff support. For example, they discuss difficulties with lower pay in social care, and suggest that staff would benefit from being signposted through communications to where they can access services and support to help them with this, such as the cost-of-living hub. Participants express that it would be useful to their organisation if Adult Services provided them with clear and informative communications that could easily be cascaded to staff.

This wish is reiterated by other participants who feel that general information on the work they are doing and information that organisations and their staff need to know is often not effectively transmitted to staff. They believe that this is largely due to the time-consuming nature of sifting through information that is distributed at too high a level to be relevant to staff. For example, they feel that general health messages are unlikely to be read by staff unless it is particular to the area they work in. Partners would appreciate receiving information that is concise and targeted to their staff and organisation to ensure the right information is going to the right people. However, they do acknowledge that this is difficult to achieve in the realm of social care.

"That's the difficulty of things, particularly for the breadth of social care, you couldn't do it just as a wide newsletter because it wouldn't be relevant to the vast majority."

5.5.3 Disseminating information publicly

Stakeholders feel that they would also benefit from ready-to-disseminate information that they could cascade to the public/ users of their services. They express that having messages and communications that are targeted and easy to put 'straight out there' onto their social media pages, for example, like a PDF would be most useful in sharing information. They acknowledge that this would have its limitations, needing to consider their audiences and what specific organisations would want to communicate. However, they also recognise a concern with this method of communication, the potential for services and teams to

become overwhelmed with requests with advertisement on social media, feeling that targeted information may be best to counter this possibility.

5.6 Presence in systems around the city

Participants were asked to describe their experience of Adult Services in 'the system' or area they work within in the context of the following statement:

'Adult Services, and their representatives are visible, accessible and present within my sphere of work, adding value through the quality and effectiveness of our working relationships?'

Considering how visible and accessible Adult Services is in their sphere of work, participants generally express that they feel more could be done to improve the presence of Portsmouth in this area. Tying this back into communications, they feel that Portsmouth could be more effective in clearly communicating who they are, what they do, and what their expectations are of their working relationships with partners, even on an individual level.

For those who did feel that representatives were visible and accessible, participants largely acknowledge that this is more effectively based on personal professional relationships, rather than having a clear understanding of an organisation. Although they feel that this does enable them to feel comfortable to approach people and know that if they have the resources or ability they can get their issues resolved, participants recognise that 'who you know' is not a good approach and would rather not feel this way. They also highlight that this can create a very different view and method of involvement between organisations, entirely depending on pre-established and built relationships.

"I think a lot of it is who you know."

Establishing presence and accessibility, participants suggest simple and practical solutions that could be implemented by Adult Services, such as ensuring that email signatures are always used (even on reply emails) which signpost the individual's name, department, role, and contact information. They express that it can be 'disconcerting' to be brought into an email chain, for example, without knowing who it is you are talking to. Other participants also express that they would appreciate an organisational chart with a clear structure to enable quick and effective communication with the correct contact to resolve issues, although they acknowledge the barriers to producing this with frequently changing job roles. They recognise that this may already exist, but highlight that, if so, more effective communication is required to share this with partners.

Beyond this, other participants also suggest that communications could be improved to help partners understand what roles they have and what they all do. Siloed ways of thinking (i.e. 'this is what I do') was raised as an issue within the system, creating barriers between services and limiting the quality of their provisions. Even within Portsmouth City Council as an organisation, some participants mention the lack of joined up working between Adult and Children's Services (as mentioned in section 2.2 'Engagement'), feeling that the transition between these services could be improved through a more integrated and involved approach.

For external partners, participants acknowledge that the focus group taking place was a great way for organisations to come together and understand the other's position but highlight that there are still those representatives who are missing from the session. They feel that these events are beneficial in producing effective collaborative working, where organisations can efficiently tie in with others, where they have the knowledge and communication channels to bring partnerships together.

"There are other organisations so focused on their world that they don't often look outside their own pressures."

Considering how best to ensure visibility and effectively manage working relationships, participants would also like to see a breakdown of barriers between organisations and Portsmouth Adult Services, with a two-way dialogue enabling Adult Services to understand the role that partners play and improve their service provision. They feel that this would also help manage expectations from Adult Services about what services organisations are able to provide. An example given by HIVE Portsmouth would be having a member of staff from Adult Social Care come and spend time at their helpdesk in order to understand the issues they receive day-to-day and help staff understand where to signpost people who require particular services. They express how important a visible presence is in the city to build effective working relationships with partners, but also to build trust with users. Both from the perspective of being able to efficiently connect users with the correct services, but also by engaging with the community on the front-line, they feel that that this would be instrumental in ensuring quality service and improving Adult Services presence within the system.

"Being in the spaces where people are going to, rather than trying to find their way through the civic offices, it would make such a big difference."

Participants also feel that this engagement with partners and presence in their systems would be beneficial in establishing expectations both ways and aligning priorities further to create more productive working relationships. An example given by Hampshire Police was the gap left in their knowledge as a result of the lack of Adult Services presence at their meetings (e.g. MARAC). They express that the expertise and professional opinion of Adult Services is invaluable to them when approaching cases, as well as more general advice, and feel that there needs to be a clearer expectation of attendance and presence in these working relationships in order to optimise them.

5.6 Strengths-based approach

Participants were provided with the following definition of a strengths-based approach and asked to consider how well they thought that Portsmouth Adult Services mirrors this definition:

A strengths-based approach explores, in a collaborative way the entire individual's abilities and their circumstances rather than making the deficit the focus of the intervention. We should gather a holistic picture of the individual's life; therefore, it is important to engage and work with others (i.e. health professionals, providers, the individual's own network, etc. with appropriate consent). Strengths-based practice is applicable to any client group, to any intervention and can be applied by any profession.

Although some participants find this difficult to comment on, given that they do not really see this scope of more operational, 'on the ground' work in their area, participants largely feel that Portsmouth is working towards a strengths-based approach. However, stakeholders acknowledge where Portsmouth Adult Services is restricted in its success in this area by the resources available to them. Where the priority is providing care, they find that a lack of funding resources can restrict a more holistic approach to general wellbeing advocated for by a strengths-based approach.

"I feel like Portsmouth would like to commission based on strengths-based approach, but the reality is the money is not in the system to do that."

Some participants also recognise that a lack of understanding about what is meant by a strengths-based approach, both from providers and users, can be a barrier to following through effectively with this approach. They feel that service user and professional expectations need to be managed, ensuring that prevention and community remains at the focus of the approach, but that the process is effectively communicated to users who often see this as Adult Services being unwilling to help them.

Considering a strengths-based approach more generally, participants discuss the balance between necessary intervention and not overstepping the crucial role of community. They describe being strengths-based as considering all levels of support, not just being about professionals making the decisions that they consider to be best. In this sense, users and caregivers are given more of a voice and the process becomes less transactional. Some participants emphasise the importance of building sustainability into this approach to ensure that support is foundational around an individual, rather than agencies temporarily stepping in and leaving when they're 'done'.

Considering 'prevention' at the heart of being strengths-based, participants question the ways in which services could be more proactive in neighbourhoods, getting involved early on rather than further down the line. In this way, Adult Services could provide intelligence to help support organisations to keep communities strong and identify where there may be gaps in service provision and opportunities for preventative intervention.

"We used to have a mentality about we'll go and have a look, you might not be known to our service yet from a particular rehab or reablement point of view, but we'd go and see what can we do to keep it that way, what can we do, working earlier with people to keep them intervention safe for longer."

However, concerns are also raised about the ability to step back and ensure services do not take over the role of the community in this approach. A few participants express concern about 'official' services toppling over due to excess demand when they are implemented to fill a gap. Suggestions are also made to ensure that where things are working without intervention, to leave this element of the community as it is, and take an approach that signposts rather than prescribes. Hampshire Police gives the example of the Social Care Information Point (SCIP) which used to exist as a kind of directory of services, providing information about all the services people could have access to. A similar 'menu' of services available to users is suggested at care planning meetings or packages offered to individuals, to enable them to tailor care and support on a case-by-case basis, as a strengths-based approach should do.

Beyond just looking at community support, some participants also emphasise the importance of consulting families and individuals in the approach to their care. Even from the perspective of tackling loneliness - an issue raised as having a critical impact on health and wellbeing - they suggest that having conversations with users can be invaluable in setting up a strengths-based approach to their care. They argue that starting from a discussion with the individual, finding out what they can do for themselves currently, what they need help with right now, and what they'll need ongoing help with, should be at the heart of what further support providers consider. They link this back to the notion of sustainability in a strengths-based approach, also feeling that consistency is key in reaching this information, highlighting that certain things may not be immediately apparent, or may be shared with staff once individuals have developed a strong relationship with them. However, participants acknowledge that restrictions in resources impact the ability to effectively achieve this element of a strengths-based approach.

5.7 Moving forwards...

Participants were asked:

Considering everything you've discussed and reflected on today - what do you suggest Adult Services could do better?

Generally, participants focus on collective and collaborative working with improved channels of communication as a common thread of improvement they would like to see to in Adult Services throughout most of the areas covered in the group. However, this also extends beyond Portsmouth Adult Social Care, as a multi-agency responsibility to ensure partnerships are working effectively together, understanding everyone's roles and how they can best support each other. Suggestions are made about events possibly being the most suitable avenue through which to maintain effective working relationships, particularly around times of change where information needs to be communicated. However, they also suggest events as an opportunity for learning as a collective, as well as reviewing priorities and ensuring everyone is aligned in this regard. Being specific, a frequency of every six months is suggested for these meetings to manage time constraints and consider how seasonality can affect services and focuses.

Frequently noted as a constraint to achieving Adult Social Care's goals, participants raise funding and resources as one of the biggest barriers to improving services. Discussions include ways of drawing money into Portsmouth, such as through encouraging investment from providers or through the council helping partners borrow money or find appropriate resources to support services. Several participants note the frustration of their own financial constraints, feeling that the value they are bringing into the city as providers should be reflected in their rents, for example. They recognise a disconnect in the fact that they are providing a necessary service, but are required to pay commercial rents, suggesting that the council could support them in resolving some of these financial frictions. An example provided by Age UK relates to one of their shops in Paulsgrove, in which they are only allowed to offer advice and information, meaning they have no way of producing income in order to pay the rent they are being charged by the council.

Other specific improvements suggested by participants include improved training, such as for care home nurses in Portsmouth. Something they would find specifically valuable is adding training around leadership and management in these roles, feeling that this is currently a huge responsibility on nurses that is not adequately supported, but could be very beneficial in helping Portsmouth improve their services.

"Because obviously we've all got, as a city, big aspirations in terms of the services we want to deliver, so let's train up the nurses to deliver those things."

The benefit of Adult Services having a visible presence in the community is also raised here (as 5.6 'Presence in systems around the city') as something stakeholders would like to see more of, enabling the council to 'get out' into the community. They feel this will help ground their work and improve the services they provide, even just through the perception of their visibility to users.

Specifically relating to partners working with homelessness, areas for improvement are noted around increasing care assessments for homeless people and improving the provision of specialist support for those with complex needs or problems with substance abuse or mental health issues. They emphasise the importance of ensuring that users are directed to specialist and appropriate housing regarding any needs they may have, requiring a more detailed approach, rather than directing all issues to general homeless hostels where complex needs may deteriorate.