



**Social Work in Somerset:
Our Commitment to You**

**Practice Framework,
Social Care Academy and Promoting Resilience**



Social Work in Somerset

Our Commitment to You

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1. Foreword



Welcome to Somerset. This document sets out what you can expect when you join Somerset Children's Services. We have the highest aspirations for the children of Somerset, and in order to achieve the best we can for our children, we have high expectations of our staff. So it is right that they are provided with the tools, skills and support they need to be the best they can be.

We are proud of the Somerset offer – it will support you to develop and maintain the highest professional standards. When you join Somerset, we will provide you with a clear practice framework, high quality training and continuing professional development, career progression opportunities, strong leadership and management and many workplace initiatives designed to look after your health and well-being. Working together, we can make a difference to the lives of the children and families we serve.



Julian Wooster

Director of Children's Services

Somerset County Council

Our Vision

Strongly shaped by young people themselves, our **VISION** is for every young person in Somerset to be Happy, Healthy and Preparing for Adulthood. We therefore want every child and young person in Somerset to have:

- **A Happy Family Life – *strong families and vibrant communities***
- **A Healthy Start to Life – *safe and healthy lifestyles***
- **A Great Education – *high aspirations, opportunities and achievements***
- **Positive Activities – *things to do and places to go to***

Somerset Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2022

Our Values

Our vision is underpinned by our strong **VALUES** of:

- **Respect**
- **Trust**
- **Honesty**
- **Reliability**

Our vision and values, in practice encompass good listening, a commitment to improve and develop, supporting others to help themselves, working closely with all partners and sharing information.

2. Our Practice Framework

Social work theory draws on a number of disciplines to inform and shape work with families. These theories help practitioners understand and inform their own experience, and how the culture and organisational structure in which they work can influence their practice. This reflexive behaviour is key to providing high quality services to children and families.

Understanding this context has led us as an organisation to think carefully about what social workers do in Somerset and what they need to succeed. **Our practice framework** aims to bring these factors together to support consistent, high quality evidence-based work with children and families.

In Somerset we will support you as a social worker to work within our practice framework which is based on the following three principles:

- **Systemic approaches**
- **Relationship based practice**
- **Strengths based practice**

What does this mean in practice?

Our practice framework is guided by an overarching commitment to **systemic approaches** to practice supported by systemically trained leaders and managers, meaning a focus on relationships and social context, a high level of collaborative working with our partners in other agencies, and excellent supervision.

Our practice is **strengths-based**. We ask our practitioners to support families to find their own solutions to their difficulties, and to identify their own goals. We **work with families**, rather than **working for them**, or **doing to them**.

Building on our values, we commit to the principles of **relationship-based practice**; empathy, warmth, respect, honesty and reliability, developing strong relationships with our immediate colleagues, families and our partners, creating a supportive learning culture.

Somerset Children's Social Care Practice Framework

Shaped by Somerset young people our VISION is for every young person in Somerset to be happy healthy and preparing for adulthood

We want every child and young person in Somerset to have

Our Vision

A Happy Family Life	➡	strong families and vibrant communities
A Healthy Start to Life	➡	safe and healthy lifestyles
A Great Education	➡	high aspirations, opportunities and achievements
Positive Activities	➡	things to do and places to go to

Our Behaviours

Tenacity + Curiosity + Openness

Our Practice Principles

Systemic Principles and Approaches

Focus on relationships and social context; recognising system interdependencies; recognising strengths; reflexive and reflective practice collaborative working, sharing conversations and actions.

Strengths Based

Supported by Motivational Interviewing, Family Group Conferencing, Empowerment, Promoting Autonomy, Focus on language, Leadership Culture

Relationship Based

Building on our values; empathy, warmth, respect, honesty and reliability in relationships with families, partners and each other; creating a positive and supportive culture.

Supporting Excellent Practice

Managed caseloads



Stable Workforce



High Quality Supervision



CPD



2. Valuing Our Staff

Social Care Academy

In Somerset we work closely with colleges and universities to support students to become qualified social workers. We provide training and continuing professional development for all levels of staff through our established and highly regarded social care academy model.

Our training programmes underpin the practice framework and are mapped to the Professional Capabilities Framework and the Post Qualifying Knowledge and Skills Framework, ensuring all training is fit for purpose and meets the high professional standards we expect from our social care staff.

We support routes into Social Work through:

- **Apprenticeships**
- **Student placements**
- [Step up to Social Work](#)
- [Frontline](#)

Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW)

The package of support we offer to our NQSWs in their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) is a highly regarded strength and prepares our new recruits to become confident and independent social workers. As an NQSW in Somerset you will have:

- **a named Consultant Social Worker for 1:1 support**
- **regular observation and assessment**
- **a protected manageable caseload**
- **a comprehensive bespoke training programme**
- **shadowing opportunities and fortnightly supervision.**

Qualified Social Work staff

The second and third post qualifying years in practice are about consolidation and growth. Qualified social workers benefit from:

- **a mentor in their first year after NQSW**
- **a comprehensive training programme**
- **access to a 5-week mindfulness course**
- **access to online resources to support evidenced based, professional practice.**

Qualified Social Work staff – third year onwards post qualifying

Further opportunities open up for those who have been in post for at least two years following their ASYE. Alongside access to the training programme to keep your practice and skills current, there are opportunities to:

- **train as a Practice Educator**
- **apply for a post as an Advanced Practitioner**
- **access our bespoke aspiring managers and leadership development opportunities to help you to prepare for progression to a more senior role.**

Other Professional Roles

Our social care academy model also supports staff who are in other professional roles, such as those in leaving care, contact workers, residential staff, staff working in prevention roles and our large body of foster cares. Through the provision of comprehensive training programmes, which are continuously reviewed and updated, staff and carers are supported to meet professional standards through continuing professional development. We are proud of the range of opportunities we are able to offer to our wider staff body, who are integral to the service.



What do our staff say?

Our Annual Social Work Survey tells us that the training and learning opportunities delivered through our academy model are highly valued and have direct impact on the work we do with our children and families.

'We have brilliant training opportunities, including the systemic training which all managers undertook'

Senior Manager

Training provided has enabled me to progress to managerial level; there are clear pathways'

Team Manager

'By applying training in practice and reflecting on it in supervision or with colleagues, my learning has supported my work with children and families'

Social Worker

In 2020 NQSWs in their ASYE rated their training and development opportunities highly with 100% scoring them above average and 38% rating a top score of 10.

Emotional Resilience

In Somerset we will support you in developing emotional resilience through:

- being part of a strong and stable team
- achieving a healthy work life balance
- a manageable caseload
- regular healthy workplace initiatives
- supporting mindful approaches
- flexible and family friendly working initiatives

What do our staff say?

From a CSC manager:

Just had a resounding endorsement of the course from a team member:

'The course has changed my mind about mindfulness - I was reluctant to do the training - but after the exercises I feel really happy - energised and calm - the trainer is excellent - I can feel the positive impact on my levels of anxiety already - I'd recommend it to everyone.'

Supervision

In Somerset we place high importance on the role of supervision through:

- a clear and established supervision policy
- comprehensive reflective training for all supervisors and supervisees via a nationally renowned provider
- additional supervision for NQSWs
- systemically trained senior leaders

We take supervision very seriously and know that supervision also has a crucial role to play in the development, retention and motivation of our workforce.

What do our staff say?

Supervision allows a space in a busy schedule to do some unpicking and sharing of dilemmas and tricky issues which helps me go forward more confidently, knowing that I am supported.

Social Worker

Our Somerset Offer

In Somerset we also offer an excellent benefits package to all of our employees including:

- A Local Government Pension Scheme.
- Discounted lease car via salary sacrifice scheme and options for discounts on petrol or diesel.
- My Staff Shop offering discounts in shops, online shopping, restaurants, cinema tickets, insurance benefits and so forth.
- A Flexible Benefits Scheme via salary sacrifice to obtain a cycle for work, childcare vouchers, additional annual leave, computers, mobile phones and health screening.
- Generous annual leave and flexible working arrangements.
- Staff discounts in gyms.
- Employee Assistance and support offering a variety of employee wellbeing services to support a healthy work/life balance and lifestyle.
- Optional pension enhancement through our Additional Voluntary Contribution scheme.

What do our staff say?

Our annual surveys for social care staff tell us that the top things about Somerset County Council as a place to work are:

- Support from colleagues, managers and peers
- Working with children and families to achieve positive outcomes
- Policies which enable flexible, family friendly working practices
- Training, development and career opportunities
- Location – proximity to home and Somerset as a rural county

4. What Else Can You Expect?

Individual Support

In Somerset, whether as a student, NQSW, social worker, leader or manager we are committed to supporting you, not only through structured policies such as supervision, case load management and learning and development programmes, but also by more informal means through:

- **mentoring and coaching schemes**
- **strong peer-to-peer support**
- **a working environment which is constructive and friendly.**

What do our staff say?

Our annual survey for social care staff tells us that support from managers and colleagues are top factors in helping our staff to do a good job in helping children and families.

'I am made to feel that I matter as a person and colleague and that what I do makes a difference to the young people I work with.'

Social Worker

Effective Team Working

In Somerset we place great value on developing our team managers to help them create stable teams with a culture of reflection and we provide them with training to help them to do this. You'll also benefit from:

- **monthly team meetings providing opportunities to share views and experiences**

- **Consultant Social Workers who are situated across all geographical areas but who work closely together, guiding and facilitating best practice and providing regular cpd sessions and listening groups.**
- **The voice of social work staff is heard via the Principal Social Worker (PSW) providing monthly group supervision to the CSW group.**

What do our staff say?

Our annual survey for social care staff tells us that team working was an important factor which supported them to do a good job, including the regular team meetings for the dissemination of information.

'My manager is very good and helps to ensure that I am looked after and that the team works well together'

Strong Leadership and Management

In Somerset our managers demonstrate and exhibit commitment to others, modelling high standards of professional values and behaviours, where children are at the centre of everything we do. Our leaders and managers:

- **are receptive to the views of others**
- **strive to be visible, accessible and available to address difficult situations**
- **share honest feedback with their teams**
- **encourage individuals' career aspirations and on-going professional development**
- **receive feedback from exit interviews, staff forums, complaints and complements policies, and act upon it.**
- **are enabled to shape the service accordingly, ensuring it is dynamic and responsive.**

What do our staff say?

Our annual survey for social care staff tells us that support from managers was a significant factor supporting them to do a good job. Staff spoke of 'positive relationships', managers who gave their staff 'time' and who were 'responsive' and 'approachable'.

In 2020 83% rated the management support and supervision they received as impacting on helping to working safety, competently and confidently, of which 20% gave a top score of 10.

Getting it Right...

In Somerset, we know we get our values and approaches right when our service users tell us:

'You have helped us be a stronger family'

'You have helped us to learn some new ways to relate'

'You are normal, human'

'You are kind'

'Thanks for all the help you've given us over the last 18 months - we're eternally grateful. '

'You're a credit to your profession in constantly challenging times'

'Thank you for believing in us'

'Thank you for all you've done for us to be a family'

'If she (SW) says she will do something, she does'

When we asked our social work staff 'What would the children and families you work with say is the best thing you have done to help them?', they responded:

'I wouldn't have wanted to go through this with anyone else'

'I listen, respond quickly to questions and requests for support, when I acknowledge that I don't know the answer I follow through'

'When I agree to carry out a task, I am dependable; I am available and I listen'

'I listened and supported them to make their OWN plan'

'Honesty, listening to them, thinking creatively of approaches to support them, giving them tools and mechanisms to assist them, accommodating their learning needs, treating them with respect and courtesy.'

'Provided an environment in which they can work together and take ownership of safeguarding their children''

Honesty, clarity, kindness and open-mindedness'

'Helping children and young people have a voice is powerful and helps inform their plan'.

Quotations taken from CSC Annual Health Check of Social Work Surveys

