



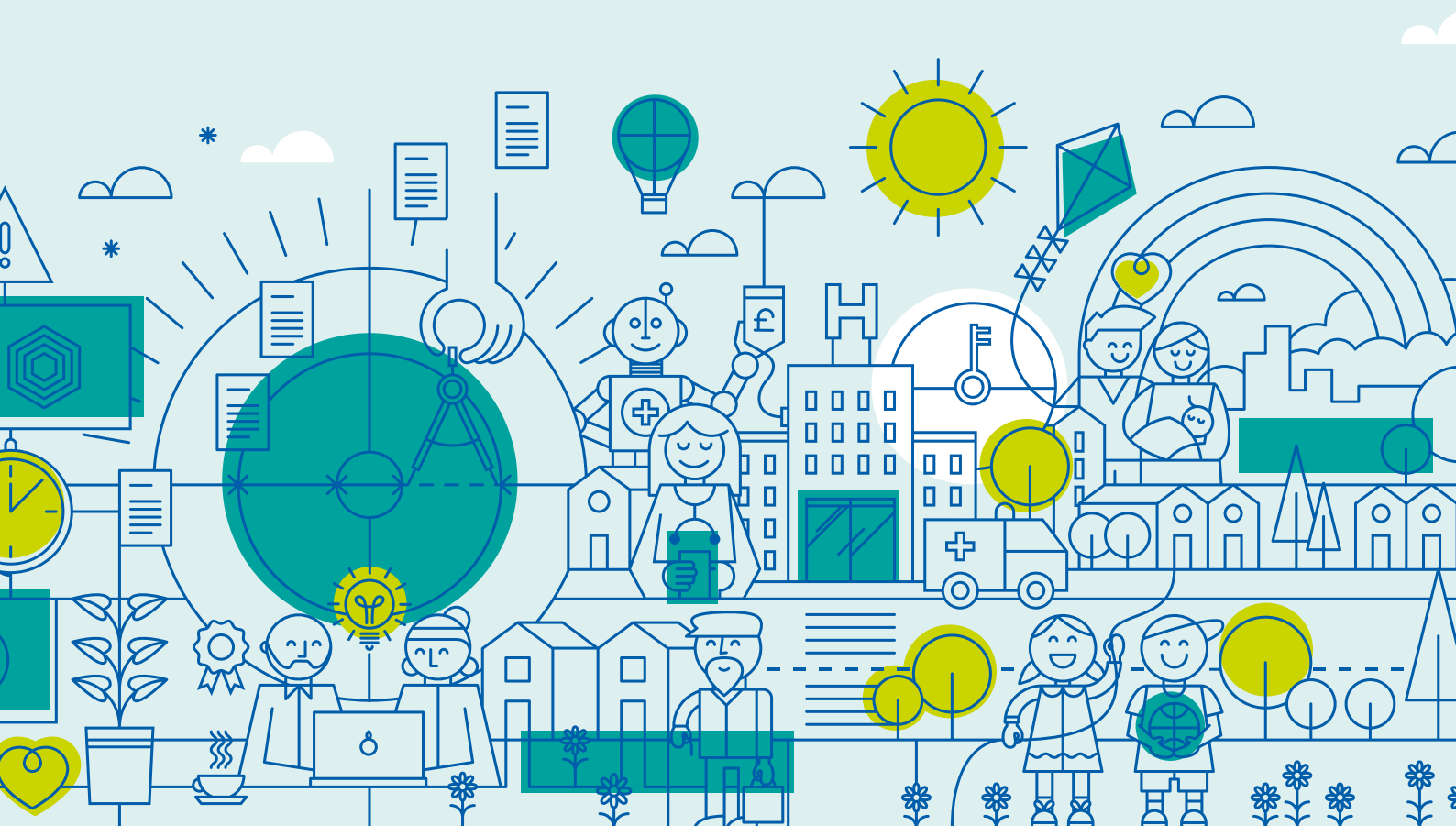
Unlocking potential for children and young people

Valuing Care: Focusing on needs, strengths and aspirations



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Foreword

In 2018, myself and colleagues in Norfolk recognised the need for a different approach to meeting the needs of the children and young people in our care. We wanted to be more ambitious and aspirational for our children. In practice we found it difficult to understand and capture children's needs and strengths consistently.



Sara Tough,
Executive Director
of Children's Services,
Norfolk County Council

As part of our response to these challenges we started working with IMPOWER to implement and apply Valuing Care - an approach which allows holistic needs and strengths to be consistently assessed and understood by practitioners, children and families. Valuing Care enables the tracking of need over time and supports decision making to ensure good value care, where the right support is in place at the right time.

Fast forward five years and Valuing Care has played an important part in improving the lives and life chances of a significant number of children and young people in Norfolk and in other areas across the country. Valuing Care has made a positive contribution across a range of areas in Norfolk, including:

- Reduction in the costs of some forms of care and support (including a 11% reduction in the average cost of external foster care)[†]
- Improvement in practice and achievement of 'Good' in our recent Ofsted inspection
- 30% increase in new fostering households and a 14% increase in the utilisation of our foster carers

We use Valuing Care to engage care providers to ensure that our approach to finding homes for children is driven by their needs and strengths, rather than their risks and deficits, which is demonstrably improving our sufficiency challenges and reducing some of the costs of care. Practitioners and teams are using Valuing Care to identify opportunities to improve lives. For example, we have used Valuing Care to identify and accelerate opportunities to safely reunify children with families, and to give children living in residential accommodation the chance to move into family placements.

This approach has also helped us to strengthen and improve our fostering service. As a result of this approach, more foster carers are prepared to care for a wider range of children (e.g. adolescents and children with disabilities).

We will continue to make children's needs and strengths the focus of our work in Norfolk. Our children and young people have welcomed an approach which puts the emphasis on their needs, strengths and aspirations in the 'here and now' rather than discussion of their 'case history'. This feels like the right focus for Norfolk and for the wider sector – and an approach which we would like to see adopted at a regional and national level. As the sector responds to the proposals in the Children's Social Care Strategy the opportunity for a sector-led focus on needs and outcomes is clear.

- Supporting more children and young people to live safely at home, with a significant decrease in number of children who are looked after
- Greater choice of homes and support for children and young people, better matched to their needs



Introduction

Raising our ambition for children and young people

In February 2023 the government set out its Children’s Social Care Strategy.

As the sector responds, Norfolk County Council, IMPOWER and a partnership of local areas have gathered insight, learning and impact from the delivery of an approach which we believe could help more local areas to:

- Improve life chances and longer-term outcomes for children and young people
- Respond to sufficiency challenges
- Improve understanding of the impact of care and support
- Reduce the cost of care and deliver significant financial savings

Seven years ago, IMPOWER supported a partnership of local areas to develop ‘Valuing Care’. This is an approach to practice and commissioning which gives focus to children’s needs, strengths, aspirations and outcomes. This allows better conversations around how care can meet needs and a stronger connection between needs and costs.

This approach has delivered demonstrable impact on children’s lives - from improving how commissioners find the right care and support for children, to helping find family homes for more children that need them.

The Valuing Care Programme brings together the local areas who have delivered this approach to share learning and to collaborate around shared opportunities and challenges. As chair of the Valuing Care Programme Board Norfolk County Council has collaborated with IMPOWER to produce this report, which sets out key insights and impact from the use and application of Valuing Care in Norfolk and in other areas. This document provides:

- Key insights and findings from the use and application of the Valuing Care approach in Norfolk.
- The wider story and impact of the Valuing Care Programme and approach.

- Proposed next steps for how interested local areas could get involved and collaborate.

Alongside sharing these insights and learning Norfolk County Council would like to invite other leaders and practitioners working with children and families to:

- Get in touch to express an interest in joining the Valuing Care Programme or one of our shared learning events.
- Share learning from other areas around approaches focused on better understanding and supporting the needs, strengths and outcomes of children and young people.



Kate Dexter, Assistant Director - Children’s Social Care, Norfolk County Council



Dominic Luscombe, Delivery Director, IMPOWER



Introduction

Valuing Care at a glance



Contributed to a significant **reduction in number of children coming into care** in Norfolk since 2018†

Foster carer utilisation increased by more than **14%** in Norfolk

Foster carer in-house capacity increased by **30%** in Norfolk

Average costs for external fostering placements reduced by **11%** in Norfolk since 2021†

Average length of family-based placements in Norfolk **increased by 54%** since 2021 demonstrating increased stability

12% reduction in the average length of residential placements in Norfolk since 2021 as more children are supported into foster care



67 children and young people supported to return to families, move to family homes, or live closer to home (and **£9.6m reduction** in cost) in two local areas

Delivered better outcomes for **25 children** and a cost saving of **£3.7m** in one local area

Valuing Care approach used and applied across **11 local areas**

Two local areas have seen an overall **reduction in needs** for children who are in their care



Valuing Care approach scaled and embedded in **4 local areas**

140 additional fostering homes found for children and families

6% reduction in unit costs for independent provision in one area

5,000 children and young people's needs profiles complete



About us

About Norfolk County Council



Norfolk County Council is the top-tier local government authority for Norfolk, England. As the largest democratic body in Norfolk, we have an important role - to give the people we serve every opportunity to improve their lives. Together with other councils and partner agencies in the county, we

want all children and young people in Norfolk to flourish, have a safe and supportive home, high aspirations, better educational outcomes and access to well-paid jobs. It is by investing in them to achieve their full potential and develop skills which prepare them for life and work, that we lay the

foundations for a more resilient future for them and for our county. As an organisation we are committed to being good Corporate Parents, always asking ourselves if this would be good enough for our own children.

About IMPOWER

IMPOWER

IMPOWER holds a profound belief in the innate value of public services; a better public sector is the cornerstone of a better society. We exist because public services can be – and should be – improved. We also believe that better outcomes cost less. Founded in 2000, we have spent the past two decades developing a deep understanding of the complexity of public services, recognising that a different kind of challenge needs a different type of approach.

Our EDGEWORK® approach drives better outcomes across complex systems, radically improving performance and saving millions of pounds as a result, and leaving our clients financially and operationally resilient in their most challenging areas:

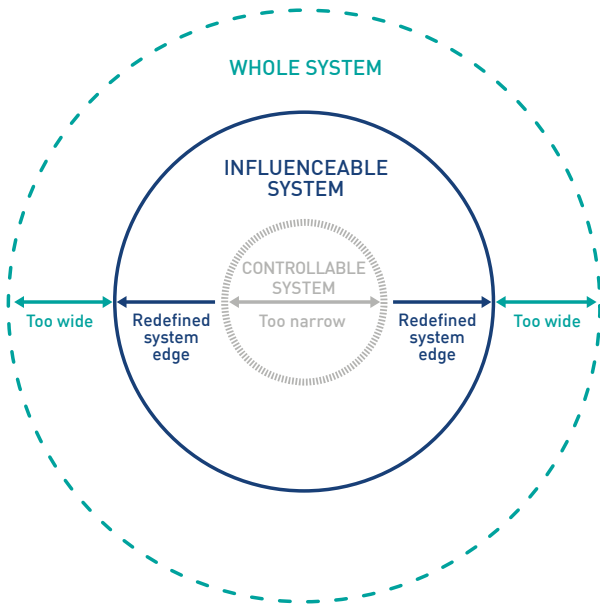
- Children's Social Care
- High Needs and SEND
- Adult Social Care
- Health and Social Care Interface
- Whole Council Transformation

Delivering better outcomes is at the heart of what we do and is the key to large scale savings and long-term financial sustainability. We aim to put humanity at the heart of public service reform.



Our delivery approach

EDGEWORK®: our theory of change



EDGEWORK® is IMPOWER’s unique approach to understanding and delivering change in complex systems. Valuing Care emerged from this approach to delivering change in complex systems.

How does EDGEWORK® work?

The issues faced by children’s services are complex. You need two fundamental things to manage this complexity and create lasting, positive change:

1. An inclusive local ambition with the right aspiration for children, young people and families
2. A mindset shift that breaks through organisational boundaries
3. An approach to understanding and responding to the needs and strengths of children and young people

The 4 key elements of EDGEWORK®



Executive summary



Executive Summary

Valuing Care: Unlocking potential for children and young people

Introduction

In 2016, IMPOWER collaborated with a partnership of local areas to develop 'Valuing Care'. This approach to practice and commissioning focuses on children and young people's needs, strengths and aspirations. This report sets out key findings, insight and impact relating to this approach in Norfolk County Council and in other local areas.

Valuing Care in Norfolk

In 2018, Norfolk County Council first trialled Valuing Care and have since embedded this across work with children, families and providers. This approach supports shared conversations across families, practitioners, commissioners, providers and carers about children's needs, strengths and aspirations.

Valuing Care has had a demonstrable impact on children's lives in Norfolk - from improving how Norfolk County Council finds the right care and support for children, to helping find family homes for more children that need them.

In the context of resource constraints, this approach has helped Norfolk County Council to deliver improved support for children from its investment in care and to reduce the costs of care (e.g. reducing the average costs of external foster care by 11%)*, while raising the quality and consistency of social work practice.

For the first time Norfolk County Council is able to bring together information on needs, support, costs and outcomes to understand the impact of care on children's lives over time and to put in place the right interventions and plans.

The Valuing Care Programme

Norfolk is part of the Valuing Care Programme - a partnership of local areas supported by IMPOWER that is using the Valuing Care approach to improve children's lives and life chances.

Next steps and how to get involved

In the context of the proposals in the Government's Children's Social Care Strategy this is the right moment to bring together more local areas to further develop this approach - and to realise the opportunity to improve life chances for more children and young people.

Norfolk County Council and other local areas believe that this approach could provide the foundation of an alternative approach to commissioning and sufficiency at a regional level - with the emphasis on collaboration and common approaches across shared data and insight on needs, cost and outcomes.



Valuing Care in Norfolk



Valuing Care in Norfolk

The journey so far

STEP 1

Identified new opportunities by widening ambition

Norfolk started work with IMPOWER setting an aspiration to understand and support the needs and strengths of children and young people in our care. An inclusive ambition was established for Valuing Care in Norfolk aiming to:

Build more connection between the needs of children and the support that they receive.

Improve understanding of the needs of cohorts of children and young people.

Move towards a system which focuses on children’s holistic needs and strengths rather than risks, deficits and labels.

Provide more opportunities for more children to live in family homes.

Reduce the use of independent or out of area care.

STEP 2

Created real confidence in the opportunity

IMPOWER and Norfolk worked together to trial and test the Valuing Care approach - building confidence, capturing learning, and identifying opportunities to positively impact children and young people.

Trialed the approach, initially by completing needs profiles for 250 children and young people.

Proactively sought feedback from children, foster carers, providers, social workers, independent reviewing officers, and other practitioners, and iterated the approach based on this.

Delivered small, focused trials, each with clear impact goals and capturing learning reflections and further iterations.

Developed practice and approaches based on learning from other local authorities using Valuing Care.

STEP 3

Delivered impact at scale by managing differently

The Valuing Care approach was scaled across Norfolk and embedded into practice and commissioning - establishing a systematic focus on needs and strengths.

Built the approach into practice (including supervision and visit templates), case management and commissioning processes (e.g. placement finding forms).

Built into foster carer recruitment, matching, development approaches, and practice.

Supported children (who would not otherwise have moved) to return home, live with a family, or move to a children’s home nearer to Norfolk.

Changed the approach for commissioning care from independent fostering agencies, with management and payment now based on children’s needs.

Built systems and dashboards which aggregate and break down children’s needs, characteristics, progress and outcomes.

Used Valuing Care to work with mental health teams to develop the right interventions and support for targeted cohorts of children and young people.

We started small and rolled out at pace. Our starting point was completing Valuing Care for a sample of 244 children in our care. We discovered immediate opportunities to improve support and had a really clear ‘proof of concept’. We quickly embedded Valuing Care across all looked after children and across the ‘assess, plan, do’ review cycle. This has driven significant improvements in outcomes, costs, and sufficiency for our children.





Valuing Care in Norfolk

A closer look at the approach

Valuing Care helps identify, track and articulate needs and outcomes for a child or young person. It allows practitioners, teams, children, and families to:

- Identify, describe and tailor the support that will best meet a child’s needs and track how needs change over time
- Understand, describe, and plan for the needs of children now and in the future

Valuing Care works in two ways:

- At an individual level it provides a holistic, rounded picture of the needs of each child, which can be used and applied across assessment, planning, and review (see figure 4)
- It provides an insight into the needs of children and young people at a cohort or population level, by aggregating child level data

Child’s needs changing over time

Figure 4. Example of a completed Valuing Care tool for a child, that has been repeated after six months

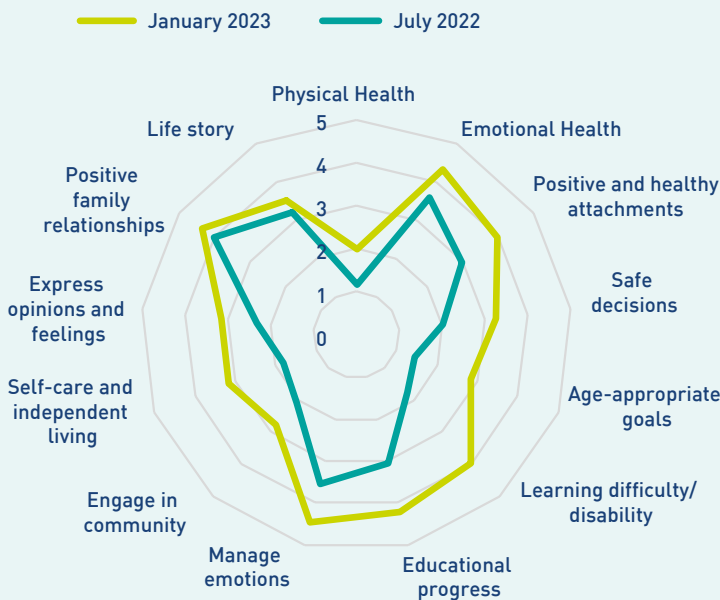


Figure 5. Using Valuing Care to understand and respond to children and young people’s needs.



Valuing Care in Norfolk

Key insights and impact

Since embedding Valuing Care and applying it across the care journey Norfolk County Council is seeing the impact of this approach across a range of areas:

Practice

Culture within teams has shifted – **with more focus on strengths and needs versus behaviour and risks.**

Valuing Care has **identified and driven reunification** and ‘step down’ to family homes.

Quality and consistency of practice has improved across social work teams.

Needs are tracked and reviewed over time for all children who are looked after – informing changes to support plans.

Foster care

Valuing Care has **improved matching** of children and foster carers.

This has delivered a **14% increase in the utilisation** of in-house foster carers, and a **30% increase in foster carer capacity.**

Carers are **supported to care for wider range of cohorts** (e.g. unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children with disabilities and adolescents).

Norfolk County Council now base all payments for new internal and external fostering provision on the needs of children and young people, and have already seen these costs reduce.

Strategic planning

Valuing Care is informing **sufficiency planning and interventions at an operational and strategic level.**

Norfolk County Council has an understanding of the needs of all children who are looked after in Norfolk, including changes over time.

Valuing Care has **improved understanding of the needs of particular cohorts of children, for example children from global majority backgrounds.**

Valuing Care continues to **improve outcomes for children aiding the development of services for children in care** in Norfolk.

Commissioning

Valuing Care has delivered an improvement in sufficiency and improved provider engagement and home finding.

Valuing Care has been used to develop provision for specific cohorts of children and young people (e.g. unaccompanied asylum seeking children).

Valuing Care is now used to develop and manage **partnerships with care providers** which focus on change in needs over time.

Valuing Care has generated insight to support strategy and commissioning at a county level.

Average costs for external fostering placements have **reduced by 11%** since 2021[†].

12% reduction in the average length of residential placements since 2021.

Average length of family-based placements **increased by 54%** since 2021.



Valuing Care in Norfolk

An approach to improving children and young people's lives

Norfolk County Council and other forward-thinking local areas including Lincolnshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire have used and applied Valuing Care across the care journey, building a focus on needs and strengths into all areas of practice and commissioning:

	Family help and safeguarding	Entry to care	Care and support	Permanency and exit
WHY VALUING CARE IS NEEDED	Plans for preventing escalation of need and entry to care for children and young people could be better informed by understanding of children's and families' needs and strengths.	Approaches to finding care focus on deficits and risk, rather than needs and strengths. Opportunities are missed to find homes for children which can improve long-term life chances.	Matching children to foster carers could be more driven by the needs/strengths of children and the readiness of carers to support them. Opportunities are missed to find foster homes for children with more complex needs.	Without consistent capture and tracking of needs, opportunities are missed to find homes which can improve life chances for a significant number of children currently living in care.
INTERVENTION	<p>1. Using a needs-led approach to prevent care entry</p> <p>Using Valuing Care to capture, track and respond to the needs of children and their families' capacity to meet their needs. Using this to drive the delivery of multi-agency plans and interventions.</p>	<p>2. Using a needs-led approach to find homes for children</p> <p>Using Valuing Care to change practice, and enhance placement finding and provider engagement. Shifting focus onto the needs and strengths of children.</p>	<p>3. Using a needs-led approach to match children and foster carers</p> <p>Using Valuing Care to improve matching of children to foster carers with focus on needs and strengths – supporting carers to meet a wider range of needs.</p>	<p>2. Using a needs-led approach to find family homes for children</p> <p>Using Valuing Care to identify and support children to move to better homes and support for their needs, where this is safe and can improve their life chances.</p>
IMPACT IN NORFOLK	Norfolk is using the Valuing Care approach to inform planning and intervention for children and families at the edge of care.	Norfolk is using Valuing Care to focus on needs when finding homes for children, and has seen an 11% reduction in average costs for external foster care through this approach.	Norfolk is using Valuing Care to match foster carers with children and has improved foster carer utilisation by more than 14%, increased capacity by 30%, and achieved savings of over £1.2m.	Norfolk has used Valuing Care to support children to step down to better forms of care for their needs (e.g. from residential to fostering) and to be reunified with families.
IMPACT IN OTHER AREAS	In one local area Valuing Care was used to drive multi-agency plans to prevent care entry in a pilot for 8 children and young people and delivered a cost avoidance of £1.5m.	One other local area has also used Valuing Care in this way, achieving a 6% reduction in average unit costs for independent provision.	Two other local areas have also used Valuing Care to better match foster carers with children.	Two local areas have used Valuing Care to support 67 children to step down or reunify with families with a total saving of £9.6m.

Results based on Valuing Care cohort from 2018 onwards.



Valuing Care in Norfolk

What has using Valuing Care meant for stakeholders in Norfolk?

Valuing Care helps children and young people, providers, commissioners, and practitioners to work together differently. Rather than focusing on deficit and risk it supports discussion and planning around how to meet needs, and how to evaluate the impact of intervention and support.



Figure 6. Perspectives on Valuing Care

*Pseudonym



Valuing Care in Norfolk

What has using Valuing Care meant for stakeholders in Norfolk?

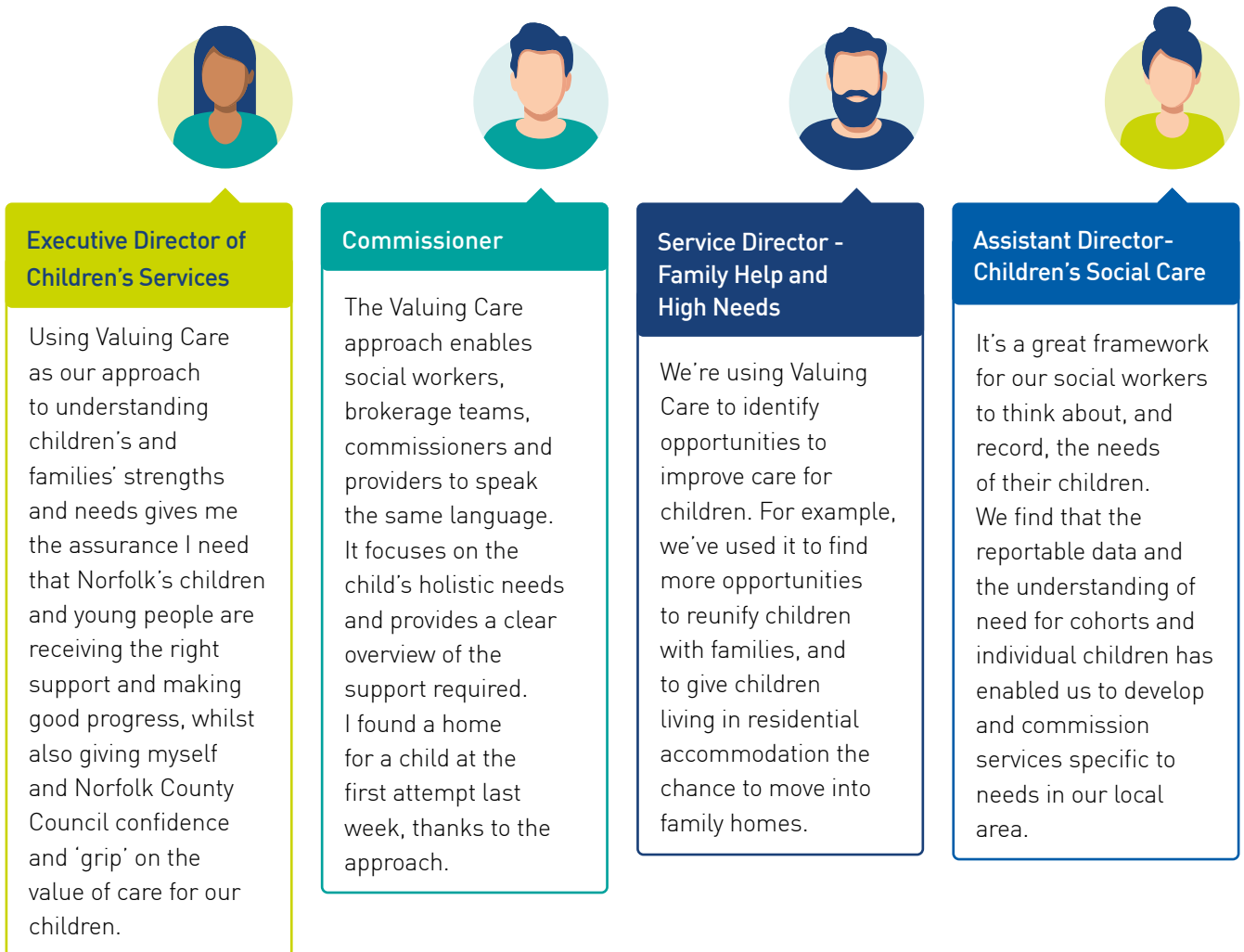


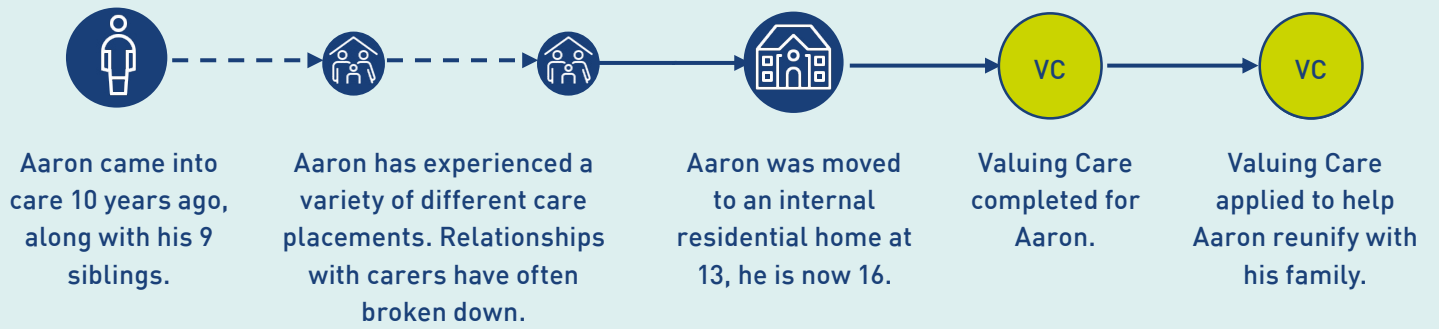
Figure 6. Perspectives on Valuing Care



Valuing Care in Norfolk

How Valuing Care has impacted individuals, like Aaron*

Aaron's experience in care over the last 10 years



Valuing Care has:

- Identified potential to reunify Aaron with his father.
- Driven creative discussions around ways of supporting Aaron and his father.
- Given Aaron's social worker confidence that his needs could be met through reunification – and tracked to manage future risks.

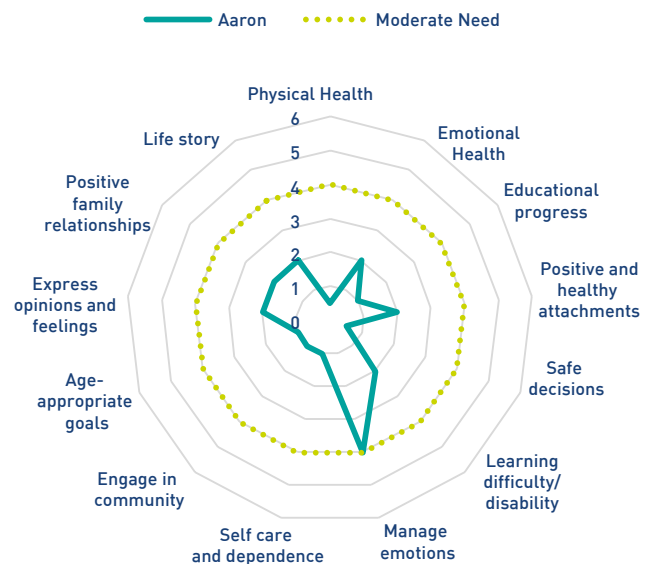
Aaron: "I'm so happy to be back with my Dad, I'm about to start college and have also been able to spend a lot more time with my cousins, I feel like I have a real family again."

Dad: "When Aaron came home I was really clear on what extra support he might need and how we could work on this with his college, his social worker, and the rest of the family."

Residential worker: "Aaron has spoken about living in a family since he came to live with us. I'm so pleased to see him happy and supported to do this."

Valuing Care has also reduced costs: £105k saving per year

Aaron's needs analysis using Valuing Care



Valuing Care Programme

Valuing Care context and governance

The Idea



Valuing Care started life as an approach to better understanding needs and the value of care. Co-developed in partnership with the sector, its broader potential was quickly realised and work pivoted to broadening the approach to practice and commissioning, embedding a focus onto children’s needs, strengths, aspirations and outcomes – and enabling better conversations around how care can meet needs.

Test and learn



Local authorities and Trusts across the country have adopted a test and learn approach, trialling the core methodology of Valuing Care to improve processes and practice across the child’s journey. We are continuously building an evidence bank of what works and can demonstrate the impact this work is having at scale.

Valuing Care Board



Norfolk County Council and other local areas believe that this approach could provide the foundation of an alternative approach to commissioning and sufficiency at a regional level – with the emphasis on collaboration and common approaches. Get involved in the Valuing Care Programme, by joining, or sharing insight and learning from other needs and strengths-led approaches.

Development



The initial approach has since been iterated across 11 local authorities and trusts, and now supports shared conversations across families, practitioners, commissioners, providers and carers about children’s needs, strengths and aspirations. It has been adapted to align with restorative and trauma-informed practice.

Shared learnings, insights and impact



A community of local authorities using Valuing Care (those who have embedded, are embedding, or are considering taking this journey) has been established, with bi-monthly events chaired by Norfolk County Council. Insight, impact and best practice are shared and discussed collaboratively.



Valuing Care Programme

Norfolk is part of a group of local areas with a shared ambition

IMPOWER has collaborated with a group of local areas including Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire to establish the Valuing Care Programme. Work across this group of local areas is demonstrating that a stronger focus on needs and strengths can improve support and life chances for children and young people, while reducing the costs of care.

DISCOVERY	INTERVENTION TRIALLED AND EVALUATED	SCALED AND EMBEDDED
<p>4 local authorities, and other responsible bodies collaborated and developed the approach - with a further 5 test sites.</p>	<p>2 early help pilot schemes, working with 10-15 children, young people and their families.</p>	<p>Across 4 local authorities, trusts, and responsible bodies.</p>
<p>1,500 children and young people were holistically assessed.</p>	<p>Worked with over 200 foster families across pilots — resulting in identification of an additional 18 family homes for children.</p>	<p>2,800 children currently in care with up-to-date assessment profiles.</p>
<p>Engaged Children in Care Councils in five local areas: Norfolk, Oxfordshire, Stockton, Hertfordshire and Northamptonshire Children's Trust.</p>	<p>50 children and young people with reunification or step down potential were identified; with 20 confirmed plans and 3 moves confirmed.</p>	<p>Over 5,000 historic assessment profiles provide rich evidence based on strengths, needs, and progress.</p>
<p>30 foster carers 150 providers 500 frontline practitioners involved in developing, testing and refining the approach.</p>	<p>Multiple pilots across fostering, step downs, reunification, commissioning (Independent Fostering Agencies), dashboards, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and homes aimed at helping children return home.</p>	<p>67 children and young people supported to return to families, move to family homes, or move closer to home.</p>
		<p>140 additional fostering homes have been found for children and families.</p>

Results based on Valuing Care cohort from 2018 onwards.



Valuing Care Programme

Better capturing of needs, cost and outcomes can change our approach to care

In January 2023, needs and cost data was gathered from Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire and Lincolnshire councils. Each area has rolled out and embedded Valuing Care across all children and young people who are looked after (approx. 5,000 children and young people).

This insight was shared and discussed at a shared learning event chaired by Norfolk County Council in 2023. For the first time, it was possible to understand and analyse the needs and costs for a significant sample of children (representing almost 4% of England’s care population).

This data and insight can help policy makers and system leaders answer fundamental questions about the impact of care for the first time, including:

- What is the relationship between needs and cost for different forms of care?
- What impact are different forms of care having on needs over time for children and young people?
- Is care helping children and young people and how are needs changing over time?

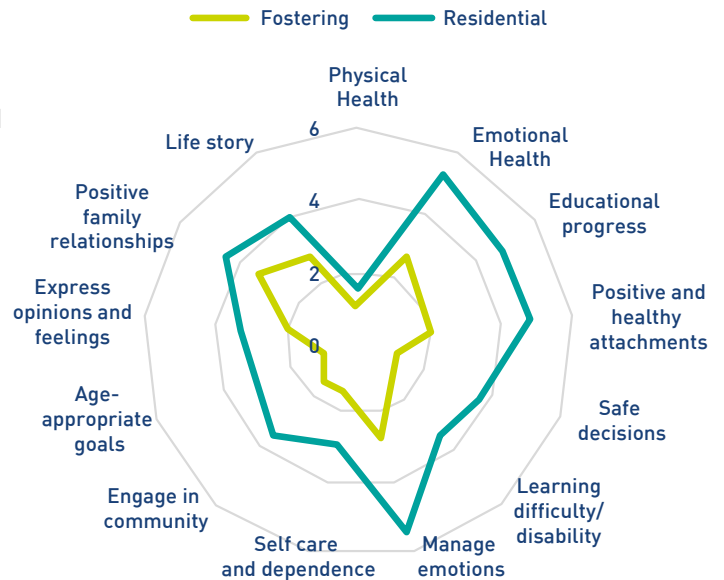


Figure 7. Needs profiles for children and young people cohort

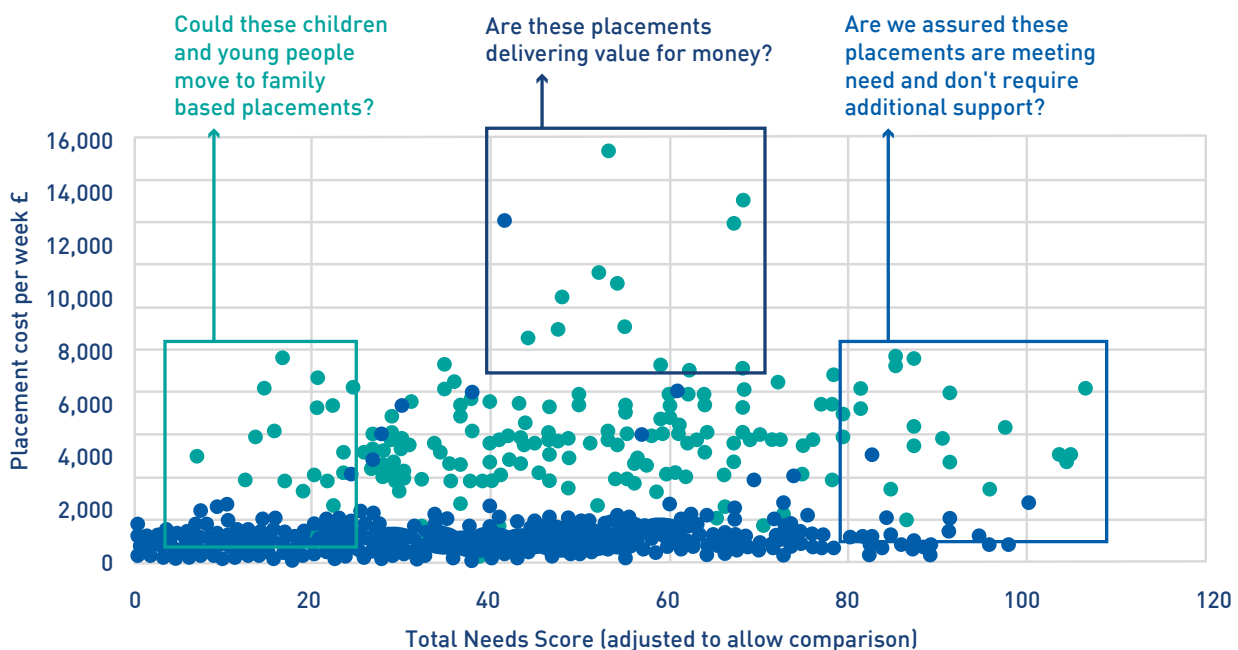


Figure 8. Relationship between cost and needs



Applying Valuing Care

Locally, regionally and nationally

Without the scale of investment needed from government, and with pressures continuing to grow, there is a requirement for local interventions with a track record of improving outcomes and reducing cost.

A number of areas have proven that a forensic and systematic focus on children’s needs and strengths has the power to:

- Transform local practice and commissioning
- Improve life chances for children
- Improve the value of care
- Reduce costs

This could be replicated locally, regionally, and nationally.

The Children’s Social Care National Framework and Dashboard proposed in the Government Children’s Social Care Strategy presents a timely opportunity to apply this learning at a national and regional level.

Meanwhile there is an immediate opportunity for local areas and national policy makers to grasp the opportunity for collaboration on this approach.

Current system	Valuing care
Random spend and opportunistic cuts	Investment and financial control
Cost	Value
Presenting behaviours and risks	Holistic view of need
Reactive	Proactive
Containment	Ambition
Measurement of inputs	Measurement of outcomes
Commissioning by anecdote	Intelligence-led partnerships
Market not meeting need	Market shaped to respond to need
Lack of evidence for inspectorate	Clear story on improvement

We think Valuing Care could be the foundation of a new approach to commissioning and sufficiency locally and regionally. We have already seen an impact on the cost and availability for independent fostering agencies and we strongly believe this could be replicated with external residential providers. Should this work at a regional level, we think it has the potential for national impact on the care market.

Kate Dexter, Assistant Director - Children’s Social Care, Norfolk County Council

Figure: Enabling a stronger local ambition



Next steps and get involved

Let's Talk Valuing Care

If you'd like to learn more, Norfolk County Council and IMPOWER would like to hear from you. There are a number of opportunities to get involved with the Valuing Care Programme:

- Get in touch with IMPOWER or Norfolk County Council to discuss this approach and/ or share insight and learning from other needs and strengths-led approaches
- Join the Valuing Care Programme or a shared learning event from our annual programme.
- Find out more about trialling Valuing Care in your area by speaking to IMPOWER.

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