
IMPOWER

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New report sets out how using data on needs and cost could improve children's lives and reduce care costs

A new report released today calls data-driven approaches focused on the needs of young people in England to be embedded into the forthcoming children's social care reforms to improve commissioning, practice and outcomes.

The report, *Valuing Care: Using data to improve children and young people's lives* by IMPOWER and the County Councils Network (CCN) analyses data on needs and cost for 3,500 young people. It finds a limited correlation between the needs of young people, the costs of their care, and the type of care they receive.

The study explores how an increased use of data – particularly to measure and track a young person's needs over time – could help to strengthen practice and decision-making from local authorities. It calls for such approaches to be embedded into the forthcoming Children's Social Care Framework and potentially used within Regional Care Co-operatives.

Released at a time when costs for children's services placements are reaching record-highs, the report advocates for a different approach to capturing and tracking data on needs and costs, which in turn could help to identify opportunities to improve outcomes for children and reduce the costs of care.

These types of data-driven approaches could help local authorities to identify and deliver specific opportunities, such as supporting children to move from residential to family homes, and reunifying children with their families. They can also help to target the right support to prevent fostering placements breaking down and to prevent children entering the care.

This analysis – and the experience of many local authorities – shows that a greater understanding of need and costs is critical to recognising opportunities to improve support, reduce cost and manage the market differently. It recommends that this type of approach is embedded into the forthcoming National Children's Social Care Framework, which is set to be introduced as part of the Government's reform agenda.

The report suggests that a consistent approach to capturing and sharing intelligence on needs and cost could help to drive more value from the care market and address current drivers of challenges with care and sufficiency.

It profiles one such data-driven approach, *Valuing Care*. This was initially adopted by four county councils – Lincolnshire County Council, Norfolk County Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire County Council – and has since been taken on by a further 11 across the country.

This system captures a young person's needs and changes over time across areas such as mental health, family relationships and educational progress. According to the councils who have developed this approach with IMPOWER, this has helped them to improve support planning, practice and commissioning for children who are looked after.

For example, Lincolnshire County Council have used this approach to make positive changes for 45 children and young people, reducing costs by £5.8m over eighteen months, while Norfolk County Council have used data to reduce the average cost of foster placements by 11% since 2020.

The report suggests that approaches such as these, which capture and utilise data on needs and cost, could 'scaled up,' allowing groups of local authorities – potentially through the planned Regional Care Co-operatives – to help them manage care markets, improve outcomes for children and drive down the costs of care over time.

Cllr Roger Gough, Children's Services Spokesperson for the County Councils Network, said:

"The financial crisis in children's services needs no introduction. Councils across the country are dealing with a rise in demand and needs, and costs for individual placements have risen exponentially over the last few years, due to the broken nature of the market. Therefore, any measures local authorities can take to reduce these costs and, crucially, improve outcomes for children in care are well worth considering."

"Today's report profiles data-driven approaches such as Valuing Care that have had a demonstrable impact on cutting costs and providing a better level of service for young people. Its findings come at an important time, with government currently rolling out its reform strategy and we hope that learning in this report can help inform some of those changes, especially over a greater use of data to better commission services."

Debbie Barnes, Chief Executive of Lincolnshire County Council, said:

"This report illustrates: how we could use these data-led approaches at a local, regional and national level, to articulate what we need to the market to get the best care for our children."

Kate Dexter, Assistant Director in Children's Services at Norfolk County Council, added:

"Approaches such as the Valuing Care model highlighted in today's report could shift practice and culture of practitioners, commissioners and providers with a focus on children's strengths and needs rather than their deficits – locally, regionally and nationally."

Dominic Luscombe, Children's Social Care Lead at IMPOWER Consulting, said:

"This report and our work with a group of local authorities has demonstrated that a better understanding of needs at a child or population level can unlock opportunities to improve outcomes, reduce cost and change how we manage the care market."

ENDS

Notes to editor

- The 'needs' methodology used in the report has been measured by social workers in the cohort of councils assessed in the analysis and then compiled by IMPOWER.
- The County Councils Network (CCN) is the national voice for England's county councils. It represents 23 county councils and 13 county unitary authorities. Collectively, they represent 25 million people, or 47% of the country's population. For more information click [here](#).
- IMPOWER, a leading public service consultancy, operates in the following areas: Whole Council Transformation, Adult Social Care, High Needs and SEND, Children's Social Care, Health and Social Care Interface.

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About IMPOWER

IMPOWER is different. IMPOWER has a deep understanding of the complexity of public services and how to deliver change, recognising that a different kind of challenge needs a different type of approach. IMPOWER doesn't just assume innovation can be shoehorned into the public sector. Instead, borne from this understanding, and over two decades serving the public sector, it developed EDGEWORK®. This unique transformational approach enables organisations to make the required mindset shift – towards a focus on outcomes and working across organisational and system boundaries – and provides the tools that make this easier.

IMPOWER believes passionately that change can only be effective and sustained if impact is delivered through co-production. There is a better way. Better outcomes cost less.

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