

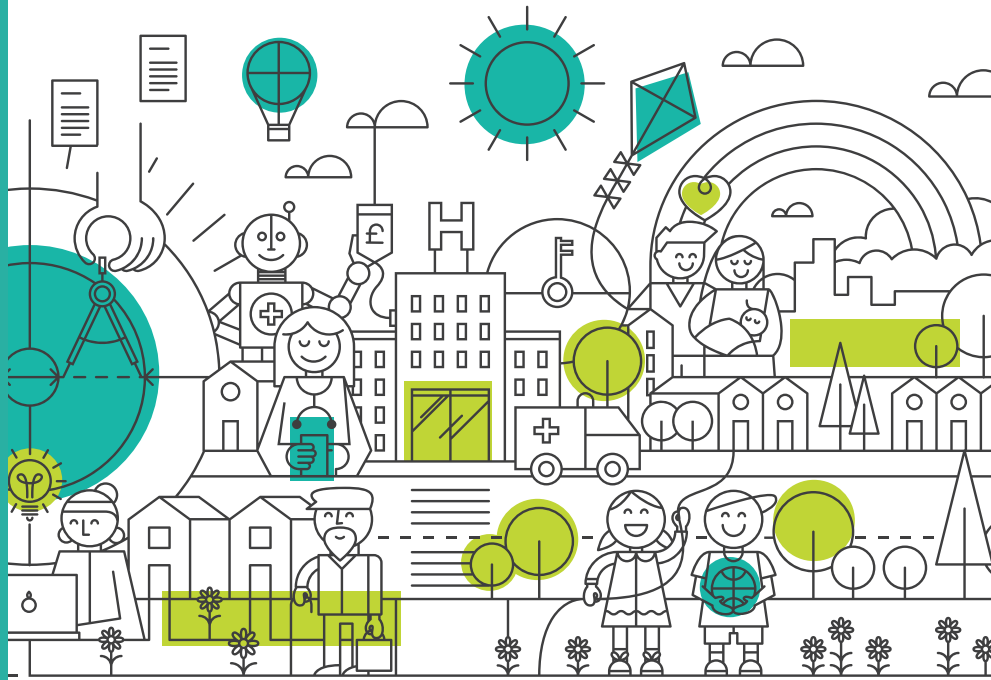
IMPOWER



# Valuing Care

Delivering better outcomes and life chances  
for children and young people

“Working with IMPOWER has helped us to significantly strengthen and improve the way we support our children in care – and this is having a real impact on children’s lives and on our efforts to maintain a stable financial footing. My team have been really impressed with how IMPOWER have engaged and worked with frontline staff, using Valuing Care to make step changes to behaviour, practice and decision making at pace.” **Debbie Barnes, Chief Executive, Lincolnshire County Council**



## The message is clear

Over the last four years we’ve engaged with over a thousand practitioners, commissioners, providers, children and families. Bringing a child into care is the most important intervention the state can ever make in a child’s life. Yet despite this, the experience of most children and young people in care is not a life-enhancing one. The outcomes narrative is well documented, and as a country we simply need to do more.

IMPOWER’s Valuing Care approach was originally devised to do just that – help councils to improve the life chances of children in care by strengthening the links between children’s needs, the outcomes being pursued, and the resources available. Councils and partners we’ve worked with have since extended the approach across the child’s journey, as a key part of preventative offers designed to strengthen family resilience. This showcases the innovation and ambition of the sector.

The triangulation of need with cost and outcomes is a relationship that defines and delivers real value – ensuring that spending goes to where it matters most to achieve better outcomes for children and young people, and delivering sustainable cost reductions in the longer term.

## From containment to ambition

There are so many people, agencies, forms, and systems involved in the journey to a child’s placement, and a lack of consistent language and understanding between them. Because of this, young people are often reduced to a label or a level of risk, rather than being understood as individuals with needs.

When it comes to care, **‘success’ is simply finding a placement and containing risk, at any cost.** This approach isn’t cost effective, and more importantly, there’s little chance of long-term happiness. Children and young people can only thrive if they’re supported as individuals, with a support package that’s tailored to their personal needs.

## Time to talk

The debate surrounding the optimum model of care is not a new one. Regardless of the latest inspection-framing or well-intended improvement initiatives, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach for delivering effective and sustainable children’s social care.

Collaboration is key to understanding individual requirements. And without a consistent two-way conversation with each child, there’s no fair or compassionate way to monitor progress. How can children’s services showcase what’s being achieved and demonstrate effective spending?

## Money where it matters most

Our research shows that the link between children’s needs and council spending is weak, and money isn’t being invested where it’s needed. Increased spend is a way of coping with increased demand, but **it is proving unsustainable** and the cost of care for councils is often disproportionate to the number of children being looked after. These spend and demand challenges existed pre-Covid-19, but have been exacerbated as a result of it.

BY MARCH 2020

**80,080**

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WERE IN THE CARE OF THE STATE



THIS IS AN INCREASE OF 12% SINCE 2015

OVER THE YEAR TO MARCH 2020, COUNCILS SPENT

**£5.3 BILLION**

ON PROVIDING THIS CARE

AND WHILE THE NUMBER OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ROSE 12% BETWEEN 2015-2020, THE COST OF SUPPORT ROSE BY A DISPROPORTIONATE 39% OVER THE SAME PERIOD.



Data source: LGA forecast of spend growth on children’s services, submission to Spending Review 2021 (validated financial outturn figures are not available for 20/21).

## In summary

There’s no correlation between the needs of children and young people, the outcomes they achieve, or the investments made. And while more money and resources are being directed towards the problem, it is unsustainable, and doesn’t solve the challenges faced by the wider system or address the pressures of rising demand within it.

It’s an unfair and unsustainable approach for all involved, and vital opportunities to improve lives are being missed.

**Something needs to change.**

# The IMPOWER approach: Valuing Care

Most problems lie within the system. And it's these unintentional flaws that need to be fixed. We developed the Valuing Care approach four years ago, working in partnership with a number of forward-thinking councils who wanted to set a new, inclusive ambition for the children's care system. It's an innovative way of working that strengthens the links between the needs, costs and outcomes for children in care, but is now showing benefits across the full child's journey.

Valuing Care provides new tools, insights and metrics that provide leaders with the evidence and confidence to define and drive value and fairness in the care system. These are co-designed to shift system culture towards demonstrable improvements in outcomes and return on investment.

IT DOES THIS BY:

- Introducing a consistent focus on needs across the care system;
- Capturing and rating the needs of children throughout their journey;
- Matching children with the interventions or placement support appropriate for their needs;
- Evidencing how children's needs and outcomes change as a result;
- Using this information to help carers, providers and professionals to better target interventions and provision to improve outcomes for children;
- Aggregating the needs and cost intelligence to underpin needs-based commissioning at cohort and population level, and fully involving children and young people.

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 don't just talk the talk

With a passion for securing better outcomes for children and young people, combined with over 20 years' experience of delivering change in complex systems, we get stuck in. We help councils develop and implement strategies to achieve better results – giving Directors of Children's Services and senior colleagues the tools, insights, and metrics they need to bring value to their services.

Since February 2018, a number of councils have used the Valuing Care approach to improve outcomes for children both in and on the edge of care. This report shares the success of just three of them.

## We understand real value

The socio-economic factors that drive demand in children's services are as broad as they are unpredictable. This is a challenge – and one that doesn't seem to interest HM Treasury in the plea for more resources. It's clearly more important than ever for local authorities to offer a consistent narrative regarding value and demonstrate impacts in the form of cost and outcomes from every pound spent.

This is the rationale behind Valuing Care, and behind our extension of the approach into special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). By better capturing and reviewing the needs of children and young people, and by assessing value and tracking outcomes, we're enabling councils to make much better decisions on support and commissioning.

Our work with numerous children's social care departments has proved that when services and interventions are focused on genuine and evidenced needs within families and communities, demand can be managed more effectively. By adopting approaches that can match those needs to the outcomes that each child can achieve, and the resources invested in them, we can define and understand value across the system.



While a funding shortfall is a big part of the problem, local government and the Department for Education now have to strengthen the argument for more funding from HM Treasury by demonstrating a much deeper understanding of how money is currently spent, and by proving what difference it makes.

By developing a more systematic understanding of demand and value, we can ensure the future sustainability of children's services – one which puts the needs of children and families back at its heart.

## Now is the time

There's never been a more challenging time to work in children's services. But with the hard work of passionate individuals, we're seeing positive change across the sector; better outcomes for children and young people and greater value from scarce resources. Valuing Care isn't a quick fix. It's an insight-led, long-term strategy with successful, sustainable results.

## EDGEWORK: A unique methodology

EDGEWORK® is IMPOWER's unique approach to understanding and delivering change in complex systems. It's the framework for Valuing Care.

## 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. A mindset shift that breaks through organisational boundaries.
2. The tools and expertise (including applied behavioural science) to understand the individual needs of children.

Our EDGEWORK® approach gives you both.

The case studies that follow in this report are framed around the four key elements of EDGEWORK®:

## 1. Identifying opportunities

We carry out avoidable demand analysis for social care and early help systems to better understand the root-cause drivers of demand. This gives us an evidence-base for future service delivery and value-framed interventions.

## 2. Creating confidence

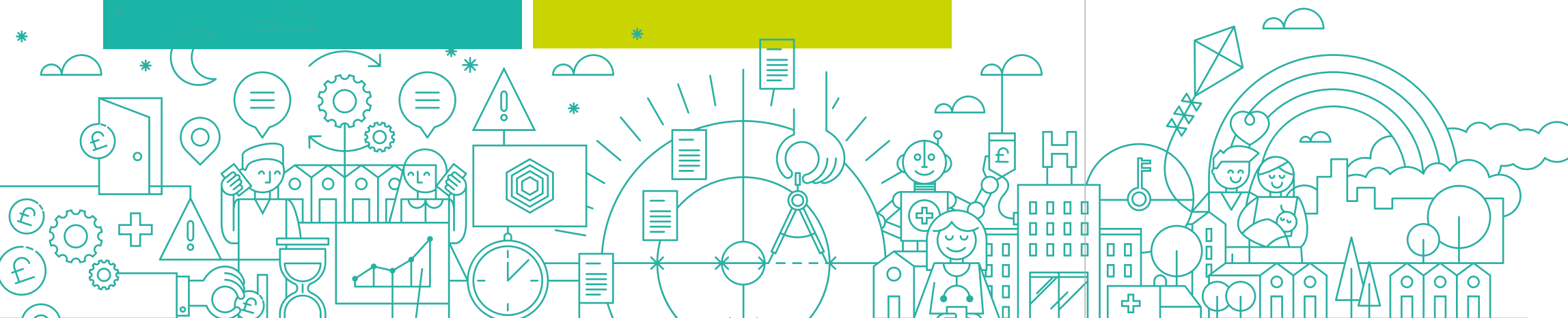
Shared ambition setting with Directors of Children's Services and their leadership teams is vital to document the SMART objectives and keep the programme focused on the correct and agreed measures of success.

### 3. Delivering savings

With an agreed ambition the team can now map the trajectory of improvement for demand and cost, while tracking needs and overall progress towards goals.

#### 4. Building resilience

By working at the front line with social workers, commissioners, and other professionals we can deliver a plan for implementation.

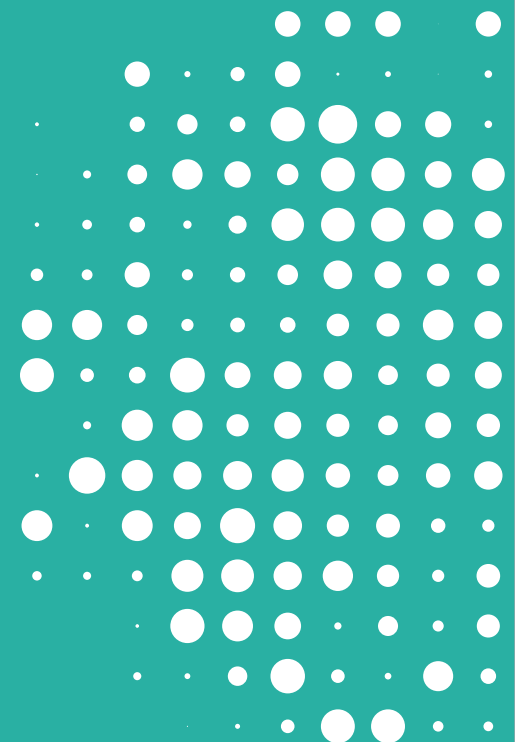


## Delivering at the front line

The following three case studies highlight exactly what's possible with Valuing Care. From embedding it as the core approach to placement decision making; through to the design and delivery of innovative outcomes-focused initiatives across the full social care journey.

Each of the councils we worked with are in different situations and their journeys with Valuing Care also differ. This provides fascinating and varied emphasis and insight. From social work practice improvement and improved relationships with young people and providers; through to strategic commissioning, and evidencing outcomes and value. But a common theme for all councils is a shift to a fairer system in which better outcomes cost less.

We don't want to stop here. We want to make this way of working the standard across the whole social care journey, for every individual. We're excited about the potential of this approach; the open and honest way in which we've shared learning with other councils has been enlightening. It feels like we're in this together and unlocking new ways of working across many different areas.





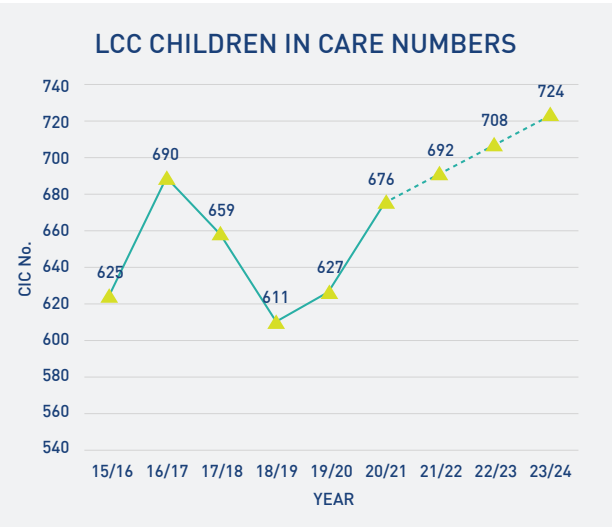
Case Study 1

# Valuing Care in Lincolnshire

Using our Valuing Care approach, underpinned by our EDGEWORK® methodology, we helped Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) meet and shape the demand coming into children’s services, and financially plan with greater confidence. We were able to further strengthen their response to addressing the needs of young people and families as early as possible, investing money and time when it matters most.

The challenge

Across the UK, the impact of Covid-19 has led to an increase of young people coming into care, and a decrease in those leaving care. In Lincolnshire the number in care went from 627 to 676 between April 2020 and Feb 2021. The availability of placements became limited - LCC were under pressure, with more children heading into high-cost external placements.



The context: what we know

Family placements help children achieve the best outcomes.

Children at the edge of care would benefit more from community support.

Many young people end up in residential placements because family placements break down. This can be avoided by focusing on specific needs.

Many young people aren't stepped out of care, because of fear that their needs won't be supported.

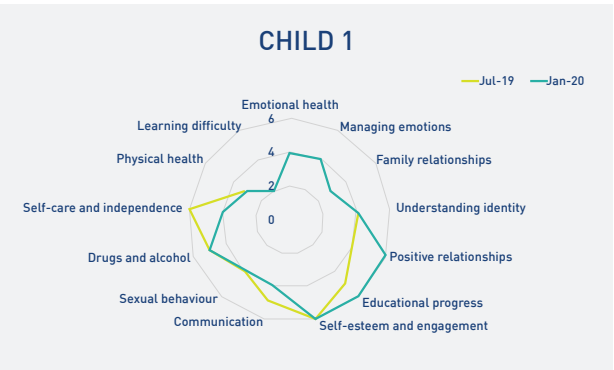
Many young people in residential units aren't stepped down to family placements because of fear that their needs won't be supported.

Our approach: a shared ambition

By implementing our Valuing Care approach in Lincolnshire, we were able to strengthen the links between children’s needs, the resources available, and the outcomes pursued. By identifying, tracking, and articulating the specific needs of every child, we helped LCC to fully understand their strengths and aspirations – putting these front-of-mind throughout the process.

How do we assess individual cases?

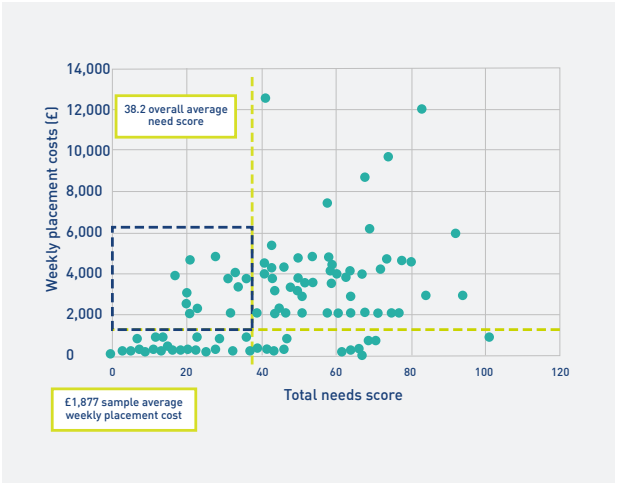
With the right support for their specific needs, children can flourish. So, we collaborate with cross-functional teams using our ‘needs-codification tool’ to discover what’s right for each young person. Below is an example of the insights that this tool gives us (0 = low need/strength, 10 = high need). Simple visuals like this enable professionals to ask the right questions and find better solutions.



How we implemented Valuing Care

We trialled Valuing Care in LCC with a selected representative\* sample of 150 children within the current children in care (CiC) cohort. We worked with 53 social workers and 20+ staff to analyse the data for children across 13 areas of need\*\*. We then created a holistic picture of CiC across Lincolnshire, and gave evidence-based recommendations for now and for the future.

With our tool we identified ‘low value’ placements, where children with relatively low needs were in high-cost placements. We also identified ‘good value’ placements, where children with high needs were in low-cost placements. The latter are more likely to break down and be in need of support before costs escalate.



This is where Valuing Care comes into its own. We can predict these situations, prevent them, and achieve better outcomes, for less. By splitting the CiC numbers down by placement type we could also see that the bigger issue was the proportion of young people in unnecessary external residential placements. It was costing LCC an extra £4.5m per year (approx).

Empowering people

Our Valuing Care approach gives social workers, and the broader team around the child, the insights and confidence they need to find the right family placements. With real, tangible data the decision-making process is fairer and more straightforward - allowing professionals to achieve the very best outcomes.

“This will really help when I go to panel, because I often feel like they are asking me but what do they need? What do they need and now I have a way of articulating that.”  
Social Worker

“I found it really useful to help my practice. After doing my sample cases, I was much more thoughtful about what I was putting down in my referral forms, thinking about need rather than just a long note about the incidents and behaviours.”  
Social Worker

“Using the Valuing Care approach, we have been able to find placements for some of our more complex children who previously we have found difficult to place.”  
Social Worker

“I liked the prospect of having a visual aid to show progress of a child and help evidence what is needed.”  
Social Worker

A success story

Our work with Lincolnshire County Council has led to very positive changes within the Children in Care service. From the practice angle, they have now adopted a sharp focus on trajectory planning, coupled with changing culture, which has been fundamental in embedding the Valuing Care approach.

Better placement oversight and management has been gained with the development and launch of a single placement referral form, together with a redesign of the Placement Management Meeting. These key elements have contributed to a more focused approach to aligning placement types to needs, and enabled seamless service ownership.

The Valuing Care approach now flows through the fostering service, with the creation of regular in-house matching days, and development of the fostering assessment forms and reviews. This is helping to better match and improve continuing professional development (CPD) for carers, enabling the right support to be wrapped around those placements.

All the above is evidenced by 23 young people who have been transitioned since June 2021 into step-down accommodation or reunified back with family members. This has contributed to LCC achieving savings up to £2.7m (as at 31/01/22) in 2021/22. This will be built on in 2022/23 to gain further savings within their budgets.

They now have new, exciting opportunities to shape the future for children and young people across Lincolnshire.

\* At the client’s request, the sample cohort included all children within residential placements and some other high priority cases. The remainder of the sample was selected to be representative of wider September 2020 CiC cohort. \*\* 1 case within the sample exited care during the needs codification period, so was removed from the sample.

## Case Study 2

# Valuing Care in Oxfordshire

Our Valuing Care approach has helped Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) understand the reasons why children are entering the care system and create more effective pathways out of care. It was a successful collaboration between IMPOWER, the council, children, and care providers.

### The challenge

OCC needed to know whether it was making the most of its resources and delivering the best outcomes for more than 700 children in its care.

In 2017, OCC found it was placing more children in care than ever before. As overall spend was increasing, so was the average cost of placements. There were also deeper issues around a mismatch between the availability and capability of local provision and children's needs. In addition to this, the council had a high number of children placed outside the county.

The overall goal was to reduce the number of children coming into care, enable more to leave care, and improve support for those within the system.

OCC embarked upon a long-term initiative to deliver sustainable change and improvement through the Valuing Care approach.

### The context: what we know

We can improve the life chances of children in care by strengthening the links between children's needs, the outcomes being pursued, and the resources available.

For less than the cost of an average residential placement, our analysis tools enable greater transparency and fairness over how resources are used across the system to improve the life chances of children. We help ensure that every pound spent makes a positive difference.

### Our approach: a shared ambition

Implementation is more than simply integrating our tools and methodology with the council's caseload system. We get involved at every stage.

To ensure all teams had a shared ambition and believed in the approach, we worked with the council on a staff training programme. It was very much a team effort involving officers, consultants and, crucially, representatives from the Children in Care Council (CiCC). That 'voice of the child' is vital in ensuring assessments truly reflect the needs of children.

Next, we rolled out our needs assessment model. Social workers could see whether, and how, a child's needs had changed over time and the data-driven visuals triggered useful, evidence-based discussions. What level of support was a child receiving? Was it appropriate and impactful?

With that in mind, two specific initiatives were implemented.

#### 1. A step-down project

The needs assessment model was used to identify children with changing needs – those who are ready to leave residential care and move to foster care placements.

#### 2. A reunification project

This was aimed at enabling children to move back to the family home. By having greater insight into each child's needs, social workers were able to identify suitable children and increase the chances of a successful and sustainable move.

**“The tool allowed for clear in-depth analysis of the child's needs which confirmed what the care plan should be.”**

Oxfordshire County Council

### Empowering people

OCC use the Valuing Care approach to analyse high-cost placements and assess whether those costs reflect children's needs. This gives the council greater control over demand and spend, while ensuring children's needs are being met.

Historically, OCC would go to the market with a placement and providers would tell them what they can offer and how much it costs. But with assessment tools in place, social workers can describe individual children in a detailed way, and push for the best possible provision for them. Valuing Care has put the council back in control, so that it's able to set out exactly what each child requires and direct spend to where it matters most.

Providers have been very positive about the needs assessment profiles and the stronger relationship it has nurtured with both the council and children in their care.

### A success story

In 2019 a children's home was closed due to the location no longer being suitable, and plans were put in place to build a new facility elsewhere. Before construction work of the home began, the Valuing Care approach was used to evaluate the plans and the specification of the building was changed to better meet the needs of children.

The step-down and reunification projects have now been mainstreamed and the role of 'Step-down Co-ordinator' has been made a permanent position within OCC. The council has now used Valuing Care to undertake complex needs assessments of all children in their care - informing and strengthening its Sufficiency Strategy. They are now able to allocate resources more efficiently and address gaps in provision.

### Outcomes

The step-down project alone has achieved savings of £3.5m up to 2020.

Children moving out of care included an 11-year-old (the youngest so far) and one child who has been placed with his siblings – the best possible outcome.

Savings enabled the council to reinvest in corporate parenting, e.g. its in-house foster care service.

There's a clearer picture of local provision and capacity to meet care needs.

22 children were stepped down to more appropriate provision.

After rising between 2016-18, the number of children in care stabilised in the following 3 years.

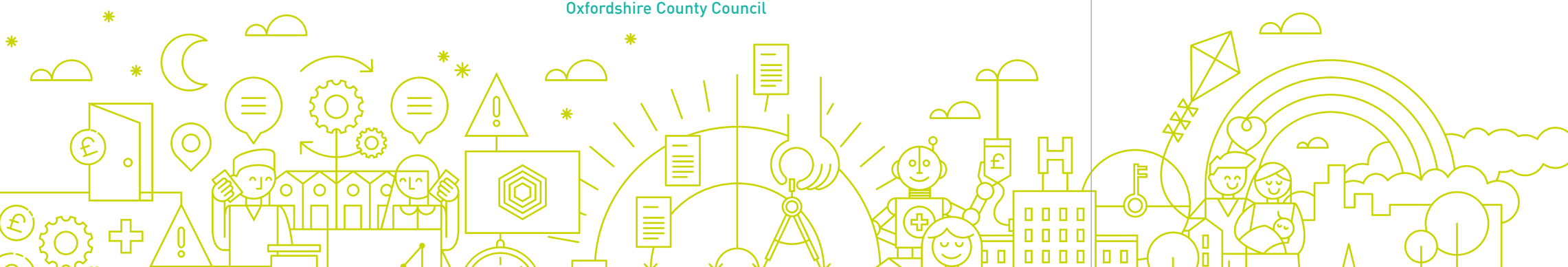
Valuing Care has embedded a deeper focus on children's individual needs across the whole system.

OCC has been empowered in their relationships with care providers.

Although OCC made savings of £3.5m over 3 years, the project was never framed as a savings exercise. It was, and continues to be, about boosting the life chances of the county's children and young people, by building a clearer understanding of their needs.

**“IMPOWER were a tremendous ally and partner to work with and there's been a sense of trust and mutual respect from the start. They have got really well-evidenced tools and solid experience not only working with councils but also some of their consultants have worked in local authorities. They really understand our work because they have been involved in it themselves at some point in their careers.**

**They were absolutely involved in everything. They add capacity from an organisational perspective but ensure that there's ownership within the organisation so that it's sustainable when they walk away. Ultimately, it's only going to work if it's led from within.”** Lara Patel, Deputy Director of Children's Services, Oxfordshire County Council













# IMPOWER

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