

IMPOWER

Fixing adult social care's plumbing and wiring

A toolkit for change



#SocialCareFuture

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Foreword

At IMPOWER, we work alongside local authorities, their partners and citizens to unlock better outcomes for people and places, whilst making best use of limited resources. This toolkit captures some important recommendations, bringing together people with lived experience, leaders and practitioners to explore both the successes and the gaps in how we fix the ‘Plumbing and Wiring’ of adult social care.

As part of their wider Plumbing and Wiring initiative, Social Care Future (SCF) asked IMPOWER to share their experience of the key issues from our work with local councils. Extensive work with stakeholders from SCF had identified eight areas of social care transformation activity, across the ‘what?’ and the ‘how?’ of achieving the mission we all share to see people living good lives in inclusive communities.

This toolkit enables people, councils and their partners to identify what gets in the way of planning, commissioning and delivering social care which enables people to live good lives at home. A group of pioneering councils are now trialling and sharing ways to fix these ‘plumbing and wiring’ issues, to get social care working for local people and the lives they want to live.

ALEX FOX OBE

Delivery Director, IMPOWER



Social Care Future’s vision

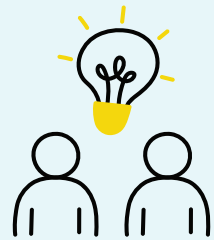
The Social Care Future vision for Adult Social Care is that the support system enables us all to live in the place we call home, with the people and things we love, in communities where we look out for each other, doing the things that matter to us.

The mission for those councils which embrace that vision is to build and sustain systems, services and play their part to support communities enabling people who draw on care and support, and their families, to live that good life.

How local areas pursue that is as important as what they do. This means we must attend both to ‘plumbing and wiring’ issues and to leadership, practice and behaviours.

Each individual has to define that good life for ourselves, taking control wherever possible and living as full citizens who can contribute to our chosen households and communities as well as having our needs met.

The core values of pursuing the SCF mission are:



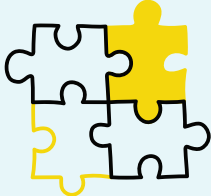
Sharing power, resources and responsibility through **coproduction**.



Taking a **strengths-based approach** that enables people, families and communities to build their own capacity, with support which intrudes as little as possible on people’s lives.



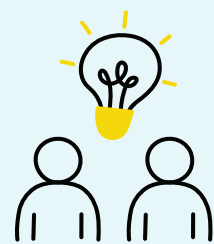
Be **person-led and relational**, with teams who have the time and skills to build rapport, form relationships and understand what’s important to people.



A focus on reducing inequalities and **promoting equity, diversity and inclusion**, reducing the gaps in how services and systems work for different groups and communities.

The plumbing and wiring initiative

As part of their wider Plumbing and Wiring initiative, and extensive work with stakeholders, we identified eight areas of activity across both the what plumbing and wiring issues and the how leadership, practice and behaviours needed to help local areas put those values into practice and pursue the mission.



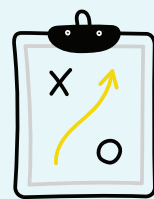
Coproduce everything



Strengthen leadership



Sustained investment in change



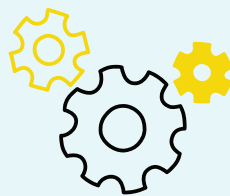
Person-centred assessment and plans



Person-centred IT and records



Better direct payments



People-powered regulation



Better commissioning



Eight areas of activity across both the what plumbing and wiring issues and the how leadership, **practice** ‘the what’ and ‘the how’ and behaviours needed so local areas can put those values into practice and pursue the mission.

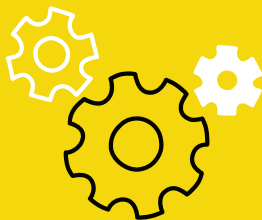
The three themes

We agreed to support the project further, exploring these issues with councils, IMPOWER and SCF engage with. The subsequent work, including a survey and seminar in the Autumn of 2024, has enabled us to refine those areas of work into three themes for local areas:



Coproduced leadership

Coproducing a vision with citizens and pursuing it together, working with communities who are currently overlooked or less well-reached. Leicester and Camden Council's work illustrates this.



Simple and human systems and processes

Simple and human systems and processes. This enables people from every community to reach, move through and leave services and systems well, building their own strengths, and feeling treated like an individual at each stage. Manchester City Council have replaced long, highly structured assessment forms with shorter strengths-based tools, with dashboards for outcomes, outputs and costs.



Co-produced commissioning and making direct payments simple

Coproduced commissioning that ensures a range of community-based support options and providers are available and making direct payments simple for those that want to use them. This is evident in Lincolnshire's work with IMPOWER to identify opportunities for more independence and what is needed to realise them and in Sheffield City Council's annual uplifts and pay bands for Personal Assistants (PAs) and development of alternatives to PAs such as micro-providers and Individual Service Funds.

Those are three areas of **transformation** that councils and their partners are working on now, but we are also identifying what needs to change at national level to bring that work to national scale, which we are calling **people powered policies and regulations**.

The national changes we have identified so far are set out below:

Coproduced leadership



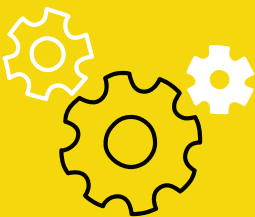
Problem

Top-down leadership overly focused on service solutions and social care as an ongoing crisis, or adjunct to the NHS.

National change needed

National leaders reframing the story and language for social care from being about crisis and problems, towards a more hopeful and human vision that inspires the public.

Simple and human systems and processes



Problem

Complex paperwork and systems that are not focused on what matters to people, driven by national reporting requirements.

National change needed

Aligning national reporting requirements around strengths-based and person-led practice. Review existing information standards to ensure systems can support strengths-based approaches and free text in support plans.the public.

Incentives for local authorities to adopt simpler, strengths-based approaches for assessment and support planning.

Coproduced commissioning



Problem

Difficulties with freeing up money from existing services into new kinds of support.

National change needed

Incentives for local authorities to encourage innovation. Examples could include simplifying procurement requirements, encouraging development of individual services funds and shared lives.

National funding and decision-making timescales that enable areas to build relationships and partnerships for the future, rather than only being able to focus on tackling problems today.

Making direct payments simple



Problem

Lack of choice, flexibility and creativity. Disproportionate monitoring of how direct payments are used.

National change needed

A CQC thematic report on direct payments, with the results used to inform the development of council assurance.

The rest of this report sets out what we've learned so far about the three areas of local change and offers some self-assessment tools to gauge your own progress. For copies of these tables email enquiries@impower.co.uk.

There is much more learning out there, so we are asking every area to fill in a survey, administered by IMPOWER, to add to that knowledge bank about what the challenges are, and what you are trying and learning in each area.

1. Coproduced leadership

Where areas have traditionally been (1)	Where areas are heading (10)	Self-assessment and planning (1 – 10)
Challenges include: • Different visions and plans in different sectors. • Short timescales for funding and decision- making. • Uneven relationships with local communities, coproduction groups that are non-diverse or exclude those not currently reaching services. • Poor or patchy collection or use of equalities data in planning. • The resources and potential of communities is not always visible to leaders and teams, with asset maps not always up to date and shared widely.	Solutions and enablers include: • A shared plan and language which all local partners co-create and sign up to. • Systematic gathering and use of equalities data to inform planning. • Investing in local VCSE coproduction capacity, with a focus on coproduction with groups and communities accessing services the most, and the least. • Ongoing practice support for managers and practitioners (not just one- off training). • Keeping asset maps updated and communicated regularly.	Where is our area on a scale of 1 to 10? What is the evidence for that score?
Current behaviours include: • Leading from the top. • Identifying a narrow group willing and able to take part in coproduction, and a lack of training and support for citizens to participate meaningfully. • Expecting people with lived experience to engage with coproduction and fit in with traditional meeting formats.	Emerging behaviours include: • Systems leadership approaches. • Ongoing coaching, huddles and leadership support for teams. • Skilling up, informing and paying people involved in coproduction. • Actively reaching out to groups not currently involved in coproduction through community and faith groups and ULOs, and adapting. • communication and meeting styles.	



Recommendations for new ways of working

Area of activity	Examples	Our planned activities in this area
Shared vision and ambition, with a strong business case	Working together for Change are working with councils including Southend and Leicester City to build on coproduction practice. Leicester City chose to address their early support offer and held 14 focus groups, with another 76 people completing a survey, focused on three key questions: • what was working well in their lives • what wasn't • what was important for the future Rather than setting the agenda first, the themes emerging from this work have steered the priorities for redesigning systems and practice, as a 'Leading Better Lives' programme. From 24 emerging themes, four priorities were identified: loneliness, struggling to access advice, not knowing where to go and not feeling listened to. Each has an action group led by someone with lived experience or an external partner. The pack presented to LCC's scrutiny commission has more detail.	Where is our area on a scale of 1 to 10? What is the evidence for that score?

Addressing language	Establishing a shared language that reflects strengths-based values and is 'de- professionalised' with easy read versions of information, making complex systems understandable to coproduction partners, such as how we measure our outcomes.	
Working with partners and communities	Investing in Voluntary Community and Social enterprise (VCSE) and faith organisations which can bring reach into communities currently not engaged in coproduction, and employing people with lived experience themselves in coproduction roles, with a variety of ways to pay people for their time, and benefits advice for participants.	
Guidance and resources	Councils and NHS Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) working together to produce shared guidance which aligns practice for social care and health personal budgets and direct payments.	
Practical support and payments	Sheffield City Council work with a user-led organisation to offer a range of ways for people to participate, from joining boards, to occasional input.	
	Camden Council have developed a coproduction guide and resources which are freely downloadable.	
Skilling up and support teams	Lincolnshire County Council have an ongoing programme of peer learning and coaching for strengths-based practice after initial training, with six-week team huddles and celebrations of what is working.	



2. Simple and human systems

Where areas have traditionally been (1)	Where areas are heading (10)	Self-assessment and planning (1 – 10)
Challenges include: • Overly complex pathways into and through the system. • Adapting statutory assessments and care and support plans to a less bureaucratic and more strengths-based approach. • Aligning workflow, auditing and financial management. • Strengths-based practice generates rich individual narratives, but negotiating with current and potential providers requires data at scale limited influence on externally-provided IT systems, information standards and reporting requirements.	Solutions and enablers include: • Mapping and reducing people's journey towards and into Adult Social Care, reducing complexity and duplication. • Building community and VCSE capacity around a shared vision for increasing people's capacity to self-support. • Approaches which embed strengths-based practice and tell a human story, while generating cohort or population level data for commissioners. • Shared data across operations, performance and finance teams, which demonstrates the cost-benefit of strengths-based practice.	Where is our area on a scale of 1 to 10? What is the evidence for that score?
Current behaviours include: • Silo'd approach with each organisation, department or team focusing on narrowly defined goals • Being driven by completion of processes.	Emerging behaviours include: • All organisations and teams aligned around a shared vision expressed through relational, person- led systems and practices.	

Recommendations for new ways of working

Area of activity	Examples	Our planned activities in this area
A strengths-based 'front door'	Strengths-based practice embedded into the 'front door', using models like Three Conversations that ask what a good life would look like and what the individual and family need to move towards it. Manchester City Council are developing an Adults Early Support Team and improving their online offer. Reframing 'prevention' as enabling people to build their capabilities, whether they have emerging support needs or draw on significant support.	Where is our area on a scale of 1 to 10? What is the evidence for that score?
Redesigning assessments, plans and records	Replacing long, highly structured assessment forms with shorter conversational tools, and using the new forms with existing as well as new clients. Codesigning new self-assessment versions of forms and redesigning internal forms with a diverse range of local people, via community groups and ULOs. Developing tech and systems that enable councils to extract the information needed for care planning from strengths-based narratives. Building datasets and dashboards that track progress against shared measures for outcomes, outputs and costs. Dimensions UK, which supports 3,500 people with learning disabilities across England and Wales, has worked with some of the 72 local authorities they contract with to develop Trusted Assessor models, which enable practitioners who often know the individual better than other workers and have a strong relationship with them, to support.	
	reviews and assessments. This also frees up capacity elsewhere in the system.	



Simpler direct payment access and management	Sheffield City Council aim to remove bureaucracy that does not reflect the simplicity of the Care Act, which provides for direct payments being used for anything that lawfully meets eligible needs. Creating simplicity and an enabling culture is now an explicit aim for teams. The council has built in an annual uplift, to bring direct payments in line with commissioned services. A PA rates decision-making tool supports people to set pay rates around 5 bands, related to the skills and experience that an individual needs their PA to have. The direct payment panel has been replaced with a direct payment Forum which is used for complex direct payments aiming to provide consistency and transparency in decision-making.	
Strengths-based support	Camden Council have taken a trauma-informed and strengths-based approach, utilising models like adult Family Group Conferencing. Lincolnshire County Council, with IMPOWER, have developed the Lincolnshire Better Lives approach which identifies opportunities for community or family support for individuals, and aggregates that information to support commissioners to reshape local provision.	
Organisational development	Recruiting a specialist systems manager to support change management. Embedding reflective practice and becoming a learning organisation, with action learning sets and ongoing coaching in strengths-based practice, not just one-off training.	

3. Coproduced commissioning and making direct payments simple

Where areas have traditionally been (1)	Where areas are heading (10)	Self-assessment and planning (1 – 10)
Challenges include: • Strengths-based practice within the ASC system isn't always matched by availability of strengths-based offers from local providers • Breakdown of family care, often where families can't get the support, they need to sustain caring or plan for endings, is a leading driver of emergencies • Councils describe a 'seller's market' with too many stress-purchases and spot-purchases • Direct payment systems that default to the most risk-averse approaches, or conversely, little support for decision- making by direct payment holders • Translating narrative information into information that can be used in commissioning • Difficulties recruiting PAs • Lack of insight into the outcomes of direct payments and the quality of organisations being widely used by direct payment holders	Solutions and enablers include: • A clear vision for self- directed support, translated into transparent processes and user- friendly guidance for direct payment holders • Support to recruit and manage PAs and strong relationships with organisations used by direct payment holders to boost outcomes • Planning conversations with current and potential providers, with cohort-level data and the scale needed to enable strategic investments in new approaches	Where is our area on a scale of 1 to 10? What is the evidence for that score?



Current behaviours include: • Relationships with direct payment holders either too 'hands-off' or too 'hands-on'	Emerging behaviours include: • Relationships with direct payment holders which focus on adding value, supporting the	
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Recommendations for new ways of working

Area of activity	Examples	Our planned activities in this area
Shared ambition for Direct Payments and joint working	Establishing a shared ambition and joint direct payment working group with finance and performance teams, setting goals including improved uptake and independence outcomes, and shorter timeframes for decisions. Moving from manual processes for monitoring direct payments towards software-enabled approaches.	
Simple, shared guidance for direct payment holders	Coproducing new direct payment guidance to create more clarity about flexibility and boundaries and taking an end-to-end approach, based on a shared vision. Sheffield City Council are simplifying the guidance for people who use direct payments, replacing complex policies with accessible fact sheets available to both service users and social care workers.	
Support to recruit and retain PAs	Sheffield City Council are simplifying PA recruitment and employment processes and is holding a PA Workforce Summit with Yorkshire and Humber ADASS, developing ways to promote the role. Lincolnshire County Council is also holding a PA recruitment fair. Sheffield also promotes alternatives to PAs such as micro-providers and Individual Service Funds (ISFs).	
Translating strengths-based practice into market reshaping	Lincolnshire County Council’s strengths-based Better Lives programme is generating new insight into which approaches and providers offer the best value for money, to inform investment decisions, and to support challenge where needed.	

Acknowledgements

Social Care Future established and led the community of practice for the Plumbing and Wiring work, with seven councils working in an ongoing partnership:

Calderdale Council
Direct payments

Camden Council
Recording systems

Cambridgeshire County Council
Customer journey

Royal Borough of Greenwich
Direct payments

Leicester City Council
Prevention and early intervention

Nottinghamshire County Council
Flexible breaks for carers

Wokingham Council
Personal budgets

These councils participated in a survey and/or seminar which contributed to this report:

London Borough of Camden

East Sussex County Council

Royal Borough of Greenwich

Lincolnshire County Council

Leicester City Council

Leicestershire County Council

Manchester City Council

Nottinghamshire County Council

Oldham Council

Sheffield City Council

Surrey County Council

Tameside MBC

Wokingham Council



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 believe that better outcomes cost less.

Founded in 2000, we have partnered with over 150 UK councils, improving performance, enriching lives, and strengthening public services and 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 leaving our clients financially and operationally resilient in their most challenging areas. Delivering better outcomes is at the heart of what we do and is the key to large scale savings and long-term financial sustainability.

IMPOWER.co.uk

Social Care Future

Social Care Future emerged in 2018, born out of frustration at the absence of people who themselves draw on social care in discussions about the future. Every successful movement needs a shared vision and story, and we knew that to have any impact on the world, we'd need to tell a story in a way that commanded the attention and support of the wider public.

The first thing we did together was to write our vision and story of change. Social Care Future is a growing, people-powered movement for change, powered by hope. Together we are

growing a future where we can all live in the place we call home, with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing the things that matter to us.

Without big changes to the way we think about social care, we and the people we care about face losing control of our lives and contact with the people and things that make our lives worthwhile. It doesn't have to be this way.

socialcarefuture.org.uk

Published October 2024 by IMPOWER consulting in support of Social Care Future.

Contact Alex Fox afox@impower.co.uk to discuss this report or for more information about IMPOWER's work with councils on making the vision for good lives a reality, including our Valuing Good Lives programme which supports local areas to reshape their practice, support offers and provider markets around the most effective and sustainable forms of support.

#SocialCareFuture

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Correct at time of publishing:
November 2024.
Sources available on request.