



In it together: achieving quality outcomes for young people with complex needs

Best practice examples of partnership working between local authority commissioners and providers of care and education services for children with complex and challenging needs.

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Many thanks to Marc Woolfson, Gemma Parry, Clive Grimshaw, the CSDG members and all the local authorities for their help in producing this good practice guide.

Please note: All names of children within this document have been changed to protect their identities

In it together: achieving quality outcomes for young people with complex needs – a joint statement from LGA and CSDG



Vulnerable children deserve the best education, care and support available to meet their often challenging needs.

Looked after children, those with learning disabilities, or those who are victims of neglect and abuse, rely on local authorities, and the providers that work with them, to provide high quality care and education services matched to their specific needs.

Across the country, services of the highest quality are being designed and delivered in partnership between local authorities and service providers from the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is essential that this good practice is celebrated and shared widely.

Local authorities are required by the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) to secure sufficient high quality care placements for looked after children in their areas and to ensure that those placements are able to meet the individual needs of each child. Using available resources effectively is central to the successful implementation of this duty. Working constructively with local and national providers, councils can meet the needs of the children they look after and guarantee that value for money is achieved through sustainable, cost effective, and high quality children's services.

Leading service providers recognise that local authorities have to operate within budget and that by working with local authority commissioners in positive and creative ways, they can provide services that deliver the best possible outcomes for children.

The Local Government Association and the members of the Children's Services Development Group collaborated on this project to highlight examples of best practice. The document sets out instances of effective partnership working between providers, commissioners and other agencies.

The case studies include material demonstrating how young people can contribute to their own care plans, methods for promoting placement stability for children who have suffered from multiple placement breakdowns, examples of innovative commissioning and flexible block contracting, as well as developing a team-parenting approach to foster care and working with multi-agency partners to manage the difficult transition into adulthood.

It is aimed primarily at those with responsibility for making commissioning and placement decisions at the highest level professionally and politically, including Directors of Children's Services, Lead Members for Children's Services, heads of commissioning and placement managers. It will be equally useful to private, voluntary and independent sector children's services providers as they seek to work ever more closely with local authorities to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children in their areas.

We hope it is found to be a useful resource.

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Case Study 1: Creative commissioning to meet local needs – Dorset County Council, Warwickshire County Council and Cambian Education Services



Schools and colleges in the Cambian Group place great emphasis on identifying the needs of local authorities, children and young people, and their parents or carers. This emphasis is reflected in the development of a number of commissioning initiatives and creative partnerships prizing greater flexibility of provision, specially commissioned packages and fee arrangements and a flexible year round use of available resources.

As councils increasingly seek to commission services based on individual capabilities and needs, Cambian have developed adaptable packages of provision to support and develop this agenda, for example providing up to 44 weeks' provision a year, where previously services were offered in either term-time only or 52 week blocks.

Further measures that have been found to be beneficial to both councils and providers include: developing day placements in addition to week and term-based boarding; creating mixed-economy placements such as providing support for students in maintained sector schools and colleges; establishing bespoke packages for particularly hard-to-place children and young people; and offering emergency assessment placements.

Case study 1: Warwickshire County Council's intensive work with Cambian Education led to the development of a bespoke care package to address the needs of Peter, a 14 year old with Asperger's Syndrome. Peter lives with his parents, does not leave his bedroom and rarely engages with anyone from outside. Cambian is using an external consultant and a clinical psychologist to work alongside Peter's parents and the local authority.

Once a clear strategy for Peter's progression to a Cambian placement has been established, a Cambian practitioner with experience in student support will be introduced to him in order to build a relationship, with the ultimate aim of aiding Peter's smooth transition into a residential placement. It is anticipated that this process will take a number of months and is likely to involve overnight stays for Cambian staff to implement a successful transition programme.

Warwickshire County Council and Cambian Education are also at an early stage in exploring partnership provision for children and young people with Asperger's Syndrome or Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

Case study 2: Cambian is working with schools to establish shared staffing arrangements.

Working with Dorset County Council and other locally managed providers they are exploring the potential for founding an Asperger's Syndrome day unit attached to a local maintained school.

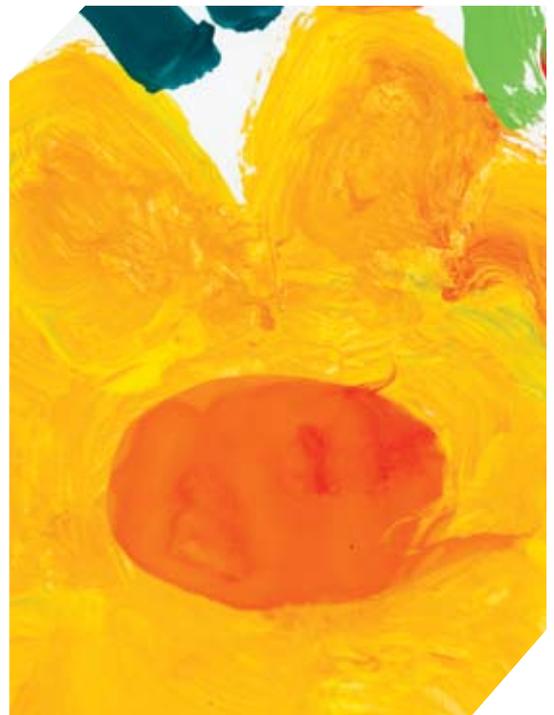
It is anticipated that any such education provision would be staffed by the provider who would carry out assessments, deliver services, support parents or carers and train locally managed staff. The Schools' Forum for Dorset County Council has endorsed this approach and more detailed arrangements, including the identification of available funding streams, are now being discussed.

Local authorities looking to develop solutions to meet the pressures of long-term needs can also be aided through measures such as enabling the commissioning of two or three year fixed-term placements or fixed-fee contracts, promoting block purchasing and an up-lift reduction for annual commissioning and payment of fees.

In addition, the provider can make wide use of available resources to offer a range of extra services, including: utilising the skills and expertise of staff to train others or offering short breaks for young people during holiday periods in support of the government's Aiming High for Disabled Children Strategy.

Effective partnership working, stemming from greater levels of trust, is a significant aim of all these commissioning initiatives. A number of local authorities have identified their interest in taking this work forward, with several located close to Cambian schools being in the forefront of developments.

Cambian intends to continue working closely with local authority partners to establish new commissioning initiatives, increase flexibility and develop creative relationships, whilst continuing to maintain the Ofsted "outstanding" category that local authorities and parents and carers have come to expect across all its schools.



Case Study 2: Promoting placement stability for children with very challenging behaviour – Nottinghamshire County Council and CastleCare Group



Local authority commissioners and those with responsibility for placing young people need to consider the knowledge of the various providers and what they can offer, as well as a clear insight into the needs of the child, the presenting problems and the outcomes that need to be achieved. In turn, providers have an obligation to be clear about the services that they are capable of offering and avoid taking a child based on the availability of a placement alone.

CastleCare believe that preventing placement breakdown begins with finding the right placement for each child, based on a detailed understanding of their specific needs. This is especially important when placing children whose behaviour has caused previous placements to break down.

Case study: Alice is in the care of Nottinghamshire County Council and had a history of complex needs. She often displayed very challenging behaviours, frequently resulting in police contact and questions being asked of the suitability of her placements, ultimately leading to her being moved on from a number of settings.

When Alice was placed with CastleCare, the initially agreed care plan resulted in her continuing to display her previous behaviours, which resulted in Alice gaining a highly negative reputation with the police and in the community.

In response, regular meetings were set up with the various partners and agencies working

with Alice. This included her social worker, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, the Youth Offending Team, the home manager, key worker, Neighbourhood Policing Team, her school and with Alice herself. Strategies and protocols were set up to ensure that all agencies involved had specific procedures for contacting other partners central to her case whenever there were any developments. This ensures that information is shared and that all relevant parties are kept informed.

Alice has benefitted greatly from the better communication between the adults involved in her care and is now settled in her placement and achieving good outcomes.

In essence, partnership working and good communication between providers and commissioners is the key to establishing long lasting placements. This is a two way process made possible through formalising regular partnership meetings, open lines of communication and monitoring and review by both the provider and local authority.

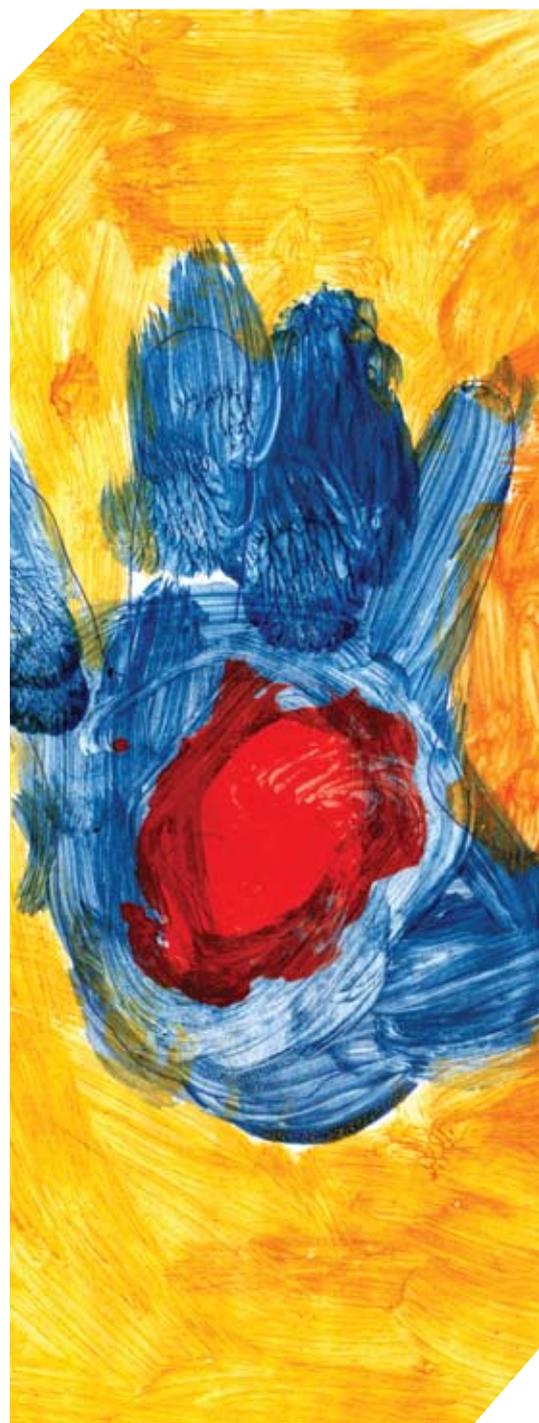
Partnership working must also include the child, via involvement in the decision making process, provision of information about the placement and allowing the opportunity to visit any new home prior to admission.

However, it is essential that outcomes measurement is sophisticated enough to understand and recognise the child's individual progress and is not limited to quantitative measurements, which may fail to acknowledge the unique circumstances of children with complex needs. Progress must be measured against the individual's starting point.

Indeed, it is essential for all those involved to recognise that difficulties will arise when dealing with young people who are facing such big challenges in their lives and that the best way forward in supporting young people through the challenges they face is for all relevant parties to meet regularly to:

- identify the challenges and needs to be met;
- realise solutions/strategies to best meet those challenges;
- establish the best person/agency to do that – Education, Social Care, Provider, PCT, CAMHS, YOT, Police and the Child/Young Person; and
- identify the resources required.

Ultimately, the prevention of placement breakdown can only be achieved through successful partnership working between the provider and the local authority, other agencies and, fundamentally, the child.



Case Study 3: Flexible block contracts – Coventry City Council and NorthernCare



Coventry City Council and NorthernCare have developed an innovative partnership to deliver residential placements for children in care. Beginning in January 2007, NorthernCare agreed a ten year contract with built-in flexibilities to allow Coventry the choice of a range of placements to meet the needs of looked after children in their area. This has helped improve financial planning for the Council and led to greater stability of placements.

A block contract best met Coventry's specific requirements due to there being a large number of children placed in independent sector provision, an absence of suitable internal alternative provision and a scarcity of local providers able to meet demand.

As a result, the council successfully redesigned its residential placement services and implemented a procurement exercise based on needs analysis, financial assessments and market evaluation. The decision to award a block contract to NorthernCare was taken following a commercial tendering process which sought to find the right balance between value for money and quality.

Improvements arising from the service redesign and procurement strategy have been wide-ranging, including sustained efficiency savings of 23 per cent per year - equating to £12m of projected savings - and the development of a collaborative, transparent and outcomes focused relationship. Ultimately, Coventry and NorthernCare have created a flexible framework for commissioning, finding solutions to the

needs of vulnerable children and offering needs-matched placements. Specified targets linked to performance management and performance indicators, designed to clearly define the duties of NorthernCare, were set out at the design stage, included in the tender and incorporated into each contract.

These improvements have been coupled with a long-term, sustainable approach to the commissioning process, linking procurement with corporate strategy and implementing services progressively, via a mix of block and spot contracts to establish robust placement allocation processes. A 'no rejection' clause has worked well to ensure that NorthernCare meet the needs of all young people and are not be able to reject more difficult cases.

Placements are continually reviewed to ensure that quality and involvement is maintained both by the local authority and provider, with a break point worked into contracts to allow for an ongoing reassessment of young people's requirements and any ensuing adjustment to services. This ongoing focus on engagement extends to all stakeholders, between whom there is a continual dialogue. A change control mechanism is in place to bring clear, auditable accountability for any contract variations. This approach has encouraged placement stability with 69 per cent of all young people placed with NorthernCare in 2008-09 remaining in their original placement and 24 per cent only moving once.

The council is given a clear view of the unit cost of all services within the contract and can monitor changes on a monthly basis. Now in its third year, the arrangement has enabled the authority to stay within budget for children's services, reduce internal administration costs and release additional resources for investment in other services – all through a system of partnership, trust and shared responsibility.

Achievements to date have been wide-ranging and include the opening of four new local homes, giving greater scope for responding to local need and enhancing the smooth running of case management and joint-working between the commissioner, provider and other local agencies eg CAMHS and teenage pregnancy services.

Regular monitoring takes place both internally and externally to ensure that outcomes for young people are met and strategic issues are addressed. Monthly Operational Management Group meetings, attended by a range of stakeholders, occur alongside quarterly meetings of senior representatives from both the local authority and provider. Discussions are informed by annual performance data and a quarterly report is supplemented by individual progress reports on young people that are distributed to their social workers.

Coventry and NorthernCare's secure relationship demonstrates a key element to commissioning effectively. When both parties can operate as partners in the process, long-term planning becomes more efficient and young people are given the best possible start in a well-matched setting.



Case Study 4: Caring for an unaccompanied asylum seeking child – Swindon Council and Foster Care Associates

The need for sensitivity in placement commissioning and care planning can be particularly acute when providing services for asylum seeking children. Foster Care Associates (FCA) respond to this need by offering bespoke therapeutic packages that are built around the child to offer high quality foster care as well as therapeutic and educational interventions.

In turn, local authorities can help create successful placements through a continued involvement in each case and a flexible attitude to supporting young people in finding the best geographical location for a placement. Councils and providers can also work together to enable young people to access services in the community.

Case study: Heja first arrived in this country from Iraq in April 2005 aged 15, having departed suddenly following the loss of immediate family members in sectarian violence. Given this traumatic background, it was essential that he was placed in a setting that would offer the emotional and practical support necessary. He was put in the care of Swindon Children's Services, who opted to place him with FCA.

Heja had no English at all on his arrival, but through the support of the council and FCA, made very good progress and began to learn how to read and write in English.

Both Swindon and FCA were keen to include Heja in decision making regarding his care and he soon requested a placement in the Bournemouth area hoping that he might make

contact with a family member he thought had lived there recently. Swindon Borough Council discussed Heja's needs with FCA and together they were able to identify a suitable placement, which continued to be funded by the Council and supported by FCA's fostering team in the region.

Heja's new carers welcomed him into their family and supported him fully in all aspects of his life. He was identified as having post traumatic stress and was provided with ongoing 1-1 support from the local CAMHS team. FCA adopted a Team Parenting model, which establishes a team around each child to meet their specific therapeutic, social, physical and educational needs.

In Heja's case, the Team Parenting Therapist also worked closely with both Swindon Borough Council and the CAMHS team to identify his ongoing needs and was consequently able to provide continued support to his carers. This support enabled them to make sense of the CAMHS work and understand how best to manage Heja's behaviour. This ongoing support helped Heja to engage with the activities and opportunities that FCA and Swindon Borough Council provided for him and to establish good relationships with staff members and other young people.

FCA's Education Liaison Officers supported Heja in accessing adult education courses and FCA and Swindon equipped him to take up art, resulting in the completion of a National Diploma in Art and Design; and Tae Kwon-do which he has had great success, having

achieved a silver medal in the British Tae Kwon-Do championships.

Heja left foster care at 18 and his local council now aid him by providing supported lodgings. He earns money through working in a fast food restaurant to fund his Tae Kwon-Do club membership and training fees to develop his success in this area. He also hopes to go onto higher education in the future.

Through a combination of provider and local authority support, in this case offered by FCA and Swindon Borough Council, transitions can be hugely successful, including for complex cases such as Heja's. The commitment of excellent foster carers, the ongoing support of a provider through tailored provision as well as funding and development of opportunities from the local council can allow an asylum seeking young person to integrate fully into the community, in Heja's case contributing both economically and socially and with a continued commitment to personal achievement and learning.



Case Study 5: Multi-agency working to manage the transition to adult services – The London Borough of Lambeth and the Hesley Group



The London Borough of Lambeth and the Hesley Group have developed comprehensive processes to ease the transition of young people to adult services.

Tensions can and do often arise at the point of transition in a young person's life, especially where there are complex and long-term needs. Those tensions can occur across departments within institutions, between agencies and between the young person and their family.

Where the young person is living with complex needs, such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Severe Learning Difficulties, communication between the care provider and the parent (where the parent is not the care provider) is vital to making the correct decisions about the best transition pathway for the young person. That pathway will invariably differ from one young person to another, so understanding the views of the young person, parent and provider of care should be at the centre of the planning process, particularly around sensitive phasing and graduation.

Case study: Theo, an 18 year old who has Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Severe Learning Difficulties with Challenging Behaviour, was placed by Lambeth at Hesley's Fullerton House (FHS) school in Doncaster at age 13. When he reached the age of 17 the council initiated proposals to move Theo to a more appropriate setting to meet his needs as an adult. His mother was initially reluctant as she was happy with his welfare and progress and wanted him to remain with the provider.

Theo was fortunate in that the Adult Learning Disability Transitions Manager had been his social worker when he was younger and was sensitive to his special needs. In December 2008 Theo was accompanied by two members of staff from Fullerton House to visit a potential new setting. Whilst the visit went well and Theo was considered appropriate for a placement, his mother felt that the accommodation was too far away from her home. Further visits were made over the next five weeks to alternative providers, including an overnight stay.

Finally, a Transfer Agreement between Hesley, Lambeth and the new placement was signed and Theo was accompanied to his new setting by two Fullerton House staff members. Comprehensive information was provided to the new carers, seeking to stand Theo in the best stead for his future. This included providing review documents and risk assessments as well as reports from a Consultant Paediatrician, Consultant Child Psychiatrist, GP, Dentist and Optician. Theo also took with him some of his favourite and personal belongings from Fullerton House, and certificates from his Key Stage 4 and Post 16 education.

After a challenging period settling in, during which the Hesley Group staff kept in contact with Theo, he eventually settled well at school and his behaviour began to improve again.

Throughout the process, ongoing meetings occurred between all the relevant agencies to ensure a cohesive and well managed transition was made. Transition meetings were sometimes

arranged to coincide with a review meeting and were attended by a Team Manager, a Care Services Manager and Theo's Key Worker at Fullerton House, alongside representatives from Lambeth consisting of his Child Development Social Worker, Educational Psychologist and the Transitions Manager.

Crucially, such arrangements allow for a holistic approach to be taken in identifying the needs of the young person during the transition process, and for planning to be conducted accordingly. Input around care services, education, speech and language needs, behaviour management issues and health, must all be taken into account.

In this example, the transition process was underpinned by a strong partnership approach between a range of agencies up to and during its implementation. This secured valuable continuity in settling the young person into the next stage of care and preparing for access to other activities and services.



Case Study 6: Enabling young people to contribute to their own Care Plans – Birmingham City Council and the National Fostering Agency



Raising the possibility of a care placement with a child is a pivotal moment and this can often act as the catalyst for young people to consider their lives and the direction they wish them to take. It is vital that this new awareness is nurtured throughout the placing process and beyond.

National Fostering Agency (NFA) believe it is essential that, as far as possible, young people are encouraged to contribute to their own care plans and that this is a vital part of consistently meeting the specific needs of individual young people throughout their care experience.

Case study: Linda had experienced a childhood where her major needs were neglected and as a result became withdrawn with low self esteem, suffering teasing and bullying at school. The challenge was to work alongside Linda to give her the confidence to identify and express her own needs.

It was within this context that Birmingham City Council, who were responsible for Linda's care, looked to place her with a foster family who would provide the nurture that she needed. A referral was made to the preferred providers of fostering services, NFA, whereby Birmingham sought to match Linda with a foster family who could offer an environment that met her circumstances, background and personality.

Linda was involved throughout the decision making process and although she struggled to articulate her feelings, she gradually became more comfortable with her social worker and their talks about foster care became easier. They

discussed two potential foster families, and talked about family membership, pets, what they liked doing and how near they were to Linda's school.

After some home visits, Linda eventually decided that she would prefer to live with Vanessa – an NFA single parent foster carer. Linda found Vanessa likeable and had lots in common with her, she felt safe and secure, something she had not felt for several years. As a result, it was agreed that NFA's proposal for placement with Vanessa was the most appropriate for Linda.

Vanessa and Linda bonded as they unpacked together and by the time of the Placement Agreement Meeting Linda had gained the confidence to tackle questions about school, her health, her routine and what she liked doing. She felt comfortable enough to speak a little and, importantly, to understand all of what was being said.

Despite initially spending long periods of time alone in her room and speaking only sparingly, over time Linda grew close to Vanessa, who was able to encourage her to join a drama club at school and attend a gym together where they could exercise to music they both enjoyed. In this way Vanessa was able to build trust with Linda by identifying common ground through music and shared interests, rather than through more conventional methods.

By her second statutory review, Linda was clearly expressing her own views and she was genuinely beginning to understand what is

meant by 'hobbies and interests'. Linda could say what parts of her lifestyle were contributing to her health and the increase in her self esteem was evident. Crucially, Linda was able to articulate what she enjoyed, what she found more difficult, how the professionals could best help her in her ongoing care plan and, more importantly, in her development into a confident young adult.

In order for young people to make a contribution to their care planning, they must have the confidence and self esteem to communicate their thoughts and feelings in their own right. Often, where children have experienced abuse and received minimal respect, their sense of self worth is extremely low. There is often also a tendency amongst these vulnerable young people to feel that they have no right to have or express a view on anything. This sense remains until a bond of trust forms and the young person gains the confidence to understand that 'it's OK to say what you feel'.

Both local authorities and service providers have a duty to not only work out what they believe to be the best placement option for a young person, but also to consider the voice of the child being placed both throughout the decision making process and on into the setting itself.



Case Study 7: Outcomes based commissioning – The London Borough of Waltham Forest and the SENAD Group



Waltham Forest Council and the SENAD Group are aware of the long-term benefit of basing commissioning decisions on the potential for positive outcomes for each young person and have found that adopting such an attitude is both cost-efficient and positive for children's development.

In order for commissioners to choose the best provider to aid a young person's progress, a thorough assessment of need is imperative. SENAD work strategically to identify young people's behaviour 'pressure points', through a functional behaviour assessment helping to improve outcomes and aid progress for each young person's future development.

Case study: Derek has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning difficulties and presented severely challenging behaviour. Prior to his admission to SENAD's Aran Hall setting in July 2004, Derek was accommodated alone in a large, isolated farmhouse and cared for by three staff for 24 hours a day. These intensive measures were necessary due to the risk he presented to staff and peers, through absconding and physical aggression, frequently damaging property and furniture.

Waltham Forest were keen to build in outcome measurements within a care and education plan to support Derek in maximising his independence and improving his quality of life. Progress was monitored regularly via school and care home reports and review meetings.

Initially, Derek settled well into the school

routine but within a few weeks he was testing boundaries and presenting disruptive and aggressive behaviour on a regular basis, which limited his access to the community. A functional behaviour assessment identified that many of his behaviours were motivated by restrictions to his preferred activities e.g. computer games. Derek's attention span was initially very short but was increased by making access to preferred activities contingent on him completing his class work, aided by pictorial timetables and a work-play procedure.

Derek has been supported to maximise his independence and his progress is judged against the Every Child Matters outcomes framework:

- **Be Healthy** - Derek now gets out of bed without protest, carries out personal care tasks without prompts, listens to instructions and is quick to calm if agitated. He has a balanced diet and enjoys sport.
- **Stay Safe** – Change in routine unsettles Derek, which his mother found difficult to manage on home visits. However, he has been supported to cope with these disruptions and now goes home regularly. He has also been on a plane with his mother on two occasions and returned to the school without any difficulties.
- **Enjoy and achieve** - Derek has passed two modules of the ASDAN 'Towards Independence' award, works for long periods and is keen to show off his work to staff and visitors. His handwriting has improved and he will now use 'please' and 'thank you' without staff prompts.
- **Make a positive contribution** - Derek is learning about recycling and contributes to the school's internal programme, with a view to

volunteering for similar work in the community. He has made friends, often going to sit next to peers if they are upset and has formed lots of strong relationships with adults.

- **Achieve economic wellbeing** - Derek is working towards greater independence by developing his social and community living skills through visits to shops, restaurants, swimming and bowling etc. His behaviour in the community is generally good and continues to improve.

Making placement decisions based on predicted delivery of outcomes is an effective way of creating significant financial benefits. Indeed, in the case of a child with complex needs, who can often become aggressive, placements that can manage this kind of behaviour can generate significant savings - approximately £500,000 in Derek's case - as increased independence and less intensive staff support all allow for financial savings.

When placements are made on the basis of outcomes, young people are ultimately helped towards greater levels of independence and can enjoy a higher quality of life. Waltham Forest's commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for young people has provided Derek with a positive experience at Aran Hall and he is planning a transition to a supported living placement close to his mother, where he will live with another adult and have a support worker. This is a step that would have been unthinkable were it not for a commitment to identifying his needs and working towards outcomes that would reflect real progress for Derek.



conclusions

We hope that the case studies in this report have illustrated that, with some innovative thinking and a high regard for the individuality of each child and their requirements, positive outcomes can be achieved even for those with the most complex needs.

In particular, the illustrations used have indicated several key areas in which a cohesive approach to commissioning and service provision between local authorities and providers can lead to successful placements for children across the spectrum of need.

Commissioning in challenging times:

At the time of producing this report, Britain is seeking ways to weather very challenging economic conditions. As the government and local authorities, look to increase efficiency in spending on public services, local authorities and providers will be ever more aware of the need to balance the delivery of good outcomes for children with complex needs with a drive for value for money.

Ultimately, the process can be strengthened through developing a focus on outcomes based commissioning, where local authorities have confidence in providers' ability to deliver against agreed outcomes for each child's case. Good commissioning supports effective, needs-matched investment for young people, which will secure an efficient high quality delivery of services to help young people with complex needs towards an independent future.

Understanding local needs and mapping local provision

Children's services departments have a responsibility to understand and plan for the needs of their local community. It is crucial that councils, through effective commissioning processes, define the nature of local needs and the outcomes that providers will be judged against.

When councils commission externally, those providers of services must strive for flexible provision and delivery of outcomes in an effective, and caring, way. Honesty is key and providers must avoid accepting a young person on the basis of placement availability alone, but rather seek to respond effectively to the needs of each young person through thorough placement matching.

However, as this publication has shown, ongoing monitoring and placement planning based on a shared vision and flexible attitude on both sides makes the process of meeting local need increasingly effective.

Communication between providers and commissioners

The ability to understand the need of a community and to effectively meet it relies on a good working relationship between local authority children's services and those who provide the services that they commission.

Communication is key to meeting need in the community and open channels of dialogue between local authorities and providers allows for effective care decisions to be made every step of the way, especially during challenging transitions.

The case studies in this report have shown what can be achieved through ongoing, timely interaction between councils and providers. Though this, young people benefit from the application of innovative thinking to professional relationships and decision making, ultimately resulting in improved outcomes and well-being.

Open discussions around needs, outcomes and challenges, as well as good representations from all parties at review meetings, will ensure that thinking around any case is comprehensive. This 'community' approach to service provision will ensure that there are no gaps in the care provided resulting from communication breakdown, but rather that all the child's needs are assessed and recorded as part of a holistic approach.

Fundamental to underpinning successful placements is ensuring that a dialogue is maintained not just between the 'experts' but also, vitally, with the child. The benefits are significant and the case studies provided in this paper show that when provided with the opportunity to have an input, young people invariably end up more engaged and confident.

Avoid placement breakdown by placing according to need

At the heart of this project remains the importance of commissioning according to the needs of each child. Commissioning success is evident when both providers and authorities are prepared to think innovatively about the best possible package of provision for individual young people.

For many of the young people who feature in this report, the nature of their placement can be the deciding factor in enabling them to successfully grow through the transition into an independent, healthy adulthood. Children with complex needs clearly require sensitive nurture and support that has been matched to their specific requirements. The process is often slow, but is fundamental to helping a vulnerable child flourish.

Once again, underpinning such an approach is both understanding and good communication between local authorities and providers.

Planning strategically for future needs

One advantage of maintaining a focus on the individual needs of the child is that tailored packages of support are far more likely to lead to improved outcomes as children respond to the care that has been designed specifically for them.

A long term view of service commissioning will generate the further advantage of different and potentially more creative thinking processes in services provision. If long term commissioning and strategic planning is undertaken effectively, the need for spot purchasing will become increasingly less common and young people will reach a fuller measure of independence and achievement.

In summary:

When good partnerships and child-centred commissioning are developed, the placement process emerges steadier and less reliant on spot purchasing to accommodate demand.

Working with providers to develop lasting partnerships and understanding is key to developing commissioning arrangements that are robust and are equipped with a detailed knowledge of the needs of the child matched by services offered. This allows commissioner and provider to work together to help ensure that each young person is placed in the best setting for them, that will allow them to develop successfully into adulthood.

When local authorities and service providers are 'in it together' the partnership delivers happier placements, better outcomes, and greater efficiency in the use of resources.

about the LGA

Based in Westminster, close to the Houses of Parliament and Whitehall, the Local Government Association (LGA) is a voluntary lobbying organisation, acting as the voice of the local government sector, and an authoritative and effective advocate on its behalf.

In fulfilling this role the LGA focuses on the issues that matter most to councils, working with and on behalf of our membership to deliver our shared vision of an independent and confident local government sector, where local priorities drive public service improvement in every city, town and village and every councillor acts as a champion for their ward and for the people they represent.

We work as part of the wider LGA group to assist our members to:

- shape public debate;
- influence policy and practice in public services;
- support innovation and excellence that enables councils and their partnerships to meet future challenges;
- help councillors exercise their democratic accountability and leadership effectively;
- ensure that the sector attracts, retains and develops staff with the skills it needs.

The 466 authorities who make up the LGA cover England and Wales. Together they represent over 50 million people and spend around £113 billion a year on local services.

They include county councils, metropolitan district councils, English unitary authorities, London boroughs, shire district councils and Welsh unitary authorities, along with fire authorities, police authorities, national park authorities and passenger transport authorities.

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about the Children's Services Development Group

The Children's Services Development Group is comprised of leading independent providers of specialist care and education services, who work together to debate issues relating to policy. All the members work closely with local authorities to provide services for children with very complex and challenging needs – including looked after children.

Members of the CSDG are the Cambian Group, the Castlereare Group, Foster Care Associates, the Hesley Group, National Fostering Agency, Northernicare and the SENAD Group,

CSDG brings together the leading providers of residential care, foster care and specialist education services to create a platform for constructive debate about the future of the children's services sector.

The group's activities are targeted to encourage greater understanding of the common issues facing providers and commissioners, who are together trying to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. This is achieved by building strong working relationships with central government officials, local authorities, parliamentarians, children's rights campaigners and the media.

CSDG membership is open to children's services providers that meet the following criteria:

- Children's wellbeing and individual needs prioritised in the delivery of services.
- Maintain consistently high ratings from regulatory authorities.
- Active support for, and delivery of, an outcomes-focused approach to children's services.
- Willingness to engage constructively in policy debates.
- Desire to invest in high quality services and to innovate to improve outcomes for children.

about individual members:

The Cambian Group - With twelve established schools and colleges, Cambian Education Services is the largest provider of specialist residential education and care for young people and adults with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome (AS) in the United Kingdom. Following an outcome focused approach, Cambian specialises in helping young people with ASD gain the education, living skills, and confidence required for a fulfilling and productive life. www.cambianeducation.com

The CastleCare Group - The CastleCare Group is a leading provider of education and residential care placements for young people with very challenging behaviours and special educational needs. It specialises in working with young people who have complex emotional difficulties that are often expressed through challenging behaviour and issues with social relationships. www.castlecaregroup.co.uk

Northerncare - Northerncare is one of the UK's largest providers of residential children's homes with DCSF registered education in the UK. They look after children and young people aged 5-19 who are in the care of Local Authorities, and provide services across the country from North Yorkshire to East Sussex, and from Somerset to Norfolk. www.northern-care.co.uk

Foster Care Associates - Foster Care Associates (FCA) is the UK's largest independent fostering agency operating in partnership with Local Authorities and Health Trusts throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. FCA provides quality foster care, placing the needs of the looked after child firmly at the centre of the care process. www.thefca.co.uk

The Hesley Group - The Hesley Group offer children and adult services for people with complex needs, challenging behaviours and severe learning difficulties, mainly arising from autism. The Group is dedicated to providing education, care and therapeutic services of the highest quality to help each student and resident develop their range of skills and maximise their full potential. www.hesleygroup.co.uk

National Fostering Agency - Founded in 1995, the National Fostering Agency (NFA) is one of the most experienced and long established independent fostering agencies in the United Kingdom. NFA provide high quality foster care that places children's welfare at the centre of its work. They partner closely with local authorities and foster carers to create the best possible opportunities and outcomes for children. www.nfa.ws

The SENAD Group - The SENAD Group was formed in 2003 and has successfully created a portfolio of care homes and schools for children and young people with a range of special educational and care needs, together with care homes to support them into adulthood. They design flexible, bespoke care, education and therapy programmes that meet the most unique and challenging needs. www.senadgroup.com

For more information about the group, please contact the CSDG Secretariat via: www.csdg.org.uk/CSDG_contactus.html





Local Government Association

The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 400 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



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