

Case study: Northamptonshire Children's Trust

The Challenge

- Managing tight budgets and financial pressures in children's care
- Working with providers to help shape future provision
- Having clear visibility of the costings making up a package
- Reviewing spot purchase placements

The Solution

- Using CareCubed Children's as part of a package of tools to aid negotiations and understand costs
- Working with CareCubed experts to train brokers and commissioners in negotiation skills
- Using CareCubed to benchmark new provision and work with suppliers strategically

Why CareCubed ?

- CareCubed is the only nationally recognised and independent solution used by both providers and commissioners
- CareCubed is increasingly being used by local authorities and becoming standard practice in commissioning and reviewing care placements
- CareCubed is available to providers and supports collaboration between provider and commissioner
- The CareCubed ensures packages are right-sized and outcomes focussed
- iESE is a not-for-profit organisation committed to supporting the sector which continually develops CareCubed based on feedback from commissioners and providers

Results

- Increased understanding of the true cost of care versus the price
- Creating a sustainable local market for providers and children
- Embedding a culture change in the way of working with providers where there is an open, transparent and consistent approach
- Upskilled workforce who are confident to discuss costs and negotiate
- The amount of spend avoided/money saved to date is equivalent to £3.2m per annum



Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) was formerly children's social care within Northamptonshire County Council. While NCT is owned by North and West Northamptonshire Councils, it has been managed and run independently by a board since 2020.

NCT started using CareCubed in October 2023. They began using the tool for reviewing existing packages for children but have since rolled out its use across its brokerage team for new residential and independent supported accommodation placements. In addition, CareCubed is also now being used strategically to scope out new provision with providers.

Louise De Chiara, Assistant Director Commissioning, Transformation & Governance Northamptonshire Children's Trust, heads up the brokerage and commissioning teams. As the person who signs off on each placement, she is held accountable for spend and managing budgets. She says procuring CareCubed has been really positive: "Our placement spend and budget, like everywhere, is under huge pressure. It is really positive for me to know colleagues have got this extra tool in their belt to be able to have evidence-based negotiations and that these are based on what the actual costs should be, opposed to what we have got used to paying. I am reassured knowing that we have that robust benchmark in place which stands up to scrutiny and has delivered immediate results," De Chiara explains.

While cost-avoidance has been achieved and there is better understanding of the true cost of care, CareCubed is also being used alongside a new way of assessing children's needs. Where there is a disparity, for example, the costs are high, but the needs are low, or vice versa, it is helping check that the child is receiving the right level of support. "It has helped us to scrutinise what the child is getting. We don't want to be harshly negotiating on the costs that go directly into supporting the child and delivering positive outcomes, it is the other costs that we need to focus on," De Chiara explains.

So far, across just a small number of placements, NCT has achieved a combination of cost avoidance and savings of £3.2m per annum through using CareCubed. Sometimes it is highlighting outlying packages or providers that are higher or lower than the benchmark cost, and sometimes it is helping identify mistakes, such as duplicate information. "In a couple of cases we have noticed that costs have been duplicated so it allows us to query that. These are just genuine mistakes in the way the costs have been built up, but it gives us an extra level of scrutiny" she adds.



Case study: Northamptonshire Children's Trust

"It is really positive for me to know colleagues have got this extra tool in their belt to be able to have evidence-based negotiations and that these are based on what the actual costs should be, opposed to what we have got used to paying. I am reassured knowing that we have that robust benchmark in place which stands up to scrutiny and has delivered immediate results."

Louise De Chiara,
Assistant Director Commissioning,
Transformation & Governance
Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

"Working with iESE has been really good. All of the staff who work in the CareCubed team are really approachable, easily contactable and they don't mind going back over things if necessary. We have developed really good relationships, and they have been happy to make tweaks to the tool for us when needed."

Sally Phillips,
Team Manager for the Home and
Support Finding Team.

Occasionally, the tool highlights providers which are pricing higher than the benchmarks, but CareCubed has given staff the confidence to ask for more detail so that value for money can be demonstrated. Sally Phillips, Team Manager for the Home and Support Finding Team, says the tool has given staff a "good understanding of the true cost of care". "We know there needs to be profit for providers to grow, train, develop and to take on risk, but there is a difference between profit and profiteering. Recently I looked at a case where the provider was asking for £17,000 per week where they said they were paying their support staff £40 per hour but that is more like a registered manager's fee. Having CareCubed in place gives us that transparency and pulls on local data to allow us to sense check."

One of the biggest benefits in using CareCubed has been that it has given commissioners and brokers the basis to openly and transparently discuss costs with providers. Phillips says the training provided by iESE on negotiating was very beneficial. "We had some really good training which has given us more confidence that it is okay to ask providers to be transparent and explain that it is our fiduciary duty to get value from the public purse," Phillips says.

While some staff might have seen CareCubed as an extra task to start with, it is now becoming part of NCT's culture. Rob Turner, Placement Review Manager, works on reviewing packages and jointly funded care. "CareCubed is helping the brokers build their general knowledge, get a feel for prices and feel more confident in their negotiations. After a while we started to see staff enjoying using the tool because it can help them feel like they've achieved a good result," Turner explains.

And while some providers might have been resistant at first, this is changing. "Sometimes it is difficult – people don't enjoy talking about finances. However, the providers we would like to keep working with over and over again are those who understand our situation with financial scrutiny. Brokers have got their confidence up now to say, 'we want to work with you, but we do require this, we can't move forward without it'. We are asking authentically, being transparent and saying, 'we've got a budget that is challenging, and we are asking you to be aware of our position'. It is embedding a change in culture with our providers. The more we do it, the more providers understand, and that sets us in good stead going forward," he adds.

Phillips agrees that the process is becoming easier as the use of CareCubed becomes commonplace both within NCT and local authorities in general: "Providers are expecting us to ask for greater detail now. When we first started using CareCubed they were surprised, but now they are expecting it, and they are aware of our requirements when making their offers."

De Chiara, Turner and Phillips all agree that adopting CareCubed has been positive for NCT. "Working with iESE has been really good. All of the staff who work in the CareCubed team are really approachable, easily contactable and they don't mind going back over things if necessary. We have developed really good relationships, and they have been happy to make tweaks to the tool for us when needed," Phillips adds.