

Social Care Benchmarking

Looked After Children

Customer case study

For the past eight years, CIPFA's Social Care Benchmarking Looked After Children (LAC) club have enabled Lincolnshire County Council to understand, plan and execute improved service provision as well as helping the Children's Services team demonstrate value for money. The depth of information available within the benchmarking reports has had a significant impact on the way Lincolnshire County Council has developed the delivery of fostering services and the expansion of their in-house fostering services.

'The LAC benchmarking club is a very useful tool allowing users to keep a track on statistical neighbour comparisons. As a scoping exercise, it identifies where improvement might be able to be achieved, providing answers to questions relating to the service we provide and year-on-year changes in terms of cost, performance, trends and impact on service provision. Without hesitation, I have and would recommend CIPFA's Social Care Benchmarking services.'

Mark Rainey, Children's Services Commissioning Manager, Lincolnshire County Council

Lincolnshire County Council first started using CIPFA's benchmarking products around eight years ago. The decision was taken to become part of the LAC benchmarking club to help demonstrate where the authority sits compared to others, which in turn, helps them remain among the upper echelons of service provision. The LAC reports help Lincolnshire County Council identify where improvements could be achieved, in terms of their residential, fostering and supported accommodation services.



Customer:
Lincolnshire County Council

Website:
www.lincolnshire.gov.uk

No of Employees:
Over 3,000

Customer profile:
Lincolnshire is the fourth largest county in England with diverse communities dispersed across a large and diverse landscape. The county is predominantly rural and home to approximately 743,410 residents. Approximately 22% of the total population is aged 0-19 years (160,880), of which 75.4% (121,260) is aged 5 to 19 years.

The vision for Children's Services in Lincolnshire is putting children first by working together with families to enhance children's present and future lives. Lincolnshire are driven by aspirations for young people and are committed to developing a family friendly, safe and aspirational place for children and young people to grow up in. Although serious financial challenges continue to plague the public sector, Lincolnshire County Council is committed to delivering the best possible services and listening to the voice of families, to ensure the most vulnerable are protected.

Research and Analytics subscriptions include:

- Looked After Children
- Special Educational Needs

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Mark Rainey, Lincolnshire County Council

Mark discussed the business challenges that led Lincolnshire County Council to consider CIPFA’s comparative data sets as a basis for future planning and re-modelling services.

“Initially there was insufficient in-house provision of foster care and as a result, children were either being placed under independent fostering arrangements, or if individual needs couldn’t be met, the fall-back was residential care or out of county placements. We wanted to bring the children back into the county and preferably offer provision through an expansion of in-house fostering service. Now we are one of the largest within the current CIPFA benchmarking club and possibly across the UK in terms of the overall percentage linked to a comprehensive in-house fostering service.

Demonstrating value for money is vital for the future roadmap of the authority’s accommodation with support services. For example when comparing the cost of in-house residential against external residential, we may wish to explore whether it is feasible to invest in another residential home. With regard to supported accommodation, it’s quite useful because we can breakdown the cost elements of those requiring minimal support and accommodation services, through to the other extreme involving young adults with intense needs who want to live independently, but require a great deal of supervision.

When considering the cost associated with all possible variations of circumstances, the total expenditure outlay for supported accommodation by the authority continues to be substantial and requires further analysis to make such expenditure more effective.”

CIPFA is the only professional accountancy body to specialise in public services – Mark commented that this was an important reason why Lincolnshire had remained loyal customers of CIPFA for many years, and went on to explain how CIPFA reports are used, and by whom.

“Working with a public sector only provider is important to us, as is the nature of the reports. They are simple to follow and being as familiar as we are with them now, it’s beneficial knowing how to draw out the right information. The report

provides an overview through the report summary, this is the first page that I turn to. Value and cost are two separate things and the level of detail demonstrates the composition of percentages, for example in terms of how the authority’s in-house fostering helps contribute to low cost, not simply in terms of being less expensive, but mainly down to the fact that there is such a high percentage of it.

Regarding comparisons, quite often the report indicates the difference between averages, linking some findings to volume and some to issues around cost. That information is valuable to the service area in terms of trying to reduce the number of LAC coming into care and by highlighting those elements of the report, it helps to provide a focus for future actions.

Report content can be re-purposed, for example directorate management teams (DMT) may be provided with a summary to show current performance and often these elements might be used in official strategy or policy documents. They are also a useful tool to use for pre-procurement market engagement events to show where the local authority currently sits.

Typically, the LAC benchmarking report is used in: the annual fostering report | in-house fostering documents | reports to DMT and the Corporate Parenting sub-group | reports relating to internal residential homes | Sufficiency strategy and performance | Accommodation strategy to highlight pressure points | evidencing budget setting plans.”

Mark discussed how Lincolnshire have benefitted directly from using the CIPFA LAC benchmarking service?

“I believe it helps Children’s Services focus minds on expanding and maintaining the in-house foster service. It directed us to invest in a small marketing team to ensure we can keep the cycle moving and service provision flowing, as it’s crucial that we replace carers leaving the service, in order to help maintain the capacity to function efficiently.

We have done some work with other authorities who have experienced issues around areas of their own Children’s Services. We recommended CIPFA’s Social Care benchmarking clubs to help them get a handle on their costs and performance, understanding how they compare with others.”



For more information visit www.cipfa.org/benchmarking
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