

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel

DATE	29th July 2026
REPORT OF	Katie Brown – Director of Adult Social Care
SUBJECT	Strengths Based Approach Programme in Adult Social Care
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The council has two strategic priorities – Stronger Economy and Stronger Communities. The delivery of adult social care is a key to delivering the strategic objective of strong communities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The programme underway will provide a better experience for the people of North East Lincolnshire who require advice or support from Adult Social Care. It will ensure the voice of people is central in all care planning activity, community and voluntary resources are fully utilised, and any paid for services commissioned by the council are maximised to ensure best value for money.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Health and Care Scrutiny panel are asked to note the detail of the Strengths Based Approach programme and outcomes achieved, seek any clarity required and determine Scrutiny oversight moving forward.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Adult social work (Care Act 2014 duties) is delivered by three community interest companies (CIC's) via joint or lead commissioning arrangements. The decision to contract for external delivery of social work functions, and to establish a specialist social work practice, was taken in the 2013 and has remained in place for a number of years. Whilst this delivery method was considered innovative at the time, North East Lincolnshire is now the only council in England that has delegated its Care Act responsibilities in this way. Focus Independent Adult Social Work CIC continues to deliver the majority of Care Act duties on behalf of North East Lincolnshire Council.

Assurance on delivery of adult social care is managed via regular performance and contract meetings between the CICs, council and the ICB.

CQC undertook an assessment of compliance with Care Act duties in August 2025. This was reported on in December 2025 with a resulting score of 59 and a requires improvement rating. Whilst the overall assessment process resulted in a high requires improvement (62 is start of good classification), the process identified areas that

needed improvement. These included:

- Support for unpaid carers
- Timely and proportionate assessments and reviews to support with management of demand.
- Improving use of Advocacy with Care Act work
- Improve uptake of Direct Payments (DP's) across system.
- Strengthen safeguarding processes.

Some of these issues had been previously identified as part of an ADASS Peer Review in 2024 and as part of the preparation work for CQC assessment so consideration had already been given to approaches that could help improve practice and provide a more person-centred way of working.

Strengths based approaches to practice are embedded in many areas across England. The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) states that:

Strengths-based (or asset-based) approaches focus on individuals' strengths (including personal strengths and social and community networks) and not on their deficits. Strengths-based practice is holistic and multidisciplinary and works with the individual to promote their wellbeing. It is outcomes led and not services led.

The approach can also be explained as follows.

- Strength-based practice is a way of working where we explore, **together**, someone's strengths, abilities and circumstances, rather than focusing on what they can't do.
- Working together, we build a **shared understanding of what matters**, and what needs to happen, to help the person live the best life possible, **focusing on their overall wellbeing**.
- We agree **personal outcomes** and use these to shape a plan that builds on what the person can do, and on their family, friends and community networks.
- We also talk openly about **what we're worried about, the risks**, and work together to manage the ups and downs, keeping everyone safe where we can.

Strengths based approaches are now an important aspect of the CQC inspection process and it is something they have referred to positively in other LA inspection reports.

The ambition for ASC in North East Lincolnshire is that we put people in the centre decision making (as they are the experts in their own situations) and collaborate creatively with them to find solutions to problems that may be short or long term. This would ensure person centred solutions are sought to individual situations. This approach will require a cultural change across all 3 providers of ASC support NEL. We believe that the development of a strengths-based approach is a key stepping stone to make this progress.

What we hope to see from using a strengths-based approach:

1. A proportionate approach being adopted at the front door (where people first come for support) to enable shorter wait for a Care Act assessment. Staff will be coached to be proportionate and listen to people rather than resort to completing full assessment formats. As a result staff will have more time to concentrate on working with people, rather than completing forms.
2. Better awareness of community and voluntary resources that can support peoples' outcomes in a different way. This will enable more people to be supported by local community and voluntary organisations, connecting them to their own communities.
3. Fewer short-term placements being used for people being discharged from hospital or who face a crisis out of hours, through better use of other resources. People who do need a short-term placement will be reviewed from day 2 with the intention to use a range of supports to enable them to be independent again at home in as short a time possible. This will reduce our spend on short term care and enable better use of resources.
4. People will have more timely reviews of care and staff will use their knowledge to right size the care required and supplement it with other local resources as identified. This will enable the strengths-based approach to be adopted, meaning support people receive is what they need at that time.
5. Carers will be offered the range of support they need in a timely and appropriate way. This will enable to have more control over their lives, with support tailored to support them as carers.
6. Reduced pressure on ASC budget

To develop a strengths-based framework for our area, NELC commissioned an independent organisation, Outcomes Matter, to develop a NEL approach. They worked with Focus and the council in the first instance.

Agreed workstreams were:

- Maximising the Front Door
- Embedding a reablement approach
- Strengths based Long Term Care
- Strengths based reviews.
- Supporting Carers

- Embedding strengths-based approaches in finance and brokerage

Enablers of this work were identified as:

- Harnessing digital and AI
- Reinvigorating innovation
- Applying data and insight
- Strengthening workforce culture
- VSCE and partner collaboration

To date the work programme is underway with some areas showing progress as shown below.

Work Area	Reason for Work	Update	RAG
Purposeful Reviews	Ensure reviews are completed in a timely manner and strengths based. Make best use of community/voluntary resources to meet needs. Ensure people have the right support.	• Strengths based review forms developed and being trialled. • Staff require further coaching and development re using strengths-based language	
Supporting Carers	Strengthen the role of carers in NEL and ensure they are listened to and receive the support they require when they ask for it. This will mean more Carers Assessments are undertaken and people are offered appropriate support as a result.	• Carers advised front door staff re use of language • Carers action plan agreed – more work required with CPG and Navigo • Carers DP leaflet developed with support from carers • Staff carers guide also developed and can be used across the system • Working towards CPG staff also completing carers assessments as part of their role • The numbers of Carers assessments offered was 117 in March 2026 (up from November 2025). The numbers completed was 93 in March 2026 (also up from Nov 2025) and the number of assessments declined in March 2026 was 24(a considerable drop from	

		November 2025). The numbers of carers receiving services has increased in some areas for example the number of carer sitting episodes has increased over the past year from 187 in May 2025 to 217 in March 2026.	
Maximising the Front Door (SPA)	When people first contact Focus, they will receive a prompt response and advice that can help them meet outcomes. People who do require an assessment will wait less time to have a review and the review will be strengths based. This work will result in fewer care act assessments being undertaken and time saved by staff can be re used for other tasks.	- Trial of AI system for recording that is saving 40 minutes per call. - New proportionate paperwork to be developed to save staff more time with forms. - System SPA review underway led by CPG.	
Data and Insights dashboard	Enable managers at Focus to have accurate information about demand and work in all areas. This will mean resource can be re allocated as necessary and enable long and short-term planning about development.	- New strategic dashboard for Focus is being developed at present. - Current Focus performance data continues to be reported to the council monthly. This has shown continued high waits at front door. - Focus have used data in a targeted initiative to reduce these waits and because of high level scrutiny, over a week they reduced the list from 371 to 313.	
Strengthening Safeguarding	Ensure safeguarding approach in NEL is meeting Care Act standards and referral routes are straight forward. This will mean people know where to go when support is required feel safer and better protected.	- ADASS Peer Review of service hosted at Focus has taken place. - Feedback has recently been given with strengths and challenges: - Data quality – need to triangulate data - Involve people with	

		lived experience re quality assuring processes and service. - OOH – need to ensure same training opportunities are available to all staff. - Better access to prevention support. • New professional's referral pathway has been launched.	
Reablement approach	Increase the numbers of people receiving reablement at home. The service has shown people who receive the service and go on to need a long-term support at home package, have 10 hours less per week than before the reablement support. This means that peoples independence is maximised and that the council makes better use of the resources it commissions.	• Work underway with CPG (who provide the service) to enhance capacity. This will include a review of pathways and handoffs between organisations. • Cases declined by reablement have been reviewed and actions are underway to improve this.	
Strengths based recording	New way of recording our conversations with people. This will include the development of AI tools and electronic recording formats to ensure consistent approach and less staff time spent filling out forms. This will free up time for other tasks.	• New review format being trialled. This is strengths based and emphasises what is working well for people and how additional community/voluntary services can be accessed to support them. Feedback to date from staff is positive and it is a key element of the overall programme. • AI system being used for calls at front door. • Other electronic forms and referral pathways will be needed. As part of this work has started to maximise the functionality of system.	
Finance	Ensure people are given	• Financial data will be part	

	correct information at the right time about financial assessments and that they are clear about our charging policy. Ensure assessments are completed in a timely way and that benefit maximisation is applied. This will enable better financial returns for the council in terms of contributions for care.	of new system dashboard for Focus – to include waits for financial assessments.	
Digital and AI	Enable a clear AI approach for staff involved in ASC. This will ensure streamlined systems for better customer experience and free up staff time for other work. It will also ensure better access to information about services in NEL.	• Trial of AI system at front door is saving 40 minutes per call. • Quality Assurance AI tool under discussion for use on case work in Focus. • Online assessment forms also being considered.	
Advocacy	Ensure a robust advocacy service is available to people in NEL area. This will ensure their voice is heard and that decisions are made with their involvement. The service should also be developed to support with care assessments.	• Procurement of service is now underway. • We are collaborating with frontline social workers to reset the use of advocacy that supports strengths-based practice.	
Workforce and culture	Consistency around practice and not using deficit-based approaches within respective CIC's needs to be addressed. This will enable a better understanding of their role as a commissioned service as well as developing a clearer NEL adult social care culture across the system.	• A developing culture of innovation is evident at Focus. For example: - Agile daily meetings to deal with emerging cases and demand. - Ongoing coaching with SLT. - Work with QUEST (training arm of Focus) to development internal systems to continue/maintain strengths-based approach through training/embedding programmes.	

Current Position

We have seen some improvement in practice and process it is too early to say that permanent change has been embedded. For example, the numbers of people waiting for assessments remains high and the number of cases requiring review remains substantial. The Outcomes Matter contract has now concluded, and this has allowed for reflection and consideration of how best to move forward.

There is still a need for transformational activity to continue to maximise the benefits we expect to see because of the programme.

Next Steps

- Although the Outcomes Matter involvement has ended, these work pilots are continuing.
- Consideration is being given as to how to maintain change at the front door and ensure AI and better processes are adopted.
- Individual elements of the programme are being reviewed to ensure the transformation culture is maintained and enhanced within Focus.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the positive start, a number of risks remain with this programme:

1. This is a significant piece of transformative work that will require up to 18 months further work.
2. Transformational capacity would be required for the next stages of this programme. This is currently being explored.
3. Consistency of social care practice across the three CIC's continues to present challenges.
4. Demographic pressures amongst over 65's and 85's age groups across NEL is projected to increase above the national average. The numbers of working age adults (those aged between 18 and 64) who require support with health and social care needed is also increasing.
5. Changes in practice could potentially lead to an increase in negative feedback in the short term.

Equally, the implementation of the programme allows a number of opportunities:

1. The opportunity to work in a way that puts people at the centre of solution focussed strengths-based approaches.
2. Many staff within Focus are committed to ensuring the programme develops and their enthusiasm is recognisable.
3. To enable better demand management for ASC services by implementing new processes and ways of approaching contacts at the front door of Focus.
4. Reduce the number of assessments and allow better focussing of resource into reviews.
5. Allow for better maximisation of budgets and commissioned services within ASC.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

The programme of work underway will have a positive reputational impact as people will not have to wait as long for assessments and this will be beneficial to them. There may be some negative feedback as services are reviewed and right sized as the review process rolls out.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

To date the work with Outcomes Matter has been funded by monies approved at BDG. Further phases will require additional funding and a request for this will need to be made.

Charging should be unaffected by this work overall with income from charging remaining stable should the number of paid services commissioned remain stable and not increase.

Overall, the work will help to deliver better value for money for the council as well as achieving better outcomes for the people who present to adult social care. The embedding of the strengths-based approach will ensure that community and voluntary options be used where possible to meet eligible needs and improve the overall wellbeing of our residents.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

This report relates solely to services provided to adults.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no known climate change or environmental implications arising from the matters in this report.

7. MONITORING COMMENTS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance, or physical assets). As a result, no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

8. WARD IMPLICATIONS

All wards will be impacted by this work.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

10. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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