

An Analysis of 6 Stories of Local Area Coordination in Surrey: Positive Changes and Costs Avoided

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Introduction and Background

This report is part of a wider evaluation seeking to understand early impacts of Local Area Coordination in Surrey. We do this here by exploring changes achieved by six Surrey residents who had a Local Area Coordinator (LAC) alongside them over a period time. Our analysis draws on stories recalled by Surrey County Council employed LACs as part of a workshop facilitated by [Nick Sinclair](#) (the lead author of this report) from partners Community Catalysts CIC at the end of January 2024. Names and identifying details were not shared, respecting confidentiality.

The Workshop

The workshop had two components. The first sought to understand the ‘positioning’, ‘principles’ and ‘practices’ of the Surrey LAC’s work, and to what extent those contributed to the people achieving positive changes in their lives. The second sought to identify likely avoidable costs to the system as a consequence of those positive changes taking place.

Summary Findings

The stories and subsequent analysis (outlined below) highlighted themes and positive outcomes consistent with previous independent Local Area Coordination evaluations (see [LAC Network](#)). We found clear evidence of thoughtful and intentional design and Local Area Coordinator practice in line with the principles and fidelity of the approach. From those six stories alone, we also identified £25,000 of highly likely immediate costs avoided to the system as a result preventative action before crisis.

Analysis

Firstly, we look here at the ‘why’ and ‘how’ (i.e. the positioning, principles and practices of the Local Area Coordinators) before looking in depth at the likely negative outcomes (and associated system costs) avoided as a consequence.

Positioning: Our analysis finds that there was consistency across all 6 stories of the LACs being easily accessible and present in the places they were based in. Introductions (N.B. not referrals) happened flexibly and through a number of ways including:

- By a service partner (i.e. a link worker, adult social care team colleague, a housing team colleague etc).
- Through a family member, friend or local community member (someone that person already knew or trusted).
- Meeting as a consequence of the LAC being present in the local area.

It was evident that many of the introductions had come about as a result of the LAC having a ‘foot in two worlds’ (i.e. being positioned in the local community but employed in the service system at the same time). It was evident that there was sufficient trust, understanding and time to allow the introduction to happen in a way that felt right for each person. It was also clear that the relationships started from the point of that person’s vision of a good life, rather than assessing them for problems and signposting to services (although

exploring the important role of formal supports and services was not overlooked or dismissed either.)

Principles (of Local Area Coordination)

NB the emboldened words below represent some of the 10 principles of Local Area Coordination.

As part of the workshop, the Surrey LACs were asked to comment on how the 10 underpinning principles of Local Area Coordination (see [here](#)) were guiding their approach alongside people. Their reflections suggested they were very much being used, and were influencing the way that they worked. For example, the stories LACs shared indicated a commitment to seeing people as **citizens** (rather than service users), helping people access the right **information, choosing** and **controlling** their options, and retaining or regaining control of their lives while respecting **natural authority**. It was also evident that the Local Area Coordinators were supporting people already drawing on services to access those in a way that worked best (or better) for them. This reflects the principle of **services being complementary** to the person or family's vision for a better life. In all instances, positive **relationships** were fundamental, as was the LAC's knowledge and connection with the local **community**.

Practices

The stories shared highlighted many intentional practices that are consistent with good Local Area Coordination design (see Bartnik and Broad's [Power and Connection](#), 2021). These included taking the time to get to know someone, working at the person's pace, starting from someone's vision of a good life, and working with 'the whole person' and family, not just focusing on one presenting issue. The stories also showed LACs successfully wrestling with the tension of 'walking alongside people' rather than 'fixing' (doing things to/for people and offering solutions). However, it was also evident that LACs were not ignoring immediate and urgent concerns that people shared with them either. This balance between being alongside vs taking proportionate and responsive action when needed (for instance safeguarding) is known as '[Safe Waiting](#)' in the Local Area Coordination literature.

Local partnerships with people, families, informal groups, services and wider organisations were also evidently very healthy. The stories highlighted clear evidence of people and their families working better together with formal services as a consequence of the LAC helping them unpick and coordinate those processes and pathways. It was evident that LACs were helping people make sense of often confusing complexity, and choosing and controlling the right supports for them. There were good examples of practical planning, where the LAC had supported the person or family to identify their goals (whatever they might be) in the wider context of that person's gifts, skills and existing connections. This meant people were able to identify more practical, local solutions from within in their own lives, rather than being signposted to services unnecessarily (sometimes referred to as 'cycling' or 'bouncing' around the system).

Reasons for Introduction

Local Area Coordination is an approach designed to help people build their own resources and strategies, overcoming things that are getting in the way of them leading their good life as a connected, contributing citizen of their own community (ibid). Reasons for introduction to a LAC are varied but often (although not always) related to a particular personal concern. The six stories shared reflected diverse reasons for introduction with each relationship developing differently for each person. However, there were a number of thematic concerns identified in the analysis that repeated for several of the people. These are outlined in table 1 below.

Table 1: Presenting or Emergent Concerns Identified In the Stories.

Presenting or Emergent Concern	No of people's stories these were mentioned in (out of 6)
Housing concerns (conditions or facing eviction)	5
Financial and welfare concerns, un and underemployment	5
Concerns around children's welfare and educational attainment	3
Concerns for a loved one's health and wellbeing	4
Personal mental health deterioration	5
Low confidence and self-esteem/feeling lost	5
Physical health, disability and requirement for adaptation/supports	3
Social isolation and experience of loneliness	3
Abusive relationships and absence of physical safety	3
Feeling unable to share personal gifts/make a contribution	3

The themes in the stories suggested complex and interconnected concerns related to physical, emotional, mental and financial wellbeing, and the associate impacts of these for people, their families and loved ones. For most of the people, this had led to concerns around maintaining and sustaining accommodation. Some were concerned about their family members and loved ones not getting the support they needed. Almost everyone was reported to be experiencing decreasing mood and mental health. These multiple, interconnected yet overlapping concerns highlight the value of the Local Area Coordination approach not being specific to a particular group/service remit for who LACs can and can't work with (no assessment process, eligibility criteria to navigate and no time limits etc).

In all six stories it was evident that a combination of time, a listening ear and a commitment to 'walking alongside' and not fixing was valued and appreciated by both the person and the LAC. It was evident that in addressing concerns, the LACs were carefully working with and seeing 'the whole person', recognising and building upon people's gifts and strengths in their existing and potential networks of connection. Contextual understanding, time, good knowledge and good relationships were evidently significant factors in people achieving positive and sustainable outcomes in their lives.

In terms of relationships with services, in some instances the stories showed a positive uptake and increase of use of services on offer. That increase was balanced with a decrease in waiting in negativity and time and energy used approaching the 'wrong' services for support (including the cost of those services assessing people with the outcome of no eligibility.)

What Could Have Been?

As part of the workshop, the LACs had been asked to reflect on people's stories where they felt they could say with some confidence what the consequences for that person or family could have been without their involvement. This can be a challenge to the philosophy and approach of Local Area Coordination. The approach is deliberately designed not to be an 'intervention' or service per se, rather an intentional relationship that helps people nurture their resources, connections and own path towards change (see [Power and Connection](#), Bartnik and Broad, 2021). It is important to note therefore that this analysis does not seek to suggest the avoided negative outcomes be attributed to the LAC as that would go against the philosophy of the approach. However, outcomes should be recognised as a consequence of the resources and connections built through that person's relationship with their LAC.

As mentioned earlier, we have only included here the **highly likely** avoided negative outcomes and costs (according to the LAC recalling the story). However, we have also included a further table (Table 3) to show some perhaps less likely but still very possible negative outcomes that are associated with similar situations as they endure and get worse.

All data used here, unless stated otherwise, has been taken from the [GMCA's research team](#) (formerly New Economy) work on national Cost Benefit Analysis. Surrey system costs may be different.

Table 2: Highly Likely Avoided System Costs

Likely Negative Outcome Avoided	Associated cost description	Unit cost (£)	No. of people likely experiencing this (out of 6)	Total (£)
Mental health decline to the point of hospital admission	Combined cost of ambulance callout and response, triage at A&E and short hospital admission	3,562	3	10,686
Housing eviction	Average cost associated with simple eviction proceedings	880	4	3,520
Requirement for child in need assessment	Children in need average total cost of case management processes over a six-month period (standard cost)	1,865	1	1,865
Homelessness (application)	Homelessness application - average one-off and ongoing costs associated with statutory homelessness	3,189	2	6,378
Anti-social behaviour and police intervention	Anti-social behaviour and further necessary action (cost of dealing with incident)	780	1	780
Hospitalisation due to ill health	Hospital day cases - average cost per episode	1,228	1	1228
Increase in unnecessary GP appointment	Average cost per visit (according to The King's Fund)	42 x10 (420)	2 (we use here an assumption of 5 extra visits per person)	420
			Overall total	24,877

Table 3: Less Likely (But Still Possible) Negative Outcomes We’ve NOT Included In the Cost Analysis.

Negative Outcomes	Cost to:
Further hospital stays Outpatient appointment Ongoing treatment, ongoing GP appointments	Local Hospital Trust / NHS system
Costs of a more complex eviction	Local Authority (D&B)
Children taken into care and enduring care costs	Local Authority (County)
Enduring temporary accommodation placement costs for complex family circumstances	Local Authority (D&B)
Impact on victims and additional proceedings relating to housing etc	Police and Local Authorities
Surgery and specialist treatment	Local Hospital System

Conclusions

We conclude that Local Area Coordination in Surrey is embedding well. This appears to be as a consequence of good design, leadership and practice from LACs committed to working to the 10 principles and core practices associated with the approach/methodology.

The story analysis suggests people have moved closer to their vision of a good life and this is because of Local Area Coordination. This has led to reduced costs to the system. Research and more in-depth evaluation from other Local Area Coordination sites shows on average a 1:4 cost benefit ratio (see lacnetwork.org). Additional evaluation could be carried out internally through more focused data capture and cost consequence work following the findings of a separate National Evaluation (that was concluding at the time of writing) to gain more evidence and build a more in-depth understanding of the cost benefit for Surrey. Advances are currently underway in this area throughout the wider Local Area Coordination Network that Surrey will contribute to and benefit from.

Finally, it is important to note the biases in this analysis. Firstly, the stories were recalled by LACs. They had been asked to recall stories that were indicative and typical, however the people were not chosen through random sampling. Secondly, the workshop and analysis was carried out by Community Catalysts: the home of the Local Area Coordination Network. Independent research into impact is currently being carried out by Dr. Sandhya Duggal who has been asked to review this analysis and add some comments below:

“Local Area Coordination in Surrey is successfully embedding within the community, driven by its well-designed and principled approach. The early impacts observed through these six stories indicate not only improved individual outcomes but also substantial cost savings for the system. This report suggests that further, more in-depth research could elucidate the cost-benefit ratio of LAC, anticipated to align with positive evaluations from other regions. The findings offer a compelling case for the continued support and expansion of Local Area Coordination in Surrey and beyond.”