



ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
4 MARCH 2024

CQC ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES

Purpose of report

1. This report provides the Committee with a summary of the latest guidance from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) regarding the assessment process and feedback from the pilot inspections which were undertaken during the summer of 2023.
2. The report also refers to the latest versions of the Department's Self-Assessment and Improvement Plan, respectively attached as Appendices A and B to this report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

3. The Committee received regular updates on the CQC assurance process during 2022, as part of broader reports on the Social Care Reform Programme (on 7 November, 5 September, 6 June, and 24 January), as a standalone report focusing on the assurance Self-Assessment and Improvement Plan in March 2023 and a further report was produced in 4 September 2023 which provided an overview of the Annual Conversation preparation visit by Dr. Carol Tozer.
4. The Committee also reviewed and commented on the first draft of the Self-Assessment produced to support the assessment process at a standalone workshop on 13 February 2023.

Background

5. The CQC piloted a programme of assessing councils' adult social care functions in 2023. A roll out of full assessments commences this month in 10 local authorities (Bracknell Forest Borough Council; Brent London Borough Council; Derby City Council; Derbyshire County Council; Durham County Council; London Borough of Harrow Council; Hertfordshire County Council; London Borough of Hounslow; West Berkshire Council; Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council).
6. The CQC will assess and rate councils' performance across four themes: working with people; providing support; ensuring safety; and leadership. It will rate each council against a series of quality statements and publish its findings, also providing a single word rating using its existing ratings of: Inadequate; Requires Improvement; Good; or Outstanding.
7. The CQC published its reports and indicative ratings for each of the five councils involved in the pilot inspections in November 2023 resulting in four authorities rated as Good, and one authority rated as Requires Improvement:

8. The CQC found similar themes across all five local authorities. These included:
- Outcomes for people were better where there was good partnership working, including with voluntary and community partners, as well as Health partners.
 - Integrated working to support people's discharge from hospital improves the flow out of hospitals and people's experience.
 - People had to wait for assessments due to the capacity within assessment teams, but councils managed the associated risks.
 - Staff tended to stay with a local authority when they felt valued, had learning and development opportunities, and where there was a positive culture.
 - There were different practices across the five local authorities in how they worked with young people transitioning from children's services to adult services, so young people's experiences were varied.
 - Workforce capacity was being addressed through incentives and innovation in recruitment and retention of staff.
9. The full reports have been considered in detail and the following learning points/considerations for Leicestershire were identified:
- a) Self-awareness is key. The Department needs to be clear what it does well, the areas of concern and plans to address concerns;
 - b) Staff communications and ensuring staff give a consistent, realistic and positive message about working for the County Council is important. The CQC Inspectors cited a number of issues raised by staff in one authority;
 - c) Awareness of and actions to support diverse communities was highlighted in all reports and consideration needs to be given to how this is evidenced;
 - d) Data collection and evidencing how it is used to support service delivery and strategic planning;
 - e) Working with district and borough councils regarding Housing is an area to focus on, as joined up approaches to housing were highlighted in the unitary authorities;
 - f) The [3 Conversations](#) (a way of working which focuses on the person, their strengths, skills, and promoting their independence) work is important as evidence of strengths-based approaches.
10. The CQC also published their assessment guidance in December 2023, including the Assessment Framework, which sets out how the CQC will assess local authorities, what information they will ask councils to provide and timescales for assessment. The evidence categories the CQC will use are:
- People's experience;
 - Feedback from staff and leaders;
 - Feedback from partners;
 - Processes.
11. For each local authority, the CQC will gather evidence in this order:
- Evidence that is publicly available, for example national data collections, insight from regulation of providers;
 - Evidence the CQC will request, for example specific policies and strategies, internal and external survey results, feedback from staff, self-assessment of performance;

- Evidence the CQC will actively collect, for example from case tracking, focus groups, conversations with staff and leaders (only for information the CQC cannot get through other means).
12. The CQC's assessment starts when the notification is sent and ends when the final report and rating is published in line with the following timetable:
- a) The CQC will send a notification of their intent to carry out an assessment and information return request;
 - b) End of week one - deadline to compile, check and send contact details for local voluntary organisations, advocacy organisations and carers organisations;
 - c) End of week three - deadline to compile check and send all other information requested (self-assessment, policy, process, feedback and other documentary evidence);
 - d) The CQC will send a second notification confirming the date of their site visit. The site visit will be six to eight weeks from the date of the notification, and a maximum of six months from the date of the first notification;
 - e) Before the site visit, the CQC Assessors will hold conversations with representatives from the voluntary and community sector, carers groups, and provider organisations;
 - f) The CQC will also meet with the Adult Social Care senior leadership team before the site visit to gain an understanding of the departmental structure and lines of accountability, the services strengths and areas for improvement.
 - g) The CQC are expected to lead timetabling of the meetings and will liaise with relevant departmental officers to plan the visit. Additional information may be requested in the lead up to the site visit;
 - h) The CQC site visit will take place over two to three days to gather additional evidence through interviews, meetings, drop-in sessions with staff, leaders, partners and people who use services;
 - i) After the site visit the CQC assessors will complete their analysis of the evidence they have gathered and draft their report;
 - j) The Director of Adults and Communities will have an opportunity to review the draft report to check factual accuracy and provide feedback. The final report will be published approximately eight weeks after the site visit.
13. The CQC's assessment timetabling will take into account local elections, major local events and any other regulatory activity.

Self-Assessment

14. The Self-Assessment (Appendix A) is updated on a quarterly basis with the latest data available. The narrative is checked and edited to ensure it reflects the latest data. The update also reflects the progress being made towards the Improvement Plan activities. The Self-Assessment is regularly reviewed by an editorial officer group in terms of accuracy and to identify any gaps or areas to develop. The Department's Assurance Working Group (which oversees activity that supports readiness for CQC Assessment, and the improvement of services and outcomes for people) and the Departmental Management Team (DMT) also reviews the Self-Assessment on a quarterly basis.
15. This is the third update of the Self-Assessment since March 2023. The main changes made since the initial version are:

- Changes to the layout, from a report style to the current table layout;
- Publication of the CQC's information return requirement has resulted in the removal of sections such as compliments and complaints, and Better Care Fund where the Self-Assessment narrative adds little to the documentary evidence requested;
- Combining sections that reference similar topics, such as strengths based, person centred practice, Carers, Contract Management and provider quality;
- Added Celebrating the success of Care Professional of the Year awards 2023;
- Refocussed the safeguarding section, additions to our hospital discharge processes and partnership working;
- Shift of focus from corporate governance to departmental governance;
- Additional narrative on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Improvement Plan

16. The Improvement Plan (Appendix B) was developed from the key priorities for improvement identified through the Self-Assessment and annual conversion recommendations. The majority of the improvement activities are reported through dedicated governance channels; the Improvement Plan enables overall progress to be monitored by the Department's DMT. Improvement leads provide quarterly updates on progress and key achievements which is reported to DMT alongside Self-Assessment updates.
17. Key achievements to date include:
 - Improved Information Advice and Guidance: a new Adult Social Care website landing page and a co-produced financial assessment video. Reviewed 44 Adult Social Care web pages for accuracy and updated content as required; and automation of Service Directory updates.
 - Finance Pathway improvements, introducing E-billing , and the financial assessment backlog being addressed.
 - The Engagement Panel, which is made up of people who use our services and their carers, is involved in co-producing Direct Payments fact sheets, Carer information and the recruitment process for a new Assistant Director.
18. A presentation focused on positive messages from the Self-Assessment and including case studies highlighting best practice is updated in line with the Self-Assessment. This has been, and will continue to be used to promote some of the Department's key achievements with staff.
19. Communication with staff and preparing them for the CQC Assessment Visit will be a major element of the Assurance Team's work over the next few months. In addition, as inspection reports are published there will be analysis of the key findings and lessons learned which can be applied in the ongoing preparations for the County Council's visit.
20. A major piece of work looking at evidencing outcomes for diverse communities and building an evidence base on the diversity of those who use the Department's services has been scoped and the Departmental Equalities Group is supporting this work.

Consultation

21. In developing the Self-Assessment there has been considerable engagement of internal staff across the Department, including a staff survey and workshops. These explored staff perceptions of the Council's strengths and areas for improvement in relation to the CQC themes and gathered staff views on how the Department could improve in its delivery of Care Act duties. The Department also undertook significant external engagement to obtain the views of service users and carers, partner agencies, and care providers. Findings from this engagement helped to shape the Self-Assessment.
22. Representatives from the Department's Engagement Panel which is made up of people who use our services and their carers and the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board have been engaged in the production of the Self-Assessment and are kept informed on the progress of the Improvement Plan.

Resource Implications

23. There are no resource implications. There is a small Assurance Team under the Assistant Director (Strategic Commissioning) leading on the co-ordination of the assurance process work supported by the Lead Practitioners.
24. The Director of Corporate Resources and the Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Timetable for decisions

25. As the CQC may request a visit at any time in the future, the self-assessment document will be regularly updated to ensure it remains relevant and reflective of the way the Council carries out its statutory duties.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. None.

Equality Implications

27. The Self-Assessment includes an assessment of the Council's overall performance around equalities, diversity, and inclusion, with a focus on the Adults and Communities Department. It sets out some key strengths in this area along with some potential areas for development.
28. Any proposed changes to the Council's policies, procedures, functions, and services which may arise from delivery of its Improvement Plan will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessments.

Human Rights Implications

29. There are no human rights implications arising from this report. Any proposed changes to the Council's policies, procedures, functions, and/or services which may arise from delivery of its Assurance improvement plan will be referred immediately to

the Council's Legal Services for advice and support regarding human rights implications.

Appendices

- Appendix A - Self-Assessment.
- Appendix B - Improvement Plan

Background papers

Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 6 June 2022 – Update on the Social Care Reform Programme

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=6840> – item 12

Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 5 September 2022 – Adult Social Care Reform – Market Shaping and Charging Reform

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=6841> – item 25

Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 7 November 2022 – Progress in Delivering the Social Care Reform Programme

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=6842> – item 39

Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 6 March 2023 Adult Social Care Assurance Self-Assessment

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=7107> – item 65

Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 4 September 2023 – Assurance of Adult Social Care

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=7109> – item 29

[Local authority assessments – implementing our new approach](#)

[Local Authority assessment reports](#)

[Evaluation of CQC's local authority pilot assessments](#)

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