



ADULTS AND CULTURAL SERVICES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 7 SEPTEMBER 2026

CARE QUALITY COMMISSION ASSESSMENT 2025
IMPROVEMENT PLAN DELIVERY UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND CULTURAL SERVICES

Purpose of report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update of the progress made to deliver the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Improvement Plan, prior to submission of the progress update to the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) due 17 September 2026.
- 2 The Committee is requested to comment on the Adults rural underrepresented communities grant scheme, included in this report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

- 3 In November 2024, the Committee received a report summarising the position and process for the CQC assessment following the initial notification of assessment received on 9 September 2024. The report included the updated self-assessment and alongside plans to prepare for the CQC assessment site visit.
- 4 In January 2025, the Committee received an update on the position relating to preparations and readiness for the CQC assessment site visit during week of 24 February 2025.
- 5 In November 2025, the Committee received a report summarising the CQC assessment findings, highlighting key strengths and areas for development. A summary Improvement Plan was presented which outlined the actions to deliver improvements identified in the CQC assessment report. The Committee requested quarterly progress updates to align with the DHSC reporting cycle.
- 6 In January, March, and June 2026, the Committee received reports providing updates on progress made with delivering the CQC Improvement Plan.

Background

- 7 The CQC published its assessment report of Leicestershire in September 2025, giving an overall rating of Requires Improvement.

- 8 Authorities achieving a Requires Improvement rating are required to develop an Improvement Plan and provide quarterly reporting to the DHSC, demonstrating progress with improvement actions.
- 9 DHSC contract with Partners in Care and Health (PiCH) to work with councils assessed as requires improvement. The nominated PiCH Improvement Advisor is working with Leicestershire to co-ordinate the response, ongoing review and support activities, outlined below:
 - Stage 1 - response to the CQC Assessment report, submitted 27 September 2025, including a response to the CQC findings, emerging improvement priorities and action planning.
 - Stage 2 – report including the Improvement Plan and oversight arrangements and the support required to deliver the plan. Submitted 17 December 2025.
 - Stage 3 – quarterly updates to DHSC commenced 17 March 2026 with the following update sent on 17 June 2026. The CQC Improvement Plan, attached as an Appendix to this report, will be submitted to the DHSC along with a summary report provided by the PiCH Care and Health Improvement Advisor.
- 10 Programme management and governance is in place to deliver the CQC Improvement Plan; internal oversight of progress is through the monthly Departmental Transformation Delivery Board.
- 11 Communication and engagement with staff and people who draw on services is taking place to inform and deliver the Improvement Plan actions.

Improvement Plan Delivery Update

Timeliness of Assessments and Reviews

- 12 The number of people waiting significantly longer than 28 days for their assessment continues to reduce, with the introduction of temporary staff to address waiting times. In August 2026, 3.3% waited over 28 days, compared to 11% in January 2026 and 18% in August 2025. Process and practice improvements continue to support sustained improvement, alongside updated operational dashboards to monitor timescales.
- 13 Permanent social work staff have been recruited, and onboarding is underway to sustain capacity and continue addressing assessment waiting times. At the end of August 2026, 101 people were waiting for an assessment, compared to 137 twelve months previously. The maximum wait duration was 29 days on 17 August, reduced from 157 days twelve months previously.
- 14 Challenges with recruitment and retention in the new Carers' Team have affected the ability to address carer assessment. However, some additional capacity is now in place, and further new recruits are expected to commence in late summer. Process

and tools have been introduced to ensure carer assessments are consistent with other assessments, supporting positive outcomes.

- 15 The focus remains on addressing timeliness of assessment and reviews. Engaging an external organisation to undertake some assessments and reviews is underway, with close oversight from the Council and escalation processes in place to ensure quality. 65% of all Carers assessments were allocated within 28 days, a further 12% were allocated within 4-8 weeks. The median wait duration for a carer assessment over the past 12-months was 0 days, reduced from 157 days twelve months previous.
- 16 The timeliness of financial assessments has significantly improved. Additional staffing and continued improvement work have reduced waits. As of 3 August 2026, 10 people were awaiting financial assessment, reduced from 102 at the start of January 2026. The average (median) wait time for residential assessments was 9 days, down from 14 days, and for non-residential assessments it was 3 days, down from 14 days in January 2026.
- 17 Maximum wait times for financial assessments have also improved. As of 3 August 2026, the maximum wait time for non-residential assessment was 9 days and for residential assessment was 21 days, reduced from 29 days and 425 days respectively in January 2026. This work will now continue as business as usual, with further improvement through process and use of technology.
- 18 The external Occupational Therapy (OT) assessment service, which began at the end of April 2026, is showing benefits following the resolution of some initial operational challenges. As of 26 August 2026, the number of people waiting for assessment was 527, down from 740 at the start of January 2026. Snapshot data from 12 August 26 shows a 93% reduction in people waiting over 2 months, from 246 in November 2025 to 18. The median wait time over the past 12-months 26 days.
- 19 OT improvement work is progressing - a new Team Manager is in post, and a redesign is expected to gather pace, with processes and structures being implemented to strengthen capacity. Reporting dashboards to support the flow of work are nearly complete.
- 20 Review teams continue to prioritise the longest overdue reviews, with targeted work underway to ensure reviews are completed and recorded consistently across all teams. Current performance indicates that 81% of people have a review completed within 12 months, compared with the latest national average of 57%.
- 21 Annual review performance continues to improve. The average (median) waiting time over the past 12 months was 36 days and close to target, with significant improvement since July 2025. Maximum waiting time over the past 12 months is 1,204 days, down from 2,729 days in July 2025. The proportion of reviews overdue by more than 3 months is currently 40%, down from 46% at the start of January 2026.
- 22 Engagement with staff continues to inform changes to guidance, tools and practice. This is supporting more effective management of incoming referrals to teams.

Access, Information, Advice and Guidance

- 23 Additional customer service advisors are now in post and are having a positive impact on call response times. Changes to the telephone menu system have been drafted and are subject to a final round of engagement and approval prior to implementation.
- 24 Recommendations from Loughborough University Design School's review of the Council's adult social care web pages were received in June and set out a customer journey-focused revision of the website. These recommendations will inform longer-term changes to online information and advice. An approach to reviewing website content in the next 3 months has been agreed.
- 25 The adult social care chatbot has launched on the Leicestershire County Council website, making it easier for people to find the information that they need. Referral routes to support people to access information online are nearly finalised.

Reablement and Hospital Discharge

- 26 A new hospital discharge information leaflet is being distributed to people preparing to leave hospital. Seven-day working is in place where required within social care, and communications are ongoing with providers to facilitate responses to requests for adult social care support at weekends.
- 27 A business case for recruitment and retention enhancements in the reablement service has been completed and is being considered. Recruitment is ongoing and capacity has increased by 15.24 full-time equivalent posts.

Carers Strategy (2026-2030) and Support Service

- 28 Consultation on the draft Carers Strategy 2026-2030 is complete, with the strategy and delivery plan due to be considered by Cabinet in September 2026.
- 29 Work is underway to consider the structures required to deliver an enhanced carers' offer aligned with the Council's strategic priorities.

Sufficiency of Provider Services

- 30 The Community Life Choices (day services) commissioning process is starting. Contingency arrangements are being put in place to ensure that people do not experience disruption to their service.
- 31 A business case for new extra care development has been approved.

- 32 Development of commissioning dashboards is underway, supporting improved understanding of demand, capacity and gaps in services. Commissioning activity continues to promote equity of access, particularly for rural and isolated communities.

Equity of Access and Experience

- 33 A proposal to offer small grants to local community organisations is being progressed. The Overview and Scrutiny committee is requested to review the proposal prior to consideration by Cabinet,
- 34 This scheme will support the Adult Social Care CQC improvement programme by addressing inequalities in access to preventative support and strengthening community capacity in areas where provision is currently limited.
- 35 By investing in locally delivered VCSE services within underrepresented rural communities, the scheme will help people access support closer to home, reduce social isolation, better support carers, deliver greater reach into underserved communities and promote independence and wellbeing.
- 36 It is focused on supporting adults who have needs or who are likely to have needs arising from physical or mental impairment which has or is likely to have a significant impact on their wellbeing.
- 37 The scheme is comprised of two separate elements to help achieve as much impact as possible;
- 38 Connections Fund using the expertise of existing local VCSE organisations to build community capacity, stimulate the development of new types of VCSE services and support in specific underrepresented areas of the county. Awards will be to the value of £15,000 per award and made following a request for quote process.
- 39 Grant Fund to sustain and grow existing groups, alongside supporting new, emerging services by providing a funding route towards the costs associated with running and delivering services that meet the scheme criteria. This might include room rental, equipment for activities, sessional staffing costs for activities, volunteer expenses, transport, and refreshments. It will enable groups to maintain and develop current services and help to stabilise this type of support within communities. Awards will be restricted to up to £5,000 p.a. per organisation.
- 40 A budget of £800,000 over a 4-year period is available (£200,000 per annum.) and this will be shared between the two funds. Funding allocations between the two elements will be reviewed periodically to ensure they continue to reflect local needs and demand.
- 41 Ownership of both elements of the scheme will be with the ACS Department. The administration of the Grant Fund will be shared between ACS and PHCLG, which will bring expertise from colleagues who have managed former grant schemes. It is anticipated that the administration and operating costs of the scheme will be met by existing resources.

- 42 An online Grant Fund application process will be put in place by ACS, and applications received and assessed in each round of funding will be considered at a Panel Decision Meeting for approval, chaired by an ACS Lead Commissioner.
- 43 To ensure transparency and fairness, all applications will be assessed against agreed criteria and considered via the panel process. Decisions and funding outcomes will be documented, with appropriate governance and monitoring arrangements in place to ensure accountability for the use of public funds.
- 44 Within 12 months of a grant award organisations will need to provide evidence of how the grant was spent along with submitting an online grant outcomes report. As part of the overall monitoring process a selection of these organisations will be required to share their experiences and learning by delivering presentations to local communities and other stakeholders.
- 45 The County Council cabinet will be asked to approve the establishment of the grant scheme.

Safeguarding

- 46 A revised safeguarding referral form is now live, reducing barriers for professionals making referrals. An updated web page also provides clearer access to referral routes.
- 47 A mechanism to ensure referrers are informed of the outcome of safeguarding enquiries has been agreed; the required system tools are in place and supporting guidance is to be finalised before the procedure is launched.
- 48 Safeguarding pathway reporting changes have been agreed, and minor system change is complete, supporting development of a dashboard to provide enhanced reporting and monitoring of agreed target timescales.

Pathway for Adulthood

- 49 The corporate pathway for adulthood project board continues to drive change to the pathway. Workstreams are progressing and a transition panel pilot is operational.
- 50 Parent and carer engagement has been strengthened, alongside joint working between Adults & Cultural Services and Children & Family Services departments.

Workforce

- 51 A review of case complexity is nearing completion, with findings to be reported and next steps agreed, which will inform allocation of cases to appropriately skilled workers, and practice improvement.

- 52 The new audit assurance group provides oversight of all practice audits and progress with implementing practice improvement, and communicating messages with staff, such as through infographics.
- 53 The workforce plan is being finalised following consultation feedback.
- 54 The Adult Mental Health Professional (AMHP) operating model has been agreed, with recruitment and onboarding underway.

Partnerships in Joint Funding

- 55 Work with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) has resumed in earnest, with a commitment to joint working. A revised deadline of October 2026 has been set to agree the revised joint funding policy and process. The ICB is to develop a plan to increase Funded Nursing Care (FNC) determinations in 2026.

Performance and Oversight

- 56 Revised waiting list dashboards for Care Act assessments, carers assessments and reviews have been completed. Development continues on safeguarding and assessment for equipment dashboards, and of additional operational dashboards to support workflow management.
- 57 Work has commenced with an external agency, funded by PiCH, to further enhance the department's culture relating to the use of data and insights across the service.

Looking Ahead and Liaison with CQC

- 58 The chosen scenario for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was announced by central government on 16 July. From April 2028, Leicestershire County Council will no longer exist, and two new unitary councils, Leicester Council and Leicestershire and Rutland Council, will provide services for the respective geographical areas. A major change initiative will plan and implement the necessary structures and services.
- 59 On 22 July, CQC published an update on how it will regulate councils' adult social care functions during the period of LGR. While CQC has advised that it will take a proportionate and flexible approach to assessment during this period of change, it has also been clear that regulatory oversight of local authorities will continue, with a focus on how services identify and respond to risks and deliver their legal duties.

Although the Council's adult social care services are now unlikely to be subject to a full assessment before or in the 6 months after LGR vesting day (1 April 2028), a 'focused assessment' may be conducted much sooner, for which detailed guidance was issued by CQC on 7 August.

- 60 Focused assessments will be targeted reviews of specific areas of a local authority's adult social care performance. They may be undertaken to follow up identified risks, assess progress against improvement actions, respond to concerns identified through monitoring, or provide assurance on priority areas, including those linked to the

Secretary of State's priorities for adult social care (commissioning high-quality outcomes, preventing care needs from escalating, and delivering joined-up support in communities). Focused assessments will examine up to three quality statements and may include information requests, stakeholder feedback, staff engagement and a site visit, where required.

- 61 The scope of a focused assessment is determined using intelligence gathered through CQC's monitoring, previous assessments, stakeholder feedback, and information provided by the Council. CQC will notify the authority of the scope, evidence requirements and any planned site visit, usually providing four to six weeks' notice before a visit.
- 62 A focused assessment could result in updated scores for the quality statements reviewed and a published report setting out strengths, areas for development and the direction of improvement. However, focused assessments will not change a local authority's overall CQC rating. Findings from focused assessments may also inform the timing and focus of future comprehensive assessments.
- 63 Scheduled assurance meetings are still expected to be held between CQC and the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS), the Principal Social Worker and other key officers. Assurance meetings will follow an agenda set by the CQC and will consider the Council's self-assessment, key data, areas of strength and innovation, progress with improvements since the previous CQC assessment report and may also consider emerging themes from feedback.
- 64 Preparations will include an updated self-assessment which will reflect the improvements made and their impact on outcomes for people. The Council has also drawn on learning from the key characteristics of local authorities that achieved outstanding and good overall ratings, summarised in the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2026. This will further enhance the quality and impact of services and people's experiences.

Key Risks

- 65 Failure to make adequate progress with the improvement actions identified will result in further intervention from DHSC.
- 66 A second consecutive Requires Improvement rating would lead to enhanced support and monitoring, including direct engagement by DHSC. Although a full assessment will not take place until after LGR vesting day, there may be further DHSC intervention if a focused assessment, which may take place in the meantime, is not satisfactory.

Resource Implications

- 67 Significant resource is required to deliver the improvement actions identified in the CQC assessment report; financial resource was confirmed through the Medium Term Financial Strategy process by the full Council on 18 February 2026.

- 68 Additional short-term resource is in place to ensure sufficient capacity to reduce the waiting time for assessments. Recruitment of longer-term roles to enhance capacity in key teams is underway.
- 69 Technology will be used wherever possible to improve access to information and streamline processes to which will support improvement activities. Business Intelligence Service resource will be required to deliver enhancements to performance reporting and oversight.
- 70 The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the contents of this report.

Recommendations

- 71 The Committee is requested to comment on the progress made to deliver the CQC improvement plan, and specifically on the Adults Rural Underrepresented Communities Grant scheme, included in this report prior to consideration by Cabinet.

Timetable for Decisions

- 71 Progress with delivering the CQC Improvement Plan will continue to be presented to this Committee on a quarterly basis.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

- 72 None.

Equality Implications

- 73 There are no human rights implications arising from this report. 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

- 74 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.

Appendix

CQC Improvement Plan – Appendix A

Background Papers

- Report to the Adults and Cultural Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 1 June 2026 Care Quality Commission Assessment 2025 – Improvement Plan Delivery Update
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s196399/CQC%20Improvement%20Plan%20Update.pdf>
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 2 March 2026 Care Quality Commission Assessment 2025 – Improvement Plan Delivery Update
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s194927/CQC%20Improvement%20Plan%20Report.pdf>
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 19 January 2026 Care Quality Commission Assessment 2025 – Improvement Plan Delivery Update
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s193999/CQC%20Improvement%20Plan%20Update%20January%202026.pdf>
- CQC Leicestershire County Council local authority assessment published 17 September 2025 <https://www.cqc.org.uk/care-services/local-authority-assessment-reports/leicestershire-0925>
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 3 November 2025 Care Quality Commission Assessment of Leicestershire County Council's Delivery of Care Act 2014 Duties
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s192588/CQC%20ASSESSMENT%20OFF%20LOCAL%20AUTHORITIES.pdf> - item 36
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 20 January 2025 – Assurance of Adult Social Care
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s187689/Report%20CQC%20Assessment%20of%20Local%20Authorities.pdf> – Item 50
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 4 November 2024 – Assurance of Adult Social Care
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s186111/CQC%20ASSESSMENT%20OFF%20LAS.pdf> – item 35
- Report to the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 6 March 2024 – Assurance of Adult Social Care -
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1040&MId=7107&Ver=4> – item 65

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