

Governance, management and sustainability

Score 3

3 - Evidence shows a good standard

The local authority commitment

We have clear responsibilities, roles, systems of accountability and good governance to manage and deliver good quality, sustainable care, treatment and support. We act on the best information about risk, performance and outcomes, and we share this securely with others when appropriate.

Key findings for this quality statement

Governance, accountability and risk management

Hounslow had a clear leadership structure. There was clear and effective governance management, and accountability arrangements at all levels within the local authority. These provided visibility and assurance on the delivery of Care Act duties. There was a clear structure for the assessment and management of risk, quality, and sustainability of provision. The local authority used data to inform decision making and collected this on several key metrics. Hounslow made use of surveys, complaints, and feedback via individual engagement with officers, and told us they were working to improve the level of engagement and communication with people including for assurance of people's care and support experiences and outcomes.

There was a stable Senior Leadership team who held broad responsibilities across adult social care, Children's services, and health. Senior leaders were clear on the role of adult social care, and the importance of meeting statutory requirements. We were told keeping people safe, in the context of robust resource management, was the priority. They held the statutory Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) to account for delivery of this.

There were clear risk management and escalation arrangements. Risks were reflected in the Corporate Risk Register and considered in decisions across the wider council. This included escalation internally and externally to partner Governance boards, such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, as appropriate. The local authority's political and executive leaders were well informed about the potential risks facing Adult Social Care, such as workforce risks, and were taking action to resolve these through a range of mechanisms such as apprenticeships and international recruitment.

We were told the council Cabinet had robust oversight of Adult Social Care and an understanding of where it fit in relation to the Corporate Plan 'Ambitious for Hounslow'. Some of the objectives of the corporate plan, such as "Support our most vulnerable residents to live as independently as possible for as long as possible" were aligned with Care Act principles and the role of the Adult Social Care directorate.

We found a clear and increasing focus on performance culture in Adult Social Care at Hounslow. There were quality assurance and performance governance mechanisms in place, but senior leaders recognised that they weren't as effective as they wanted them to be. They told us that they wanted to take improvements made in Children's services and replicate them in Adult services. Some auditing was completed by external parties currently to add capacity and rigour. They told us they intended to bring all audits in house by September 2024. Safeguarding was a key priority and was monitored and reported appropriately within the directorate. There was a Practice Framework which clearly set out expectation of staff at all levels. The Practice Framework was aligned to the broader organisational values and culture. Periodic audits provided objective challenge and presented a further level of governance and accountability.

The local authority had a clear awareness and focus on tackling inequality. They had undertaken a learning and partnership approach to developing their Strategy 'A Fairer, More Equal Hounslow'.

The political makeup of the council reduced the likelihood of challenge at scrutiny as the opposition were a significant minority, but papers were presented and discussed. The political and executive leadership had positive, constructive relationships and confidence in the officers responsible for delivery of Care Act duties. They felt able to challenge or raise issues if they felt it was necessary.

The Principal Social Worker (PSW) is a statutory role under the Care Act 2014. The Principal Social Worker at Hounslow was a member of the Departmental Leadership team rather than the Senior Leadership Team. They had the opportunity to contribute to shaping practice, developing innovation, and meeting the strategic challenges of Health and Social Care in Hounslow through participation in and contribution to key programmes of work which were led by the Executive Director (Statutory DASS). They also led on the Annual Social Work Healthcheck and reported to the DASS on the impact of the Quality Assurance Framework which they had developed and implemented in adult social care. They had what was described as an "open access route" to the Executive Director (DASS) and we were told that diarised meetings were being reestablished in 2024.

Strategic planning

The local authority routinely used data effectively in relation to the population it served to understand risks, performance, inequalities, and outcomes. It used this data to inform its Strategy for Adult Social Care, allocation of resources, and more broadly for the “Ambitious for Hounslow” Corporate Strategy.

The local authority had developed a Delivery Plan and Improvement Plans for Adult Social Care based on improving outcomes for people. These were both focused on implementing actions, but as these plans were in the early stages, it was too early to demonstrate any outcomes, against the planned objectives.

Information security

Hounslow were able to demonstrate they had robust arrangements to maintain the security, availability, integrity and confidentiality of data, records, and data management systems within the local authority. Where the authority worked in multi-agency settings, arrangements were in place to govern and manage safe information sharing to support safe, and seamless care.