

Learning, improvement and innovation

Score 3

3 - Evidence shows a good standard

The local authority commitment

We focus on continuous learning, innovation and improvement across our organisation and the local system. We encourage creative ways of delivering equality of experience, outcome and quality of life for people. We actively contribute to safe, effective practice and research.

Key findings for this quality statement

Continuous learning, improvement and professional development

The local authority was undertaking a significant transformation which was informed by learning. Leaders had a good understanding of where the local authority needed to improve and there were plans to improve in areas where we identified shortfalls. The local authority had started to improve its approach to co-production and we saw examples of people's feedback being used to inform strategic priorities. Staff and leaders could clearly articulate what the local authority did well as well as an honest appraisal of where they needed to improve. Wherever shortfalls had been identified there were clear actions, tethered to the strategy, which were intended to bring about improvements.

The strategic priorities had also been set by learning in areas such as safeguarding, staffing and performance. Leaders were able to use data to measure the impact of the transformation and could attribute improvements in performance to the strategy, such as improvements to waiting lists or safeguarding timescales being driven by work to set up new teams. Leaders could clearly articulate how actions in the delivery plan for the strategy were directly linked to learning and improvement. For example, the introduction of the safeguarding hub was informed by performance data about waiting lists but also feedback and learning about consistency of decision-making. Staff and leaders could describe how the introduction of the hub was already having a positive impact on performance and consistency. Staff had a good understanding of their own performance and were able to cite data and describe learning and outcomes from recent themes and trends, such as financial assessment training which was introduced following work to understand timescales for claiming charges back and learning from feedback from people using services.

The local authority used co-production to seek the views of people with lived experiences. However, feedback about co-production was mixed, whilst we did hear about people being involved in strategic planning in areas such as support for people with a learning disability, other areas such as co-production to develop services for older people were at an early stage. Voluntary partners gave mixed feedback about the extent to which they were able to inform and influence strategy in this area.

We heard that opportunities had been limited but there was a sentiment expressed that engagement was improving in recent months. The local authority and partners launched RBWM Together which was an initiative to encourage people to come together, share information and ideas as well as for more formal co-production to take place. This was at an early stage at the point of assessment so the full impact may not have come across in feedback.

The local authority carried out surveys to seek feedback from people using services. There was a system to request feedback from people and unpaid carers through an annual survey. The majority of feedback showed people were satisfied with the local authority's approach and support. The last survey was completed in January 2023 and was sent to a random selection of adults who had contact with adult social services over the previous 12 months. The survey had a 31.1% response rate and showed 46% were 'very satisfied'. We also saw data from people with a learning disability who were surveyed with 85% saying they were very happy with the way staff treated them.

We heard from leaders how these survey results were reported through the local authority's governance processes, but they also said there were plans to improve in this area and to seek ongoing feedback from people. Staff and leaders said they anticipated the new IT system would provide more opportunity to gather and collate feedback and information about outcomes.

Staff had access to training. We met multiple staff who had undertaken professional qualifications to develop professionally and feedback about this was consistently positive. There was structured training for staff but also training in response to specific learning or issues, such as recent training in financial assessments after it was identified as a theme. Staff could access apprenticeships as well as be supported to undertake a professional qualification.

Learning from feedback

The local authority used learning from complaints to improve practice. In the 12 months up to December 2023, the local authority had received 21 complaints. Of these, 24% were upheld, 33% were partially upheld and 60% were not upheld. Feedback was also used to inform the local authority about what they were doing well. In the same period the local authority had received 20 compliments. The compliments cited positive feedback such as the professionalism, kindness and helpfulness of staff who worked with them or support offered to people during difficult circumstances. One member of staff working with autistic people had received 4 compliments about their practice and approach.

In the same 12 months up to December 2023 there were 5 complaints referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and 1 of these complaints was upheld. Complaints were analysed and the themes were presented to leaders, with learning shared from all complaints regardless of their outcome. We saw how these were used to inform changes to areas such as charging, information and advice, and provider quality.

The 'world café' programme created opportunities for those attending the events to provide feedback to influence changes to service provision. We heard how the programme led to improvements in information and advice services as a response to people's feedback, as well as using feedback to inform priorities for community funding. The programme had evolved into workshops to gather more detailed comments in priority areas which showed feedback was being used and gathered in a structured way to inform strategic priorities.

However, we heard from voluntary partners that it could sometimes be difficult to engage with the local authority. This was also an area of strategic focus, with recent work to introduce more co-production at the local authority. The feedback we received showed co-production was not yet fully informing strategy, which the local authority recognised.

Staff feedback was used to inform the transformation programme. The local authority had identified challenges in recruiting and retaining staff and used staff feedback about pay and conditions to inform the decision to bring the Care Act functions back in-house to enable the local authority to offer staff parity of terms and conditions with other local authorities and to allow more direct control of financial decisions. Leaders demonstrated a strong value base when it came to listening and responding to staff, they described how they found staff input and feedback important and took steps to frequently meet with staff to provide opportunities to share feedback or learning.
