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

The local authority demonstrated clear and effective governance, management, and accountability arrangements at all levels. These provided visibility and assurance on delivery of Care Act duties. There was strong senior management oversight, both at a strategic and operational level. They told us they used performance management to understand their strengths and areas for improvement, and that performance management was at the heart of their drive to secure continuous improvement in delivering quality, efficient, and user-focused services.

Part of the rationale for the new operating model of which Phase 1 was implemented in October 2023, was to improve the customer journey and attain better, more efficient outcomes, but also to build in better capability to measure performance metrics. Leaders told us they didn't currently have all the data they needed but had more than before. They wanted staff to be able to see data themselves. The local authority intended to collect data about timeliness of? interventions and the experience of different equality groups. This was included in the case file audit process, but there was not yet enough evidence to be assured.

Leaders said the focus on prevention and early intervention was deliberate to ensure services were sustainable in the long term, without compromise to people's experience of care and support the outcomes achieved.

There was a stable adult social care leadership team, with an experienced system leader as Executive Director for People, bringing together adult services, children's services, Commissioning and Early Help and Community Services. This stability and breadth of management enabled learning and improvement to be shared to achieve better outcomes for people.

Leaders were visible, capable, and compassionate. Whilst people had specific roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, the working environment and relationships empowered staff to put forward ideas and be fully engaged in the shared purpose of improving outcomes for people. Staff confirmed that good communication and relationships with Senior leaders made them feel integral to the development of services.

We were told that the local authority's approach to risk management was characterised by proactive engagement, strategic alignment, and continuous improvement. Leaders told us that this was vital to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone they served. They evidenced strong governance processes in place at senior management level to ensure that risks were carefully managed. Risks were recognised, and specific measures to manage or mitigate these put in place. There were escalation arrangements internally and externally as required. Risks deemed to be of corporate significance were elevated and updated on an ongoing basis which ensured visibility and accountability at the highest levels of governance.

The local authority has had a new political administration since May 2023, and many of the Councillors including the Lead Member for Adult social care were new to their roles. We were told by several people that Councillors, from both the leading and shadowing parties and senior officers of the council worked collaboratively for the good of the people of the Borough which supported effective and well-informed decision making. Executive leaders in the local authority provided Councillors with the information and guidance they needed to be well informed about potential risks facing adult social care. These were reflected in the corporate risk register and considered in decisions across the wider council.

Some teams, for example staff told us the Hub, safeguarding and mental health team had shortages which impacted on waiting times. The local authority had identified that staff recruitment and retention were critical to delivering its Care Act duties and leaders had considered what local factors might influence this. The local authority had taken significant steps to retain staff and to be an attractive place to work. They had considered pay rates and increased them for qualified staff, as well as providing significant in-house opportunities for staff to become qualified in their profession including through apprenticeships to 'grow their own'. Recruitment was underway at the time of our assessment.

Many staff we spoke with were proud to work there and described the local authority as "the best employer they had had". There was a strong focus on staff wellbeing, with staff being provided time each month for reflection, and wellbeing resources made easily available. A cultural survey was conducted in December 2023 as part of an MBA project. It was completed by 202 staff from the People directorate. Initial findings of the survey identified staff felt proud to be associated with Bracknell Forest Council.

Strategic planning

The local authority worked with partners across the Integrated Care System, including people with lived experience, statutory organisations such as the NHS, independent organisations and VCFS organisations, to agree strategic intentions and how they would be delivered.

The Health Care Plan 2023-25 was agreed between partners from the shared priorities in the Frimley ICS Strategy 2023, the Bracknell Forest Council Plan (BFCP) and the Bracknell Forest Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-26 (BFHWS). The BFHW board identified a framework for the BFHWS. Multi-agency task and finish groups then identified key areas for improvement, based on collective insights and evidence including information about inequalities, performance and outcomes. A wide range of stakeholders were engaged to identify the key outcomes for these areas of improvement, what action was required to deliver the outcomes and how success should be monitored. Leaders told us they also used information on performance, inequalities and outcomes to understand whether they had enough resources in the right place and doing the right things.

Information security

The local authority had very clear governance arrangements and information sharing agreements in place to ensure the security, availability, integrity and confidentiality of data, records and information management systems.