

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

There was an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning and improvement. Staff felt supported to continuously learn and develop. The local authority ensured staff had access to a range of corporate training courses, as well as more bespoke courses specific to their roles. Where appropriate, staff were invited to attend NHS training sessions too. Regular discussions were held with line managers to explore further professional development opportunities. Staff spoke positively about learning and development opportunities and had described this as a strength of the local authority.

Local authority leaders highlighted that the local authority had a good staff retention as well as a good pay offer and promotion through workforce development. In 2023/23, staff turnover rate was 5.3 %, which is lower than the London average of 13%, for local authorities in adult social care. There had been learning from exit interviews, which had supported identification of themes to improve workforce recruitment and retention.

There were several staff who had been supported by the local authority to qualify as social workers through the apprenticeship route. The local authority had recognised the need to develop a proactive approach to the recruitment of OTs, due to the challenges of recruiting to this role nationally. Subsequently, the local authority had sourced funding for three Independent Living Assessors to take up an apprenticeship programme. This displayed a positive learning culture. Local authority leaders mentioned the strong links they had with academic and research providers which supported various apprenticeships.

Staff had ongoing access to learning and support so that Care Act duties were delivered safely and effectively. There had been a Training Needs Analysis in place which had been coproduced with the workforce and led by the Principal Social Worker. The local authority was also affiliated with training organisations, such as Making Research Count and Research in Practice.

Local authority leaders had been involved in the workforce development plans and displayed good knowledge of this. As part of the quality assurance of practice, monthly case file audits were undertaken to support staff's reflection on their positive work and identify areas for development. They told us that there was a rise in workforce engagement, current figures showed 77% engagement rate from staff compared to 42% 6 years ago. They also mentioned that staff feedback to the Local Government Association reflected positive working environment and good continuous professional development with the learning and development offer. A good ethos around professional development was highlighted by staff we spoke with.

Local authority leaders we spoke with presented a commitment to promoting continuous professional development. Staff told us that they were able to maintain their professional accreditations. Likewise, leaders also told us that they had a robust social work apprentice programme which started in 2020. Three social workers qualified in 2023 and moved into the Assessed Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme. Furthermore, Practice Educators (PE's) had qualified and moved into Team Managers positions. The local authority had Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP) training as well as separate funding for staff who had special training interests. Additionally, staff spoke positively of the supported internships, which were opportunities for young people with disabilities to engage in development opportunities. The local authority had been leading this by example by providing supported internships internally. We were able to see examples of this whilst we visited the local authority.

The local authority was committed to working collaboratively with people and partners to actively promote and support innovative and new ways of working. Staff told us that the ethos of co-production had been embedded into practice and that the strategy team had sat in a co-design place, enabling them to work with people with lived experiences and reach out to community groups to learn from experience. Local authority leaders had told us that the local authority's development of the Local Account Group (LAG) was driven by local people. The LAG was established in July 2018 and had been formed of local people from the Borough who met monthly to assess how well social care was working and aid decision-making. The LAG had been given the opportunity to engage with various teams across the local authority to ascertain information on the services available to the community which they were then able to share with the wider community in the Borough. The LAG felt they were listened to by senior leaders and that their improvement suggestions were welcomed. For example, the LAG suggested improvement of staffing and training in care homes to ensure the right cultures were in place. Local authority leaders had welcomed this suggestion and shown consideration.

The local authority shared learning, best practice and innovation with peers and system partners to influence and improve how care and support was provided. They had used case studies to improve services using a person-centred approach. Partners told us that they were working together with the local authority to look at ways of how technology could be used to better support unpaid carers. The local authority had shown awareness of a new generation of unpaid carers who were becoming reliant on technology and had exploring innovative ways of using technology to reduce barriers.

Staff had provided us with examples of innovation around digital technology. An example of a digital service was given which was used as a preventative measure, to enhance personalised care. Other examples included, but not limited to, home alarm sensors as well as use of digital key safes. Staff we spoke with showed good knowledge of the assistive technology that was available, and the local authority had continued efforts to improve how person-centred care and support was provided. Staff also told us that they had felt knowledge was shared. Weekly 'Loop Live' sessions were being held which offered staff a space to share best practice and knowledge. Staff also mentioned an online platform which was used to promote training sessions.

Staff and leaders engaged with external work, including research, and embedded evidence-based practice in the organisation. Local partnerships had been used to share knowledge and resources locally. The local authority had been working with partners to address specific training needs. For example, suicide prevention was carried out as a co-production project between the local authority and partners, and we heard that feedback from local authority trainees had been positive.

The local authority actively participated in peer review and sector-led improvement activity. They drew on external support to improve when necessary and had been working with local providers to improve the use of assistive technology.

Learning from feedback

We had positive feedback from partners and staff reflecting the local authority's conscious efforts to co-produce to establish their strategies in a meaningful manner. Partners explained that the local authority focused on continually learning and improving services, and this was described as a strength. The local authority had multiple stages of consultation and co-production throughout the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Partners told us that senior leaders participated in group meetings to listen to people with learning disabilities, which contributed to the local authorities Learning Disability Plan. Co-production for the Learning Disability Plan had been done through The Advocacy Project, Make it Happen, Pursuing Independent Paths, and Full of Life. This plan had been presented at the Health and Wellbeing board and praised for its coproduction and the work done to engage with people with learning disabilities and unpaid carers. Partners also told us that they had co-produced the Carers Strategy through the use of carers forums and had achieved positive outcomes for unpaid carers.

Local authority leaders told us that training evaluation questionnaires were used to drive learning, improvement and future needs. There had been measures in place to also embed lessons learnt from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs). Partners told us that learning from SARs was implemented to practice in a timely manner.

Regular meetings were being held with adult social care teams, partners and the Care Quality Commission to analyse trends from incidents and complaints which fed into improvement actions. Peer reviews were also sought to drive improvement, for example the Safeguarding hybrid model was implemented following a peer review in 2020 and consultation with the Local Account Group. Staff told us that they felt listened to when they raised concerns, and that senior leaders acted promptly on feedback received. An example provided was the creation of the Direct Payments team following feedback received from staff which had brought considerable improvements.

Local authority leaders acknowledged improvements in data collection and told us they were replacing paper forms with electronic forms and telephone calls which offered an opportunity to enhance how it collected feedback from service users.

The local authority had taken complaints seriously and continually looked for learning opportunities within those. There was a system in place to receive complaints and compliments. Data from the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman showed that 67% of complaints to them were upheld and that any recommendations for remedies were carried out in a timely way. Evidence submitted by the local authority showed that 110 statutory complaints had been received during 2022-23, of which, 41% were regarding the quality of service and 21% were regarding communication. Evidence from this showed that there was a good system in place to learn from complaints whereby themes and trends were identified, and feedback was used to improve services.

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