

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

As part of the ongoing changes to structures and processes the local authority had identified, where workforce improvements could offer positive impacts to the delivery of Care Act 2014 duties, including outcomes for people receiving care and support services.

Staff said they enjoyed working in Telford and Wrekin and there was a culture of support and openness which started at the 'top' of the organisation and worked its way throughout. Following the local authority staff survey (2023) staff felt senior leaders and cabinet members had made themselves even more accessible, attending regular engagement meetings and staff forums as well as providing information, training, and support to promote staff wellbeing and resilience. Staff told us managers were supportive and considered personal circumstances, flexible working, wellbeing, protected characteristics, and unpaid caring needs.

Frontline social work teams told us of effective communication between teams, with good use of technology and regular meetings. The PSW and Principal Occupational Therapist (POT) facilitated regular supervisions, peer reviews, audits, and shared learning opportunities. The POT role had recently been introduced to take a professional leadership role across the organisation, and act as a bridge for better communication and understanding between senior leaders and frontline staff. The both roles oversaw quality assurance and improvement of social work practice, advising the Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) and wider council in complex or controversial cases, and on law relating to social work practice. However, feedback from people we spoke to, and the local authority's analysis of complaints showed these roles still needed time to embed fully.

Senior leaders told us how the local authority was realigning its 2 locality teams to short term and long -term borough wide teams. The social work practice framework was under review at the time of the assessment to ensure clear lines of accountability and understanding of roles and responsibilities. Staff confirmed they had been included in the team changes and felt valued and listened to by leaders.

Staff, leaders, and partners told us there was an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning and improvement, with annual personal performance and development discussions, sharing of casework with colleagues for support, learning and critical advice, and opportunities to attend events such as International Social Work Day. Learning opportunities focused on not only national areas but were identified through quality assurance processes, including internal and external audits. Corporate Management and Leadership programmes were in place to provide opportunities for leaders and managers to develop, and training days given to ensure staff had time to update professional qualifications and registrations. There was also an online learning platform ('Ollie') supporting induction and refresher training as well as allowing access to awareness training such as the Oliver McGowan mandatory training for staff working with people with learning disabilities and autistic people.

Professional development opportunities included trainee social work and occupational therapist apprenticeship schemes with local universities, specialist assessment service coordinators supporting newly qualified social workers, and Practice Educator training to support student social workers. There was a particularly strong emphasis on continuous improvement. The views of people using the service were at the core of quality monitoring and assurance arrangements. Innovation was celebrated and shared.

Staff and leaders engaged with external work, including research, and embedded evidence-based practice in the local authority. For example, the PSW annual report highlighted ways in which the local authority kept up to date with changes in practice and learning, as well as sharing good practice through regional and national work. This included involvement in the West Midlands ADASS PSW and POTs networks, representing PSWs and POTs on the national ADASS workforce, continued involvement with the West Midlands teaching partnership, and implementation of ADASS research posts within Adult Social Care. In addition to this, other senior leaders participated in regional and national committees. For example, the DASS was a member of the West Midlands ADASS, and a member of ADASS executive council, as well as being a member of the West Mercia Strategic Management Board and the ADASS policy lead for learning disabilities and autism.

The local authority actively participated in peer review and sector-led improvement activity. The local authority drew on external support to improve when necessary. For example, Telford and Wrekin had previously invited external challenge from the Local Government Association (LGA), ADASS peer reviews, and the department of health and social care, as well as being part of the Society for Innovation Technology and Modernisation (Socitm) advisory community of practice, which helped support information and advice service improvements. Staff told us they participated in regional best practice sharing forums such as family carers, supporting the local authority's staff champions programme, and were actively involved in the Regional International Recruitment programme, supporting 14 councils to adopt best practice in relation to ethical recruitment.

The local authority collaborated with people and partners to actively promote and support innovative and new ways of working which improved people's social care experiences and outcomes. For example, the implementation of integrated care records across the ICS, a new eBrokerage web-platform to support people looking for support providers, and the development of an on-line and self-assessment service option as part of the 'Live Well Telford' social care Portal. Hospital discharges were supported through a virtual care smart hub and an 'Oyster' scheme supported fully mobile assistive technology enabled people to contact carers when needed during the night to support hospital admission avoidance (including the Planned Overnight Care team).

The Independent Living Centre enabled members of the public to access advice, information and support on how to stay safe and access preventative services. The centre acted as a link to the Virtual House Tour, showing examples of assistive technology, sensory aids, and OT equipment to promote independence. This formed part of a presentation to the LGA's conference innovation zone in July 2023. More recently, the local authority worked alongside Co-Fund and Collaborate to Innovate in developing an app to support people with learning disabilities to prepare for and maintain employment.

Coproduction was embedded throughout the local authority's work. Staff and leaders told us how partnership working with people with lived experience to develop Adult Social Care services was an essential part of strategic and operational practice at every level of the authority. Leaders developed, discussed, promoted and implemented innovative ways of involving people in developing services which exceeded best practice.

In addition to multiple staff champions supporting equality, diversity, and inclusion within the organisation, the Making it Real Board was set up in January 2018, made up of people who use adult services or who were interested in the development of Adult Social Care in Telford and Wrekin. Members of the board received training and support and attended all local authority and partnership forums, in addition to regional and national coproduction groups, to represent seldom heard people's voice and ensure best practice.

Telford and Wrekin's coproduction framework (2023-2025) set out the local authority's approach to coproduction and engagement, citing national best practice examples, such as 'Think Local Act Personal' and the National Coproduction Advisory Group.

Staff and leaders told us there was a large coproductive presence in the development of new services. There was rigorous and constructive challenge from people who used services, the public and stakeholders, which was seen as a vital way of holding services to account. For example, the new online self-service Portal, allowing people to self-refer for needs assessments, was strongly influenced by members of the Making it Real Board who provided advice on accessibility and ease of use. Reviews and changes to existing services also included 'experts by experience' who gave feedback on how effective services were. For example, feedback on direct payment processes had led to a restructure of the team and the introduction of new quality assurance processes.

People told us the local authority's coproductive approach made a genuine difference to Adult Social Care services. People gave examples of carers wellbeing guides, the All-Age Learning Disability strategy, and the All-Age Autism strategy, as examples of coproduction having a positive impact on local authority approaches to meeting people's needs. Examples of effective changes to accessible information included guides to direct payments and DRE, information on assessments and people's rights, production of support plans and other support documents in formats meeting people's communication needs, and a 'know where to go' document signposting people to Adult Social Care services throughout the borough.

Recently the Making it Real Board had recognised there were gaps in their representation of all communities within the borough, for example, from some ethnic communities and from older people using Adult Social Care services, and were working with frontline teams, as well as using social media and attending awareness events to recruit a more diverse representation of Telford and Wrekin. The addition of unpaid carers and parent carers of people with learning disabilities had supported coproduction in these areas, for example in identifying supported accommodation needs.

People and partners told us coproduction extended into community inclusion projects and joint working with the voluntary and community sector. For example, a community café supporting people with learning disabilities to gain work experience, and digital drop-in sessions based in community hubs and the Independent Living Centre, supporting people to use technology to promote independence and access services. Partners told us how they attended the Making it Real Board, along with senior council leaders and cabinet members to listen to people's concerns and how the board held people to account for safe, effective provision of services.

Learning from feedback

The local authority learned from people's feedback about their experiences of care and support, and feedback from staff and partners. This informed strategy, improvement activity and decision making at all levels. There were processes to ensure learning happened when things went wrong, and from examples of good practice. Leaders encouraged reflection and collective problem-solving.

Staff and leaders told us opportunities for learning were taken from multiple sources, including complaints and compliments, safeguarding concerns (including SARs), and public engagement forums such as community hubs. The local authority also invited feedback from staff and partners and arranged external audits with neighbouring local authorities to ensure impartial scrutiny and objective criticism.

Senior leaders shared their vision of a culture of openness and transparency, ensuring they were visible and accessible to staff and the local community. As part of the assessment, we received multiple examples of leaders engaging effectively with staff, partners and people using services. People told us of genuine cooperative approaches which made them feel listened to. Staff told us of multiple ways to share concerns and learning opportunities, including staff forums, supervisions, awareness sessions, and audits, as well as access to formal policies such as whistleblowing and speaking up.

There was clear evidence learning from concerns and incidents was a key contributor to continuous improvement. Data provided by the local authority showed there had been 40 complaints raised about Adult Social Care services in 2023-2024, with 28 concerns upheld, leading to actions and improvements. The most common themes were concerns around assessment waiting lists, and communication (totalling 61% of concerns).

Examples of learning and actions following feedback on joint working with health partners included the introduction of new and innovative ways to support hospital discharge processes. This included changes to discharge pathways to improve the ratio of complex discharges home as well as the 'Getting it Right First-time' programme looking at rates of 'unsafe' discharges. Improvements to reduce hospital readmissions included Virtual Wards and the Planned Overnight Care team. Recent changes to engagement during assessments and safeguarding enquiries included a refreshed 'keeping in touch' process designed following concerns frontline teams did not always keep people and providers updated on progress and outcomes.
