

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 received appropriate training and support to be able to carry out assessments in line with their job roles. There was a robust training offer available to all staff regardless of tenure, including through the Social Care Academy. Staff in provider organisations were able to access the training resource. Staff were supported to complete required continuing professional development in line with their roles. Some staff described limited capacity to commit to training considering the pressure of workload and team size.

The Principal Social Worker (PSW) had a lead role in working with the Social Care Academy in developing appropriate resources. This included for example, the recognition that existing online training was not working for everyone, so borough-specific webinars were in development at the time of our assessment. The PSW had regular reflective sessions with managers and had recognised a need for more training about complex legal work, following a rise of cases in the borough.

Staff had access to reflective practice and case discussions and regular supervision from managers. A variety of tools were available, including huddles, team meetings, and monthly practice forums to keep staff and managers up to date on practice and provide support. The supervision policy and guidance had recently been reviewed, and management training was in place to support effective case discussion and supervision. Social care staff could directly reach out to the PSW for practice support as needed. Some staff felt teams' roles and the pathways between teams needed to be clearer, as there had been disagreements between teams, and they would welcome more opportunities to have these discussions.

Some staff described clear progression pathways that supported their career aspirations, including as practice educators and managers. Apprenticeship schemes were in place to support unregistered social care staff to attain social work accreditation. Social work students and those in their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) were supported by the service. Staff described feeling that the local authority invested in their development. OT student placements had previously been supported, but this was not in place at the time of our assessment.

Better Lives Review Panels had been implemented in Ealing. These were opportunities following decision making, so as not to cause delays to care, to review assessments to ensure best practice and as an opportunity for learning. This included checks that assessments were strength-based, considered carers, community resources, and ethnic, cultural and religious needs had been considered as these had been areas of practice that had previously been overlooked. Staff we spoke to who attended were positive about the improvements this had made to their individual practice. There was work ongoing at the time of our assessment to develop the mechanism to share general learning points for practice and link this with the training offer where relevant. The local authority was tracking and reporting whether people's outcomes were achieved through this process, which was good practice in that the local authority was able to monitor the impact of their practice on people's experiences.

The local authority implemented tools, such as the resource allocation panel, which aimed to support consideration of appropriateness and cost effectiveness of care planning. This did not decide on funding but offered opportunities for reflection and learning, supporting the organisation across all staffing levels to take ownership of challenges in the area, with a view to better managing this in the future.

The local authority was refreshing their partnership boards at the time of our assessment to better support co-production with the community. The local authority had a participation contract in place with a community sector organisation to support people who used services in co-production activity. Co-production work had been effective in the borough, for example in co-designing proposed standards for learning disability day services and in the development of the suicide prevention action plan.

Members of the partnership boards told us that they felt they'd been able to raise issues that were important to their community, such as pre-diagnostic support for autistic people. Some staff agreed with partnership group participants that they should be recompensed considering the importance of the boards. Some people told us this was not consistent, and they felt undervalued, and that it was not clear if there was a local resolution. People told us they were not always clear how decisions were made and that sometimes this happened outside their boards in ways that was not explained or that they could be involved in. Most people we spoke to were very proud and excited by the co-production work they were involved in and felt supported to do so in a way that worked for them.

People's voices were heard regularly at scrutiny panels and the corporate priority regarding the 'your voice, your town' programme indicated clear commitment to co-production and a community driven approach. Some partners described improvements in meaningful consultations taking place with communities and slow, but progressing reductions in siloed working. Community and voluntary sector organisations told us they did not always feel they were included in opportunities for co-production. Some partner organisations were keen to see appropriate resource allocated to co-production to ensure there was enough time and capacity to do it meaningfully.

The local authority had increased direct communication with people using services through the introduction of a quarterly newsletter. The local authority has increased resources to its telephone-based contact centre, introduced daily MARAC systems and improved reporting and benchmarking on call handling.

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The local authority was trialing the use of artificial intelligence to support aspects of the daily activity of the service, including carrying out Care Act assessments. They were working collaboratively with a provider to trial the approach within the reablement and bridging service with a small group of staff. The service took a measured approach to testing and development but had noticed significant benefits in reduced administration time. Sufficient checks were in place to ensure the accuracy of the model. The service's trial of predictive analytics to support triage in some services was being reconsidered and redeveloped, for example, as the confidence in the model was limited and required improvement. The local authority was keen to realise the benefits of technology in their work, and further development was ongoing. The trial was still in its infancy; therefore, the local authority had not yet gained feedback from people who used services to analyse how this service had improved outcomes for them. Staff who had used the technology were positive but there were some anxieties in other parts of the service about its use which would need to be considered.

The local authority also took part in Local Government Association (LGA) peer reviews to invite challenge. Staff had access to Research in Practice, an online resource that supports evidence-informed practice with children and families, young people and adults. The service connected to local universities to support ongoing reflective practice and knowledge of theory, while maintaining practice skills. Staff engaged with other local authorities to develop practice based on their learning, for example in relation to direct payments or independent living skills in transitions. An independent review had been completed regarding direct payments to invite learning and recommendations.

Learning from feedback

The local authority was open to feedback from staff about what was working and what needed to improve. Staff felt managers and senior leaders were open, visible, and responsive.

The local authority had a good response to complaints. Between February 2023 and January 2024, the local authority told us they received 70 complaints about the service, with the highest number of complaints about delays in assessment and review and decision making. 58% of the received complaints were upheld. Actions had been implemented, such as additional capacity in the OT team through an external agency. The local authority told us not all teams recorded compliments well and they were working to resolve this at the time of our assessment. Feedback was captured on assessments and reviews on information systems, but staff were not clear how the PSW or the performance clinics used this feedback indicating that further work was needed to complete the improvement loop. Some teams told us they directly used information they gathered to inform the development and operation of their service, such as the bridging and reablement service.

Some people who accessed care and support did not always feel listened to or that information was shared with them about how to make a complaint. Some felt that their concerns had been either been dismissed by staff or that there was no oversight of concerns that they had not raised as formal complaints. The local authority's website promoted the use of an online form, which required an account, to make and track complaints. The published policy online was primarily written for the service and was not easily accessible for people who used services. This could have discouraged people from making complaints.

Between February 2023 and January 2024, the local authority told us they received 68 complaints about their financial assessment service, with themes around incorrect charging, delays in financial assessments and missed or cancelled homecare. The local authority had significantly improved people's waiting time for financial assessment following this feedback.

National data from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in July 2024 indicated that the local authority had a lower than average uphold rate of 50% than for other local authorities of its type (80.12%). Responses to the LGSCO were timely and compliant.

Leaders told us the local authority had increased direct communication with users through the introduction of a quarterly newsletter. They also increased resources to their telephone-based contact centre and improved reporting and benchmarking on call handling. They introduced monitoring of user satisfaction with care assessments and reviews, and we were told this had shown above 75% satisfaction rate since March 2024.

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