

Learning, improvement and innovation

Score: 2

2 - Evidence shows some shortfalls

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 worked with people and partners but their approach to co-production was still developing. We heard positive feedback from people and partners about co-production, but we heard consistently that whilst this work was welcome, it was also recent and had yet to mature. Some partners said they had been able to instigate positive change, such as around provision for people with a learning disability and autistic people. In other cases, we heard that some minority ethnic groups had not yet been involved in co-production work.

People and partners involved in co-production said they sometimes had little direction from the local authority which meant they took it upon themselves to develop their own projects. We heard how attempts to influence local authority approaches to accessible information had so far not led to positive change. Some partners felt decision-makers were too 'stretched' with the ongoing transformation and described how co-production work sometimes hit a 'ceiling'.

The local authority proactively sought feedback through Local Government Association (LGA) peer challenge reviews. A 2023 LGA peer challenge review identified areas the local authority was working to improve, such as a need to improve the link between strategic commissioning and operational teams or make better use of data. These were both areas of which were subject to a lot of improvement activity at the time of our assessment but had not yet been fully implemented.

There was a learning culture in which staff had access to training to ensure they could deliver Care Act duties effectively. The local authority reported mixed feedback with regards to their learning and development offer with compliance high in some areas such as 82% for dementia training but needing improvement in other areas such as autism which had a 53% compliance rate. The local authority told us about various career pathways, programmes and learning sessions that were promoted as part of their learning and innovation drive. There was work ongoing with a local university to support new ways of encouraging more staff to complete professional qualifications and we heard positive feedback from staff about the support they had accessing this. The local authority had identified a need to improve staffing, and their data showed they had improved recruitment and retention of staff. Leaders told us about plans to improve this further by expanding their ability to develop their own staff and improving the local authority's ability to develop staff was key to achieving this. Local authority data showed this had reduced staff turnover rate and had reduced social work vacancies from 30% at the end of 2022 to 18.75% by August 2024.

Staff spoke positively about the training on offer, and we saw how this was targeted towards identified learning needs. Regular practice audits were carried out and we heard how the findings of these were used to inform areas of focus. For example, we heard consistently positive feedback about huddles that were introduced to support people with complex cases relating to the Mental Capacity Act. Leaders told us these had been introduced following findings in practice audits.

Learning was shared across the partnership, we heard particularly positive feedback about approaches to learning in hospital discharge. Staff said they had good training and development opportunities that they could access from across different providers, in response to current issues or themes. We heard positive feedback about some approaches, such as staff in housing who undertook training in equipment and adaptations to become trusted assessors which improved people's experiences by getting adaptations carried out quickly. We also heard about an innovative approach to dissemination of learning across the safeguarding adults board partnership with 70 staff undertaking 'train the trainer' training to deliver learning from the board about safeguarding themes. This approach meant 70 staff across partners were specially trained and signed off to be able to disseminate learning to their colleagues.

Learning from feedback

The local authority had systems in place to analyse and learn from complaints. In 2022/23 there had been 70 formal complaints and the local authority analysed these to look for themes. For example, the 2022/23 report identified themes around mental capacity assessments and we heard about improvements to staff training and support implemented in response.

National data from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) showed the local authority had 7 investigations by the LGSCO which was lower than the average number for this type of authority of 12. The percentage of complaints which were upheld was 75% which was consistent with the average for this type of local authority.

The local authority conducted surveys of both staff and people in receipt of services and we saw this was used to inform strategic priorities. Staff survey results for December 2023 had a mix of positive and negative feedback from staff. The survey included positive scores in areas such as the support people received from line managers and the learning offer. However it also showed staff had some concerns around change management, and identified improvements needed in areas such as safeguarding and commissioning.

They also used learning from external surveys, such as the Local Government Association (LGA) Annual Health Check of Social Workers. The local authority told us how the 2021/22 results had picked up on themes around lack of homecare which had informed strategies in these areas. However, these strategies were ongoing and the issues raised had been improved but not fully addressed.

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