

Governance, management and sustainability

Score: 2

2 - Evidence shows some shortfalls

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 had undergone a significant restructure following the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in 2023 and as a result was on a transformation journey in its Care Act delivery. There was a wide-ranging Transformation and Service Improvement plan (2024-2026) and overlapping Achieving Excellence Plan. This included, amongst several other areas, pathway redesign, strengthening the front door and pre-front door, the Cumberland Care Review, discharge flow work (including intermediate care) and improving coproduction.

The LGR had presented the local authority with both challenge and opportunity. A leader told us legacy arrangements had impacted the timeliness of new systems and processes being implemented. For example, the local authority had not been able to separate some records from their legacy arrangements until November 2024, and this had limited changes in this space. However, leaders and staff also told us of the opportunities the LGR had presented. A senior leader described the overhaul of the previous legacy model, with the local authority now focussing on prevention work through a lower cost, higher outcome model. This was in line with a priority of the Adult Social Care (ASC) and Housing Vision and demonstrated the shared direction of the local authority.

Directorate structures supported the standing of ASC within the Council and aligned priorities between ASC and other services. Prior to LGR, there was no standalone ASC directorate, but a senior leader told us the introduction of an ASC and Housing directorate had given prominence to ASC across the local authority. The addition of housing to the ASC directorate was also referred to as a positive move by leaders and staff, with operational partnership working still embedding. There were positive outcomes for people because of close working between both ASC and housing staff.

There were functions of ASC which sat outside of the directorate. A senior leader told us there was a 'business partnership' model of working, where functions such as commissioning and the SPA (ASC front door) sat outside of the directorate. Feedback from staff and leaders was positive about the close working with commissioning. There were systems to support close working between the SPA and ASC, such as management within the SPA attending regular ASC operational leadership meetings and close operational working between SPA staff and social work practitioners. Internal partnerships continued to strengthen to support operational delivery.

Senior leadership was visible and supportive for staff. Staff teams consistently told us leaders were approachable and were supporting a positive culture. For example, a team told us staff felt more involved in discussions about the future, got to share their views and had better sight of the direction of travel for the local authority. A senior leader also told us there had been a culture change since LGR, which was more open and supportive of staff to speak up. A partner also felt senior leadership were visible, accessible and ready to listen to them. The local authority leadership was promoting a positive and safe culture for staff.

Governance structures supported senior leaders to retain oversight on performance and risk and this continued to embed. Regular Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings were held with a rotating theme, which supported oversight of a range of areas to be covered regularly. Senior leaders, including political leadership, also met regularly to support oversight of risk and performance in ASC. There was, however, opportunity to ensure oversight was embedded in key areas. For example, a senior leader told us they did not get detailed performance information around safeguarding performance. This was despite systems in place to share safeguarding information across leadership positions. This included through, for example, the safeguarding dashboard and the strategic risk register for safeguarding. There was opportunity to ensure information was effectively shared to senior leaders to support governance further.

The local authority had developed quality assurance systems to support oversight of performance. The quality, improvement and care governance senior leadership team gathered information on performance through designated groups and sub-groups. A leader told us the work of the groups supported performance information to be shared to senior leadership as well as to operational staff. The local authority had developed a case file audit to quality assure staff practice. Audits were completed by managers monthly and included feedback from people to support quality assurance. Examples of feedback gathered between June and December 2024 showed the positive impact staff had on people's lives, with themes showing person-centred and strength-based practice. Themes from the audits were collated and presented to the DMT. There was opportunity to better embed the case file audit process, however, with the April and May 2025 Practice Theme Report highlighting only 22 out of 32 audits completed and this risked themes being missed. The July 2025 report did, however, have a 100% completion rate.

The local authority was developing its processes for scrutiny and challenge. There was a People Overview and Scrutiny Committee which was new following LGR. Senior leaders told us the scrutiny function was developing, with work ongoing to better set agendas and gather performance information to challenge effectively. Senior leadership in ASC were also working with the scrutiny committee to highlight current challenges. The Committee received quarterly ASC performance reporting to support their oversight and scrutiny of performance. There were also other examples of political leaders challenging decision making. For example, the HWB had challenged where they felt there was waste of resource which could be better used. A senior leader also told us they provided challenge and sourced external resources to support scrutiny, such as through the Local Government Association. Scrutiny was continuing to strengthen to better challenge decision making.

Strategic planning

The local authority was developing its strategic priorities to inform the direction needed to improve care and support outcomes for people and local communities. The Council-wide Cumberland Plan (2023-2027) set out initial strategic focus for the local authority and ASC direction was aligned with this. For example, the ASC and Housing Vision, was aligned to the Council's wider strategic priorities, with the vision of "People live fulfilled, healthy, independent lives in the place that they call home." Other key strategies for ASC, such as the Adult Social Care and Housing Commissioning Strategy which was due for sign off at the time of the assessment, sought to address local challenges and support people to better outcomes.

The local authority was proactive in their approach to resourcing improvements to services and outcomes for people. The Transformation and Improvement Plan was an ambitious and wide-ranging programme following a review of services post-LGR. The resourcing of this medium-term plan showed emphasis of the local authority in improving outcomes for people. A Transformation Board with associated project officers oversaw this work. While it was not yet clear on the impact of this work, it demonstrated a direction for ASC.

A Strategic Risk Register (2024-2025) was used to keep track of key risk areas and outlined relevant controls to help mitigate risk. For example, the risk register identified unsustainable demand and inability of health and social care to keep people sufficiently safe and the related impact this had on people. There were a range of controls to help mitigate this risk such as arrangements for oversight, waiting well procedures, transformational efficiency and recruitment.

While there was clear strategic oversight of risks, there was opportunity to focus resources to further support key service areas. For example, there was ongoing work to reduce waits for assessments, reviews, OT assessments, equipment and DoLS authorisations but waits were still significant for people. People at most risk were being supported in a timely manner, but there was risk of escalating need for people having to wait longer. There was evidence of some improvement in these areas following investment, with for example, reduced waiting lists for annual reviews, but there was a continued need to address waits for support for people effectively.

Workforce challenges were highlighted by staff and partners, with teams such as the SPA, learning disability, autism and transitions team and some teams based in the West of Cumberland particularly impacted. Staff and leaders told us the LGR had impacted on resources, in some cases disproportionately, which had led to increased pressure on teams. Some staff teams told us it was difficult to manage their workloads, especially with increased complexity. They also told us there were a lack of experienced or advanced practitioner staff embedded within some teams, who they would usually access for case support. While all teams had more senior roles within them, there could be difficulty accessing their expertise. As a result, this increased the ask of managers, as staff would contact them for case support. There was a separate advanced practice lead (APL) team, which could be contacted for support, but this expertise was not embedded within teams. The APLs also offered 1:1 support for staff, reflective discussion and advice in relation to complex work, for example. Where this resource was accessed, there was positive feedback on the APLs.

In response to staffing pressures, a senior leader told us the local authority ensured risk was mitigated. They told us agency staff (externally provided workers) were used to fill gaps if needed. They told us the frontline did not have excessive vacancies, but recognised workflow was an issue for some teams, with increased casework which may not be appropriate for their team. Staff teams also told us they were well supported by their managers, who helped them to manage their wellbeing and workload. The local authority was working to address these concerns further to help reduce these pressures.

The local authority had developed its use of data and insight to support performance oversight, risk management and service delivery. Despite challenges of legacy data issues following LGR, data dashboards provided managers and leaders with up-to-date information on service performance such as waiting lists. A leader told us, for example, dashboards were used in oversight and assurance meetings and supported leaders to identify and investigate specific areas of performance. Staff and leaders told us there was still work to improve data collection and accuracy, including in data around outcomes for people, but there was recognition of the progress made in this area in a relatively short space of time. The local authority continued to strengthen its use of data for oversight and delivery.

Information security

The local authority had arrangements to maintain the security, availability, integrity and confidentiality of data, records and data management systems.

A staff team told us there were robust processes around data sharing and confidentiality. For example, they told us the local authority used a secure email system to support confidentiality of sharing information. People were also asked about their preferences around information sharing to ensure consent was gathered where required.

There was mandatory training on ICT and data management for staff as part of their induction. An information governance team also led on data management and provided advice around data security issues.