

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 was on an improvement journey as it embedded changes following LGR. There was a learning culture which was supporting the development of using feedback from staff, people and partners to improve systems and processes.

There was a recognition of a need to use co-production more effectively to support service improvement. A leader told us a culture change around co-production was embedding and this was reflected in the appointment of a new co-production lead role, who had a wide-ranging action plan, along with a planned co-production charter. A Living Well sub-group of the local authority's Quality Assurance Board had also been created which was co-chaired by the co-production lead and a person with lived experience. The group acted as a point of consultation on co-production work and considered areas where co-production could be used. The local authority was also working with partners such as Healthwatch, the Improving Adult Care Together (IMPACT) network and Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) to better embed their approach.

There were some positive examples of development of coproduction. For example, the introduction of the carer's forum. The forum was supporting improvement work for carers and the creation of the carer's charter, which was due for sign off. In a further example, a fictional case study had been developed with people with lived experience around the challenges faced by homeless people. A leader told us this story had been developed to be trauma-informed and was used as a tool to promote understanding for the local authority and key system partners. Each of these examples highlighted how people and carers were listened to, and this showed the intent of using people's voice to better influence strategy, processes and understanding.

People and partners also told us the local authority was developing co-production, but said this needed to be better embedded, more structured and with more representative groups of people. There was evidence of the local authority building relationships with communities to develop their approach, such as through a 'Power of Lived Experience' event which invited a range of partners and community groups to come together to discuss how lived experience can inform future practice. The local authority was also developing a more considered approach in practical arrangements for people, with for example, the development of a policy on compensating people involved in co-production work. The local authority had a clear direction to better embed co-production, and this continued as an area of focus

Staff were supported with learning, improvement and their continuous professional development (CPD). Staff teams told us they had supervisions which supported their wellbeing, progression and reflective practice. The introduction of the advanced practice lead team was supporting staff learning and improvement, through updates to processes, policies and directed learning from case file audits. Staff also told us of opportunities to progress in their roles such as through BIA and AMHP training or social work qualifications funded by the local authority. A new virtual practice library had also been developed which supported staff to access information, guidance and best practice which a staff team told us had over 1000 visits in its first 7 days.

There was a supportive offer for new staff, including students, apprentices and Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) social workers. A staff team told us the social care academy delivered tailored workshops, which included case study examples, on a 12-month rolling basis to ensure new staff could continually access this support. This included, for example, OT specific sessions around moving and handling. There was also support for staff who had just completed their ASYE or OT preceptorships, and into the second and third years of their professional practice where it was required. This demonstrated the local authority's investment in the development of their staff.

The local authority recognised the need for more innovation and technology. The Transformation and Service Improvement Plan had a range of projects to advance 'tech-enabled care'. There were plans to recommission their assistive technology offer so it was more comprehensive and innovative. A positive example of the move towards better use of technology was the 'Ethel Care' pilot, which staff told us supported virtual prompting of tasks for people to support independence. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) to support efficiency was also being developed, with an ongoing pilot for an AI program to reduce staff administrative time, which staff told us was working well. A leader also told us AI was being developed to better forecast and planning around staff caseloads. The local authority was committed to developing innovation to support independence and efficiency.

Learning from feedback

The local authority learned when things went wrong such as following SARs and LeDeR reviews (Learning from Lives and Deaths – People with a Learning Disability and Autistic People). For example, there had been co-produced work with a relative following a LeDeR review, which had involved development of training to help improve local practice. A staff team told us there had been positive feedback about this learning and there were plans to widen its scope.

There had also been development of post-incident and serious success reviews, to support staff development. Post-incident reviews were cases which had not met the threshold for statutory reviews such as SARs, but where learning was identified. Serious success reviews highlighted positive case examples for staff. In an example given by staff, a post-incident review had led to the local authority and partners improving access to specialist equipment for people. Learning was provided for staff in 7-minute briefings, at team meetings and practice improvement groups to support staff development.

The local authority sought to learn from feedback from partners to learn and improve practice, but some partners felt feedback was not always acted upon. Key VCSE partners were members of strategic delivery boards, and they told us their feedback was valued by the local authority. However, some other partners told us although they felt heard, they felt feedback was not always acted upon as issues re-occurred. A partner told us the local authority was working with them to improve gathering of feedback.

The local authority used external expertise and best practice to support learning and improvement. For example, the local authority had benefitted from LGA and ADASS peer challenge exercises, including a bespoke review around safeguarding. The reviews had led to targeted improvements, particularly to recommendations around safeguarding to reduce waits for people. External consultancy was also being used to support transformation and improvement, with resource invested in support of improvements to the front-door and pre-front door. While some of these changes were not yet embedded, it showed the local authority's openness to learn from challenge and external resource.

The local authority was also using staff feedback to help develop their approaches. The local authority used 'what matters to you' sessions to gather feedback from staff. A staff team told us the use of this information had helped to inform improvements to the supervision policy and there was a focus on making changes collaboratively with staff. There had also been staff engagement as part of the transformation planning, with an interactive planning day and roadshows. This was a positive approach to including staff voice in the local authority's development.

The local authority analysed its compliments and complaints to draw out any themes. The local authority's Practice Improvement Group was a forum which could look at themes from this analysis. However, there had been a low number of upheld or partially upheld complaints which meant identification of practice themes was limited. Data provided by the local authority between January 2024 and January 2025 showed there had been 57 complaints and 11 compliments. The most regular issues highlighted from complaints were around care standards, quality and continuity, and disagreement with Council policy, decisions and procedures. There was also a range of positive feedback from people as part of the case file audits, which commended staff on their practice.

There had been 2 detailed investigations following complaints to the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) between 01 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. Both of these complaints were upheld, with the local authority complying with the outcomes of these investigations. There was, however, 1 incident of late compliance.