

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
01 April 2025

CQC ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK – UPDATE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update and inform Scrutiny on the CQC assurance framework and inspection outcome

Summary

2. The CQC Assurance Framework for Local Authorities in England, introduced by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), is a structured approach to evaluating the performance of local authorities in delivering Adult Social Care services. It aligns with the goals of the Health and Care Act 2022, which aims to ensure high-quality, equitable, and sustainable care for individuals in need.
3. The framework evaluates how local authorities:
 - a) Assess needs: Identify and understand the care and support needs of their population.
 - b) Provide support: Deliver timely, effective, and personalised care.
 - c) Ensure safety: Protect adults at risk from harm and ensure high standards of care.
 - d) Leadership and workforce: Exhibit effective leadership and maintain a skilled, motivated workforce.
4. Assessment Criteria: The CQC uses four key themes:
 - a) Working with people: Involves engagement with service users, families, and carers.
 - b) Providing support: Focuses on commissioning and direct service provision.
 - c) Ensuring safety: Covers safeguarding and risk management.
 - d) Leadership: Examines strategic direction, governance, and staff wellbeing.

5. Methods of Evaluation:

- a) Data and Evidence: Review of qualitative and quantitative data from local authorities and service providers.
- b) Inspection Visits: On-site evaluations to observe practices and gather insights from stakeholders.
- c) Stakeholder Feedback: Input from people using services, their carers, and partner organisations.

6. Outcome Ratings:

- a) Local authorities are rated on their performance, using categories such as Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, or Inadequate.

7. Improvement Focus:

- a) The framework emphasises continuous improvement by identifying strengths and areas for development, supporting local authorities to enhance service quality.

Conclusion

- 8. The CQC's assurance process aims to create transparency, foster accountability, and drive better outcomes for individuals relying on Adult Social Care services.
- 9. This report seeks to update Scrutiny members on the inspection undertaken between 20 January 2025 - 24 January 2025.

Recommendation

- 10. It is recommended that Members note the contents of the report.

Climate Considerations

- 11. This report has considered climate impact and change. All consideration was undertaken with sustainability in mind and aim to reduce the carbon footprint, and re-use energy and environmental resources where possible. The feedback and evidence for CQC assurance framework has been developed electronically and shared via emails, Teams or in the main through virtual events. Adult Services have appointed practitioners to lead on climate change within the service and develop literature and information to share with people who access services.

Joss Harbron
Assistant Director of Adult Social Care

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Council Plan	The report and the activity to support the preparation for regulation and inspection is aligned to the Council Plan priorities.
Addressing inequalities	This programme has no specific impact on protected groups however all inequalities are considered as part of the assessment process.
Tackling Climate Change	All consideration was undertaken with sustainability in mind and aim to reduce the carbon footprint, and re-use energy and environmental resources where possible.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Key aims with Adult Services is to deliver efficient, effective and person-centred care which supports a strength based approach aligned to the requirements of the Care Act and includes effective use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	The strategy outlined in this report will continue the Council's drive to deliver services and support that enhance people's life chances and opportunities to thrive.
S17 Crime and Disorder	N/A
Wards Affected	All Darlington Wards.
Groups Affected	All adults with social care needs in Darlington.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not impact on the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This report is an update.
Urgent Decision	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The proposed projects have no specific impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

12. The Care Quality Commission have undertaken an onsite inspection of Darlington Borough Council Adult Services between 20 January 2025 - 27 January 2025.
13. The inspection was undertaken by six inspectors who remained on site for three days and then undertake a further two days chairing Teams meetings with specific groups.
14. The inspection team arranged group meetings with:
 - a) Front-line practitioners from each Social Work and Occupational Therapy teams and including Commissioning, Brokerage, Contracting and Performance.
 - b) Council Members – i.e. Portfolio Holder, Shadow Portfolio Holders, and Scrutiny Chair.
 - c) Senior Leadership – i.e. Chief Executive, Director of Adult Social Services and Heads of Service.
 - d) Partners, e.g. Carers Support Services, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, Tees, Esk and Wear Valley, Integrated Care Board and Darlington Association of Disability.

- e) Stakeholders, e.g. carers and people who use Adult Services.

Outcome of Inspection

15. On 5 February 2025 following the inspection CQC provided high-level feedback to James Stroyan, Executive Director and Joss Harbron, Assistant Director. The findings shared were overall positive with feedback from the Lead Inspector on the commitment and passion of staff, the good relationships with partners, Members, and people who use services.
16. Assessing local authorities is a new role for CQC, so they have added calibration panels as a temporary additional step in the quality assurance process. These panels will then review and validate the scores and ratings from the assessments to make sure they provide a reliable and consistent view of quality across local authorities. The panel will include both internal and external representatives.
17. A draft report will be shared with the local authority and will:
 - a) Include a short summary of the key features of the local authority.
 - b) Show CQC most up-to-date findings against the themes and for each quality statement.
 - c) Focus on people's experiences of care, including:
 - i. What people have said about their experience.
 - ii. How CQC used it in their assessments.
 - d) Include a description of:
 - i. Areas that need to improve.
 - ii. Areas of strength and good practice.
 - iii. Whether the local authority is moving in the right direction.
18. The Local Authority will be able to check the factual accuracy and completeness of evidence used in the draft report. There will be a short period between the assessment and when CQC publish the final report on our website.
19. When CQC publish the ratings, they will publish the:
 - a) Overall rating.
 - b) Score for each quality statement.
20. The score will indicate where a local authority sits within a rating, showing whether it is nearer the upper or lower threshold.
21. CQC will quality-assure their processes and reports to check that their view of quality is reliable.
22. The Department of Health and Social Care has requested that CQC include financial information in assessment reports. However, CQC do not consider this in their assessment – it is presented for information purposes only.

23. The report will make clear any areas that require improvement. CQC consider local authorities to be best placed to lead their own improvement and the assessments consider any improvement actions that Darlington Borough Council Adult Services has already put in place.
24. If CQC find that a local authority is failing to perform its functions under the Care Act to an acceptable standard, they must inform the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. This duty is under section 50 of The Health and Social Care Act 2008.
25. The duty is triggered where any quality statement receives a score of 1. This applies to all quality statements except those under the [‘Leadership’ Theme](#). These do not directly map to Part 1 of the Care Act.
26. When this happens, the Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care and Integrated Care will write separately to:
 - a) The Secretary of State to explain how they made our decision.
 - b) The Chief Executive and Director of Adult Social Services at the local authority to inform them that a section 50 notification has been made.
27. Following this notification, the Department of Health and Social Care will provide guidance and co-ordinate any improvement or intervention activity. This is described in the [operational framework for adult social care intervention in local authorities](#).

Conclusion

28. At time of writing this report the final report has not been published. It is anticipated to be published by end of March - early April 2025.

