

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
26 AUGUST 2025

CQC ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK – UPDATE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update and inform Scrutiny on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance framework and inspection activity.

Summary

2. The inspection, carried out by CQC in January 2025, is part of a new national framework designed to assess local authorities and ensure that people are receiving high-quality care and support.
3. We had to provide a Local Authority Information Return (LAIR), Self-Assessment several cases for tracking, feedback from partners, carers, people who use services and in January 2025 an on-site inspection.
4. The final report was published on 30 May 2025 with an outcome of GOOD, with an overall rating of 73%.
5. This is a significant achievement for the Local Authority (LA) and testament to the hard work, commitment and dedication of the adult service teams and wider colleagues who have worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome.
6. The score of 73% has placed the LA as one of the highest rated adult services in the country. This is an amazing success for a small LA.
7. James Bullion, CQC's chief inspector of adult social care and integrated care, said: "At this assessment of Darlington Borough Council's adult social care services, we found a positive culture between staff and leaders, which was reflected in their commitment to continuous learning to help improve services and meet the needs of the local population. People's feedback was mainly positive about their care and support, and people felt they had more control over their daily lives. It was positive to hear that carers in Darlington were more satisfied with social services (52.38%) than the national average (36.83%). The authority was working well with partners around hospital discharge. For example, after someone was discharged from hospital, a social worker worked with partners to organise equipment to support them at home. This was installed the same day which meant the person could retain their independence. We heard about examples of direct payments being used to support people for a range of needs, including when their first language wasn't English. The local authority offered care and support from a personal assistant who spoke their first language, which was arranged and funded through a direct payment. However, the

assessment team found that more work was needed around the local authority engaging with people in the local community and seldom heard groups, so they have more involvement in developing strategies, to help improve services for people living across Darlington. However, plans were in place to develop engagement with relevant groups. Overall, Darlington Borough Council should be really pleased with the many positive findings in our report and are already building on this with further improvement plans. We look forward to returning to see how they have built on areas of good practice and how their plans mature.”

Recommendations

8. It is recommended that: -
- (a) Members note the content of the report.
 - (b) Assistant Director to provide updates to members on areas of improvement within the Adult Services transformation plan service reports in subsequent scrutiny committees.

Joss Harbron
Assistant Director of Adult Social Care

Background Papers

- (i) [CQC rates Darlington Borough Council’s adult social care provision as good - Care Quality Commission](#)

Joss Harbron Extension: 5278

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. In relation to the findings of the report, the service has clear plans to address inequalities further and embed it’s “Stronger Together” strategy within the local community.
Tackling Climate Change	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.
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

9. The CQC assessed us against nine different quality statements .
 - (a) Assessing needs;
 - (b) Supporting people to lead healthier lives;
 - (c) Equity in experience and outcomes;
 - (d) Care provision, integration and continuity;
 - (e) Partnerships and communities;
 - (f) Safe pathways, systems and transitions;
 - (g) Safeguarding;
 - (h) Governance, management and sustainability;
 - (i) Learning, improvement and innovation.
10. We received Good in eight of the nine quality statements, with a Requires Improvement for Equity in Experience and Outcomes.
11. The report recognised the strengths of Darlington's approach, which focuses on independence, choice, dignity and community support.
12. The inspectors highlighted several key areas of good practice:
 - (a) Darlington provided a good level of Adult Social Care (ASC) service and support.
 - (b) There was a consistent strength-based assessment programme with flexible approaches from staff as well as supportive management around support planning.
 - (c) Carers were identified they received a good level of support and national data was positive. Risk prioritisation was evident across all assessments.
 - (d) There were no delays to hospital discharge.
 - (e) Data around reablement and outcomes following discharge were better than average.

- (f) The 'Making Every Contact Count' approach, had an effective impact on support in the community.
 - (g) Clear plans to further embed public health approaches in its ASC work to address health inequalities.
 - (h) There was good partnership working in the discharge of the better care fund and work had been done to address gaps in the care market.
 - (i) There was also a good quality assurance support service from the Local Authority (LA) and additional funding had been provided to support the home care market.
 - (j) Collaborative working with partners was evident, particularly in relation to hospital discharge and the interface they had with social work teams.
 - (k) Section 75 agreements worked well with co-location and multidisciplinary team working embedded.
 - (l) Academic work undertaken with the university was brought back by social workers into practice.
 - (m) We commission the voluntary community and social enterprise sector to provide services to support people in the community and there were market engagement sessions which fostered a positive relationship with providers.
 - (n) There was mostly positive feedback about transitions to adult services.
 - (o) Safeguarding arrangements were effective and proportionate to the size of the LA and involved shared arrangements with the children's safeguarding board.
 - (p) There was a good performance on deprivation of liberties assessments and good oversight of decision making of the S42 threshold, via a dip sampling method.
 - (q) CQC found open and transparent relationships with senior leaders and staff felt they had the ability to challenge and influence policies and practice.
 - (r) Leaders had an impact on staff retention, and we heard reports of a positive workplace culture. A key feature of the work of leaders in recent years, had been to embed practice and validation forums. These effectively supported staff learning.
 - (s) The LA demonstrated a commitment to continuous learning related to cultural needs and commissioned external training.
13. While there were some areas where improvements can still be made - such as increasing access to accessible information, reducing waiting times for certain assessments, ensuring co-production and equality are at the heart of service improvements - the CQC praised the Council for recognising these issues and already taking action.
14. The CQC also noted how well Darlington works in partnership with the NHS, voluntary and community organisations, and local care providers. The Council's approach to prevention,

including early support and practical help at home, was praised for keeping people independent for longer.

Subsequent Actions

Increasing access to accessible information.

15. Adult Services are working with Disability Action Darlington to seek feedback on the Darlington Borough Council (DBC) Adult Services web pages, specific procedures and practice guidance. Together they are sourcing and developing easy read and accessible information.

Reducing waiting times for certain assessments.

16. Adult Services have an established reporting system to review waiting times for all assessments. This is monitored on a regular basis by the leadership team.
17. The key indicators are:
 - (a) Care Act Assessment open 28 days.
 - (b) Carers Assessment over 28 days.
 - (c) Occupational Therapy Assessment over 60 days.
 - (d) Overdue reviews (i.e. over 12 months).

Ensuring co-production and equality are at the heart of service improvements.

18. Adult Services have worked in partnership with Partners in Health and Care Improvement to undertake a self-assessment of the teams understanding of diversity within practice. The feedback has enabled the development of an equality, diversity and inclusion action plan to be led by the Head of Practice and Quality and shared with the teams.
19. The teams are also working closely with Public Health on the exploration of Neighbourhood Health and inclusion of “harder to reach groups” such as Gypsy Roma Traveller etc.

Conclusion.

As reflected in the summary report Adult Services will continue to drive learning and developments within practice and service delivery. The Assistant Director will provide updates at subsequent Scrutiny meetings.