

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
04 December 2024

Adult Social Care Assurance Update

Report by Corporate Director of Adult Social Care

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to**
 - i. Note the timeline for the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) Local Authority inspection for Oxfordshire County Council.
 - ii. Note the update provided on preparations for CQC Assurance and the development of a self-assessment of Adult Social Care.
 - iii. The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

Executive Summary

2. Formal notification of the CQC Local Authority inspection was received on 15th July 2024 to assess how the council meets its duties under the Care Act (2014). The notification initiated a two-stage process.
 - i. The submission of a self-assessment and evidence return in August 2024 and
 - ii. A CQC on-site assurance visit. On 4th November, the council was notified that the on-site visit would take place between the 13th – 17th January 2025.
3. This report provides an update on preparation for CQC Assurance, following the last update to scrutiny on 22nd April 2024, with a specific focus on the improvement plan, which was developed following a Peer Review in March 2024, the service performance in relation to the timeliness of Assessment, DoLS and Safeguarding and the ongoing activities required to plan for the on-site visit.

Background

4. The Health and Care Act 2022 introduced a new duty for the CQC to independently review and assess how Local Authorities are delivering their Care Act functions. From 1st April 2023 CQC has powers to assess local

authorities in England, looking at how well they meet their duties under the Care Act (2014).

5. The priority for the assessment is to seek insight into how well local authorities are providing access to personalised care and support for those who need it, commissioning services to meet good outcomes, supporting the local care system and supporting and developing the workforce.

LGA Peer Review

6. To support the council to prepare for CQC assurance and provide external challenge to our self-assessment, the Director of Adult Social Care invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a Peer Review for Adult Social Care in Oxfordshire.
7. The Peer Review took place between 5th and 7th March 2024 and provided a valuable opportunity to check and challenge our self-assessment ahead of a formal CQC assurance process, as well as to drive our continued focus on improvement and development.
8. The feedback highlighted the following strengths:
 - i. Staff are committed to delivering good services with passion and pride
 - ii. Good initiatives are driven by staff to make a difference, and genuine desire to learn and improve.
 - iii. Evident senior political and officer support for adult social care with Director of Adult Social Services a visible presence leading the Directorate.
 - iv. Waiting lists are well-managed.
 - v. Good grip of safeguarding with a mature, outcomes-focused Safeguarding Adults Board
 - vi. Strong joint working across children's and adults' services in Moving into Adulthood transitions for young people as they become adults.
 - vii. Recent stability in senior management posts, and a key senior role in housing that will aid in solving complex housing issues.
 - viii. Strong integrated commissioning arrangements across the health and social care system that afford an opportunity to provide a cohesive service.
 - ix. Discharge to Assess model recognised as providing a solid foundation for "Home First" approach to hospital discharge.
 - x. Live Well at Home framework that delivers care in people's own homes has delivered ability to manage the market and increase capacity.
 - xi. Some areas of strength recognised in specific teams, e.g. Occupational Therapy
9. The feedback also identified the following areas of focus for further development:
 - i. Further embedding the Oxfordshire Way strategic vision with our staff so that they can articulate how their work supports delivery of the vision.

- ii. Green shoots of good practice in co-producing support with people receiving a service need to be further developed, as well as incorporating the voice of the person in operational and strategic decisions.
- iii. Improvements to data and intelligence with dynamic live trend analysis available to a broader cross-section of staff to increase ability to respond to areas of concern.
- iv. Stronger focus on people's wishes and outcomes in recordkeeping to show better evidence of strengths-based practice.
- v. Further embedding Making Safeguarding Personal, an approach that enhances involvement, choice and control in our safeguarding culture.
- vi. Further embedding Oxfordshire's Joint Carers Strategy to improve the experience of being a Carer in Oxfordshire
- vii. Further development of commissioning strategies and plans
- viii. Embedding our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion so that staff can articulate how their work supports organisational progress on this area.
- ix. Recommendation to undertake a transformation of current pathways from first contact with adult social care to provide end to end strengths-based model.

Continuous Improvement Implementation Plan

- 10. The monthly Adults Performance, Practice and Pounds (PPP) extended leadership meeting provides a forum for focused internal scrutiny and challenge as well a place to share and celebrate what is going well. PPP oversees all improvement activity including our Continuous Improvement Implementation Plan which addresses our areas of development identified in spring 2024 (listed in paragraph 9 above) with support from the LGA Peer Review.

| | Area of focus (abbreviated) | Action(s) taken |
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| i. | Further embedding the Oxfordshire Way strategic vision with our staff | <p>An updated Oxfordshire Way strategy has been developed, published and shared with teams and wider stakeholders.</p> <p>Communications within the service (e.g. regular newsletters, staff forums) have concentrated on simply and clearly communicating the Oxfordshire Way vision.</p> <p>Focused workshops have taken place with 90 front line colleagues, including many of those who are likely to meet CQC to support them to develop examples of how their work links to and supports delivery of the Oxfordshire Way. Individuals attending the workshops have also cascaded their learning to their teams.</p> |

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| ii. | Green shoots of good practice in co-producing support with people receiving a service need to be further developed. | <p>5 x Voice of the Person workshops, collaboratively developing our approach to co-production in Oxfordshire adult social care. These sessions have brought together people who work for the county council with people who have direct experiences of our services and our co-production approach to develop plans to make our approach stronger in future.</p> <p>Co-production groups are supporting commissioning strategy development work.</p> <p>Actively co-producing as we recommission services throughout 2024 e.g. the short breaks and respite service offer.</p> |
| iii. | Improvements to data and intelligence with dynamic live trend analysis available to a broader cross-section of staff to increase ability to respond to areas of concern. | <p>A new data reporting and analysis approach has been developed using Power BI that will further strengthen strategic oversight, inform prioritisation and drive continuous improvement through internal and external benchmarking.</p> <p>Adult Social Care is also working alongside public health to utilise data to tackle inequalities.</p> |
| iv. | Stronger focus on people's wishes and outcomes in recordkeeping to show better evidence of strengths-based practice. | <p>Whilst adult social care staff self-assess that they are strength based in their practices, case audits indicate that person centred outcomes are at risk of becoming lost in recording. Feedback and learning sessions led by the Principal Social Worker and Principal Occupational Therapist have been delivered alongside the implementation of refreshed Practice Standards.</p> <p>Social Care Futures have delivered training sessions in relation to strength-based approaches called "Gloriously Ordinary Lives" attended by 187 staff. 5 sessions have taken place this year with a further programme to be established for 2025.</p> <p>The peer review highlighted that we could further improve our strength-based practice by revising the language used in our Care Act Assessment and Support Plan documentation to be more outcome-focused.</p> |

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| | | <p>The Council is signing up the Gloriously Ordinary Language project to rehumanise the language, reconnect practice with personal and organisational principles and reimagine care and support. In addition, the co-production team and Principal Social Worker will be working with people who draw on care and support and frontline workers to establish how our documentation can facilitate best practice, supporting people to identify their outcomes and live the lives they want.</p> |
| v. | <p>Further embedding Making Safeguarding Personal, an approach that enhances involvement, choice and control in our safeguarding culture.</p> | <p>Service Managers have reviewed team practice and procedures and are assured that Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) is embedded.</p> <p>Refresher learning sessions are delivered by the Principal Social Worker to reinforce understanding of Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) across the service. Whilst evidence of MSP approach remains strong at the closure of an enquiry, through audit, the Principal Social Worker identified earlier in the year that outcomes were not always robustly sought at the very beginning of the enquiry process. Work is in progress with the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB) and advocacy partners to hear from people with lived experience to understand their experiences. In addition, regular “dip audits” are conducted and “on track conversations” are taking place in the team, providing positive assurance that people’s views are now being sought at the very beginning of the safeguarding episode or that their consent has been sought for a safeguarding referral.</p> |
| vi. | <p>Further embedding Oxfordshire’s Joint Carers Strategy to improve the experience of being a Carer in Oxfordshire</p> | <p>Our support for carers continues to include offering information, guidance and support which focus on prevention and early intervention.</p> <p>The Carers Strategy has provided a platform for all statutory and voluntary organisations to join up their activities which helped to develop better support for carers. Achievements include</p> |

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| | | improvements to how we identify carers and record them across the system, connecting the support available in health and voluntary sector partners with Carers Oxfordshire sharing new initiatives (such as Carers ID) across the system and with carers. |
| vii. | Further development of commissioning strategies and plans | <p>The Oxfordshire Way vision guides our commissioning strategies. We have clear overarching strategic commissioning priorities setting out how we will deliver across commissioning areas of Start Well, Live Well and Age Well. Our activity is also supported by existing strategies such as the Oxfordshire Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy and the Oxfordshire All Age Carers Strategy.</p> <p>Several commissioning strategies are in development with a particular focus on specific care need / communities of interest and supporting early intervention and outcomes-based approaches wherever possible.</p> <p>A Supported Housing Needs Survey was delivered in July 2024, which is informing our commissioning intentions relating to accommodation requirements both in the short and long term.</p> <p>The service's approach to commissioning strategy development is underpinned by principles of coproduction to ensure that the voices of people who draw on care and support are at the forefront of conversations about our work. We also work in partnership with operational services and the procurement hub to develop and deliver the approach.</p> |
| viii. | Embedding our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion | <p>A comprehensive review has been undertaken to capture how activity in the directorate supports the three pillars of our Including Everyone equalities framework (Thriving Workforce, Communities and Services).</p> <p>The findings have recently (in November) been shared with our teams in a staff forum, prompting discussions of how we could further improve in this area.</p> |
| ix. | Recommendation to undertake a transformation | The Improving the Customer Experience transformation programme has a live project |

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| | of current pathways to provide end to end strengths-based model. | with Adult Social Care and the Social and Health Care Team. This project is designed to ensure that there are no delays between a person contacting the council and being directed to the correct team for ongoing support should this be needed. Adult Social Care are working closely with the Social and Health Care Team to ensure that the processes in place for people at the first point of contact are person centred, timely and streamlined for them to achieve the most desired outcome with support of Adult Social Care. The Senior Responsible Officer for the project, Project Manager, Customer Service Delivery Manager, ASC Director, ASC Deputy Director and ASC Service Manager meet weekly to monitor the reduction in delay of referrals being progressed, progress of the improvements and raise escalations to drive delivery of the project. |
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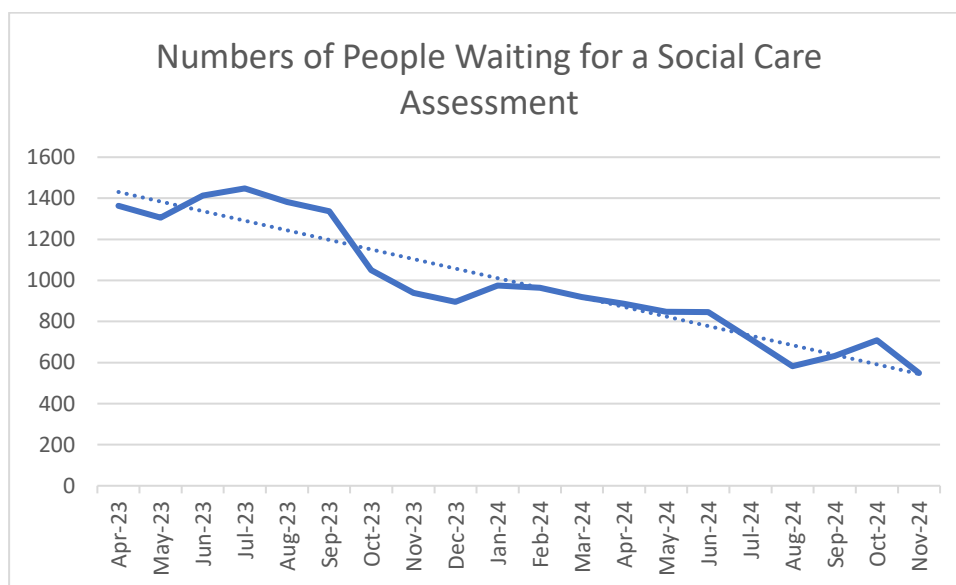
Timeliness of Assessment, Safeguarding and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)

11. Timeliness of Assessment, Safeguarding and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) remain a key area of focus for CQC, the council closely monitor performance in these areas and have developed robust plans for improvement. A progress update on each of these discrete areas is provided below.

Timeliness of Assessment

12. Managing demand is a key challenge for local authorities and it is therefore vital that we target this as a key priority area.
13. Further implementation of the Oxfordshire Way and attention to performance has had a positive impact, leading to a reduction of 64% in the number of people awaiting a social care assessment between July 2023 and November 2024. With the longest waiting time for assessment by a locality team currently at 43 days down from 132 days in July 2023. The service has taken a robust approach to both performance and quality management with a weekly Meaningful Measures meeting attended by Team Managers, Heads of Service and the Deputy Director for Operations to agree targets, identify areas of concern and to address emerging themes and risks for people. The Social and Health Care Team also attend this meeting in addition to their weekly project meeting cited above to ensure that the service can see the person's journey from first contact with the Council to their assessment in a team.

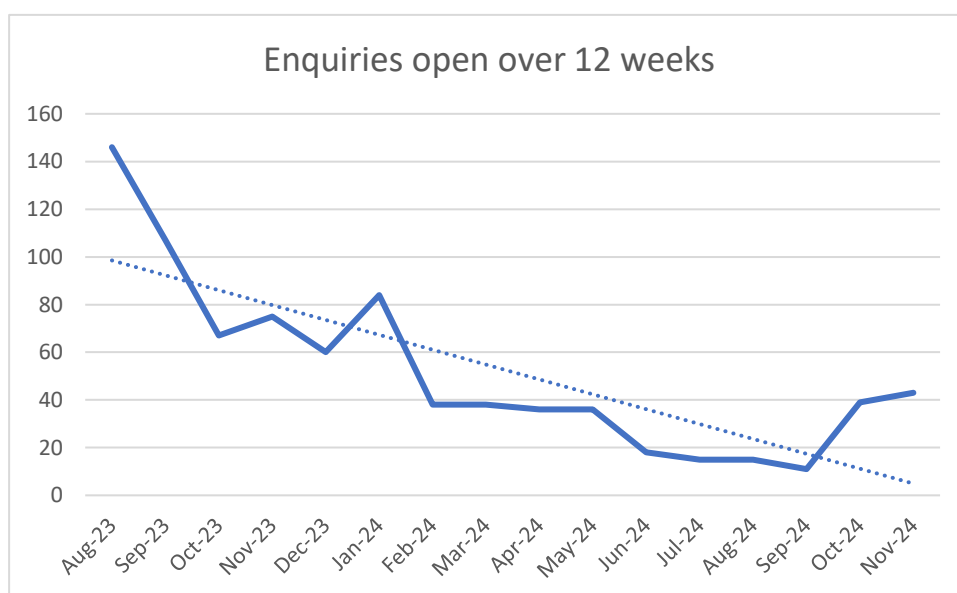
14. Following a successful pilot in the East Locality Team the service is moving to an appointment setting methodology across the locality teams to go live in January. The appointment setting pilot demonstrated that residents preferred knowing in advance when their appointment would be, allowing time to prepare their thoughts and questions and for colleagues the benefit of a well organised work schedule is reported to have improved the work experience. Using an appointment system across the localities will ensure an equity of experience for all residents in Oxfordshire whilst those experiencing urgent situations will continue to be prioritised accordingly and seen as required.



Safeguarding

15. The dedicated Safeguarding Team retains responsibility for the triage of the majority of statutory concerns and completes a s.42 enquiry where the person is not already known to another social care team or where organisational abuse is suspected.
16. The Care Act does not define timescales for safeguarding, but we have set internal timescales based on the outcomes of a benchmarking exercise where timescales proposed by other local authorities were researched and considered:
- Concerns should be raised on the same working day
 - Triage of concerns should be completed within 2 working days
 - Allocation of enquiry to a worker within 10 working days from completion of triage
 - Enquiries should be completed within 20 working days from allocation

16. The Safeguarding Team has undergone a radical approach to performance improvement in the last 12 months to target delays in allocation and resolution of safeguarding concerns and enquiries. This involved the development of a formal action plan which was initiated in February and following completion of the initial plan ongoing delivery and implementation of a Meaningful Measures approach was adopted overseen by the Deputy Director and Service Manager. Actions, escalations and progress are tracked weekly through this forum. Other interventions include refresher training for staff in June 2024.
17. A key area of improvement was to address the number of concerns that remained open over 12 weeks. Through the Meaningful Measures approach targeted action was adopted and a reduction from 273 enquiries open over 12 weeks in July 2023 to 47 in November 2024 has been achieved. The service accepts that some complex enquiries will require intervention for longer than 12 weeks and that this number will fluctuate over time, but that of the circa 2500 enquiries completed a year this should be a minority of cases.
18. The Safeguarding Service as for any other team is subject to fluctuations in staffing levels due to recruitment, annual leave and sickness. Periods of increased demand also impact the service with a 25% increase in referrals seen over the last weeks. Safeguarding is recognised as Everybody's business across Adult Social Care and as such at times of pressure a service wide response is adopted with locality teams supporting the triage of concerns and staff redeployed to support enquiries as needed. A further review of the operating model for the service is planned in the New Year to ensure that it is sustainable and able to cope with increasing demand.



19. The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards were brought into force by way of amendments to the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (the MCA), in response to concerns about the protection of individuals who lacked the requisite capacity to make decisions as to their care and treatment. The DoLS regime created a new duty on Local Authorities and relevant professionals to ensure that appropriate checks and balances were applied when they had to deprive people lacking capacity of the liberty. Further details about the background of the DoLS can be found in the paper presented to People's Scrutiny in September 2024.
20. DoLS remain a priority area of focus. Due to unforeseen changes in service management arrangements in 2022 and a delay in the proposed reforms to DoLS known as the Liberty Protection Safeguards being implemented, an action plan was developed for delivery in Q1 of 24/25 to further reduce the DoLS waiting list.
21. The action plan involved several measures including ongoing investment in the team designed to improve staff capacity, reduce the waiting list, and ensure the needs of those on the list are prioritised and understood. This included:
 - i. The successful one-off procurement of two agencies to complete a total of 750 assessments. This has been implemented and is on track for delivery by the end of December.
 - ii. Bespoke training on DoLS for staff and the introduction of a regular Mental Capacity Forum that is well attended by colleagues across the service.
 - iii. Proactive and targeted interventions aimed at those who have waited the longest to ensure their circumstances are understood by the care homes. This work prompts those involved in caring for these residents to regularly review, prioritise and understand the associated risks, and promptly identify any changes to their circumstances.
 - iv. The assignment of each DoLS worker to a designated group of care homes, to improve the relationship with the providers and ensure the residents in their care are waiting well.
 - v. An ADASS RAG rating tool is used when all authorisation requests are received ensuring that a clear procedure is in place to determine urgency and risk.
 - vi. Raising awareness of the risk prioritisation tool to all care homes in Oxfordshire.
21. As a result of these interventions, the number of open DoLS has reduced from 2010 in January 2024 to 1313 at the end of October 2024.
22. Additional long-term funding has been identified to increase the full-time staff in the team to sustain an improved position. Further work is planned across Adult Social Care to expedite the completion of community deprivation of liberty applications i.e. those people who are in their own home as opposed to a care home but subject to continuous supervision and control.

Timeline of Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance visit

23. Following the notification of the CQC Local Authority Assessment on 15th July 2024, the council was required to submit its self-assessment to CQC.
24. The self-assessment provided an opportunity to:
 - i. Review and update the Self-Assessment
 - ii. Assess and judge our performance in relation to the quality statements
 - iii. Use evidence to support our judgements
 - iv. Highlight key successes, risks and challenges
 - v. Identify actions needed to address the most pressing risks.
25. Alongside the Self-assessment, some key documents, information and data was submitted as part of the Local Area Information Return (LAIR) on 2nd August.
26. On 4th November, the council was notified that the on-site CQC Assurance visit would take place between the 13th – 17th January 2025. This announcement led to the initiation of the CQC logistics plan which includes twice weekly core group meetings. In preparation for the development of the on-site interview schedule, information about staff groups to be interviewed was sent on 11th November

Case Tracking

27. Case tracking is one of the pieces of evidence gathering methods used by CQC in local authority assessments, enabling them to gain an in-depth understanding of people's journeys through the social care system, their experiences of how care and support decisions were made by commissioners and social work teams, how they were communicated and implemented, and the impact this has on their lives. The lived experience of people drawing support from social care will be key to CQC's assessments of local authorities.
28. The assurance process required the submission of 50 cases on 18th November: CQC have selected 10 cases for the detailed tracking process. The council are required to submit a "pen picture" of each individual along with confirmation of the person's consent to speak with CQC by the 3rd December. It is understood that CQC will speak to 6 of the 10 individuals identified as part of the assurance process.
29. The remaining timeline of activities required to prepare for CQC is set out below:

| Activity | Date |
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| Notification of Assessment | 15/7/24 |
| Submission of evidence and self-assessment | 2/8/24 |
| Notification of on-site dates | 4/11/24 |

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| Case file tracking Submission of 50 codes cases Detailed information required for 10 cases | 18/11/24 3/12/24 |
| Leadership presentation | 13/12/24 |
| Logistics meeting with CQC | 17/12/24 |
| CQC Team on site | 13/01/25 to 17/01/25 |
| Initial feedback to DASS | 23/1/25 |

Corporate Policies and Priorities

30. Adult Social Care's priorities are shaped by our corporate vision and priorities, with particular focus on:
- Tackling inequalities: working with partners to address inequalities focussing supporting on those in greatest need, embedding and implementing our digital inclusion strategy
 - Prioritising the health and wellbeing of our residents: working with partners to implement our health and wellbeing strategy prioritising preventative initiatives.
 - Supporting carers and the social care system: deliver seamless services, explore new ways to provide services promoting self-directed support and increasing choice, focus on preventative services, invest in creative options to support carers.

Financial Implications

31. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
32. Comments checked by: Stephen Rowles, Strategic Finance Business Partner

Legal Implications

33. This report provides an update only.

Checked by: Janice White, Head of Law and Legal Business Partner (Adult Social Care and Litigation).

Staff Implications

34. The Senior Responsible Officer for assurance preparation is Deputy Director of Adult Social Care. Our preparation for assurance is supported by an Assurance Lead. A permanent appointment to this post was made in September 2024.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

35. Equity in experiences and outcomes is a key theme in CQC's framework for assessing local authorities.
36. Equality and inclusion are identified as a key priority within this report and our self-assessment considers the way in which we are meeting our duties and responsibilities in this area

Risk Management

37. The Quality and Assurance Project Board has oversight of the development of our self-assessment and improvement plan and maintains a risk register. The Board reports to Adult Social Care Directorate Leadership team, Senior Leadership Team and Informal Cabinet through monthly updates. There is an established process for the escalation of risk.

NAME Karen Fuller, Corporate Director of Adult Social Care

Background papers: [People Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Adult Social Care Assurance Update – 22 April 2024](#)

Other Documents: [Oxfordshire County Council Self-Assessment](#)

HESC Annual Report 2023-24 and Development Plan 2024 - 2025

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December 2024