

North Somerset Council

Report to: Adult Services & Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 21/03/2024

Subject of Report: Quality Assurance and Preparedness for Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection

Town or Parish: All

Officer/Member Presenting: Jo Hopkins – Principal Occupational Therapist

Key Decision: NO

Reason: Update on progress in respect of future Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance Visit.

Recommendations

Members of Adult Services and Housing Policy Scrutiny Panel are asked to note the report and its contents as part of their preparation for a future assurance visit from CQC.

1. Summary of Report

This report intends to inform members of the panel about the latest updates from CQC following the pilot inspections and learning from those inspections. This report also intends to outline the North Somerset position and our preparedness and preparation for the CQC assurance visit.

2. Policy

The [Health and Care Act \(2022\)](#) gave the [Care Quality Commission \(CQC\)](#) new regulatory powers to undertake independent assessment of local authorities (LA's) delivery of regulated care functions set out in Part 1 of the Care Act (2014).

The assessment framework draws on the [new CQC approach](#) that defines a set of quality statements that are arranged under topic areas and describe what good care looks like. The [framework](#) aims to:

- Set out clearly what people should expect a good service or system to look like.
- Put people's experiences of care at the heart of judgements.
- Ensure that gathering and responding to feedback is central to the expectations of those assessed.

Our [Cooperate plan](#) – focuses on the priorities residents have identified and sets out our Council's vision. CQC assurance visit fits under our ambition 2&4 whereby our communities are caring, healthy and safe and where our council delivers consistently good services and value for money to support our communities.

3. Details

Health and Social Care Act 2022 enabled Care Quality Commission to inspect local authorities. A framework was developed to assure consistency of measures across all 153 local authorities. In the summer of 2023, the pilot inspections started. Five Local Authorities were selected to part take in the pilots. Those were:

- Birmingham City Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Suffolk City Council
- Lincolnshire city Council
- North Lincolnshire City Council.

The pilot inspections gave the opportunity to CQC as well as the Local Authorities to:

- test, refine and further develop CQC approach through pilot assessments.
- gather information to help develop CQC and local authorities understanding of performance across local authorities.
- establish a starting point to use as the basis for future assessments.
- build relationships within each of the areas.

Following the initial pilot inspection each of the above LA was given rating and full [report of the inspection](#) was published in November 2023. 4 local authorities were given 'Good' rating whereas Nottingham City Council was rated as 'Requires Improvement'. Certain themes emerged from the pilot inspections which allowed CQC and local authorities to evaluate how the evidence is gathered/reviewed and where more focus should be given.

Following the pilot inspections 3 further LA's were selected for an assurance visit and these were announced in December 2023 (West Berkshire, Hounslow and Herefordshire). In January & February 13 further LA's have been selected but none are in the Southwest. Further assurance visits can be announced at any time, and it is highly likely that future announcements will include Southwest councils and so it is important that we maintain our momentum and continue to prepare for an assurance visit. CQC is aiming to undertake assurance visits in all local authorities by 2025.

The assessment process and what to expect:

CQC will write to local authorities to notify them that they will be assessed and ask them to complete an information return. All local authorities will have 3 weeks to return this information back to CQC. CQC will tell the local authorities what types of information they need and a date when this is to be submitted. They will review the information provided and start engaging with the voluntary and community groups, providers, and other stakeholders, to inform the interviews inspectors will carry out while on site. Following the information gathering stage, CQC will contact local authorities again to give a date for on-site interviews. This will always be at least 6 to 8 weeks in advance of the visit.

The on-site visit will be facilitated by team which will consist of

- Assessment Managers
- Inspectors
- Specialist Advisors
- Executive Reviewers

The team will hold interviews with the Corporate Leadership Team, speak with people who are using care and support services, and with their representatives, front line staff, Portfolio Holder, Elected Members, and partner organisations.

When CQC have gathered enough evidence across the quality statements, they will draft an assessment report. Local authorities will be able to check the report for factual accuracy in advance of publication. CQC is using calibration panels to assure quality and fairness when giving scores and ratings. When the assurance process is complete, the CQC communication team will liaise with local authorities communication team before the report is published.

North Somerset and our preparedness

The information return to CQC includes a self-assessment and we are currently in the process of preparing the self-assessment which we can keep updated. We are using this opportunity to highlight our key successes as well as reviewing the key risks and challenges we are facing. It is vital to get the self-assessment as robust as possible and therefore contribution from senior leadership is paramount.

To give us a better overview and understanding of the self-assessment we have recently (1-2 February 2024) undergone a series of workshops facilitated by Local Government Association (LGA). Those workshops were aimed at front line staff, middle management and senior leadership and provided front line staff with level of reassurance and confidence for when the visit takes place and senior leadership with feedback on areas where more focus should be given.

We now have the Quality Assurance team in place (full time quality assurance officer and part time quality assurance programme manager), and we are focusing on gathering the evidence for CQC as well as making sure that quality services are being delivered in North Somerset.

It is important that we have robust governance in place and we have developed the following:

- **Assurance board** – this was created in recognition of the changes to Health and Social Care Act 2022 whereby CQC was given the authority to inspect the local authorities Adult Social Services. The purpose of the Assurance Board is to provide governance over the development and approval of a plan to demonstrate delivery of reforms to adult social care.
- **Assurance network** - This network was developed to share understanding of the wider aspects of quality assurance within North Somerset Council. This includes understanding the quality assurance framework as well as quality standards which North Somerset Adult Social Services are required to ensure compliance with. Core members consists of representatives from each team in Adult Social Services as well as representatives from Senior Leadership.

Our Quality assurance team is keeping abreast with the latest updates from CQC and networking with other Southwest local authorities and ADASS. Although we do not know when we can expect an assurance visit, there is a good degree of confidence that we will be able to present them with good evidence of sound practice, coproduction, and engagement in North Somerset.

In addition to the above, we are reporting regularly to the Director, Adult Social Services & Housing, the Directorate Leadership Team and to the Performance and Quality Board chaired by Jo Walker and attended by the Leader and Elected Members. Regular reports are also provided to Adult Services & Housing Scrutiny Panel.

4. Consultation

The assurance assessment framework has been developed by CQC as a coproduction with carers and older and disabled people. The department has been engaging with our own staff, as well as with other council colleagues, Local Government association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Adult social Services (ADASS).

5. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report although I should be noted that there could be costs attached to a negative rating from the CQC.

Funding – N/A

6. Legal Powers and Implications

The Health and Care Act 2022 gave the Care Quality Commission (CQC) new regulatory powers to undertake independent assessment of local authorities' delivery of regulated care functions set out in Part 1 of the Care Act 2014. High level enabling legislation was introduced through amendments to the Health and Social Care Act 2008. This created a new duty for the CQC to review local authorities' performance in discharging their adult social care functions under the Care Act 2014. Alongside this, the Health and Social Care Act gives the CQC powers to have oversight of Integrated Care Systems.

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

Assurance framework is considering climate impact through all new policy development, and therefore contributing to the council of being green. Contract managements and sustainability of market is also contributing towards Climate change.

8. Risk Management

The outcome of a CQC assurance visit will result in recommendations for improvement and we will need to develop an improvement plan and report on progress to the CQC. Non-compliance with this requirement could have a reputational impact on the council.

9. Equality Implications

Equality diversity and inclusion Inherent with Theme 1 in CQC and forms a quality framework. An equalities impact screen was undertaken on commencing the programme The outcome was that the self-assessment and subsequent improvement plan will benefit all people who use council run and commissioned services.

10. Corporate Implications

We are committed to working closely with all Directorates within the council to ensure that we receive a positive rating from our CQC assurance visit.

The outcome of this inspection will reflect on the council overall.

11. Options Considered

N/A

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Appendices:

Please see links within the text above.

Background Papers:

Please see links within the text above.