

Learning, improvement and innovation

Score 3

3 - Evidence shows a good standard

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

Staff told us about a positive, supportive and inclusive culture of continuous learning and improvement. The training ensured staff had the knowledge and experience to carry out assessments effectively, including specialist assessments and those for unpaid carers and to carry out safeguarding duties effectively. Training meant staff were able to undertake their roles effectively and all staff to understand cultural diversity within the area and to engage appropriately with people.

They believed there were plans to overcome challenges and pressures, for example to increase staffing levels in some teams. They talked about a focus on wellbeing and spoke highly of their managers and the support they provided, both professionally and emotionally. They told us their workloads felt manageable.

Local authority staff had ongoing access to learning and support so that Care Act 2014 duties were delivered safely and effectively. The local authority's ASC Workforce Development Statement gave a clear overview of the social care learning programmes available to staff. Harrow also had a commitment to supporting development through apprenticeships which they recognised as being an important source part of their future workforce. Two staff members also told us they had been supported to complete their social worker qualification whilst working for the local authority.

Other staff told us they had recently undertaken work as part of a staff members dissertation into sex and relationships for people with a learning disability. This had prompted learning and team discussion around enabling this, including how their practice could support young people to overcome barriers in this area and develop their relationships.

There was support for staff to have continuous professional development. They spoke positively about the training on offer and the learning environment created by leaders and peers. The local authority provided mandatory training modules; but staff were also able to seek out their own training. For example, one team attended a domestic violence programme which supported improvements to their practice.

Senior leaders told us that the plans to invest in people, demonstrated their commitment to the workforce. Front line teams described a positive working environment where they felt listened to, valued and supported in their roles by their managers.

The local authority offered opportunities for social workers to train as trusted assessors to enable them to carry out assessments for more basic occupational therapy equipment such as toilet frames, rails and commodes. This would provide a more seamless service for some people and add capacity for occupational therapy assessments.

Newly qualified staff had monthly newly qualified sessions and some opportunities to explore practice. They told us they received a lot of their support from peers within the team and less from managers.

Senior staff had oversight of the learning and development programmes. This included running a monthly practice forum for staff where they covered a range of topics, for example advocacy or carers' rights. The forums were targeted based on current themes or learning from audits, recent. examples had included training provided by the London Fire Brigade and a barrister.

The local authority shared learning, best practice and innovation with peers and system partners to influence and improve how care and support was provided. For example, the local authority had organised conferences where they celebrated and showcased good practice. Partners such as housing and people with lived experiences presented at the event which received positive feedback from staff.

The local authority participated in the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge. An action plan was developed in response to this to take onboard the findings and recommendations. The local authority acknowledged a further peer review would take place in 2024.

Learning from feedback

Staff had given feedback about the 'three conversations' model, and how it did not always make for effective reviews and assessments. The local authority took this on board and allowed staff to use a shorter assessment model when required. Staff said they had been listened to.

Voluntary groups told us the local authority responded well to feedback from voluntary and community organisations and took steps to address concerns. However, at times funding was not always available to implement the actions required.

There were processes to ensure that learning happened when things went wrong, and from examples of good practice. Leaders encouraged reflection and collective problem-solving. Formal complaints were recorded and reported annually. The Annual Complaints Report Adult Social Care 2023/24 was not yet available. According to the data from the report dated 2022/23 recorded between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the complaints service recorded a total of 510 complaints, of which 116 were stage 1 complaints and 16 complaints progressed to stage 2 review. Twelve complaints were received via the Ombudsman during this period. The main themes were around financial assessments, care planning and charging.

The local authority had implemented learning from complaints. This included a review of the collection and payment of client contributions and top ups for residents where the Council arranged care home placements. A carer described a breakdown in safeguarding communication in their case but a subsequent good duty of candour response including lessons learned. The local authority recorded 64 compliments in 2022- 2023.

We heard how some members of a voluntary group were candid about the fact they had complained about the local authority in the past. As a result of this, they had been encouraged to join the group to give honest feedback to the local authority. This group was made up of a broad group of representatives who having experienced services. They were champions for the adults in Harrow who receive support and ensured what people said was heard and acted upon, by the local authority.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsmen's (LGSCO) current data relating to adult social care complaints showed that they had carried out a higher than average number of detailed investigations into complaints involving the local authority. They also found fault in a higher-than-average percentage of those investigations. However, the local authority also had a 100% LGSCO compliance rate which demonstrated they had been able to consistently make improvements where needed, in response to the findings of the Ombudsman's investigations. The LGSCO identified 17% of these improvements as having been implemented late.
