

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

The local authority had a committed and passionate workforce. The local authority told us they were passionate about 'growing their own' and a second cohort of social workers supported by the local authority had just graduated with a 100% pass rate. Staff we spoke with felt valued, well supported and were very positive about working for Shropshire local authority. They said working conditions were very good which gave them a lot of flexibility to manage any caring responsibilities they had for children or relatives. They said their personal wellbeing was important to the local authority.

The local authority service had an award initiative which recognised the work of teams and individual staff. This was particularly valued because the awards were voted for by colleagues.

Local authority staff had ongoing access to learning and support, so they understood their roles and responsibilities to deliver the Care Act 2014 duties safely and effectively. Some teams told us they struggled to get specific training for specialist roles. Examples of recent training provided included continuing health care, women on the autistic spectrum and self-harm and trauma. Some training had been carried out by people with lived experience.

A programme called Getting Leadership Right had been designed to develop leadership skills and the behaviours required for a cohesive approach. We were told 350 people had completed the programme, and it had won the Best Learning and Development Award in the Public Services People Managers Association (PPMA) Excellence in People Management Awards 2024.

Teams told us they valued having access to peer support. They had regular 121 supervision with line managers time and space for reflective practice, wellbeing, and debriefing following difficult situations. Staff told us they received an effective induction and had regular direct observations of their practice as part of the supervision process.

The local authority worked collaboratively with people and partners to actively promote and support innovative ways of working that improved people's social care experiences and outcomes. Staff were given the autonomy to produce ideas and implement them to meet different demands.

There was a commitment to co-producing decisions and developments in respect of care and support provision and to involving people at all stages. Some work was already underway, and partners gave examples including working on an action plan with the Carers Support Team and developing the way they supported unpaid carers. This was considered by them to be a positive example of co-production as some ideas were generated jointly by unpaid carers and local authority staff.

There was a well-established 'Making it Real Board,' which was a formal mechanism to lead and progress coproduction activity in the area. The board was co-chaired by the member of Shropshire Council with responsibility for Health & Wellbeing, and by an Expert by Experience elected from the membership of the board. The board had drafted a co-production framework setting out what the local authority needed to do across individual operational and strategic levels to make co-production a reality. The local authority had recently appointed a co-production lead to deliver the actions within the framework.

It was positive to see the involvement of people in several coproduction groups. People who were currently involved in coproduction work said they would benefit from being able to meet and work with experts by experience from different boards so they could learn and support each other, and that it would be beneficial for them in their roles, if they were helped to increase their understanding of the working of the local authority and its structures so they knew who was responsible for what. To improve the involvement further, representatives from co-production groups told us they wanted more feedback provided to experts by experience about the outcomes of their feedback and contributions. They also said they would like to be involved earlier in decision making processes to ensure they were able to fully contribute and shape decisions. This was recognised by the local authority and there was an intention to get people involved at the design stage and to involve more experts by experience on the Making it Real Board.

The local authority participated in the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) peer review in March 2023, where they were assessed against the then proposed CQC assessment themes. Shropshire had also supported other local authorities as a critical friend, sharing learning and best practice across the region.

Senior leaders told us they were proud of specific initiatives that had improved people's outcomes, and which they described as innovative. For example, the 'Two carers in a car' scheme, which was designed to provide care during the night for people living in their own homes, who would otherwise have to move into residential care. Each contract required two paid carers who could travel to any household within a specified area to provide support between 10pm and 7am. Feedback from people who used this service was very positive. People told us it provided much reassurance, the night calls were incredibly helpful, and it was an excellent service. The local authority said this resulted in fewer people going into residential care because of their care needs.

Learning from feedback

The local authority gathered feedback in a range of ways and used it to inform and improve practice and service delivery. These included using Ombudsman reports, safeguarding adults reviews, thematic audits and complaints and compliments. A new Quality Improvement and Service Delivery Board was created to monitor progress against improvement actions. We did not see how the board worked in practice or the outcomes and impact.

Practice reviews were undertaken by peers. For example, the local Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) had reviewed Shropshire's approach to strengths-based practice and learning disability provision within adult social care. As part of the review, case notes were evaluated, and reviewers sought feedback from people using the service. The review identified key strengths and areas of good practice for example ensuring good quality and clear Mental Capacity Act assessments with corresponding Best Interests decisions. It also made recommendations for practice improvement such as re-examining how risk was recorded and considering the development of a separate risk assessment. The local authority was using this to make improvements.

The Adult Services Feedback Report from October to December 2023 recorded 30 compliments and 28 complaints. The main themes related to arrangements for care at home, discharges from hospital, care needs assessments and placements in residential care. The report outlined clear outcomes, learning and actions to be taken where appropriate. The new Quality Improvement and Service Delivery Board evaluated progress of actions and improvements.

There were compliments received which related to Enable, START and day services. Some compliments provided were from other practitioners. Themes included the friendliness and approachability of staff who treated people with respect, and the level of care knowledge of staff, high standards and the way they supported people to regain independence.

Staff told us about an 'Innovation Week' which focused on what they could do differently and being empowered to find solutions to the challenges their teams were facing in terms of resources and meeting demand. Staff told the local authority their views on what was needed to do this, which included more training around health interface funding, Continuing Health Care and section 117.

Shropshire had 9 detailed investigations into complaints made about them by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in 2022/2023 and a higher than average uphold rate at 89%. The average uphold rate for a comparable local authority was 75.49%. 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. Three service improvement recommendations were made by the LGSCO about assessment and care planning and 1 about direct payments in 22/23.