

Somerset Council
Scrutiny Committee
– 3 August 2023



Adult Social Care Assurance Update

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Executive Lead Member: Cllr Dean Ruddle, Lead Member for Adult Social Care

Division / Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report and its supporting appendices provide an update to Scrutiny Committee members on key developments relating to the assurance of Local Authority adult social care services, both nationally and here in Somerset. We wish to continue to ensure that quality in adult social care isn't an event, but a habit – something routinely monitored in order to help us deliver the best possible service to, and outcomes for, local people.
- 1.2. Adult Social Care's assurance activity directly supports the vision and priorities of Somerset Council, as outlined in the 2023-2027 Council Plan¹, especially those aligned to ensuring we are a 'healthy and caring Somerset'.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1. For Scrutiny Committee members to note the key updates provided in relation to Adult Social Care (ASC) assurance developments and activities, particularly acknowledging the key role of the Committee in contributing to the new Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment of adult social care at a Local Authority level.
- 2.2. For Scrutiny Committee members to consider whether they wish to make any recommendations arising from the report, its appendices, and any wider discussion.

3. Background

- 3.1. The scale of adult social care and support is vast. People of all ages, and with a diverse range of needs, draw on care and support in different ways and at different stages of their life; some people will require support throughout their

¹ [SCC - Public - Somerset Council - Council Plan.pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

life whilst for others care needs will develop suddenly or gradually. At its best, social care enables and transforms lives, supporting people to live the lives they want to lead, where they want to live them. It helps people stay healthy, happy and independent through the scaling up of preventative, person-centred, strengths-based approaches. It is vital that robust mechanisms exist, both internally and externally, to help us monitor our performance and deliver our ambitions and legal duties.

3.2. New independent assessments of care at a Local Authority level

commenced nationally from April 2023 with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) given new powers to support greater understanding of the quality of care in a local area / system in order to provide greater assurance to the public and publishing interim guidance to support roll-out nationally². Work has started on 5 pilots in Councils across England. The assessments will focus on how Local Authorities discharge their duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014³ and will focus on 4 overarching themes:

1. How local authorities work with people;
2. How local authorities provide support;
3. How local authorities ensure safety within the system; *and*
4. Leadership.

3.3. The Local Authority's Adult Social Care service in Somerset welcomes this external scrutiny of its activity and has been working to prepare both staff and stakeholders for the additional focus of future inspection. Senior 'theme leads' have been identified for each of the four elements outlined above, and work has progressed in maintaining regular self-assessment against CQC quality statements and evidence gathering. To further support our preparedness, the service has invited independent representatives from the Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) to observe and contribute to one of our regular internal sessions focused on performance improvement. We are also contributing to **LGA Assurance peer challenge** events in both Devon and Gloucestershire this year as part of regional 'buddy group' arrangements, ahead of commissioning our own LGA challenge event which is expected to take place in February 2024 and help us scrutinise our own performance further.

3.4. The service has recently finalised and published its **Annual Report for 2022/23** (*Appendix 1*) clearly setting out the national and local context for adult social care including demographics, performance and demand pressures, and care workforce planning considerations. The Annual Report for the first time provides a current self-assessment against the new CQC framework, as well as capturing people's experience of care here in Somerset and is intended

² [Assessment framework for local authority assurance - Care Quality Commission \(cqc.org.uk\)](https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/assessment-framework-local-authority-assurance)

³ [Care Act 2014 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/section/1)

to provide a helpful overview of our work and performance to a range of interested stakeholders.

- 3.5.** In response to our ongoing self-assessment and continued internal improvement plans and aspirations, the service has also published a **public-facing Strategy for 2023-2026**⁴, (*Appendix 2*) setting out our 4 key priorities and commitments:

Our priorities:



4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1.** The focus of our revised 2023-2026 Adult Social Care Strategy was informed by public engagement and feedback gathered from October 2022 to early January 2023. Responses were gathered via an online survey form, as well as through in-person contributions at local public events. In total, 438 responses were secured in relation to how adult social care could be better, and what the biggest challenges facing social care were felt to be. Key themes emerging from the public centred on funding, workforce recruitment and retention, communication and information about social care support services, and increasing accessibility to timely care and support.
- 4.2.** Our internal workforce was also engaged in Director-led sessions to inform our strategic focus. Themes from staff feedback included the need to continue to develop our preventative offer and further shape our local care market to meet changing needs; more focus to be placed on staff retention and wellbeing; seeking more opportunities to improve communication both internally and with the public to help raise awareness of adult social care; enhancing support and opportunities for young people and adults with learning disabilities; and further seizing opportunities for collaboration and joined-up working with other local services and departments.

All of the above was used to influence our strategic commitments and can be evidenced within our strategy and delivery plan. We also set out a clear intention within our new Strategy to enhance our co-production and engagement activity with local people, especially those with lived experience of adult social care.

⁴ [Adult Social Care Strategy 2023-26](#)

5. Implications

- 5.1.** The CQC will clarify precisely how they will publicise and rate Local Authorities as part of their ongoing piloting activity of their new assessments, alongside their interim assessments of Integrated Care Systems⁵. The Health and Care Act 2022⁶ not only placed a duty on the Care Quality Commission to assess local authorities' delivery of their adult social care functions; it also provided for the secretary of state to intervene where a local authority is failing. There is the potential for reputational damage and financial pressures associated with the new external assurance regime.
- 5.2.** Additionally, it is important that elected members acknowledge the significant contribution they will play in supporting CQC assessments in future. The regulator will seek feedback from members of the Council, in particular the Leader of the Council, the Executive Lead Member for adult social care, and members of the Scrutiny Committee and Somerset Board that help oversee adult social care locally. Members will be expected to be well briefed on the framework and familiar with the focus, context and performance of the service.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** Appendix 1 – Somerset Council Adult Social Care Annual Report (2022/23)
Appendix 2 – Somerset Council Adult Social Care Strategy (2023-2026)

Note *For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author*

⁵ [Interim guidance for assessing integrated care systems March 2023 \(cqc.org.uk\)](https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/interim-guidance-for-assessing-integrated-care-systems)

⁶ [Health and Care Act 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/25/contents)