

Somerset Council  
Scrutiny Committee  
– 4 April 2024



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## Adult Social Care Assurance Update

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Executive Lead Member: Cllr Sarah Wakefield, Lead Member for Adult Social Care Division / Local Member: All

### 1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update to Scrutiny Committee members following the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge that took place between 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024. The Peer Challenge process has been an important part of our wider assurance activity and directly supports the Local Authority's preparedness for future assessment of Adult Social Care in Somerset by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- 1.2. Adult Social Care's assurance activity directly supports the vision and priorities of Somerset Council, as outlined in the 2023-2027 Council Plan<sup>1</sup>, 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 initial findings emerging from the LGA Peer Challenge team at the conclusion of their visit on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024. A detailed report is expected to follow in mid-April 2024.
- 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. A previous report presented to the Scrutiny Committee in August 2023 outlined some of the key changes to Adult Social Care assurance following the introduction of CQC independent assessments of Local Authorities that commenced in April 2023. The report also described the external Peer

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

Challenge assurance process that Somerset was planning to undertake with support from the LGA.

**3.2.** As a reminder, the CQC assessments will explore how Local Authorities discharge their duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014<sup>2</sup> with a 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.

The LGA were asked to conduct the Assurance Peer Challenge review process in line with the CQC focus to offer us some assurance in terms of our preparation for CQC inspection, give us an opportunity to ‘test’ our logistical arrangements, and also offer staff further experience of external scrutiny and challenge.

**3.3.** The LGA Peer Challenge was undertaken by a team of 8 experts drawn from different Councils across England and co-ordinated by the Local Government Association. The team included a Director of Adult Social Care, an Elected Member, and senior operational and commissioning leads from adult social care services. A range of detailed documentary evidence was provided in advance of the Assurance Peer Challenge to support the external team, including the [latest Adult Social Care self-assessment of January 2024](#), which will be maintained and updated on a regular basis.

**3.4.** During the 3 days that the Peer Challenge team were on-site in Somerset, over 30 meetings were held with Council staff, as well as our partners and people with lived experience. In total more than 220 people were invited to contribute to the process covering a wide range of aspects of work we deliver and support. Two members of the peer team also supported a case file audit in advance, considering social work practice across 22 case files with the support of our own Principal Social Worker and Principal Occupational Therapist. In total, the team spent over 25 hours with the Council and more with its pre-submitted documentary evidence – the equivalent of 40+ working days.

**3.5.** On the third and final day that the team were on-site they provided some initial, high-level feedback to stakeholders including Somerset Council’s Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for the service, as well as Adult Social Care staff and strategic partners. The slides (included within Appendix A) outline the key messages fed back to us by the Peer Challenge Team, and have been summarised below:

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<sup>2</sup> [Care Act 2014 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

- The peer challenge **did not find any areas of immediate concern**, but this is always a limited process, and you will continue to benefit from ongoing quality and practice assurance work to further assure and mitigate risks associated with waiting lists, and consistency in practice.
- There is **considerable ambition** in the service; this would benefit from further clarification in terms of performance, outcomes, and the impact of any developments. **Can everyone in the Council answer the “so what?” question and describe what good looks like and their part in this journey?**
- The ambition and **vision of the new unitary council needs time to be fully realised** (for instance around community engagement and capacity, or integration of wider service offers). Maintaining momentum and energy for this will be a challenge given the present financial situation, and consideration should be given to this impact.
- You have **passionate, experienced, and committed staff and senior leadership**. This represents a huge asset, but also a potential risk. You would benefit from finding ways to systematise key knowledge, experience, or expertise, across a wider pool of staff, or in more formal processes.
- There are **strong partnerships with your provider market, VCS, and with the NHS, which you can build on** to support the above. In particular market shaping development and links with the transformation plan will be important in light of financial pressures.
- Similarly, **further work in the new unitary to develop corporate partnerships will support ASC and the wider work of the Council** (e.g. the development of a shared housing strategy).
- You have **strong performance in key areas of ASC and commitment culture and values to support your work in these** (for instance in take up and approach to Direct Payments). Finding ways to develop greater consistency across these areas of delivery can support improvement in those areas of performance that may be less strong.
- The peer team found **examples of considerable strengths in your service and strong and innovative practice**. All the people with whom we met were enthusiastic to talk about their work, and open honest and frank about areas that are challenging or where they would like to see improvement or change. This is a strong foundation for your ongoing improvement journey.

- You have a **good foundation for co-production**, and whilst there is work to do in this area, there is commitment and energy to push forwards on this journey.

#### **4. Implications and next steps**

- 4.1.** We await the final LGA Assurance Peer Challenge feedback report, which we expect to receive after Easter in mid-April 2024. In the meantime, initial feedback and reflections have informed our Adult Social Care Assurance Board activity, which met on 22 March, and are supporting the ongoing development of our self-assessment and improvement plans. Our Practice Quality Board continues to meet on a monthly basis and has benefitted from the LGA case file audit feedback.

We are yet to be notified by the Care Quality Commission of an imminent assessment but continue to maintain readiness for this event.

#### **5. Background papers**

- 5.1.** Appendix A – LGA Peer Challenge initial feedback slides, 7 March 2024

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