

Northumberland Self-Assessment

January 2024 - Report



Contents

1. Acronyms.....	3
2. Foreword from our Lead Member – Cllr Wendy Pattison	6
3. Introduction to the self-assessment	7
4. Overview and summary	8
5. Theme 1: Working with people.....	14
6. Theme 2: Providing Support	24
7. Theme 3: Ensuring Safety	34
8. Theme 4: Leadership.....	41

1. Acronyms

ADASS	Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
AMHP	Approved Mental Health Professionals
AQPAG	Adult Quality, Performance and Audit Group
ASCOF	Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework
ASC	Adult Social Care
ASYE	Assessed and Supported Year in Employment
BCF	Better Care Fund
CCF	Complex Care Forum
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CHC	Continuing Healthcare Funding
CNTW	Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Mental Health Trust
CPVA	Child to Parent Violence and Abuse
CQC	Care Quality Commission
CTR	Community Treatment Reviews
DASS	Director of Adult Social Services
DFG	Disabled Facilities Grant
DP	Direct Payment
ERC	Enquiry and Referral Coordinator
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IOD	Indices of Deprivation
IMCA	Independent Mental Capacity Advocate
IMHA	Independent Mental Health Advocate
ISL	Independent Supported Living
JELs	Joint Equipment Loans Service
JSNAA	Joint Strategic Needs Asset and Assessment

LA	Local Authority
LD	Learning Disabilities
LGA	Local Government Association
LGInform	Local Government Inform
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
MCA	Mental Capacity Act
MDT	Multi-Disciplinary Team
MH	Mental Health
MPS	Market Position Statement
MSIF	Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund
NCT	Northumberland Communities Together
NCC	Northumberland County Council
NCASP	Northumberland Child and Adult Safeguarding Partnership
NENC	North-East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
NHCT	Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NIHR	National Institute for Health and Social Care Research
SSCR	School for Social Care Research
OADR	Old Age Dependency Ratio
OT	Occupational Therapy
OCN	Open College Network
OPG	Operational Process Group
OSC	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
PCF	Professional Capabilities Framework

PCN	Primary Care Network
PSW	Principal Social Worker
RAG	Red, Amber, Green
SAB	Safeguarding Adults Board
SAR	Safeguarding Adult Review
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
SLAs	Service Level Agreements
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
STSS	Short Term Support Service
VALs	Vulnerable Adult List

2. Foreword from our Lead Member – Cllr Wendy Pattison



Producing this self-assessment has given us the opportunity to explore in detail our strengths and areas we need to develop within Adult Social Care in Northumberland.

We are absolutely committed to providing high quality adult services and working with our residents, our staff, and our stakeholders.

As the cabinet member for Caring for Adults I can see how dedicated our staff are and I look forward to continuing to work with them to deliver our vision for Adult Services which is to 'help people live the life that they want'.

Our self-assessment was completed in preparation for a CQC local authority assessment and producing it is important for helping us achieve that vision.

I believe it demonstrates our aim to provide the strongest possible support to clients and residents in Northumberland to help them live the best life they can.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pw Pattison".

Cllr Wendy Pattison
Portfolio Holder for Caring for Adults

3. Introduction to the self-assessment

The Health and Care Act 2022 gave the Care Quality Commission (CQC) new regulatory powers to undertake an independent assessment of Local Authorities' delivery of adult social care functions as set out in Part 1 of the Care Act 2014. To enable them to carry out their regulatory duties, the CQC have introduced a Single Assessment Framework which applies to Providers, Local Authorities and Integrated Care Systems.

The four themes of the Local Authority CQC assessment are:

- Working with people
- Providing Support
- Ensuring Safety
- Leadership

As part of preparations for the Local Authority CQC Assessment, Northumberland County Council have produced a self-assessment that provides an overview of how our adult social care service meets the Care Act 2014 legislative requirements. The self-assessment starts with an overview of Northumberland and provides a summary of our key strategic priority areas, our key strengths and our risks and challenges. There is then a more detailed assessment relating to the four CQC themes.

4. Overview and summary

4.1 About us – Northumberland

Northumberland is England's most northern county, stretching from the Scottish Border in the north and east to Tyneside and County Durham in the south. Northumberland is a county of stunning contrasts. From ancient castles to high-tech industry, from pristine beaches to wild countryside. The county is the largest unitary authority by geographic coverage with the greatest area of Green Belt of any Local Planning Authority. With an area of 5,013 km² and a population of 323,820 (2020), Northumberland is the least densely populated of the North-East region's 12 local authority areas and the sixth most sparsely populated in England. The different parts of the county have distinct characteristics, from urban to rural, coastal to upland and well-connected to remote.

The south-east of the county is the most densely populated, with the three largest towns, Blyth, Cramlington and Ashington. These act as main employment centres, drawing from a wider area than just south-east Northumberland. Beyond the south-east, the county's main settlements are located along the Tyne Valley corridor and along the coast. Morpeth, Hexham, Prudhoe, Berwick and Alnwick are the main market towns, all of which have significant rural hinterlands. Almost 97% of the county's land area is classed as rural, with just under half of the population living in this area and over half of the population living in 3% of the land area, mainly in the south-east of the county.

Our Market Position Statement 2022 provides an overview of the health and care needs of our adult population. An ageing population is probably the county's most significant feature and the most challenging issue for health and social care and public policy more generally.

According to the Office for National Statistics the population is forecast to increase to around 339,415 by 2043, an increase of 4%. Northumberland has an ageing population with those aged 85+ projected to increase by 80% by 2043 (compared to England 60.5% and North-East England 58.2%).

In 2021, the Old Age Dependency Ratio (OADR) - a simple ratio of the number of people of pensionable age and over per 1,000 people aged 16 to State Pension age - in Northumberland was 403; this was significantly higher than both the Northeast (305) and England (280) OADR. An ageing population, and higher aged dependency, presents a variety of wider considerations and concerns - whether it's cancer diagnoses, frailty-related hospital admissions for things such as falls or care needs of residents.

Approximately 12% of Northumberland's population live in one of the 10% most deprived areas of England (Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD 2019)). The county falls into the most deprived 20% of local authorities in the country for employment, ranked 39th overall and for the income scale (the number of people income deprived), ranked 50th.

The 2021 Census tells us that 32.8% of households in Northumberland are single person (compared to 30.2% England and Wales) and 15.6% of all households are composed of a single person aged 66+ (compared to 12.9% England and Wales).

The health and care needs of the population reflect some of the diversity of Northumberland, as evidenced in our current Market Position Statement. Examples of this are:

- Healthy life expectancy for Northumberland is high in comparison with the average for North-East England and health services are rated highly
- Life expectancy is lower in the urban South-East than in the rest of the county, for example, in Croft in Blyth life expectancy for women is 77 years and for men is 71 years; in comparison to Ponteland, life expectancy for women is 94 years and for men 88 years
- Access to care and support can be limited in more remote rural communities, particularly due to issues recruiting homecare workers
- The number of people with complex needs is rising due to advances in medical care including at birth, in childhood and following traumatic injury or illness
- It is increasingly difficult to characterise needs purely by age with many older people still in work or seeking work; many retired from work and playing an important role in looking after other family members and with others living with long term conditions or disabilities
- There is an increasing awareness of the importance of social interaction and that reducing isolation has a key influence on mental and physical health (as evidenced in 'A connected society', the Government's strategy for tackling loneliness).

Nearly 5,000 Northumberland residents were receiving formal care and support for Adult Social Care in 2021/22, arranged through a council contract or direct payment in comparison to over 5,700 in 2017/18. These figures demonstrate a reduction in the number of service users which is due to a range of factors including:

- Day services have reopened following the easing of lockdown; however, demand appears to have fallen and attendance rates are lower than before the pandemic. There are still reports of a reluctance to attend group sessions which has impacted on attendance figures
- Occupancy rates in residential and nursing homes reduced significantly during the pandemic. Although these are approaching pre-pandemic levels again now.

Homecare / ISL (Independent Supported Living) was the highest demand service (as at March 2022) as we continue to prioritise increasing the number of residents supported in their own home environments.

Our Corporate Plan 2023–2026 sets out the vision – “A Land of Great Opportunities” and our corporate priorities – Achieving Value for money; Tackling Inequalities; Driving Economic Growth. These are underpinned by the four values People First, Respect, Excellence and Resilience. In Adult Services we promote the corporate vision and values with all staff and ensure that our strategies, policies and procedures reflect this.

There is a very strong history of genuine Health and Social Care integration in Northumberland over a long period, which is still evidenced today by leadership commitment, strong partnerships and operational collaboration with all parts of the NHS.

In terms of Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) Performance information as published in December 2023 for the financial year 2022-23:

- 10 out of 17 report outturns for Northumberland **better** than the NE and England averages
- 6 out of 17 report outturns for Northumberland **between** the NE and England averages
- 1 out of 17 report outturns for Northumberland **worse** than the NE and England averages:
 - Proportion of adults receiving direct payments
- 8 out of 17 indicators are ranked within the upper quartile of 151 authorities.

The following is a summary of the Annual Adult Social Care Survey results and the Biennial Carers Survey results (from the previous year) headlines:

- Survey results compared to NE and England – **6** out of 7 ASCOF indicators report outturns **better** than the NE regional and England scores
- 6 out of 7 indicators from the User survey were ranked in the upper quartile
 - 4A – “Proportion of people who use services who feel safe” is ranked **4th** in England. Note: the lower the ranking number the better
 - 1A – “Social care-related quality of life” is ranked **7th** in England. Note: the lower the ranking number the better
- All 5 indicators from the Carers Survey were ranked within the upper quartile, with 4 indicators ranked 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th in England.

4.2 Our strategy for adult services

Our key strategic priority areas are:

- Further upskilling of front-line teams to utilise **strengths and assets-based approaches** to support care planning, to help ensure we meet the **diverse needs** of our residents
- Review of **workforce capacity** and further solutions to attempt to increase that capacity
- Strengthen our approach to **engagement and co-production**, particularly with those with lived experience
- Enhance our **information and advice service** in collaboration with our key stakeholders
- Further **development of partnerships with Health** particularly the relationship with primary care and CNTW (Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust)
- A review of the use of **direct payments** and more flexible solutions to ensure this is a primary option for individuals and their families
- Continue to support the health and wellbeing of our **unpaid Carers**
- Development of NCC's 'Communities First' model that will focus on the layers of prevention from ASC 'front door' to the wider community. This will involve review of and increased interaction with **Northumberland Communities Together (NCT) and wider partners** to develop more **community asset options** for support
- Promotion of growth in **extra care and support housing** solutions
- Development of **specialist dementia care and dementia solutions** focusing on shortfalls in localities
- Full **engagement** in the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) **co-ordinated regional pilots of assistive technology**
- Further work with Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Trusts on **system wide solutions to the hospital capacity issues**
- Work with partners to strengthen our collective approach to **MCA assessment and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards / Liberty Protection Safeguards**.

4.3 Our key strengths

Our key strengths are:

- We have developed and continue to promote a **positive and supportive culture** within Adult Services workforce

- We have **strong integrated services** and **partnership arrangements** at strategic and operational levels, based on a long history of various forms of integration particularly with Health partners
- We have **maintained performance and financial performance** in most areas through some very challenging times for the service and the Council over the past 2-3 years
- Our **Safeguarding partnership** demonstrates **best practice** and leads on regional and national initiatives, and our innovative **Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)** provides an integrated children's and adults services response
- We have a **well-established integrated hospital discharge service** with Adult Services staff working into all Northumbria Health Care Trust sites
- We have established **effective and robust governance arrangements** since moving back into the Council in 2021
- We have recently established a **social work academy** within Adult Services which provides dedicated and consistent support for all newly qualified social workers and social work apprentices
- We have in place a very **strong collective focus in our senior management team** within Adult Services and a fresh and integrated Executive team at a corporate level in the Council. The platform for growth is strong
- In order to respond to the geographical challenges which Northumberland presents, we have **locality-based teams** to strengthen knowledge and provide the best possible support for each area.

4.4 Our key risks and challenges

Our key risks and challenges have identified the following areas for development:

- **Workforce Capacity:** Develop further capacity in the adult social care workforce to meet demand in the system
- **Engagement and Co-production:** Use client, stakeholder and workforce feedback to effectively drive forward service improvement and ensure there is an embedded culture of co-production in everything that we do
- **Strengths Based Approach:** Embed outcome focussed strength-based approaches across all of Adult Services
- **Direct Payments:** Enhance and strengthen our approach to Direct Payments

- **Housing solutions:** Speed up the delivery of new supported and extra care housing solutions across the geography of Northumberland
- **Technology:** Pilot and invest in new technology to provide innovative solutions to the key challenges that we face across Adult Services.

5. Theme 1: Working with people

5.1 What is our ambition and strengths?

In Northumberland our ambition is to strengthen our focus on the benefits of prevention and early intervention which actively promotes independence and wellbeing of our residents. We will maintain a flexible and responsive service that acknowledges the unique challenges of a large and diverse county.

Information, Advice and Guidance

Accessible, accurate and up-to-date information and advice is fundamental to enable people to make well-informed choices about their health and wellbeing, as well as how to meet and fund any care and support needs they may have.

- Clients have access to information, advice and guidance on their rights under the Care Act 2014 and examples of this include Information Sheets on our website and an Information Pack which is sent to all potential service users
- Our Front of House services include Onecall, Enquiry Referral Coordinators (ERCs) and Telecare. Our Onecall service provides a single point of access for referrals to a wide range of community health and social care services in Northumberland. This includes adult social care advice and needs assessments, requests for equipment at home, Occupational Therapy, and the Council's Telecare service. Audits of calls to Onecall and ERCs are carried out at each supervision session for compliance and any further learning is discussed and actioned with the staff members.

Prevention

We have a range of well-established services in Northumberland focused on helping people to stay healthy and independent, including reablement services, supported living and extra care, occupational therapy, home improvements and adaptations, assistive technology, aids and equipment, support for carers and our front of house services to include our safeguarding team.

Our approach to prevention supports our staff to deliver our Adult Services Vision to 'help people live the life they want' and is directly linked to our NCC Corporate Plan priority of 'tackling inequalities'.

A key element of our approach is the link to community assets provided by the voluntary and community sector and Northumberland Communities Together (NCT). NCT, was formed internally by the local authority as part of the emergency response to Covid and has subsequently evolved, working with local communities and partners to deliver their mission statement "connecting, strengthening and supporting people in local communities to improve health and life chances".

Assessment, Care Planning and Review Processes

Assessments

Northumberland Adult Services are working towards a strengths-based approach to the assessment of client needs. The current assessment documentation provides a comprehensive framework to ensure all aspects of an individual's care is robustly identified and recorded. Our Quality of Practice Framework has recently been reviewed in collaboration with our workforce and there has been a renewed commitment to adopting strength-based approaches within Adult Services. The current documentation also provides the framework for setting the indicative budget which forms the starting point for discussion with people about their options. In addition to this, we work closely with Northumberland ICB to offer personal health budgets for clients where appropriate.

Our advocacy service is provided by a third-party provider, and we refer appropriately for Independent Mental Capacity Advocate (IMCA), Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA) and Care Act advocacy. We actively promote the uptake of advocacy services.

Examples of specific approaches to assessment which respond to the identified need of our diverse client group include:

- We have a sensory interest worker group consisting of staff based in all 4 localities. Staff can carry out robust assessments of need with the sensory provider if required. To support the sensory interest workers, we have commissioned specialist deaf blind assessor training which is Open College Network (OCN) accredited to Level 3 and Level 5. Our recent sensory impairment specification was co-produced with service users
- We carry out assessment of needs for prisoners who are identified as having eligible care and support needs prior to their release from prison. The completed assessment is then shared with the prison, probation and the respective local authority that person is being released to. To support our Learning Disability (LD) clients, we are able to offer, where appropriate, a joint assessment provided by our co-located LD Community Nurses
- Learning Disability clients who go into crisis or are considered high risk are discussed at the Complex Care Forum (CCF) or the Adult Support Register (DSR) meeting facilitated by our secondary health partner. Community Treatment Reviews (CTRs) are also held - these meetings are chaired by health and there is a multi-disciplinary presence from both health and social care professionals to review, manage risk and plan support
- 'Homesafe', our hospital discharge team, complete Urgent Needs Assessments with a focus on Discharge to Assess. The reason for this type of assessment is that whilst still in hospital if a client has a period of

acute crisis, it is not always appropriate to assess for long term provision of care

- The Occupational Therapy (OT) service undertake a functional assessment which holistically guides and supports the OT to work with clients. At the end of the intervention the OT completes an outcome measure with the client to determine if a positive change has been achieved. A Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) will be completed where appropriate
- The Trusted Assessor model is in place for placements into those care homes that have signed up to the model
- Where a need is identified, a carers assessment will be offered and completed by Northumberland Social Care practitioners.
- Our social work inpatient team working in secondary care that supports with timely discharge from MH inpatient wards

Carers

As part of our commitment to supporting carers we have developed a comprehensive Carers Strategy which has been co-produced with the Carers Partnership Board and is owned by that Board.

The purpose of *Northumberland's Commitment to Carers Strategy 2022-24* is to support the health and wellbeing of all carers living in Northumberland and help them to live a life outside of caring, to actively promote open and honest co-production with carers and to ensure carers have a voice and are listened to.

Working with our stakeholders/partners our current focused priority areas are:

- To have a clear information offer and carers pathway which will consider key entry points for carers within their health and social care journey: Carers Northumberland lead on this
- Enable carer involvement and experience, allowing all stakeholders to capture the carers voice to shape future services: Healthwatch lead on this
- Ensure young carers are identified in a timely way and effectively supported: NCC Children's Services lead on this
- To expand the offer for carers of people with mental health problems across all ages: CNTW lead on this
- Create an offer and a pathway for parent Carers: NCC Children's Service and Carers Northumberland lead on this
- Workforce Awareness, to raise the profile of Carer Assessments and need: NCC Adult Social Care lead on this

- Continue with our audit process which ensures that we are carrying out good quality assessments: NCC Adult Social Care lead on this.

We welcome all feedback from carers. Our dedicated Survey People's Experience Group has focussed upon findings from the national Carers Survey. This resulted in a report with detailed actions and timescales to respond to our carers feedback.

We provide additional support to our carers through a variety of forums including:

- Awareness raising, for example National Carers Week
- Carers Northumberland – a commissioned charitable provider who support all unpaid carers across Northumberland. They offer a range of support including information and advice, carers groups, education and employment support, workshops and training, young carers, as well as a dedicated Carers Northumberland newsletter
- NCC Staff carers network group – support network for staff who are carers.

Care Planning

Care planning and support for a large proportion of service users and their families is provided by locally based teams made up of social workers and care managers.

Our social care assessment and care plan is a comprehensive combined document, co-produced with our client and advocate where appropriate, which is completed within 28 days from the point of referral, and once completed this will always be shared with our client or their identified appropriate person.

As a result of a recent audit, we have identified that if we are unable to immediately arrange all of the care that we have assessed for, we will still send the client a copy of the assessment and care plan. This makes it clear to the client what their outcome is and explains what will happen during the interim period until a service has been sourced. Clients that are awaiting packages of care, regardless if they are at home or have had to go into a short-term placement in lieu of Domiciliary Care, are monitored at least weekly or more frequently if necessary. In addition, we have two multi-disciplinary support hubs in each rural area to support with identifying alternative options to care provision.

We are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of our approach to Direct Payments via our Adult Services Transformation Board. Direct payments have always been available as a solution to enable clients and their families to take more control over their lives, but we recognise that comparatively our take up of direct payments in Northumberland is lower than many other Councils. The project is intended to support staff to think more widely and inventively about how a direct payment could create a more optimum solution to achieve the outcomes that are desired from the

assessment process. Our Direct Payments review and action plan is currently in draft form and will be updated using the outcomes of the transformation project. It will outline the objectives, the framework linked to payments, Care Act duties and ASCOF information. It also details key areas of change, development and opportunities to raise awareness for staff about the importance of ensuring clients have Direct Payments as an option for their care planning.

As an example of our person-centred care planning, our Learning Disabilities (LD) In-House Services care plans are compiled based on service user strengths, level of independence and quality of life, and goals are kept to small measurable achievable targets. They are clear and easy to read and understand, giving step by step instruction. All care needs are assessed and developed with service users, where possible, otherwise a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) approach is used which includes families, carers and professionals with regular reviews. It ensures that service users are appropriately assessed and aligned to services that support their independence and quality of life and reduces the level of support required.

Social Care Reviews

In meeting our statutory obligation, our normal practice is to review all new care plans within 6-8 weeks, or earlier if required, with a further face-to-face review completed within a 12-month period as a minimum. We have recently updated our review documentation to provide a clear person-centred structure for staff to consider when reviewing a client. We routinely review our performance relating to reviews at our monthly Performance and Finance review meeting.

Equity in experiences and outcomes

As part of our duty under the Equality Act 2010, the Council publishes Equality Objectives every 4 years. Our Equality Objectives for 2021-2025 are:

- Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the needs of our communities
- Listen to, involve, and respond to our communities effectively
- Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to help us embed equality, diversity and inclusion in how we deliver services and support our staff
- Create a positive culture, with a clear leadership commitment to improving equality diversity and inclusion both within the council, with our partners and the wider community.

All staff complete Equality and Diversity training as well as corporately aligned customer services training.

Examples of equity in experience include:

- The NCC Accessible Information Standard guidance provides information on how staff can provide information in alternative formats as a reasonable adjustment for disabled people and to how to provide key information in alternative languages where there is a need for this
- There is access to interpreters as well as guidance on the commissioning of local interpreters, including a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter
- On-line awareness training of accessible information standards for Adult Services staff
- At point of referral any special characteristics or specific considerations are recorded, and appropriate signposting as required
- The safeguarding adult review policy requires that protected characteristics are considered as part of the Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) process. Our partner agencies are required to identify special characteristics at point of referral
- We encourage involvement of service users with lived experience in procurement of services, an example being the procurement of the sensory impairment provision
- NCC have a variety of recognised staff support networks run by and available to all staff including:
 - Apprenticeship staff network group
 - Armed Forces staff network group
 - Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) staff network group
 - Carers staff network group
 - Enable (disability) staff network group
 - LGBT+ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender) staff network group
 - Menopause staff network group
 - Mental Wellbeing staff network group
 - Race Equality staff network group.

5.2 What is our performance and how do we know?

Performance

Our comprehensive dashboards for all service areas, including national submission information, are shared and reviewed regularly within our Governance arrangements. This includes consequent action planning based

on the data, both at a lower service specific issue level and with the ability to influence more major project development.

Our senior management Performance and Finance Group are responsible for the analysis of LG Inform data on a quarterly basis, with a comprehensive review annually. An area of strong performance for Northumberland is in relation to the carers survey and we believe that our carers have the opportunity to engage with and shape the support available through the Carers Partnership Board and the Carers Strategy. This is demonstrated by findings from the most recent Carers survey. Some examples include:

- Quality of Life – Northumberland is 2nd in the country
- Proportion of Carers who said they had as much social contact as they would like – 3rd in the country
- Proportion of Carers who report that they have been included or consulted in discussion about the person that they care for – 4th in the country
- Proportion of Carers who find it easy to find information about services – 6th in the country.

We believe that a key reason behind the above performance could be linked to our proactive response during Covid where our Carers were contacted on a regular basis from a wellbeing perspective. Post Covid face to face contact has been restored and Carer wellbeing is a key part of these visits.

One reason for a reduction in the recorded number of direct payments in recent years is a conscious decision which we made in 2019. At that time, some of our contractual arrangements were resulting in a situation where significant numbers of people were being told that their only option for getting the support they had been assessed as needing was to agree to receive a direct payment to secure a service from a provider which we did not have a contract with. As a result, we made our contracts more flexible, and asked front-line staff to check when plans were reviewed whether people did in fact feel that the direct payment was giving them additional control, and want to continue with it, or whether they had agreed to it only because no alternative had been offered.

How we receive feedback from service users

Examples of how we receive feedback from service users includes:

- National surveys linked to Service User and carer feedback
- ASCOF Performance Indicators and subsequent local and national benchmarking information which are regularly shared with staff and key stakeholders

- Direct feedback from client review meetings is used to inform commissioning services
- Compliments, shared with staff via internal communications and recorded within recipients' supervision session
- Complaints reported quarterly/yearly via Governance framework
- Sensory interest group provides clients with a sensory impairment with a forum to provide feedback on their lived experience and raise awareness, discuss gaps in service and support in planning services
- The Autism Partnership Board provides service user representation via Inclusion North and Splinter group. This board is still in its early phases but ultimately these service user groups will be used to influence the strategic autism plan for Northumberland. Inclusion North recently undertook work on service availability
- Short Term Support Service (STSS) customer satisfaction survey
- Care and Support, Learning Disability and Mental Health Team Manager Quality Record Audits include service user feedback
- A recent Healthwatch specific to homecare in Northumberland report provided valuable feedback on the experiences of users of homecare services
- STSS Reablement worker feedback regularly received and updated to support reviews of client needs and goals
- Our dedicated 'Peoples Advisory Panel', in collaboration with Healthwatch, provides us with a forum to receive regular feedback on a number of different areas, which help us to shape future service provision.

This feedback is analysed and actions identified to share good practice and to support continuous service improvement.

How we receive feedback from stakeholders

Examples of how we receive feedback from stakeholders includes:

- Staff example - We receive comprehensive and valued feedback from our corporate NCC staff survey which is then analysed at both corporate and service level. The subsequent Adult Services specific action plan is shared with Adult Services staff and our corporate lead for staff engagement
- Leaders example - Adult Services reports are routinely shared with Overview and Scrutiny Committee, attended by our portfolio holder, to gather their feedback

- Partners example - Learning Disability Partnership Board provides a forum for updates on pathway developments.

5.3 What are our plans to maintain/improve our performance in this area?

Our plans to maintain/improve our performance in this area are:

- We are currently revising the assessment documentation to make it more user friendly and ensuring there is a focus on outcomes for the person. This will be informed via planned audits on care act assessments
- We are continuing with stage 2 of our project to increase the uptake of Direct Payments in Northumberland
- We identified within the needs assessment documentation that there was a requirement for a structured risk assessment and risk management framework. This is currently being piloted within specific specialist teams
- We have recently developed a Holding List Guidance Document to standardise the process for triaging and monitoring new referrals. Our approach will be developed further to ensure a robust and fair process in place
- We understand the importance of focussing on the needs and goals of the person. Quality interventions need to be more outcome focussed, with the outcomes defined by the individual to help them live the life that they want in accordance with our Adult Services Vision
- We will further develop and update our guidance for staff on when to refer to advocacy services – this will form part of advocacy awareness training
- NCC is currently updating the corporate website to a more user-friendly platform and has recognised that Adult Services information will be prioritised as part of this project. The project will be split into two phases. Our vision for Phase One is based on developing an online hub where members of the public, as well as staff, can go for information. This will include signposting to other services or organisations where appropriate. Phase Two will include consulting with service users and stakeholders to ensure the content meets their needs. We will also be exploring the potential to provide more self-service functionality so people can plan for their future. This will include interactive transactions such as online assessments and referrals to maximise efficiency and provide better value for money
- The Shared Lives service are setting up carer and user forums to achieve co-production of processes, training and how we engage with our stakeholders
- Across Adult Services we are reviewing the current methods of gathering service user feedback in order to enable us to effectively use this information to inform services

- We have started a review of Front of House services, which forms part of the development of the 'Communities First model with a focus on prevention in ASC
- We have identified a need to review the assessment process and a pilot has been initiated with a small group of social workers supporting individuals with autism.

6. Theme 2: Providing Support

6.1 What is our ambition, what are our strengths?

Health and Social Care Integration

The North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Integrated Care Partnership Board is a statutory joint committee between the thirteen Local Authorities across the Northeast and North Cumbria (including Northumberland LA) and the NENC Integrated Care Board (ICB).

There is a long history of genuine Health and Social Care integration in Northumberland, evidenced by leadership commitment, strong partnerships and operational collaboration and our key ambition is to maintain and strengthen these partnerships.

At an organisational level this has included the existence between 2002 and 2013 of a Care Trust within the NHS structure locally, to which the Council delegated almost all of its social care statutory functions. This transferred in 2013 to a partnership arrangement between the local Acute Trust and the Council following national changes in NHS structures. More importantly, there is a rich history both pre and post the partnerships with the NHS of joint teams, joint services and shared responsibility for funding.

Prior to becoming Northumberland ICB, there was a very strong culture of partnership working with colleagues across the Local Authority and the former Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), which was developed over a long period of co-location within County Hall in Morpeth. This cemented working relationships and helped to ensure that our values and workstreams were closely aligned. We are maintaining these key forms of service integration and continuing to explore opportunities for further integration.

The largest of the formal NHS partnership arrangements currently in place is an agreement under Section 75 of the NHS Act under which the Council commissions, case manages and administers NHS Continuing Health Care (CHC) services. The assessment of eligibility for CHC remains an NHS function. This partnership was originally with Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group and has now transferred to the ICB. The agreement also covers the commissioning of care services for people receiving aftercare under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act, and the administration of funded nursing care payments, and support with personal health budgets under all applicable legislative frameworks.

For people receiving these services, the key benefit of this arrangement is continuity if their eligibility status changes. Care and support plans and professional involvements can be modified as necessary to reflect changes to people's needs, but there are no changes simply because of a transfer of organisational responsibility. For care providers, there is the simplification of a single contractual framework regardless of funding source, and a single payment process. The arrangement also maximises the joint ability of the NHS

and the local authority to manage care markets and minimises administrative duplication.

The Northumberland System Transformation Board (comprising all of the main areas of the NHS in Northumberland and the Local Authority) was a consultative forum which became a sub-committee of the ICB on 1st April 2023. One of its key purposes is to agree joint commissioning arrangements and allocate joint funding, and examples include the allocation of funding to winter pressures and more recently hospital discharge, where Northumberland are using part of this funding to initiate a pilot to provide overnight social care support to clients who have been recently discharged from hospital to return home safely.

Up until October 2021, Adult Services were uniquely placed within Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHCT) via a partnership agreement. This arrangement has generated extremely close working relationships with the Trust, which have continued following the transfer of Adult Services back to NCC. A lot of effort went into making sure that the transition process was as smooth as possible for our clients and workforce.

Our Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board have made a key commitment to 'work well together' to focus priority on improving health and wellbeing across Northumberland, supported by the Northumberland Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2028. Additionally, the Health and Wellbeing Board have signed up to the Northumberland Inequalities Plan, which defines our understanding of Inequalities in Northumberland and sets out themes for improvement.

We have a number of strategic partnership arrangements and strong working relationships with health providers to ensure that robust arrangements are in place to improve the health and social care outcomes of our population. Examples include Continuing HealthCare (CHC) Funding, Section 117, Joint Equipment Loans Services (JELs), and the Better Care Fund (BCF), which are supported by robust Section 75 partnership agreements where appropriate.

Our aim is to work collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector in order to provide preventive solutions for residents of Northumberland. We work alongside NCT to proactively develop the community offer for alternative support and solutions in localities.

There are a number of operational examples of Health and Social Care integration in practice:

- The Home Safe integrated service, based in Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHCT) hospitals undertake joint holistic assessments/reviews with appropriate professionals. Staff attend daily ward rounds and MDT meetings to discuss and share information
- The Short Term Support Service (STSS) is an integrated health and social care service providing care and rehabilitation in people's homes for patients in Northumberland following an accident or period of illness. The

aim is to help people live independently and safely. The service focuses on things which are important to the service user with an emphasis on trying to help them regain skills and confidence. The service can provide a rehabilitation programme led by a physiotherapist or occupational therapist; help with tasks such as washing, dressing or meal preparation; and equipment to help them live safely and independently at home

- The Joint Equipment Loans Service (JELS) provides equipment to people who live in Northumberland, or who are registered with a Northumberland GP, to help them maintain their independence in the community and to continue to live safely in their own home. Referrals come from Health and Social Care professionals following an assessment by a professional requisitioner e.g. district nurse, community nurse, occupational therapist, physiotherapist and paediatrician
- Social Work Team Manager Huddle with Home Safe Teams in the hospitals is attended daily by someone within the contracts team to assist with any complex hospital discharges and give advice on vacancies within Northumberland. In addition, a daily huddle also operates in the MH Social Worker inpatient team.
- Community Matrons are case holders for fast track CHC cases and have direct links with community teams to support with any social care issues
- Co-location of Social workers on local MH inpatient hospital site and CNTW Learning Disability service within our adult social care sites.
- Care and Support Social Work teams are aligned to the local Northumberland PCNs.
- Current working arrangements in place between Children's and Adults Services on a transitions protocol
- Close working with Public Health and commissioned health drug and alcohol service team (Humankind) in accordance with the National Drug and Alcohol strategy
- Mental health transformation board and subgroups provide us with an opportunity to discuss key mental health priorities across health and social care
- Development of Autism Strategy in partnership with the ICB and co-produced with clients who live with autism; ASC is a leading partner on one of the 6 principles
- Regular meetings with CQC to share information and agree actions with regard to care providers and quality. Meeting attendees include representatives from a range of NHS roles and the LA Safeguarding Team

- Complex Housing Hub established which promotes close working with the LA housing service, to identify appropriate accommodation for vulnerable clients at risk
- CNTW in partnership with the voluntary sector and the LA have developed a 'Safe Haven' in Ashington; a non-clinical environment to support people who are experiencing psychological distress. The project involves multi-agency partnership working to ensure inclusivity and accessibility across the county
- ASC involvement in the Older Person's Pathway Group led by health will enable the strategic delivery of community services for Older People and their families in Northumberland
- Bi-monthly meetings with Healthwatch Northumberland.

We provide high quality and responsive care and reablement services to enable people to return to their optimal independence. Our January 2023 Annual Conversation with Dr Carol Tozer identified that "it is clear that ASC's reablement offer is highly effective for the people who receive it". Our reablement offer includes:

- Reablement care plans where therapy intervention is goal focused following an initial visit with the client
- Reablement worker feedback regularly received and updated to support reviews of client needs and goals
- Home Safe Support Team available to provide wrap around support on hospital discharge
- We operate a same day and two-day reablement support response from multi-disciplinary team of OTs, Physios and Reablement Workers

Commissioning

Our Market Position Statement sets out our vision for commissioning adult care services to support adults with social care needs in Northumberland. It highlights our priorities, gives a sense of direction for care and support in Northumberland, and highlights potential business opportunities during a time of uncertainty and significant change.

The MPS identifies that the key challenges for Northumberland include:

- an ageing population
- a shortage of social care staff
- a shortfall in the number of qualified nurses
- the rurality of the county

- financial constraints.

In response to the care and support needs of our communities, tender opportunities are presented to providers to shape and develop a resilient market in order to introduce new and varied services that are required, an example being the current Dementia Service Tender initiated due to the identified need for dementia nursing beds in Northumberland.

The council engages with the provider markets in different ways and regular provider forums are a key part of our links with social care providers.

Our commissioning quality assurance process sets out our approach to assuring the standards of commissioned adult social care services in Northumberland including out of area services. This is governed by four key principles which underpin our approach to quality assurance:

- An overarching commitment to improving the quality and capacity of care services through training, information sharing and peer support
- Early identification and resolution of issues
- Emphasis on partnership working with social care providers
- The quality of our care and support services becomes everyone's responsibility, where information and intelligence are routinely and consistently shared and effectively responded to so that service users, family members and carers can be confident that the support and care being delivered is of a good quality.

Support to providers is critical to our social care market to continually develop the quality of services. Some examples of this include contracted social care providers and their staff are offered access to the councils training courses to improve the quality of the services that they deliver. This includes training on Safeguarding, Mental Capacity Act, and an Excellence Course to enhance the skills and knowledge of care service managers. We also provide programmes and events to facilitate the sharing of good practice of care providers rated as “outstanding” and supporting providers with their most difficult structural challenges such as recruitment and retention.

Locally defined Contracts Monitoring visits take place on a regular basis. The team will cross-reference information provided by CQC and other council services to inform their visits. Visits gather feedback from clients and staff and may observe the interaction between staff and service users, assess the environment, analyse support plans and documentation and ensure the service is operating in line with contractual obligations.

Feedback from the visits will be shared with relevant professionals and other colleagues to ensure collaborative and proactive working to resolve any identified issues.

The Contracts team aims to deal with provider concerns at as early a stage as possible. Where there is a contract default as a result of quality concerns, it is the role of the Quality and Compliance manager to support the provider in developing and reviewing an action plan in response to the concerns raised. The council will enforce the contract where a provider does not respond effectively to quality and performance concerns.

The Council uses diverse methods to monitor commissioned adult social care service quality, beyond simply reviewing CQC quality ratings, examples of this include:

- We hold information sharing meetings with professionals on a regular basis to discuss specific services and/or raise new concerns or information to agree actions
- Information is shared directly with the Council's contracts and commissioning team via CQC, adult social care operational teams, safeguarding, families and other council services
- Monthly quality monitoring framework meetings are undertaken within the team to discuss priority services, updates, changes, improvements and any outstanding actions to be followed up on
- Regular and timely quality monitoring visits are undertaken by our Contracts and Commissioning team, to ensure safe and effective service provision within commissioned services
- A RAG rated monitoring document has been developed and is used for each service area
- Commissioning officers maintain action plans for areas of improvement. This is shared with the provider following completion and focuses on core areas
- There is a central repository for the recording of issues, concerns, compliments and positive feedback. This is then forwarded on to the most appropriate member of the team for review and action
- All ongoing Safeguarding concerns are regularly reviewed with the safeguarding adults team and support is provided with any issues that fall within contracts remit.

We recognise that recruitment and retention within social care is a challenging issue nationally, and this is no different in Northumberland. We have initiated a strong local recruitment campaign and are supporting the regional North-East ADASS and national campaigns in order to address the current and future recruitment issues. Our local campaign features a dedicated recruitment website we also promote vacancies on our Council website and on social media, and we hold a series of recruitment events in market towns around Northumberland. Our model facilitates and supports quality improvement

through a values-based recruitment process and encourages training and development for the care and support workforce through alignment with Skills for Care.

Examples where the local authority has used incentives/financial support for care and support workforce provision include winter pressure initiatives, grants and bonus scheme within the Domiciliary Care contract. In January 2022, the Cabinet backed a proposal to offer a contract variation and fee increase to providers who would guarantee to pay their staff the equivalent of the real living wage. A similar offer off a fee increase specifically to domiciliary care providers to raise minimum mileage reimbursement for their staff to 45p per mile was agreed and funded by the Council in the latter part of 2022 to further attempt to assist in recruitment and retention in the sector. In May 2023 the Council's Cabinet agreed to use of the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) to increase the Northumberland minimum wage to £12 per hour for home care workers and develop "guarantees" for homecare workers terms and conditions.

6.2 What is our performance and how do we know?

Performance

In January 2024 there were 95 care homes in Northumberland, of these 35 care homes include nursing provision and the remaining 60 care homes are without nursing:

- 78 care homes (82.1%) are currently rated as good or outstanding (an increase from 77.3% in December 2022)
- 84.5% of beds in care homes in Northumberland are currently rated as good or outstanding (an increase from 74.7% in December 2022).

The number of care homes currently rated as inadequate is 0. 15 care homes have a current rating of requires improvement, and currently 2 care home is without a current rating.

We are benchmarking nationally with all Northumberland Care Homes and are performing above average for community-based locations rated as outstanding or good across the 5 CQC domains.

In January 2024 there were 50 locations in Northumberland providing community-based adult social care:

- 43 locations who provide domiciliary care
- 13 locations who provide supported living care
- 0 locations who provide extra care housing.

There are 47 community care locations (94%) rated as good or outstanding. The number of community-based care locations currently rated as inadequate is 0. The number of locations currently rated as requires improvement is 1, and currently 2 without a current rating.

How we receive feedback from Service users

Examples of how we receive feedback from service users includes:

- The use of monitoring documentation to detail any discussion had with service users during a monitoring visit
- A summary of the Carers Survey information, as reported by The People's Experience Working Group, identifies actions following feedback from carers
- Compliments and complaints received into adult services
- Survey feedback from clients which has been completed by providers.

How we receive feedback from stakeholders

Examples of how we receive feedback from stakeholders includes:

- Regular meetings with Healthwatch Northumberland
- Monthly Provider Forums
- Provider Assurance Visits
- Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board
- Home Safe meetings with NHCT which cover key areas linked to Length of Stay meetings, daily site briefs and senior management weekly catch ups
- Regular strategic and operational meetings between NCC senior managers and senior staff from the ICB, the Acute Trust and CNTW
- Feedback from Cabinet and Members, a recent example being the Market Position Statement 2022 which was discussed and approved by Members in November 2022.

6.3 What are our plans to maintain/improve our performance in this area?

Providing Support

Our plans to maintain/improve our performance in this area are:

- Work to maintain partnership arrangement with ICB on delivery of CHC in conjunction with social care funded services to streamline processes and

simplify the interaction with the NHS and Local Authority (LA) for clients and providers

- Further develop the relationship with NCT under the Communities First model to stimulate service development in the community and voluntary sector
- Further joint commissioning of services with ICB including services commissioned to respond to hospital pressures, support discharge, and Transforming Care
- We are currently exploring new models of care and support for people living with Dementia that will enable them to continue to live independently (e.g. Lyndon Walk Challenging Behaviour Unit)
- Developing opportunities to pilot new and emerging technology linked to service delivery with a pilot scheme due to go live
- As part of the Council's strategic change programme, there is a dedicated workstream to review our use of direct payments against best practice across the country and a programme to expand our "shared lives" capacity
- We will be focusing on bringing forward independent supported living and extra care schemes for all categories of service over the next 3 years in line with our extra care and supported housing strategy. This will include review of the use of targeted DFG funding to support developments.
- We will look to review with the ICB and partners the options in relation to managing the various aspects of workforce pressures on services with particular focus on joint solutions and options that work in harmony rather than in conflict to other parts of the system
- We are continuously identifying innovative recruitment and retention solutions, an example being the use of an external independent specialist consultant to support recruitment of social workers
- We are currently looking to expand the Inpatient Mental Health Social Work team to include Community AMHP's, who will track and support their own inpatient admissions with the aim to reduce Mental Health Act Section 3 detentions.
- Adult Social Care are involved in the development of a Mental Health Crisis Café in Northumberland
- Work with Northumberland ICB, primary and secondary care in Northumberland to ensure a robust plan is in place re the delivery of S117 aftercare following discharge from hospital
- Our Mental Health Social Work inpatient team have established a close working relationship with CNTW, which includes an office to support with co-location and joint working at St. George's Park. The team also work

close with Home Group (provider based at St. George's Park) regarding appropriate accommodation to support discharge, identify gaps in services that can be fed back to commissioners - to support with commissioning strategies

- There is joint working with the Humankind (health provider to support substance and alcohol) with a team of social care staff aligned to our safeguarding team in view of the close links with self-neglect cases.
- We have close working relationships with Northumberland ICB in order to deliver the NHS / Mental Health plan around Transformation (Leadership forums and all the workshops attended by NCC) with all relevant partner agencies including, third sector, voluntary sector, carers and service users and have a key role in developing and shaping the mental health provision across the communities of Northumberland.

7. Theme 3: Ensuring Safety

7.1 What is our ambition, what are our strengths?

Safe Systems, Pathways and Transitions

Safety is a priority for everyone, and it is intrinsic within all our work.

Learning from adverse events: We have a flexible, resilient workforce who can respond effectively to adverse events and challenges when needed and learn from previous experiences.

Recent examples of learning from adverse events includes:

- Our proactive response to Covid. We held focus groups to understand the learning from Covid and from this we continue to utilise some of the valuable learning outcomes, an example of this would be the use of hybrid working both for staff and stakeholders
- Following the impact of Storm Arwen, the Local Authority undertook a detailed review and key lessons learnt have been implemented
- Risk to Staff meetings are held in response to any incidents relating to Violence and Aggression. As an example, our in-house provider services have NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) Guidance NG10 in place, which ensure compliance in learning lessons from violent and aggressive episodes.

Safe Systems

In order to ensure our systems are safe and effective, we have implemented the following:

- Comprehensive Business Continuity Plans in place for all Adult Services teams
- Health and Safety specific Statutory / Mandatory training completed by all staff
- Adult Services dedicated senior manager on-call system in place to support our operational teams 24-7
- Our Vulnerable Adults List (VALS) has been developed to support clients in an emergency response
- We work collaboratively with NHFT and CNTW to share hazard/risk warnings to support the safety of our collective workforce
- Corporate and Adult Services risk management processes

- A review of our response to incidents recorded on our incident management system. All incidents must be reviewed by senior management and lessons learnt shared where appropriate
- Risk assessments across services, for example, individual moving, and handling risk assessments are regularly updated and recorded in order to keep clients and carers safe
- Consideration of consent, best interest decisions and safeguarding as part of our assessment processes
- The opportunity for staff to share anonymous concerns via 'Safecall' which is an independent confidential service
- A monitoring and review processes for unauthorised DoLS (Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards)
- A robust Section 21a challenge process in operation

Transitions between Children's and Adult Services

We aim to ensure there is a seamless transition for children/young people moving into Adult Services. This is supported by:

Transitions Protocol

- Monthly transition meeting with children services with clear Terms of Reference
- A dashboard is in place to highlight the data for transitions and ensure actions completed and feedback
- A high-level resource panel in place
- A Growing up in Northumberland Guide – produced in partnership with ICB.

We have used NICE Guidance NG43 to benchmark our transition arrangements and have a clear action plan in place to support continuous improvement in transitions. A themed transitions audit, based upon the NICE recommendations, has been developed.

An example of service specific transitions from children to adult services is in our Shared Lives service which ensures that the service:

- Attend a review of the young person before they transfer
- Attend any transition plans linked to their care and support
- Communicate regularly with the children's link worker

- Communicate with their identified adult's worker
- Request any capacity assessment for finance and/or accommodation.

Transition following hospital discharge

Staff have access to NHCT systems to support effective discharge arrangements. Detail about our hospital discharge process is included in Theme 2.

Pathways

In order to ensure continuity of care and support, robust Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidance tools are in place across all service areas. Our auditing framework enables auditors to identify the effectiveness of these and how they are applied to practice, with areas of focus for improvement.

Safeguarding

Our aim is to support people to live safely and independently for as long as possible in their own homes and safeguarding is very much about how we can support families to do that. In Northumberland we have a well-established Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB), which has recently integrated with the Children's Partnership to create the Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership (NCASP). This promotes a 'think family', life course approach to safeguarding. In accordance with our Care Act 2014 statutory duties, we have a SAB Strategic Plan 2021/24 and published annual reports.

We are an active member of the regional ADASS safeguarding network, and Northumberland have led on several pieces of work on behalf of the region. Recent examples include benchmarking of organisational abuse processes and the production of self-neglect resources which includes 7-minute guides and a self-neglect animation. During Safeguarding Adults Week in November 2023, Northumberland raised awareness relating to domestic abuse in older people and shared learning within the ADASS network. Right Care Right Person has been a focus within the regional ADASS safeguarding network during which, Northumberland have taken an active approach sharing information and learning in preparation for the launch along with supporting the network in developing cross authority safeguarding processes and SAR Champions Networks.

Our Partnership has a comprehensive suite of multi-agency safeguarding adult policies and procedures via the online platform Tri-X, which is accessible to all staff and partners. We update our online policies and procedures 6-monthly. We have benchmarked our Safeguarding Concerns and Section 42 Investigations against Local Government Association (LGA) and ADASS guidance frameworks.

Our Partnership is truly collaborative and is supported via a robust Joint Multi-Agency Information Sharing Protocol which enables us to share our data effectively and appropriately. We work with our partners proactively to support

collaboration, for example we have developed a pro-forma template for GPs, as they weren't always able to attend meetings or provide information to inform the Safeguarding meeting/safety plan. This continues to be reviewed to ensure best multi agency working is developed within the organisation and partnership.

NCASP have produced a range of information, advice and guidance including:

- Online practice guidance
- 7-minute briefings
- Leaflets and posters
- Animations to raise awareness of safeguarding adults with the public
- Tricky Friends, what to do about self-neglect
- Hidden Harm Video to raise awareness of Domestic Abuse in Older People
- Mental Capacity SWAY documents for front line staff
- Monthly NCASP newsletter is being implemented to ensure staff have up to date knowledge of NCASP developments
- Safeguarding website has been updated

We promote Safeguarding Adults Week annually, provide a number of events/webinars, and develop and promote a range of resources. All sessions are advertised in advance with all teams and follow-up presentations and resources are shared with all staff.

All Safeguarding Adults information / referrals / forms / guidance is available on the NCC website.

We commission and publish Safeguarding Adult Reviews in line with our statutory duties. There is a positive culture of learning and improvement and effective processes in place for sharing learning. We produce 7-minute guides and briefings on all of our reviews, and we have developed and delivered specific Lessons Learnt training to adult services staff and relevant stakeholders. There are a series of lessons learnt recorded webinars available on the internal Adult Services training platform Learning Together. Senior Safeguarding Managers regularly present to Social Work and Care Manager forums to present emerging themes and lessons learnt. We also undertake benchmarking in relation to National Reviews in our SAR subgroup and share learning. We have undertaken a number of joint Learning Reviews with Children, and have developed action plans, training and guidance in response.

Learning from our Safeguarding Adult Reviews has resulted in a number of improvement workstreams. For example, the development of our Child to Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA) pathway which is joint across Children's and Adults services.

We have just recently reviewed our SAR Policy and Procedures to ensure they are more accessible and directly linked to the recently published national quality markers that were produced by SCIE (Social Care Institute for Excellence). We have also led on the co-production of a North-East quick guide to support decision making and commissioning.

We have developed a Learning Review toolkit and provided training for senior managers on the principles contained within the toolkit. The aim is to provide support and resources for senior managers whilst undertaking reviews in the future.

All safeguarding referrals are received through the front door and into the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (children and adults). All decisions on referrals must be made within 24 hours via a dedicated safeguarding triage team which includes staff from Adult and Children's services; a sergeant, three detectives and eight civilian staff from Northumbria Police; an education worker and staff member from CNTW; two safeguarding health nurses from Northumbria Healthcare; and a domestic abuse worker from Harbour. There are also single point of contacts with other stakeholders who can be contacted when required.

We have developed a feedback loop to CQC (monthly) to provide outcomes of safeguarding concerns.

The safeguarding team also deals with organisational safeguarding, for example with providers such as care homes and domiciliary care. If we get an anonymous concern about an organisation we can make proactive unannounced visits to see what is happening and decide whether to take it into organisational safeguarding.

Our Transitional Safeguarding Protocol aims to promote robust transitional arrangements and ensure effective and timely referrals between Children and Adult Services. It recognises that harm is likely to continue post 18, and that abusers target vulnerability irrespective of age.

We have developed training to support our children and adult services workforce on transitional arrangements.

7.2 What is our performance and how do we know?

Performance

We have a comprehensive Safeguarding Adults Board Dashboard in place. We monitor Making Safeguarding Personal data within the Safeguarding Adult Board performance dashboard on a quarterly basis.

For the ASCOF indicator 'the proportion of people who use services who feel safe', Northumberland are ranked 4th in the Country.

How we receive feedback from service users

Family involvement in SARs and Learning Reviews (and where appropriate involvement from the adult at risk) gives them the opportunity to shape service improvements.

We record what individuals express as their outcomes within safeguarding documentation and if these outcomes are achieved. In December 2023 – 83% of adults or representatives were asked for their outcomes, of those who expressed outcomes, 100% were fully or partially met.

How we receive feedback from stakeholders

Examples of how we receive feedback from stakeholders includes:

- We have robust arrangement in place to self-assess our safeguarding arrangements. We complete an annual multi-agency quality assurance framework and have recently adopted the safeguarding children Section 11 audit and applied it across children and adults safeguarding. Findings from the self-assessment contribute towards the safeguarding adult's strategic plan
- Members of NCASP are encouraged to challenge and provide constructive feedback on all aspects of safeguarding adults
- Northumberland Local Authority is an active member in national and regional safeguarding networks, proactively sharing our learning and improvement workstreams and requesting feedback. These include:
 - Regional ADASS Safeguarding Adults network
 - Regional Safeguarding Adult Review Champions
 - National Safeguarding Adults Network.

7.3 What are our plans to maintain/improve our performance in this area?

Our plans to maintain/improve our performance in this area are:

- Implementation of ArcGIS (interactive mapping tool) for visual tracking of vulnerable clients to enhance our emergency response
- Continue to raise awareness of our new online Safeguarding Adult Policy and Procedures. Whilst we have already carried out a number of introductory demonstrations with staff, we are planning to develop an online webinar demonstration which can be included in the staff induction
- We are developing information packs to provide to individuals who are within the safeguarding procedures

- We are planning to develop further training courses on safeguarding decision making, chairing safeguarding meetings and making safeguarding personal
- We have identified that there are issues with the Section 42 data that is recorded, which results in Northumberland being an outlier. We have undertaken audits to assure safeguarding practice and decision making are robust and they are, but we are now making system and recording changes to fall more in line with the approach to recording and categorising that seems to be used in other areas
- We are undertaking work with partners about what constitutes a safeguarding concern to attempt to reduce inappropriate referrals
- We are planning to include a discriminatory abuse practice guidance section within our multi-agency policy and procedures
- We are looking at improving access to referrals for independent advocacy and enabling staff to understand the process of referrals
- We would like to improve our approach to gathering service user feedback of the safeguarding process
- Partner and public consultation on safeguarding website content
- We have developed an Adult Services Learning Review Action Tracker which will provide an overview of all actions attributed to Adult Services from Learning Reviews.

8. Theme 4: Leadership

8.1 What is our ambition, what are our strengths?

We are striving for a strong collegiate leadership culture of empowering and developing staff, teams and managers. This is very much in line with the NCC corporate leadership training programme which is currently being rolled out across the Council, “The Living Leader”.

Our ambition is for Adult Services to build upon the strong and sustained history of governance arrangements that provide the necessary overview and assurance required to support our business processes.

Governance, Management and Sustainability

Corporate Governance

Our Corporate Plan 2023–2026 sets out the vision – “A Land of Great Opportunities” and our corporate priorities – Achieving Value for money; Tackling Inequalities; Driving Economic Growth. These are underpinned by the four values:

- People First
- Respect
- Excellence
- Resilience

In 2022 NCC reviewed their corporate vision and values to ensure that they were still appropriate.

Our Portfolio Holder for Adults’ Wellbeing is Cllr Wendy Pattison, and we have a well-established Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Adult Social Care is fully integrated into all Council business, and examples of Council corporate forums and projects involving Adult Social Care include:

- NCC Executive Team
- Strategic Leadership Team
- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- JSNAA Steering Group
- Health Inequalities summit 2022
- Strategic Change Board.

Our Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) is an Executive member of the corporate executive team and regularly provides updates on the issues and challenges facing adult services. They are also an active member and the Treasurer of our strong regional ADASS network.

An independent governance review in the Local Authority was undertaken by Max Caller in early 2022. That happened soon after the partnership arrangement between NCC and Northumbria NHS Trust ended in 2021 and the majority of Adult Services had just moved from Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust to NCC. This was a significant change in the overall structure of adult social care in Northumberland and it took over 9 months to manage to the transfer in full. However, it is to the credit of both organisations that it had limited impact upon Adult Services delivery and practice.

In January 2024 we had a Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review. The review team met with over 200 people including staff, elected members, our partners and those in our communities. The final report is due to be published in March 2024, however the review team provided initial feedback and noted that they saw significant progress has been made over the last year.

NCC has recently implemented a full corporate structural review at senior management level, led by the new Chief Executive who started in February 2023.

NCC has initiated a Strategic Change programme 'BEST' which aims to look at most aspects of the way the council works to ensure that we are fit for the future:

- Best Services to Customers
- Best Value for Money
- Best in Class Commissioning
- Best use of Resources
- Best use of Assets
- Best use of Technology
- Best Talent and Opportunities.

The main challenges the programme will focus on are finance, inequalities, and the geography of the county. This program will run in its first phase over the next 2-3 years, but is intended to continue on an ongoing basis ensure NCC remains a "best value" authority moving forward.

Risk management is a key component of the Adult Services Governance process, with assurance provided via our Estates and Health & Safety Group. In line with the corporate framework, operational and strategic risks are owned and managed at a local level, whilst corporate risks are reported, owned and managed by the corporate Executive Team and Cabinet.

In conjunction with the NCC Civil Contingencies team, each Adult Services team has a Business Continuity plan which is reviewed and shared within the team on a regular basis. This supports managers to ensure they are ready to respond to an emergency situation when required. In addition to this, appropriate managers also take part in table-top exercises to test crisis response in a range of scenarios. One such example being the Tri-sector Challenge (North-East) where one of our senior managers won the Shining Star award.

The NCC Client Relations Team receive information relating to compliments and complaints from residents in Northumberland. As part of our Quality and Governance Group, a quarterly report is shared and discussed with Senior Managers specific to Adult Services.

Adult Services Governance

We have a robust self-assessment process in place to provide assurance on delivery of our Care Act duties as well as to identify any gaps or risks to service quality and delivery. An example of this is our internally managed quality assurance visits within each team.

We have a strong Governance framework in place to support the strategic and operational requirements of all the services which encompass Adult Services. This includes:

- Operational Process Group (OPG)
- Adult Quality and Governance Group
- Adult Services Transformation Board
- Adult Services Human Resources Dashboard
- Adult Services System / Information Technology meeting
- Adult Services Finance Meeting
- Adult Services Estates and Health and Safety Group
- Adult Services Review of Performance and Finance meeting

All meetings report into the monthly Adult Social Care Senior Management Meeting, where key information from these meetings is reviewed and discussed. We also share our key Governance information via a quarterly

Governance report. The aim of the report is to translate our key information to share with stakeholders. Our monthly Adult Services Quality and Governance Group ensures that governance is embedded across all services and underpinned by a culture of open and honest reporting and learning.

An audit of our governance meeting terms of reference was undertaken for the period April 2022 – March 2023. A report summarising key findings and recommendations was shared with all meeting Chairs and our Quality and Governance Group in October 2023.

The Executive Director for Adults will raise any relevant issues to corporate leadership through the following main channels (alongside ad hoc communication on any urgent issues):

- Chief Executive and the Executive Team using the Executive Team meeting
- Lead Member, either via weekly catch-ups or more formal monthly briefing with the DASS
- Lead Member, via regular individual catch-ups with the Adult Services senior management team alongside the DASS
- Leader/Deputy Leader/Cabinet, via weekly Senior Leadership Team meeting or where necessary via report to Cabinet or full Council
- Shadow Lead Member, via monthly formal briefing
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee, via formal reports
- Health and Wellbeing Board, via formal reports or ad hoc update at the meeting.

Effective and Visible leadership

The Adult Services senior leadership team has a good blend of experience and some newer appointments to more senior roles. Each individual brings a significant amount of knowledge and experience. Our leaders have clear roles and responsibilities and are effective and visible:

- Director Meets and Greets, where the Executive Director attends different sites on a rolling basis to meet the teams face to face and discuss and share key and topical information.
- Monthly webinars provided by the Senior Management Team and circulated to all staff
- Senior Management shadowing and observations including:
 - Heads of Service on-site support visits with agile working

- Informal Principal Social Worker (PSW) on-site support visits.
- Investment in Leadership Team via:
 - Team Days
 - Dedicated Training for Senior Leaders, including the Living Leader programme.

Corporate staff newsletters and our own Adult Services newsletter provide an opportunity to raise awareness about the leadership team – who they are and what their collective priorities are.

Our bi-monthly quality workshops, which include all Team Managers and Senior Managers, are evaluated and have provided us with some positive feedback on our Adult Services Leadership Team.

Performance and Finance

In Adult Services, we have detailed oversight of financial information and are developing a strong performance culture to ensure that we are evidence based. Performance data drives learning, and improvement and our monthly Performance and Finance meeting allows our senior managers to fully review and respond to key operational, strategic and legislative performance and finance information, to identify key trends and areas for investigation. This includes reviewing any national and regional benchmarking information available.

We have introduced a bi-monthly Quality workshops and monthly performance workshops for social work and care management Team Managers, Senior Managers and our performance, quality, finance and governance leads. The purpose of these workshops is to ensure that operational Senior Managers and Team Managers are confident and competent in the governance and quality of work practices and performance for their respective service area/team and support them with areas that require further development.

There is a strong link between the corporate finance team and those staff working on finance within the service. We make extensive use of the client system SWIFT to support a more detailed level of commitment budget management. This has been further enhanced by the use of Tableaux to create more user-friendly reports for teams and managers.

Communication

There are many forms of communications used to meet the needs of the recipients of the information as well as to meet the needs of the information being communicated. Examples of these include:

- Corporate briefings for senior leaders, with key messages from the Chief Executive and Executive team

- Two weekly staff newsletters – one linked to corporate news, and one aligned with staff wellbeing
- Adult Services also have many internal forums for communication which include:
 - Monthly Adult Services newsletter
 - Quality Matters newsletter.

Policy and Strategy Development

We have a dedicated Senior Policy lead in Adult Services who is responsible for ensuring that we meet our statutory responsibilities and future legislative changes. Our policy and strategy development process includes:

- Identifying opportunities for co-production with relevant stakeholders, where appropriate
- Sign off by relevant senior managers and DASS
- Communicated via relevant forums including the Adult Services newsletter.

Example - The Market position Statement developed by our Contracts and Commissioning Team used a lot of material discussed with providers within provider forums, it was considered at the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and approved by Cabinet in November 2022. This was then publicised externally and disseminated to all Adult Services staff via the Adult Services monthly newsletter in December 2022.

We have commenced a project to transfer all of our policies, procedures and guidance onto an online system called Tri-X. This will provide a user friendly and accessible web-based platform for all our documentation.

Learning, Improvement and Innovation

There is a strong focus on continuous learning and improvement within Adult Services.

For example, all our social work staff once qualified have an opportunity to study at post graduate level on specialist areas of practice at a local university.

Workforce Development

We have in place a separate and dedicated training team for Adult Social Care. The team provides all the professional development opportunities for social work and care management staff, including Postgraduate Certificate in Social Work, ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) programmes and student placements.

We have a specialist training programme available for both social work and care management staff and the wider adult services workforce e.g. tier 1 autism training, reflective supervision training and Mental Capacity, assessment in practice training.

We have access to all the Council's training resources and there is a strong statutory and mandatory training programme in place for all staff which is closely performance managed to ensure take up by all staff. We have in place dedicated social work and care management forums where staff regularly come together to network, learn and share best practice.

The Living Leader leadership and management training programme is currently being rolled out across the organisation via a train the trainer model.

Northumberland has recently established a leading social work academy within Adult Services. This provides dedicated and consistent support for all newly qualified social workers and social work apprentices. In March 2023 we received an independent external quality assurance visit from Skills for Care who, via a series of interviews, assessed the quality and implementation of our ASYE programme in Northumberland. The feedback was extremely positive and demonstrated that Northumberland is a national exemplar of best practice, with plans to share our approach more widely. One of the assessors stated, *'It was the most positive visit that I have ever had'*.

We are actively involved in the regional workforce steering group which has provided a forum for regional collaboration dedicated to responding to workforce and retention issues in relation to social work staff.

We have had a Social Work Workforce development strategy in place for a number of years. This has recently been expanded to include the wider adult services.

We have recently evaluated our recruitment and retention survey aimed at social work and care management staff. As a consequence of this, we have responded to feedback from staff and have implemented a number of key outcomes, for example, the development and implementation of a case prioritisation tool.

In recognising the pivotal role of team managers within social care and in order to support them we have introduced a pilot of a team manager competency portfolio, which is linked to the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF).

Quality Improvement and Assurance

We are part way through a cultural shift within Adult Services as we move away from a process driven approach and focus on quality of outcomes. We are currently on a journey to ensure that our policies, procedures, processes, systems, and training support this shift in approach.

We have developed and implemented a governance structure to support our quality work via the formation of the monthly Adult Quality, Performance and

Audit Group. AQPAG was established in 2019 for oversight of all quality assurance activity across Adult Services. This was reviewed in 2023 and a new meeting was established entitled Quality and Governance Group, to provide oversight and alignment of both of these key areas. There is good representation at these meetings from Heads of Service, for assurance purposes.

In 2020 we published our quality of practice framework which sets out our approach to quality assurance and service improvement to support our overall vision to help people live the life that they want. The framework was updated in December 2022 and January 2024 following collaboration with our adult services workforce via a series of interactive workshops, team meeting updates and staff communications. A 7-minute briefing has been developed to support awareness raising of the Quality of Practice framework.

We have a comprehensive approach to auditing, which is embedded in practice throughout adult services. During 2022 we worked on standardising the approach to audits and ensuring that the Quality of Practice framework principles are adhered to. A new audit framework was implemented in November 2022 which encompasses case quality audits, service / team audits and themed audits. The framework was then updated in November 2023. Feedback from audits is shared and discussed with managers at the meeting to support learning and improvement. We have introduced a comprehensive audit dashboard that reflects the quantity and outcomes of audits.

We are working alongside our NCC corporate internal audit colleagues to provide assurance that our Adult Services internal processes meet their requirements.

Northumberland Adult Services has a strong history of using NICE Guidelines to support quality improvement. We have baseline assessments and accompanying action plans in place for the most relevant NICE guidelines, and processes in place to review the assessments. This work did slow during the Covid pandemic, but our Quality and Governance Group is committed to ensuring that adherence to NICE Guidance is prioritised. We are active participants in a NIHR SSCR (National Institute for Health and Social Care Research School for Social Care Research) research study into evaluating the costs and benefits of implementing NICE adult social care guidelines. An Assistant Professorial Research Fellow in the London School of Economics, who is leading on the study, said during a January 2024 webinar:

“Northumberland has been an amazing case study for our research. Few local authorities are doing such an amount of work on NICE implementation. It has been great observing their progress; and how much more intelligence has been gathered whilst adopting the guidelines in practice. We now understand your longer term aims of guidance implementation and how that fits into your organisational goals. It is great seeing your improved service outcomes and the work undertaken to assess value for money”

Engagement and co-production

This is an area that we know we need to improve on, and our Engagement and Co-production strategy is currently in development and sets out our current and future plans for engagement for the coming period. An example of co-production in Adult Services is our 'People's Advisory Panel'. The purpose of the panel is for adults with lived experience, Northumberland County Council Adult Services staff and Healthwatch Northumberland to work together in equal partnership to advise upon embedding a culture of co-production across social care and to improve the quality of our services. An agenda item at the December 2023 meeting was this self-assessment document.

Digital Innovation

We have established a Digital Innovation working group with representation from across Adult Services. The purpose of the group is to share regional and national updates on digital solutions. Output from the working group feeds into the Adult Services Governance process.

We have an enthusiastic, but cautious approach to digital innovation and having seen a number of high profile expensive and resource intensive ideas across the country provide limited tangible benefit to clients, their families and social work staff. Northumberland wants projects that will work and deliver genuine benefit to our clients and their families.

There are various pilots currently taking place within Adult Services. These include:

- Northumberland is part of an ADASS regional project whereby each local authority is tasked with piloting a different innovative assistive technology solution and sharing feedback with the other authorities. Our project involves the provision of a digital communications solution to support the delivery of services remotely
- The use of Power Apps in Microsoft to support the OT service in recording client consent, equipment handover and adaptation sign off, using mobile phones.
- There is a range of projects currently underway to support the move from analogue to digital technology. An example is the Telecare Lifeline Alarms and Telecare Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC). Due to the national public switch telephone network (PSTN) being removed and replaced by digital networks traditional analogue alarms will no longer work after December 2025 when the PSTN exchanges are completely decommissioned. Just under 3000 Telecare Customers are having their lifeline alarm units exchanged for digital alarm units

- We are currently piloting the use of Amazon Show. The purpose of this project is to pilot a virtual service offer to Northumberland residents as an alternative to, or alongside, a traditional in person service
- A further project is determining how GPS trackers can be utilised to facilitate hospital discharges in Northumberland. In addition to this, we are exploring how GPS devices can be utilised to safeguard lone working across Northumberland.
- A key project which is currently in the implementation stage for Adult Services is the replacement of our main client information system SWIFT, with AzeusCare. This is a workflow-based system, supporting the needs of the client through an intuitive step by step process which will provide a more fluid, innovative and user-friendly system.

8.2 What is our performance and how do we know?

Feedback

Examples of how we receive feedback include:

- A Quarterly Governance Report and Annual Report from our PSW
- Regular informal updates from our PSW to our Adult Services Senior Management Meeting
- Ad hoc and regular updates to Overview and Scrutiny Committee e.g., the recent Market Position statement was shared with OSC in November 2022
- An overview from our annual corporate Staff Survey and Pulse Survey
- Localised report from the LGA Social Work Health Check
- A 6-monthly Training and Evaluation report provided to Quality and Governance Group
- Webinars and Workshops e.g. Quality and Improvement workshops
- Service level agreements in place where appropriate to provide feedback from our partners and stakeholders. We encourage feedback from partners where SLAs are not appropriate
- An annual training needs analysis
- Staff turnover, new starters and leavers.

8.3 What are our plans to maintain/improve our performance in this area?

Our plans to maintain/improve our performance in this area are:

- Implementation of our Adult Services digital strategy which emerged following completion of staff workshops specific to identifying key problems and potential solutions via digital innovation
- A case prioritisation tool is currently being piloted across a range of social work teams with an aim to roll this out across all teams which will provide information on fairness within caseload allocation
- A Members briefing is currently in development which will be used to provide an update on key projects and developments within Adult Services
- Meetings have taken place with Directors and Heads of Service to identify the need for enhanced Care Act training. This will be designed based on themes emerging from service audits
- Complete transfer of our policies, procedures and guidance onto an online system called Tri-X. This will provide a user friendly and accessible web-based platform for all our documentation.