



Northumberland County Council

Cabinet

11 February 2025

Care Quality Commission assessment of adult social care

Report of Councillor(s) Wendy Pattison, Cabinet Member for Caring for Adults

Responsible Officer(s): Neil Bradley, Executive Director for Adults, Ageing & Wellbeing

1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

The primary focus of Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessments of adult social care is on the quality of the support being provided for people with care and support needs and carers. It is therefore most relevant to the Tackling Inequalities priority in the Corporate Plan.

2. **Purpose of report**

This report summarises the conclusions of the assessment of adult social care in Northumberland by the Care Quality Commission, following their visit in August 2024. Overall, the Council's adult social care services were rated as "Good".

3. **Recommendations**

3.1 The Cabinet is invited to note the report for information, and in particular to note that:

- a) CQC's assessment of the Council's delivery of its adult social care duties is among the most positive assessments that they have so far published. The report makes particularly encouraging comments on the Council's partnership arrangements with other organisations.
- b) The report assesses the Council's performance as "good" in seven of the nine domains which it covers. The two domains in which it says that the evidence considered by CQC "shows some shortfalls" were both identified as priorities for improvement in a position statement that was published by the Council earlier this year as the starting point for a broad conversation with service users, carers, staff and partner organisations about priorities for adult social care over the next three years.

- c) Consolidated action plans are being developed to address priorities for improvement identified through the CQC report and through the local conversation which the position statement initiated.

4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

This report was listed in the Forward Plan on 12 December 2024. It is an information report, and does not require the Cabinet to make a “key decision”.

5. Background

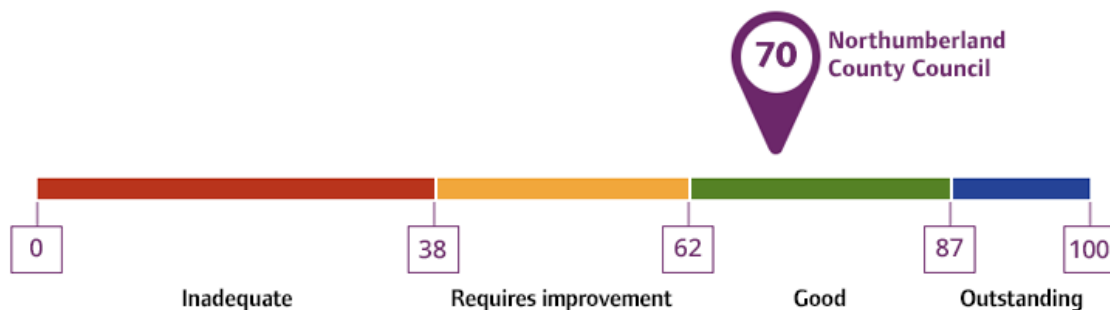
- 5.1 The Health and Social Care Act 2022 introduced a requirement for the Care Quality Commission to carry out reviews of how local authorities are exercising their adult social care functions under the Care Act 2014 (which includes most, but not all, of the Council’s statutory adult social care duties). No overall inspections of local authorities’ adult social care services had taken place since a previous process was discontinued by the Coalition Government after 2010 in favour of a system of “sector led improvement”.
- 5.2 The then Government’s impact assessment on the social care provisions in the 2022 Act explained that:
- Currently, while local authorities have a legal duty to provide ASC [Adult Social Care], there is not a regular means for evaluating what they are doing well and what needs to improve. There is a lack of data available with which local populations can hold local authorities to account and we therefore cannot be sure that every person who relies on ASC is getting the high-quality care they deserve.
- 5.3 Adding that:
- The policy is not about centralising control of ASC, it is about delivering high-quality ASC and clarifying government’s role in supporting local systems to realise that aim; the precedent of minimal central oversight and levers over the last decade has demonstrated that the status quo is not working for service users and local areas.
- 5.4 CQC carried out five pilot assessments during 2023, and began a full programme early in 2024. The intention is to assess all local authorities with social care responsibilities on three-year cycle. To date, the programme has progressed more rapidly in some parts of England than others; in the North East all of the local authorities have now had notification that an assessment will be taking place within the next few months or have already been assessed and are awaiting the outcomes.
- 5.5 A national report into the operational effectiveness of CQC was commissioned in May 2024 by the previous Government, and published in two stages in July and October 2024, after the change of Government. The new Government has indicated that it accepts the conclusions of the report and intends to require changes. However the process has not yet changed, and the Northumberland inspection was carried out in the original format.
- 5.6 In Northumberland, the Council received notification on 19 February 2024 that an assessment would take place within the following six months, and the on-site visit took place during the week of 5 August 2024. CQC spoke to a wide range of frontline staff and managers in adult social care, to the Cabinet Member and

shadow Cabinet Member leading on adult social care, the chair of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Chief Executive and the Director of Public Health. They also interviewed key managers in a range of partner agencies, and representatives of service providers and voluntary and community sector organisations. They spoke to members of partnership and “co-production” groups, and they examined in detail how the directorate had managed six individual cases.

- 5.7 The Council received a draft report on 24 October 2024, under strict conditions of confidentiality, with an opportunity to make comments on factual errors or omissions. The final version of the report was published on 24 January this year.

6. The report

- 6.1 The graphics and table below show CQC’s overall rating for the Council’s performance and the specific ratings for each of the nine domains which underlie that.



- 6.2 As at 24 January 2025 when the Northumberland report was published, 24 local authorities had been assessed by CQC (five of them during the stage in 2023 when the process was being piloted). CQC rated adult social care performance in 16 of these authorities as “good”, in 8 as “requires improvement”, and in none as “outstanding” or “inadequate”. The published scores underlying these judgements allow a more detailed comparison against the other 18 local authorities assessed after the pilot stage (during which scores were not published). Only three of the authorities assessed had been given a higher score than the 70 awarded to Northumberland. The highest score given to any local authority was 78, the lowest was 53.

- 6.3 CQC has given a score out of four for each of nine areas covered by the inspection with one being the evidence shows significant shortfalls, and four showing an exceptional standard. The table below shows these scores.

Theme	Area	Score
How the local authority works with people	1. assessing people’s needs	2
	2. supporting people to lead healthier lives	3
	3. equity in experience and outcomes	2
Providing support	4. care provision, integration and continuity of care	3
	5. partnership and communities	3
How the local authority ensures safety in the system	6. safe pathways, systems and transitions	3
	7. safeguarding	3

Leadership	8. governance, management and sustainability	3
	9. learning, improvement and innovation	3

6.4 CQC’s formal summary of their assessment of Northumberland is reproduced in Appendix 1 to this report. The full 46-page report is available on the CQC website; a link to it is provided in section 9 below. CQC’s press release published alongside the report quoted James Bullion, their national chief inspector of adult social care and integrated care, as making the following overall comments:

“At our assessment of Northumberland County Council, we found an organisation putting collaboration with people and partners at the heart of everything they did. This was having a positive impact on people’s experiences which we saw reflected in the feedback people gave to us on their interactions with the authority. This is particularly impressive given the logistics of providing support to people in rural communities over such a vast geographical area.

“We saw that people using services received up-to-date assessments and reviews. It was also good to see the way the local authority worked with people to put clear goals in place and that assessments reflected changes in individual needs. This was mirrored in the impressive data that showed over 95% of people had reviews during a year, compared to the England average of under 60%. This was reflected in the amount of people feeling in control of their daily lives being higher than the national average.

“People who needed care after being discharged from hospital had a good experience. Over 90% of people aged 65+ were still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement and rehabilitation services. This was higher than the England average of 83.7%. Staff were very rightly proud of their work supporting people to remain in their own home.

“Northumberland built strong and meaningful relationships with partner organisations, including the voluntary and community sectors. This positively impacted people’s experiences and outcomes including preventing delays in their care.

“They aimed to involve partners on decision making, commissioning and delivering services. We heard about the joined-up approach between health and social care with good communication between different teams meaning people didn’t need to repeat their stories and experiences multiple times.

“The multi-agency safeguarding hub had been recognised regionally and nationally by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services as best practice for its management of high level of risk and harm to children and adults at risk within Northumberland.

“However, the authority needed to improve its understanding of the needs of different groups to ensure that people receive the specialist care they need. For example, we heard from people with learning disabilities who had challenges integrating into their local community and accessing employment opportunities due to transport links and a lack of specialist support. However, tackling inequalities was a key priority of Northumberland’s strategic ambitions with aims to further develop its work.

“Overall, Northumberland should be pleased with the findings of this assessment, and the good practice we found.”

7. Planned actions in response to the report

7.1 Work will be carried out to address all areas in which CQC identified scope for improvement. In some cases where CQC reports that particular issues were raised by service users, carers or voluntary and community organisations, officers will

initiate further discussions to ensure that the Council understands the issues involved in more detail and is able to consider what actions are called for.

- 7.2 Appendix 2 comments briefly on how officers are addressing the specific areas for improvement identified in this summary, most of which were also identified as priorities in the Council's own position statement published three months before the inspection, and were already included in the Directorate's action plans.

8. Implications

Policy	Both the positives identified by the CQC report and the areas where there is scope for improvement are broadly in line with the Council's own position statement published in May 2024 as the starting point for a conversation with service users, carers, staff and partners.
Finance and value for money	There are no immediate implications.
Legal	The purpose of the CQC assessment regime is to assess the effectiveness of each local authority's implementation of Part 1 of the Care Act 2014.
Procurement	No immediate implications
Human resources	No immediate implications identified
Property	No immediate implications identified.
Is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point The CQC report raises general issues about equity and equality of access to support in the geographically diverse area of Northumberland which are already known; options for addressing these will continue to be considered when planning the commissioning of services.
Risk assessment	No new risks are identified by the CQC report.
Crime and disorder	The CQC report assesses positively the Council's joint working with the police to safeguard adults at risk of abuse or neglect.
Customer considerations	The CQC report confirms the need previously identified to strengthen further arrangements for "co-producing" plans for adult social care with adults who have care and support needs and carers.
Health and wellbeing	Adult social care services support many of the residents of Northumberland whose health and wellbeing are most at risk.

Wards	All Wards
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9. Background papers

Northumberland County Council: local authority assessment, CQC January 2025: [full report](#) and [press release](#).

DHSC [Social care impact assessments](#) for the Health and Care Act 2022 (updated September 2023)

[Review into the operational effectiveness of the Care Quality Commission: full report](#) (DHSC October 2024)

10. Links to other key reports already published

[Next Steps for Adult Social Care in Northumberland, 2024-2027](#) (Council position statement published May 2024)

11. Author and Contact Details

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