

## **CQC assessment of ASC: Appendix 2 – Notes on planned actions**

### *[1] Barriers to influencing key strategies*

We think this comment is likely to be based on comments made to the inspectors by one or more of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations represented on joint planning groups with the NHS. We will explore further the nature of their concerns.

### *[2] Access to community and employment and specialist services for people with learning disabilities*

Northumberland's geography is likely always to make it challenging to make local arrangements to support people with specialist needs – and sometimes very expensive to transport people to specialist services. We will continue to explore opportunities to redirect some of the funding currently used to pay for expensive long-distance transport so that it is used instead to enable more local services to provide the support people need.

### *[3] Transitions to adulthood aligned with educational and employment opportunities*

The transition into adult social care support for young people who have significant special educational needs but have not needed support from children's social care services has in the past not been as clearly defined as it might be. Officers in adult social care are working closely with the Council's special educational needs service to develop a clearer pathway.

Officers are also engaged with initial preparations in our area for the new national initiative, led by the Department of Work and Pensions, which will be working to support people with disabilities or special needs into employment.

### *[4] Housing options*

As we recognised in our May 2024 Position Statement, we have fewer "extra care" and similar housing options for older people than some local authorities, and need to accelerate the pace of our work on this, learning from other areas. This is already in progress.

### *[5] The DFG process*

Our understanding is that the comments about this issue made to the inspectors are likely to have been concerned with the speed with which adaptations are arranged for people with rapidly progressing disabling health conditions. The council agreed in December 2023 a discretionary grant scheme designed to address delays in arranging urgently needed and straightforward adaptations by removing the need for a means test and a financial contribution. Initial experience suggests that this scheme is working as intended, and we think that comments made to the inspectors may have reflected the situation before it was introduced. However we will keep under review whether there are continuing issues about delays in meeting priority needs.

### *[6] The experiences of carers*

We recognised in our May 2024 Position Statement that records of assessments in Northumberland do not reflect carers' needs as well as they should, and that we need to understand how well we are listening to carers. We have already taken steps to address this, including working with carers to re-design our training on assessing carers' needs,

and embarking on a rolling programme of carers awareness training for all front-line adult social care staff. To ensure that we draw on the experience of carers in our overall planning, we have established a new Carers Forum, which met for the first time in November 2024, and we are working with this forum and our partners to strengthen the Northumberland Carers Partnership Board, and to prepare a new five-year Commitment to Carers Strategy.

[7] *Direct payments*

It is hard to be sure from available statistics how well the Council is doing comparatively at supporting people to take a positive decision to control their own care arrangements through direct payments. This is because in some areas (including in the past Northumberland) people may have opted for direct payments because of dissatisfaction with the services commissioned by the local authority rather than because of a positive wish to manage their own arrangements. However we agree that there is more work to do to ensure that all local teams understand how to have meaningful conversations with all of the people who they work with about the option of a direct payment. The Council's May 2024 Position Statement identified this as a key current priority.

[8] *Co-production with people with lived experience*

Officers had during the eighteen months before CQC's visit begun a programme of initiatives designed to increase the involvement of people with care and support needs and carers in "co-producing" the Council's overall approach to planning adult social care services. During 2023 we arranged training for 144 staff to increase awareness of techniques for including people with lived experience in discussions about the development of services, and towards the end of that year we launched an Adult Services People's Advisory Group, in which adults with lived experience, Adult Services staff and Healthwatch Northumberland work together to give advice on how we can embed a culture of co-production across social care and improve the quality of our services. The Position Statement which we published in May 2024 was designed to launch a wider conversation with people with care and support needs and carers, as well as staff and organisational partners, about what we should be aiming to change. An Engagement and Co-production Strategy finalised in summer 2024 sets out a continuing programme of work.

[9] *Commissioning arrangements with Voluntary and Community Sector services*

Officers will be discussing further with VCS organisations that we work with the issues that were raised with CQC about the need for a predictable financial context in which to plan their services. The financial context in which the Council operates makes it difficult to offer any body funded through adult social care complete financial security, but it may be possible to identify ways to formalise current unwritten understandings about the notice that would be given of any major change in funding, without significantly restricting the Council's ability to manage financial pressures.