Healthier Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Date: 24 January 2024

Agenda item:

Subject: CQC Assurance: Progress and Departmental Preparations Update

Lead Director: John Morgan

Lead Officer: Phil Howell

Lead Member: Cllr Peter McCabe, Cabinet Member for Health & Social Care

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Recommendations:

1. For Panel to note the developments within the national role out of CQC assurance and the department's continued preparations for both LGA peer review (planned for June 2024) and CQC assurance

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1.   PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1   CQC Assurance is being rolled out nationally across Adult Social Care departments. Five local authorities volunteered to take part in pilot assurance activity in the autumn of 2023. The findings and individual assurance reports of these pilot assessments were published in November 2024. Four Authorities were rated as 'Good'. One was rated 'requires improvement'.

1.2   At the same time the CQC published it's Information Request template. This is the core information the CQC is required to receive ahead of Assurance visits. This allows all local authorities to prepare this portfolio in full knowledge of the request, without waiting to be advised they will be visited by CQC. Effectively giving the department more time to prepare exactly what is needed.

1.3   In December, the CQC issued letters to three authorities – Hounslow, Hertfordshire and West Berkshire – notifying them they will be the first three Authorities to be subjected to the full assurance process. This phase of the process is intended to undertake 20 assurance process and as such, the department is still preparing in the event we are one of the 20 Authorities.

1.4   The department has also put itself forward for an LGA Peer Review in preparedness for assurance. This was originally planned for February, however due to LGA capacity this had to be revised. We have now received confirmation this will take place 5 – 7 June 2024.

1.5   The purpose of this report is to provide CMT with detail on the national process, as it progresses to the next phase and to provide an update on the departments preparedness for both LGA peer review and CQC assurance.

2. DETAILS

1.1 The new Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance framework for adult social care came into operation on the 1st of April 2023 as a result of the Health and Care Act 2022. The Act places a new duty on the CQC to assess local authorities' delivery of adult social care duties under part 1 of the Care Act 2014.

1.2 There have been some significant updates over the last 9 months including:

· 5 LA pilot sites have completed inspections, and each have received a report and rating,

· the development of a clearer process involved during a CQC assessment,

· the development of a new Information Return,

· 3 local authorities have recently been selected in the first wave of assessments.

1.3 During April 2023 CQC requested local authorities to volunteer to test out the assurance process across the 4 themes (working with people, providing support, ensuring safety within the system and leadership). The assessments were completed over the summer period and the final reports were published in November 2023. North Lincolnshire County Council, Lincolnshire County Council, Suffolk County Council and Birmingham City Council were rated as Good and Nottingham City Council was rated as Requires Improvement.

1.4 Areas of strengths highlighted included: Senior staff were reported to be accessible and visible, good strengths based and person centred practice, commitment to learning, people's needs assessed in a timely way, cohesive preventative offer, embedded co-production approach and positive feedback from users involved, good use of data, positive integration at an operational level and staff knew their communities, all staff and leaders have a good understanding of inequalities in their area, staff overwhelmingly positive about working for the local authority.

1.5 Areas for improvement highlighted included: gaps in provision of accessible information, delays when contacting the local authority to get assessed, links with health partners were informal rather than structural, more work needed to include the views of people within safeguarding enquiries, recruitment difficulties, greater focus needed in identifying and understanding the needs of seldom heard groups, improvements in transition to adulthood required, pathway for autistic people unclear.

1.6 The feedback from the pilot sites enables a greater understanding of the areas which will need specific focus upon and will need covering within the self-assessment e.g., having a narrative in relation to management of

waiting lists, improving transition to adulthood, knowing our community, being aware of and highlighting any recruitment issues, being aware of any gaps and stating them in the self-assessment and having plans to improve.

Roll out of full inspections.

1.7 The CQC intend to carry out a baseline assessment of all 154 local authorise over the next two years and will give a narrative report alongside a rating. Three local authorities were selected at the end of December 2023 to undertake the first wave of assessments which are due to start in 2024. The local authorities selected are Herefordshire County Council, London Borough of Hounslow and West Berkshire County Council.

Process

1.8 The assurance process has become clearer as a result of the pilots, updated CQC guidance and intelligence gathered from various national and local networks which officers attend e.g., Principle Social Worker network, London ADASS. Officers will continue to be involved in these networks in order to gain insight and keep up to date with developments.

1.9 Once a local authority has been selected by the CQC, the Director will receive a notification email titled 'Notification of CQC inspection' with a formal letter detailing the process which will include completing an Information Return, providing details of key personnel for interview and the development of onsite visits and interviews. Indications are that leaders will be interviewed approximately four weeks from the notification, this is likely to include the DASS, Principal Social Worker and senior leaders. Onsite visits will take place nine to eleven weeks after the notification.

1.10 The onsite visits will include key people for example, people who use services, the independent chair of the safeguarding adults board, a range of providers, a large range of voluntary and community sector agencies, the adult social care portfolio holder and shadow portfolio holder, the chair of the health and wellbeing board, front line staff, director of public health, chair of the Integrated Care Board.

Local Authority Information Return

1.11 On December 8th the CQC issued updated guidance in relation to the type of information and evidence that they will require. This is called the Local Authority Information Return (the equivalent of Annex A for children's inspections).

1.12 There are 38 categories contained within the information return. Examples include the self-assessment (optional), feedback from compliments and complaints, feedback from staff and partners, processes and pathways (e.g., care assessments, reviews, financial assessments), waiting list size and management of, market position statements, market shaping plans, safeguarding adult reviews and action plans, adult social care risk register, unpaid carers strategy.

Case tracking.

1.13   An important part of the Information Return will include case tracking. Details will be provided by CQC at the time of notification. However, this is likely to centre on producing 50 case summaries with a focus on the customer journey and practice across a range of groups e.g. older people, transition, autism, learning disability, safeguarding, mental health, unpaid carers. This will help the CQC understand people's journey through the social care system and their experience of how care and support decisions were made.

1.14   The CQC will select 6 of the cases randomly and hold 4 in reserve. They will speak to the individual as well as any significant people and agencies involved. The lived experience of people who are supported by adult care is key to the assessment. The allocated workers for the cases chosen by the CQC will also form part of the interview schedule.

Update on CQC preparation.

1.15   Two staff conferences were held in December 2023 with 101 staff attending across both events. Key themes included an overview of progress on the Towards Outstanding Programme, the current and future budget position, an overview of the CQC framework and feedback from the pilot inspections, an overview of the annual account with a focus on 'how well do you know our demography / community'.

1.16   There was also a feedback and celebration session gaining views from staff in relation to our strengths and what they are most proud of. Some of the examples included;

- challenging opinions of others for the benefit of the individual,

- utilising community resources and sign posting,

- direct payments monitoring and claiming back unspent money,

- supporting individuals to apply and obtain NHS continuing health care funding,

- promoting an integrated approach with health,

- strengths based working,

- good relationships with providers and working through issues,

- OT assessment centre providing quick assessments whilst promoting independence.

Adult Social Care Policy & Procedure repository

1.17 Working with an independent provider of web based policy platforms, we launched Merton Adult Social Care Tri.x site on 20th November 2023, and ran 3 staff sessions to support them to become familiar with the site.

1.18 The site provides our staff with consistent guidance, easier to access, up to date information. The guidance on the Tri.x site is based on national legal requirements and best practice.

1.19 The information included will:
- Guide and inform practice,
- Provide information about local policy and procedures for social workers, occupational therapists and other social care practitioners in the London Borough of Merton in one easy to use site; and
- Keep practitioners up to date with local and national developments in adult social care.

External web page review

1.20 All external adult social care pages have been reviewed, and are being updated to ensure there is up to date information for people using adult social care services, including providing information and advice. They have also been reviewed to ensure our documents published online are accessible to people with disabilities, including using simple language and structure, style and formatting.

Questionnaire

1.21 A questionnaire covering the four CQC themes was carried out with staff and partners and ran from July until December 2023. In all there were 39 responses with an even distribution of staff and partners. The results have been analysed and will be used to inform the self-assessment and action planning. Some of the feedback received included:

1.22 Strengths: Some recurring themes in relation to staff approach being well intentioned, competent, caring and person centred; Partnership and collaborative working appears to be strong and valued within Merton; Response to crisis and incidents of increased risk appears to be proactive; Strong safeguarding partnership and making safeguarding personal evident.

1.23 Areas for development: lack of a self-assessment at the first point of contact; information can be confusing and complicated for people; a perception that people can wait a long time for assessments to be completed and services to be started. The questionnaire also highlighted a

lack of a response and awareness in relation to the areas of equality of experience in outcomes and awareness of learning and innovation which suggests that promotion and further development within these areas is needed.

1.24   In response to the new guidance in relation to the Local Authority Information Return a new spreadsheet has been created to map the evidence that the CQC will require. For each of the 38 evidence areas, key documents or links to documents will be stored, these will be reviewed and updated to ensure that this process runs smoothly at the time of an inspection. Where there are gaps in the Information return an action plan will be created to address the shortfall and these will be tracked to measure progress.

CLD submission

1.25   The Client Level Data (CLD) collection represents an evolution of the annual aggregated Short and Long Term (SALT) collection by asking Councils to submit the underlying data instead. The intention is that quarterly CLD returns will replace the existing annual SALT collection from 2024-25.

1.26   CLD submission is carried out by detailing information on the client's journey through the adult social care system. The CLD return will provide data on individual person details, all requests, assessments, reviews, services, service costs and funding details. Adult Safeguarding activity, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) assessments and Mental Health Act assessments are excluded from CLD. The first quarterly submission was in July 2023 and currently we are working on the third submission, covering April – December 2023.

1.27   In order to provide accurate data, we have developed dynamic Power BI Dashboard reports which will provide visually interactive dashboard along with client level data output and data quality reports and data output. These reports are specifically written to help social workers and managers to provide performance information and data quality insight into client journey through adult social care system. These reports are used during monthly Quality Assurance meetings with managers to monitor and to improve ongoing missing data and data quality issues.

1.28   We are minimising the missing data for CLD return by making all the necessary CLD data mandatory where possible and a mandatory data recording checklist has been provided to staff to provide context and explain what needed to be selected from the picklist. This helps to improve data quality.

1.29   The main data source for CLD comes from Mosaic and additionally we
        receive monthly carer and equipment data from external providers. Data is
        combined and all the necessary quantitative and logical qualitative checks
        are carried out and a data submission is provided to NHS Digital's Data
        Landing Portal (DLP).

1.30   Following submission, we are provided with a data quality report, which
        shows how we compare to our previous submission and to other LAs.
        NHSE also carry out NHS number matching process after each return and
        any missing numbers which are found (based on name, date of birth and
        postcode) are sent to us, this report is fed back to teams to update
        Mosaic.

CLD data publication and national statistics

1.31   During 2023-24 both SALT and CLD will be used to provide Adult Social
        Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF). However, from 2024-25 CLD will
        be the main source of ASCOF and other reporting.

1.32   Currently Adult Social Care Client Level Data dashboard for Local
        Authorities has been developed via Athena (ardengemcsu.nhs.uk), It is
        still at the early stages of the development and only has your own
        council's data. During 2024, the tool will be developed to include
        some SALT and ASCOF measures derived from CLD. It will also include
        metrics and benchmarking to support service planning and
        commissioning, as data quality and completeness improves. It is intended
        to provide benchmarking statistics on a quarterly basis.

1.33   In addition to this dashboard DHSC will publish statistics on CLD to
        provide useful new information to the public, local and national
        government. It is intend to begin publishing some activity statistics derived
        from CLD in the Monthly statistics for adult social care
        (England) publication from March 2024.

3.   ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1   The CQC have stated that producing a self-assessment is optional. We
        will be producing a self assessment and accompanying report together
        with a Local Account document that is intended to be published. Deciding
        to not complete a self assessment would likely result in the CQC spending
        more time during the onsite visit stage and a lack of a clear narrative being
        produced in relation to strengths and areas for improvement.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

4.4   There has been no formal consultations completed at this moment in time. A number of engagement activities have taken place with staff and partners to gather feedback (see 7.6 above). Feedback will continue to be sought from people with a lived experience, and this will help to inform the self-assessment, improvements action plan and our evidence for coproduction.

5. TIMETABLE

5.1   A CQC inspection could occur at any point over the next 2 years. Over the next 3 months the priorities will include ensuring that a self-assessment report is completed, an action plan is completed, and the Information return is populated, and any gaps are highlighted and there is a plan in place.

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1   There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1   The CQC assessment will test LBM compliance with part 1 of the Care Act 2014. Any issues with the application of the Care Act will be highlighted in the CQC narrative report which will result in further work being undertaken in relation of an improvement plan.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1   N/A

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1   N/A

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Reputational. CQC will issue a rating and a narrative report. A low rating is likely to affect LBM reputation in terms of the local community, morale of officers, it may affect staff recruitment, and the wider view held nationally.

11. APPENDICES – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

N/A

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

i. **Local authority assessment reports - Care Quality Commission (cqc.org.uk)**
ii. **Information return guidance - Care Quality Commission (cqc.org.uk)**
iii. **Assessment framework for local authority assurance - Care Quality Commission (cqc.org.uk)**

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