

Learning, improvement and innovation

Score: 3

3 - Evidence shows a good standard

The local authority commitment

We focus on continuous learning, innovation and improvement across our organisation and the local system. We encourage creative ways of delivering equality of experience, outcome and quality of life for people. We actively contribute to safe, effective practice and research.

Key findings for this quality statement

Continuous learning, improvement and professional development

Staff told us there was an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning and improvement. Staff were able to access training and shadowing opportunities which they felt supported their role. A member of staff told us they had attended a course on hoarding and another on how to support people with no recourse to public funds.

Local authority staff had ongoing access to learning and support so that Care Act duties were delivered safely and effectively. Temporary staff told us they were offered opportunities to develop their skills through training and staff skills development meetings. Staff highlighted some gaps in training, which the local authority was aware of, such as specialist commissioning or brokerage training. The local authority had benefitted from their partnership with the North West London Social Care Academy. They had used the Academy's data to carry out a workforce analysis to identify workforce needs and enhance their training offer.

The Principal Social Worker led on workforce development. The Principal Social Worker was a key part of the senior leadership team and integral to implementing the transformation plans of the local authority. Their vision for a more flexible staff team with access to clear pathways for career progression was outlined in the Brent Adult Social Care Workforce Development Plan.

Staff spoke of the measures in place to encourage staff to become permanent employees, which included, financial incentives, protected caseloads and buddy arrangements for new staff. New staff also had increased supervision and opportunities for reflection, supported by the practice development leads.

Practice development leads were a recently created role and were central to improving the quality of practice across the local authority, such as supporting the introduction of the new Standard Operating Procedure. A senior staff member told us the practice development leads had supported staff to increase their awareness of the importance and needs of carers, following the introduction of the new Carers Strategy.

Senior leaders told us about their commitment to the apprenticeship schemes within the local authority, which provided a practical way of tackling staff shortages and offered employment opportunities to local people. Staff were positive about the apprenticeship scheme and the role of the practice development leads in supporting learning and reflective practice. An apprentice told us they had benefitted from opportunities to reflect on the importance of case reviews within safeguarding.

Senior leaders told us they were committed to promoting continuous professional development. Regular events were set up, for example a weekly meeting for social workers, which created opportunities for shared learning and professional development. Most staff gave us positive feedback about how they had been encouraged in their career progression, such as being supported to train as best interest assessors. Staff in some teams told us they did not feel their professional skills were recognised and promoted. Our discussions with senior leaders indicated they were already aware of where improvements were needed and had actions in place to tackle the areas of concerns staff had told us about.

The local authority had recognised the need to develop a proactive approach to the recruitment of OTs, due to the challenges of recruiting to this role nationally. The Principal Occupational Therapist had led on workforce strategies to improve the recruitment and retention to permanent positions, such as a review of pay scales and opportunities for progression. These strategies promoted continuous professional development. An OT told us the local authority respected their professional judgements, for example when selecting equipment.

The local authority was committed to working more collaboratively with people and partners to actively promote and support innovative and new ways of working. We had positive feedback from partners and staff about the effectiveness of the Brent Hubs in improving people's social care experiences and outcomes. Based across Brent, the hubs had adapted to reflect the needs of their local communities. For example, an organisation which worked with the Romanian community was one of the agencies working in an area where the local Romanian population lived. Another hub provided a British Sign Language interpreter to support deaf people in accessing face-to-face advice and guidance.

The local authority was developing systems to promote more structured engagement with local communities and people who used services to ensure they were involved in shaping care services. Senior leaders told us they had started on the journey to develop co-production, which included developing a co-production board and formalising links with local community groups. They highlighted the launch of the new carer's strategy as an example of their enhanced approach. Carers had been involved in co-producing the strategy to ensure their views and needs were taken into account.

The local authority shared learning, best practice and innovation with peers and system partners to influence and improve how care and support was provided. OTs attended a Brent OT forum where they could develop skills and share experiences. This provided an opportunity for shared learning around best practice and enhancing outcomes for people.

The local authority told us they were quite early in their journey to develop innovative digital solutions and were learning from best practice in other authorities. Some products were still in development but had the potential to increase efficiency. For example, electronic systems were being amended to reduce duplication for staff carrying out care assessments with health partners. Individual members of staff gave us examples of innovative pieces of work, for example to support people with sensory needs through using Bluetooth technology. Support included providing a deaf person with a vibration pager and placing pressure mats with different sounds across a person's home to alert them.

Staff and leaders engaged with external work, including research, and embedded evidence-based practice in the organisation. Local partnerships had been used to share knowledge and resources locally. The local authority benefitted from research carried out by partner universities. As part of the Brent Health Matters programme, the local authority used research carried out through a partner university into how local approaches tackle health inequalities. The programme was able to use this research to understand how best to target diverse communities, for example, by promoting new initiatives on a local radio station.

Learning from feedback

The local authority had recognised the need to continually improve how they learned from people's feedback about their experiences of care and support, and feedback from staff and partners. A survey of people's experience was conducted by the local authority in March 2024 and included 78 participants (47 of whom were unpaid carers). In this survey the majority of respondents reported receiving help when needed and felt they were listened to.

Systems were being improved to ensure feedback was used effectively to inform strategy, improvement activity and decision making at all levels. Opportunities had also been set up for senior leaders to meet directly with staff for their feedback. Numerous staff were positive about being able to speak up about issues which were important to them and told us the local authority was promoting a culture where reflection and learning was encouraged.

The local authority had increased engagement with Healthwatch. There was a clear plan for the work being carried out by Healthwatch, with extra tasks being commissioned to ensure increased feedback from people. This included mystery shopping and a focus on direct engagement with groups to include people with dementia, neurodiverse people and young carers.

There was evidence feedback had been used to ensure service provision reflected local need. In response to concerns a support fund had been set up for people facing digital exclusion. A member of staff told us a person they were working with had been given a computer and a carer a laptop through this scheme.

Senior leaders were improving processes to ensure learning happened when things went wrong, and from examples of good practice. Staff at the local authority told us SAR's (Safeguarding Adults Reviews) training was being organised to ensure learning was shared across the department. Improvements in partnership working were enhancing learning opportunities. Partners told us the panel looking at high risk cases promoted shared learning. Senior leaders told us there had been positive learning with partners following a serious incident in Brent.

Information in relation to compliments and complaints were used to inform areas of focus for improvement. There were 166 complaints received between January 2023 to January 2024 and themes included communication, service failure and service request. Communication had the highest number of complaints followed by service failure. In terms of compliments, 14 were shared by the local authority covering different aspects of adult social care including positive feedback about social workers and OTs. The Complaints Annual Report in 2023 detailed the complaints process. For the period 2022-2023, 113 complaints were received which was a 53% increase from the previous year, and 62% of complaints were upheld or partially upheld. Appeals against assessments and support planning decisions were undertaken through the complaints process currently however the local authority were considering managing these through an alternate system in the future.

The local authority had 8 investigations by the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in 2022/23 with a slightly lower uphold rate at 63% than other comparable local authorities. This meant the Ombudsman agreed with the complainant in 5 out of the 8 cases. Figures from the LGSCO show that in 2022-23, the local authority had provided a satisfactory remedy in 41% of upheld cases before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. This compares to an average of 15% in similar authorities which indicated the local authority was listening to people who raised concerns and took action in response.