People and Health Scrutiny
30 November 2026
Adults CQC Assessment Improvement Plan
For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:
Cllr S Robinson, Adult Social Care & Health

Local Councillor(s):

Senior Leadership Team:
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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

1.1 Dorset Council's Adult Social Care services were assessed by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) between August and December 2025 and received an overall rating of **Good**. The assessment provides independent assurance that the Council is meeting its statutory duties under the Care Act 2014 and delivering positive outcomes for many people and carers across Dorset.

The assessment recognised significant strengths in leadership, prevention, partnership working, safeguarding improvements, workforce development and innovation. People and carers generally reported positive experiences, and inspectors highlighted the Council's strong preventative approach, effective collaborative working with health and community partners, and positive organisational culture.

However, the assessment also identified several areas where further improvement is required, including:

- Delays in assessments, reviews, carers' assessments and financial assessments.
- A backlog of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) assessments.

- The need to strengthen co-production and communication with people and carers.
- Opportunities to improve equality, diversity and inclusion engagement.
- Gaps in specialist provision for some groups, including autistic adults and people with complex needs.
- Ongoing challenges associated with rurality, workforce availability and equitable access to services.

Adult Social Care has developed an eight-theme improvement programme to address these findings while building upon the significant strengths identified by the CQC. The Committee is invited to consider whether the emerging themes and priorities reflect the Council's strategic ambitions and whether additional opportunities or risks should be explored as future proposals are developed.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 Review the findings of the CQC assessment.

2.2 Note the Good rating achieved by Dorset Council.

2.3 Review and support the Adult Social Care Improvement Plan.

2.4 Provide scrutiny, challenge and assurance regarding delivery and impact.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

3.1 Dorset Council has statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014. Delivery of the improvement programme supports better outcomes for adults and carers, regulatory compliance and the delivery of Communities for All within the Dorset Council Plan.

4. The report

4.1 The CQC assessment took place under the regulator's assurance framework for local authorities' delivery of Care Act responsibilities. Dorset Council received an overall rating of **Good**, with six of the nine quality statements judged as Good and three identified as requiring improvement. No areas were assessed as demonstrating significant failure.

4.2 Dorset Context

Dorset faces a distinctive set of opportunities and challenges that shape Adult Social Care delivery:

- A significantly older population than the national average, resulting in growing demand for care and support services.
- A predominantly rural geography, affecting access to services, transport, workforce recruitment and market sustainability.
- Areas of deprivation alongside generally affluent communities, creating inequalities in outcomes and experiences.
- Housing affordability and availability challenges that impact independence and wellbeing.
- Workforce pressures associated with a comparatively smaller working-age population.

4.3 Key Strengths Identified by CQC

The CQC assessment identified a number of significant strengths across Dorset Council's Adult Social Care services. These strengths reflect a mature and ambitious organisation with a strong focus on prevention, partnership working, continuous improvement and achieving positive outcomes for people who draw on care and support.

<u>Strong and Visible Leadership</u>

CQC recognised the strength and visibility of leadership across Adult Social Care. Leaders demonstrated a clear strategic vision, were highly accessible to staff and partners, and promoted a culture of openness, learning and accountability. There was strong evidence that senior leaders understood local challenges and opportunities and were committed to addressing inequalities while driving service improvement. Staff consistently reported confidence in leadership and felt empowered to contribute ideas and raise concerns.

A well-developed prevention agenda

The Council demonstrated a proactive approach to preventing, reducing and delaying the need for formal care and support services. Prevention was embedded across service delivery, with investment in community-based support, early intervention initiatives and programmes that help people maintain independence for longer. This strategic focus supports better outcomes for residents while reducing the need for more intensive interventions.

Positive experiences reported by people and carers

People who use services and their carers generally reported positive experiences of Adult Social Care. Feedback highlighted that individuals felt listened to, treated with dignity and involved in decisions about their care and support. Carers reported feeling valued and recognised for the important role they play. The assessment found evidence of person-centred practice, with services designed around individual needs, strengths and personal outcomes.

Effective Partnership Working Across Health, Housing and the Voluntary Sector

A particular strength was the Council's ability to work collaboratively with a wide range of partners. Strong relationships had been established with NHS organisations, housing providers, community groups and voluntary sector organisations. These partnerships supported joined-up service delivery, improved information sharing and enabled more coordinated support for individuals with complex needs. Collaborative approaches were contributing to improved outcomes and helping people navigate services more effectively.

Strong Workforce Development and Organisational Culture

The assessment highlighted a positive organisational culture underpinned by shared values and a commitment to continuous professional development. Staff described feeling supported, respected and valued. Investment in workforce development, training, leadership programmes and career progression opportunities had helped to build a skilled and resilient workforce. There was evidence of strong staff engagement and a culture that encouraged learning and innovation.

Innovative Approaches to Prevention, Reablement and Technology-Enabled Care

Dorset Council demonstrated innovation through the use of technology and creative service models designed to maximise independence. These included technology-enabled care solutions, digital tools, strengths-based approaches and effective reablement services that support people to regain skills and confidence following illness or changes in circumstances. The Council was able to evidence how

innovation was being used to improve outcomes while ensuring support remained personalised and proportionate.

Improvements in Safeguarding Arrangements Through the New Operating Model

CQC recognised the progress made in strengthening safeguarding arrangements. Changes to the operating model had improved oversight, decision-making, quality assurance and partnership working. Staff demonstrated a good understanding of safeguarding responsibilities and there was evidence of improved processes to identify, manage and mitigate risks effectively. Leaders had created stronger governance arrangements that provided assurance regarding the protection of vulnerable adults.

Commitment to Learning, Innovation and Continuous Improvement

The Council demonstrated a strong commitment to ongoing improvement and organisational learning. There was evidence that feedback from residents, carers, staff and partners was actively sought and used to shape service development. Robust performance management, quality assurance processes and a willingness to embrace innovation enabled the organisation to respond effectively to challenges and continuously enhance service delivery.

Strong Focus on Strengths-Based Practice

The assessment highlighted the Council's commitment to strengths-based approaches, ensuring that assessments and support planning focused on what people can do, their personal networks and community assets rather than solely on needs and deficits. This approach promoted independence, choice and control, enabling people to achieve outcomes that matter most to them.

Effective Use of Data and Performance Information

Leaders demonstrated a good understanding of service performance through the use of data, intelligence and quality assurance mechanisms. Performance information was used to identify risks, monitor outcomes and inform strategic decision-making. This supported a culture of evidence-based improvement and accountability across the organisation.

Strong Community and Voluntary Sector Relationships

Dorset Council had developed productive relationships with local community groups, charities and voluntary organisations. These partnerships expanded the range of support available to residents, reduced social isolation and strengthened community

resilience. The Council recognised the important contribution of community assets in supporting wellbeing and independence.

Clear Strategic Planning and Long-Term Vision

CQC found evidence of strong strategic planning, with clear priorities aligned to local population needs and future demand. The Council demonstrated an understanding of demographic pressures and had plans in place to ensure Adult Social Care remained sustainable, responsive and outcome-focused in the future.

Co-production and Engagement

The Council showed a commitment to engaging people with lived experience in service design, delivery and review. Residents, carers and stakeholders were involved in shaping services and influencing strategic developments. This helped ensure services remained responsive to local needs and reflected the experiences of those who use them.

4.4 Key Themes for Future Consideration

Analysis of the CQC findings suggests several strategic questions for future development:

Timeliness and Operational Performance

While recent operational changes are delivering improvements, delays remain within statutory reviews, some assessment pathways, carers' assessments, financial assessments and DoLS. Sustainable recovery remains essential.

Prevention as a Strategic Driver

Prevention is a recognised strength and cultural characteristic of Dorset Adult Social Care. There is an opportunity to further embed prevention and early intervention as a core principle across the wider health and care system.

Equity of Experience and Outcomes

Although significant progress has been made, further work is required to ensure that all communities experience equitable access to information, support and outcomes, particularly within rural communities and underrepresented groups.

Market Sustainability and Specialist Provision

The Dorset Care Framework has strengthened market capacity; however, challenges remain around specialist provision, emergency placements and support for people with highly complex needs.

Transformation and Continuous Improvement

The assessment recognised Dorset's extensive transformation programme and strong improvement culture. Maintaining pace while embedding sustainable change will be critical to future success.

4.5 Current Position & Proposed Action

The Adult Social Care Improvement Programme has been developed in response to the CQC assessment and is being delivered through existing service plans, transformation programmes and quality assurance governance arrangements.

The programme focuses on eight priority themes:

1. Reducing waiting times.
2. Strengthening co-production.
3. Supporting people with complex needs.
4. Equality, diversity and inclusion.
5. Voice of the person and carer.
6. Safeguarding.
7. Housing and independence.
8. Communication and customer experience.

A number of improvement initiatives are already underway, including:

- Redesigned front door arrangements.
- Prevention and Early Intervention services.
- Safeguarding Hub and Spoke model.
- Expanded reablement pathways.
- Technology Enabled Care initiatives.
- Improved support for unpaid carers.
- Continued development of the Dorset Care Framework and market-shaping activity.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 Not Applicable

6. Legal considerations

6.1 It is a legal requirement for Dorset Adult Social Care to meet its statutory duties under part 1 of the Care Act 2014. Following external inspection the

improvement plan enables Dorset Adult Social Care to meet legal requirements effectively and efficiently.

7. Financial implications

7.1 In the event of an inadequate CQC rating or judgement, where adults are at risk of ineffective safeguarding, the financial impact would be significant, to undertake rapid, system wide improvements to deliver safe, effective adult's services.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

8.1 Considered by the relevant services as part of the delivery of adult's services.

9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 Delivery of high-quality services to adults and their carers promotes and contributes to their health and wellbeing.

10. Other implications

10.1 Reputational damage can arise from poor CQC inspection outcomes.

11. Risk implications

11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

12. Equalities

12.1 Considered by the relevant services as part of the delivery of adult's service's

13. Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1 – Inspection of Dorset Local Authority Adult's Services

Appendix 2 – Dorset's Post Inspection Action Plan

14. Background papers

14.1 Adults and Housing Directorate Self Assessment

15. Report sign-off

15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Assurance & Governance (Monitoring

Officer), the Director for Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Cabinet Member(s)