

## Adult social care assurance

### Purpose of Report

For information.

**Is this report confidential?** No

### Summary

This report serves as background to the verbal update that will be given by Hazel Summers, Director of Adult Social Care Improvement, Partners in Care and Health, and Cllr Beccy Hopfensperger, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Suffolk County Council.

**LGA Plan Theme:** Supporting local people and places

### Recommendation(s)

That the Community Wellbeing Board notes the contents of this report as background to the verbal update.

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## Adult social care assurance

### Background

1. The proposal to establish a new system of adult social care assurance was first introduced in the Government's health and care [white paper](#), 'Working together to improve health and social care for all' published in February 2021. Further information was provided in the Government's [white paper](#) for adult social care, 'People at the heart of care', in December 2021. This set out that assurance would involve the independent assessment of how well councils are meeting their statutory duties under Part 1 of the Care Act by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). It also set out that there would be enhanced improvement support, as well as a mechanism to intervene, as a last resort, if a council is judged to be failing. Alongside CQC's existing regulation of social care providers and its new role in adult social care assurance, the regulator is to also assume new responsibilities for oversight and assurance of ICSs.
2. The creation of a new national system of regulation of councils' adult social care duties is a major endeavour. Officers from the LGA and ADASS have met regularly with DHSC and CQC for more than two years to work through the range of issues that have needed to be considered in designing the adult social care assurance framework. Alongside LGA policy input, Partners In Care And Health (PCH) have developed a comprehensive support offer for councils as they prepare for assessment.

### Update

3. Of most significance, the five councils who piloted assurance (Birmingham City Council, Lincolnshire County Council, North Lincolnshire Council, Nottingham City Council and Suffolk County Council) have now completed the process and have received their assessment reports and indicative ratings. Four pilots received an indicative rating of 'Good', with Nottingham City Council receiving an indicative rating of 'Requires Improvement'.
4. CQC's learning, common across the pilots, is that:
  - 4.1. Outcomes for people are better where there is good partnership working, including with voluntary and community partners as well as health partners.
  - 4.2. Integrated working around discharging people from hospital was working and had improved the flow out of hospitals.

- 4.3. Staff tended to stay with a local authority when they felt valued, had learning and development opportunities, and where there was a positive culture.
5. CQC have also used the pilot experience to identify where they need to improve their assessment approach. These improvements are likely to focus on:
  - 5.1. Simplifying the 'information return': CQC uses this to collect the evidence they need from councils to understand how the local authority is delivering its adult social care functions.
  - 5.2. Making the case tracking process more efficient: this process looks at how individual people access and receive care through a council.
  - 5.3. Improving engagement: this is about how CQC engages with the public through community and voluntary groups.
6. With the pilots having concluded their work, attention now turns to full rollout and the first tranche of 20 councils to go through assessment. At the time of writing, these 20 councils have yet to be confirmed, but CQC has committed to giving those councils around 10 weeks' notice (from the point of notification to the point of onsite inspections). The LGA continues to push the CQC on timescales and our latest understanding is that notifications should commence in early December.
7. As above, the PCH team (working at relevant points with CWB officers) have been extremely busy in developing a solid support offer for councils. Highlights include:
  - 7.1. A sixth incredibly well-attended webinar on assurance (the second aimed specifically at Elected Members) in October with speakers from CQC, the Department of Health and Social Care, and colleagues from two of the five pilot councils. A seventh webinar is in development for February.
  - 7.2. Engagement with 40 councils on staff support workshops to prepare for CQC assessment. This is based on PCH support offered to two of the five pilot councils (North Lincolnshire and Suffolk), which was extremely well received. It is a very popular offer and meeting demand is a PCH priority.
  - 7.3. A tailored support programme for Principal Social Workers (PSWs) who approached PCH for support given the key role they play locally and the linked importance of their contribution in the assurance process.
  - 7.4. A communications support programme including webinars, a communications toolkit and tailored communications advice post-inspection.

- 7.5. A new 'Must Knows' for Elected Members on assurance, plus briefings to Member Peers at their annual conference and engagement with Lead Member regional networks.
- 7.6. Sessions on assurance at the annual National Children and Adult Services Conference and the launch of a new publication capturing interviews with the five directors of adult social services from the pilot councils. At the time of writing, we are planning an accompanying press release for the aforementioned publication, calling for clarity on timescales and a commitment from Government to keep the costs of assurance under regular review.

### Implications for Wales

8. The issues set out above cover England only as social care policy in Wales is a devolved matter.

### Financial Implications

9. All financial impacts of action arising from this report will be met from within existing LGA and PCH budgets. Nationally, and as per paragraph 7.6 above, we are seeking a commitment from Government to keep the costs of assurance under regular review. Councils have received a flat-rate New Burdens payment of £26,730 for assurance, but given the significant amount of work and time required for preparation we are keen to better understand whether this funding is sufficient. More broadly, given the absence of any new funding for adult social care in the recent Autumn Statement, we continue to be concerned that assurance may set councils up to fail because pressures and their consequences are so challenging.

### Equalities implications

10. Equalities is an important thread running through the assurance process. Assurance is structured around five key themes (safe, effective, caring, responsive, well led) with each supported by accompanying 'quality statements' that explore the themes in more detail. The experience of people who draw on care and support is central to the process and this includes people with protected equality characteristics and people most likely to have a poorer experience of care or experience inequalities.

### Next steps

11. Officers from the Community Wellbeing Team and PCH will take forward all such work as directed by Board Members.