Social Care Institute for Excellence

Care Quality Commission (CQC) analysis

Introduction

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has undertaken a detailed analysis of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment reports for 146 local authorities (LAs)*, published up to mid-July 2026. These assessments examine how councils are meeting their duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014. This briefing summarises key findings, highlighting both systemic challenges and examples of good practice. It is intended to support local authorities in reflecting on their own performance and identifying opportunities for improvement and innovation.

Key challenges identified across local authorities

CQC assessments reveal widespread issues in several core areas of adult social care. The most frequently cited areas for improvement include:

- **Care Act assessments and reviews (60%)**
  Long waiting times and inconsistent quality are common, often linked to workforce shortages. People report feeling unheard and assessments lack personalisation and a person-centred care approach.
- **Support for informal carers (57%)**
  Many carers are unaware of their rights or struggle to access timely assessments and respite. Cultural biases and lack of contingency planning further exacerbate the issue.
- **Quality of local services/capacity in local services to meet demands (31%)**
  Workforce instability, staffing shortages, training gaps, and changes in leadership continue to impact service quality and delivery.
- **Market shaping and commissioning (29%)**
  Gaps in provision, especially for specialist care, limit choice and lead to out-of-area placements. Strategic commissioning is often underdeveloped.
- **Accessible information (27%)**
  Over-reliance on digital channels creates barriers, particularly for older people and those with sensory impairments or limited English proficiency.
- **Equity of access (25%)**
  Some people experience barriers to support, with experiences varying by locality, need and cultural identity.
- **Direct payments (24%)**
  Uptake is low due to complex processes and a weak market for personal assistants, limiting autonomy and choice.

Other areas requiring attention include safeguarding, transitions from children to adult services and embedding co-production into practice. The most common safeguarding themes include ongoing difficulties with processing Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications and weaknesses in feedback processes, particularly regarding communication with individuals and care providers.

SCIE targeted support – helping local authorities (LAs) to address key challenges

- SCIE provides targeted support to LAs with a 'requires improvement' rating as part of our DHSC funded programme, helping them achieve sustained improvement, with practical, focused support to move from 'Requires Improvement' to 'Good'. Please speak to your CHIA to find out more.
- Our not-for-profit SCIE consultancy offer can support you, whatever your rating in any area – if you would like advice, guidance or simply an exploratory chat on any challenges you face, and how we can help you, please do contact us at: **consultancy@scie.org.uk** or come and speak to us at our **Exhibition Stand F10** at **NCASC**.

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*Of the 146 LAs, 2% were rated as inadequate; 34% requires improvement, 61% good and 3% rated as outstanding.

Examples of strength and innovation

Despite challenges, many authorities demonstrate strong leadership and innovative approaches:

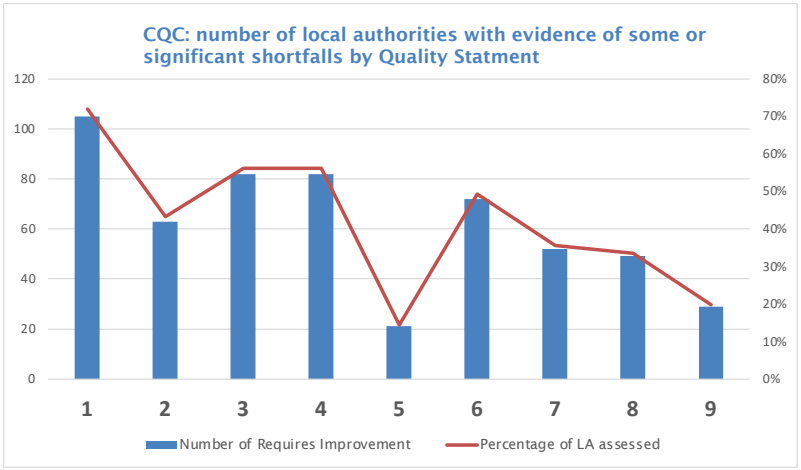
- **Leadership and workforce**
  Compassionate, visible leadership fosters positive cultures and high staff retention. Learning cultures and robust governance systems support continuous improvement.
- **Prevention and early intervention**
  Authorities with strong reablement services and 'home first' models show better outcomes. Effective partnerships with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) help reduce demand for formal care.
- **Co-production and person-centred care**
  Genuine co-production is evident in several areas, with citizens shaping strategy and service design and strengths-based models successfully being implemented.
- **Integration and partnership working**
  Integrated discharge hubs, pooled budgets and multi-agency teams are reducing delays and improving outcomes.
- **Local innovation**
  Authorities are trialing new technologies, flexible carer budgets, mobile Occupational Therapy (OT) clinics and creative outreach models such as Conversation Cafes.

Conclusion

The CQC assessments paint a picture of a sector under pressure, with workforce pressures, data oversight and variable practice emerging as critical barriers to delivering timely, equitable and person-centred care. However, there are clear examples of excellence and innovation that offer valuable learning for others. SCIE encourages local authorities to use this briefing as a prompt for reflection and discussion, considering how the emerging themes, strengths and challenges align with their own local context.

Appendix

The table shows, for each of the 9 Quality Statements, how many local authorities had 'some shortfalls' or 'significant shortfalls'. The highest proportion of local authorities with 'Evidence shows some/significant shortfalls' relates to assessing needs, which aligns with our qualitative findings highlighting support for informal carers (57%) and Care Act assessments and reviews (60%) as common challenges for local authorities.



Key: 1. Assessing needs ● **2.** Supporting healthier lives ● **3.** Equity in experience ● **4.** Care provision/ continuity ● **5.** Partnerships and communities ● **6.** Safe pathways/transitions ● **7.** Safeguarding ● **8.** Governance and sustainability ● **9.** Learning and innovation

About SCIE

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) is an independent social care charity, collaborating and innovating with a wide range of partners and people with lived experience, to improve people's lives. Working across social care, health and related services such as housing, for adults, children and families, we contribute to the development and implementation of better care, support and safeguarding at local and national level.

As we are not-for-profit, our income goes towards improving social care, delivered through our four offers: innovative **consultancy**, expert **training**, extensive **resources** and information, and evidence-based **insights**.

Co-production with people with lived experience underpins and informs what we do, and with over 20 years' experience we bring a wealth of trusted, evidence-based expertise to work together to help transform care.



Your not-for-profit partner, working with you to identify and implement improvements



Research, evidence and policy insights to drive improvements and innovation, and influence national policy and practice



Bespoke online or face-to-face learning and development including:

- safeguarding
- co-production
- strengths-based approaches



Guidance and tools to support best practice, co-production and innovation

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