

Gloucestershire County Council

Children's Social Care Workforce Development Strategy

2023-2026

Right child, right support, right time, every time

Living our values every day



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Foreword



Ann James, Director of Childrens Services



Paul Shallcross, Director of Safeguarding and Care

Gloucestershire is a great place to live and work, with good transport links and a combination of beautiful countryside and urban centres such as the historic Gloucester City, with its medieval cathedral and buildings or the regency spa town of Cheltenham¹.

For those looking for a future in public service and Children's Social Care in particular, Gloucestershire offers a myriad of opportunities to start or develop your career, supported by a phenomenal Social Work Academy offer, a developing systemic practice methodology, an ambitious leadership team and an award-winning workforce. Children's Services is improving, you don't have to take our word for it, our latest Ofsted inspection (February 2022) identified that:

'Significant progress has been made in many areas of Gloucestershire's children's services... significant financial investment and the backing of political leaders, has led to improved services that are now more effective in meeting the needs of children and families.'

'As a result of these improvements to services and support for children, they are now better protected... The Director of Children's Services has ensured that staff have been provided with a clear model of practice and of what is expected of them. Therefore, the majority of children now benefit from more timely effective interventions.'

[Ofsted | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

¹[Visit Gloucestershire - Places to stay, things to do, towns to visit](#)

However, like most local authorities Gloucestershire County Council faces unprecedented challenges in delivering its strategy and vision for the County's future in a world that is increasingly volatile, uncertain and complex. Our role is to protect the most vulnerable and to champion equality and inclusion for all. That's why we want to attract, retain and develop the most talented candidates, not just to Children's Social Care, but to live, work and bring up your family in the county, where the economy is thriving and opportunities across the public sector and in industry are growing.

These are challenging times, whilst Children's Services in Gloucestershire have received investment, the public sector faces continued reduction in funding and increasing demand for services. We want to achieve a permanent workforce in which we can invest. As a Council our services are overwhelmingly delivered through people, directly or indirectly, and so the effectiveness of those services will be chiefly influenced by how well our workforce is enabled, with the appropriate workplace culture, capacity and capability to carry out their roles.

To achieve delivery of our statutory responsibilities for children, young people and families, and to continually improve the quality of services delivered against a backdrop of significantly shrinking resources requires that we must innovate and adapt, and that we are motivated and skilled to work creatively, flexibly and efficiently, with our Council core values; accountability, integrity, empowerment, respect and excellence, at the centre of all that we do.

The Council Plan for 2022 – 2026 Building Back Better in Gloucestershire, [Building Back Better in Gloucestershire - Gloucestershire County Council](#) details the County Council's vision and strategic objectives, with this Workforce Development Strategy setting out a clear vision for the development of a high performing, confident and well-equipped social care workforce able to respond to the challenges of 21st century social care, with the aim of delivering good outcomes for children and young people and giving every child the best possible chance of a remarkable life, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.

Our overriding aim is to retain, recruit and develop talented, skilled and experienced staff able to deliver excellent services to meet the existing and future needs of children, young people and their families.



Children's Services

Putting Children and Families at the heart of all that we do:

We work together to support families and schools to give every child the best possible chance of a remarkable life, especially those children who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.

Vision

Right child, right support, right time, every time



Live our values

We will be **accountable** for our actions and decisions; be **honest**, learn and act with **integrity**; practice in a way that is respectful and **empowering** for children and families, enabling individuals to create their own solutions and we will be **relentless** in our pursuit of excellence.

Achieving for the children and young people of Gloucestershire we will:

- **do** everything we can to enable children and young people to thrive within their family and community, supporting independence and enabling children to grow up to live remarkable lives
- **collaborate** with parents, families and partners to prevent harm and protect children and young people
- **be** involved when needed for as long as is needed
- **promote** inclusion and belonging, helping to make Gloucestershire a place where our children and young people see their future
- **act** on what children and young people tell us is needed, developing services with children, young people and families
- **use** language that cares
- **challenge** discrimination and equality whenever we see it

Our most recent Ofsted inspection in February 2022 judged that we 'require improvement to be good'. The inspection highlighted that significant progress had been made since the date of the last inspection in 2017 when the Authority was judged to be inadequate [Ofsted | Gloucestershire County Council](#).

We are ambitious to get to 'Good' and have a continuous improvement programme in place aimed at enabling us to achieve this, supported by our innovative Social Work Academy which was recognised as an area of strength during our inspection. It focuses on continuous professional development and learning and involvement for practitioners and managers at all levels of experience and is the bedrock of our 'grow your own' approach to developing colleagues throughout their social work career.

To get to 'Good', we will consolidate what's working well, spread that to all elements of the system so that we're a county that works for all children, and create the space for creativity and innovation. We will do this through leadership and practice development, increasing the use of systemic ideas into our practice, innovation and partnership ensuring that we meet Ofsted's recommendations and respond in full to their findings.

Continuous improvement



Our Council Values

Our values are at the heart of everything we do.



That means we will be **accountable** for our actions and decisions; be honest, learn and act with **integrity**; practice in a way that is **respectful** and **empowering** for children and families, enabling individuals to be the architects of their own solutions and be relentless in our pursuit of **excellence**.

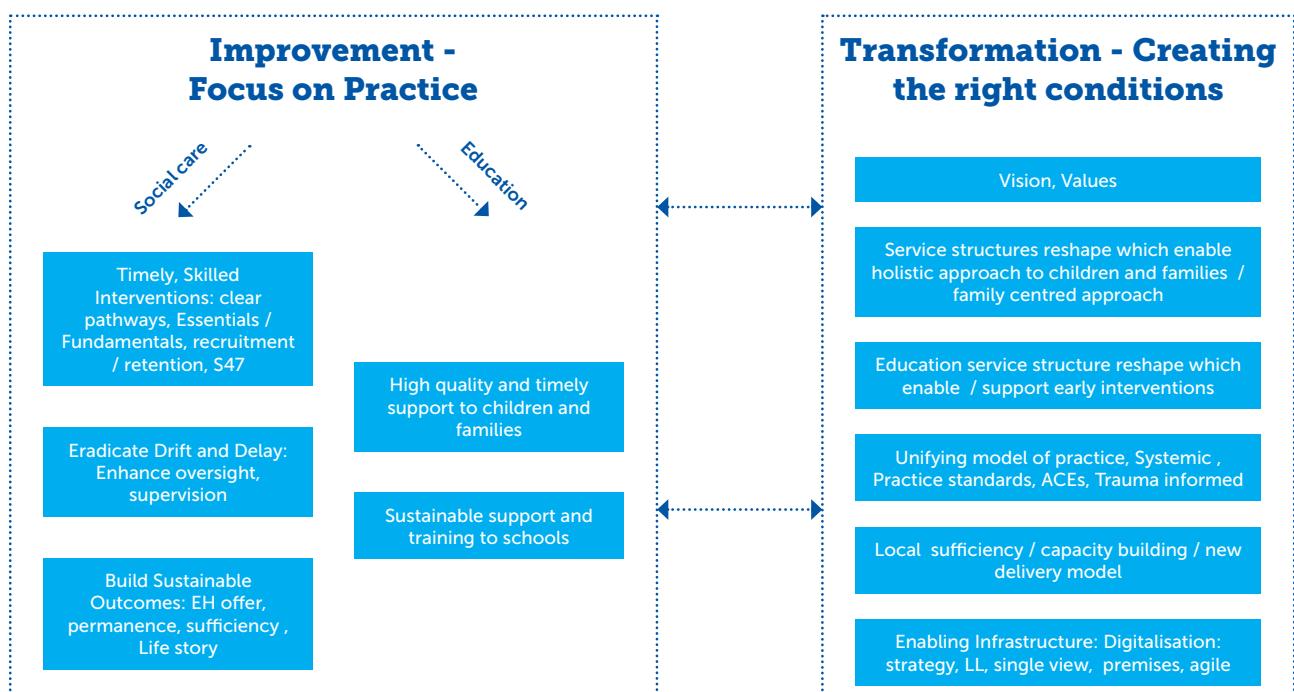
Children's Services- Our Guiding Principles

The principles that inform and guide our practice are:

- We will prioritise and respond to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- In line with our practice framework, our interventions will be strengths based, evidence informed and proportionate. We will not over-intervene in the life of families.
- We will work to help children to grow up within their families and communities, where it is safe to do so.
- We will help families to find their own solutions, so they can achieve the change they want for themselves and their children.
- We will actively seek the views of children and their families to help our assessments, plans and interventions have meaning.
- We will work with children and families to help shape and improve our services.
- We recognise that children, young people and their families are the experts in their own lives. Working together, we will help them to find solutions, by accessing resources from their networks, their communities, and from professionals.
- We will be accountable for delivering an effective and ever-improving service in the best interests of children, young people and families.
- We will value the diversity in our communities, because it enriches our understanding of each other. Our practice will be inclusive, ethical and we will challenge discrimination where we see it.
- Our work and practice will keep children at the heart of everything we do. We will work respectfully with tenacity to support children and their families. We will work openly and honestly to build resilience within family networks to create and support sustained changes.

Children's Services - Our Commitment to Deliver the Best Outcomes for Children and Families

Deliver the best outcomes for children and families through building a sustainably good children's service



Children's Social Care- National Context

In March 2021, the Government launched an independent review of the needs, experiences and outcomes of children supported by social care. Published in May 2022, the report arising from this review set out a series of wide-ranging recommendations to help families in crisis, to act decisively in response to abuse, to unlock the potential of wider family networks to raise children, to put lifelong loving relationships at the heart of the care system and to lay the foundations for a good life for those who have been in care [Independent review of children's social care](#)

Importantly from a workforce development point of view, the review recognised the significant recruitment and retention challenges facing the profession and recommended creating a radically new offer for Social Workers with improved professional training and development providing progression through an Early Career Framework. This Framework, linked to national pay scales, is envisaged to create a desirable career pathway to encourage individuals to remain in practice, specialise and progress through experience. The review was clear that the reliance on agency social work should reduce to provide more stable professional relationships for children, young people and families.

In response to the Children's Social Care Review findings and recommendations, in February 2023 the Government published 'Stable Homes, Built on Love'; a consultation on Children's Social Care reform setting out proposed action across six pillars in respect of Children's Social Care [Children's social care stable homes built on love consultation](#) Pillar five of this response focuses on creating a stable Children's Social Care workforce to improve retention and reduce reliance on agency staffing together with increased utilisation of apprenticeship routes into the profession and continuous professional development for Social Workers.

We have contributed within various local and national forums to the consultation and implementation plans and are remodelling our services to support us to achieve our vision for Children's Social Care. We will review our workforce development approach in response to the above once the final report is published later in 2023.

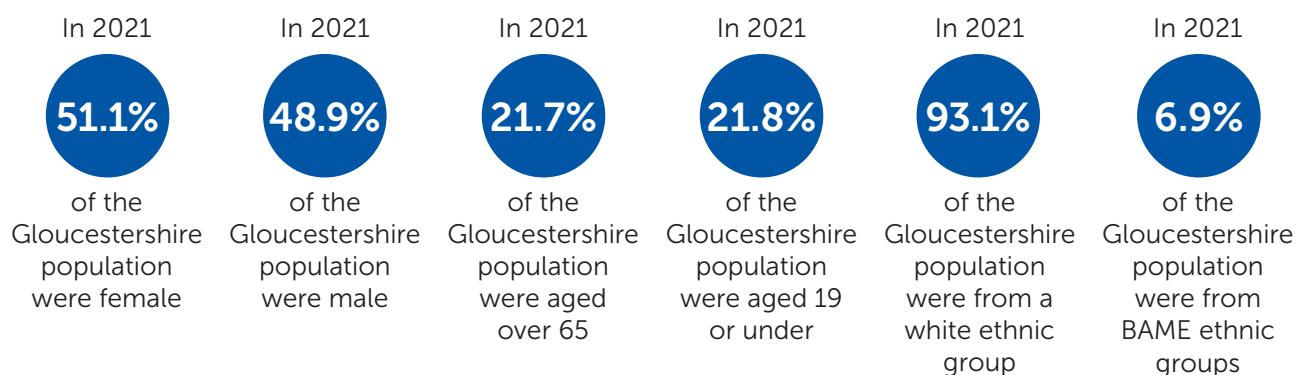
Local Context and our Workforce

Gloucestershire is a relatively prosperous county with a growing population. It has easy access to large cities such as Birmingham and Bristol and, with its range of affluence and poverty, rural and urban, together with an increasingly diverse population it offers Children's Social Care professionals a wide range of career opportunities and challenges.

In comparison to England, Gloucestershire has some additional features that impact on serving the community.

- An aging population, with a higher rate of over 65's and a net loss of young people
- A smaller BME population in comparison to England (according to Census 2011)
- Both rural and urban areas
- Areas of deprivation in contrast with other areas of significant wealth
- In competition for diverse talent with neighbouring authorities and other large employers (NHS and Central Government)

Key Demographics from 2021 Census for Gloucestershire include:



Like many Councils, Gloucestershire has experienced the challenges of recruiting and retaining a skilled Children's Social Care workforce, particularly into qualified positions and more rural locations. Our vacancy and turnover rates for Social Workers and reliance on agency staffing are relatively high and this, coupled with a national shortage of qualified social work staff and competition from neighbouring local authorities presents an ongoing challenge that our plan sets out to address. The rising cost of living means that the national economic picture impacts our efforts to attract and retain social work talent.

As a Council our direct headcount is 4,184 and as at 1 July 2023 1,286 were employed within the Children's Directorate (covering Education, Children's Commissioning and Children's Social Care) which includes 430 permanent employees in Children's Social Care. Additionally, there are around 128 agency workers, largely Social Workers.

As at 1 July 2023, over half of our workforce were aged over 40 years. Whilst this brings wisdom, maturity and longevity to the workforce, it also carries with it risk when our experienced workforce moves on and highlights the importance of establishing future succession pathways.

The proportion of employees within the Directorate from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background is 7.1% (where stated). Whilst this is reflective of the Council as a whole, we need to continue to create positive opportunities to employ a diverse workforce that is culturally rich and from which children and families will benefit.

Workforce Metrics as at 1 July 2023

	Gloucestershire County Council	Children's Directorate
Headcount	4184	1286
Average working days lost due to sickness absence per FTE (full-time equivalent) - annualised	7.09 days	5.53 days
Staff aged 40-49 years	22.9%	24%
Staff aged 50-59 years	31.2%	28.5%
BAME staff (where stated)	6.7%	7.1%
Voluntary turnover	11.2%	10.8%

Gloucestershire's Children and Young People Population

At the end of the first half of 2022/23, there were almost 4,700 children open to Social Care receiving support, protection or care. This represents a rise of almost 20% compared with the 31 March 2020 when just over 3,900 children were open to Social Care. Overall, there are more males than females open to Social Care, although this has reduced slightly compared with prior to the pandemic (52.4% September 2022, down from 54.9% March 2020) [service-user-diversity-report-2021-22.pdf](#)

Children and young people population figures for each district are as set out below:

Age Group (inclusive)			
	0 to 17	18 to 25	0 to 25
Cheltenham	22,977	12,213	35,190
Cotswolds	16,394	6,404	22,798
Forest of Dean	16,148	6,873	23,021
Gloucester	28,533	13,153	41,686
Stroud	23,584	8,599	32,183
Tewkesbury	19,590	6,774	26,364
Gloucestershire	127,226	54,016	181,242

Source: Mid-2021 Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics

There has been a small but steady increase in the proportion of particularly vulnerable children (unborn children and children aged under 1 year) open to Social Care (8.1% at the end of September 2022, compared with 6.4% at the end of March 2020).

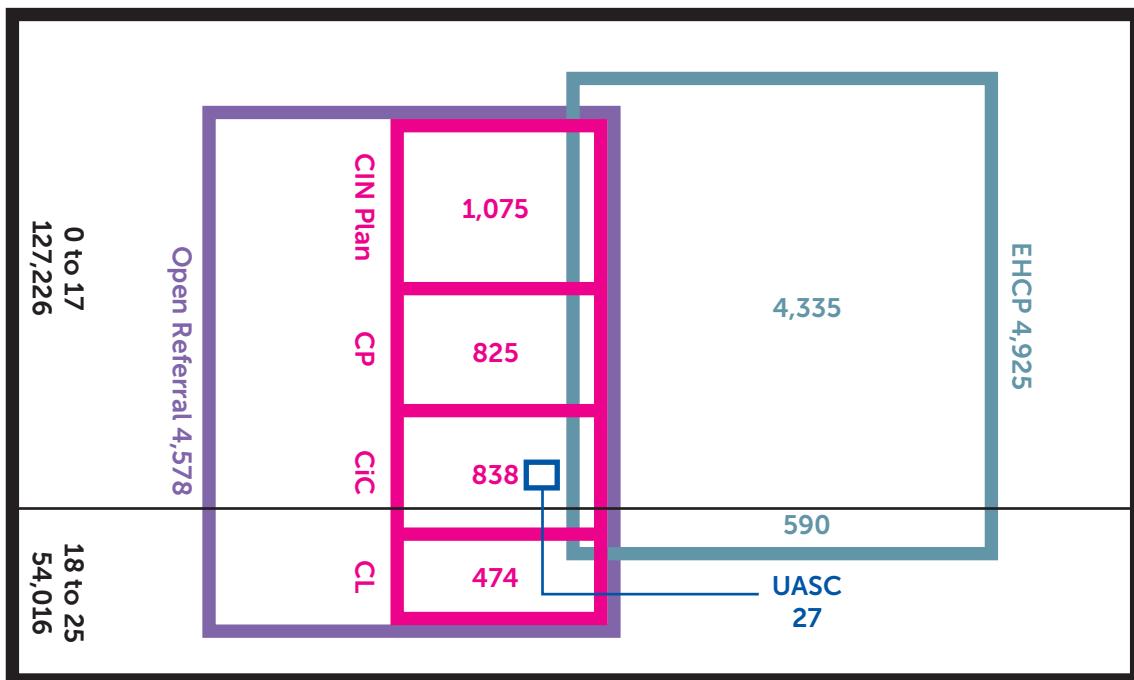
Over the same period, there has been a slight reduction in the proportion of 1–4 year olds and 5–9 year old groups open to Social Care (from 19.1% to 16.0% and from 23.5% to 21.7% respectively). This is now more closely aligned with population levels for these age groups (15.1% and 20.7%). One-third of the children receiving support, protection or care are aged 10–15 years old (32.4%). This has increased from 28.8% over the last two and a half years and this group is over-represented in terms of the overall 10–15 year old population in Gloucestershire (25.6%). The proportion of 16–18 year olds has reduced slightly from 15.1% to 14.3% but remains slightly above the population level for this group (12.4%).

With regard to children in care, younger children (aged 1–4 and 5–9 years) are under-represented compared to the overall population (13.7% compared with 19.5% and 16.4% compared with 26.9%). For older children in care, aged 10–15 and 16–18 years, there is an over-representation compared with the population (38.5% compared with 33.1% and 25.4% compared with 16.1% respectively). Almost two-thirds of young people receiving post-care support services are between 19–21 years old (58.6%), this compares to this age group making up one-third of the overall 16–24 year old population (30.8%).

Children living in Gloucester accounted for one-third of those open to Social Care (31.3%). These children are over-represented, with children in Gloucester making up under a quarter of 0–24 year olds in the County overall (23.0%). All other Districts were slightly under-represented compared with the population overall, in particular in Cotswolds and Stroud where children open to Social Care accounted for 4.7% points and 5.9% points less than the overall 0–24 years population respectively. The district that the child resides in, or where they lived before entering care, was not recorded for 6.2% of children.

The below sets out numbers of children and young people receiving Social Care support as at 31 March 2022 with the heatmap overleaf showing the rates as at 31 March 2021 for children and young people aged 0- 19 years:

Gloucestershire 0 to 25 population: 181,242



CIN Plan: Child in Need Plan

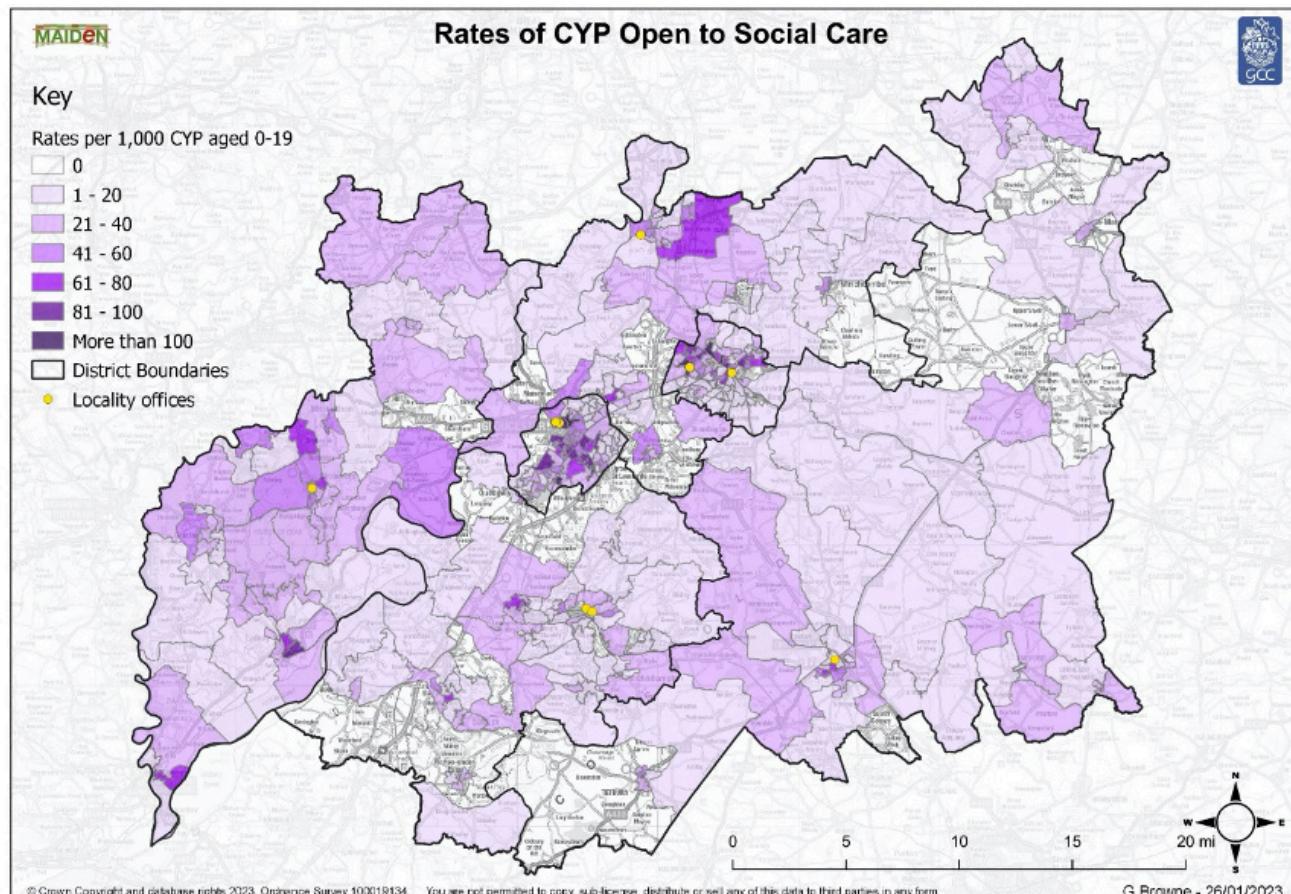
CP: Child Protection

CiC: Children in Care

CL: Care Leaver

UASC: Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child

EHCP: Education, Health, and Care Plan



Vision for our Workforce

We must have the right people with the right skills working in the most effective way within appropriate roles and structures if we are to successfully deliver services in the next four years and thereafter. The key principles underlying this need for a flexible and skilled workforce are that:

- We, the workforce, directly delivered or commissioned, are at the heart of everything that the Council achieves;
- Our values and behaviours are clear about how we will work with each other and with the public of Gloucestershire, and that these values and behaviours are a clear and present thread within all of our activity;
- We have high expectations and are committed to developing and supporting both the achievements and the wellbeing of ourselves and our colleagues;
- This strategy will be a journey aimed at delivering a culture of continuous service improvement, innovation, respect and professionalism across the Children's Social Care workforce, whatever our role.

This Workforce Strategy has three key themes

- **Culture** - we will ensure that our organisational vision, values and behaviours are evidenced, embedded and celebrated across the workforce, not as aspirations but as a central part of everything we do. We will actively engage all our colleagues in our aim to succeed, and with the valued contribution each individual's role delivers in this. We will proactively support the health and wellbeing of all our colleagues in what are, undoubtedly, challenging circumstances for our workforce and the children, families and communities we work with. We will embed new methods for two way communication and engaging with our workforce through the Employee Engagement Strategy.
- **Capacity** - we will plan our staffing to ensure that we have the right number of appropriately skilled and experienced staff available to deliver services, anticipating future variations in demand, and technological advances. We intend to be able to recruit, motivate, develop and retain a workforce fit for the present and the foreseeable future. We aim to be an employer of choice, to recruit and retain the right people and to create a culture that reflects our values and vision.
- **Capability** - we will have skilled and confident leaders at all levels, able to provide the transformational and distributive leadership we need to meet changing operational circumstances and ensure good quality provision. Leadership skills and experience will encompass both professional excellence but also organisational, commercial and people skills aligned to high impact service outcomes.

Our leaders and managers will be proactive in creating and seizing opportunities for innovation, increased efficiency and growing service impact and quality despite constrained resources. We will be comfortable with changing operational circumstances and demands and will feel valued and constructively challenged in our development and our day-to-day work. We will be supported in developing and maintaining the skills, knowledge and confidence to maximise the impact of our work.

A detailed Workforce Development Plan has been developed in support of the strategy under the key themes of workforce - Capacity, Capability and Culture.

A summary of the actions forming that plan is set out below:

Culture

Our values and behaviours

- We will continue our efforts to build a culture of honesty, kindness, inclusivity and openness linking with our organisational values and to preserve the Council as a safe and supportive place to work, promoting diversity and encouraging constructive challenge and innovation.
- We will align our recruitment, retention and succession practices with our organisational values and behaviours.
- We will continue to place Systemic Practice at the heart of our support for children, young people and families building open, honest and strong relationships and speaking the language that cares.

Health and Wellbeing- supporting our staff to be the best they can be

- We will ensure that the Health and Wellbeing Policy is delivered for all our colleagues with an increased emphasis on prevention and proactive health interventions in the wake of the Covid pandemic.
- We will revise workforce policies, conditions and guidance to encourage and underpin a changed and agile workplace culture supportive of a healthy work/life balance.
- We will continue to support the health and wellbeing of practitioners promoting and encouraging wellbeing interventions and the importance of selfcare and good practice.

Employee Engagement- listening to our staff

- We will embed cultural change within the delivery of the Employee Engagement Strategy creating a motivated and engaged workforce able to respond to current and future social work challenges.
- We will proactively listen and respond to feedback from our staff on what is working well and suggestions for improvement and change. We will use our Employee Voice Group, Social Work Health Check and 'Meet the Director' meetings as effective feedback channels with regular 'You Said, We Did' messaging as a positive engagement tool.

Capacity

Organisational Re-design - to best deliver our services to children, young people and families

- We will review and transform our locality model to ensure we are able to best deliver our services to children, young people and families. This Transformation Project will be underpinned by best practice in delivery models to create a service structure fit for the future.
- We will structure our working arrangements to become more agile and responsive, to enable a flexible employment offer, conditioned to meeting both changing service requirements, customer needs and to our colleagues' expectations of a positive work/ life balance.
- We will seek to maximise the use of available technology to provide our staff with greater capacity through the smarter ways of working such technology can offer.

Recruitment and Retention- creating a strong and stable workforce

- We will structure our approach to pay, reward and employer branding to ensure that Gloucestershire County Council is seen to be an attractive work and career destination in an increasingly competitive labour market.
- We will develop a reward strategy for the Council and ensure our reward offer for Social Workers remains competitive when benchmarked against other Authorities.
- We will upgrade approaches to recruitment and candidate attraction, including the development of a Social Work recruitment microsite, showcasing our enhanced employee value proposition, its connection to innovative and collaborative Social Work and the difference that is 'Gloucestershire'.
- We will enhance retention and support career progression for existing talent within our workforce as an antidote to labour market pressures, including 'grow our own' initiatives. Such initiatives will allow us to provide an increasingly diverse range of entry routes into the profession in addition to allowing us to recruit and support students, newly qualified Social Workers and Social Workers who qualified overseas creating a strong and stable workforce.
- We will continue to develop apprenticeship opportunities and other career development for colleagues at all levels, including Social Work and Family Support Worker apprenticeships, as a pathway into the profession.
- We will explore opportunities to encourage Social Workers who have left the profession to return, showcasing our employer offer and our vision for Children's Social Care.

Workforce Planning- creating a strong and stable workforce

- We will adopt a Workforce Plan that will address future requirements, encompassing required roles, skills, capacity and behaviours and which is clearly aligned to our recruitment and retention activity.
- We will adopt a systematic approach to retention and succession planning, featuring appropriate planned professional development and promotion from within our workforce.
- We will improve our availability and use of workforce and comparator data, aligning this with business need and enhanced relevance for service impact.
- We will reduce our reliance and expenditure on agency and consultancy workers as we seek to 'grow our own' Social Workers of the future and attract and retain high calibre practitioners to the difference that is 'Gloucestershire'. We continue, however, to recognise the value of external advice and skills and therefore will use agency and consultancy where most appropriate.
- We will implement and embed a replacement employee records, payroll and management system to enable managers and staff to use data and software to enhance business efficiency.

Capability

Talent Management- supporting our staff to be the best they can be

- We will ensure that there is an appropriate development offer for our staff promoting continuous learning, innovation and development with clear pathways for progression.
- We will continue to be informed by the 70/20/10 model of workforce learning which centres around the idea that the majority (around 70%) of learning comes through experience, around 20% comes from social learning with colleagues and 10% comes from more formal learning. We will utilise our innovative Social Work Academy to provide practitioner learning and development opportunities of the highest standard.
- We will systematically upskill our workforce ensuring it is ready to meet future challenges, including digital skills, planning and delivery.
- We will provide practitioners with high quality learning to build confident Systemic Social Work practice, enabling them to build open, honest and strong relationships with families and colleagues and helping them to create real and sustainable change.
- We will ensure all colleagues have access to high quality research and evidenced informed learning to support them as champions for excellent and innovative social work practice.
- We will identify those talented individuals who are the leaders and expert practitioners of the future. Using our Social Work Academy and Principal Social Worker, we will be explicit in supporting their development, providing growth opportunities, and helping them see their future with us as practice and system leaders.

Performance Management - supporting our staff to be the best they can be

- We will promote consistently good standards of performance management to deliver accountability and professional growth and consistently good family led practice.
- We will continue to embed a supportive performance culture with regular professional supervision and Performance Development Review (PDR) meetings aligned to our values and behaviours and to Systemic Practice.
- We will provide managers with training on how to effectively hold development conversations with staff, encouraging dialogue and early intervention to address performance concerns whilst motivating and developing higher performing colleagues.

Leadership and Management Development- inspiring and empowering our managers

- We will adopt a workforce development strategy that systematically delivers improvements in leadership and management competencies at all levels and particularly in our business-critical areas.
- We will offer a leadership programme to develop high-performing leaders of the future and continue our ongoing investment in leadership and practice development for our managers.
- We will seek to empower our managers providing them with the leadership tools and support as they create the right conditions for high performing teams and effective family led practice.
- We will embed a revised leadership and management framework and design and embed a strengths-based approach with a particular emphasis on proactive management support for effective performance and continuous service improvement.
- We will utilise our innovative Systemic Practice Leadership Programme to create our leaders for the future, shaping our practice and delivering the best outcomes for children and families.
- We will maximise opportunities to participate in national, sector-led Leadership and Management development programmes to ensure we offer our managers the best development pathways.

Success Measures

Our Workforce Development Strategy aims to create a skilled, resilient and stable workforce, reducing our turnover rates and use of agency staff as we attract and retain high calibre practitioners to our vision for Children's Social Care in Gloucestershire.

We will measure and assess our progress in delivering for Children's Social Care through a range of quantitative and qualitative workforce metrics and engagement tools including:

Culture

- Sickness and absence rates
- Health check surveys
- Employee satisfaction and engagement scores
- Our annual Staff Engagement Survey
- Participation levels in health and wellbeing initiatives

Capacity

- Sickness and absence rates
- Average allocated cases for Social Workers
- Health check surveys
- Our annual Staff Engagement Survey
- Turnover percentage
- Workforce stability
- FTE vacancies
- Exit and retention interview analysis (including new starter check-ins)
- New candidates applying, candidates shortlisted and candidates starting
- Agency percentage against overall workforce
- Performance Development Review (PDR) completion rates
- Supervision completion rates
- Audit outcomes

Capability

- Progression or promotion of existing employees
- Training take up and completion rates
- Health check surveys
- Our annual Staff Engagement Survey
- Performance Development Review (PDR) completion rates
- Supervision completion rates
- Sickness and absence rates
- Number of formal employee relations cases

Responsibility for Delivery of our Strategy

All colleagues in Children's Social Care have a key role to play in delivering our Workforce Development Strategy with managers being responsible for ensuring that their teams understand how their work contributes to this delivery.

The Director of Children's Safeguarding and Care will have overall responsibility for the successful delivery of this strategy in conjunction with the Children's Directorate Senior Leadership Team.

Our senior managers will lead by example driving performance and effective social work practice in their services and empowering staff to deliver for children, young people and families.

Monthly progress and monitoring oversight of the strategy will be provided by the Children's Social Care Workforce Planning Board.

Reports on key workforce projects and metrics and associated analysis will be received on a regular basis throughout the period of the strategy's implementation ensuring that any key risks are reviewed and resolved. Benefits realisation will be monitored and reported on a regular basis.

The Workforce Development Strategy will be subject to formal review annually.

In addition, the Director of Children's Safeguarding and Care will report on progress against this Workforce Development Strategy to the Continuous Improvement Board allowing for further scrutiny and challenge as we continue our improvement journey, seeking to consistently deliver services to children and families that are rated Good or better by Ofsted.