

LGA Peer Challenge November 2023

Position statement



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

LGA Peer Challenge November 2023

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Foreword

Since our last Peer Challenge in 2018, Gloucestershire County Council has faced and successfully managed some significant challenges. We have a new council strategy which has focused on growth and transformation. We have a workforce that is working in new ways, with changing technologies, and we have continued to invest to make improvements in the services that we provide.

We have achieved significant improvements within our children's services, coming out of intervention and seeing improvements being sustained and built upon, despite growing demand. We are exceeding our targets for carbon reduction across our own activities. Adult social care has reduced those waiting for a package of care to allow them to be discharged from hospital to record low levels. We are pushing ahead with strategically important infrastructure projects, such as increasing the capacity of J10 of the M5 and our 26-mile cycle spine project. Through our lobbying we have helped secure government funding for the A417 'missing link'. We have tackled the issues and are developing plans and solutions for the future.

We welcome this corporate peer challenge as an opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made, learn from others, and to both challenge and inform the council's future development - helping us to achieve our aims over the next few years.

In addition to the five 'high level themes', and given our current focus on economic growth and transformation, we would also like the team's perspective on:

- **The council's effectiveness in leading partners towards achieving the vision for future growth in Gloucestershire**
- **How effectively the council is aligning its resources to drive transformation and improvement organisationally whilst supporting improvement within specific areas such as Fire, Children's Services, Adults and Highways**

This document will provide the team with an introduction to Gloucestershire and to Gloucestershire County Council. It sets out our strengths, areas for development, and future challenges. Throughout the document we also provide case studies to illustrate the way the council is working to improve the lives of local people and communities. We have highlighted some specific areas where we would value the team's challenge and recommendations.

On behalf of the members and officers of Gloucestershire County Council, we look forward to welcoming you in November.

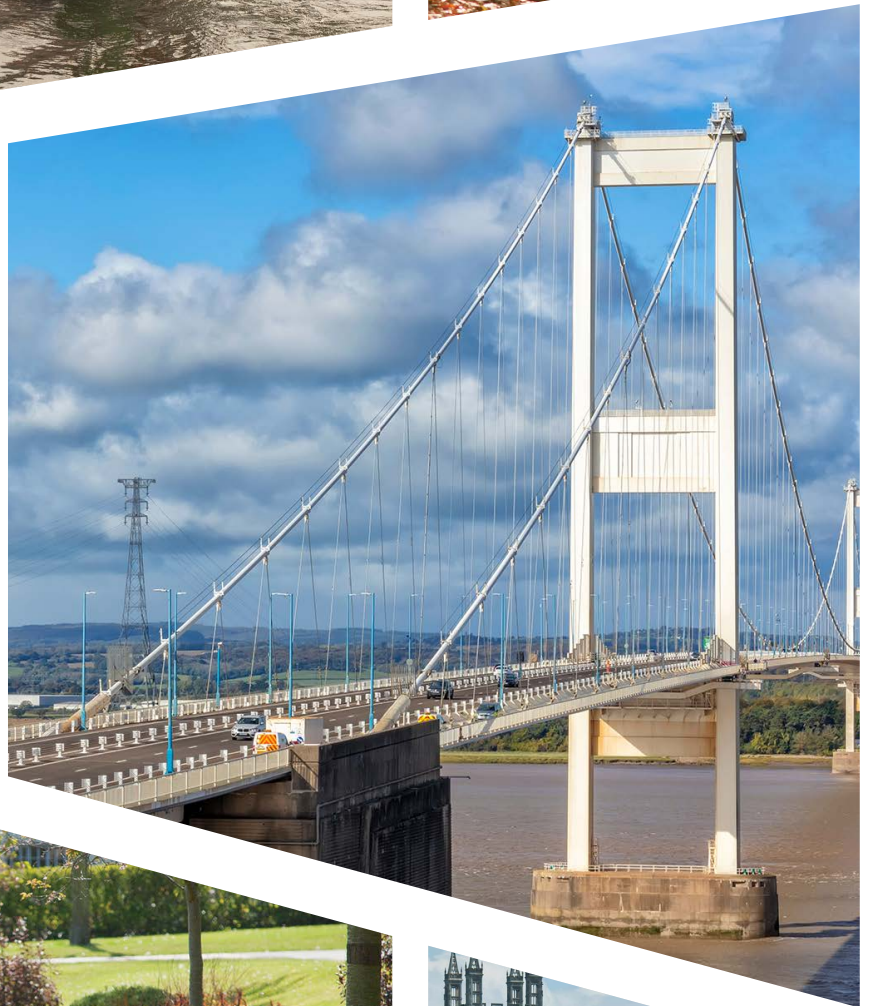
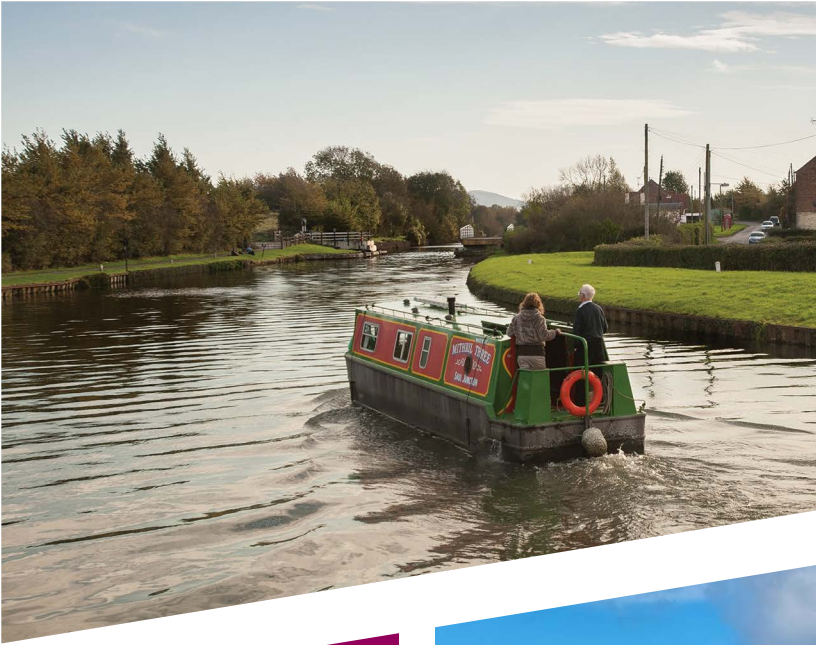


Cllr Mark Hawthorne
Leader of the Council



Peter Bungard
Chief Executive

"We welcome this peer challenge as an opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made."



1. About Gloucestershire

Governance

Gloucestershire is a two-tier area, with a single county council, six district or borough councils and over 200 town and parish councils. The County Council is the Fire and Rescue Authority, with the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service fully integrated with us.

The local public sector is unusually coterminous – one Integrated Care Board, one Police Constabulary and a Police and Crime Commissioner all covering Gloucestershire. There is also a single Local Enterprise Partnership for Gloucestershire;

GFirst LEP, and a thriving Voluntary & Community Sector Alliance for the county. There are three universities, the largest of which is the University of Gloucestershire. There are 300 schools, including 41 secondary schools and of those 36 (87.8%) are academies or free schools. All of the 7 grammar schools in county are academies. Of the 244 primary age schools, 68 (28%) are academies or free schools. We also have four Alternative Provision Schools, three are maintained (including one hospital education service) and one is a free school. There are 11 special schools of which 6 are academies and one free school.



Geography

Gloucestershire is the northernmost county in the South West Region. It shares its southern boundary with three unitary neighbours – South Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire. The county borders Oxfordshire to the east, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire to the north and the Welsh County Borough of Monmouthshire to the west.

It is predominantly a rural county, bisected by the M5 corridor between Birmingham and Bristol. Cheltenham and Gloucester are the key urban settlements and as such act as the main business, commercial, educational, service and cultural centres. They are complemented by a number of important market towns which act as employment hubs and as providers of services to resident communities and outlying rural areas.

The county covers an area of 265,253¹ hectares, just over half of which comprises designated Areas of Natural Beauty (AONB) – the Cotswolds, Wye Valley and the southern tip of Malvern Hills. To the west of the county is the Forest of Dean which became Britain's first national forest park in 1938. The River Severn and its flood plain run through the centre of the county.

The presence of three AONBs and the Royal Forest of Dean, can be an obstacle to growth, placing constraints on development in rural areas. However, this environmental quality also makes Gloucestershire an attractive area for businesses and residents to locate and attracts large numbers of visitors. In 2011 83.1% of Gloucestershire residents also worked within the county², meaning it is a strong functional economic area in its own right.



The county covers an area of **265,253¹** hectares



3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Forest of Dean



Forest of Dean became Britain's **first national forest park** in 1938



83.1% of Gloucestershire residents also work in the county²

¹SAM 2023, ONS Area to Mean High Water Excluding Area of Inland Water (Land Area) (AREALHECT)

²2011 Census, ONS

Population

Gloucestershire has a population of 646,627³.

Over the past decade the population of Gloucestershire has increased by 8.1%, which is faster than the rate of growth seen across England and Wales (6.3%)⁴. Growth across the county has been uneven, and was greatest in Tewkesbury, with the population increasing by 15.8% from 2011 (a gain of approximately 12,951 people). Tewkesbury borough sits between the two main urban areas of Gloucester and Cheltenham, and is experiencing significant housing and employment land development. As well as being the district with the highest growth in Gloucestershire, Tewkesbury has had one of the highest growth rates nationally, ranked 8th out of 331 district and unitary authorities in England and Wales.

Gloucestershire has an older population than nationally, with those aged 65+ accounting for 21.7% of the population, higher than the national average of 18.7%, and a lower proportion of people aged 0-15 and 16-64. In the county's more rural districts of Cotswold and the Forest of Dean the older population is even more pronounced than the county average with more than 25% of the population being over 65⁵.

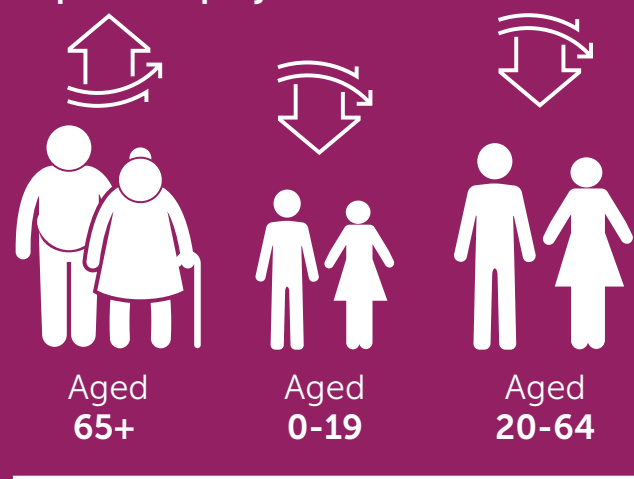


Population projections suggest the population in Gloucestershire will rise by 50,291 between 2018 and 2028. This increase of 7.9% on the 2018 projections is substantially higher than those for England (5.0%). Within the county, Tewkesbury and Cotswold are projected to have the largest percentage increases in population over the next 25 years (16.4% and 14.0% respectively). Cheltenham is projected to have the smallest increase (1.8%)⁶.

The notable feature of the projections is the sharp increase in the population aged 65 or over, which is projected to increase 23.9% (national average for England 19.6%). As a result of this growth the proportion of people in Gloucestershire who are aged 65 or over is predicted to rise to 24.5% of the population by 2028, while the proportion of people aged 0-19 and 20-64 is projected to fall. The increase is predicted to be greatest in Cotswold (65.1%) and lowest in Cheltenham (45.5%)⁷.

82% of the population live in areas classed as 'urban city or town' or 'rural town and fringe'.⁸ By contrast, 83 per cent of the county is rural. Our challenge is to ensure the most vulnerable and isolated people in our county have the support they need and stay connected with public services.

Population projections



³ Mid 2021 Population Estimates, ONS

⁴ 2011 and 2021 Census, ONS

⁵ 2018 Based Sub National Population Projections, ONS

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rural Urban Classification 2011, and 2021 Census at COA; ONS

⁸ Rural Urban Classification 2011, SAM 2015, ONS Area to Mean High Water Excluding Area of Inland Water (Land Area) (AREALHECT)

Quality of life and deprivation (see also 'tackling inequalities pg 13)

Quality of life is generally good in Gloucestershire, and most people enjoy better outcomes than the UK average.

Despite its general affluence, Gloucestershire does have pockets of significant and persistent levels of deprivation. Males living in the most deprived areas of Gloucestershire have a life expectancy 7.6 years lower than those in the most affluent areas, while females have a life expectancy of 5.8 years lower¹⁰.

7.6% residents of Gloucestershire live in areas that are in the 20 per cent most deprived in England¹¹.

Economy

Gloucestershire has a prosperous and resilient economy. The total GVA of the Gloucestershire economy was approximately £19.1 billion in 2021, representing 12.8% of the value of output in the South West and 1.0% of the UK economy. According to latest figures, GVA per head in Gloucestershire was £29,574, which was above the South West (£26,219) but below the UK average (£30,443)¹².

Productivity in Gloucestershire as measured by GVA per hour worked stood at £37.39 in 2021 this was higher than the regional average of £34.48 but lower than the UK average of £37.7¹³. When compared to other Local Enterprise Areas, Gloucestershire ranks 12 out of 38¹⁴, this was

largely driven by high levels of productivity in Cotswold and Forest of Dean with both districts exceeding the national average in terms of productivity and sitting amongst the 20% most productive local authority districts in England¹⁵.

Environmental quality combined with a competitive, skilled workforce, good connectivity, and land supply in Gloucestershire is a strong selling point to businesses and investors. This is reflected by the number of head offices, international and entrepreneurial companies in the county, including GE Aviation, Safran Landing Systems, Renishaw, Ecclesiastical Insurance, Ecotricity, St James's Place, Bottlegreen Drinks Co, Watts Group and EDF Energy.

Historically strong in sectors such as defence and aerospace, Gloucestershire continues to have a significant manufacturing presence, with particular strengths in advanced engineering. The county is also a major centre for banking, finance and insurance, cyber and the future of global communications, and is home to a number of government agencies including GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters), and UCAS (University and Colleges Admission Service).

Despite areas of specialism, Gloucestershire has a diverse local economy, not overly-reliant on any one large company or single sector. In 2021 the wholesale and retail trade accounted for the greatest proportion of employment in the county (15.0%), followed by human health and social work activities (14.0%), manufacturing (10.4%) and education (8.5 per cent)¹⁶.

Gloucestershire's diverse economy



Manufacturing
10.4%



Retail
15%



Education
8.5%



Human health
and social work
14%

¹⁰Inequality in life expectancy at birth, PHOF, OHID

¹¹Indices of Deprivation 2019, MHCLG and Mid 2020 Population Estimates, ONS

¹²Regional gross value added (balanced) per head and income components, ONS

¹³Sub regional productivity, ONS

¹⁴Sub regional productivity, ONS

¹⁵Sub regional productivity, ONS

The health of the Gloucestershire labour market is recovering having deteriorated following the Covid-19 pandemic in line with national trends.

- **The employment rate (the proportion of residents aged 16-64 years who were in work) stood at 76.4% during the peak of the pandemic (July 2020- June 2021) and has recovered to 80.5% (Apr 2022 - Mar 2023), higher than the national average (75.6%)¹⁷.**
- **The corresponding unemployment rates have consequently reduced. The number of people claiming unemployment related benefits peaked at 5.0% (August 2020). By Oct 2021 this figure had fallen to 2.1%, although it increased to 2.3% in August 2023.**

However, in line with the national and regional picture there are concerns about an increasing proportion of the working age population becoming economically inactive, with 17.3% of the 16-64 year old population falling into this group (Apr 2022- Mar 2023) up from 15.3% pre pandemic (October 2018-September 2019)¹⁸. This has been accompanied by a record number of job postings, with 20,766 being advertised in August 2023, up from 10,787 in January 2020¹⁹.

This means there are currently around 2.2 vacancies available per unemployment related benefit claimant²⁰. Combined with an ageing population and an already higher than average job density figure, this may pose problems for Gloucestershire if the trend continues, making it difficult for employers to recruit which in turn will stifle economic growth.

There is a positive entrepreneurial culture in Gloucestershire, and start-up businesses have a high survival rate. 93.8% of businesses born in 2020 survived one year and 62.6% of businesses born in 2018 surviving three years (national average of 92.4 per cent and 57.4 per cent respectively²¹). However, there are signs that business survival rates are falling in the county, in opposition with the picture seen at a national level. In addition, in 2021 business deaths outnumbered business births in Gloucestershire this was the first time this had happened since 2010 and contrasted with the picture at national level, where there were more business births than deaths. Levels of self-employment have

historically been higher than the national average, however, in recent years there has been a decline in self-employment in line with national trends.

Gloucestershire is part of the Western Gateway 'regional powerhouse', which aims to attract investment, development and growth into the area. It is also home to three universities. The largest is the University of Gloucestershire which is a mid-table university providing many strong courses, but they are not necessarily matched to the needs of the local economy or a magnet for retaining young people. The Royal Agricultural University is the oldest agricultural college in the English speaking world and has been at the forefront of agricultural education since 1845. Hartpury College and University Centre is one of the UK's leading land-based, equine, and sports educational establishments.

Health

Overall, the health of people living in Gloucestershire is better than the England average. Average life expectancy at 65 years of age is better than the England average for both males and females²². Gloucestershire is broadly in line with the national average for the proportion of overweight or obese adults and smoking prevalence but is significantly better in terms of alcohol related admissions to hospital and levels of physical activity²³.

Residents in Gloucestershire have lower rates of severe diagnosed mental illness than the national average. However, the excess under 75 mortality rate in adults with severe mental illness is significantly worse than the national average²⁴. Gloucestershire has also had a higher rate of deaths by suicide than England for several years (albeit these are small numbers); higher childhood obesity; and self-harming rates in young people.

All of these issues vary across our districts, and impact our more deprived neighbourhoods more acutely (see later section on inequality and levelling up).

¹⁶BRES, ONS

¹⁷APS, ONS

¹⁸Annual Population Survey, ONS

¹⁹Lightcast

²⁰Lightcast and Claimant Count, ONS

²¹Business Demography, ONS

²²PHOF, OHID

²³PHOF, OHID

²⁴PHOF, OHID

Adult Social Care

At the end of August 2023 just under 4,900 people were receiving a long-term adult social care service²⁵, with 35% receiving a nursing or residential care service and 65% receiving a community-based service. Some 60% of service users were aged 65 years or over, with 65% of this group being female; by contrast, amongst service users aged 18-64 years, 44% were female. The average age of people in the 20-64 age group was 43.4 years, whilst the average age of people in the 65+ age group was 81.0 years. In recent years, there has been a downward trend in the total number of people receiving residential or nursing care, although within this group the number of people receiving dementia services has increased; this overall downward trend in residential/nursing care was exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.

Since April 2021, the number of people in residential dementia care has risen faster than the number of people in non-dementia residential care has fallen leading to an overall rise in the number of people in residential care. The number of people in nursing dementia care has remained steady whilst the number of people in non-dementia nursing care has fallen leading to an overall fall in nursing care. In April 2017, of the people aged 65+ in long-term nursing or residential care, 41% were in dementia care; this has risen to 72% in August 2023.

The number of people receiving community-based services fell between 2017 and 2019. There was then a slight rise during 2020/21 which was at least in part related to people receiving Covid-funded services which have now ended. From April 2021 the number of people receiving community services fell and then rose again but was still lower in March 2023 compared with April 2021.

At a district level, the rates of accessing long-term community-based services are currently highest in Gloucester followed by the Forest of Dean and lowest in Cotswold and Tewkesbury. Rates of access of long-term residential and nursing care services are highest in Cheltenham followed by Gloucester and lowest in Tewkesbury and Cotswold. In relation to deprivation, rates of access of both community-based and residential services are highest in the most deprived areas²⁶.

²⁵Excluding self-funders and people receiving CHC funded services.

Children's Social Care

We have been on an Ofsted improvement journey since 2017, and achieved an improved Ofsted judgement of 'Requires Improvement' for our Children's services in 2022.

As at 1st September 2023 the number of children open to Children's Social Care is 4,094. Of those there are 863 Children in Care, 638 the subject of a Child Protection Plan, and 550 receiving Care Leaver services.

The numbers of Children in Care have continued to rise year-on-year since 2014 beyond expected increases due to population change to the current rate of 67.8 per 10,000 0-to-17 year olds. The rates of Children in Care have been higher than our Statistical Neighbour average since 2016.

Numbers of 'Children the subject of a CP Plan' has fluctuated since 2014, although with a general increasing trend to 2022 and a significant reduction over the course of the last year to current levels which are now at a rate of 50.1 per 10,000 0-17 year olds. This results from a review of long and repeat plans and is part of our delivery on our strategic intent to reduce drift and delay and build sustainable outcomes through timely, skilled interventions. Our rates in previous years have been clearly the highest of all our Statistical Neighbours; reductions in the last 12 months bring us more in-line with our comparators, although still at the higher end²⁷.

Accessibility

The rural nature of the county means accessibility is a challenge for many residents. Around 19% of residents in Gloucestershire live in neighbourhoods in the most deprived 20% nationally in terms of the IMD Domain Barriers to Housing and Services, this increases to over 40% of residents in Cotswold district²³. Recent increased costs and recruitment challenges have threatened the stability of our rural bus services in recent months.

Access to superfast broadband and good quality mobile signals can also be a barrier for residents particularly in the more rural parts of the county.

*Sources of further information:
Inform Gloucestershire*

²⁶Data and Analysis Team, GCC

²⁷Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019, MHCLG

2. Local Priorities and Outcomes

Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on those priorities?

The council vision and priorities

Our council strategy, *"Building Back Better in Gloucestershire 2022-26"* is a four year document, in its second year of delivery. It was written following the full County Council elections in May 2021, based around both the manifesto mandate of our administration, and setting out our key transformation programmes.

Our vision is

"To make the most of all that Gloucestershire has to offer, help improve the quality of life for every community, support businesses to be successful and make sure the county is a place where people want to live, work and visit"

Our priorities are:

- ✓ **Tackling Climate Change**
- ✓ **Improving our Roads**
- ✓ **Sustainable Growth**
- ✓ **Levelling up our Communities**
- ✓ **Securing Investment for Gloucestershire**
- ✓ **Transforming Children's Services**
- ✓ **Transforming Adult Social Care**
- ✓ **Transforming Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service**
- ✓ **Improving Customer Experience**

Understanding Future challenges

Whilst Gloucestershire is a fantastic place to live, we face some major challenges that will impact the county if we don't take action now. We see the key challenges facing Gloucestershire as being:



Demographic change

Gloucestershire's population is ageing more quickly than the UK average. We are also seeing more people living with disabilities and other long-term conditions in all age groups, as well as a trend towards more single person households with less access to family support. The challenges for the future of social care are significant. At the same time, our 18-64 population is expected to remain about the same. While the concept of 'working age' is changing, we do need to respond to this challenge, to make sure we have the skills we need to keep the county competitive and support economic growth.



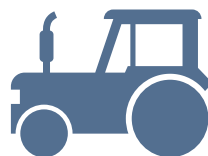
Inequalities and deprivation

While living standards in Gloucestershire are high overall, there are areas of the county where residents' outcomes fall well below national averages and where, as a result, local people are more likely to rely on the services we provide. 7.6% residents of Gloucestershire live in areas that are in the 20 per cent most deprived in England, and face greater challenges or barriers to good health, education and skills attainment than others.



Climate Change

Along with other councils up and down the country, the county council has declared a climate change emergency, recognising the threat to our communities. We are providing a strong leadership role, working with other public sector bodies and local communities to reduce carbon emissions across the county. We are already close to achieving net zero emissions as a council and have made a strong public commitment to do all we can to be a carbon neutral county by 2045.



Rural isolation

As well as being one of our best assets, the rural nature of the county makes it difficult for some people to access the services and employment they need. Access to reliable and affordable public and community transport is critical to combatting rural isolation. The roll-out of high-speed broadband has already reached nearly all addresses across the county, but we need to continue to work towards full coverage so that all households and businesses benefit.

Transformation

The council is delivering transformation across all of its directorates. For this reason, we have asked the Peer Team for particular focus on whether the organisation is effectively focussing its resources on delivery of those programmes.

Our key transformation programmes include:

- **Childrens Continuous Improvement Plan** – Having achieved an improved Ofsted judgement of 'Requires Improvement' for our Children's services in 2022, we are determined to continue our improvement journey towards achieving consistently good outcomes for children and young people.

The focus of our continuous improvement programme is on a stable and skilled workforce, developing the placement market to be able to better meet local needs through strategic capital investment and tackling demand through early intervention.

- **Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) Improvement Plan** – GFRS has been on an improvement journey since a series of audits and an inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in 2018. The Service was re-inspected by HMICFRS in November 2021 and in July 2022, they published the final report for GFRS.

Their feedback identified two Causes for Concern relating to:

- Culture and
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

These and the wider issues raised are being addressed through a comprehensive Improvement Programme with a strong emphasis on culture.

- **Adults Transformation Plan** – Adults Social Care has had a significant programme of change for well over a decade. Initially this was tackling the demand challenges of an ageing population. In 2012-13 the focus shifted to include the impacts of austerity on council wide budgets and a shifting social care marketplace focussing on independent living for longer. 2021-22 saw a further reshaping of the programme to deal with the challenges of the Care Act reforms and the incoming assurance and inspection regime under the Care Quality Commission (CQC). See paragraph on p14 on recent ASC peer challenge.
- **Highways Transformation** – this programme was stood up to give greater political and senior leadership oversight to the 'Improving our Roads' priority within our strategy. It has workstreams prioritising delivery of improvement works and customer satisfaction outcomes.



As well as these Directorate and strategic priority level transformation programmes, there are several other significant and organisation wide programmes underway, including, Digital First which oversees our ICT improvement roadmap (dealing with legacy infrastructure improvements, our delivery model and rollout of digital tools like M365), and the 'One Programme' – a new set of systems for HR and Finance collaboration, replacing a legacy 'SAP' system.

Additionally, we have recognised the need for immediate investment in services for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) with an injection of revenue funding to address the immediate capacity issues. A medium term strategy is now being developed to tackle the areas identified in the recent LGA peer review of SEND services (completed 28th April 2023, final report [here](#)).

Great work is being achieved in supporting these programmes by our support services. For example, the excellent performance and data support provided to Children's Improvement journey; the support by HR on recruitment and retention issues council wide; and the work by Digital and ICT to move our social work data systems (adults and children's) to a more stable, cloud-based platform. The resources required to deliver this level of prolonged improvement work is stretching our corporate services and we welcome the Peer Team's input on these issues.

Adults LGA Peer Challenge September 2023

Adults Social Care invited the Local Government Association in to conduct a Peer Challenge (19th – 22nd September 2023). The recommendations the LGA Peer challenge team have offered are based on the triangulation of what they read, heard, and saw over the week. This feedback will fundamentally help us to prepare for Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection. We will receive two detailed reports towards the end of October, one will cover the overall peer challenge and the other will cover a focus on learning disability and autism, these reports will be used to inform our transformation and improvement plan.

Initial feedback is that they have broadly agreed with our CQC self-assessment, but some issues require more prompt action than we anticipated. This relates to our line of sight over the statutory functions of mental health social work and occupational therapy that GCC has delegated to the ICB, who commission Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust to deliver. A working group has been convened with senior staff from all three organisations and they plan to have agreed a solution by Christmas.

We heard that we need to move to routinely using data and intelligence to inform our decisions and that we do not routinely hear the voice of those who use our services or their carers. We also need to do more to co-produce services with those who use them. These were all issues we had identified in our self-assessment.

The peer review team also found lots of evidence that our vision for the adult's directorate was well understood by our staff and was driving our work. It was fantastic to hear that they found our staff to be passionate and values led. Our Directorate Leadership Team had a Q&A session with staff on 25th September to provide initial feedback – this recording can be viewed [here](#).

Find out more: Read our CQC self-assessment or want to know more about the Adult Social Care LGA peer challenge then visit our Sharepoint homepage - P CQC Assurance - Home ([sharepoint.com](#)).

Understanding local needs

The council has a long track-record of working with our partners to understand the needs of local communities.

The MAIDeN (Multi-Agency Interactive Database for Neighbourhoods) partnership was first established with our district councils over 20 years ago, in the early days of neighbourhood-level statistics. It has now developed into a partnership resource that provides district and parish councils, police, health and voluntary organisations with access to local information, statistics and profiles. This includes ward-level profiles for all elected members.

InformGloucestershire is our central source for information about the county, its districts, communities and residents. It is maintained by the council's Data and Analysis team, which works very closely with Commissioning Managers and Heads of Service to ensure that commissioning decisions, contracting and service design are underpinned by a sound understanding of local needs.

InformGloucestershire has hosted the Gloucestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) since 2012. Our local approach to this statutory partnership requirement is to ensure that data and insight is available to those planning and commissioning services, but also that best evidence and practice is highlighted to help improve population health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities in access to services and in health and wellbeing outcomes.

We aim to give visibility to the many strengths and assets within our communities. A project is currently underway with our partners in the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to improve our JSNA specifically in terms of the accessibility of information and analysis through data visualisation tools.

Tackling inequalities

Whilst outcomes for Gloucestershire people are generally good and better than regional and national averages, these mask significant differences at local level. There are 12 neighbourhoods (across Gloucester, Cheltenham, Tewkesbury and the Forest of Dean) which are amongst the 10% most deprived in England (Indices of Deprivation 2019) and 3.1% of the county's population reside in these neighbourhoods. We also have significant populations for whom inclusion and service access is more difficult e.g.. rough sleepers; non-white and non-English speaking; traveller communities, asylum seekers, etc.

Our commissioning decisions and service delivery are informed by this, for example the Levelling Up conference hosted in May 2022 with partners and community representatives leading to the establishment of community grants and our 'Know Your Patch' networks which inform understanding of local communities (see pg 22 – working with the VCSE sector).

A self-assessment was carried out against the Local Government Equality Framework in 2022. The self-assessment has found that, for the most part, the Council is able to demonstrate that it is meeting the 'Developing' level, with elements of 'Achieving'. However, practise is inconsistent. An action plan has been developed to embed equalities, diversity and inclusion more deeply within our culture and ways of working. This includes a more thorough approach to Equalities Impact Assessments to be broader and consider a wider range of inequalities than the standard protected characteristics.

We recognise that there is more we could and should do to make both our workforce and elected members more reflective of the communities we serve:



Age

The council, like many local authorities across the UK, has an older workforce.

31% of our workforce is aged between 50 and 59, compared to 22% of the Gloucestershire working age population (ONS census 2021). The *average* age of our staff is 45.

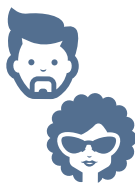


Disability

4.4% of employees have declared a disability, although 17% preferred not to say, and only 79% have registered a response to this question.

It is difficult to know whether this is due to the council employing a lower proportion of disabled staff, or due to low declaration rates, as 16.7 per cent of working age people in Gloucestershire consider themselves to have a disability.

There is representation of disabled employees across the grading structure.



Race

6.4% of the 93% employees who completed the ethnicity question are from a BAME background, compared to 6.9% in Gloucestershire (ONS census 2021).

Representation remains low at very senior management level but proportionate through the other grades, including across managerial roles.



Sexual Orientation

Only 44% of staff have chosen to complete a sexual orientation status. Of these a further 10% registered 'prefer not to say, and just 3.9% of responders (1.8% of total staff) have identified as gay, lesbian or bi-sexual. Representation remains low at senior management level.



Gender

70% of the council's workforce is female, compared to 51% of working age people in Gloucestershire.

This correlates with the national profile for public sector workers - two thirds of the total workforce in public roles is female. Women are well represented across all grades, although only 33 per cent at senior management level (this figure was 66% at the last Peer Challenge in 2018).

We have a mean gender pay gap of 3.9%. This figure was 8.9% in 2018.



Consultation, engagement and coproduction

The council has a consultation process, endorsed by the Consultation Institute, which sets out a consistent approach to planning and implementing consultation and engagement activity across the council. We continue to have a strong working relationship with the Consultation Institute and ask for their support where necessary, including training for those staff who support the wider organisation in this area. To help keep pace with best practise and other developments within the consultation and engagement arena, the council is beginning to use the LGA's New Conversations Guide to help it in plan and deliver consistent and effective consultation and engagement activity going forwards.

We recognise that we need to do more to improve our mechanisms for ensuring good coproduction of our services. The need for this has been highlighted in the LGA Peer Reviews of adult's social care and SEND, and we are actively working to improve this through joint working across directorates and with our partners.

Key strengths:

- Clear politically owned priorities.
- The richness of data on local needs, both within the council & across key partnerships.
- Success working with central government to secure investment in major infrastructure improvements - J10, A417.

Key areas to develop:

- Resource alignment to transformation pressures.
- Addressing some limited but vital gaps in data oversight, and improving access to live data for decision making.
- Our workforce and elected members being more representative of the communities we serve.
- Coproduction mechanisms.





Gloucester Library Development Partnership

Gloucester Library is currently situated in Brunswick Road in Gloucester and opened in May 1900. The building does not easily suit a modern library service with constraints placed on it by listed building status and layout; outdated boilers fuelled by fossil fuels; a high backlog of maintenance and improvement works; access limitations, and unfit staff accommodation.

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This is one of two strategic libraries within Gloucestershire, although its use has been declining, due in part to its location. For many years the library was used by students studying at the Gloucestershire College building next door, which was vacated in 2007. Major shops that were located close by have also closed down leaving the Library and Museum isolated.

In partnership with the University of Gloucestershire an opportunity was identified for the library to relocate as part of a major scheme in the heart of the city centre. The university wanted to extend its campus into the city into the former Debenhams building, adjacent to a major regeneration project already underway in Kings Quarter. The university also planned to relocate their library to the building which presented the perfect opportunity to bring both together on the ground floor right in the heart of the regeneration area - breathing life back into an iconic building that had been left to decline over recent years.

In order for the overall scheme to be affordable for the university, GCC agreed a financing package to pay rent-in-advance for the whole term of its 25 year tenancy of the building, providing the university with upfront capital to enable the refurbishment, and giving access to levelling up funding and other grants to make the wider scheme viable.

The project is now underway and progressing well with a planned completion date of July 2024. The new facility will provide many benefits including:

- **Modern, fully accessible library on the ground floor, with coffee shop and cafeteria.**
- **Efficient low energy building to BREEAM excellent standard.**
- **Increased projected footfall with excellent location and links to all transport routes.**
- **Regeneration of the city centre core, and enhanced one public sector estate and 'Levelling Up' outcomes.**
- **Frees up former library building for redevelopment of the Greyfriars area of the city.**

Sources of further information:

[City Campus - University of Gloucestershire \(glos.ac.uk\)](https://www.glos.ac.uk)



Gloucestershire 'Cycle Spine' route development

Gloucestershire County Council has secured in excess of £48 million to deliver a Gloucestershire Cycle Spine linking Gloucester, Cheltenham, and Bishop's Cleeve. Our aim is to extend this spine to Stroud with the route totalling 26 miles of inclusive, high quality infrastructure to enable people to make active travel choices and to travel more economically and sustainably. The cycle spine is being delivered in line with the latest, best practice, cycle design guidance; LTN 1/20. Reducing reliance on private vehicles and prioritising active modes of travel. This flagship corridor will prioritise cycling and walking, targeting a step change in behaviour and attitudes towards modal hierarchy.

Investing in active travel will bring environmental, health and economic benefits. Active travel reduces emissions of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), Particulate matter (PM) and CO₂ helping to tackle climate change and improve air quality in line with;

- **GCC's Climate Change commitments to achieve 'Carbon Zero' by 2040, and;**
- **Local Transport Plan targets to increase active travel, and;**

In addition, 'healthy weight' and 'physical activity' are strategic priorities in the Joint Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2019-29).

The cycle spine is one of our flagship Local Transport Plan schemes and connects Cheltenham, Gloucester and key towns. We have worked closely with Active Travel England and Sustrans to secure monies. The strategic corridor was identified through consultation with district authorities, businesses and cycling representatives, as well as partner organisations such as Active Gloucestershire. Extensive consultation has also taken place between Cheltenham-Churchdown-Gloucester (B4063 website).

Work is nearing completion on 2.7 miles of the route with construction ongoing on a further 1.8 miles of the spine, the cycle charity Sustrans have described the work to date as 'exemplar' with three miles of facility currently under construction. Data already shows a 20% increase in cycling at the East extent of the scheme despite the link being incomplete.

Sources of further information:

B4063 Gloucester to Cheltenham Cycleway Scheme



3. Organisational and Place Leadership

Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?

Leadership Gloucestershire

Leadership Gloucestershire is a joint leaders board comprising of the leaders of Gloucestershire County Council, Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucester City Council, Stroud District Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council, the Integrated Care Board (ICB), the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC). The primary role of Leadership Gloucestershire is to promote collaboration and joint working across the county to drive improvements and create positive change for the people and businesses of Gloucestershire.

One of the ways Leadership Gloucestershire can assist with driving improvements across the county is by developing and implementing a shared vision and strategy for the region. This involves identifying key priorities and opportunities for growth and investment and coordinating efforts to achieve shared goals.

Leadership Gloucestershire can also facilitate collaboration and partnership working between different sectors and stakeholders, such as businesses, universities, and community organisations. By bringing together a diverse range of perspectives and expertise, the board can help to drive innovation and creativity, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. Another important role of Leadership Gloucestershire is to advocate for the county at a regional, national, and international level. This involves promoting the strengths and opportunities of the region and lobbying for investment and support to drive economic growth and development.

The county council has worked through Leadership Gloucestershire to explore and refine the ambitions for a level 2 county deal and will continue to pursue this option with the partners. Overall, Leadership Gloucestershire plays a critical role in driving improvements across the county by promoting collaboration, innovation, and partnership working, and advocating for the interests of the region.

The Gloucestershire City Region Board has been established by Leadership Gloucestershire to develop a long term strategic vision for whole of the county, and provide additional capacity to support delivery of its aims. The City Region Board builds on the success of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee which it replaces.

Integrated Care Board (ICB)

GCC enjoys a coterminous relationship with the ICB, as its footprint mirrors that of the former Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group. When the Integrated Care Board was created in July 2022, four GCC officers were invited to join: The Chief Executive, Executive Directors of Adults and Children's services and the Director of Public Health. Two of which were voting member appointments. A fifth place was offered to Cllr Allaway-Martin as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board and Chair designate of the Integrated Care Partnership (see next section). This arrangement is a recognition of the strength of partnership that exists between GCC and the local NHS system.

GCC's role on the ICB has been instrumental in bringing the local authority perspective to ICB discussions to help deliver improved health and care services for the population of Gloucestershire. Specifically in relation to adult social care's role in the urgent and emergency care (UEC) system improvement, it allows a system-wide approach to tackling inequalities and raising the profile of the needs of children in care in relation to NHS services. Our Executive Director for Adult Social Care, Communities and Wellbeing is joint Senior Responsible Officer for UEC improvement, and our Director of Public Health is the joint Senior Responsible Officer for health inequalities.

The Gloucestershire UEC system has been under significant pressure for some time, resulting at times, in sub-standard patient care. A diagnostic of the UEC system was commissioned and showed that to improve the UEC system a large-scale transformation programme was needed, of a scale and complexity not seen in Gloucestershire before.

Since then, health and social care leaders have carefully considered the feedback and how to deliver the transformation needed and at pace, in time to effect change for next winter. The Gloucestershire ICB took the decision to commission an improvement partner to support the transformation programme. Gloucestershire County Council has led the commissioning process, and on 29 March Cabinet approved direct award of the improvement partner contract to Newton Europe via an intermediary called Bloom. The commissioning of this contract and the appointment of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care, Wellbeing and Communities as joint senior responsible officer (SRO) for this transformation programme are examples of the strength of the relationship with the ICB.

Health and Wellbeing Board and Integrated Care Partnership

The Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) has continued to focus on its seven priorities (tackling loneliness and social isolation, housing, early years and the best start in life, healthy lifestyles, mental wellbeing, physical activity, adverse childhood experiences), under the leadership of the Chair, Cllr Allaway Martin. The Director of Public Health and their team have led the development of the strategy and facilitated its delivery via the sub-groups. More recently work has been undertaken to understand how the requirement to have an Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) for Gloucestershire will align with the role and work of the HWB.

For a coterminous area, the remit of an ICP is very similar to that of an HWB. The Integrated Care Board appointed Cllr Allaway-Martin as Chair of the ICP. This has enabled the alignment of the two Boards which has an almost identical membership made up of a wide and inclusive range of partners from across the county including NHS partners, district councils, VCSE representatives, police, fire, LEP and, on the Health and Wellbeing Board, elected members. The ICP strategy incorporates the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS, 2019 – 2030) as its first pillar which prevents duplication of effort and recognises the significant engagement that went in to the development of the JHWS.

The strategy emphasises the need for a joined up, partnership approach to delivering the best outcomes for the Gloucestershire population. It has a strong focus on reducing inequalities and ensuring upstream focus on creating and maintaining wellbeing whilst doing more to prevent ill-health. The HWB and ICP structure allows a joined up and pragmatic approach to agree priorities for the system that we can collectively address. In the first year this has been tackling smoking, increasing detection and treatment of hypertension, and increasing employment opportunities for people in the county. There will be an informal review of the arrangements in the coming months that we will use to inform and review our approach. We have received good feedback from NHS England in their annual review of the local system.

Local Enterprise Partnership



The

GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was established in May 2011 as part of a central government drive to stimulate economic recovery on the back of the recession, through greater engagement direct with businesses and the private sector. Since 2011 GCC has acted as the Accountable Body for GFirst LEP ensuring the financial accountability and transparency of the LEP. The council has also partnered with the LEP on several delivery projects: acting as the first point of access for Growth Hub business support services through the thirty-one libraries across Gloucestershire; working with the LEP on the net zero agenda for business support; delivering transport schemes across the county; and supporting, through match funding, the inward investment activity of the LEP.

The publication of the Levelling Up White Paper in 2022 made it clear that on agreement of a devolution deal LEP functions and activities would move into the council. The council worked closely with the LEP during the Summer of 2022 to move forward with a closer working relationship ahead of an agreed devolution deal for Gloucestershire. In August 2023 Government announced that core funding for LEPs would end on 31st March 2024 and that LEP functions and assets would transfer to the council.

The Chief Executive of the LEP is seconded to the role of Director of Economy and Environment for four days a week and current planning is progressing to identify the key functions delivered by the LEP and to explore how they can be fulfilled by the council from April 2024 when core LEP funding from central Government will end. In addition, the council has worked with the LEP board, executive team and nine business groups to explore the potential for a county deal.

All of the LEP groups have fed into the process as plans are developing. Early in 2023 the process to develop a new economic strategy for the whole county was initiated as a joint project between the council and the LEP. The Director of Economy and Environment / Chief Executive of the LEP is overseeing this project and the intention is for the final economic strategy to be agreed by the council and the LEP board early in 2024.

Children's Safeguarding partners

Inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate

of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) conducted a Joint Targeted Area Inspection of the county council, police and NHS from 12 to 16 June 2023. This inspection considered the county's response to the identification of initial need and risk (often referred to as the 'front door').

The inspection report published in August (Final Report ([ofsted.gov.uk](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk))) praised the strength of Gloucestershire's strategic partnership between the County Council, NHS and Police, which is testament to the collective commitment of all partners to keeping children and young people in the county safe. It noted that this mature relationship is supported by effective governance in the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children's Partnership (GSCP). Inspectors found that most children living in Gloucestershire who are identified as being in need of help and protection receive a swift and appropriate multi-agency response. They highlighted a daily multi-agency vulnerability meeting held in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), or 'front door,' as a key strength in promoting effective partnership working.

They also found that when children's needs warrant further children's social care intervention, assessments are detailed and thorough with children being seen promptly, including the same day if required with children visited at home and when appropriate, in school. Inspectors said children's plans lead to children receiving the right help and intervention. Steps are being taken to make progress in the areas that inspectors found needed improvement including the efficiency of partner recording systems, the consistent use of police vulnerability screening tools and making sure children's voices are used to inform decisions across all partner agencies.

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSES)

The Council has a long history of working in partnership with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector across all areas of its business rooted in mutual respect and trust for each sector. This relationship was tested during the Covid pandemic, but the strength and depth of the relationships meant that the VCSE were treated as equal partners and were key in supporting our communities during the lockdowns and working with the Council to deliver messages to communities most at risk. The community response during the pandemic was co-ordinated by the County Council, the six District Councils and Health working closely with local voluntary and community groups. Established in 2018, the Know Your Patch networks were key to this approach as they were able to rapidly

convene virtual meetings to bring together VCSE organisations, community groups and newly created mutual aid groups.

The networks were the 'ears' on the ground about what was happening in our communities and were able to pass requests, feedback and comments to the Community Resilience Cell for consideration and action. An example of this was the creation of the Community Resilience Grants Fund in April 2020 to get money out as quickly as possible to community groups for items such as floats, food supplies mobile phones, freezers and children's activity packs. The VCSE brings specialist expertise about the needs of our communities, local knowledge, and a community-based perspective of public service delivery. The council values the role the sector play and have invested in community infrastructure to enable communities to act for themselves and to listen and support communities to achieve their goals.

The Know Your Patch (KYP) Networks were created in 2018 based in each district of Gloucestershire and are led by local VCSE organisations who with have a service level agreement with GCC to cover the administration costs. They were established with the belief that thriving communities are key to good lives and building resilient communities. Connecting with local people, places and things that can help will in turn help people live well and worry less. KYP believes that people prefer to find their own solutions. When we get better at helping those people, we reduce pressure on services.

KYP networks are made up of VCS organisations, community groups, providers, and public sector practitioners. These networks meet regularly virtually and in person for networking and discussion about the needs and challenge for

people living in their communities. The networks now have over 2000 members. The most current topics for discussion amongst the KYP networks are: sustainable community groups, the cost of living crisis and maintaining levels of funding so they can continue to deliver to their communities. The council has adopted an approach to commit to the VCSE via ongoing small grant programmes and a willingness to try innovative practice where appropriate for example Employment and Skills Hubs and Digital Hubs.

Gloucestershire County Council has implemented four Councillor-led grant schemes since 2014 – Active Together, the Children's Activity Fund and Growing our Communities and the current scheme Build Back Better. Over 2000 small grants have been awarded to community groups across the county. The Build Back Better – Councillor Grant scheme has awarded over 400 grants since its launch in July 2021. This shift towards smaller funding pots for local groups has led to new ways of working collaboratively with communities in terms of grant provision and has enabled Gloucestershire County Council to broker new, improved, and trusted relationships with the VCSES.

This has now become firmly embedded in the ways the council operates and they have expanded into other thematic areas including Children and Families and Adult Social Care. Commissioning includes a range of opportunities to invest in local community infrastructure not limited only to procurement. Grants and investment in infrastructure agencies, user lead organisations and specialist services such as Citizens Advice demonstrates commitment to local agencies who are more likely to understand local community needs and deliver social impact.



Key strengths:

- A long history of partnership working and partnership arrangements that are system wide and co-terminus
- Commitment to flexible investment in the VCSE e.g., Levelling Up Together Grants
- Acknowledgement that often the VCSE is better placed to reach vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. Willingness to work differently with VCSE to support those communities e.g. employment and skills hubs and Digital Hubs



Key areas to develop:

- Create a mechanism for a listening loop with our communities as an ongoing dialogue not one off for a service change or business need
- Ensuring consistency of approach in working with the VCSE across all areas of the Council
- Bringing on board the LEP functions without reducing the collaborative relationships with business partners



Homes for Ukraine (HFU) sponsorship scheme

The Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched on 14th March 2022, allowing sponsors in the UK to bring Ukrainians to a place of safety following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Over 1,500 Ukrainian guests have now arrived in Gloucestershire, welcomed by more than 800 hosts.

As a two-tier area, the data and the funding for the scheme comes to the County Council, and so good partnership working has been essential to ensure seamless delivery for guests and hosts.

The County Council identified a lead director to work with existing networks to set up a HFU Planning Group to coordinate the multi-agency response. This involves GCC, District Councils, Health, the Department for Work and Pensions, Police and voluntary and community organisations, including Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS). We also established a small "HFU team" to coordinate the initial checks and welcome visits for guests, alongside district colleagues.

Honest and open dialogue between all seven local authorities has ensured additional work and staff were funded for the increased capacity the scheme required, including the procurement of voluntary sector support from GARAS.

The HFU team coordinates ongoing communication with hosts and guests; arranges rematches of guests with new hosts; manages complex cases where there is risk of homelessness or safeguarding concerns; and works with partners to maximise welfare and community integration. This hub and spoke model with district, health and wider partners has ensured a joined up and consistent approach.

One solution solved collectively through our partnerships involved establishing a 'deposit and rent in advance' scheme to Ukrainians on the HFU scheme to assist with their move to living independently. We continue to have low numbers of homeless presentations compared to other areas, signalling how well we are working together to solve issues.

Recognising that the response to supporting refugees and other asylum seekers in county was growing, the Gloucestershire Strategic Migration Partnership was established and is co-chaired by the County Council's Director of Public Health and Tewkesbury Borough Council's Director of Communities. By considering strategic issues and barriers such as housing, health, safeguarding and employment, as well as community integration and human trafficking, the Partnership maximises opportunities for Ukrainian guests and other asylum seekers and refugees to settle and integrate successfully in Gloucestershire.

Sources of further information:

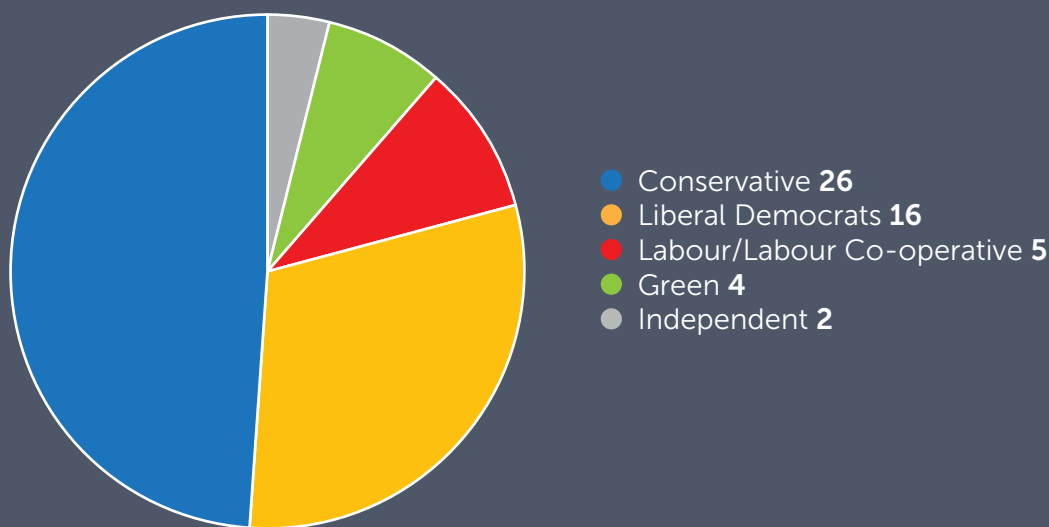
Homes for Ukraine: council guides - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

4. Governance and culture

Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?

Political leadership - make up of council

The council has 53 divisions, each with a single county councillor. The 2021 county elections returned the Conservatives with an overall majority, but changes in group membership since then have resulted in the following political make up:



Although this means that the Conservative administration no longer has a technical overall majority, in practice, the support of the two independents in the Council Chamber continues to provide political stability and allows the Executive to provide strong leadership and decision-making.

Gloucestershire has mature politics. The Council Chamber is a very active environment for political debate, through regular motions and public and member questions.

The council operates a cabinet and scrutiny system. The council's cabinet is made up of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Mark Hawthorne, the Deputy Leader who is also portfolio holder for Finance and Change, and eight other county councillors as portfolio holders for Adult Social Care Commissioning; Adult Social Care Delivery; Children's Safeguarding and Early Years; Education, Skills and Bus Transport; Fire, Community Safety and Libraries; Environment and Planning; Highways and Flood; and Public Health and Communities.

Scrutiny and challenge

Member Scrutiny is structured to enable members to develop expertise in specific areas – Health, Adult Social Care, Children and Families, Environment, Economic Growth, Fire & Rescue, and an overarching Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Police and Crime Panel and the Audit and Governance Committee also sit within the family of scrutiny committees.

Each committee develops its own work plan to guide its work through the year. These are flexible to enable them to respond to urgent issues that arise. There is a Director lead for each committee, who meets regularly with the scrutiny chair and the lead members from each political group and also informs and guides work when task groups are commissioned.

Most Scrutiny committees are chaired by Conservative members, and vice-chaired by an opposition member, apart from Environment, Fire & Rescue and the Audit and Governance Committee, which are chaired by an opposition member. The scrutiny function provides an important opportunity for non-executive members to be engaged in the work of the council and they are provided with the tools to allow them to be 'scrutineers'.

Scrutiny in Gloucestershire is well developed and continues to evolve. The previous Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee had very busy agendas and was arguably too focused on health at the expense of social care and public health. These areas have now been split into separate committees for Adults Social Care and Communities, and Health.

We also added a committee for Fire and Rescue in 2021 following the outcome of HMICFRS inspections which criticised the overall inclusion of fire service work in our oversight. The Ofsted improvement journey for Children's Services has also caused us to reflect on how scrutiny can be more effective. Children and Families Scrutiny have had assistance from the LGA in this regard.

Member / officer relationships are generally positive and co-operative in tone, and we have recently strengthened arrangements for keeping opposition groups informed about issues. Robust arrangements are in

place for dealing with conduct and standards issues. Building on the LGA model Code of Conduct, the Council has recently adopted a Gloucestershire code of conduct that is common to all 3 tiers of local government in the county, providing greater clarity to both the public and to councillors, allowing training resources and best practice to be shared, and simplifying the arrangements when a complaint arises in relation to a twin-hatted or triple-hatted councillor.

There has been no need to convene a Hearings Panel since the introduction of the new Standards Regime in 2013, and the resolution of complaints at earlier stages of the process is monitored by Audit & Governance Committee through an Annual Report.

Engagement of Local Members

Current arrangements for communicating with opposition Members now include: Group Leaders meeting prior to Full Council with the Chief Executive to preview issues and as a forum to raise concerns, Members weekly newsletter, briefings on topical issues and the Chief Executive also has regular meetings with group leaders on an individual basis for them to raise any concerns or issues.

Local members also have access to a number of specific grant pots through which to steer council investment in their divisions covering highways, health and wellbeing, economic recovery, and youth services.

Some backbenchers (particularly those elected in 2021) report that they sometimes find it difficult to navigate and engage with the council and services, but we have recognised that and are developing plans to address it:

- **Development of a protocol on notifying local members of issues in their division**
- **Refreshed Member development programme**
- **Training and awareness raising for senior officers at a future leadership conference**

Managerial leadership

The council's managerial leadership was revised in late 2019 to introduce 'Executive Directors' for each Directorate, and several 'Directors' within each. There is then a flat structured Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) including the Chief Executive, which allows cross-directorate working and review of performance. We take a collaborative approach to council leadership, and have developed one-council approaches to a range of areas, such as property, ICT and programme management. The culture is one of high challenge and high support.

CLT has regular joint meetings with Cabinet to develop policy, strategy and corporate direction. Cabinet Portfolio Holders also meet frequently with their respective Directors. The development of the current Council Strategy was built on these established ways of working.

Governance framework

The council's governance framework is set out in detail in our Annual Governance Statement, which also provides assurance that these controls are operating effectively across the council.

There are regular meetings of the three statutory officers responsible for corporate governance - Head of Paid Services, S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer to review data on corporate indicators and to identify patterns and learning.

The Constitution is a living document. The Constitution Committee meets regularly to ensure that it is kept under review and that its structures and procedures continue to promote the effective, efficient and transparent administration of the authority.

Performance management

The council manages its strategic corporate performance using an annual plan against its Council Strategy, and a core dataset of around 100 publicly reported indicators. Cabinet Members and Directors meet with

the Leader and Chief Executive at the end of each quarter to review performance, risk and financial data in order to hold to account, provide early sight of issues and address any blockages.

Collective oversight and ownership of corporate performance sits with CLT, who receive a quarterly strategic performance report from the Director of Policy, Performance & Governance, prepared by the Planning, Performance and Insight service.

Political and public accountability for performance is provided through quarterly performance reports to Cabinet (recently reinstated after a gap of several years) and then to scrutiny committees. Each Director reports their performance to the relevant scrutiny committee on a quarterly basis, while the Director of Policy, Performance & Governance also provides a quarterly overview of performance to the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee.

Strategic risk management

The council has a robust risk management approach based on and informed by best practice. Risks are identified and managed at all levels of the organisation. A Strategic Risk Register is owned and managed by CLT, reflecting the key strategic risks to achievement of the Council Strategy.

Each area of the council also manages a risk register relevant to the objectives of the appropriate plans and services. Accountabilities and responsibilities for risk management are embedded within the management structure, and roles are set out in detail in the council's Risk Management Policy Statement and Strategy.

Risk reporting is fully integrated into Corporate Performance and Finance reporting.

An independent review of Risk Management practices was carried out in 2021, with recommendations to Audit and Governance Committee, which have since been completed.

Staff engagement and communication

As the organisation continues to evolve, it is more important than ever that staff play an active part in the evolution.

As a large, complex and constantly changing organisation, staff engagement is a challenge, particularly in making sure it reaches and involves those staff who are based in satellite offices and frontline teams. We keep staff informed and involved through a variety of means, including Talksmart (our internal staff e-newsletter), Managers Brief (our internal manager e-newsletter) and our Staffnet intranet site.

Following feedback in our staff survey we have reinstated the live Q&A sessions that were run during Covid and these take place in all Directorates and have been very well received. As well as Talksmart, we also have a number of service specific e-newsletters that highlight current issues and achievements. Adpanels (advertising in key locations across the council), are also used to keep staff informed.

“The survey results emphasise that our staff really value the opportunity to have input into how changes are developed and delivered”.

Our annual staff engagement survey is a key tool for finding out how engaged our staff are. The latest staff engagement survey (May 2022, the 2023 survey is currently underway) evidenced overall staff engagement at 88.3%. The feedback highlighted important issues around how we manage and implement change, the importance of the visibility of our senior leadership teams and how we

share information and knowledge across Directorates. We are addressing these through a new Workforce Strategy underpinned by a new Communication and Engagement Strategy.

The survey results emphasise that our staff really value the opportunity to have input into how changes are developed and delivered. Our Employee Voice Groups are now very established across each Directorate and these take place a minimum of three times a year. They provide a platform to review the detailed staff survey results, obtain feedback on areas that we need to improve and gain input on other strategic priorities such as Agile, our new hybrid way of working, that has enabled us to develop organisational and directorate specific solutions.



We also have several employee networks that provide help and support and are open to all GCC, GFRS and city council staff. These employee-led networks aim to promote equal opportunity and eliminate discrimination in the workplace. Thanks to the impact of our 'Speak up if it's not right' campaign, feedback from the staff survey confirms that 78% of our staff feel confident to raise an issue if they were to personally experience bullying, harassment or discrimination and 88% feel confident to raise concerns about wrongdoing, risk or malpractice with their line manager.

Vision, values and behaviours

We have worked in partnership with employees to create our vision, values and behaviours. These are now embedded in a number of our processes, including, induction, performance management, and our recruitment practices where we have developed a new values-based toolkit to support our recruiting managers.

The staff engagement survey also established that we were in an excellent position of having 99 % of staff say that they understand our values, 89% know how their team contributes to delivering the council's vision and 92% feel their line manager is approachable and demonstrates the values.

Our values:

- **Accountable** – we do what we say we will.
- **Integrity** – we are honest, fair and speak up.
- **Empower** – communities and colleagues – to be the best we can.
- **Respect** – we value and listen to each other.
- **Excellence** – we continually improve through listening, learning and innovation.



Accountability



Integrity



Empowerment



Respect



Excellence

Employee health and wellbeing continues to be an important area for the council, with a range of support services and networks available to staff. Support includes, managing resilient team workshops, MIND mental health eLearning for managers and two new toolkits have been developed to support wellbeing conversations together with a SHE Stress Indicator tool. This is all easily accessible and available to staff via our new Health and Wellbeing Hub that was launched earlier this year.

In addition, a monthly newsletter is communicated (via staffnet) that features articles and webinars to help staff stay healthy and well.

<https://staffnet.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing-hub/>

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan

In May 2022, the organisation undertook a self-assessment against the Equality Framework for Local Government, to establish our progress and priorities for improvement. This work has led to the development of an improvement action plan, with four objectives:

- **Improve the quality and consistency of the data we collect on service user and workforce equality characteristics;**
- **Strengthen leadership, oversight and governance of Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion across the Council;**
- **Embed equality, diversity and inclusion within GCC's culture and ways of working;**
- **Develop an infrastructure that enables GCC to hear from communities and engage effectively with them.**

Key strengths:

- Political ownership of outcomes and strategy.
- Staff engagement in our values and aims.

Key areas to develop:

- Improving our EqIA approach and training for staff.
- Delivering our wider Equality, Diversity & Inclusion action plan.





Growing Great Managers

Growing Great Managers (GGM) is a learning pathway for early career line managers to become effective people managers. It is part of our workforce development plan to improve manager capability. The aims of the programme are for the organisation to grow leaders of the future and for the participant to build skills, knowledge, and confidence in managing their team. Participant's team members will have a great manager and feel inspired and empowered to perform at their best.

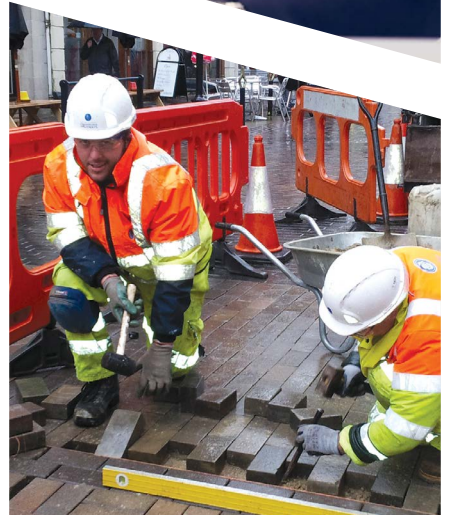
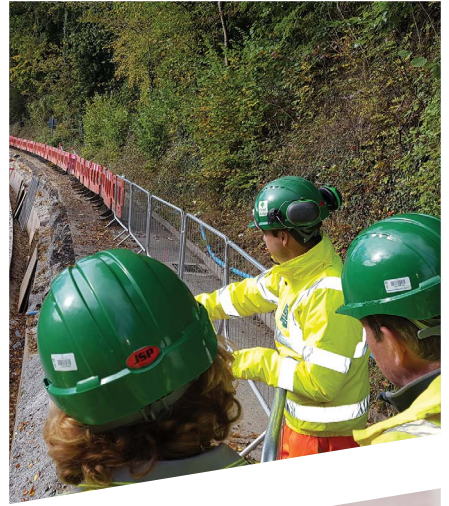
Whilst GCC has provided short courses on specific leadership and management topics over a number of years, GGM provides a structured approach to ensure that managers acquire the foundational people management knowledge and skills they need, in an environment where they can learn from others and gain peer support.

GGM is a two year programme during which time participants complete twelve taught modules covering areas including equalities, well-being, and managing people and relationships. On the programme participants learn both with their cohort and other managers, which maximises learning and gives flexibility on when and how they learn. Six facilitated peer learning sessions are also included in the programme. These have been designed to share best practice and develop solutions to the challenges that people managers face such as hybrid working, performance management, building teams and managing change.

Three GGM cohorts of twelve participants have already been completed and a fourth took place on 12th July 2023. Participant feedback shows the programme has helped to build skills and confidence in managing others and provided opportunities to share experiences, seek advice and gain support from peers, without fear of being judged. Participant learning outcomes have been improved self-awareness, greater openness to change and ability to support others through change, improved communication skills, becoming more connected across the organisation, problem solving and delegation skills.

Sources of further information:

[Participant feedback - Staffnet \(gloucestershire.gov.uk\)](#)

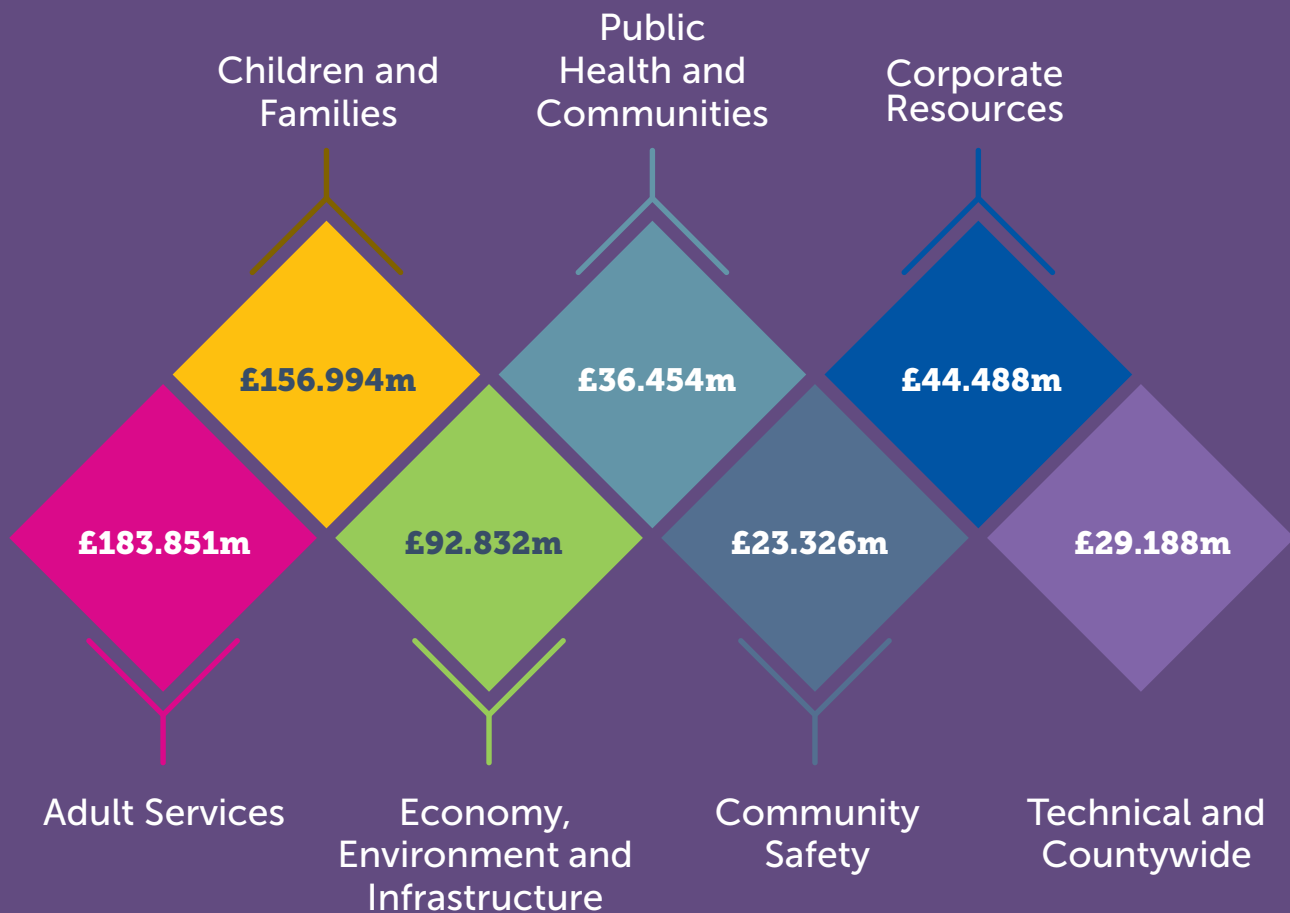


5. Financial Planning and Management

Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address financial challenges?

Our Finances

The revenue budget for 2023/2024 (excluding schools and specific grants) is £567.133 million, broken down as follows:



Total future capital investment approved by the Council in February 2023 is £536.280 million – of which £235.031 million is profiled to take place in 2023/24.

The financial standing of the Council is sound.

- The budget is based on historic spending patterns, robust inflationary and pay assumptions, known cost pressures and targeted areas for service improvement.
- Savings targets are achievable and regularly monitored during the year.
- General Reserves are set at an appropriate level based on an annual risk assessment which is included in the MTFS report to Council.
- The current MTFS does not anticipate making use of the flexible use of capital receipts directive to support revenue expenditure however the Council is open to re-considering this position if circumstances change. The use of capital receipts in this way will require the approval of the County Council.
- The approved Capital Programme is fully funded without the need to take out additional external borrowing and the Council continues to have a policy of repaying existing external debt in full as the loans mature. This policy is reviewed annually.
- The Council has assessed itself against the requirements of CIPFA's Financial Management Code and concluded that processes are in place to ensure compliance with the Code.
- The Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 has been signed off by our auditors Grant Thornton with no significant issues raised.



Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

The Council has a strong track record of setting robust budgets and ensuring that net expenditure is contained within the approved budget, without having to draw on General Reserves. The key to setting robust and achievable budgets is sound financial planning – this has been especially important over the past few years given the lack of longer term financial certainty, a series of one year Financial Settlements from Central Government, the need to invest in service improvement and the additional uncertainty caused by the impact of Brexit and then Covid-19.

Despite this uncertainty, the Council has continued to produce a 4 year MTFS whilst still ensuring that these plans can adapt to changing circumstances during the year. The end result of this detailed financial planning and in-year adaptability are robust and realistic budgets, which are flexible enough to adapt to changes.

The MTFS is developed alongside the Council Strategy to ensure resources are aligned to our strategic priorities for addressing the challenges and opportunities faced by the Council.

Over recent years the Council has strengthened its budget setting process by involving Cabinet Members at an earlier stage. This has been achieved through a series of 'Star Chambers', where the Chief Executive and S151 officer go through individual Directorate's budget proposals with the relevant Executive Director and Cabinet Member. In the last budget setting round it was necessary to have two rounds of Star Chambers given the initial size of the budget gap.

Prior to the Star Chamber sessions, the Strategic Finance Team work proactively with each Directorate's Senior Management Team to identify potential budget pressures and savings opportunities. All potential growth items are subject to a rigorous internal challenge from a cross cutting "challenge team" comprising colleagues from Finance, Policy and Performance and Procurement in

order to ensure the pressures are unavoidable and that a consistent approach is taken, before the Star Chamber process commences.

The decisions of the Star Chamber are then consolidated into a draft budget, which is further considered by the Corporate Leadership Team and the relevant Cabinet members. At this stage there is often a budget gap pending the announcement of the provisional Finance Settlement in mid-December. It is at this stage that the Council launches its public consultation – in the recent budget round the consultation period commenced on 8th December 2022 for a 4 week period. The findings of this public consultation are presented to Cabinet and Council prior to the final MTFS approval.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) also undertakes a budget scrutiny process, which in recent years has taken the form of a full day meeting, where COSC members have the opportunity to ask questions of the Leader, Chief Executive, Cabinet Members and Executive Directors. Their findings and recommendations are presented to Cabinet and Council for consideration when agreeing the final budget and MTFS.

Effective financial control

Through a framework of financial management and controls, and despite the financial challenges, the council has achieved a balanced budget for the past seven years.

Budget monitoring is carried out within service areas, with the Financial Management team undertaking a challenge and overview role. Spend against budget is monitored by the Corporate Leadership Team monthly and reported to Cabinet every time it meets, meaning that areas at risk of overspending can be identified early and decisive remedial action taken.

Key financial risks

The highest risk areas continue to be demand led services, especially care for older and vulnerable people, especially Children in Care where demand and cost of care continues to rise. Significant amounts of additional budget have been added to Children's Service each year since 2017 to help address the weaknesses identified in the 2017 Ofsted report. This additional investment and service improvements has resulted in Children's Services moving from "inadequate" to "requires improvement". In order to address the significant overspends that have occurred in Children's Services during this service improvement stage the senior leadership team has developed a financial recovery plan. The senior leadership team meet weekly to review progress against this plan. This is given further impetus by monthly meetings with the s151 officer and the establishment of a Financial Recovery Oversight Group which includes the Leader, the Chief Executive and s151 officer.

Adults Social Care budgets have also increased to meet increasing demand – much of this has been funded from the Adult Social Care Levy and other ring fenced grant funding. In addition an Adult Care Reserve has been established in recent years to cover the budgetary risks associated with fluctuations in demand – the level of this reserve currently stands at just under £12 million. This reserve was created from previous years underspends in Adult Social Care.

Until the current financial year a similar reserve did not exist for Children's Services – this was mainly due to the service not underspending in recent years. In order to address this a £6.2 million Children Reserve was created when setting the 2023/24 budget. In a similar way to the Adult Social Care reserve this will be used to manage fluctuations in demand between years.

"Through a framework of financial management and controls, and despite the financial challenges, the council has achieved a balanced budget for the past seven years".



Working with the Integrated Care System (ICS) and Board (ICB) – Finance Perspective

In Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) has significant joint working arrangements and jointly funded activities with the NHS Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB). At the end of 2022/23 the joint funding will total £193.6m and £1.2m with Gloucestershire Health & Care (GHC) NHS Foundation Trust. We use all Health Act flexibilities (which supports pooled budgets and delegation of functions as standard practice) to support this funding and commissioners and finance teams across health and social care work closely together to ensure robust financial management.

To ensure that the funding flows accurately and efficiently we operate a 'cash flow' basis and this limits the number of invoices that are raised in each organisation that need to be processed and paid. This has been working for several years and works well. Most funding goes through the cash flow with invoices raised at the year end if needed. Monthly meetings are held at an operational finance level, as well as Finance Director level to monitor and assure the process. In addition, a Resources Strategic Group (RSG) also meets on a monthly basis, with the objective of information exchange, sharing best practise and resolving issues.

The ASC structure for Commissioning has a Director of Integration and Heads of Integrated Commissioning for Older People, Mental Health, Disabilities, Housing, Enhanced Independence Offer and Community Services. These are joint posts and jointly funded. The GCC and ICB finance teams support these in their respective organisations. The finance teams do not have joint posts or joint responsibilities; however, they work closely to ensure that the Head of Integrated Commissioning is supported with their joint responsibilities and activities.

The RSG recently commissioned a piece of work across the ISC finance teams to look at finance staff development. As a result, the Gloucestershire ICS Finance Staff Development Plan was launched on the 27th February 2023.

There are 3 workstreams that are being taken forward:

- **Increasing sharing, networking, and collaboration opportunities**
- **To develop our people and nurture talent in Gloucestershire**
- **To promote finance as a career in Gloucestershire**

In pure numbers, NHS finance staff dominate, however GCC finance staff have welcomed the opportunity to support this programme as a way of developing our existing staff, improving staff recruitment and retention and ensuring that different Finance teams gain a better understanding of their partner organisations. The overall aim is to deliver the best possible financial support to the ICS as a whole.

“To ensure that the funding flows accurately and efficiently we operate a 'cash flow' basis and this limits the number of invoices that are raised in each organisation that need to be processed and paid. This has been working for several years and works well.”



Capital investment plans

Consistent with the council's priority to reduce the level of long term debt, and the impact of interest and capital repayments on the revenue budget, the capital programme for 2023/24 and beyond is largely 'capped' at the level of developer contributions, capital grants received and revenue contributions from capital financing budgets, with internal borrowing only being used for key administration priorities.

In order to take advantage of any invest to save or commercial opportunities the Council has created a £50m capital fund for Investment and Transformation Projects. The council is currently looking at using this fund to invest in key projects with partners.

Sources of further information:

Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

Financial Monitoring reports to Cabinet

Statement of Accounts

In order to take advantage of any invest to save or commercial opportunities the Council has created a £50m capital fund for Investment and Transformation Projects.

Key strengths:

- The council is financially viable.
- Track record of delivering significant change.
- There are rigorous processes in place to set a robust budget, monitor expenditure and track savings.

Key areas to develop:

- Maximising opportunities for income generation and commercialism.



6. Capacity for Improvement

*Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities?
Does the council have the capacity to improve?*

Investing in our staff

The council employs 3641 members of staff²⁹ (3226 FTE). Despite significant organisational change over the last few years and the challenges of Covid, last year's staff survey indicates 90% of staff enjoy the work they do, 84% are proud to tell people where they work and 95% of staff know what's expected of them.

Development of current and future leaders continues to be a key focus for the council. There is a rolling programme of leadership and management training courses available. Senior managers come together three times a year for a leadership conference, which provides the opportunity to discuss and understand the latest developments affecting the council / the sector, contribute to strategy, and work collaboratively on problems and issues.

GCC's managers also play a vital role in the performance of our organisation. To help support our managers to develop the essential skills needed to enable them to perform well in their role we have created a manager's framework.

The framework was developed through a series of workshops with managers from across our organisation as well as benchmarking with other organisations, and comprises four core areas; Managing myself; Managing others; Managing the service and Managing the council. The skills selected also help to reinforce our values and align to our vision and ambitions.

The council is also a member of the West Midlands Coaching Pool, developing coaching skills amongst our leaders, as well as offering cost-effective coaching support to those managers leading change around the organisation. We actively participate in the National Graduate Development Programme, offering two placements annually, and retaining a number of graduates on completion of the scheme.

The council is also committed to offering a structured Apprenticeship programme, to develop existing staff, fill skills gaps, and attract others to the council to develop and grow whilst earning. There are currently (as of the end of September 2023) 269 apprenticeships on programme, with roughly 30 to be added to that figure once all the enrolments have been finalised by providers. As part of our commitment to Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) we also offer places in Stepping Up and Flourish which are both positive action development programmes.

Our workforce is key to successfully achieving our goals, and therefore we need to establish a culture of strong leadership and equip our staff with the skills to think innovatively, work across boundaries, work in partnership, and work in an ambiguous and complex climate. We recognise that our focus has been on developing strong leadership and that there have been fewer training opportunities for the wider workforce.

²⁹ As at 1st March 2023. Excludes GFRS, TSS / Temp / Casual / Zero Hrs and agency

Improving employee mental health and wellbeing (H and WB)

Within GCC, anxiety, stress and depression is the largest single cause of long-term sickness absence. Employee absence puts additional pressure on services to the communities we serve and additional strain on remaining staff to cover the work of absent colleagues.

'*Thriving at Work*', the Stevenson/Farmer report into mental health and employers, called on Public Sector bodies to lead by example across employers by adopting what it referred to as enhanced standards. These include increased transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting of sickness absence, as well as ensuring provision of tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help.

To date, we have set up a Health and Wellbeing (H and WB) stakeholder group drawn from across the organisation with a sponsor at CLT to oversee a corporate H and WB plan. We've created a Hub on staffnet and weekly articles giving tips in Talksmart, and produced the H and WB dashboard so directorates can monitor absence and take up of H and WB programmes.

Managers have access to MIND E-learning 'managing mental health at work' & 'Wellbeing conversations toolkit' – improving disclosure and discussion. We've made H and WB conversations part of the recorded process of all staff PDR's and re-stated our commitment to our in-house counselling service and our Employee Assistance Programme. We provide free flu vaccines for everyone not eligible for a free one under the NHS, and GCC has also gained accreditation as a Mindful Employer and a 'Healthy Employer'.

In our Staff survey 2022, 81% of staff felt that the council supports their health and wellbeing at work. This question was first asked in the staff survey for 2019/20 and the score was 77%, in 2021/22 it went as high as 85%, before landing last year at 81%.

Building capacity for the future

Workforce development is an area of continuous improvement, particularly in areas where we need to invest in future capacity. Recruitment and retention and an ageing workforce are issues which we are managing in particular areas of the authority, particularly social care, legal services and highways.

There has been considerable investment in frontline social workers within both children's and adult's social care over recent years, but recruiting and retaining social workers continues to be a challenge. We are utilising the apprenticeship levy to fund training for staff in areas where we struggle to recruit individuals with the right skills. There are also initiatives to use other resources available to us, for example the use of fire fighters as first responders for vulnerable and isolated Telecare users (see case study). There are significant challenges linked to demographic growth and the broader skills needed for a resilient economy which our Council Strategy (and emerging Economic Strategy) are trying to address.

Project and Programme Management – PMO review

We are in the process of reviewing our approach to our 'Portfolio Management Office' (PMO) function and the support and oversight of projects and change. Our model has evolved significantly over the last decade, from a controlled centralised model to a 'Hub and Spoke' Directorate approach, with higher level central oversight and support. Recommendations for formalising this evolution have been produced and discussed, but we are keen to use this Peer Challenge as part of our feedback gathering for improvement.

Staff wellbeing



81% of staff feel the council supports their health and wellbeing (2022)

Agile Working

Our vision is to become a council that empowers and enables its staff to work where, when, and how they choose – within a framework that meets business needs and promotes a healthy work / life balance.

The concept of ‘agile’ or ‘hybrid’ working in Gloucestershire is not new. Many staff were working flexibly prior to the pandemic, but lockdown restrictions required all staff to adapt quickly to working differently and accelerated many of our plans for the supporting ICT and property infrastructure.

We have seen many benefits to this for the council, customers, and staff, including improved productivity and more flexibility for staff to balance work with personal commitments. There have also been environmental benefits from reduced commuting / business miles and substantially less printing. We recognise that we need to be a modern employer that promotes flexibility to help us tackle budgetary and recruitment/retention challenges, and therefore have a programme of work to help achieve this, which is actively supported by Cabinet and senior management.

We have an agile toolkit to support structured conversations within services about how, when and where each team will work. It provides a framework in which services can establish and review their own agile plans, ensuring consistency whilst recognising that one approach doesn’t fit all:

Figure 1: The council’s agile vision and five principles.

We’re working towards being a council that empowers and enables our staff to work where, when and how they choose - within a framework that meets our business needs and promotes a healthy work/life balance.

Agile working is for everyone but will look different depending on business need

Office based staff will be able to work remotely at home or from a range of GCC buildings - 2-3 days a week on average

Teams will have allocated ‘home zones’ with unallocated desks

Staff will have the flexibility to work at a time that suits operational needs and customer access

Agile working is an enabler, not an end in itself



To support this, we have made changes to our policies and procedures to enable teams to re-think how they deliver services to be more responsive to needs. Our corporate training offer is being updated to reflect our new ways of working and to develop the behaviours and skills we need. We recognise that to become an agile organisation will require further culture change – shifting mindset and behaviours from a traditional to an agile approach.

Providing suitable buildings and workspaces is a key enabler for the culture change required. This is a great opportunity for us to redesign our offices so that they better meet our needs for how we utilise the space now. So far, our focus has been on providing teams with workspaces suited to the activity that brings them into the office and co-locating interdependent teams closer together. We have also begun modernising our buildings to make them more comfortable, inspiring, and accessible, including the creation of locality drop-ins; increased space and innovative facilities for meeting and collaboration; improved shower and changing facilities as well as secure cycle storage to encourage sustainable travel options; an upgraded accessible council chamber; and cafes with informal meeting spaces. This work will continue over the next few years, learning from pilots already in place.

Through better utilisation of our buildings, we are also identifying opportunities to share our offices with partner organisations, increasing joint working and income generation. The ICB joined us within Shire Hall in August this year, as they take up an opportunity to work alongside us rather than in a location outside the city centre. Also, core teams of the Fire Service have moved into accommodation beside Shire Hall, making further efficiencies possible and a closer working relationship culturally.

The right ICT infrastructure and equipment, as well as support and training for staff to get the most out of it, is also a critical enabler for agile. The council has rapidly implemented a range of technology to better support effective and collaborative agile working,

such as video conferencing solutions; a digital postal service; increased mobile devices; and Microsoft 365 productivity and collaboration tools.

Development of delivery partnerships

The council has a mature approach to the commissioning of services. Our approach is to consider the best delivery model depending on the nature of the service delivered, evolving that model as appropriate. This has included developing creative partnership arrangements.

For example, the Digi Hubs project aims to address digital exclusion through forming collaborative partnerships with voluntary community groups and establishing digital hubs. GCC partnered with the Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF) – who had piloted a successful digi hubs model in the Forest of Dean. A transferable hub delivery model was created as online toolkit (a fleet of resources and guides to help community partners set up and run their own hubs). Community partners were then onboarded into the project one locality at a time. The project has now successfully onboarded with community partners in every locality across Gloucestershire. The project has so far seen the launch of 7 hubs.

Also when re-shaping our Children's and Families Centres in 2016, a network locality model was developed. Each service reflects the local characteristics and differing needs, providing skilled family support and interventions to families who will most benefit from it. We also supported local communities to develop a range of support operating from other existing children's centre bases, including early education and childcare, and open access activities delivered by voluntary and community groups. This local approach enables people to develop services and solutions that suit local circumstances.

Shared Services

The council has a number of shared services arrangements with district councils to ensure a more joined up, accessible and efficient service. We have a Memorandum of Understanding with Gloucester City Council (and until recently shared offices), with the aim to deliver efficiencies through sharing several back office functions. Other examples include a shared Internal Audit and Risk Service (ARA) with Gloucester City and Stroud District Councils.

The council and Tewkesbury Borough Council share a **Public Services Centre**, along with Police, health, and local third sector organisations, to provide a single access point for customers. This was the first arrangement in the country where the Department of Work and Pensions agreed for Jobcentre Plus services to be provided at a local authority office. It has resulted in improvements in sharing information and identifying vulnerability and, where necessary, has allowed the organisations to act quickly to put early interventions in place to keep people safe.



Key strengths:

- Staff engagement through multiple forums.
- Welfare support resources for staff.
- Apprenticeship take up and making the most of the levy available to develop our people.



Key areas to develop:

- ICT infrastructure improvements
- Traded Services with academies, as schools move from the maintained model.
- Embedding Social Value and achieving measurable benefits.



Gloucestershire Social Work Academy

'Grow our own' - transforming the recruitment and retention of children's social workers.

During the last decade, the council recognised a chronic recruitment and retention issue amongst its social care workforce resulting in an increased reliance on agency social workers with the inevitable impact on costs and high rates of turnover. This reflected the national trend of higher demand for social workers, insufficient number of students completing their training and increasing numbers choosing to leave the profession. Like many others, the council had to think creatively about how we attract the right candidates.

In response the Gloucestershire Social Work Academy (SWA) was launched in 2019. The SWA has a clear vision for their social workers – to 'grow our own'. To stand out regionally as a centre of excellence offering a comprehensive programme of learning opportunities and to provide a structured career path and continuing professional development at all levels. The Social Work Academy is a symbol of Gloucestershire's commitment and investment in children's social workers and allied professionals.

The Social Work Academy has become a key driver of improvement within Children's Social Care, through the direct delivery and facilitation of learning and development programmes to commissioning external trainers and subject experts in the field. Our partnership with Research in Practice means that social workers have access to resources and events that support evidence-informed practice. Most recently the SWA has begun the roll out of systemic practice training in partnership with the Centre for Systemic Social Work, which will bring new opportunities to make Gloucestershire a child friendly county.

Over recent years we have increased our routes to attract and recruit to support our 'grow your own' strategies, particularly in Children's Social Care. This includes:

- **attendance at Compass Events, local university job fairs, radio and DAX campaigns to target passive job seekers around Gloucestershire and neighbouring councils.**
- **recruiting overseas and retaining the majority of these workers.**
- **using the social worker apprenticeship to provide a career pathway for unqualified staff to move into qualified social worker role.**
- **reviewing salaries annually to ensure we remain competitive.**

There has been significant work to improve the experience of candidates applying to our social work roles, with faster application to start dates and improved onboarding experience, which has increased our 'conversion rate' for new candidates from interview to start date.

We also engaged a marketing agency to support us with the development of the employer brand. The brand will enable the council to have a consistent message in the marketplace as an 'employer of choice'. Staff focus groups led the development of social media and advertising campaigns, with videos featuring our staff promoting working for the council. Embodying this new approach, the Social Work Academy is committed to creating a learning culture to support the development of outstanding practitioners and leaders who affect positive change and the best outcomes for children, young people and their families in Gloucestershire.

Sources of further information:

Gloucestershire County Council's Social Work Academy – addressing recruitment and retention in children's services | Local Government Association



Apprenticeships

GCC's apprenticeship provision has matured successfully over the last four years whereby we are evidencing the positive impact that apprenticeships for new recruits and upskilling existing staff is having.

At any given time we have between 250-300 staff members studying apprenticeship standards, ranging between levels 2-7. Between April 2019 – March 2023 we have had 674 apprenticeship starts as per our public sector annual apprenticeship report spending £2,375,000 in that period of our apprenticeship levy.

We have seen successes in programmes such as;

- **School leavers public sector apprenticeship programme**
- **Social Work apprenticeships (Adult's & Children's)**
- **Teacher apprenticeship (New in 2022 to the authority)**
- **Public Health Practitioner**
- **Trading Standards Practitioner**
- **Solicitor**
- **Operational Firefighter**

We have also seen good conversion rates for apprentices completing their apprenticeship and securing substantive roles within the Authority, including senior admin posts, and one of our apprentices completing their level 2, then gaining a level 6 Public Health Practitioner Apprentice post with us.

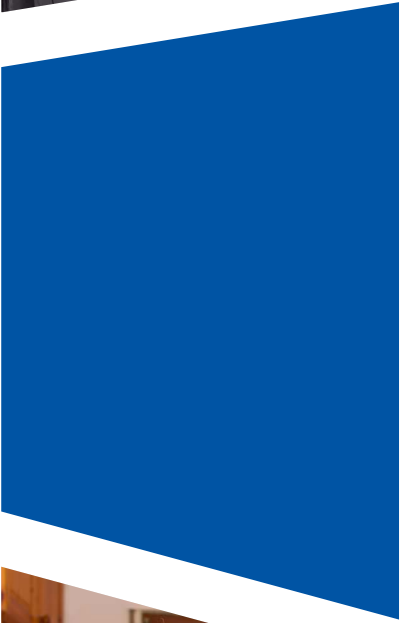
New to 2023 we have started with our Solicitor programme where four of our Paralegals will be starting their 3 year legal qualifying programme, to support our grown our own model. One particular area we are really proud of as we were an early adopter of the facility, is our apprenticeship levy transfer supporting individuals and local businesses across Gloucestershire by funding their apprenticeship training. Since April 2019 we have funded over £900,000 worth of training across Gloucestershire.

Our aim has also been to increase accessibility to apprenticeships across Gloucestershire and we have been able to help other large levy paying organisations to support other employers, much the same as we have.

We are now spending over £1m annually on our apprenticeship training and spending our full allocation of Levy transfer to other Gloucestershire businesses in excess of £300,000 per year.

Sources of further information:

[Apprenticeships - Gloucestershire County Council](#)



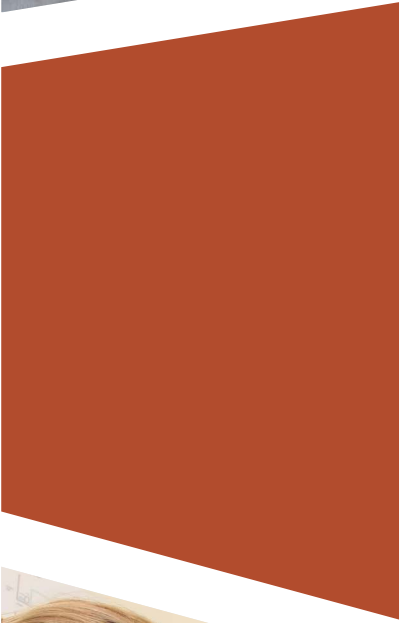
7. Areas for local focus

The council have indicated that, within this, they would welcome an emphasis being placed upon the following:

- **The council's effectiveness in leading partners towards achieving the vision for future growth in Gloucestershire.**
- **How effectively the council is aligning its corporate resources to drive transformation and improvement organisationally whilst supporting improvement within specific areas such as Fire, Children's Services and Adults.**

These issues are cross-cutting and woven into all of the outcomes and issues listed above.

We welcome your thoughts and feedback on our progress.





Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL