

Ambitions Board – Director’s Report

May 2024

- 1.0 This report summarises activity and progress on the ambitions plan since the last meeting of the CSC Ambitions Board in March, as well as setting out areas for future focus.
- 2.0 The tables in appendix 1 below set out how we are progressing in the nine ambitions. The sections highlight what is working well in each ambition and set out those areas where further action is required and planned to achieve the ambitions as stated.
- 3.0 Progress on the plan continues, with some variability between ambitions in regard to engagement and pace. Following on from the confirmation of leads for ambition 6, we have seen good early progress in this ambition, with a clear sense of ownership of the aims and investment in the need for change, and in the solutions required to evidence improving outcomes.
- 4.0 Highlights from the current period.
 - 4.1 Performance across the system demonstrates a number of areas of improving practice, but is also characterised by inconsistency, by area and across the wider service. Work is ongoing with colleagues in the performance team to review and update the monthly dashboard to provide a clearer focus on the journey of the child through services, and to allow better insight into relative performance across district areas. Work within the QA service will also look to provide a better analysis of poorer performing teams, enabling leaders to focus remedial actions where they are needed most.
 - 4.2 The service wide focus on proportionate intervention is showing signs of embedding. We have seen a steady and consistent reduction in our children in care numbers (down around 6% in the last 6 months), led in particular by reducing the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds entering care. This is taking place in the context of increasing care numbers nationally. Similarly, we are seeing reducing numbers of child protection plans (down 15% in the last 6 months), as managers respond to the challenge of ensuring that plans are agreed on the basis of clear risk assessment rather than process escalation. Further work in this area is planned, including a leadership development session looking at live case decision making, and dip sample audits, to provide assurance that decision making remains safe and child focused.

- 4.3 The roll out of a county legal gateway panel is embedding, with weekly panels now chaired by the service director or assistant directors, scrutinising all requests to use pre proceedings or to issue court proceedings. This approach enables leaders to model consistent and proportionate thresholds for legal action, whilst providing the opportunity to scrutinise the quality of practice for children who are at the highest risk of harm.
- 4.4 The use of systemic approaches is feeling more embedded and productive, particularly across the leadership team. Weekly systemic sessions, facilitated by all managers on a rolling basis, are helping to de-mystify some systemic concepts and help us to think about how we can use theory to promote change. The next challenge is to ensure that this work is having a similar impact at team and practitioner level. To support this, we are talking to Warrington CSC, via the sector led improvement route, to understand the success they have had in this area. GCC continues to lead on the development of a regional centre of systemic excellence across the southwest.
- 4.5 The remodelled structure for CSC went live on 2nd April, with a smooth and well-planned transition. Transfer of children on LL was seamless and the new duty and allocation processes are in operation. We will continue to monitor the impact of changes as structures embed.
- 4.6 Support from Wiltshire Council, via the regional sector led improvement fund continues. Whilst this work has progressed slower than we would have liked, we hope to be able to report on outcomes at the next board. This work aligns with ongoing reviews of our levels of intervention document, and the review of the early help strategy.
- 4.7 We continue to make good progress in establishing a stable permanent workforce. Turnover rate for social workers dropped to 13% in April, the lowest figure in over three years. Agency worker numbers are also the lowest since 2021 and the vacancy rate is below 20%.
- 4.8 The social work academy continues to support improving practice across the service, with a focus on recruiting and supporting newly qualified social workers. Induction and engagement events are well established, providing a focus for new GCC staff as well as an opportunity to promote the GCC offer for social workers. The academy is launching a revised learning and development offer, focused on 'secure foundations' and 'building expertise'. The team manager development programme is underway and initial feedback and engagement is positive.
- 4.9 Children's services and corporate representatives met with colleagues from Bristol and Somerset last week to hear about how they have developed a database which supports a single multi agency of view of the child. This is the first step in creating something similar in the Gloucestershire context.
- 4.10 Work continues to develop the family hub approach, with a number of engagement sessions taking place with CSC leaders. A multi-agency development session, as part of children's services extended leadership team has also taken place, with the aim of firming up ideas around how all agencies can contribute to the family hub offer.

5.0 Key priorities for the next period

- 5.1 Finalising and launching our early help strategy and levels of intervention documents, and incorporating feedback from the Wiltshire diagnosis of GCC early help services.
- 5.2 Formal launch of the revised practice framework.
- 5.3 Continuing to develop our family hub offer and expanding our locality focus.
- 5.4 Reviewing and refreshing our QA framework, including exploration of team diagnostics and multi-agency practice evaluation.
- 5.5 Further development of our successful social work academy, to support residential staff and other professional groups.

Paul Shallcross – Service Director

May 2024

Appendix 1 - Ambitions Summary.

Ambition 1 - children and families receive the right help at the right time from the right professional.
Working well
The development of the family hubs approach is picking up pace, supported by an extended leadership meeting involving key partners to seek their commitment and input into the ongoing development work.
Sector led improvement support around the Gloucestershire early help service from Wiltshire is underway – report and recommendations due end of June
Work around proportionate intervention with the team manager cohort has begun, with initial session positively received.
Front door review is continuing – looking at streamlining and rationalising processes to reduce the demand and ensure that the service is dealing with the right children.
Priority action areas.
Delay to the launch of the EH strategy due to hold ups in building web pages and creating an animation.
CSC leadership extended meeting is taking place 22/05 with a focus on developing a shared understanding of thresholds for intervention at section 17 and section 47 – utilising case studies to develop a shared narrative.
Levels of intervention document is under review – meeting reinstated following a pause to incorporate the impact of WT 2023.

Ambition 2 Leaders and managers at every level will understand and lead practice which is consistently good.
Working well
TMs development programme (growing excellent managers) is underway, with three sessions completed so far (2 cohorts per session). Further sessions planned and diarised.
Coaching for TMs – potential training providers have been identified and funding is secured.
Positive meetings with the performance team have taken place and an updated draft dashboard is under development.
CSC practice framework is finalised and with a designer prior to publication this month.
Priority action areas.
Work to update the quality assurance framework is underway – update will build on existing best practice and adapt to the Gloucestershire context. Draft to be agreed by end of June.
Cracking quality webinars – sharing learning and quality updates (CSC and partnership) with practitioners will start in June.

Ambition 3 - we will utilise the strength of family networks and communities to support children who cannot live safely with their parents.
Working well
The experts by experience group continues to develop via co-production, with nine parents having attended sessions – group name agreed (ICE) and future meetings planned.
New FGC coordinators are in their induction and will be contributing to the newly named service (Family Meeting Service).
SGO pathway on LL now in place and ready to launch
Priority action areas.
Youth support contract is out for tender – this will include delivery of community-based support options.
Comprehensive review of the government kinship strategy is underway, which will consider how we fund, promote and support our special guardians in the context of central government proposals.

Ambition 4 - our children in care and care leavers will have permanent and stable homes, built on love.
Working well
Working groups are in place looking at placement sufficiency and stability
The local offer for care leavers is being revised following feedback from care leavers and examination of best practice across the region.
Training and development offer for personal advisors is being created with support from the social work academy
We have recruited team managers for all six care leaver teams.
The regional front door for fostering recruitment has been launched.
Priority action areas.
Corporate parenting strategy is close to completion and launch.
Supported lodgings project is launched and the first assessments are underway
We are continuing to scrutinise children in residential and high-cost placements to ensure that placements are appropriate, quality of support is high and value for money is achieved.
We are focusing on ensuring that more of our care leavers are engaged positively in education employment or training, with close scrutiny and support via the CPG.

Ambition 5 - Our workforce is skilled and well supported to develop and grow
Working well
Increasing focus on our digital and ICT priorities, and how they can support our workforce – plan on a page launched.
Clear pathways which set out our learning and development offer are in the final stages of development – including ‘secure foundations’ and ‘developing expertise’ pathways.
Return to social work pathway offer signed off and ready to launch.
Responses to the staff survey under development on an area basis.
Priority action areas.
Plans to enhance the role of the social work academy continue to develop, with focus on collaboration with ASC, how we support the growing GCC residential care offer and potential links with SEND QA.
Marketplace event to take place 15/05 to promote roles with GCC – hosted at the SWA.

Ambition 6 - to have strong multi agency partnerships that work together to impact positively upon the lives of children, young people and families.

Working well

New leads for this ambition are in place and bringing ideas and energy to progressing the positive impact of partnership working.

Work has started to finesse and improve the partnership priorities based on input from a varied group of MA contributors.

Priority action areas.

Work will focus on understanding and developing a MA partnership approach based on the following key areas:

- Shared language
- Mutual respect
- Improved assessment of need
- Effective escalation
- Improved communication
- Clear governance and information sharing

Ambition 7 : To reduce the number of children that are living and experiencing neglect

Working well

Ambition lead has attended the GSCP quality and improvement subgroup to highlight support needed in progressing this ambition.

Discussions underway in EH and health around how we can quantify neglect from our current systems, and how we can understand the use of the quality of care toolkit in assessing neglect, particularly in the early help arena.

Priority action areas.

Development of a neglect strategy and subgroup to sit within the GSCP.

Discussions to take place with public health around our understanding of neglect related issues at a population level to understand the need across the county and to inform future developments.

Ambition 8 - to strengthen our practice when working with families where domestic abuse is a feature

Working well

Operation encompass – audit tool has been developed and is being rolled out.

Domestic homicide reviews – representation from CSC agreed and plans in place to share learning with within the service.

Training around domestic abuse is now incorporated into the newly restructured social work academy offer.

Priority action areas.

Scoping work has started to consider how we can better track and monitor our work with DA via Liquid Logic.

Ambition 9 - To take action and collectively safeguard our children and young people from all forms of exploitation and going missing from their home.

Working well

Diagnostic of the CE team has been completed by AD Julie Miles and has been shared with the team. Final plan, produced with the team, to be completed by end of April 2024.

GSCP executive has signed off a recommendation to review the Gloucestershire child exploitation strategy, with a view to developing a harm outside the home strategy.

My safety plan conference launched as an alternative to CP processes for harm outside the home – positive initial feedback but further evaluation needed.

Priority action areas.

Re-draft of current missing protocol will be facilitated via the GSCP business unit and the missing and exploitation subgroup.

Training rolled out during May to support improvement in the role of missing champions – jointly facilitated by champions and ambassadors.