

**Gloucestershire County Council Budget Consultation  
2021/22**

<b>Schools' Forum Date</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> January 2021
<b>Type of Decision</b>	For information and comment as part of the consultation
<b>Background Documents</b>	<p>Council Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2022/23 Council Report: 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020</p> <p>Cabinet Report: 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020: MTFS 2021/22 to 2023/24. Link for full report – Item 6 on the Agenda</p> <p><a href="#">Gloucestershire County Council Cabinet report 16 December 2020: MTFS 2021/22</a></p>
<b>Author</b>	<p>Sue Hall, Finance Business Partner</p> <p><i>Extracts of report presented by:</i> Paul Blacker: Director of Finance Steve Mawson: Executive Director of Corporate Resources Jayne Fuller: Corporate Finance Manager</p>
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To inform the Schools Forum of the budget strategy and draft details for 2021/22 and the MTFS covering the period 2021/22 to 2023/24.
<b>Key Recommendations</b>	That the report is noted and that any comments are fed back through the Council's consultation process by 15 <sup>th</sup> January 2021.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	The report covers the Council's overall budget and the specific financial implications for Children and Families.

**Summary of Information**

The attached report is the summary MTFS position presented to Cabinet on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 for the whole Council. The link to the detailed report is included above but a number of specific annexes relating to the overall budget and specifically to Children and Families are attached for information. These include:-

- Annex 2: Budget Summary by Service Area for the Council & budget movements in services for Children and Families
- Annex 1.2 - Children and Families Commissioning Intentions 2021/22

In summary it is proposed that Children and Families achieve cost reductions of £0.116 million and receive cost increases of £9.443 million, a net increase in budget of £9.327 million. The Council's financial planning cycle has recognised the continued pressure on the children's and families budget during 2020/21. The forecast overspend at October was £14.648 million but included within these figures is the forecast additional cost of the impact of COVID-19 on budgets which totals £6.979 million giving an underlying over-spend of £7.669 million and this is reflected in the investment being made.

## Annex 2 – Budget Summary by Service Area

### Medium Term Financial Strategy – 2021/22 Budget – Overall Summary

Budget Area	Approved 2020-21 Budget	Removal of 2020-21 One Off Budget Adjustments	Agreed Budget Transfers between Service Areas	MTFS 2020/21 Base Budget	Pay Inflation Costs	Cost Increases	Cost Reductions	Proposed 2021/22 Budget	Cash Increase / Decrease	Percentage Increase / Decrease
	£'000	£000	£000	£'000	£000	£000	£000	£'000	£000	%
<b>Programme Budget Areas</b>										
Adults	150,490	-	341	150,831	1,031	6,964	-3,713	155,113	4,282	2.84%
Vulnerable Children	100,694	-1,761	-698	98,235	1,131	5,631	-4	104,993	6,758	6.88%
Other Children Services	17,970	-	339	18,309	281	2,400	-112	20,878	2,569	14.03%
Economy, Environment and Infrastructure	72,553	-4,505	2,660	70,708	453	4,523	-447	75,237	4,529	6.41%
Community Safety	19,519	-	-	19,519	374	129	-13	20,009	490	2.51%
Prevention & Wellbeing	34,387	-60	-61	34,266	45	1,123	-171	35,263	997	2.91%
Corporate Resources	35,066	-2,110	939	33,895	734	923	-961	34,591	696	2.05%
Technical & Countywide	37,504	498	-3,520	34,482	30	2,085	-2,223	34,374	-108	-0.31%
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>468,183</b>	<b>-7,938</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>460,245</b>	<b>4,079</b>	<b>23,778</b>	<b>-7,644</b>	<b>480,458</b>	<b>20,213</b>	<b>4.39%</b>

## 2021/22 Children and Families Budget - Vulnerable Children

	Cost Increases £000	Cost Reductions £000	£000
<b><u>Budget Changes:</u></b>			
Approved MTFS 2020/21 Budget			100,694
Removal of 2020/21 One Off Budget Increase			-1,761
Agreed Service Budget Transfers			-698
<b>Starting Budget (2020/21 Revised Budget)</b>			<b>98,235</b>
<b><u>Cost Increases</u></b>			
Pay Inflation	859		
Additional Pay Inflation (0.75%)	272		
Agency Social Workers additional costs - Based on an average of 65 agency staff in established posts across the year, reduced from 100 agency staff last year. The funding was allocated on a one-off basis in 20/21 so a further one-off bid is required to cover the on-going costs	1,000		
External Placements. Rise in number and cost of placements - the increase is based on a total children in care population of 760 with 39%, 296 in external placement at a unit price of £103,600. This requires an additional £4.017m to be added to the current budget. Current placement numbers are 317, excluding C19, and will be linked to the in-house fostering service which should reduce the number of external placements. £1m to be found from 20/21 MTFS bids held back	3,000		
Child Protection Conference Chairs/IRO's. Cost pressure to cover staff regrading to bring them into line with team managers (£111k); also covers the cost of ICT equipment for student social workers in the academy (£30k)	141		
Fostering/Adoption/SGO & Child Arrangement Allowances. Child allowances based on 20/21 increase 2.05%, carers fees 0.7% (May CPI), contract 2%. Increase is against the budget which will cover number of allowances as follows:- Fostering 417, Child Arrangement Orders 23, SGOs 390, Adoption 174.	233		
SGO'S Increased Numbers. Forecast July £340k O/S. Activity increased from 40 starters estimated to 73 in 19/20. 70 new SGOs assumed in 20/21 and on-going. The model is based on the actual numbers at the start of the year 20/21 (390) less estimated leavers (17) and starters (70) which are profiled over the year. This has reduced by £78k equivalent to 9 SGOs	875		
Child Protection Case costs - Increase required in the non-legal disbursement budget for child protection cases. Cost of legal fees for expert advice has increased due to an increase in care proceedings. Overspend in 19/20 £236k with £100k added into the budget through the MTFS in 20/21.	100		
<b>One Off Cost Increases</b>			
Interim Commissioning /Operational Staff (One-off). Delayed recruitment to posts due to Ofsted inspection being delayed due to COVID-19 - timing of recruitment will impact on funding required.	282		
<b><u>Cost Reductions</u></b>			
Income Target		-4	
<b>TOTAL NET CHANGE</b>	<b>6,762</b>	<b>-4</b>	<b>6,758</b>
<b>Children &amp; Families - Vulnerable Children Budget 2021/22</b>			<b>104,993</b>

2021/22 Children and Families Budget - Other Services

	Cost Increases £000	Cost Reductions £000	£000
Approved MTFS 2020/21 Budget			17,970
Removal of 2020/21 One Off Budget Increase			-
Agreed Service Budget Transfers			339
Starting Budget (2020/21 Revised Budget)			<u>18,309</u>

**Budget Changes:**

**Cost Increases**

Pay Inflation	210	
Additional Pay Inflation (0.75%)	71	
Home to School Transport Inflation - Costs have been increasing as routes are retendered and this will have included the new living wage (NLW) potential costs since no increases have been given out to providers. A 2% increase in costs would require £239k.	200	
Home to School Transport - Current overspend is forecast at £1.6m (excluding COVID-19 costs), market is struggling to maintain standards and new contracts are submitted at a higher cost. SEN routes are predicted to increase by 236 between Jan 20 and Jan 22. Measures being taken to reduce over-spend include reviewing high cost transport for alternative providers/options; cutting any discretionary services, potential for in-house service; solo routes; ticket prices and also to develop the market	2,000	
Supporting Children with SEND - Increase in number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) assumed at 300 to 350 a year and 450 CYP with SEN support - additional staff required to support this need and will include 1 FTE SEN support (RB1), 2 FTE EHCPs (Grade 10), 2 FTE Assistant Education Psychologist	200	

**Cost Reductions**

Education Pensions: Reduce the budget based on an assessment of the reduction in no. of pensioners and spouses based on age and trends		-100
Income Target		-12

**TOTAL NET CHANGE**

<u>2,681</u>	<u>-112</u>	<u>2,569</u>
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**Children & Families - Other Services Budget 2021/22**

<u>20,878</u>
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\* This budget excludes the ringfenced Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

## **Annex 1.2 - Children and Families Commissioning Intentions 2021/22**

### **Introduction**

The Council has wide ranging responsibilities for services for children, young people and families; this includes leading and co-ordinating all local partners to ensure outcomes for children and young people improve. In 2020/21 the total budget for Children's Services excluding the Dedicated Schools Grant was £118.6 million; this included other grants and funding from formula/Council Tax. The strategic direction for Children's Services is set by the local Families Framework, which is currently being replaced by a new Children and Families Plan when combined together with the Council Strategy, identifies a continuing need to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable.

### **Background**

Since our last Ofsted inspection in February 2017, Gloucestershire's Children's Services have been on an improvement journey - 'Building the Best'. This improvement plan sets out how we are bringing about the necessary improvements to services for children and young people across Gloucestershire and to ensure clarity and direction for Children's Services, our partners and everyone who needs to be involved in our transformation journey.

Following seven subsequent monitoring visits and the most recent Ofsted Focus visit in October 2020, we are now in the final preparations for a full inspection within the next few months. It is acknowledged that Children's Services continue to be on a very structured improvement journey and whilst there are some strong signs of improvement, the recent Focus visit saw an improvement in the pace of change over the past six months, however there is still work to be done to ensure there is consistent practice and performance. The service is very clear as to the main areas that require focus in readiness for the full Ofsted inspection, and dedicated work is underway to ensure this remains a priority. There is a communication and implementation strategy to prepare all staff and partners for the pending inspection, so Gloucestershire has every opportunity to demonstrate all the improvement work that has taken place, how practice has changed, and the wider long term vision for Children's Services.

### **Strategic Direction**

Strategic priorities within our commissioning intentions have been reshaped as an inevitable consequence of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We have taken on additional responsibilities and ensured the market has been supported and managed, to allow services to continue where possible. For some areas within the market there has been a 40% reduction in capacity, GCC has worked hard to mitigate these enforced changes, by supporting providers to access additional funding, which in turn has provided much needed stability during these anxious times. This includes some contract extensions for 2021 which have been awarded following council processes.

Additional responsibilities taken on by Children's Integrated Commissioning in direct response to the pandemic include:

- PPE - co-ordination for the department, partners and providers for Children Services
- COVID-19 children fund
- Emergency Assistance Grant - for GCC

In addition a Vulnerable Children Cell (VCC) chaired by the AD for integrated commissioning, brings together a number of agencies, partners and voluntary sector colleagues, to review the impact of COVID -19 on families and identify the "new Vulnerable " who's circumstances have changed due to the impact of COVID -19. The VCC highlights areas of need, delivers coherent messages to partners and families about support and resources available.

The following are activities coordinated through the VCC:

- Summer programme to support the reduction of 40% activity - by commissioning targeted provision
- Holiday hunger programme - local provision with Councillors, targeted work within the holiday programmes - developing a Food booklet for all families and professionals - FSM voucher scheme for Oct half term - " no child in Gloucestershire will go hungry "
- Fuel poverty - via the Emergency Assistance Grant

- Christmas programme - for food and activities
- Early years sufficiency - to support vulnerable families under 2yrs - especially babies
- ICON - champagne
- See Hear Respond - Barnardo's national programme
- Data review of new FSM - children accessing education and early years settings

### **Joint Commissioning**

The County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group are committed to an integrated commissioning model that spans both children and adult's services. Within the Children and Families Commissioning Hub we have much to be proud of with regards to how we approach commissioning across our children's health and social care systems. Our shared approach and commitment to jointly commission directly contributes to improving outcomes for our most vulnerable children, young people and their families. As part of the single vision for Gloucestershire, local partners are committed to the development of a highly aspirational vision for Gloucestershire's children and young people. It will be informed by the views of children and young people in both its development and delivery phases through the Child Friendly County project. The Health and Wellbeing Board provides strategic oversight and direction. This includes our strategic aspirations around improving outcomes for not only children, young people and their families, but for the wider partnerships and Children's Services workforce.

We are now just entering into the third year of our Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Gloucestershire, which initially set out our revised blueprint to improve Gloucestershire Children's Services over a three year period. The Sufficiency Strategy aligns with our improvement journey for improving front line practice, especially in planning for and where appropriate, preventing children and young people from coming into care. The number of children and young people in care has increased, and the strategy sets out how we intend to purchase placements, to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people, and use our resources in the most efficient and effective way.

We have made progress in some areas to implement the Sufficiency Strategy by embedding oversight and compliance through the implementation of a number of panels, which have been expanded to take on the additional challenges due to COVID -19. As part of this work and to ensure we embed commissioning into practice, a number of tools have been created to support practice and partners with this new approach.

The NHS Long Term Plan, 2019 – 2024 sets out the vision for the NHS redesign of services to better support, and properly join-up care at the right time in the optimal care setting. Our local commissioning intentions reflect the national priorities in the long term plan, in particular for children – reducing health inequalities for children and young people including children in care and care leavers, faster access to community and crisis mental health services; ensuring children with learning disabilities and/or autism live happier, healthier and longer lives with timely support to children and families; and improving the health of children and young people with long term conditions.

Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Board has published a new coherent narrative of change, (Gloucestershire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2030), which creates a universal strategy for the county by setting out our future ambitions to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of all Gloucestershire residents and reduce inequalities. The Board oversees two linked strategic initiatives of particular relevance to our emerging Youth Support Strategy within the Children and Families Commissioning Hub:

- The development of a single, strategic shared plan/vision for all children and young people in Gloucestershire. This complements existing plans on social care practice, safeguarding and the welfare of the most vulnerable, with a wider focus on the safety, health and well-being of all children and young people.
- The Child Friendly Gloucestershire youth engagement and research project, which has been working closely with the third sector to engage a wide range of young people, host a platform for their diverse voices, and report back in 2020. The overarching aim is to create an infrastructure through which to have a continuing, authentic dialogue with young people on the scope and quality of our offer.

Working through its recently revised multi-agency child safeguarding and commissioning arrangements, Gloucestershire continues to review its approach towards Early Help, which will set out the vision with our partners to join up current activity and providers of early help to develop a coherent partnership plan that

meets the needs of children and their families at a lower level of need to stop the escalation into specialist services.

The key drivers for this plan will be to intervene at the earliest point for the children or family, to be outcome focused in our approach, using evidenced based practice where possible, build resilience and above all keep families together where it is safe to do so. The Early Help Strategy once implemented will deliver some of the biggest changes to families, by identifying and responding to need in a timely and proportionate manner, which in turn will reduce the pressures on statutory services. Getting this element of the continuum right is critical to not only turning the curve on improving outcomes for children and families but also for the wider improvement journey in Gloucestershire.

Commissioning has a key role to play within early help services, not just with the external Children and Families Centres, but also to contribute towards a shared commissioning and investment strategy in this space, across all areas of the continuum including working with partners. Commissioning will scope the development of community hubs within children and family centres where midwifery, health visitors and family support services can be aligned and staff are co-located. This will support the development of family hubs identified within the Early Help Strategy.

Commissioning has reconfigured the composition and function of departmental panels to achieve better consistency of practice and decision making across children's and families. The revised panel configurations for 2020/21 are:

- Access to Resources – which oversees a range of spend and creates a framework of providers from auditing of needs against spend to commissioning high quality and efficient therapeutic services.
- Additional Emergency assistance grant - for individuals and families experiencing financial difficulties due to COVID -19
- Multi-Agency Panel – which actively monitors and reviews provision, through local services or out of authority placements for Children and Young people with exceptional needs.
- Transition Tracking Panel – for all placements where adult service assessments need to be undertaken.
- 16 Plus Panel – for all young people becoming care leavers, to review their placements. To also track young people at risk of Homelessness in B&B's, hotels, sofa surfing or at risk of being evicted. Also review all young peoples placements 18+ who have not been able to transition into independent housing due the impact of COVID-19
- High Risk, Cost and Unregulated Placements – this is the Corporate Parent's senior management and structural response to oversee and scrutinise those children and young people whose needs, risks and consequently costs are most acute.

### **Wider Drivers for Change**

The Children and Families Act 2014 seeks to improve services for vulnerable children and support their families. It underpins wider reforms to ensure that all children and young people can succeed, no matter what their background. The changes in the law give greater protection to vulnerable children, better support for children whose parents are separating, a new system to help children with special educational needs and disabilities, and help for parents to balance work and family life. It also ensures vital changes to the adoption system can be put into practice, meaning more children who need loving homes are placed faster. Reforms for children in care can be implemented, including giving them the choice to stay with their foster families until their 21st birthday.

The Care Act 2014 is designed to bring the current laws relating to adult social care together into one Act. Whilst predominately focused on adults, the Care Act did introduce new legislation to support young people who find themselves caring for a parent or sibling. Gloucestershire Young Carers project was recommissioned in 2019, at this time it was expanded to include the development of new young adult care services to support young carers who want to remain in education or training.

Following on from the Keep on Caring Strategy 2016, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 is intended to improve support for children in care and care leavers, promote the welfare and safeguarding of children, and make provisions about the regulation of social workers. The Act reinforces the corporate parenting principles for the Council as a whole to be the best parent it can be to every child in its care. These are largely a collation of existing duties local authorities have towards children in care and those preparing to leave care,

and are now extending our duties up to the age of 25 for all care leavers who require ongoing advice and support. For those who choose not to receive support post 21, we are keeping in contact to ensure they know their right to come back into the service if they wish to. We are required to publish our support offer to care leavers and to promote the educational attainment of children who have been adopted or placed in other long term arrangements. The legislation extends the current considerations of the court when making decisions about the long term placement of children to include an assessment of current and future needs and of any relationship with the prospective adopter. The Act makes changes to the arrangements for local child safeguarding partnerships and the serious case review process, including provision for a central Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel for cases of national importance. It also establishes a new regulatory regime for the social work profession.

Commissioning has responded proactively to the statutory requirement in the 2017 act. We continue to work in partnership with our care leavers to publish a local offer by reviewing our corporate commitment to ensure care experienced young people are placed in the right placement first time (Sufficiency Strategy 2018-2021). In 2019 we reviewed the offer and updated it leading to the development of a revised Care Leavers Strategy which places greater emphasis on the voice of young people and committing to make every service we commission good enough for our children and care leavers, thereby giving them a positive experience of their transition to adulthood.

Liberty Protection Safeguards were introduced in the Mental Capacity (Amendment Act) 2019, replacing the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguarding system that is currently in place. The Safeguards will provide protection for people who are deprived of their liberty as part of their care or treatment, and don't have mental capacity to consent to their care arrangements. Groups who might have a Liberty Protection Safeguards authorisation include those with dementia, autism and learning disabilities. The amended act will have a significant impact on young people aged 16 years + in several key areas of children and families commissioning including health, placements, youth support and care assisted young people, which will drive change in the way we commission services for these groups in 2020/21.

### **The European Settlement Scheme**

Commissioning has been mindful of the substantial impact the Brexit agenda and accompanying legislative changes will have on the services we provide for children and families in 2020/21. Commissioning has taken the departmental lead on Brexit and has been instrumental in the dissemination of Brexit related information across the department, to ensure adequate preparatory plans are in place for the anticipated legislative changes. The most pertinent legislative change affecting children and families is the European Settlement Scheme (EUSS), which sets out a new application process to be completed by EU citizens, their families and others currently working or residing in the UK post Brexit.

Commissioning has successfully bid for £114K to deliver practical support to Gloucestershire vulnerable or at-risk EU, EEA and Swiss citizens and their family members to help them make their EU Settlement Scheme application. Our EUSS project covers the whole of County of Gloucestershire, complimenting support provided in Tewksbury District by Tewksbury BC funded by the Home Office. It will provide information advice and practical registration support for the most vulnerable EU, EEA and Swiss citizens (and their non-EU family members) many of whom we believe are currently unaware of the Scheme or their need to register. The staff and volunteers of the three VCSE delivery partners, North and West Gloucestershire CAB, Stroud and Cotswolds CAB and GARAS, will provide information, advice, support and technical assistance for vulnerable EU citizens and their families to register with the EU Settlement Scheme

We have designed a flexible and responsive programme, focusing on providing registration support out in our communities across the County, which is important in our rural areas which we know are sometimes hard to reach through our experience of supporting vulnerable residents.

Our Communications Strategy for the project will harness the networks of the County and District Councils, including social media, to reach local residents, business and community and voluntary sector. We will work with local media to ensure that regular consistent messages are provided to our residents about the need to register and the support for vulnerable EU citizens.

### **Needs Analysis**

The Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) identifies a number of areas that require review.

In 2018/19, despite decreasing numbers and rates, Gloucestershire had a higher rate of permanent school exclusions in comparison to national and statistical neighbour rates (and the same rate as regional). The proportion of secondary pupils excluded was the fourth highest among our statistical neighbours, and in the second quartile among authorities in England. Over half of these exclusions relate to children and young people with additional needs. Permanent exclusions in Gloucestershire reduced by 23% for the 2018/19 academic year, with significant reduction in the primary phase; putting us equal with statistical neighbours and national comparators for that phase, and below the regional comparator.

Fixed term exclusions have historically been relatively low in Gloucestershire compared to national and statistical neighbour averages but are now starting to rise as an alternative to permanent exclusion.

Over the past few years there has been a national increase in children being identified as having social, emotional and mental health needs: and this is no difference in Gloucestershire. From an education perspective, this has placed pressure on specialist SEMH places and has resulted in a rise in the number of children with such needs requiring independent specialist provision. A Commitment has therefore been made to build a new 75 place SEMH to meet such needs in county by 2021

Due to Covid-19 there is no assessment data for 2020, but for the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2019, 71.9% of children achieved a good level of development (GLD); this has been steadily improving since 2014 and for the first time Gloucestershire is slightly above the national average of 71.8% although more improvement is needed to bring us in line with statistical comparators. There remains a notable gap in gender with 78.4% of girls, and 65.4% of boys achieving a GLD (mirroring the national gender differences). The achievement gap between the lowest attaining 20% of children continues to reduce in Gloucestershire and is currently at 29%. This is compared to the national gap, which is increasing and currently at 32.4%.

In 2019 51.9% of the children in Gloucestershire who are eligible for free school meals have achieved a good level of development which although increased, is still slightly below the 56.4% national level. However the trend is upwards and has improved significantly from 30% in 2013. Since the first COVID related lockdown, the FSM figures have grown significantly. From 23<sup>rd</sup> March to 5<sup>th</sup> December 2020, we have an additional 2,754 young people currently entitled to FSM, bringing the total number of protected FSM to 17,006. It is important to note that included in the aforementioned figure are 1,869 new applications which have been received since the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2020, 1,137 of these are current entitled protected.

The Joint Additional Needs Strategy brings together a multi-agency response to understanding and responding to children's needs. There have been noteworthy improvements to the support offered to such children; however this requires greater co-ordination and strategic multi-agency leadership moving forward. As such, a number of work streams to deliver the strategic priorities of the Joint Additional Needs and High Needs strategies have been established, with oversight from strategic leaders across the Council. This will form a key part of our work moving forward across the education, social care and health arenas; not only meeting our statutory duties but also providing the most appropriate and effective support for children and young people.

The 2018/19 rate of young people aged 10-24 admitted to hospital for self harm in Gloucestershire (536.4 per 100,000) is higher than England (444.0) but lower than all except for one of our statistical neighbours. Now rated as "Red", this represents an increase from 456 per 100,000 in 2017/18.

A review of the self-harm pathway has been completed, and a number of initiatives have been taken forward; supplementing the existing services and support already available in the county. These include:

- Introduction of an advice line for parents concerned about their child's emotional wellbeing (run by TIC+).
- Improved information resources on self-harm for young people, their parents/Carers, and health professionals.
- Commissioning of a new self-harm training course targeted at professionals working with people who may be self-harming,
- Development of 'Harmlessglos', an online planning and support tool for professionals working with children and young people who are self-harming.

It is unclear about the effects of the pandemic on children's mental health. However, an analysis of various sources including a survey run by Oxford University in which pupils from 88 schools in Gloucestershire took

part and nationally, generated research estimate that there will be a rise in need and demand. Work is ongoing locally to better understand and monitor trends.

Gloucestershire County Council commissioned additional services to provide a range of support to children and young people. These included two open access, universal services for children and young people which do not require a referral from a health professional i.e. children and young people can access support directly. In addition, Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group have commissioned a more targeted offer for vulnerable young people.

Education permeates across all aspects of children and families commissioning. As a result of the local area SEND inspection in 2016, Ofsted and CQC were pleased with the Council's initial response to the SEND reforms following implementation of the Children & Families Act.

The second round of inspections are being formulated for late 2021 and it is anticipated that these will focus more specifically upon; joint commissioning, impact for children and young people resulting from effective multi-agency working across social care, education and health, early help across all services and embedded co-production with parent and carers. Whilst there has been much progress in relation to supporting children and young people with SEND and additional needs in the county these areas have been identified as requiring greater leadership and impact prior to any future inspection regime.

We have a Joint Strategy for Children and Young People with Additional Needs (including SEND) agreed with the Clinical Commissioning Group and partners, and this outlines the county's approach to meeting the needs of these children and young people (0-25 years) between 2018-2021, across education, health and care. This supports the holistic assessment and provision for children and young people which holds them at the centre. This is further supported by our High Needs, Post 16 and Specialist Commissioning strategies which ensure that our commissioning provides value for money and meets emerging changes in children's needs whilst preparing them for effective transition into adulthood

Ofsted evaluation of the framework for the inspection of local area's effectiveness in identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND was published in July 2020. The report evaluates the fidelity of the framework's implementation and explores views on the impact of the framework on services for children and young people with SEND. However, at date of writing the SEND review was still being undertaken and options for consultation were yet to be finalised.

Our School Place Commissioning Strategy which sets out our educational requirements over the next five years is reviewed annually to ensure that all children have access to local, quality provision which meets their needs. This sets the expectation that most children will have their needs met in mainstream education settings and therefore underpins the Specialist Commissioning Strategy which focuses on specialist education settings for children with higher level of needs.

Following the academy agenda and the financial pressures on the education system, the increasing concerns for home educated children, those with SEND and those who have been excluded or off-rolled from schools has gained significant national coverage and parliamentary interest. The new Ofsted framework which came into place in September 2019 for schools which has a greater focus on outcomes for all children is therefore welcomed. It is also anticipated that there will be legislative changes made to how the education system responds to these challenges in 2021– with a greater expectation of inclusion and ability to meet children's needs across school systems and greater accountability in how schools provide for all children.

The focus of education during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance for all children, and especially the most vulnerable, to have access to high quality face to face education which can be differentiated to meet their needs. Whilst all settings will continue to ensure that children and young people continue to receive a broad and balanced curriculum, they now have to respond to infection control measures, helping children catch up on any missed education and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children whom have been away from formal schooling during the lockdown period. We are having to adapt our approach and offer to support the challenges created by COVID-19 for children, families and education settings alongside managing the system as our business as usual.

## **The Compliance and Quality Assurance Team**

Commissioning is committed to ensuring that every Provision we commission for our vulnerable young people provides the best service possible. To ensure we continue to meet this obligation, we have now developed a Compliance and Quality Assurance Team (CQAT) which will lead on developing, implementing and monitoring a high quality compliance process for all existing and new providers. CQAT will lead on the development of a range of tools to allow Commissioners and Social Workers to quickly identify the assessed position of every provider on compliance, inspection (where appropriate) and quality assurance and collate that into a single RAG rating.

The CQAT will also work alongside the wider GCC Quality Assurance team to gather in-depth, real time intelligence about the quality of commissioned services, to inform assurance activity and judgements with a focus on information from and about individual service user.

The CQAT are currently involved in the following tasks to support improving outcomes for children and young people;

- Single agency visits and assessments of providers of concern (as a result either of recent Inadequate judgements or where serious incidents have been reported)
- Joint visits with Education colleagues to Residential Schools where concerns have been raised on both education and care issues. This has included developing joint action plans between GCC Education, Social Care and the provider to improve quality;
- Attendance at Allegation Management Meetings and Complex Allegation Management Meetings as appropriate;
- Leading the Commissioning Hub response to the request by the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Executive for a section 11 Children Act 2004 audit of providers safeguarding policies and procedures;
- Completing all new Due Diligence requests to the Hub;
- Identifying lead contact points within CQAT for all providers these team members will also lead annual monitoring meetings with the provider;
- Developing a RAG rating for each provider based on inspection outcomes, s11 responses and service user feedback

### **Children's Social Care**

Gloucestershire currently has an increasing cared-for population which currently stands at 782 children in care, which is a clear increase for 730 children in care at the same period last year (Oct 2020) and a substantial increase from previous level of 651 in March 2018. There are a number of possible reasons for this; the current improvement journey shows that our thresholds are not fully understood by all services, and therefore not consistently applied so, along with an improvement in practice and assessment; this could increase the number of children and young people becoming looked after. The Children and Social Care Act has also extended the statutory duties for young people leaving care up to the age of 25 (previously 21), irrespective of their educational, employment or training circumstances and this is likely to further increase our care population. We know our care leaving population will be one of our largest growth areas of the coming years.

Our work with children and young people who have additional needs as they transfer into adulthood will be a critical area of focus for the coming year. We are committed to developing and implementing a partnership approach to transitions, so that young people and their families get the right information, support and assessments at the earliest point, ensuring transitions are understood planned for and effective.

This will include tracking all young people who we believe might meet a threshold for adult services, from the age of 14 years or as early as possible post this age, so that joint planning, working and assessments can take place at the right point within a young persons journey.

Taking a collaborative and solution focused approach, our key ambition for all young people where possible is for them to remain in or return to county, with the appropriate support to fulfil their potential. To achieve this aspiration we will work together, make joint commissioning decisions, manage and develop our commissioning frameworks to allow for smooth transitions at 16 years as they journey to adulthood.

### **Single Point of Access for All placements:**

To ensure we have a seamless process for all placements, in September 2019 the Children's commissioning hub took responsibility for all 18+ Placements that were held within the leaving care service.

This included:

- All 18 + placements within semi-independent provision
- Staying Put arrangements
- Staying Close developments
- Crash Pads
- Two independent properties

Over the next year – we intend to drive this work further by:

- Developing a virtual estate agent for care leavers, to get advice on housing, report poor quality, concerns or repairs about property and also get advice and guidance about moving on especially when they are leaving university, or secured employment
- Establish a housing forum, that will include, working with housing officers, districts, supporting people, leaving care services and care experienced young people to develop and manage a housing offer for vulnerable young people, reducing /eliminating the risk of homelessness.
- Tender for a partner to manage and deliver our two semi – independent properties
- Expand our in county property portfolio to include dedicated accommodation for Edge of care provision, UASC and supported lodgings
- Expand our current Staying Put offer for young people in foster care to stay with their families post 18yrs
- To develop our residential market to offer our young people Staying Close arrangements for young people in placements post 18yrs.
- To test the Staying Close arrangements within Trevone House and embed this within future placement developments.

### **Capital Projects**

As part of GCC Sufficiency Strategy “Right Placement First Time” - our ambition is to develop quality provision in county using a partnership approach with providers. Trevone House is our pilot project, which has been well received within the market securing a well established provider as our delivery partner, as well as gaining national interest as a model of best practice. The council is committed to expanding this work further with the intention to build on the success of Trevone House by Commissioning and developing a 3 year programme of capital projects which includes:

- Development of residential home within county using the existing Barnwood site, to development into a registered residential home, for two young people with additional capacity within the grounds for emergency provision
- Reconfigure council assets to develop a second site similar to Trevone, to provide support for our care leavers into semi-independent accommodation.
- Reconfigure council assets to create a site of excellence for early years, offering residential parent and child assessments, a children centre and nursery

There are other capital projects being developed with the Department of Health and NHSE, to provide provision and support in county for some of our most complex children and young people so they can stay with their families or have a lifetime home in county.

### **Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/22**

While having a substantial increase to the agency budget for 2020/21 this still shows a large predicted overspend in addition to the increased funding. While some of this additional expenditure is due to the increase in the numbers of children in care, there has also been the impact of COVID-19, especially for young people who have reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday during 2020, but have been unable to transfer into independent provision. Efficiencies also need to be gained through better market management and purchasing. Commissioning continues to make savings through the review of packages of care for young people through High Cost Panel and 16 + panel which has made efficiencies during 2020/21 despite the new pressures.

There were no efficiency targets for Children’s Commissioning for 2021/22, but we have embarked on trying to capture some efficiencies, which was predominantly in relation to better management oversight and governance for corporate spend, high cost placements, access to recourses and applying a standardised assessment criteria to joint funding arrangements. There will also be a key focus on planning earlier for

young people who transition to adult services, beginning this work earlier within a child's life, from the age of 14 years.

Over the duration of the next financial year, children and families will continually review services to ensure we manage demand in the most effective and efficient way.

### **Looking Forward**

In preparation for the full Ofsted inspection, Children's Services are on a very structured improvement journey and the associated improvement plan has focused and driven our priorities.

We continue to strive to embed commissioning into practice and continue to work in partnership with internal and external partners to change practice and the overall outcomes for our children and young people. The implementation of our "How to guide" has provided clarity around practice and procedures relating to placement requests, writing a child or young person's profile, and how to make requests for both emergency and planned needs.

While the latest Ofsted monitoring feedback acknowledged some key areas of improvement, there are still clear priority areas in relation to assessment and risks, especially to young people, so it is important we continue to work at pace to embed change. While the focus is particularly on the children in care population, the Council will also need to continue to respond to changes in Government funding for core education services as responsibility for school improvement continues to transfer to schools and academies.

The new Children and Families Plan will underpin our wider strategic direction with our partners. During 2019/20 the Council reviewed our needs analysis and worked with all partners to develop both the Children and Families Plan and the Placement Sufficiency Strategy. Taking forward the priorities of our partnerships with a focus on prevention through to providing support for the most vulnerable and keeping children safe, the Children and Families Plan will have a family based focus and will frame the longer term commissioning strategy.

### **Delivering Change**

The main drivers to our work in 2021/22 will be:

- To deliver against the OFSTED improvement plan pending full inspection
- Take forward the priorities identified in the forthcoming Children and Families Plan including areas identified in the JSNA.
- Implementing the changes in legislation outlined in the Children and Social Care Act 2017.
- Review transitions processes between children and adult services to develop a joint strategy for young people "preparing for adulthood" - in partnership with adult services, the Clinical Commissioning Group and partners.
- Continue to deliver on the key priorities identified in the Sufficiency Strategy "Right placement First Time" 2018-2021. Complete a full review and deliver a new Sufficiency Strategy for Gloucestershire 2022 - 2025
- Deliver on priorities in the NHS Long Term Plan 2019 -2024.
- The Joint Additional Needs and High Needs Transformation Programme.
- Implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards introduced in the Mental Capacity (Amended Act) 2019 – for young people aged 16 years+.
- Improve services around children with special education needs and disabilities including EHCP, learning disabilities service, positive behavioural support, medical needs in schools and personal health, early years, placement for children with disabilities and additional needs.
- Continued implementation of the new Positive Behaviour Service for children with additional needs
- Continued Implementation and mobilisation of Trevone House, and the capital programme linked to our sufficiency strategy.

### **Specific Planned Activities**

1. Review the first year of the strategy and align this to the continued implementation of the Sufficiency Strategy for Children's Services. This is a whole system change and will include extensive market management and the development and reconfiguration of provision across the continuum of need, which will include:
  - A new Early Help Strategy, to deliver a robust early help offer that is understood and implemented

across all partners and services.

- Support, scrutinise and challenge the Trevone House project in furtherance of our pledge to achieve the right placement first time for our care experienced young people.
  - Edge of Care Services - reconfigure provision and where appropriate, prevent children and young people from coming into care.
  - Improved placement stability – through better planning and market developments.
  - Increasing the capacity of in-house fostering provision by 100 new households over the next three years.
  - An increase in placements offered in county to support children and young people to remain in local schools, with improved access to health services allowing children to stay connected to their families and communities.
  - Development of placement and support services provision in county to meet the needs of children and young people with additional needs, so where possible they can stay at home, and purchase services through direct payments and personal budgets.
  - The development of emergency provision to meet current needs, including the Out Of Hours and PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) placements.
  - Development of the market for accommodation of young people to meet the new Duty for Care Leavers which comes into force from January 2019 - this will include UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) young people.
  - Redesign services for young people who are at risk of Missing and Exploitation, jointly with our partners.
  - Our commitment is to ensure young people are actively involved in the development, design and monitoring of ALL our contracts, services and tendering activities.
2. While in our latest Focus visits, inspectors confirmed that Commissioning is having positive impact on children's and young people lives, this is still a key area of work for the commissioning hub who will continue to work in partnership with practice and strengthen the relationships further.
  3. Re-configuration and re-tendering of the Youth Support Service to achieve better more efficient focusing of youth provision for all young people in GCC. A one year contract extension was granted in response to the pandemic, with the intention of submitting a full retendering exercise in 2021.
  4. Development of a preventative pathway for young people in vulnerable circumstances, by working in partnership with Supporting People tendering process for young people aged 16 years and beyond.
  5. Continue to work with colleagues across the partnership to implement the Joint Strategy for Children and Young People with Additional Needs ensuring seamless support for children and young people's needs. This will include a focus on improving transitions to adult services for children with additional needs by ensuring they are supported to make a smooth transition into early adulthood.
  6. The implementation of the new statutory guidance for young people leaving care, as stated within the new Children and Social Work Act 2017, which was required from January 2019. Requirements include:
    - To publish an annual re-refresh of the authority's "Leaving Care Offer".
    - Timely allocation of a Personal Advisor for all care leavers up to the age of 25 years - regardless of whether the young person intends to pursue education or training.
    - A duty to carry out an assessment of the young person's needs and to provide the necessary advice and support.
    - Meeting the requirements for care leavers within the new Reducing Homelessness Act 2018.
    - To support practice to embed the new "Preparing for Independence" tools into practice.
    - To create Gloucestershire's Leaving Care Strategy, and monitor progress.
    - Support the implementation of Gloucestershire's Trail Blazer in schools.
    - Work in partnership to monitor the delivery of wider young people's mental health services within Gloucestershire as described within the Clinical Commissioning Group's Long Term Plan. This will include extending the Mental Health in schools approach from Stroud into Gloucester City, working with partners on the self harm pathway and also looking at the mental health needs of children and

young people who have suffered trauma and abuse.

7. Development of priorities in the NHS Long Term Plan, in particular,
  - Health screening and needs met for children and young people with a learning disability.
  - Working with partners to increase annual health checks for those over 14 years with a learning disability.
  - All children with learning disabilities and autism are supported by easily accessible ongoing care - this will encompass developing better pre diagnosis support, increased post diagnostic support and shorter waiting times for a diagnosis.
  - Working with partners to ensure that there is a digital flag in patient records to ensure staff know a patient has an LD and/or autism.
  - Children and young people with LD/autism with most complex needs have designated keyworker implementing Lenehan recommendations.
  - Reduction of waiting times in learning disability services.
  - Development of an agreed collaborative approach to funding packages of care across social care, health and education through PBENG (Personal Budget Exceptional Needs Group) and the Multi-agency Resource Panel.
  - Development of the services to support medical needs in schools provision.
8. Update of the Childcare Sufficiency Strategy and associated action plan to deliver the anticipated rise in demand following the roll out of the free 30 hours entitlement.
  - Work with the market to increase the take up of achieving 2 year old funded places.
  - Roll out a new business and market management strategy to support the EY sector. This is especially key during and post COVID-19. (New additions)
9. Supporting children and young people in care to promote their health and wellbeing, in particular ensuring:
  - Improved timeliness of initial and review health assessments.
  - A streamlined process across social care and health professionals to ensure timely health assessments.
  - A targeted approach to providing young people with a health passport to ensure they have their health information in one place.
  - The emotional wellbeing and mental health of children in care is fully addressed in health care assessments, reviews and health plans, and in doing so, conducting a review of the Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) process and how this can be developed as part of a patient centred pathway for mental health.
10. Work with Public Health Nursing and Education, to ensure the 2 – 2½ years integrated checks are fully embedded across the county.
11. Continue to deliver the Council's statutory responsibilities for education which include:
  - A significant expansion of mainstream primary and secondary school provision in Cheltenham and Gloucester – mix of new schools and expansion of existing schools.
  - Building a new maintained special school for children with SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health) needs and Autism.
  - Shift of support for children with additional needs to early help and creation of primary hubs – passporting more high needs funding to schools. This is subject to Schools Forum agreement.
  - Using the implementation of the Education Strategy to provide a whole system response to high quality education in the county.
12. Continue to embed ACE's (Adverse Childhood Experiences) within all new Children's Services contracts; rolling out the refined ACE's tools, within services and partner agencies. Embed ACES across the Social Work Academy and build on trauma informed practices within commissioning and across Children's Services.

13. Following a successful pilot of the Family Plus Outcome Star within the Children and Family Centres Targeted Support offer in Stroud, Forest of Dean and Gloucester City, embed this practice and roll out to other providers in Cotswolds, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury areas to ensure they are meeting the threshold for support and families are having a consistent service and the service has measurable outcomes and impact of support.
14. Set up a process that will review the step up and step down work of the commissioned Children and Family Centres. This will involve auditing 10% of cases that have been open for over six months and or themes identified each month.
15. Continue to review the development of a Fostering Social Impact Bond (SIB) which will re-design fostering services in Gloucestershire and increase the number of foster carers recruited by the Council that will offer placements to children in Gloucestershire to enable children to stay close to their community, school and friends.
16. Continue to implement and monitor the suite of Panels, moving on to develop commissioning frameworks which will ensure procurement and governance requirements are met as well as achieving value for money and quality assurance, including the new spend for national COVID funding.
17. Scope the development of community hubs within Children and Family Centres where midwifery, health visitors and family support services can be aligned and staff are co-located. This will support the development of family hubs emerging from the Early Help Strategy.
18. Embed a range of strategic changes within placements for children in care alongside the IPC work and revamped panel work including:
  - Increase placement stability, continuity and sustainability throughout the child's life-long journey in care.
  - To have a sufficient number of beds in order to adequately meet the accommodation needs for the growing number of children in care.
  - To increase access and sustainability of more accommodation provisions, to further improve the quality of support required to better prepare children in care for their transition towards independence/leaving care.
  - To ensure that the voices, wishes and feelings of our children in care/care leavers that were ascertained throughout the development of the Sufficiency Strategy (Right Placement First Time), are embedded into practice to further improve the experiences children and young people are likely to encounter.
  - The implementation of measurable tools, i.e. (Young Peoples Outcome Star) is to be imbedded in placements so as to better monitor the outcomes for Children in Care/Care Leavers and to inform the commissioning of support packages so they are needs led to achieve good outcomes for our young people's journey to adulthood.
19. Children in Care and Edge of Care, our improvement plan includes building resilience by supporting families where appropriate to remain together with the right support:
  - Expansion of the Family Group Conference Services will support families earlier and be a county wide provision.
  - Additional resources will be available for special guardianships.
  - The Social Work Academy will continue to drive best practice, develop and grow our social work workforce, to give our children, young people and their families' continuity in practice, stability and a good Children's Services offer.
20. SEND needs analysis strategy to consider the development of additional specialist placements to meet increasingly complex needs.
21. Redesign of the alternative provision school system and approach for children at risk of exclusion from school.

22. A review of Speech and Language and Mental Health support provided to children and schools to identify and respond to emerging needs; including a review of the neurodisability diagnostic pathway.

Over the past year the Children and Families Integrated Commissioning Hub has developed a dynamic commissioning model that responds to both the longer term strategic needs of the departments as well as emerging needs of the service and complex individuals. This approach has allowed innovation to take place supporting Gloucestershire County Council's aspiration for a Good Children's Service.