

Accelerated Improvement Plan December 2021

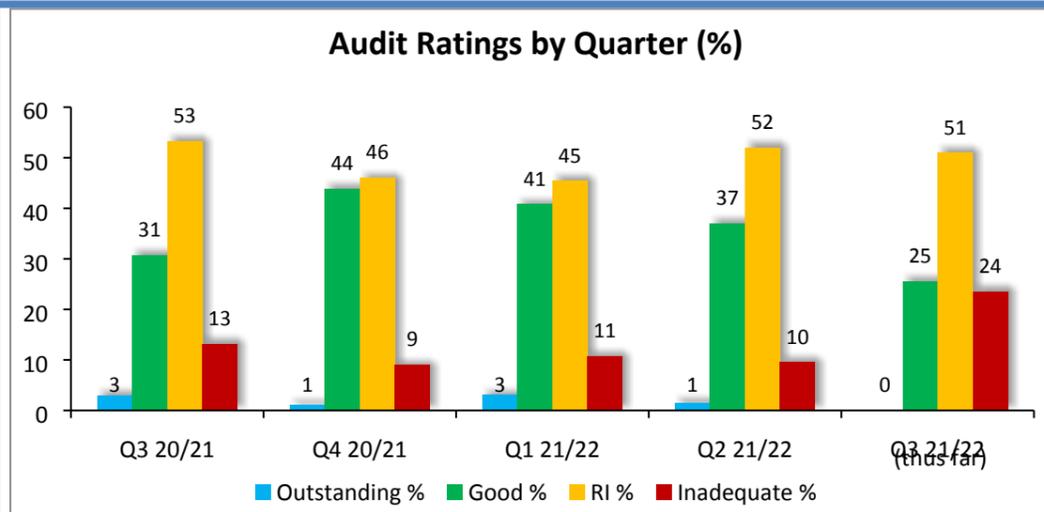
Aim of the plan	To deliver consistently good services so children are safer, sooner	
Priorities	1.	To reduce the proportion of inadequate practice and increase the proportion of improving practice so that practice is consistently good or better.
	2.	To ensure full participation in Essentials and in-house Management and Leadership Programmes to deliver consistency, compliance and quality of practice and performance as quickly as possible.
	3.	To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool, including: a) Supervision and Management Oversight (to be regular, reflective and appropriately recorded in order to drive good practice outcomes) b) Visiting and Direct Work (to be timely, purposeful and champion the voice of the child - including MASH red RAG rated contacts) c) Assessment of needs, risks and circumstances (to reflect the Essentials 2.0 Programme 'Anchor' and 'Risk' principles) d) Planning and Reviewing (to be C-SMART, adaptive and effective) e) Case Recording (to be up to date, clear and comprehensive)
	4.	To communicate with Practitioners, Managers and Leaders and engage their 'hearts and minds' to deliver practice and performance improvements
	5.	To protect children through timely decisions and risk informed intervention and support that has a positive impact and improves outcomes
	6.	To achieve permanence for children at the earliest appropriate opportunity to improve their life chances and overall outcomes

D A S H B O A R D

Reporting period:	Improvement Board – 21 December 2021			
	Actions Status		Impact Status	
1. To reduce the proportion of inadequate practice and increase the proportion of improving practice so that practice is consistently good or better.	■ On target		■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	
	● Completed		● Completed	
2. To ensure full participation in Essentials and in-house Management & Leadership Programmes to deliver consistency, compliance and quality of practice and performance as quickly as possible.	■ On target		■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	
	● Completed		● Completed	
3.a.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool Supervision and Management Oversight	■ On target		■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	
	● Completed		● Completed	
3.b.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool Visiting and Direct Work	■ On target		■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	
	● Completed		● Completed	
3.c.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool Assessment	■ On target		■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	
	● Completed		● Completed	

3.d.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool Planning and Reviewing	■ On target	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: green;"></div>	■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: yellow;"></div>
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	
	● Completed		● Completed	
3.e.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool Case Recording	■ On target	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: green;"></div>	■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: red;"></div>
	● Completed		● Completed	
4. To communicate with Practitioners, Managers and Leaders and engage their 'hearts and minds' to deliver practice and performance improvements	■ On target	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: green;"></div>	■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: red;"></div>
	● Completed		● Completed	
5. To protect children through timely and consistent risk informed intervention and support that has a positive impact and improves outcomes	■ On target	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: green;"></div>	■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: yellow;"></div>
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	
	● Completed		● Completed	
6. To provide care and achieve permanence for children at the earliest appropriate opportunity to improve their life chances and overall outcomes	■ On target	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: green;"></div>	■ On target	
	◆ Compromised		◆ Compromised	<div style="width: 100%; height: 10px; background-color: yellow;"></div>
	▲ At risk		▲ At risk	
	● Completed		● Completed	

Actions & Progress made																				
1. To reduce the proportion of inadequate practice and increase the proportion of improving practice so that practice is consistently good or better.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly case file audits - these continue to be undertaken on a monthly basis. The table below set out the last 3 months performance and the following table sets out performance over the past year. 																			
	<p style="text-align: center;">Audit Ratings Last 3 months (%)</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Audit Ratings Last 3 months (%)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Month</th> <th>Outstanding %</th> <th>Good %</th> <th>RI %</th> <th>Inadequate %</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Aug-21</td> <td>0</td> <td>35</td> <td>55</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sep-21</td> <td>0</td> <td>35</td> <td>50</td> <td>13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Oct-21</td> <td>0</td> <td>25</td> <td>51</td> <td>24</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Month	Outstanding %	Good %	RI %	Inadequate %	Aug-21	0	35	55	8	Sep-21	0	35	50	13	Oct-21	0	25	51
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- The previous short-term AIP targets for practice rated good and inadequate have been sustained over much of the previous year, these were recently revised to aim for 50% of practice rated as Good, and 9% of practice rated as Inadequate.
- **Position statement** - The current signals in the system (reported by staff, performance and other QA indicators) suggest that there is a significant turn from the previously positive trajectory. As reported by other LAs across the country, we are grappling with the combined effect of notable rises in workflows and workloads as a result of the clear emergence of latent demand; the increasing turnover of staff causing 'churn' in the system; and the difficulties of social work delivery given the unprecedented circumstances and workforce fatigue associated with the continuation of the CV19 pandemic and recent announcements about the Omicron variant.
- **Workforce** - Considerable investments have been agreed to support the deployment of additional interim resourcing in permanence teams (from Early Permanence to Children in Care or Care Leavers), with an extensive case file screening initiative, harmonisation of agency rates to promote recruitment and retention, further investment in the Reviewing Service, and, most recently, an enhanced remuneration to stabilise and grow our Safeguarding Team staff resource which continue to prove to be the hardest to recruit and retain by some considerable margin. Though the consequent recruitment activity has been mobilised, and is showing some early signs of impact and improvement, there will still be some delay in translating this investment into capacity in teams, especially as the Christmas and New Year festive period arrives. The thematic workforce review report prepared for the December 2021 Improvement Board provides further information about the social worker workforce issue.

2. To ensure full participation in Essentials and in-house Management & Leadership Programmes to deliver consistency, compliance and quality of practice and performance as quickly as possible.

- **The Social Work Academy** – the SWA is settled into the new premises in Quayside. Delivery of Essentials 2.0 and 3.0 programmes were paused during August to allow for the Academy to relocate but re-started in September 2021 and have continued thereafter.
- **The Essentials 2.0 Programme** – Since the start of September 2021, sessions have continued to be offered by the Social Work Academy once per week with the places available for each session oversubscribed from 16 to 24, as agreed at the Academy Board meeting in July 2021.
 - Within Children's Services, a total of 566 staff are currently required to complete Essentials 2.0 Modules as part of their role. As of 06/12/21, a total of 69% of the eligible staff group had completed 1, 2 or 3 modules with 53% of the eligible staff completing all 3 modules.
 - The breakdown of data in relation to module completion is as follows:

No. of Modules Completed	No. of Staff	% of Eligible Staff Group
3	303	53%
2	58	10%
1	32	6%
0	174	31%

- **The Essentials 3.0 Programme** - the Essentials 3.0 thematic programme has been developed and modules are being delivered through a virtual classroom.

- **NAAS/PQS** - GCC continues to be part of the National Assessment & Accreditation System (NAAS) / Post Qualifying Standard (PQS) Trailblazer Programme which commenced in December 2020. This enables children's social workers to develop skills and knowledge to improve outcomes for children and families. GCC is an identified trailblazer. The NAAS/PQS development and endorsement processes is providing wider benefits in clarifying role profiles and career progression pathways for staff. This has had an initial benefit in qualifying the experience needed for Senior Social Worker and Advanced Practitioner roles. As part of our NAAS pilot there are now 3 staff cohorts of trailblazers with a total of 34 participants:
 - Of the 34 NAAS participants, 27 (80%) are undertaking the endorsement programme as part of our new senior social work progression route, which supports the development and retention of social workers.
 - The evaluation process for the Management and Leadership programme (see below) will support the endorsement of Team Managers.
- **Team Manager Management and Leadership Programme** – The first cohort of our Leadership and Management Programme, which was developed in line with the Practice Supervisor Post Qualifying Standards (PQS), has now been completed.
 - On completion of the programme, there were **40 team managers** within the cohort.
 - The Academy delivered the following modules: Introduction; Quality Improvement (QI); Quality Control (QC); Quality Assurance (QA); Power, Authority and Influence; Shaping and Improving the System; Performance and Resource Management; and Emotionally Intelligent Supervision. There has also been 2 days focusing on systemic leadership from the Institute of Family Therapy (IFT).
 - On completion of the programme, **11 team managers (28%) had attended all 10 modules**.
 - During the course of the 12-month programme we have seen 11 managers leave GCC or move to a new role, and 5 managers have commenced their systemic practice training. The breakdown of data in relation to module completion for the Management & Leadership Programme is as follows:

No. of Managers	No. Completed	Modules
11		10
8		9
5		8
1		7
8		6
2		5
2		4
3		3

- Feedback from managers attending the programme was positive and the Academy undertook a review of the modules in readiness for delivering the programme to a second cohort of team managers commenced in October 2021.
- **Service Manager Management and Leadership Programme** - The SW Academy have finalised the Service Manager Management and Leadership Programme. The DfE grant has funded the design and delivery of the Management and Leadership Development Programme for Service Managers which is scheduled to commence in January 2022.
- **Transformation Programme** :
 - **Remodelling** – a comprehensive Area based remodelling proposal has been developed and remains paused pending the imminent notification of the Ofsted inspection. The pause will allow the senior leadership team to incorporate the feedback from the Ofsted inspection as well as consulting formally with affected staff.
 - **Systemic Practice** – Formal and accredited training commenced with the Centre for Systemic Social Work (CfSSW) in June 2021. The 1st cohort includes 19 x Practitioners and 10 x Practice Supervisors and the 2nd cohort, which started in September 2021, includes 35 staff - 20 practitioners, 10 supervisors and 5 practice leaders (Heads of Service and Service Managers). A Systemic Practice Awareness Workshop for SLT took place on 22 October 2021. The workshop will be cascaded to all Children's Heads of Service in Children's Social Care and across Commissioning and Education. Plans are underway to explore options for integrating systemic clinical leads within practice to support practitioners and managers under-going CfSSW training and to support the implementation of systemic learning in practice. Preliminary discussions have ruled out CAMHS sessional/secondment opportunities due to local CAMHS capacity, however negotiations with the CfSSW is likely to identify capacity and expertise provided by professionals with joint-qualifications in systemic practice and social work and this is being activity considered at the moment. Implementation of the Systemic Practice programme is likely to be a 3 to 5-year programme and marks a significant commitment and milestone for the service.
 - **Fostering Transformation Board** – Following the independent review of the in-house Fostering Service undertaken by Karen Simmons (LGA Associate) and previously presented to the Improvement Board, the service has now established a new Fostering Transformation Board chaired by the interim Director for Safeguarding and Care, the Board has now met twice. An introduction to the fostering transformation programme has been presented to the December 2021 Corporate Parenting Group. The Fostering Transformation Board is multi-agency/disciplinary and is tasked with the strategic oversight and direction of the Operational Project Group which will progress the development and delivery of 7 workstreams including:

- **Service Development** - This includes the development of the Strategic Plan and the underpinning Vision and Operating Model for the Fostering Service; a workforce development plan for the Fostering Service which includes its interface with the wider Directorate; an options appraisal and implementation of a therapeutic model to strengthen the consistency and quality of care; an options appraisal and development of bespoke fostering models for children with complex needs
- **Support to Children** - This incorporates an alignment of existing resources to support placements and the development of enhanced support services including contribution of partner agencies for children with complex needs; closer integration of the Fostering Service with placing social workers regarding use of care teams, placement stability meetings and permanence planning
- **Support to Foster Carers** - This includes development of 24/7 support arrangements to foster carers; delivery of bespoke training, incorporating the agreed therapeutic model, to support carers to respond to the needs of complex children; the development of enhanced assessment, supervision and support arrangements and bespoke arrangements for connected carers
- **Recruitment and Retention** - Benchmark activity regarding support and remuneration; development of refreshed recruitment and retention and marketing strategies with potential additional investment. Creative use of resources including Fostering Champions
- **Placements** - This includes the development of an options appraisal for a streamlined approach to manage resources and processes to identify placements
- **Care Planning** - This includes an options appraisal regarding social work capacity to support permanence planning and the development of an early permanence pathway for long-term fostering and connected carers
- **Quality Assurance and Performance** - As a regulated Service, this includes the development of measures to strengthen audit and performance management arrangements to drive improvements in the quality of care

- **SLT 'Leadership Fundamentals' and Leadership Programme** –The leadership fundamentals continue to be used to shape, inform and underpin a range of improvement, development and transformation activities. The Staff College has been commissioned to co-produce the SLT Leadership Programme and support the delivery of the Transformation Programme. A preliminary planning session was held between the Staff College and SLT in June 2021 and the programme is scheduled to commence shortly now that the new Director for Education, Kirsten Harrison, is in role. This initiative is funded by the DfE grant.
- **Staff College Coaching Programme** - The DfE grant is also being used to fund a comprehensive coaching programme for all Team Managers, Service Managers and Heads of Service. Following completion of the introductory orientation sessions, all managers were matched with a Staff College Associate Coach following a preliminary 'chemistry conversation' and individual coaching sessions are now underway and progressing well. Each manager will receive up to 6 coaching sessions over a six-month period. The programme has a broad specification and capacity to address a wide range of professional and organisational priorities. The coaching offer provides a maximum of 6 hours coaching over 4 or 6 coaching sessions depending on whether sessions are an hour or one and a half hours. All coaching is being delivered remotely and virtually and there was a staggered start beginning with Heads of Service, then Service Managers and Team Managers. The programme will be evaluated and surveys are now starting to be distributed to, and returned by, managers and coaches for completion and evaluation as their scheduled coaching sessions are completed. To date anecdotal feedback is very positive with managers reporting via 1:1 supervision that they are appreciative of the coaching offer and the dedicated time, space and independent coaching expertise delivered by the Staff College associate coaches. It is anticipated that the Staff College will be able to analyse the coaching survey feedback and present an evaluation report by February 2022.
- **Trauma Informed Model of Care (TIMoC)** - The DfE grant provided match funding to deliver the TIMOC training for Trevone House staff as part of a phase 1 pilot. The official Trevone House virtual launch took place on 11 March 2021 and all Trevone House staff are now TIMOC trained. A number of operational social work staff have also received training which is targeted to prioritise social workers, team managers, service managers and Heads of Service who have young people already living in Trevone House or with agreed plans for young people to transition into Trevone House. Planning has been underway for the TIMOC phase 2 development which focuses on the in-house Fostering Service. As part of an extension of the training, Dr Draper is also providing consultation to staff, and identified externally commissioned placement providers, to help promote the TIMoC with a number of young people presenting with very complex needs and this has assisted in bringing a more therapeutic and nuanced understanding of the care needs for a number of young people experiencing crisis, instability and disruption. This has helped to stabilise a number of placements and reduce repeat placement disruption. The Trevone House phase 1 report has been completed.

<p>3.a.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool</p> <p>Supervision and Management Oversight</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand - The monthly average number of children open to Children’s Social Care has been the highest in 4 years during 2021/22 (4,149 compared with 3,906 in 2020/21, 4,114 in 2019/20 and 3,956 in 2018/19). In October 2021, the number of children that Children’s Social Care were supporting, protecting and caring was at the highest level recorded to date (4,393 children). The increasing latent demand, and complexity, has impacted on the management system. • Supervision - There are three supervisory components which are tracked and reported including casework supervision (focusing on allocated children, young people and families), professional supervision (focusing on individual staff and professional issues) and reflective/clinical supervision (focusing on a group learning approach to promote professional curiosity and a deeper appreciation of the relevant issues to problem solve and explore appropriate remedial action): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Casework supervision – the casework supervision target has been stretched to 95% for 2021/22, up from 80% in 2020/21. Performance was below target for October (77%), which is 3% below the previous 2020/21 target. The Interim Director of Safeguarding maintains on-going scrutiny of supervision performance with monthly compliance reporting. Performance has been adversely affected by high (latent) demand, increasing caseloads, workforce ‘churn’ as well as absence, due to combination of leave arrangements and some sickness, although overall sickness levels are generally lower than pre-CV19 absence reports. ➢ Professional supervision performance for October 2021 was 91%. ➢ Reflective / clinical group supervision over the last 12 months this has continued but has been impacted by CV-19. Advanced Practitioners have aimed to facilitate these sessions on a remote and hybrid basis although teams are beginning to report that they are increasingly starting to undertake this on a face to face basis. Moving forward the plan is to use the reflective/clinical group supervision sessions to focus on the development and implementation of systemic practice. Ideally this will be supported by the introduction of the proposed clinical expertise and capacity mentioned above. • The Team Improvement Project (TIP) – The TIP has continued to be led by the lead improvement and development consultant and focuses on identified teams most likely to produce the weakest / inadequate practice based on analysis of performance and QA evidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Following the generally positive conclusion of the previous TIP cycles, most Teams were able to make and sustain positive improvements ➢ Four teams where persistent weakness was detected continue to receive targeted TIP coaching input, alongside informal and formal capability plans where necessary and required with individual Team Managers ➢ The previous AIP reported unresolved specific issues with 2 teams in the Forest of Dean and Tewkesbury and action has been taken with both. The 11-25 Service Cheltenham and Gloucester North Teams continue to receive TIP input to help address specific concerns and stabilise the management groups. ➢ The TIP focus and resource was shifted during the course of the Case File Review initiative ➢ The next TIP review will consider a refresh of TIP membership based on current performance and QA evidence. ➢ The Director of Children’s Safeguarding and Care continues to review the monthly Social Worker and Team Performance Tracker which targets priority key performance indicators by scrutinising individual social worker and team level data. • The Practice Fundamentals (PF) Tool was introduced across operational children’s social care teams in July 2020 and is now pretty well embedded as a key Quality Control and Quality Improvement initiative. The tool builds on the findings through Quality Assurance and the work of the regulator that improvement is required in the fundamentals of practice including Supervision and Management; Visiting and Direct Work; Assessments; Planning and Review; and Case Recording which are the AIP priorities. A PF dip sampling tool and approach was developed by staff and launched in August 2020 to test the implementation and impact of this approach. The PF dip sampling has continued to run alongside the monthly case file auditing process for over a year now and evidence indicates that the tool is well liked and evident in examples of best practice. In October 2021, it was agreed that the Practice Fundamentals dip sampling would be devolved to Localities/Service areas to be targeted by the HOS and management groups to address identified practice priorities for each Locality/Service area. A review of these dip samples will be considered within monthly Quality Assurance Panels, chaired by Locality Heads of Service, to inform their continuous self-evaluation and quality improvement activity
<p>3.b.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool</p> <p>Visiting and Direct Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand - The monthly average number of children open to Children’s Social Care has been the highest in 4 years during 2021/22 (4,149 compared with 3,906 in 2020/21, 4,114 in 2019/20 and 3,956 in 2018/19). In October 2021, the number of children that Children’s Social Care were supporting, protecting and caring was at the highest level recorded to date (4,393 children). The demand has inevitably had an impact on caseloads. • Caseloads - In October, 65% of workers were responsible for 18 children or fewer. 94.1% held 25 children or fewer; this was below target for the first time in 12 months having reduced from 98.9% in May. • Visits to children – As a result of increasing demand and caseloads, the timeliness of initial visits was below target in October 2021. The visiting standard continues to require face to face visits as part of the CV19 business continuity planning moving from response to recovery, although the government announcements regarding the new Omicron variant will require the service to be additionally vigilant and fleet of foot given some of the more concerning recent announcements. Announcements about further precautions and restrictions as a result of the Omicron virus will continue to influence the service’s operational arrangements in relation to visiting in order to stop

	<p>the spread of the virus but the current visiting highlights report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The overall 12-month position for children seen within timescale for initial visits following contact was 74% in October 2021 (s47 enquiries was 57.6% and s17 was 74.9%) which is below the target of 85%. Performance across Localities ranges considerably from 49% in the Cotswolds to 78% in Tewkesbury. This is with the exception of Stroud where 91% of visits were timely and performance has been better than target for the last 3 months. The significant variation between Localities reflects the local conditions and the impact of increased demand coupled with workforce 'churn'. ➤ The percentage of children subject to a Child Protection Plan seen within timescale was 86.8% in October 2021 which is a decrease compared to last month and below target (93%) ➤ The percentage of Children in Need seen within timescale was 89.3% in October, which is within tolerance of target (93%), ➤ The percentage of Children in Care receiving statutory visits within timescale was 94% in October, which is nearly on target (95%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Principal Social Worker & Participation Champions - The PSW continues to coordinate a network of Participation Champions across all teams to act as a single point of contact to promote and support direct work with children and young people. Working with the PSW the Ambassadors produced the Ambassador Takeover newsletter in December 2021 where they introduced new ambassadors, shared their response to the National Care Review, highlight barriers to education, employment and training (EET) and shared their experience of mentoring Directors and Councillors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A quality assurance exercise focusing on the child's voice and diversity is on-going between the PSW, Ambassadors, Participation Champions and social work teams. This continues to focus on the impact of the 'Social Graces' training to improve practice about difference and diversity, best practice in respect of life story work to help children achieve a secure understanding about their past, present and future and the impact of the 'Language that Cares' campaign regarding the language that is used to speak with and about care experienced children and young people. • Language that Cares – As part of National Care Leaver's Week, The National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF) shone a spot light on innovative projects co-created by care experienced individuals and professionals that make a difference to care experienced young people locally and/or nationally. GCC's Ambassadors were shortlisted for 'The Best Project Award' and were the overall winners, as chosen by other care experienced young people, at the NLCBF Care Leaver's Celebration Event and awards ceremony held on 28th October 2021. The Language that Cares initiative continues to influence local practice about speaking with and about care experienced children and young people. • ICT issues – ICT difficulties and the disruption that has previously been reported and discussed with Improvement Board members has largely been addressed in accordance with the proposed corporate ICT improvement and development plan. Clear improvements have been felt since July 2021 with far less incidents of concern and disruption being reported. This has had a positive impact on staff morale as well as practice and performance. The service is currently undergoing the Microsoft 365 upgrade as part of the planned ICT improvement programme.
<p>3.c.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool</p> <p>Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contact demand – this reduced from 3,113 to 2,850 in October 2021 but remains high. In the 3 previous financial years, the average number of contacts received on a monthly basis was between 2,200- 2,500. The monthly average in 2021/22 has been 2,900 contacts. Just over 40% of incoming demand continues to close, with around half of these receiving advice, guidance and support at the point of contact, as they do not meet the statutory children's social care criteria. ○ Initial decisions – these were timely for around 80% of children in October 2021. There was a further increase in the number of contacts rated as Red this month (222 compared to a monthly average of 70 between Sep-20 to Aug-21). Timeliness of decision making for these children improved slightly 75% but is lower than needed. ○ Referrals – new referrals requiring a statutory social work single assessment reduced by 116, from 967 to 851, in October 2021 but they remained at the second highest level ever seen over the last 5 financial years. ○ Referral source - Referrals from the Police continue to remain high and reflects the demand narrative from the Constabulary leadership ○ Neglect - The completion of the Neglect Toolkit Checklist at the point of contact continues to be low. Of the 163 contacts received from a professional which highlighted a concern about Neglect, the Neglect Toolkit Checklist was only completed for 7% (11 children) which is slightly up on June 2021 when it was 2% ○ Single Assessments – 78.9% of social work single assessments were within timescale in October 2021, which was a decline and below target (87%) • Children's Single Point of Contact (C-SPA) - Following internal developments to streamline and strengthen the service response, the GCC C-SPA (Children's Single Point of Access) was launched in November 2021. The GCC C-SPA provides additional capacity, expertise and resilience to triage all in-coming partnership contacts by co-locating Early Help staff and the Family Information Service alongside Children's Social Care staff. The C-SPA shows high levels of demand activity including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A high proportion of contacts still not reaching the statutory threshold ○ Evidence of latent demand leading to a 30% increase when compared to pre-CV19; and, ○ Increasing a high level of risk and complexity (evidenced by the spike in Red RAG rated requiring MASH enquiries)

- The combination of these factors has had an impact on the timeliness of initial decision-making, declining from the mid-90%'s to the low 80%'s. Initial decisions were timely for around 80% of children in October 2021, however, timeliness of finalising contact decisions declined to 68%. There was a further increase in the number of contacts RAG rated as Red in October 2021 (222 compared to a monthly average of 70 between September 2020 to August 2021). Timeliness of decision making for these children improved slightly but remains too low (75%).
- **Partnership Contacts and Referrals** – As previously reported, the Ofsted Focus Visit letter published on 20 November 2021 highlighted the comparatively high rate of contacts not meeting the agreed levels of intervention for a statutory social work service. Inspectors queried whether this was because the partnership is risk averse and/or not understanding or complying with locally agreed thresholds.
 - Following previous reporting to the Improvement Board about the continuing high number of contacts from Police, Health and Schools/Education to Children's Social Care Services that do not meet the threshold for statutory social work intervention, a multi-agency audit was completed under the auspices of the GSCP. The Partnership has agreed a number of recommendations to address the issues and these need to be progressed at pace:
 - A review of the Partnership agreement allowing Partner agencies to use adapted MARF's to notify MASH of a safeguarding incident.
 - Review of Partnership agreement for Partner agencies to use adapted risk assessments
 - Review of the audit sample to understand the percentage of notifications concluded NFA including the reasons for why they concluded with NFA.
 - Further exploration into the reasons for delay and a better understanding of the complexities of the Health system.
 - Obtain advise on the services within the Health system that will have varying knowledge of the child and family to ascertain which services have the ability to include quality information compared to services that will have limited /restricted information.
 - Understand the usability of GSCP Toolkits/screening tools e.g. Neglect, Exploitation, Pre-Birth
 - Further review of Health audit sample to extrapolate further information and context with consideration of establishing a Health Triage / interim measure to support and scrutinise Health notification prior to contact and referral
 - Review of automated emailing system for missing children/young adults to ensure engagement with Health
 - Undertaken a deeper dive to ascertain whether notifications submitted were reasonable due to the presented risk.
 - Police collaboration with Partner agencies to adapt the VIST to include pre-birth protocol questions.
- **GSCP governance** - In line with recent changes to the governance of the MASH Board, the new C-SPA and MASH Sub Group of the GSCP will now take forward the partnership audit recommendations outlined above. The Acting Head of Service for MASH, EDT, Missing and Exploitation, Claire Connolly, is the new Sub-Group chair person.
- **Legal Planning** - Following the previous legal planning improvement work undertaken by the seconded Ofsted HMI, which started during the first CV19 lockdown in the summer of 2020 and ended at the end of August 2020, the Legal Planning Task and Finish Group has progressed all agreed actions. This has culminated in publication of new practice guidance, changes to operating protocols and a re-design of the Liquid Logic legal workspace, including a new Legal Planning Meeting recording template. The Liquid Logic functionality to develop a PLO pre-proceedings and court tracker has also been progressed. Most recently a decision has been taken to train Legal Services to be Liquid Logic users so that legal colleagues with conduct of specific pre and court care proceedings can enter their legal advice directly into the child's electronic record which will be more efficient and effective. The refreshed practice guidance has been launched alongside a series of workshops facilitated by the lead improvement advisor with all teams and services. This activity was timely and coincided with the launch of the PLO National Working Group final report and recommendations. This activity relates to the Ofsted Focus Visit feedback in respect of the 'use and tracking of pre-proceedings to bring about change effectively and to prevent drift and delay'. During 2021, there has been so far (up to end of October 2021) a total of 137 Legal Planning Meetings and of these:
 - 48.35% resulted in a decision to initiate care proceedings
 - 65.47% resulted in a decision to initiate pre-proceedings
 - 16.12% resulted in no further action
 - 6.40% resulted in decisions for alternative legal action e.g. secure accommodation / deprivation of liberty etc.
 - 2.20% resulted in a discharge or revocation of an existing court order
- **Re-referrals** - Re-referrals were 22.1% in October 2021 which was better than target (22.5%) for the third consecutive month. This continues to be a priority performance issue with monthly dip sampling of all re-referrals continuing across all of the six Localities. This activity routinely reports to identify existing and emerging themes and issues to inform on-going remedial actions. The key aim now having made improvement is to sustain improvement moving forward.

3.d.To improve the quality

- **C-SMART Planning** – child centred planning remains a priority across the whole service for children in need of support, protection, care and independence. Overall, the

<p>and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool</p> <p>Planning and Reviewing</p>	<p>quality of plans has been improving although not all are consistently good or better yet and recent pressures in the system threatens to compromise the improvements that have been made although continued scrutiny by the Reviewing Service using the new Dispute Resolution Protocol should help to mitigate this risk and continue to place a spotlight of protection and care planning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIN Planning and Review - The previous changes to the CIN Planning and Review Protocol are being implemented and include increased oversight and intervention from the Team Managers which is designed to increase the level of management oversight. Team Managers are now expected to chair the 1st CIN review 4 weeks after the conclusion of the Single Assessment, the next CIN review is due three months after that and then at six-monthly intervals thereafter. 75.9% of Children in Need had a timely review or were not yet due a review in October 2021. • Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) – timeliness of ICPCs had previously been a significant long-standing performance concern. As a result of targeted whole system improvement activity, performance had improved significantly and been above target (80%) for five consecutive months until July. Performance declined in August and September 2021 but rallied and improved in October (73%), although remained below target (80%). A recent Leadership Team Meeting convened on 1 December 2021 brought Service Managers and Heads of Service together with the Review Service management group to reflect and respond to recent analysis and proposed solutions designed to further improve and sustain performance at or over the performance target. • Repeat child protection planning – this continues to fluctuate with one-third of the children made subject to a protection plan in October 2021 having had one or more previous protection plans (33%, 24 children). This compares with one-fifth in August (17%). Performance remains below target (25%). • Child in Care Reviews – the vast majority (97.3%) of statutory Child in Care Reviews remained timely and within tolerance of the very demanding target of 100%. • Joint Police – Children’s Social Care Workshops x 3 – following months of delay due to CV19 three joint workshops eventually went ahead face to face at the Sabrina Centre. The focus of the workshops which were led by senior leaders within both services concentrated on Child Protection Strategy Discussions/Meetings. The second two workshops engaged Children’s Social Care Team Managers, as the chairs and key decision makers, alongside Police Decision Makers and colleagues from the Police Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT). The workshops were beneficial for much needed face to face networking purposes but also served to tackle several challenges and obstacles associated with joint working and provided an opportunity to acknowledge the strengths and successes of joint working. Agreement was reached about a number of key issues, with a commitment to pursue a number of next steps, including regular future workshops on a quarterly/termly basis. A joint all staff communication is being finalised for distribution to all relevant CSC and Police colleagues.
<p>3.e.To improve the quality and performance of social work practice in line with the Practice Fundamentals Tool</p> <p>Case Recording</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT - The fragility of the ICT system, which began in October/November 2020 with difficulties associated with the previous contractor, compromised the recording of practice and performance which had a detrimental impact on staff morale for a number of months. The reliance that Children’s Social Care has on ICT for recording practice and performance, particularly in relation to Liquid Logic, cannot be underestimated. Corporate changes and improvements have been under development and the prevalence of on-going difficulties have reduced significantly. The service is currently undertaking the Microsoft 365 upgrade. As was promised by the Corporate ICT Team incremental improvements are already starting to impact more positively which is very welcome. • Liquid Logic – Over the past year the Liquid Logic functionality has been developed and improved to support recording in a number of different areas, including the following, although the ICT fragility has unfortunately hampered the anticipated impact of these developments at this stage of the journey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recording child protection Strategy Discussion decisions and rationale ➤ Recording the progress and outcome of child protection enquiries and decision making ➤ Recording Step-Up and Step-Down arrangements ➤ Recording a new exploitation episode with an updated Screening Tool ➤ Recording a revised and refreshed legal workspace ➤ Recording placement disruptions • Screening Review Team - Whilst most children’s social care Liquid Logic records can usually be accessed and navigated fairly easily, the ICT fragility reported above hampered efforts to achieve and maintain timely records. Historically, record keeping has been an area the service needed to address and this has been commented upon by Ofsted in the previous inspection and monitoring visits. Ofsted inspectors have reported that staff generally know children and young people very well, are well placed to articulate clear and consistent assessment outcomes and planning decisions and are great champions, but sometimes the recording does not match these standards. Whilst staff made sterling efforts to overcome the ICT difficulties and manage the impact on recording at the time of the ICT disruption, this was a worrying scenario, especially given the much-anticipated Ofsted inspection. To mitigate associated risks the CEx and corporate leadership team generously allocated additional funding to employ a bespoke team of experienced QA screeners to review as many Liquid Logic records as possible. The Screening Team was assembled ready to start screening w/c 26.07.2021. All Screeners were assigned to individual Heads of Service to seek guidance and direction about their focus, responses to their findings and the completion of identified remedial actions, as required. A bespoke screening tool, created by the interim Director for Safeguarding and Care and the lead improvement

and development advisor, was used by the Screener to record evidence and RAG rated best practice and serious shortcomings. Two improvement and development advisors supported the coordination of the screening team and all of the screening has now been completed.

- **Overall the screening exercise reviewed 2,525 children and young people's records.** The Screening Tool RAG Rating Descriptor was as follows:
RED = There are serious concerns regarding the content, quality and recording of practice, which includes omissions, gaps and delays leading to concerns about the safety or wellbeing of the child and requires urgent remedial action.
AMBER = There are some concerns regarding aspects of the content, quality and recording of practice which does not raise concerns about the imminent safety or wellbeing of the child and can be addressed by progressing the identified actions.
GREEN = No obvious concerns regarding the content, quality or recording of practice. The record is generally fit for purpose and does not need any specific action to be taken.
- **The closing summary position was as follows:**

Locality/Service Area	No. of screens	Red	Amber	Green
Gloucester Locality	458	12%	77%	11%
Forest of Dean Locality	272	28%	59%	13%
Cotswolds & Stroud Localities	313	9%	30%	61%
Cheltenham Locality	415	40%	59%	1%
Tewkesbury Locality	331	15%	27%	59%
Under 11s Service	179 (all)	4%	87%	9%
Over 11s (Cheltenham) Service	158	13%	87%	0%
Over 11s (Gloucester/Stroud)	298	12%	41%	47%
DCYPS	101 (all)	14%	84%	0%
Total %		16.33%	61.22%	22.33%

- As a matter of urgency, all Heads of Service and their respective Management Teams were tasked with addressing identified remedial actions identified by the Screening Review Team. Particular attention has been given to all the Red RAG rated findings, including management oversight from relevant Service Managers and Heads of Service as well as undertaking visits to confirm the safety and wellbeing of all identified children. It has been confirmed that no children with a Red RAG rated record were found to be at risk of imminent harm.
- **The Screening Review Team** – the team has now concluded all of its work. One of the Screeners has been retained to provide additional capacity and support to the Cheltenham Locality for up to a 3-month period. Cheltenham Locality has taken swift action to address remedial action and the retained screener is now focussing on the underlying reasons including management oversight, decision making and thematic practice issues.

4.To communicate with Practitioners, Managers and Leaders and engage their 'hearts and minds' to deliver practice and performance improvements

- **Workforce** – As agreed at the October 2021 Improvement Board, a deep dive report on social worker workforce issues have been produced for the December 2021 Improvement Board. This report covers the recruitment and retention as well as staff morale & wellbeing. In summary, the current signals in the system, as reported by staff, performance and other QA indicators, suggests that there is a significant turn from the previously positive trajectory. As reported by other LAs across the country, we are grappling with the combined effect of notable rises in workflows and workloads as a result of the clear emergence of latent demand; the increasing turnover of staff causing 'churn' in the system; and the difficulties of social work delivery given the unprecedented circumstances and workforce fatigue associated with the continuation of the CV19 pandemic and recent announcements about the Omicron variant. Against this backdrop the Children's Social Care workforce is continuing to work hard and remains committed to delivering a consistently good service but the conditions within which many are operating is less than ideal.
- **Recruitment position statement week ending 10 December 2021** - The agency recruitment activity following the recent uplift in agency safeguarding social worker rates and the uplift in the stability payment for permanent safeguarding social worker which was initiated on 10 December 2021, originally focused on 44 vacancies which has been gradually reducing and most recently as of 10 December 2021, focussed on 37 active vacancies. The update includes new vacancies approved by Director of Safeguarding and Care on 10 December 2021 with the HR Recruitment Team, including 2 x Advance Practitioner (AP) posts. Of the 37 posts outlined below, 11 candidates have been interviewed, offered and accepted offers which leaves 26 vacant position to progress. In addition, there are a further 8 vacancies for other roles (including Professional Advisor (PA), Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Emergency Duty Team (EDT) & Team Manager (TM) vacancies). The table below sets out this position:

Social Worker (inc AP) Recruitment	Total Vacancies Remaining	Total Candidates in Play	Received & CV with Managers	Shortlisted & awaiting interview availability	Interview booked	Offered but not accepted	Accepted but not started yet
Safeguarding	19	7		1	1	2	3
Assessment	14	13	3	1	1	1	7
11-25 Permanence	4	3			1	1	1

- **CV19 Business Continuity Planning** - arrangements continue with Head of Service catch up meetings each Monday morning, an extended Bronze Group and Leadership Team meeting each Wednesday morning, with Services Managers attending on a monthly basis, as well as a Head of Service peer - peer meeting every Friday morning.
- **Staff Absence Tracker** - The staff tracker shows that overall sickness rates for children's social care staff continue to be lower than before the CV19 pandemic but has increased since overall since August 2021. Staff testing positive for CV19 has been relatively low overall comparatively speaking throughout the pandemic and there are currently 4 staff off sick with a CV-19 diagnosis and one member of staff with long COVID (as of 1st December 2021). All front-line social workers and GCC foster carers have been vaccinated. Children's social care are currently working with Adult Service and Public Health to assess and respond to the governments' announcement about compulsory vaccinations. Children's social care staff are currently identified in the second cohort of staff and arrangements are in hand.
- **Ofsted**– The much-anticipated and very overdue notification for the Ofsted inspection remains outstanding. In February 2022, it will be 5 years since the previous inspection in February 2017 and it is now over a year since Ofsted undertook the Focus Visit. The Ofsted Annual Conversation took place on 20 September 2021. The conversation covered the key issues and areas for development outlined in the Focus Visit letter date 20 November 2020. The delay in receiving the Ofsted inspection notification continues to have an impact on the service as staff have been held in the 'inspection readiness' posture for a very long time now.

5.To protect children through timely and consistent risk informed intervention and support that has a positive impact and improves outcomes

- **Ofsted Focus Visit** - Following the Ofsted Focus Visit in October 2020, the feedback and learning has been used to refresh improvement and development activity. A number of these issues affect practice with children in need of support and protection in respect of the use and tracking of PLO Pre-Proceedings.
- **PLO Pre-Proceedings and Family Court Proceedings** - Children's Social Care now has sole responsibility for managing the PLO pre-proceedings and care proceedings tracker and has dedicated staff to achieve and maintain the tracker. The revised Liquid Logic legal workspace continues to require scrutiny to improve electronic reporting and updating to ensure this continues to contribute to the on-going 'grip and pace' that is necessary. The improvement and development lead chairs a monthly review meeting with relevant operation staff from Locality Safeguarding Teams and their Heads of Service before reporting to the Director of Safeguarding and Care. A comprehensive report is presented to the Leadership Team each month.
- **Public Law Outline (PLO) Pre-proceedings** - activity, especially children subject to pre-proceedings for longer than 26 weeks, was highlighted in the Ofsted Focus Visit. A targeted action plan, which was shared with the lead Ofsted inspector at the time of the Focus Visit, has reported progress on a monthly basis. The action plan is designed to improve 'grip and pace' so that children experience effective change and drift or delay is avoided. Where evidence of the following is apparent however, matters are put before the court to provide the child/ren with legal protection:
 - There is engagement or non-engagement from parents but the risks persist
 - The impact of the identified concerns on the child has worsened
 - The child's safety cannot be managed with the child remaining in the parent's care
- **PLO Pre-Proceedings activity** – based on the latest PLO pre-proceedings activity in the preceding period, the data is as follows:
 - **As of 10.12.2021**, there were **58** family groups that were subject to pre-proceedings
 - 12 sets of pre-proceedings concluded in the previous month, with 9 of the 12 resulting in court care proceedings being issued
 - An additional 12 new sets of pre-proceedings were initiated

- 12 family groups subject to pre-proceedings were due to be issued and 4 of those related to unborn babies with a plan to issue at birth

- **PLO Pre-proceedings timeliness broken down by Locality:**

- Gloucester: 22 x pre-proceedings, with 7 over 26 weeks with longest at 52 weeks with a recent decision being taken to issue
- Forest of Dean: 3 x pre-proceeding, with none over 26 weeks and the longest at 19 weeks
- Cheltenham: 4 x -re-proceedings, with none over 26 weeks and the longest at 22 weeks
- Tewkesbury: 8 x pre-proceedings, with 4 over 26 weeks with the longest at 45 weeks with a recent decision to exit pre-proceedings at the review LPM
- Stroud: 9 x pre-proceedings, with none over 26 weeks and the longest at 24 weeks
- Cotswold: 3 x pre-proceedings, with 1 over 26 weeks at 27 weeks

- A review of annual safeguarding activity data shows that as of 08.12.2021 the volume of activity over the past 12 months is as follows across Localities and DCYPS:

Locality/Service	Child Protection Planning	PLO Pre-Proceedings Planning	Family Court Care Proceedings
Gloucester (x6 S'G Teams)	468	129	114
Forest of Dean (x2 S'G Teams)	213	28	47
Cheltenham (x4 S'G Teams)	343	62	81
Tewkesbury (x2 S'G Teams)	193	38	41
Stroud (x2 S'G Teams)	163	32	48
Cotswold (x2 S'G Teams)	137	39	18
DCYPS (x1 Team)	12	22	2

- **Progress of the Court Recovery Plan** – in addition to the PLO pre-proceedings activity outlined above, there continues to be an on-going focus to progress the court recovery plan in partnership with Cafcass and the Judiciary to ensure children receive timely legal protection when required. The impact of the pandemic has severely impacted judicial capacity but the development of GCC's 8 x Virtual Court Rooms in Gloucester and Cheltenham has been an innovative solution to a relieve a difficult situation. Current proceedings and pre-proceedings represent an extremely busy and demanding area of practice. The latest court recovery plan report dated 10.12.2021 indicates that:

- 130 set of care proceedings (in addition to the 58 family groups subject to pre-proceedings) and of these;
 - 34 sets of proceedings were allocated to Warwickshire Legal Services the remainder were allocated to GCC Legal Services
 - 5 sets of proceedings were managed through the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)
 - 12 sets of new proceedings were issued between 01.11.2021 and 30.11.2021
 - 13 sets of court proceedings were concluded in October 2021
- Of the 130 sets of care proceeding, approximately two thirds are timetabled for an Issues Resolution or Final Hearing over the next few months:
 - 39 were awaiting an Interim Hearing (Case Management Hearing, Further Case Management Hearing or Finding of Fact Hearing)
 - 63 were timetabled to an Issues Resolutions Hearing
 - 22 were timetabled to Final Hearing

- **Virtual Courts** – The use of the 8 x Virtual Courts in Cheltenham and Gloucester continues. The previous concerns expressed by the judiciary about GCC's fragile ICT has been managed with the use of iPad / tablets with no outstanding issues.

- **GCC Legal Services** – Legal Services have faced considerable pressures and demand arising from volume and complexity of court care proceedings. Legal Services have managed to employ new staff and have also secured additional capacity from Warwickshire Legal Services. There is a corporate response to ensure GCC Legal Services continues to be able to meet demand.

- **Parenting Assessments** – In order to address the most common reason for a delay in pre-proceedings, children's social care leadership team has been exploring 'ParentAssess'. It is anticipated that children's social care will seek to reclaim responsibility for parenting assessments which have gradually over the years become an area of practice that has been commissioned to independent social workers completing PAMS (Parent Assessment Manual). The Leadership Team has explored the ParentAssess approach at a Leadership Team Meeting. A Task and Finish Group is now being established to further explore the logistics of adopting 'ParentAssess', include due diligence with other Local Authorities, the Policy Unit at Bath University and the Local Court User Group.

- **NPLWG** - In March 2021, the National Public Law Working Group (NPLWG) published its final report including 47 core recommendations and 15 longer term recommendations. Best Practice Guidance recommends that the pre-proceedings timeframe is reduced from 26 weeks to 16 weeks. In accordance with the NPLWG to recalibrate practice, adjustments have been/are being made locally to develop and further improve pre-proceedings practice. This includes reducing the pre-proceedings timeframe to 16 weeks, from 26 weeks, and this new timescale is now in the process of being implemented for all new pre-proceedings and will be counted from the date of the first pre-proceedings meeting. This new timescale will be increasingly reflected in future performance reporting.

- **Child Protection Conferences** - In October the timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences improved to 73% , this remains below target (80%). A whole Leadership Team Meeting was given over to a whole system management review meeting with the Reviewing Service, HOS and Service Managers on 8 December 2021 to review deep dive analysis about the variables that are require to achieve and maintain consistently good performance so that ICPCs remain timely. This was a productive review meeting with agreement across the system about changes in practice and next steps.
- **Repeat Child Protection Planning** – Repeat child protection planning continues to fluctuate with one-third of children becoming subject to a plan in October having had a second or subsequent plan compared with one-fifth in August (17%). Performance remains worse than target (25%) in September 2021.
- **Duration of Child Protection Plans** – The number of children subject to a protection plan for more than two years reduced in October 2021 and remains low (18 children) and pre-proceedings or family court proceedings were underway for more than half of these children
- **Joint safeguarding developments** – There are several initiatives and activities that have been undertaken to improve joint working across the children’s safeguarding partnership, including:
 - **Child Protection Strategy Discussions/Meetings** – these are now convened by the relevant Locality, as opposed to the MASH, to ensure continuity of management oversight throughout the s47 child protection enquiry/joint investigation.
 - **Refreshed Child Protection Strategy Discussion/Meeting agenda** – this has been refreshed and agreed between GSCP strategic executive leads for Children’s Social Care, Police and Health.
 - **Risk Outside of the Home/Exploitation** – joint planning, improvement and development activity is on-going with key partners to progress the following: In addition to launch and implement the revised Exploitation Screening Tool which and the streamline and coordinate shared resources the Joint Police / Social Care Exploitation Team, the new draft partnership strategy to protect young people outside of the home which is due to be presented at the December 2021 GSCP Executive Meeting. The draft strategy includes a revised and refreshed multi-agency strategic proposal which has been led by the Acting HOS for the MASH as chair of the strategic Task and Finish Group. The strategic proposal includes:
 - A Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Hub and Spoke model, providing strategic oversight and direction at the centre with local disruption activity being coordinated at Area/Locality/District level.
 - Aspiration for a Specialist Lawyer and Data Analyst (subject to a ‘Safer Gloucestershire’ Partnership request)
 - Evolution of the child protection conference system and the high-risk panel meeting (to adequately address the safeguarding challenges to safeguard young people at risk of harm outside of the home)

6.To provide care and achieve permanence for children at the earliest appropriate opportunity to improve their life chances and overall outcomes

- **Ofsted Focus Visit** - the key practice and performance priorities coming out of the Ofsted Focus Visit in 2020 in respect of children in care included:
 - **Edge of Care** - Services for children and families at the Edge of Care
 - **Placement Sufficiency** - Number and choice of suitable placements to meet children's needs and reduce disruption
 - **Personal Education Plans** - to improve the quality to be more ambitious, specific and have measurable targets
- **Innovate Managed Team** – In addition to the Screening Review Team already referred to above, additional corporate funding has also been used to commission a Managed Team with Innovate. The Managed Team model comprised of a Team Manager and 5 Social Workers with the capacity to support 100 children over a 3-month period. The agreed focus for the Managed Team is permanence planning in the U11s Service which is necessary to address outstanding Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) as a result of the increasing care proceedings as well as intensive support to children in care and care leavers in the O11s Service which is necessary due to the pressures associated with staff 'churn', especially in the Cheltenham and Gloucester North Teams. The initiation meeting took place on 16 August 2021 and the mid-point review meeting took place on 1 October 2021. At the end of the 3-month contract there remained significant concerns about the quality and performance of the Innovate Permanence Team.
- **Edge of Care** - The reviewed Edge of Care Service is integral to the children's social care transformation remodelling. As part of the planned staff engagement and formal consultation process the intention is to adopt the Intensive Family Preservation Service (IFPS) approach which is an evidence-based approach to help families continue to look after their own children and avoid the need for them to come into local authority care. The continuing focus of the Edge of Care Service is:
 - Diversion from care
 - Support in care, and
 - Reunification home from care.

Specialist learning and development about the IFPS model is being sourced and it is anticipated that a bespoke programme will be initiated with relevant managers in the first instance so that the managers can co-facilitate the training with the rest of the staff group. A review of impact and outcome evidence has been undertaken to evaluate the first six months of the Edge of Care Service, including the Edge of Care contribution to the Admission to Care Panel, and it is anticipated that a summary report with evidence will be available in January 2022.
- **Increase in children in care numbers** – the number of children in care is increasing and having previously plateaued around 750 recent admissions have accelerated to a peak of 844. At the time of writing this AIP refresh on 13 December 2021, the number of children in care was 840. This compares to an average of 778 in 2020/21 and 727 in 2019/20. This number is expected to rise again based on analysis of the PLO pre-proceedings tracker and evidence from the Admission to Care Panel (ATCP) although it is anticipated that this will plateau as the service addresses the additional demand in the system caused by the latent demand. There has been more than 800 children in care month on month since May 2021.
- **Placement Sufficiency** – The next phase of the capital programme is being presented to Cabinet in December 2021 and this sets out an ambitious programme of activity to develop additional placement provision over the next 3 – 5 years. This addresses the Ofsted Focus Visit feedback about 'The number and choice of suitable placements for children to meet their needs and reduce the risk of placement disruption.'
- **In-house Fostering** - the March 2021 Improvement Board heard from Karen Simmons, an independent consultant from the LGA, about the findings and recommendations from a comprehensive review of the in-house Fostering Service. Karen Simmons has now been retained to provide on-going support and challenge to deliver on the review recommendations and there is now a Fostering Transformation Board chaired by the Director of Safeguarding and Care. There are seven operational workstreams designed to targeted the key areas.
- **Placement stability (long and short term)** - In respect of short-term placement stability, 15.9% of children in care had 3 or more placements over the last 12 months across all periods of care, this is improving but remains below target (13%). Long-term stability has improved to 67% which would have been above the old target (65%) but is just below the new stretched target (68%) and statistical neighbours (68%). There have been, and continue to be, a number of improvement and development activities to promote and address placement stability including:
- **Permanence Project Phase 1** - The first phase of the Permanence Project was completed by the beginning of June 2021 with 500 children in care considered in a series of 12 Permanence Panels. The phase 1 Permanence Project concluded with key actions being embedded into business as usual practice to ensure all children and young people in care with a permanence plan have permanent carers identified so that children and young people can be formally matched to provide secure emotional, placement and legal permanence.
- **Permanence Project Part 2** – Following the recommendations from phase 1, some targeted Permanence Panels were recommended for September/October 2021. To date a targeted approach has been taken to review the position in respect of children in care with a plan of permanence and need to be long term matched with a foster carer. The Under 11s and O11s Service positions have been reviewed in two repeat Permanence Panels in October / November 2021 and there is a further additional Permanence Review Panel scheduled for January 2022 to review all outstanding children
- **39 children have been booked into a number of additional Fostering Panels convened for a long-term match scheduled between November 2021 and February 2022. Progress to date is on track and positive.**

- **33 children are living with their long-term foster carers and, subject to confirming various care planning issues/queries, will be matched at additional Fostering Panels scheduled from February 2022 onwards. A further 2 additional Fostering Panels have been booked in April 2022.**
- **8 children had previously had a plan for long-term fostering but were not yet living in their permanent carers and targeted family-finding is underway. To date progress has been made with 3 of the original 8 children now having identified LT foster carers and matches will be progressed at Fostering panel accordingly.**
- **Permanence Tracking** – work has been undertaken to review and enhance the previous Permanence Tracker to ensure the process is aligned to the care planning processes already in place and scrutinises all children awaiting permanence. The Permanence Tracker has been used to inform and support the Permanence Project Panels.
- **Placement Disruption** – targeted improvement and development work has been progressed and is now concluded to address the way in which the service supports children in placements at risk of disruption. New and extended practice guidance, support and Liquid Logic reporting tools are now in place to establish a more effective, pro-active and targeted practice approach. Placement disruption reporting is now in place.
- **Admission to Care Panel (ATCP)** – The ATCP continues to take place on a weekly basis every Wednesday afternoon and considers all requests, pro-active planning in advance and retrospective for children and young people entering care in an emergency in between Panels. This includes all planned admissions, including consideration of PLO pre-proceedings and court applications, as well as unplanned/emergency admissions, including retrospective approval following Emergency Duty Team intervention, Police Powers of Protection and Youth Court hearings. There has been a significant demand increase, with 844 children in care as at 13 December 2021. The Director for Children’s Safeguarding and Care and the lead for improvement and development advisor oversee all requests for care and consult directly with relevant Heads of Service for every unplanned/emergency request for care as well as all planned requests. The ATCP comprises of key managers/officers from Edge of Care, Family Group Conferencing, Fostering, Commissioning, the Reviewing Service etc in order to provide challenge and support, additional scrutiny and opportunities to work better together at such a critical point in the decision-making process. Both the Virtual School and Child in Care Health Team are routinely provided with early notice of decisions via the ATCP decision log. Wherever appropriate alternatives to care are explored but the recent rise in child in care numbers reflects an increasing level of risk and complexity in the system at the moment and it is anticipated that some of this is due to the predicted latent demand related to the CV19 pandemic and the impact this has had on family resilience.
- **Admission to Care Panel Reviews** - The weekly Admission to Care Panel was launched in February 2021 to provide better oversight and management of the planning and decision-making process for children and young people to enter the care of the Local Authority. One of the underlying drivers for the Panel is to address Ofsted’s comments about what inspectors called the ‘second front door’. In addition to the preliminary 3-month review previously reported to the Improvement Board, a further mid-term review 6 months after at the end of November 2021:
 - 3-month Review Highlights:**
 - Between February and May 2021, 94 families / 132 children were presented to the ATCP
 - Just over a third of ATCP requests related to the ratification of children who had already entered care. Most of these were a result of ‘trigger’ incidents such as injury to a child or Police intervention but there were also consistent numbers of requests relating to young people excluded from staying in their family home, including homeless 16 – 17 old presentations.
 - Of the 94 ATCP requests, 11 did not result in a care admission with a recommendation of either an agreed package of diversionary support or family resolution via a Family Group conference / Edge of Care intervention
 - The early indications from the establishment of the ATCP are broadly positive.
 - More children are now entering the care system with evidence of improved planning and decision making with improved opportunities for Fostering and Commissioning Services to search and match placements more reflectively with children and young people’s needs. In channelling care admissions in this way our edge of care response is better targeted and timelier to maximise the opportunity to support families to remain together.
 - 9-month Review Highlights:**
 - From May to November 2021 inclusive, ATCP considered 265 children from 178 families.
 - Of these, panel agreed that 241 (91%) should come into care. This suggests there is a common and appropriate understanding of thresholds for entry to care.
 - Diversionary support including edge of care was offered for those children and families where entry to care was not agreed.
 - Unborn children constituted 6% of the total number of requests (17 children). In the first months of the ATCP, these were too often last minute. More recently most requests for children to come into care at birth have been made well in advance of the due date (six weeks or more). They have been well evidenced and carefully planned. There is though, a tendency to request parent and baby assessment placements “in case that’s what the court wants”. Sometimes this is appropriate, but there have been situations where evidence has led panel to believe the LA needs to be clearer and bolder in asserting the need for separation.
 - Of the 241 children for whom agreement was given, 98 (41%) had already entered care, often in crises. Such retrospective decisions were needed for a range of reasons. Seven related to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Four children in one family entered care following the unexpected death of their mother. A small number were for Southwark assessment homelessness reasons. Some followed the use of Police Powers of Protection.

- This means that a clear majority (almost 60%) of children who entered care in the period did so in a planned way, often following a period in pre-proceedings. For these children there has been more scope for careful placement searching and matching. Nonetheless, we clearly need to maintain the focus on the importance of early planning to drive further improvement.
 - Panel membership has been consistent and attendance very good. Social workers presenting to panel say they find it simultaneously constructive and challenging. There is full compliance with requirements for paperwork and the quality of written and verbal submissions are largely good.
- **Section 20** - Of all children in care 21.4% were accommodated under a Section 20 arrangement in October 2021. This continues to follow an improving trend against a high number of children in care and is better than previous target (25%). A stretch target of 19% has been set since October .
 - **Care Leaver's Pathway Planning Quarterly Review** - Performance for care leavers with an up-to-date Pathway Plan was at 89.6% in October, this is just shy of target (90%) and has improved since April 2021 (up to 14.4%).
 - **Care Leaver's Accommodation** - A high proportion of care leavers continue to live in suitable accommodation (89.4%). This reduced slightly in October 2021 and is just short of being in tolerance of target (95%). Weekly tracking and leadership reporting continue for care leavers who are, or may become at risk of being, homeless. Identified young people continue to be reviewed on a weekly basis during the CV-19 pandemic to ensure continuity of support and intervention as necessary and appropriate.
 - **Care Leavers not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)** – Just over half of our Care Leavers are in employment, education or training (53%); Performance is above our peer group (49.8%, March 2020) but remains a long way from our very ambitious stretched target (75%) which was set as a result of representation for our Ambassadors who provided the Improvement Board with a thematic presentation about Care Leavers not in EET and requested a more ambitious stretch target to convey the aspiration and commitment that they wanted to see locally. As has been acknowledged across the country, the CV19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on young people and improving opportunities for young people to get into EET remains a key priority for the Council. The support programmes that are in place to help young people gain employment, include:
 - **AIM** – these are supported internships as part of an established education employability programme for young people with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP).
 - **Step Forwards** – this is a GCC corporately funded programme which specifically targets care-experienced young people to provide them with the support they need to move into paid work.
 - **Works for Me** – this is funded through the GCC Economic Recovery Plan and targets young people who are NEET and who are from areas of the highest deprivation.
 - **Kickstart** – this is a DWP national programme that provides paid work placements for young people to help them build their employability skills ready to move into full time paid work.
 - **GEM Project** - a project for those who are furthest from the labour market.
 - **Step Forwards** - has a Steering Group which oversees the whole system approach for and with young people. The Steering Group Vice chair role is filled by an Ambassador and there has recently been an appointment of a young person as a Job Broker who is employed in and supported by the Gloucestershire Employment and Skills Hub Economy, Environment and Infrastructure Directorate. The Steering Group is tasked with establishing a performance dashboard to report on activity, impact and outcome measures.
 - **Personal Education Plans (PEPs)** – The Virtual School has taken targeted action to address the Ofsted Focus Visit feedback about PEPs needing to be 'more ambitious, specific and measurable.' To date extensive training and improvement activity, including external reviewing, has taken place to address the Ofsted feedback which confirms that improvements have been made to the process and focus of the PEP with Schools. Further analysis and evaluation are awaited via an LGA independent review being commissioned by the new Director for Education to determine the impact and outcome of the improvement activity in respect of children in care's progress and attainment. It is anticipated that the Virtual School will be able to report to the Improvement Board about the outcome of the LGA PEP review in due course.
 - **Trevone House** - was shortlisted as a finalist in the MJ Awards in the Children's Services Innovation category. Judges said: "This project impressively showed how to develop a programme based on feedback from young people with care experience, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and demonstrating excellent outcomes." The MJ Award ceremony was held on 17 September 2021 at London's Hilton Hotel on Park Lane where Trevone House was Highly Commended. Trevone House was also shortlisted in the 'Children's Services' category at the LGC (Local Government Chronicle) Awards 2021.

Post script:

In light of recent discussions about the review and refresh of the statutory notice arrangements and the future focus of the Improvement Board, there has been a proposal for a thematic approach for key practice and performance issues that would benefit from a broader and deeper review of the relevant issues to address the obstacles and challenges. Some suggestions for a thematic focus on the Improvement Board Forward Plan are as follows:

- **Social Worker Workforce Planning – scheduled for the December 2021 Improvement Board**
- **Contacts and Referrals:** Focus on revisiting the progress of the multi-agency partnership audit recommendations and the progress that has been made.
- **Managing risk outside the home –** child criminal and sexual exploitation in line with the new GSCP strategy
- **Missing:** Focus on the system and practice solutions to address delays in reporting missing and establish a more strategic overview of ‘push-pull’ factors.
- **Children of Concern:** Focus on revisiting the previous COC reporting with a focus on exploitation and the connectivity with missing (see above).
- **Care Leavers:** Focus on key performance indicators and practice issues (e.g. Pathway planning, visiting/keeping in touch, accommodation/risk of homelessness, NEET, Health Passports etc).
- **Sufficiency Strategy Refresh**
- **Fostering Transformation Programme**
- **Children’s Social Care Re-modelling**