

To:

**Ann James**  
**Director for Children's Safeguarding and Care**  
Children & Young People  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Shire Hall, Westgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 2TP  
email: Ann.james@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Please ask for: Ann James

Phone: 01452 583503

---

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

Date: 12th October 2022

Dear Colleagues

### **Social Work Health Check 2022**

We are pleased to share with you the 2022 Social Work Health Check. Our health check survey was open during May and June 2022 as an additional section of the GCC staff survey. Additionally, Rob undertook 24 face to face and virtual focus groups with around 80 colleagues across teams and localities.

Thank you to everyone who took part - we want to assure you that your views count, we're listening carefully and acting on what you say. This year, your views continued to reflect our shared experiences and the challenges we're meeting as we strive to improve our services in a changing local and national environment.

The report reflects what you told us and sets out the context and a shared organisational understanding of our experiences in children's social work and social care in Gloucestershire in 2022. As in previous years, the senior leadership team are committed to responding to your views and to helping create the conditions for purposeful work with children and families.

**Last year we had 4 recommendations and we wanted to take this opportunity to let you know what we're doing or have done to deliver against them:**

1. *National and local learning from the pandemic response should further inform both immediate activities and wider dialogue about post lockdown practice. The lived stories of staff working directly with children and family's needs to further influence how practice expectations are formulated and shared.*

We have:

- Supported a return to more in person working where this is of benefit to children and families
- Provided facilities in all our buildings for hybrid working
- Supporting agile working - combining home and office or field work and keeping the benefits under review
- Contributed to the DfE funded Southwest Sector Led Improvement toolkit on virtual working

- Provided direct work kits to individuals and teams as part of the Ambassador led Big Participation Conversations that have been happening (our work is about building relationships with children and families, understanding and influencing the child's world after all)
  - Improved the way we hear about, celebrate and share great practice.
  - Revising the Quality Assurance Framework and embedding Appreciative Inquiry into our practice development by focussing on '*what works and why*'.
  - Established 'learning lunches', as a chance to come together to consider a particular area of practice or policy with the aim of developing practice expertise, reflection and ideas sharing.
2. *The impact of virtual working and the additional mechanisms, guidance and oversight required to promote risk informed and inclusive practice with children and their families should be regularly encouraged in teams. This should include broader consideration and resources to support staff wellbeing and formal access to reflective opportunity to consider risks, intended outcomes, and the effectiveness of virtual plans.*

We have:

- Rebalanced the system, using the virtual world only where it adds value to our work with children and families, for example returning to in-person child protection conferences.
  - Continued to improve supervision: this year, 69% of colleagues told us they have access to regular, reflective supervision and 74% said that discussions about equality, diversity and inclusion were encouraged in their team and supported better relationships and practice.
  - Improved the health and wellbeing offer to include guidance for managers on how to hold effective wellbeing conversations, the launch of MIND managing mental health e-learning and a comprehensive emotional wellbeing support package. If you want to find out more, go to Staffnet:
    - [Wellbeing conversations - a toolkit to support the mental health of colleagues - Staffnet \(gloucestershire.gov.uk\)](https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/staffnet/wellbeing-conversations-a-toolkit-to-support-the-mental-health-of-colleagues)
    - [MIND Managing mental health at work - Staffnet \(gloucestershire.gov.uk\)](https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/staffnet/mind-managing-mental-health-at-work) and
    - [Emotional Wellbeing Support Package - COVID-19 - Staffnet \(gloucestershire.gov.uk\)](https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/staffnet/emotional-wellbeing-support-package-covid-19)
  - Adopted systemic practice as our practice methodology – we're now in our second year of training teams and leaders
3. *The reach and relevance of service wide practice changes, messages and expectations should be considered, and additional consideration given to how these are shared, understood and sustained in teams and with partner agencies.*
- We'll keep using Families Count because 88% of colleagues say they enjoy Families Count and that it provides useful information about our priorities
  - The majority of colleagues attended whole staff webinars during and after our inspection and joined senior leaders to discuss our continual improvement journey during visits to district offices
  - Weekly 'Meet the Director' sessions are now established in the Social Work Academy
  - Plans are in place to improve the induction for new colleagues and for the development of experienced colleagues that will be shared with everyone very soon

- Implemented systemic practice groups led by the PSW and being developed further for this year's cohorts
4. *Role responsibilities and progression routes could be more transparently discussed, with practitioners, linking more clearly and explicitly with the post qualifying standards. Communications need to be rationalised where possible and accompanied by good management translation of these in their teams.*
- Senior Social Worker and Advanced Practitioner roles developed and are now embedded within a career progression framework
  - 19 colleagues successfully progressed to Senior Social Worker roles in 2021-22 and we continue to support the development and reach of this role
  - Most colleagues say the Essentials Principles are now embedded into service and team language and expectations
  - However, colleagues also told us that PDRs are not yet undertaken for everyone and that we've more to do to make the Social Work Academy Programme known and accessible to all.

**This year the Health Check highlighted 5 areas that we're working on:**

1. *Increased opportunity for social workers and social care staff to be involved in dialogue regarding 'threshold' and apparent barriers to partnership working with service and local agency colleagues is necessary to encourage revised narratives, and collaboration about risk, roles and responsibilities.*
  - We are working closely with the GSCP Business Unit to review the 'levels of intervention' (threshold) document and are developing opportunities for practitioners and managers to contribute to this revision. We intend that this will support our joint approach to meeting need at the earliest point and working together to protect children.
  - Look out for shared learning opportunities through the GSCP and SW Academy.
2. *The opportunities presented by increasing staff familiarity with systemic practice principles should be developed and prioritised within these conversations and wider team contacts. Key practitioners should be supported to rehearse and exemplify these approaches in CP conferences, CIC reviews and within assessments and plans.*
  - We will continue to hold introductory sessions for practitioners and managers about systemic practice and the expectations of the training.
  - We are developing guidance aimed at helping managers supporting colleagues undertaking the Systemic Practice programme.
  - Lunchtime Learning sessions will include Systemic ideas and practice examples led by participating teams.
  - We now have sessional clinical support for our Systemic Practice - Chloe Constable started with us recently and is a Clinical Psychologist and Systemic Psychotherapist, we'll be introducing you to her soon.
  - Over 30 children's services leaders are completing the Systemic Leadership programme together to ensure we can support your developing practice and do our best to model and lead developments systemically.

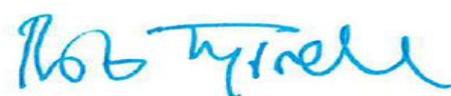
3. *Confirmation of supervision expectations, practice, recording and comprehension of promotion of 'reflection' as an integral tool for SW support and development is required to promote wider confidence, accountability and shared dialogue about improving practice across the service.*
  - We have reviewed the supervision policy, recording expectations and Practice Standards.
  - We will launch the new policy with supervision skills development sessions to support our new approach.
  
4. *Similar attention to opportunity to identify emotional health impacts and support in social care contexts is necessary, linked to wider development and dialogue about Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.*
  - The comprehensive health and wellbeing offer in place (see above) will be reviewed via the GCC Corporate Health and Wellbeing Group, which includes representatives from the Children's Directorate as part of its core membership.
  - The Social Work Academy will continue to incorporate the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion module in Essentials 3 and review its content with you during 2022/ 23.
  - Ensure our recruitment encourages and enables applicants from diverse backgrounds. ASYE assessment and interview methods have been reviewed by the HR lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Any recommendations will be acted upon.
  - Increasing focus on the Social GRACES as part of our systemic approach (read John Burnham's work or start with this [BASW summary](#)) as well as other models that support inclusive practice.
  
5. *Further consideration of how social workers and managers might better evidence improved outcomes, with consideration given to increased autonomy for budgets and decision making as a counter to existing narratives and perceptions of unnecessary bureaucracy*
  - Work is underway to consider levels of delegated authority and how best to reduce bureaucracy, retain accountability and ensure decisions are taken as close to the child as possible.

Thanks for your interest and involvement this year's Social Work Health Check – please take the time to read the attached report and get in touch if you have any ideas or suggestions.

Kind Regards



**Ann James**  
**Director of Children's Safeguarding and Care**



**Rob Tyrrell**  
**Principal Social Worker**