

Inspection of safeguarding

Gloucestershire

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Reporting inspector: Martin Ayres HMI

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About this inspection

1. A full inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services in Gloucestershire took place in November and December 2010 and found that the overall effectiveness of safeguarding services in Gloucestershire was inadequate. The overall effectiveness of services for looked after children was adequate. An unannounced inspection of Gloucestershire council's contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2011 noted improvements in safeguarding arrangements with five areas for further development and no priority actions.
2. The purpose of the inspection is to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people are properly safeguarded. The inspection team consisted of two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector. The inspection was carried out under the Children Act 2004.
3. The evidence evaluated by inspectors included:
 - information gathered through discussions with children and young people receiving services, front line staff and managers, senior officers including the Director of Children's Services and the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board, elected members and a range of community representatives
 - the analysis and evaluation of reports from a variety of sources including a review of the Children and Young People's Plan, performance data, information from the inspection of local settings, such as schools and day care provision and the evaluations of a serious case review undertaken by Ofsted in accordance with *'Working Together to Safeguard Children'*, 2010
 - a review of 55 case files for children and young people with a range of need. This provided a view of services provided over time and the quality of reporting, recording and decision making undertaken
 - the outcomes of the most recent annual unannounced inspection of local authority contact, referral and assessment services undertaken in February 2011
 - interviews and focus groups with front line professionals, managers and senior staff from NHS Gloucestershire PCT, NHS Gloucestershire Care Services, Gloucestershire Hospitals' NHS Foundation Trust and 2gether NHS Foundation Trust, the Police, and other relevant partners.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

4. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale.

Outstanding (Grade 1)	A service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements
Good (Grade 2)	A service that exceeds minimum requirements
Adequate (Grade 3)	A service that only meets minimum requirements
Inadequate (Grade 4)	A service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

5. Gloucestershire covers 1,025 square miles and has a population of 593,500 of which 139,100 are aged 0-19 years. A significant proportion of the county population of children and young people (41%) live in the two major towns of Gloucester and Cheltenham which have areas in the most deprived 10% nationally. The county contains large rural areas and smaller conurbations which also include some areas of high deprivation. Children and young people from minority ethnic groups represent approximately 11% of the school population, the largest groups of which are White, Black Caribbean and White Eastern European. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is very close to 5% and 10.8% of children and young people across the county are in receipt of free school meals.
6. The arrangements for partnership working in the county are being reformed to establish a Health and Wellbeing Board which will oversee the development and implementation of strategies for services to children. The function of the Children's Trust has been reviewed in light of these arrangements and an Operations Board has been established which will bring key strategic countywide organisations together to oversee key change programmes. A new Education Partnership or Forum is also being developed to provide collective leadership for the local education system. The Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (GSCB) has an independent chair and brings together the main organisations working with children, young people and families in the county to deliver safeguarding services.
7. Community-based social care services are provided by four referral and assessment teams, seven children and family teams, two looked after children teams, a post-16 service, a disabled children and young people's service and an emergency duty team. There are also seven locality teams bringing together a range of professionals focused on early intervention through increased opportunities for service integration.

8. At the time of the inspection 410 children and young people were subject to child protection plans and 486 children and young people are looked after by the local authority. Early years childcare and nursery education are provided by 98 accredited childminders, 129 day nurseries, 39 children's centres, 140 out of school care arrangements, 228 pre-school play groups, 19 independent nursery units, 12 private nursery schools, and six special schools with a nursery class.
9. Primary and secondary education is provided by 228 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, 46 academies (17 primary and 29 secondary), 12 special schools and four pupil referral units. A virtual school is provided for children and young people who are looked after. NHS services and primary care are commissioned by NHS Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT). NHS Gloucestershire Care Services is the provider arm of NHS Gloucestershire, and delivers a range of community-based health services to children and families, such as health visiting and school nursing. Gloucestershire Hospitals' NHS Foundation Trust provides acute hospital services and community paediatrics. The 2gether NHS Foundation Trust is the main provider of specialist mental health services to children and young people throughout Gloucestershire.
10. The police service is coterminous with the county area. Services to children and young people who are at risk of offending or have offended are provided for through the Gloucestershire Youth Offending Service. Some 436 voluntary and community organisations work with, or have an interest in, services for children and young people in the county.

Safeguarding services

Overall effectiveness

Grade 3 (Adequate)

11. The overall effectiveness of safeguarding services is adequate. Since the inspection of safeguarding in December 2010 significant progress has been made, particularly within children's social care, to strengthen and improve services. The quality of provision is now adequate with a defined trend of improvement against all the key safeguarding indicators. The issues of concern raised in the previous inspection which substantially focused on the quality of provision, have been addressed through decisive management action and improvement planning. Additional resources have been deployed to ensure there is sufficient capacity to raise standards and to deal with identified service gaps. Record keeping is improving but the development and use of chronologies in day to day practice is inconsistent.
12. A good framework is in place to support the engagement of all agencies identifying children and young people who may be at risk of harm and ensuring appropriate action is being taken to meet assessed needs and reduce risk. Although some arrangements are in place within accident and emergency services to identify children and young people who are the subject of child protection plans this is not fully supported by an electronic information exchange system. Joint work is in hand to deal with this gap. Thresholds for service interventions are explicit and widely understood across the partnership. Statutory responsibilities, including those of the GSCB, are being met in accordance with the requirements of national safeguarding guidance. This inspection examined a wide range of randomly selected cases and no children or young people were assessed by inspectors as being at risk of harm. Interventions are responsive, timely and based on assessments that are at least adequate, with some good examples. The council and its partners undertake a wide range of surveys and this is providing information which firmly indicates that children and young people in the county feel safe. However, data arising from complaints are not being fully utilised to inform planning. Improvements in the organisation of social care services and across the partnership as a whole supports the view that children and young people are now appropriately protected and risks are reduced.
13. The quality of provision is now more consistent within and across teams and issues of practice variation is being tackled through case auditing and strengthened management oversight. Social work capacity is good and all child protection cases are allocated. The workforce is stable, recruitment and retention processes are robust and safe. Case loads are manageable and staff supervision is regular, although reflective supervision practice is not fully established across all teams. Newly qualified staff are appropriately supported and good staff development and training

opportunities are available. Partnership working is adequate overall with good attendance at all the relevant boards and meetings. There are good examples of effective joint working in some individual cases and in some projects but this is not fully embedded in respect of the whole continuum of need and services. The use of the common assessment framework (CAF) is good and becoming more targeted on those children and families in greatest need. The work of children's centres is also effective in supporting families.

14. The council and partners demonstrate good ambition to maintain the momentum of improvement in safeguarding and there is strong political support and understanding of this service. Priorities for service development are set within up to date business plans and strategy documents for intervention and permanency planning. Local priorities are being identified and acted upon within a framework of defined service targets and standards. The frameworks for performance management are in place and quality assurance systems have been used extensively in the past year to evaluate the level of compliance against agreed standards. These are now being extended to ensure that service quality is also closely evaluated and to establish more joint auditing arrangements. There is evidence of increasing challenge through audits and chairs of child protection conferences but this is not fully extended in respect of the whole range of service provision.
15. Leadership and management are good and have been very well focused on service improvement and ensuring vulnerable children and young people are identified and appropriately helped. There are clear signs that a management and performance culture is being established which is child centred and aimed at effective early intervention and planning. The engagement of children, young people and parents in planning is improving with some good examples where user views have influenced policies and practice. However, this is not yet consistent across the partnership as a whole. The council and partners have a good understanding of the needs of the county population and services are being targeted on groups and areas of greatest need. Commissioning arrangements are robust and safeguarding is given a high priority within contracts and tenders. Responsiveness to issues of equality and diversity are adequate overall but insufficient use is made of information relating to culture, race, religion, language and disability in individual case and workforce planning.

Capacity for improvement

Grade 2 (Good)

16. The capacity for improvement is good. The council and partners have sustained improvements to services identified as being adequate or good in the previous inspection. Additionally, the recommendations arising from inspections have been robustly tackled leading to significant improvements in the quality of provision. Ambition and prioritisation and leadership and

management are good. Service targets are becoming increasingly ambitious and performance is now at least in line with similar areas. Workforce planning is comprehensive with good investment in training, staff development and retention. Most staff report that they understand the improvement journey and feel they want to contribute to future success.

17. Partnership working is now generally established with appropriate involvement in the range of boards and planning structures including voluntary and community representation. This provides a good foundation for the continued development of partnerships in order to meet changing needs and demands. Frameworks for joint intervention and permanency planning are in place and these provide real opportunities for setting high standards of practice and partnership working to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people at different levels and stages. The council and partners are self-aware and demonstrate good capacity to identify gaps in provision, areas for development and implement change. There is confidence within the council and across the partnership that the substantial progress made will be sustained and that all areas for improvement will be actively addressed.

Areas for improvement

18. In order to improve the quality of provision and services for safeguarding children and young people in Gloucestershire, the local authority and its partners should take the following action:

Within three months:

- ensure there is an operational electronic system in place as an addition to current flagging arrangements, to enable health staff in accident and emergency services to identify children and young people who are the subject of child protection plans
- ensure all relevant health services have access to information relating to children and young people who are the subjects of child protection plans
- ensure that the new information and recording system facilitates the development of good quality chronologies and these are used in day to day practice to inform assessments and analysis
- conduct an intensive and joint review of all cases of children and young people who have been the subject of child protection plans for longer than 18 months.
- develop joint audit tools which not only focus on compliance but also monitors practice and service quality, equity, impact and outcomes

- develop monitoring tools to evaluate the composition of the workforce and how well this reflects the diversity of the local population
- ensure information in respect of culture, religion, language and disability is fully utilised in strategic planning and in individual case planning
- ensure that collated data on representations and complaints are fully reported to relevant boards including GSCB.

Within six months:

- monitor the quality of staff supervision to ensure this is undertaken in accordance with the agreed policy and framework and is sufficiently reflective in respect of practice, research and ongoing analysis
- review the scope for the integration of the current intervention guidance and permanency strategy and alignment of joint service and performance measures
- review opportunities to increase the level of partnership challenge to ensure all agencies and professionals fully contribute to meeting the assessed needs of children and young people.

Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people

Children and young people are safe and feel safe

Grade 3 (Adequate)

19. Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people are adequate. The inspection of safeguarding in December 2010 identified a range of issues adversely affecting the safety of children and young people in the county leading to an inadequate judgement. The key issues identified at that time have been substantially addressed and front line staff in children's social care now work collaboratively with other providers to identify children and young people at risk and to ensure better ongoing planning, support and care. The sample of child protection cases, randomly selected and seen by inspectors, demonstrates this improvement and in all cases children and young people at risk of harm are being suitably identified and protected. This trend in improvement was also identified in the unannounced inspection of referral and assessment processes in August 2011 where no priority actions were required. The workforce guidance for levels of intervention has been updated and provides greater clarity in respect of thresholds for access to services based on assessed needs and risks. In essence, there has been a greater focus on ensuring the basics of joint service delivery are in place, leadership and management is strengthened, and quality assurance arrangements are more robust.
20. Pathways to services are also more clearly stated and definitions of contacts and referrals are now explicit. Family support workers are engaging with families to reduce the level of family breakdown and unnecessary admissions to care. The use of the CAF is extensive and becoming more targeted on those children, young people and families in greatest need. Where cases are transferred from referral and assessment teams to longer term teams clear protocols are now in place to ensure greater continuity of care and supervision. Evidence from this inspection shows that children and young people are routinely being seen by their social workers and there are emerging signs of engagement of children and young people in case conferences. Child protection cases are allocated to suitably qualified and experienced social workers and management oversight within local teams is becoming more effective. Social work staff report that they are challenged appropriately by conference chairs and cite this as a significant and positive change. Inspectors found some unallocated lower level cases in one social work team which were being inappropriately held by an assistant team manager pending the provision of information from other agencies. Once reported to senior managers, this practice ceased and the team now operates in line with the agreed allocation arrangements in place across the county as a whole.

21. Gloucestershire has a good record of internal surveys to determine the progress of children and young people against key outcomes, including safeguarding. The biennial online pupil survey which commenced in 2006 has an increasingly large response rate, the last being over 18,500 children and young people. The large majority report they feel safe in their schools and at home and know how to seek help and advice if needed. This view was fully reflected in the comments made by children and young people in the course of this inspection. The role and function of the local authority designated officer (LADO) is well understood across partner agencies and is used effectively to protect and safeguard children and young people. Processes associated with the engagement of the LADO are suitably robust with evidence of increased awareness of safeguarding issues, including in the voluntary and community sectors which constituted 39% of attendance at training events in the last year. The LADO is increasing awareness of safeguarding through better engagement with madrassas and mosques and ensuring businesses providing transport for vulnerable children and young people are set high safeguarding standard within their contracts.
22. Although service users are routinely provided with information on processes for making representations at initial assessment stages, the wider provision of information on the complaints system is limited, including when referrals are assessed as requiring no further action. Information from Stage 1 complaints is aggregated and themes for future learning are being identified. However, the annual complaints report is not routinely presented to the GSCB although a brief summary is included as part of overall performance monitoring reports. Good progress is being made in developing advocacy and support for children and young people who are looked after, who are subjects of child protection planning and those making representations or complaints. Case records seen by inspectors demonstrate that information relating to children, young people and families is being recorded in respect of race, culture, religion, language and disability, but this is not being used consistently within planning to ensure these are fully considered at all stages. Training with regard to the application and use of diversity information has not yet fully penetrated all teams and systems.
23. Effective work is being undertaken across the partnership to respond to wider safeguarding concerns, including bullying, children and young people who go missing, sexual exploitation and e-safety issues. The biennial pupil survey usefully identified that pupils did not always feel their concerns about bullying were being fully considered. This has led to positive changes in policy and practice and the subsequent survey has shown a marked increase in satisfaction levels. Joint processes for responding to children and young people who go missing, including looked after children and young people, are robust and based on a clear understanding of risk. Good work is undertaken to monitor school attendance and to trigger action where patterns of school non-attendance

are identified. Similarly, effective action is taken to evaluate the risks posed to children and young people through their use of the internet and to help them to keep safe. There is good awareness across health services in respect of safeguarding and health staff complete an assessment record and arrange contact with the social care helpline or out of hours team where children and young people are presented and concerns are raised. However, this is not currently supported by an electronic information exchange system within accident and emergency services and this has been identified by senior managers as an area for improvement. Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) have been strengthened and attendance by all partner agencies is good. Awareness raising in respect of private fostering is also improving with more robust processes for registration and monitoring now in place.

24. Ofsted inspections of the councils regulated services, including short-break services for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, adoption services and fostering services have demonstrated that safeguarding is being given high priority with outcomes judged to be satisfactory or good with an improving trend overall. Commissioning processes are robust and ensure that safeguarding is given high priority within contracts with all service providers and is being closely monitored. Arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff within the council and across partner agencies are good.

Quality of provision

Grade 3 (Adequate)

25. The quality of provision is adequate. The council and partners are implementing an early intervention strategy 'Right First Time' supported by a robust commissioning framework. This is facilitating the deployment of additional resources across the seven locality teams to identify at early stages children and young people in need. Good quality multi-agency training which is well attended is underpinning this strategy leading to a shared sense of responsibility in respect of early intervention work and safeguarding generally. The implementation of the CAF is good and developing with a recent report to GSCB demonstrating that 280 lead professionals have undertaken 523 common assessments with a significant number completed by schools and children's centres. The engagement of the voluntary and community sector in the use of the CAF. The Family Information service is effective and through the internet provides parents and carers with good quality information on the range of services that are available across the county.
26. A very good permanency strategy is in place which embraces planning requirements across early intervention, safeguarding and looked after children services to ensure children and young people are appropriately and safely diverted from statutory provision and that a continuum of service provision is available to achieve secure family living. Family group conferences are used well to support families in crisis or at risk of

disruption. There is a good focus on young people who may be at risk of homelessness. Children's centres play an effective role in supporting parents and carers and in providing a wide range of imaginative services for children. There is good evidence of collaborative working between centre staff and local social care teams and health professionals in the identification of need and provision of relevant joint services. Parents who attend children's centres and who met inspectors were very positive about their experiences and the individual help and support they receive. This includes a range of direct services for children such as speech therapy, ante-natal and post-natal care, opportunities to meet other parents and to feel less isolated within their communities. The range of direct services to children is also good. The quality of self assessment undertaken by centres is good and incorporates regular user feedback and satisfaction.

27. The reported incidence of domestic violence in Gloucestershire is high with almost 57% of child protection cases showing domestic violence as a significant risk factor. The domestic abuse referral process (DARP) is facilitating the effective coordination of interventions and responsiveness to families where domestic violence is identified. There are daily meetings between social care staff and Police to prioritise incoming work relating to domestic violence. A service review has commenced which is being closely monitored by the Director of Children's Services alongside senior officers from the Police and health to ensure learning from the DARP is carried forward in the context of organisational changes and resource pressures. This is also aimed at meeting some identified gaps in services including elements of outreach support and work with perpetrators of abuse coming out of prison. There are good links to the early intervention programme for community based services to support individual protection plans. Six action learning sets have been developed to support staff in understanding the issues for children, young people and adult victims of violence. There are separate magistrate's courts dealing with domestic violence cases with examples of barristers providing free legal advice for those victims who cannot obtain legal aid.
28. Thresholds for access to services are clear and work to support all partner agencies in applying them consistently has been undertaken effectively through the GSCB and sub-groups, and through the work of the referral and assessment and locality teams. Co-location of local service teams alongside referral and assessment teams is ensuring better communication and identification of children and young people in need and at risk. No cases seen in the course of this inspection have shown children or young people to be at immediate risk of harm. Staff in children's services report that co-location of locality services has facilitated improvements in stepping down work where concerns are reduced enabling front line staff to concentrate more on higher priority cases. However, some health staff report that they do not always receive timely feedback on contacts and referrals although there is a general consensus that communication across the partnership is much improved.

29. Considerable effort has been made by senior children's services managers to ensure that all teams in the county are operating to agreed and consistent standards and this is being monitored through a range of performance and quality assurance programmes. The direction of travel in achieving greater county-wide consistency is positive, although some variances in the quality of assessments, recording and planning are still noted in a range from adequate to very good. There is evidence of increasingly timely interventions to ensure children and young people are safe and appropriate use of escalation arrangements where needed through strategy meetings and initial child protection conferences. Child protection plans are kept up to date and are regularly reviewed through core groups and review conferences. Team managers and social workers acknowledge that gaps remain in the application of equality and diversity issues in the assessment and planning of their work.
30. The participation of all agencies in the range of child protection and safeguarding processes is generally good including attendance at strategy meetings, core groups and case conferences. There is more evidence of the use of assessment and support frameworks such as the 'Freedom Programme' and team managers report that access to medical support in relation to child protection investigations is good. However, the attendance of General Practitioners (GPs) at conferences and other meetings is inconsistent despite the importance of this role within safeguarding provision. Nevertheless, team managers have recently attended safeguarding training for doctors and some referral and assessment teams are providing observation opportunities for trainee doctors.
31. The timeliness of assessment has significantly improved and is now in line with similar areas. However, the quality of assessments remains variable with some assessments being detailed, analytical and exploring risk and protective factors with others not yet fully up to this standard. Chronologies are being used increasingly within risk assessments but again this is not yet fully established practice for all workers. The engagement of service users in planning is improving and being reflected in some records. However, this is not yet fully embedded as a process and not enough attention is being given in some cases to observations of very young children as opposed to using direct communication methods. Parental and carer attendance at case conferences and core groups is improving with their views being suitably recorded. In some cases seen by inspectors there was too little differentiation in the recording of needs between different children within families.
32. Outcomes and planning objectives are being increasingly set but in some cases there is a lack of clarity in the objectives of continued child protection planning when children and young people have been the subjects of plans for over 18 months. Child protection chairs are providing an appropriate level of challenge in respect of work quality leading to

appropriate analysis and decisions in most cases. Nevertheless, in some cases the local authority and partner agencies have agreed to children and young people remaining the subjects of child protection plans when lower level services could have been provided. In these cases there has not always been sufficient evidence of robust professional challenge to deliver alternative services in the context of other joint planning options at the time of initial referral or when plans are reviewed.

33. Management oversight of cases is now more clearly evident with some good examples where managers have helped to drive planning based on explicit objectives and outcomes. Timescales for achieving outcomes in child protection plans are not always specific and this reduces the opportunities to measure progress against agreed outcomes over time. Contingency plans are more evident in recent cases but have not been used consistently in the past to ensure cases did not drift within the child protection planning system. Staff supervision is regular and reported by staff to be supportive and helpful. However, the quality of reflective supervision is too variable.

Ambition and prioritisation

Grade 2 (Good)

34. Ambition and prioritisation are good. Safeguarding is prioritised across the partnership with strong ambition and motivation for continuous service improvement. The current leadership has been able to identify the changes needed to strengthen safeguarding and had started a process of change at the point of the previous inspection. This has been accelerated over the past year leading to measureable and improved outcomes across services, including identification and responsiveness to concern, management arrangements and service quality. Action planning in response to the previous inadequate judgement has been robust and systematic leading to good evidence of a cultural change and bottom-up improvements. The local authority and partners are self-aware of their strengths and areas for improvement and provided a realistic and accurate evaluation of their current performance for this inspection. The momentum of improvement is good and being sustained. Local teams have in place a system to self assess performance against clear practice standards and these are reported through explicit business planning mechanisms.
35. Improvement plans are ambitious and set realistic priorities and performance targets. Elected members demonstrate high ambition for effective safeguarding across the county and also show good awareness of the challenges and demands of joint work in a complex area of service. Where a good case has been made by managers for new or additional resources these have been provided. There is a commitment to ensure that resources will continue to be provided to ensure services to safeguard children and young people continue to improve and are sustained. GSCB is now seen to be providing a more focused and business-like approach and

this has been reflected in the comments made by managers from all participating agencies, including voluntary sector organisations. Guidance for levels of intervention and strategy for permanency planning are both very well produced and provide a robust structure for effective planning at strategic and individual case levels. These provide considerable scope to continue to support integrated service provision in order to continue to achieve greater coherence and engagement of partners across the full continuum of need. This includes early intervention and support and acute services to protect children and young people for immediate harm. Although most agencies are undergoing some organisational change there is a strong commitment to safeguarding in the county and making use of opportunities that now exist to streamline services to make best use of available resources.

36. During the past year the principle of case auditing on a regular basis has been emphasised and this has contributed substantially to changes in attitude and culture. The continued use of auditing and performance monitoring frameworks are now seen as an integral part of the drive and priority for quality services and ensuring the partnership is a good learning organisation. Additional training opportunities have been provided to managers to gain ownership of joint safeguarding priorities and their individual roles in the improvement journey. Capacity within the conference chairs team has been strengthened enabling them to develop a more effective way of working, including a focus on child protection plans which have been in place for longer than 18 months, and supporting staff in dealing with complex cases and hard to engage families. Financial support and extra study leave is being provided for those staff studying their Master's Degree. This further supports the council workforce planning programme to help retain suitably qualified and skilled social care staff.

Leadership and management

Grade 2 (Good)

37. Leadership and management are good. The strong and effective senior management team of children's social care services has ensured that all the recommendations arising from the safeguarding inspection in December 2010 and subsequent unannounced inspection have been fully implemented. Local authority staff and colleagues in other agencies have reported a strong sense of renewal, energy and clear direction. Weaknesses that were evident at the time of the previous inspection had already been identified and were being addressed, particularly those in respect of safeguarding responsiveness and service quality. Services that were then judged as being good, including those provided by health and education partners, have been sustained and in some instances further strengthened, such as work to reduce the impact of bullying. Staff across the partnership have stated they now feel more confident in the future and can see the impact of improvement planning in their day to day work. They also value the opportunities that have been provided to enhance

their professional development through a comprehensive management support programme.

38. The structures associated with strategic planning including the Partnership Board, emerging Health and Wellbeing Board and GSCB are good and are ensuring the partnership plan for 2012-2015 is fully implemented. The local authority and its partners have routinely undertaken comprehensive needs analysis and mapping which is ensuring good data are available on which to plan and target services. Key priorities have been set including children who require protection, children living in troubled families and children living in poverty. The plan is designed to identify gaps in planned provision and to ensure partnership action is taken to address any unmet needs or ameliorate the affects of adverse conditions. GSCB has a clear business plan for the year ahead with targeted themes for work including neglect and sexual exploitation. Leadership of GSCB is good and it is meeting all its statutory responsibilities. The board is also becoming more effective in holding individual agencies and other boards to account for safeguarding performance and developing the performance tools to underpin this approach.
39. Commissioning arrangements are supported through the Joint Commissioning Partnership Board (JCPB) and are firmly established. Safeguarding has a high priority in joint service development and delivery, including within provider organisations and contracting, and tendering processes are well managed in relation to quality, value for money and meeting the needs of vulnerable children and young people. The council is moving towards becoming a commissioning council with greater attention to quality, service outcomes and impact and value for money. An open discussion is taking place across the partnership on the development of both children's and adult safeguarding boards with a view to having a common chair of both boards with a closer operational link in the wider context of 'Think Family'. The boards will remain separate with careful consideration being given to maintaining business continuity and the overall effectiveness of the whole safeguarding system across the age range. Opportunities for linking with other partnerships such as MAPPA and domestic and sexual violence boards will also be actively pursued. Financial resources are used effectively and additional resources have been provided to increase capacity in crucial operational areas where gaps have been identified.
40. Workforce planning is good overall. Sufficient numbers of suitably qualified and experienced staff are employed with additional staffing resources deployed following the inspection in December 2010. Caseloads are maintained at a manageable level and are overseen by managers to ensure capacity is being maintained. Team managers report improvements in social worker capacity, with appropriate senior management response to issues including a rolling programme of recruitment, filling maternity vacancies and use of agency staff where necessary to cover sickness and

statutory leave. Teams are stable and the ratio of experienced staff to newly qualified staff is appropriately considered. All child protection cases are allocated. Exit interviews are conducted when staff leave the employment of the council and there is a monthly check on actual and likely vacancies. The current vacancy rate in children and families services is nine overall which includes six in the referral and assessment teams and longer teams combined, and three in the 16 years plus team. Most of these vacancies have been filled by good quality newly recruited staff who will take up their posts in the near future. This will leave an actual vacancies rate of only 2% which is below the target council vacancy rate of 5%. The rate of overall staff turnover in children's services is also comparatively low at 11.5%. The council has not developed a system to closely monitor the diversity of the workforce and to evaluate how far this reflects the make-up of the local population.

41. Staff recruitment processes are robust, including the arrangements for safe recruitment of staff. The council has formed effective links with universities and colleges to maintain learning and employment opportunities. The county is able to attract staff to work with children and families and job advertisements consistently result in a good range of applicants. Retention policies support the further development of skilled and experienced staff with accessible and well focused training events and programmes. A staff appraisal system is in place. Management development days are also supporting managers in further developing their managerial skills and this is closely aligned to the objectives set through business plans. There is a good support program for newly qualified social workers, including fortnightly supervision by mentors as well as line managers. Newly qualified social workers have protected caseloads in their first year of employment.
42. Arrangements to capture the views of children and young people in strategic planning are not yet fully embedded although there are some good examples where users have played an active role in evaluating services. Questionnaires are used well to obtain user views on the services they receive, including the extensive pupil survey and surveys within children's centres. However, collated complaints data are not fully utilised to inform service improvement.

Performance management and quality assurance

Grade 3 (Adequate)

43. Performance management and quality assurance are adequate. Considerable progress has been made since the inspection in December 2010 in establishing performance management and quality assurance frameworks and culture across the partnership. Performance targets are being set which are increasingly challenging and achievement against key safeguarding indicators are mainly in line with similar areas and national patterns. Referral rates are slightly higher than in similar areas but there is

good definition of what constitutes a referral across the partnership and this is correctly resulting in elevated figures. The rate of completion of initial and core assessments within timescale is now slightly above comparable areas. Although numbers are relatively small, the number of children who have been the subject of child protection plans for longer than two years is comparatively higher than other areas. This is partly explained by some inadequacies in previous planning arrangements where firm plans were not agreed from the outset and a tendency of partner agencies to seek security through child protection planning. Current practice in respect of initial planning is more robust and the level of in-built challenge through child protection chairs is increasing. Staff report that they feel included in service development and have opportunities to engage with senior management in relation to service improvement. Management information is available to staff and teams are made aware of performance issues and need for continuous improvement. Team plans are formulated based on self-assessment and these support the monitoring of progress. Senior managers have a visible presence and are supporting change in a sensitive but purposeful manner.

44. A good framework for performance management is in place within children's social care services and this is ensuring that important information against key indicators is routinely provided to all the boards including the improvement board and scrutiny committee. Although partner agencies have also developed performance management tools, the level of integration is not yet fully evident, particularly in respect of partner engagement and impact in meeting joint objectives set within intervention guidance. A range of audit systems have been implemented by the council and partners in the past year in order to monitor compliance and to evaluate the consistency of practice within teams, between teams and across the partnership as a whole. This has been invaluable in driving up standards, consistency of practice and compliance leading to measureable improvements. However, current audit tools do not concentrate sufficiently on the quality of practice and the impact of services in improving outcomes. The GSCB routinely receives performance information and has commissioned some themed audits on key aspects of safeguarding. This is not yet sufficiently extensive to ensure the board is providing the level of challenge across the partnership as a whole and the continuum of provision set out in the intervention guidance and permanency strategy.

Partnership working

Grade 3 (Adequate)

45. Partnership working is adequate. GSCB is fulfilling its statutory duties and is operating on a firm business footing. Membership reflects the range of partnerships across the county, including voluntary and community groups, and there is an increasing focus on user engagement. The independent chair of the board provides a good level of challenge on safeguarding issues and the board is now setting clear priorities for the

year ahead through business planning arrangements. The issue of transition of the board to align more with adult safeguarding arrangements in the context of 'Think Family' will be the subject of consultation across the partnership. There are assurances in place that any change will sustain the improvements made by GSCB and that there is good continuity of business to maintain momentum. A recent GSCB business planning day has forged a corporate understanding of the safeguarding agenda, roles and responsibilities and to determine new priorities. Sub-groups are operating well to respond to emerging issues and themes rating to safeguarding in the county. Work to raise safeguarding across the county has been effective.

46. Clear thresholds for service interventions are set through the intervention guidance and this is well understood across the partnership. There has been a strong focus in children's social care services to ensure a good response to children, families and professionals and open scrutiny. However, the level of challenge in respect of the engagement of all partners in all aspects of the guidance is not yet fully evident. This is particularly the case in establishing joint contingency plans in individual cases and ensuring that all service options are available and being effectively applied.
47. Partnership working at an individual case level, including the use of CAF and the work of children's centres, is generally good. The work of voluntary sector organisations is also highly regarded and enabling identified need to be addressed in new and imaginative ways. Attendance at case conferences, core groups and strategy meetings is generally good with the exception of GPs who do provide written reports. There are some particularly good examples of effective project work across the county which demonstrate partner commitment to meeting the needs of vulnerable children and young people and addressing risk. A good example is the work being undertaken with very vulnerable young women at a youth centre in Gloucester. The project is referral based for young women who would like to develop their confidence, self-esteem and skills as they move towards independence, parenting, training and employment. The project is helping the young women concerned to tackle issues of anger, relationships, sexual health, confidence, self image and aspects of mental health. Outcomes are clearly defined in respect of increasing self-esteem, new life skills, progression into other development opportunities, active accreditation and work based qualifications, healthier life styles, having fun and healthier relationships. The programme is very well structured and supported by skilled and committed staff.

Record of main findings:

Safeguarding services	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate
Capacity for improvement	Good
Safeguarding outcomes for children and young people	
Children and young people are safe and feel safe	Adequate
Quality of provision	Adequate
Ambition and prioritisation	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Performance management and quality assurance	Adequate
Partnership working	Adequate
Equality and diversity	Adequate