

Meet Chris Spencer, Director of Children's Services



Hello,

My name is Chris Spencer and I have been DCS in Gloucestershire since March 2018.

I am a long serving DCS, one of the longest in the country having worked as DCS in four LAs, the last one being the London Borough of Harrow where I worked for 4 years. I accepted the challenge of improving services for children and young people in Gloucestershire primarily because it is my own "backyard". I have had a home here in Gloucestershire since 1977 and my children were born and brought up in the county and attended local schools which served them well. It is a great place to live and work and I would welcome anyone wishing to come and settle in this wonderful part of the country who is able and willing to make a difference to the experience of our most vulnerable young people. I hope you will consider this opportunity and in return we offer fantastic career development support which is clearly among the best in the country.

We're looking for motivated, ambitious and skilled social workers to join our improvement journey and this is an exciting time to join us. In the last two years we have achieved a huge amount and I'm confident that when Ofsted visit us for our first full inspection since Gloucestershire was rated inadequate in 2018, that they will see a much improved service.

Covid-19 has meant that we don't yet know when this full inspection is likely to be, but we continue to work hard keeping our county's children and young people safe, whilst responding to the unique challenges that the coronavirus has placed upon us.

When I arrived there were three big issues which needed addressing: workforce instability, the culture of the organisation and establishing a common model of social work practice. We have made significant progress in all these areas and I'm proud of what we have achieved together.

Making our workforce more stable has been crucial. We have recruited social workers from India, through Frontline, Step Up to Social Work, the Open University and apprenticeships.

Our ASYE programme has also gone from strength to strength, supporting newly qualified social workers. Praised by Ofsted during a recent monitoring visit, it's a key part of our 'grow your own workforce' strategy, offering the best opportunities to learn and develop. Recognising that our AYSE colleagues need time to grow, we have increased our overall capacity, making sure they have the time they need to develop and that we can maintain manageable caseloads for all.

There are signs that we've tuned the corner with workforce stability, our turnover is below the regional and national average, but we want to do more to encourage social workers to join and stay with us. We regularly review our reward package to ensure it is competitive, our colleagues benefit from flexible working and have access to the latest technology. Whilst we'd like to reduce our reliance on agency staff, they are an important part of our team so we have given them benefits aimed at keeping them with us for longer.

Gloucestershire is a great place to live and work, with excellent schools and stunning landscapes. It's within easy reach of big cities like Bristol, Birmingham and London too.

Our Social Work Academy is front and centre of our aim to establish a highly competent and confident workforce. Through the academy we have implemented our Essentials social work training programme based on what good practice looks like, with masterclasses from Research in Practice and management development courses run in partnership with the Institute of Public Care. All of this

has helped us to create a collaborative culture which underpins our desire to succeed. I am determined to create the right conditions for us to thrive and I'm working with politicians and partners to achieve this. Council's cabinet has recently agreed further investment of £15m into children's services for the financial year 20/21. This will mean that over the last three years the council has invested around £40M into the services we deliver to protect children and young people.

It's a great time to join us and help us achieve our ambition of #buildingthebest children's services.

I hope to meet you soon.