1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is to update Committee of the progress in implementing the Reclaiming Social Work Model in Children’s Services in Aberdeen.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Committee

(i) Note the progress to date
(ii) Ask the Head of Children’s Service to prepare a report outlining the challenges and increasing demands and implications on the service.
(iii) Request an update report on the Reclaiming Social Work transformation programme in 6 months from the Head of Children’s Services.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Implementation costs of £400,000 – £500,000 over 3 years were outlined to Committee in September 2013.

3.2 It is anticipated that the implementation of the reclaiming social work model will assist in the medium and long term progress in meeting the Priority Based Budget (PBB) saving (SCW14) by stemming the growth and need for specialist out of authority placements.

3.3 However, the demand for Children’s Social Work Services in Aberdeen has increased significantly along with an increase in the complexity of work. This includes increases in:

- child protection joint investigative interviews
- initial and review child protection case conferences
- applications for child protection and other emergency protection orders
- referrals to the Scottish Children’s Reporter’s Administration
- looked after children
- numbers of children in need
- population of children
- new statutory duties

3.4 Work is taking place to show this increase, map the current demand and project future need.

3.5 Any increase in need and demand is likely to impact on Council resources and will be highlighted in a future report to Committee.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1 One of the critical elements in the transformational process is the training of practitioners in the service.

4.2 It is important to ensure that while each practitioner’s course is running that operational service continues to a safe and effective manner.

4.3 In effect, each course means 540 days (the equivalent of over 2 F/T members of staff) away from frontline service delivery. Currently there are 2 training cohorts, resulting in a commitment of 1080 days. This is an appropriate and indeed core investment given the likely impact of the transformational programme. However, it means significant operational pressure on the service. A number of mitigating and contingency actions have been put in place such as, not scheduling review child protection case conferences or resource and screening fora the week of the training and increasing management support in localities. However, it is proving necessary to have backfill arrangements in place.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 There has been significant progress with the implementation of the Reclaiming Social Work model to date.

5.2 The Programme Board, chaired by the Director of Social Care and Wellbeing has been established and had its first meeting in October 2013. Meetings are set at a frequency of monthly and include a range of appropriate internal and external stakeholders including NHS Grampian, Education Culture and Sport, Scottish Children’s Reporters Administration, Children’s Hearing and a Trades Union representative.
5.3 The Children’s Services Management Team chaired by the Head of Children’s Services has the role of Project Team and meets on a weekly basis to review progress, maintain momentum, identify and resolve issues, plan and agree the implementation.

5.4 There are three workstreams in place to progress the work of the programme: 1. Human Resources  2. Communication 3. Systems. Each workstream has a Terms of Reference and action plan in place and reports to the Project Team and Programme Board.

5.5 The additional post of Children’s Services Manager has been filled since the end of October 2013. This has provided some capacity to the programme but not as initially anticipated given the increasing need/demand for the service.

5.6 The Operational Reference Group made up of staff of all levels is established and is meeting regularly and acts as a conduit for the wider staff group to the transformation programme. This group meets the week subsequent to the training to ensure any issues are identified and progressed.

5.7 The Head of Project Support of Morning Lane Associates has been working on the transformation programme supporting the workstreams, contributing material from other local authorities, acting as critical friend and delivering on specific tasks for the Project Team.

5.8 Managers in the Service have completed the 3 day manager’s course ensuring a baseline of knowledge and understanding to support the change in service delivery and practice.

5.9 The 18 day practitioners’ course started in late January and to date staff have completed 4 of the 18 days. There are two cohorts (60 staff) undertaking the training in Year 1 of the programme. While some staff experienced a degree of anxiety at the commencement of the training (due to rigour of an accredited course, levels of study, academic submission and continuing to deliver operationally) there are high levels of commitment and motivation among staff.

5.10 The Scottish Government was approached about how it might offer support given the innovation proposed transformation and national interest. A recent letter from the Scottish Government indicated that they neither wanted to support nor be actively involved in the programme. The Chief Social Work Advisor to the Scottish Government has signalled his interest and his wish to be kept informed of the City’s progress in implementing the model.

5.11 It is agreed that the City will adopt the “unit” model pioneered in Hackney and evaluated by Forrester June 2013. It is anticipated that
staffing proposals and human resources implications will be brought to a future Committee.

5.12 The Head of Children’s Services is working on the service management structure taking into account the model and increasing demand of the service. Any structure proposed requires to be effective, cost effective, flexible and responsive in the short and medium term.

5.13 Recognising the importance of effective communication a new micro-website has been set up for Reclaiming Social Work and a new email address together@aberdeencity.gov.uk is in place for staff to raise issues, suggestions, ask questions all of which will be responded to within a short timescale.

5.14 In addition there is a monthly bulletin sent to all staff outlining progress and seeking engagement.

5.15 A secure forum has been set up on the national Knowledge Hub to encourage staff to debate and discuss issues and practice.

5.16 The Head of Children’s Services has met with the Care Inspectorate to appraise it of Aberdeen’s vision and our plans for service transformation. This has been done outwith the scrutiny process as a proactive, helpful measure.

5.17 The School of Social Work and Social Sciences at Robert Gordon University (Programme Board member) has agreed to carry out an evaluation of the three year implementation and transformation programme in Aberdeen and will commence this shortly.

6. IMPACT

6.1 This report is consistent with the Service’s 3 Year Business Plan, the Corporate Business Plan and the Single Outcome Agreement. In particular to;

- improve the life chances of children, young people and families at risk
- improve the healthy development of young children and their families particularly those most at risk
- to improve the life chances of looked after children
- reduce use of out of authority/specialist placements
- children, young people and their families are supported to stay together
- sustain long term change by focusing on the prevention of our reduction in health inequalities
7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

7.1 As outlined in the September 2013 Committee Report, there are risks associated with pioneering this innovative model of service delivery in Scotland.

7.2 Risks will be mitigated by effective engagement, excellent communication and a “working with” approach with all internal and external stakeholders.

7.3 It will be important that actions are taken to ensure safe service delivery during the period of implementing the transformation programme.

7.4 In the last few months the increase in need for children’s social work services and the complexity of need has become apparent. It is proposed to bring a future committee report setting out the increase, reasons for increase and the challenge this poses for Children’s Services in Aberdeen.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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