To: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE	Subject: DEVELOPMENTS IN ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SHARING – CHILDREN'S SERVICES
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK	
Date: 11 MARCH 2004　　Ref: JD/FT	

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report advises Committee on developments and funding arrangements for the creation of electronic information sharing arrangements, among partner agencies who have responsibility for children's welfare. Initially, this work will centre on child protection responsibilities. The report also seeks approval for a temporary post to assist with associated work required within the Social Work Department.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. The North Lanarkshire partner agencies are pursuing the issues set out in various Scottish Executive policies and reports including "For Scotland's Children" (2001); "Getting Our Priorities Right" (2001); and "It's Everyone's Job To Make Sure I'm Alright" (2002). Part of this work involves establishing more integrated working across agencies and the development of shared assessment frameworks and electronic information sharing in children's services.

2.2. North Lanarkshire's Children's Services Strategy Group and the North Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee have agreed that the highest priority in improving communication should be in respect of child protection and work began in November 2003 to consider how this could best be achieved.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1. As a result of North Lanarkshire's information sharing work in community care, the Scottish Executive's Modernising Government Fund 2 (MGF2) Children's eCare Programme approached the Social Work Department in November 2003. They proposed that Lanarkshire partners join the eCare Programme with a view to pursuing work on child protection. An outline proposal was submitted and was well received by members of the eCare Programme. The proposal was to develop the linkage of electronic information systems used by the partners, to develop the capacity to share data sets by building on the shared data store. It also proposed to examine the scope for using new processes such as "predictive technology", which may be able to flag up alerts for action/investigation, when composite information held in different host systems points to possible child abuse.

3.2. The MGF 2 Programme has indicated it will make £115k available to fund the technical work required and to meet project management costs. The Lanarkshire eCare Project will be responsible to a Board, made up of representatives from partner agencies. These will be North and South Lanarkshire Social Work and Education Departments, Strathclyde Police, NHS Lanarkshire and the Scottish Reporters Administration. It will also have appropriate Information Technology representation.

3.3. The eCare work will require to be considered jointly with the additional monies anticipated from the Changing Children's Services Fund. Although provided separately from eCare funding this money will be central to delivering change in respect of organisational development, training etc. This funding is for work in North Lanarkshire only, while the eCare money is for technical work across Lanarkshire.

3.4. The project management associated with the work outlined above will be of major significance. In addition, following work on child protection, it is planned to develop electronic sharing across other services for children e.g. those with or affected by disability, those looked after and accommodated etc. The Development Section within the Social Work Department will undertake the responsibility for project management. This will include reporting to the various appropriate bodies – the Scottish Executive's MGF 2 Children's eCare Project Board; the Children's Service Strategy Group; and liaison with the Child Protection Committee and its various sub-groups.

3.5. Approval is therefore sought for the creation of a temporary post of Senior Development Officer, Grade PO2/5 to assist the Department's work and allow this project to be managed. Responsibilities will be similar to that of existing posts. The duration of this post will be till March 31st 2005.

3.6. Additional posts will be required to support the implementation of developments within the work of the partners. It is proposed to create 3 posts of IT Support Workers, Grade AP3 located within Social Work, to embed developments within Social Work systems, and to support partnership activity in the sharing of information and use of systems across the partnership.

4. FINANCIAL/PERSONNEL/LEGAL ISSUES

4.1 As noted above, the eCare Programme will provide £115k towards the technical work required. The work on child protection is due to be completed by March 2005.

4.2 The Changing Children's Service Fund is expected to make £150k available in both financial years 2004/5 and 2005/6. As noted earlier, the second year funding is intended for organisational development work on other aspects of children's services.

4.3 The cost will be met from the above funding sources.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Committee is requested to:

(i)   note developments to achieve electronic information sharing in children's services; and

(ii)   approve the creation of a temporary post, till March 31st 2005, of Senior Development Officer, Grade PO2/5 and 3 posts of IT Support Worker, Grade AP3.

(iii)   remit this report to Policy & Resources (Personnel Sub Committee) for their consideration; and

(iv)   otherwise note the contents of this report.

Jim Dickie
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20 February 2004

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