

To: Education and Children's Services Policy Board

On: 1 November 2018

Report by: Director of Children's Services

Heading: Best Services Trial

1. Summary

- 1.1. The protection of children is a priority for Renfrewshire Children's Services. Children's social work is committed to ensuring children live with their birth families where this is safe and appropriate. Some children require to be placed in alternative care when there are significant risks. In these circumstances social work attempts to find a family setting for the child including the possibility of a kinship placement or a foster placement.
- 1.2. As a learning organisation, children's services aims to provide the best support for vulnerable children. Children's Social Work has agreed to take part in a randomised controlled trial being led by the University of Glasgow and delivered in partnership with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NSPCC. The trial is presently ongoing in Glasgow City Council as well as in three London boroughs. The trial will commence in Renfrewshire October 2018.
- 1.3. The aim of the trial is to learn how to best support the development and wellbeing of young children who come into local authority care. The trial will compare two approaches: (i) service as usual (i.e. usual parenting capacity assessment undertaken by our social work team); and (ii) an evidence-based infant mental health intervention called 'GIFT'. The GIFT approach originated at the University of Tullane in New Orleans USA and uses a multi-disciplinary team of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and social workers to assess and treat infants and their birth families. GIFT is delivered by the NSPCC.
- 1.4. All families who have a child under the age of 60 months accommodated for reasons of maltreatment will be invited to participate in the Best Services Trial. Participation is wholly voluntary and refusal to participate in the trial will cause no detriment whatsoever to families.
- 1.5. Families who consent to participation in the trial will be randomly selected to either service as usual or GIFT. While service as usual and GIFT will utilise different assessment and support approaches, both will make

recommendations in a legal sense about whether a child can return home safely to their family or whether permanent care away from home is indicated.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Education and Children's Services Policy Board is asked:

- to note the involvement of children's social work in the Best Services Trial.
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3. Background

- 3.1. Best is a randomised controlled trial comparing an infant mental health service, the New Orleans Intervention Model (NIM), with Social Work service as usual. It aims to find out what is the best service for young abused and neglected pre-school children coming into foster care and which approach is the most cost-effective. The trial is being led by Glasgow University and the principal investigator is Professor Helen Minnis, a child and adolescent psychiatrist.
- 3.2. Children who have experienced abuse and neglect are at increased risk of mental and physical health problems throughout life. This places an enormous burden on individuals, families and society as a whole. Regardless of the severity of this abuse and neglect, these negative effects can largely be reversed if children are placed in secure, loving homes early enough in life. Placing children in nurturing foster placements can help them recover rapidly, but it is not known whether it is better for children's long term development to place them with substitute (foster or adoptive) families or return them to birth or extended families who have been helped to get over their problems.
- 3.3. Social Work service as usual aims to make a thorough assessment of family relationships for maltreated children coming into care and then make recommendations regarding placement. The NIM aims to both assess such families and offer an infant mental health treatment service aimed at improving family functioning so the child can return home.
- 3.4. The NIM is delivered by NSPCC and is called, 'GIFT'. The GIFT team is multi-disciplinary, comprised of infant psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers and support workers.
- 3.5. Glasgow University researchers have carried out careful exploratory research, in Glasgow on the New Orleans Intervention Model (NIM). NIM was developed by at the University of Tullane in New Orleans in the United States of America. The model offers families who have a child who enters care due to abuse or neglect a structured assessment of family relationships followed by an intensive treatment that aims to improve family functioning and child mental health. If adequate change is achieved, a recommendation is made for the child to return home but, if not, the recommendation is for adoption. Preliminary research from the USA suggests that NIM might reduce future maltreatment of the child and other children in the family, and improve mental health in middle childhood. However, this US research was conducted in a

context where there were virtually no preventative child social services. It might be that the much better preventative social work services that exist in the UK could be as good as or even better than NIM.

- 3.6. Activity to enable implementation of the Best Trial in Renfrewshire is well advanced. All social work practitioners and managers, as well as our foster carers, have been briefed about the approach and new processes instigated to ensure appropriate identification, referral and tracking of participant families. The Trial team have met with local Children's Reporters and the Children's Panel. Legal Services colleagues have written to the local judiciary and the Faculty of Procurators to offer information briefings.
 - 3.7. The Best Services Trial aims to recruit around two thirds of eligible families and the Trial will conclude in 2021.
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Implications of this report

1. **Financial**
None.
2. **HR and Organisational Development**
None.
3. **Community/Council Planning**

Our Renfrewshire is safe - *Our participation in the Best Services Trial contributes to all of our children having the best start in life, being safe and healthy.*
4. **Legal**
None.
5. **Property/Assets**
None.
6. **Information Technology**
None.
7. **Equality and Human Rights**

(a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health and Safety**
None.

- 9. **Procurement**
None.
- 10. **Risk**
None.
- 11. **Privacy Impact**
None.
- 12. **Cosla Policy Position**
None.

List of Background Papers

- (a) None

Children's Services

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