

**To: Education and Children Policy Board**

**On: 20 August 2015**

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**Report by: Director of Children's Services**

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**Heading: Membership of European Social Network**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The social work service became a member of the European Social Network in 2014, following approval by the social work, health and wellbeing policy board in November 2013. Membership has supported social care staff to benchmark and learn from the experience of other organisations, in order to ensure that social care services continue to modernise and improve to meet the evolving needs of local people. It has also allowed the work being progressed in Renfrewshire to develop social care services to be showcased on an international stage.
- 1.2 Renfrewshire Council has undertaken a significant programme of improvement across social work services in recent years, in order to ensure that the services and supports which are available to local people help them to achieve the best possible outcomes. Many of these developments, particularly in children's services through initiatives such as regional childcare commissioning and Achieving Step Change, have been sector leading and are being replicated in other areas of the country.
- 1.3 The ability to benchmark and learn from other organisations is an important element of the work being undertaken to develop and implement new arrangements for children's services in Renfrewshire, as well as to develop integrated working arrangements for adult social care and health services through a health and social care service.

- 1.4 The director of children's services, in his role as chief social work officer, has professional oversight for social care staff employed by the Council across the various client groups. Annual membership has therefore been reviewed by the director of children's services/chief social work officer, and it is proposed that Renfrewshire Council retains membership of the European Social Network at this time at an annual cost of £750. Social care staff working across children's, criminal justice and adult services will continue to benefit from this membership
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## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the education and children policy board approves annual membership of the European Social Network at an annual cost of £750, subject to annual review by the director of children's services.
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## **3. Background**

- 3.1 Social care staff have worked very hard in recent years to improve and modernise the services and supports that are available in local communities in order to address a range of demographic and financial pressures. In terms of children's services, these relate to increasing numbers of children requiring care and protection due to the significant issue of parental alcohol or substance misuse. In addition, increasing numbers of adults are living longer with more complex conditions, at a time when services are aiming to support people to live as independently as possible within their own homes and services. Officers from the social work service worked with partners in the public, private and voluntary sector to develop a range of early intervention and preventative services which better meet the needs of local people; many of these developments have been sector-leading or have been piloted locally before national implementation.
- 3.2 It is important that Renfrewshire Council continues to build on this success in order to meet the changing needs of local communities. Membership of the European Social Network would provide officers within this organisation with opportunities to benchmark and to learn from the experiences of other organisations across Europe which provide social care, and in turn could facilitate further opportunities for improvements to local services for the benefit of local residents.
- 3.3 The European Social Network (ESN) operates as an independent network for local public social services in Europe, with the key aim of bringing people together who design, manage and deliver social services in public authorities across Europe. The network supports the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

- 3.4 The ESN was founded in 1998 by the associations of social care directors of Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, France, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and the UK, with member organisations also extending to universities, funding and regulatory bodies and research and development organisations which work closely with public authorities on the development of social services. In Scotland members include the Care Inspectorate, Perth and Kinross Council, the Scottish Government and Social Work Scotland Ltd.
- 3.5 The annual cost of membership for the European Social Network is £750, which facilitates access a range of learning events and workshops. Over the past twelve months senior officers from the social work service have participated in a number of activities via the ESN. These events included participation at a social planning event in November 2014 and delivering a workshop on permanency planning at the annual ESN conference in July 2015 in partnership with the Centre for Excellence for Looked after Children (CELSIS). These events are funded by the ESN and allow the council to learn from best practice in other European countries and share our own best practice with other members in a mutual learning environment.
- 3.6 The director of children's services is a member of the ESN Semester Group which operates to ensure that best practice is developed and shared across the European Union. The ESN doesn't only focus on social work issues but has a wide focus on the provision of people services including education and early years issues. As a consequence it is considered that continued membership of the ESN will contribute in a positive manner to the ongoing development of the services for children and adults in Renfrewshire.
- 3.7 The ESN are currently pursuing European funding to support service users in attending its annual conference. This would be a welcome initiative and one which we should support as part of our commitment to service user participation and involvement in service design.
- 3.8 Following review, it is considered that the membership of the European Social Network remains best value and has supported the professional development of social care staff in Renfrewshire at minimal cost. It is recommended that annual membership of this organisation is retained, and that this is reviewed on a regular basis by the director of children's services in terms of best value.
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## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - Annual membership of the European Social Network would incur a cost to Children's Services of £750, which would be met from existing resources.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - None.
3. **Community Planning** – None.
4. **Legal** - None.
5. **Property/Assets** – None.
6. **Information Technology** – None.

7. **Equality & Human Rights** - 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.
  8. **Health & Safety** – None.
  9. **Procurement** – None.
  10. **Risk** - None.
  11. **Privacy Impact** - None
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### **List of Background Papers**

(a) **None**

The foregoing background papers will be retained within children's services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Lisa McIntyre, principal officer, planning and performance , tel 0141 618 6807.

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*Children's Services*  
*JT/LMcA*  
7 August 2015

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