

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>10 DECEMBER 2010</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>MOBILE WORKING FOR SOCIAL WORKERS WITHIN SAFEGUARDING AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN SERVICE</b>
<b>REPORT BY:</b>	<b>HEAD OF SAFEGUARDING AND REVIEW</b>

**CLASSIFICATION:** Open

### **Wards Affected**

County-wide

### **Purpose**

To inform the Committee of the current position in respect of mobile working for children, social workers and support workers within Herefordshire.

### **Recommendations**

**THAT: Scrutiny Committee support the proposal for:**

- (a) **ICT technical options to be identified between the Children and Young People's Directorate and ICT Services to find a suitable and cost effective way for staff to work in a more mobile way.**
- (b) **A review to take place on the current ICT equipment used by social workers and family support workers and where necessary replacements to be costed to enable them to work remotely**
- (c) **All Herefordshire children's workplaces, including children's centres and the proposed locality "hubs" have capacity and connectivity for staff to connect to the network when in the locality; and**
- (d) **Further work is undertaken on the financial feasibility of the proposal.**

### **Key Points Summary**

- Mobile working for social workers and family support workers will be a significant improvement in terms of efficiency and ways of working. A rolling standardisation programme for computers is in place within Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire and where equipment over a certain age is replaced like for like from an ICT budget, or where a desktop computer is not suitable for a member of staff a more suitable technology can be supplied at a small cost to the relevant department. Staff who have a laptop and a crypto card, which is the corporate secure remote access solution, can access the network from home, however staff who do not have a

Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
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laptop and crypto card currently need to return to the office in order to update Frameworki in terms of assessments and case notes.

- Where staff require laptops and are not due a replacement under standardisation the full cost of the device would need to be met from the specific department.
- Mobile working is a key element of the Frameworki action plan developed following the recent Ofsted inspection which will improve the system as well as the way of working for the Service as a whole.

## Alternative Options

- 1 There are no alternative options.

## Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 It is recognised that mobile working has great benefits for social workers, allowing them to work more flexibly and keep their records up to date. Information regarding children can be immediately updated and thereby is the most efficient way of using the current electronic system to ensure that children are safeguarded.
- 3 More mobile ICT provision would significantly reduce travel costs and time that social workers spent on the road as they could work from a local base to them or return home to do their written work. It should fit in with any recommendations of the current Munro review that will allow social workers to operate in the most efficient and time effective manner, allowing our key staff involved with child protection to operate in a professional and safe manner without further disadvantage in their operational practice.

## Introduction and Background

- 4 Herefordshire introduced the new Integrated Children System, which was heavily driven by the Government of the time in October 2008 and Frameworki was introduced at the same time. Many of the Council social work staff found it difficult to adapt to a new system as quickly as the project plan expected.
- 5 Since then, there has been considerable investment in training and infrastructure to the point where the majority of managers and social workers within Herefordshire now have remote access via crypto cards. This allows them to work flexibly and also at times of extreme weather conditions, allows people to operate from their home bases.
- 6 The Council's ICT Services are currently using crypto card as the Council's remote working solution, this works by giving the user a unique login number to securely access the council's network from home.
- 7 A number of options for mobile working are either being considered by the Council or are being implemented these are listed below and their respective advantages and disadvantages detailed:

### **3G**

3G is like a mobile phone signal which users can use to access the internet and in turn the Council's network using a crypto card. Research from OLA's would indicate that the best solution for mobile working would be laptops fitted with 3G cards, however within Herefordshire coverage of the 3G signal is poor and as it is provided by a national company Herefordshire Council are unable to improve this.

A pilot would be required to see whether 3G would be an option for Herefordshire and included in this would be to check if frameworki would work efficiently across a potentially weak 3G signal. Another consideration would be the need for wireless cards in existing laptops and new equipment going forward, this may also be an overhead for departments.

Advantages if signal is available are, quicker updates to the frameworki system providing a more accurate up to date service. Duplicate data entry would be reduced which would enable staff to work in a more time effective manner.

### **Frameworki Offline Files**

This feature of Frameworki allows workers to download set forms on to a laptop before visiting patients, from Frameworki for them to be completed "off-line" at the patients home, which can then be uploaded back onto Frameworki.

Offline forms allows specific forms to be filled in away from the office. Dagenham & Barking local authority have found that social workers could complete one additional assessment per day using this way of working.

Disadvantages are that only downloaded forms can be accessed and that other information on the framework system is not available off line which includes the updating of case notes.

Originally, this was due to be piloted with 10 social work staff from both Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children and ten from Adult Social Care, starting in April 2010. The timescales for this pilot has now been set for January 2011.

### **Digital Pens**

This technology allows staff to use a dedicated pen and paper to complete the assessment forms whilst at the homes of patients, once back at the office the pen is connected to the network and the completed form is transcribed onto the screen ready for finalising and submission into the framework system. Costs can vary for this solution and changing forms can increase stationery costs for redesigning of the digital form.

### **Locality Working**

In addition to the Council buildings, the 'No Wrong Door' project within the Children and Young Peoples Directorate will be going live with 6 locality offices in 2011, staff will be able to call into these centres to either connect wirelessly to the network or use a fixed desktop computer to access either the Council or PCT network. These sites could be utilised by the staff as a closer venue to update patient records after visits. In addition to this wireless networks are planned to be set up at Blackfriars, Plough Lane, Brockington and Thorn in 2010.

### **Wireless-enabled laptops used with crypto cards**

Currently staff who have a laptop and crypto card can access the Council's network by connecting to their home internet using a cable. Where laptops are wireless enabled the cable is not required which allows more flexible working as there is no need for direct cable connection to network. However wireless enabling of laptops is part of a wider project and timescales are not yet defined and is not a preferred approach of ICT because of increased security risks.

Security needs to be thorough to ensure protection of information which means access to any wireless networks to connect to the Council's Network is only accessible via a dual authentication login using the crypto card. Again there may be a cost to enable the laptop to work wirelessly by installing a wireless network card.

Printing is not currently possible when using the Council laptop and crypto card at home.

In terms of HR the need for self-regulation around work, leisure time is important as is having an appropriate work station for health and safety purposes.

Crypto cards are available to individuals on a one-off basis at a cost of £50.00 each. Social workers and managers find these cards very helpful, as they can work from home when writing reports for conferences and court, and are still able to access Frameworki for information.

- 8 The electronic recording system was criticised in the recent Ofsted unannounced and announced inspections and an action plan is in place to address the issues raised. A key consideration of the action plan is the move to mobile working which would bring improvements for the Service in terms of up to date recording but also improve the morale of staff who would have quicker access to the system.

## **Key Considerations**

- 9 Mobile working is a key element of modernising and improving social work practice and ways of working in Herefordshire. An up to date case recording systems is critical to ensure that children and young people are effectively safeguarded. The geography of the county means that mobile working is even more important than in other more urban authorities. Ofsted will be looking at the way in which the authority is improving Frameworki, and access to it, following the outcome of their recent inspections. Improving data quality and speed of recording will also have a major impact on accurate performance reporting.

## **Community Impact**

- 9 Effective mobile working will ensure that user views can be recorded swiftly onto the system. By implementing it across the Service, it will ensure equality for our client group that are in more rural locations as their records will be as swiftly recorded as those within the towns where our social workers already operate.

## **Financial Implications**

- 10 The financial implications of the different options will vary from low to significant and on acceptance of the recommendations of this report full costs will be detailed for all available options.

## **Legal Implications**

- 11 Fully encrypted mobile working will enable that the information is safely stored. As a result, there would be reduced reliance on memory sticks and minimise the amount of copying of highly confidential client information to use with families and at meetings as this would all be available on the system. Where memory sticks are used, these will be corporately issued and encrypted for security.

## **Risk Management**

- 12 The risks in terms of data security and lone working are the same as for the current development of locality team working in the directorate. Council protocols and procedures would operate to mitigate those risks.

## **Consultees**

Senior managers and staff in Children's Services.

ICT Services Division

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background Papers**

None identified.