Renfrewshire Council has 299 accommodated children. 81 of these children are looked after in residential accommodation, with the remainder being cared for in foster care. Renfrewshire Council has 5 residential children’s units with a registered capacity of 56 beds. Occupancy rate across the residential service is currently 52, with another 29 children placed in external residential resources which includes, specialist provision for children with disabilities, secure care and residential schools.

Residential care is used by Renfrewshire Council when the specific needs of children and young people means that they cannot remain living with their parents or in an alternative family setting. It remains an important part of our overall provision for children. It can be the most appropriate setting for older children with more complex emotional and behavioural problems, and is often their preferred choice. Residential care can make a real and positive difference to the lives of children, however there are some considerable challenges facing residential child care both at a local and national level.

Recognition of the challenges facing the residential child care sector led to the establishment of the National Residential Child Care Initiative. Renfrewshire Council was represented on the working group which looked at commissioning of residential services. We also participated fully in the review which is the focus of this committee meeting by providing information regarding the cost of our own residential care and we were one of the Council’s chosen to have the case files of young people in residential care audited.

How we care for accommodated children now and in the future is arguably one of the greatest challenges the public sector faces; however service provision needs to be seen in the context of social work services facing increased levels of need, at a time when there are severe constraints on public spending. In light of this, Renfrewshire Council is involved in regional and local initiatives to improve outcomes.

The Regional Child Care Commissioning Initiative is funded by the Scottish Government and is hosted by Renfrewshire Council. It was originally envisaged to encompass Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Glasgow and East Renfrewshire Councils but the potential of the Initiative to deliver better outcomes for children and service efficiencies for statutory partners was quickly recognised and as such the membership of the project was broadened to include all eight councils and two health boards within the Clyde Valley region.

The pathfinder initiative arose out of The National Residential Child Care Initiative which found significant gaps in knowledge regarding the forward demand for residential
services as well as a lack of agreement about the actual needs of the children and young people requiring residential care. Another key finding of the NRCCI which led to this Initiative was the uncertainty within statutory agencies about the best models of provision to meet the needs of children and young people and a growing mis-match between these needs and available services.

The Initiative has been underway for seven months and following detailed market scanning and analysis work, three clear areas of concurrence of individual interests, needs and aspirations have been identified: services for children with autism and their families; foster care services; and diversions from secure care for vulnerable young people. Commissioning groups comprised of a range of stakeholders are currently working on progressing opportunities for regional and sub-regional collaboration within each of the service areas. The value and potential of partnership working between statutory agencies, service providers, service users and other stakeholders is already evident as the commissioning groups explore creative ideas for the development of more flexible, child-centred and efficient services across the Clyde Valley.

A key objective of the Regional Child Care Commissioning Initiative is to deliver outcome focussed services. This is a challenge given the hitherto inconsistent approach to outcomes focussed services by purchasers and providers, however, the commissioning groups are committed to delivering outcomes based commissioning. While the ongoing financial pressures are an important driver of outcomes focussed services, the shared commitment of all stakeholders to achieve better services for children and young people in need is paramount. The Regional Initiative offers a valuable and timely opportunity for us to bring about significant and lasting change in the way we match our available resources to the needs of our children and young people.

Renfrewshire Council, through the Renfrewshire Children’s Services Partnership (RCSP), has made a successful application to the Big Lottery Fund to support work that will transform key aspects of integrated children’s services. The Project is entitled “Achieving Step Change in Children’s Outcomes” The project has a 3 year time frame and specifies three outcomes to be achieved over the funding period. These are:

- Engagement and ongoing development of the community and service users in identifying their current and future needs
- Improve service delivery so that young people are more capable and able to deal with the challenges of 21st century life
- Improve the health and well being of looked after children in Renfrewshire and thereby reduce the numbers of young people being looked after and accommodated

The process through which the enhanced outcomes will be achieved will include:

- A planned process to reduce the numbers of children looked after and accommodated by the local authority where appropriate and possible, by facilitating enhanced community supports
- An in-depth analysis of need, together with effective client engagement
A review of “what works”
• A review of partnership working by the RCSP to result in the development of a shared vision amongst all stakeholders which is based upon a clear understanding of the main challenges and on how to bring about a fundamental “step change” in the key outcomes achieved by children/young people in need
• Facilitating a significant shift of resources over the life of the project to focus on prevention and early intervention.

A key feature of the outcome focussed approach will be effective community engagement, ensuring that services are increasingly tailored to the actual requirements of the people that they are aimed at.

Renfrewshire is committed to Corporate Parenting and the GIRFEC agenda. Corporate Parenting is firmly embedded within the Council. We have a working group which meets regularly to progress issues such as employment opportunities for LAC, training for elected members and partnership working between agencies to ensure looked after children are supported effectively. We also have an elected member who has been appointed as the LAC champion and she has been a regular visitor to our own children’s units.

As part of our commitment to children in Renfrewshire we have made concerted efforts to embrace the GIRFEC agenda and have developed a Renfrewshire GIRFEC policy which has been approved by our Children’s Services Partnership. A large focus of this work has been developing and implementing an Integrated Assessment Framework across Renfrewshire which promotes early intervention at the point that a child requires it. This requires culture and practice shift as we are moving to children’s plans being supported by a Lead Professional which is determined by the needs of the child. It is hoped that full implementation of the IAF will lead to earlier and more effective intervention with children and young people therefore preventing them requiring to be looked after or indeed accommodated.

This is particularly important given that the overall trend in numbers of looked after children in Renfrewshire has been upwards since 2001. The largest increase has been seen amongst children aged 11 years and under. The increase in Renfrewshire’s accommodated population is higher than the Scottish average and this is due to the significantly higher than average rates of social deprivation, drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence.

The costs of accommodating children are significant, particularly when we place children in external foster or residential resources. As referred to in the Audit Scotland Report “Getting it Right for Children in Residential Care” the number of children cared for in a residential setting has remained stable over the last seven years, the cost of residential placements has grown by 68% during the same period. A secure placement costs in excess of £250,000 per annum, and an external foster placement costs on average £50,000 per annum compared to just under £25,000 for a Renfrewshire foster
placement. This is why the work of the Regional Child Care Commissioning Initiative is critical.

Increased demand on resources influenced our decision to review our Children’s Services within Social Work pending the outcome of the “Achieving Step Change in Children’s Outcomes”. This comprehensive review will seek to deliver the best outcomes possible for children in Renfrewshire whilst ensuring value for money. A review of residential child care forms part of the work stream however two other work streams will impact significantly on how residential child care in Renfrewshire might look in the future.

The review of Children’s services identified gaps in resources for accommodated children who were ready to leave care and acknowledged that this was having a negative impact on the residential service. In recognition of this gap Social Work and Housing and Property Services in Renfrewshire have made significant progress in developing a service which will provide additional supported accommodation for young people leaving care. This will consist of 10 new build self contained flats, with 24 hour support on site. This project will be managed by Social Work. A site and housing provider have been identified and work has begun on the design of the building. It is envisaged that the project will be operational by late summer / early autumn 2012. 6 of the flats in this project will be ring fenced for young people leaving our residential provision. The remainder will be for young people who are currently placed in external resources.

Further development of our fostering service has been identified as one of the catalysts for change in delivering better outcomes for children in Renfrewshire. To maximise opportunities for children to live with families there is a need for the fostering service to meet the needs of children with more intensive care needs and older children. This will also assist with diverting children away from the residential service unless this is the placement they require. A high profile recruitment campaign with a focus on attempting to attract carers who would be interested in caring for young people who typically end up in residential care is currently underway and it is hoped that we will see new carers created by early spring 2011.

Regardless of the developments to the Throughcare Provision and the Fostering Service, Renfrewshire Council is committed to developing its residential care service. Recent research into residential child care confirms that better outcomes are achieved when three factors are in place. The first is clear leadership and an effective philosophy, the second is smaller units and the third is higher staffing ratios. We are currently in the process of taking forward an improvement plan which tackles all of these issues.

We have also established a forum for accommodated children which is facilitated by the Who Cares? Scotland worker we commission. The forum is made up of representatives from all of our children’s units and I have attended to discuss issues which are of importance to them.
Renfrewshire Council is committed to improving our own residential service to achieve better outcomes for the most vulnerable children in our care. We are also strongly committed to improving commissioning practices to ensure robust contracting practices and value for money is achieved.