

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 September 2006

**PROPOSAL TO EXTEND MEMBERSHIP OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Purpose of Report

1. This report asks the Committee to agree that the membership of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be extended to include up to 7 additional members, as non-voting co-optees.

Action Required

2. To submit a recommendation to the 7th November 2006 County Council meeting asking that the membership of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be extended by up to 7 additional members to incorporate a number of non-voting co-optees, comprising the following representatives:

Schools Sector - Chairman of the Primary Heads Forum
 - Chairman of the Wiltshire Association of Secondary Heads
 - 1 teacher representative

Charity Sector - 1 representative from National Children's Home (NCH)
 - 1 representative from National Society for the Prevention of
 Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
 - 1 representative from Barnardos

Children's Sector - 1 children & young people's representative

3. To authorise the Scrutiny Support Officer, the Director of the Department for Children & Education (DCE) and the Chairman of the Committee, to identify the names of the proposed representatives in 2 above for Council to formally appoint on the 7th November 2006, in order that the extended membership can be confirmed in time for the 29th November Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Background

4. During the summer members were consulted on a 'review of meetings', one outcome of which was a request from the Leader that the Head of Democratic & Members' Services review the way the cabinet and cabinet members achieve cross party input into decisions.
5. With regard to policy development and decisions taken in respect of Children and Education Services, a review of stakeholder input into recommendations made and discussions held by non-cabinet members,

i.e. by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee (a role that was previously performed by the Children, Education & Libraries (CEL) Advisory Panel), therefore also seems appropriate.

6. Consequently, the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee is asked to extend its membership to include up to 7 additional members as non-voting co-optees, a number of which were previously assigned to the CEL Advisory Panel.

Implications for the Committee

7. The principle of allowing stakeholders from schools, the charity sector and children themselves to have a voice on the Scrutiny Committee is a good practice and exercised by a number of other councils, including Dorset County Council, Poole Borough Council, Devon County Council, Cornwall County Council and Hertfordshire County Council.
8. Although non-voting, the co-opted members will bring to the Committee table first hand experience of the issues which affect children, and therefore their comments will help to inform members' recommendations regarding future policy and decisions made by the Council.
9. Currently, the Committee includes 18 voting members (13 councillors / 5 non-elected voting members), and, if approved, this recommendation would lead to a potential total membership of 25 (13 councillors / 5 non-elected voting members / up to 7 non-voting co-optees). The Chairman, Vice Chairman and officers supporting the Committee will therefore need to be mindful of the risks such a sizeable membership could have, if only to ensure effective management of committee business and an equal voice to all on the Committee.
10. Finally, another implication from the 'review of meetings' and 'review of cabinet / cabinet member input into decision making' will be that the Scrutiny Committee will in future receive those items regarding the performance of the DCE which formerly were directed towards the CEL Advisory Panel.
11. An extended membership and extended work programme will require careful management, which the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Scrutiny Team will be focusing on in the coming months.

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