**Meeting of Executive Members and
Children's Services Advisory Panel**

Report of the Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services.

UPDATE ON THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHAMPION SELECTION PROCESS

Summary

1. This paper updates members about progress on developing the selection processes for the Children and Young People's Champion.

Background

2. The meeting of the Executive Members for Children's Services Advisory Panel on 19th of July resolved:

    (iii) That Officers explore the possibilities of an ICT based election
    (iv) That the issues regarding process and fairness that arose in the last election be addressed
    (v) That the format of the ICT process be delegated to Officers and the Executive Members and Shadow Executive Members for Children's Services and Youth and Social Inclusion.

    In considering the ICT process officers were asked to explore the 'I'm a Councillor, get me out of here' package, the university student union voting system and the possibility of working with students at the college to develop a system.

Update

3. **I'm a councillor get me out of here**
    The 'I'm a councilor get me out of here' system was considered. It costs £ 4k and needs to be run in school lesson times. Ideally hustings events need to be run in schools prior to the election process, which presents some logistical problems. The product is aimed at secondary school pupils so may not be suitable for primary schools. Feedback from schools that have used the system suggests that it is expensive and that it did not have high participation rates from children and young people. Feedback from Councilors reinforced these views; therefore, this option was discounted.

4. **University student union system**
   The system used by the university was explored. It is a secure and cost effective system. However, this system works because the university issues an email address to every student. As we don't have a secure email address for each child or young person in the City it is not possible to adopt this approach. This option was therefore not pursued.

5. **York College students**
   Officers were asked to explore the possibility students at York College developing a system. However, given the short timescale for managing this project and following concerns expressed by the directorate IT representative about achieving the appropriate levels of security and encryption, the business case for this option was felt to be too high risk. This option was therefore discounted.

6. **e-voting**
   Officers worked with the directorate IT representative. After extensive research we found 2 companies that could develop or provide a product that met our needs. One company was unable to develop a product in the timescale. The second company had an off the peg solution – however, this would cost $ 12,750 (£6,312). This breaks down as:

License:	$3995
Voter registration and data check:	$4255
(Based on 25,000 voters)	
Video viewing	$500
Accessibility customization	$4000

   There are very few companies offering these products and these were the only ones that could be found that met our requirements.

7. In order to run the process we would also need to spend a minimum of £419 producing postcards informing children and young people about how they could vote and £2100 producing a video of a hustings event which they could view on the website. This would bring the total cost to £8831.

8. **Analysis**
   Officers from the democracy unit have raised concerns about the security of web based voting. It was also unclear how many children and young people would choose to vote using this mechanism. Last time there were 1600 votes cast; however, this happened in a more controlled environment and there were some concerns that fewer votes would be cast using the e-voting system. Options for piloting the scheme so that not all children and young people could vote were explored; however the core costs of the software meant that reducing the number of people who could participate didn't significantly reduce the costs.

9. **Decision**
   Given this information the Executive Member for Youth and Social Inclusion and the Shadow Executive Member agreed that e-voting was not a cost

effective option for selecting the children and young people's Champion as the costs were high and there was a risk of low participation from children and young people.

10. **Next steps.**
The Executive Member for Youth and Social Inclusion and the Shadow Executive Member agreed that a paper should be produced and taken to the next meeting of the Young people's Working Group (9th October) and the October Executive Members for Children's Services Advisory Panel. Verbal feedback from the meeting of the 9th October will be given at the meeting of EMAP. It was agreed that the paper to both forums should:
   - Outline options for a paper based election process
   - Update the role description for the Children and Young people's Champion
   - Set out clear election rules addressing issues of fairness
   - Set out a clear timetable for the election process

11. **Options for a paper-based election process.**
   Consultation with children and young people
   Consultation with Children and young people undertaken in 2005 before the last process revealed that their first choice for a process to select a Children and Young People's Champion would be through a ballot in schools. Children and young people also stated that they would like to communicate with the Champion face to face.

12. **Guiding Principles for an election process**
   The Executive Member for Youth and Social Inclusion and the Shadow Executive Member agreed that the principle guiding the development of the options should be widening the process so that as many children and young people as possible are able to vote. They also agreed that as the risks associated with electoral fraud were low, a numbered vote would not be a prime consideration if this prevented a wide range of children and young people being able to participate and that any options developed should work on this basis.

13. The Executive Members for Children's Services Advisory Panel on 19th of July stated that 'there were logistical problems with schools running the elections that needed to be overcome. Schools were already stretched and it was felt that it would be difficult for children to access any material to do with the selection of the Champion within lesson times.'

14. **Running a ballot in primary and secondary schools.**
   In order to meet these aims it is proposed that the election process is run in schools in the spring term of 2008. Notice of this intention would be given to schools in the Autumn term to enable them to plan this into programmes. A hustings event would be held in the New Year with a small group of children and young people asking each candidate questions. This event would be videoed and a DVD produced (costing about £2k), thereby enabling children and young people to see the candidates responding to issues without the logistical problems of trying to co-ordinate access to 66 schools in the City.

15. **Analysis**
Running a paper-based ballot in schools provides the most cost effective means of undertaking an election process which provides as many children and young people in the City with the possibility of voting for the next Children and Young People's Champion. However, whilst all schools can be approached, officers cannot guarantee that all schools will participate in the scheme, or that all children and young people in each school will be offered the opportunity to vote.

16. **Option 1**
Full election process including ballot boxes and numbered ballot papers involving all primary and secondary schools within the City.
It would cost £209 to produce 25000 numbered ballot cards. In order to ensure security of the vote, teachers in each school would need to allocate a numbered ballot to an individual child/ young person, recording which child/ young person used which card. It would cost around £3k to transport polling booths/ ballot boxes to all of the schools. Children and young people themselves would need to be involved in organising the elections within the schools with support from teachers and officers, including counting the ballot papers.

17. **Analysis**
This option is expensive (£5200). It would also require additional Officer time it terms of getting schools on board and co-ordinating the process, which is not currently available. Requiring increased input from teachers is likely to decrease the number of teachers and schools that are willing and able to fully support the process and so reduce the number of children and young people who are able to vote.

18. **Option 2**
Election process including numbered ballot papers involving all primary and secondary schools within the City.
It would cost £209 to produce 25000 numbered ballot cards. In order to ensure security of the vote teachers in each school would need to allocate a numbered ballot to an individual child/ young person, recording which child/ young person used which card. The cards would then be collected by teachers and returned to the returning officer before the close of polling. The Independent Scrutineer would then count the ballot.

19. **Analysis**
This option is less expensive costing (£2,209); however it still requires significant input of officer and teacher time in order to co-ordinate, allocate and check the numbered vote allocated to each child/ young person. There is still the risk that the additional time and input required of teachers could reduce the number of children and young people who are able to vote. Given the low risks associated with electoral fraud the risk of reduced participation may outweigh these concerns.

20. **Option 3**
Election process using un-numbered ballots in all primary and secondary schools within the City.
It would cost £133 to produce 25000 un-numbered ballot cards. These cards could be easily distributed across the schools. The process of distributing ballot cards is much simpler, requiring less officer and teacher time. The ballot would take place in supervised environments (form periods/ assemblies) with a card being given to each pupil, reducing the potential for children and young people to fill in multiple ballots. The cards would then be collected by teachers and returned to the Independent Scrutineer before the close of polling. The Independent Scrutineer would then count the ballot.

21. **Analysis**
This option is cheaper costing (£2150) and doesn't introduce any barriers to encouraging the widest possible access to the voting process. As the risks associated with electoral fraud are low, this may be the best option to minimise the risks that access to the vote could be restricted. It would also be easier to involve York College students using this option.

22. **Revised Champion role description**
The role description (Annex 1) has been up dated to take account of the revised constitution and role of the Young People's Working group.

23. **Election rules**
Officers have worked with representatives from Democratic Service to develop some election rules (Annex 2) that are robust and fair and address issues identified with the previous process around the lack of clarity about the conduct of the hustings, the publication of election material and the roles of officers in the process.

The rules will need amending once the process for running the election has been agreed.

24. **Election timetable**
Officers have worked to establish a proposed election timetable as outlined in Annex 3.

Corporate Priorities

25. Involving children and young people in the selection of their Champion meets the Council objectives of:
   • Encouraging all Children and Young People to become Active Citizens
   • Consulting with children and young people about the future of the City and about provision by the council.

26. **Implications**

   • **Financial.** Any spend is within existing budgets, so there are no adverse financial implications of this report

- There are no specific Human Resources (HR), crime and disorder, IT or legal implications of this report

- **Equalities** Whilst there are no specific equality implications of this report the movement to a newly appointed children's champion creates further opportunities to ensure that key issues facing children and young people are brought to council attention

Risk Management

27. There are no specific risks associated with this report.

Recommendations

28. That the Working Group advise the Executive Member that:

1) Members agree to the process outlined as option 3 (para 20)

   Reason: This ensures that the vote is extended to the maximum amount of children and young people at a reasonable cost.

2) Members agree the revised role description for the children and young people's champion as outlined in para 22 and Appendix 1.

   Reason: To ensure that the role description fits with the new constitution.

3) Members agree to the election rules as outlined in para 23 and Annex 2.

   Reason: In order to ensure a fair and transparent process for the election of a new Children and Young people's Champion

4) Members agree to the election timetable as outlined in para 24 and Annex 3.

   Reason: In order to ensure a fair and transparent process for the election of a new Children and Young people's Champion

5) Members agree that any final amendments to the rules, timetable, process or delivery required be delegated to Officers and the Executive Members and Shadow Executive Members for Youth and Social Inclusion.

   Reason: To enable the election of a new Children and Young people's Champion to take place as swiftly as possible.

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Report Approved | ✓ | **Date** | *1 October 2007*

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

None

Wards Affected: **All** | ✓ |

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers

None

Annexes

Annex 1 - Role description for the 'Children and Young Peoples Champion'
Annex 2 - Children and young people's champion election rules
Annex 3 - Timetable for electing the new Children and Young People's Champion