

Meeting of Executive Members and Children's Services Advisory Panel

19 July 2007

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

Options for the selection of the Children and Young People's Champion

Summary

1. This report reviews the process used in 2006 to select a Champion for Children and Young People and asks the Executive Member to determine the arrangements for the coming year.

Background

2. The post of Champion for Children and Young People for the City of York was established through the constitution of the Council as a member appointment. The first Champion was appointed for a one-year term of office during the school year 2006 – 07. One thousand six hundred (1,600) children and young people were involved in a process of selection that started in April 2006 and was completed during the summer term. The selection process was undertaken through school councils, making use of the annual primary and secondary school council conferences as an opportunity to debate the issues and vote on the candidates. The opportunity to participate was also extended to all secondary schools in the City through a DVD and small resource pack. Four secondary schools involved their wider school community in this way. The selection process was run on a very short timescale, because of the timing of the school council conferences.
3. Although the appointment has been a success, some criticisms were made of the selection process, most notably that there were no clear election rules, as a consequence of which young people did not all have a similar understanding of the process or an equal opportunity to make their voice heard. There was also a lack of clarity about the conduct of the hustings and the publication of election material.
4. This review was also asked to consider whether the post might be opened up to an independent person, rather than an elected member. Each of these issues is considered below, and a series of options proposed. This report has been considered by the Young Person's Working Group at a meeting on 12 July 2007 and their views will be reported to the meeting.

Elected Member or independent person?

5. The champion holds a position with no power and is expected to be impartial. In many ways it reflects, at the local level, the role of Al Aynsley-Green, the children's commissioner for England, at a national level. An elected member may have time to visit schools during the day and have considerable influence within the council. Elected members also bring with them the authority of having already put themselves up for election and being genuine democratically elected representatives.
6. The case for an independent person as champion is that they are self evidently impartial and, although they may not have the power of an elected member, they would bring a different perspective to the Executive Member for Youth and Social Inclusion with whom they would be expected to work very closely.
7. Should the decision be taken to appoint an independent person, it is felt this role requires someone with a connection with young people e.g. someone at school, university, or someone working with young people in a voluntary or paid role. The individual taking this role needs to have time to talk to young people at schools through the school councils and take this information forward and work with the Executive Member. The champion would be supported by an officer.

Selection or election?

8. The argument in favour of an election is that it would provide children and young people with the opportunity to experience an election process in full by registering, and having a ballot card, polling station and ballot box.
9. Most other Champion positions within the council are inward facing and so are not subject to any form of public selection. The exception to this is the Older Person's Champion who was selected by The Older People's Assembly which wrote to all Councillors asking them to apply for the post and then selected the Champion through an interview process. However as there isn't a similar body of children and young people currently existing in the City this model could not be replicated. It does, however, set a precedent for working with a smaller group to select the Champion.
10. In arriving at a decision about this, it is important to remember that the Children and Young People's Champion is a non-political position. The Champion provides a voice and advocates for children and young people, but has no direct power or budgetary control. An election is closely associated with the political process and there is a risk of creating some confusion in the mind of the children and young people who would be involved. Three members of the senior leadership teams from different secondary schools have voiced their concerns about this as well as drawing attention to the logistical difficulties of running a full election.
11. A full election process would require a much higher commitment from participating schools than at present and the authority would have to provide much more support in terms of time and co-ordination from members of staff in

order to recruit, train and support the young people who will act as election officials. It would also require the staff to give up a number of lunch times in the secondary schools in order to ensure that all young people who wished to had the opportunity to vote. During the last process a limited number of schools took part. If the expectation placed on schools reduced the number willing to participate, the actual electorate may become less rather than more representative.

Options

12. There are a number of options for undertaking the selection process in following years which are outlined below:

Option 1: Full election process run in all schools

13. A full election process, involving all primary and secondary schools within the City, would cost around £4k (£3k for transport of polling booths/ ballot boxes. £210 for production of 22,000 numbered ballot cards, £500 To produce materials to support the election process that would be distributed to schools). Young people themselves would be involved in organising the elections within the schools with support from teachers, this includes counting the ballot papers.

Option 2: Hustings at the school council conferences followed by simpler voting process in schools.

14. Both candidates would attend a hustings event at the primary and secondary school council conferences. Information from this would form the supporting pack that are sent to schools, including a short DVD of the key point from the hustings at the conferences. Voting would then take place in schools. The voting process would be overseen by the schools on photocopyable voting cards, without the provision of ballot boxes and polling booths.

Option 3: Election at the primary and secondary school council conferences

15. This would be similar to the process run last year with voting being open to the children and young people who attend the school council conferences for primary and secondary schools. This would include a hustings which both candidates would attend and the children and young people would vote based on this.

Analysis

16. In analysing these three options, consideration has been given to the capacity of the department to provide the support that it needed, either in officer time or in budgetary provision.
17. There is limited budget for supporting children and young people's participation across the City (currently £8600 per year). A full election process would take around half of this budget and mean that other types of consultation and

involvement work would not be able to happen. To give examples from this financial year, the cost of the election process is the same as the cost of involving young people in the development of the new information, support and counselling service at Castlegate and the production of the Transitions mental health DVD.

18. Similarly there is limited officer time available to support children and young people's participation and involvement. Consideration needs to be given to the balance of time taken to develop the selection process and the time that would be left to support the ongoing work of the Champion through out the year.
17. Option 1 is very expensive and would use most of the remaining Voice and Influence budget. It would also require additional officer time in terms of getting schools on board and co-ordinating the process, which is not currently available. If schools were not willing to participate, the young people from that school would be disenfranchised. Although this option would extend the number of children and young people who are able to participate and promote the work of the Champion, there would be limited opportunities to have face to face contact with the candidates as organising visits to the 67 schools across the City would be problematic.
18. Option 2 would cost around £500 to produce the support packs for schools. It would provide an opportunity for a cross section of children and young people to meet and talk to the prospective candidates face to face, which was something they said they preferred. However, equal participation of all schools cannot be guaranteed so not all children and young people could be guaranteed a chance to participate. The scaled down voting processes is manageable within existing officer time as it requires less commitment from schools.
19. Option 3 would limit the number of children and young people who participate in the selection process. Young people who attend a school without a school council or schools that are unable to attend on the day would not be able to participate. However this option offers an easily manageable process that is transparent and deliverable within existing budget and officer time.

Consultation

20. In initial consultation undertaken as the role of the Children and Young People's Champion was being developed, the strongest feedback was that children and young people placed highest value on having the opportunity to meet candidates face to face, running a full election process across all primary and secondary schools. Young people's preferred method for selecting the Champion was through a vote in their individual schools rather than through the school council conferences, suggesting that they felt it was important that there was wider participation in the selection process.

Corporate Priorities

21. 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.

Implications

22. This report has the following implications
 - **Financial** Any spend is within the existing budget for Voice and Influence.
 - **Human Resources (HR)** No implications except for option 1.
 - **Equalities** No implications.
 - **Legal** No implications.
 - **Crime and Disorder** No implications.
 - **Information Technology (IT)** No implications.
 - **Other** No implications.

Risk Management

23. There are no risks associated with this report.

Recommendations

24. The Executive Member is recommended to:
 - adopt Option 2 as the process for selecting a Champion for Children and Young People
 - request that officers identify an independent person willing to serve as the Children and Young People's Champion.

Reason: This ensures a cross section of children and young people have an opportunity to talk with the candidates face to face as well as extending the option to vote to the maximum amount of children and young people at a reasonable cost.

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Report Approved **Date** 25.06.07**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all***All** **For further information please contact the author of the report**