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**Scrutiny Management Committee**

**27 June 2005**

**Report of the Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services**

**Proposed new topic: 'Children's Health: the role of Leisure, Education and Partnerships': Background briefing by Director Designate of Children's Services**

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is for Members to gather background information on the proposed new topic on 'Children's Health' which has been added to the list of possible topics to be progressed by an ad-hoc scrutiny panel. Members will have the opportunity to question the Director Designate of Children's Services about the topic in the light of his future plans for the new service.

**Background**

2. At its last meeting, SMC received a report that asked Members to consider the registration form and feasibility report on the above topic and decide whether or not to progress it. The topic registration form is attached at Annex 1.
3. Members were impressed with the depth and breadth of the proposed topic, its cross-cutting nature and the involvement of partnership organisations and felt that it was a very worthwhile area to research.
4. However, Members raised concerns about the size of the topic, suggesting that it might be broken down in to smaller, more manageable topics. Members were also concerned about officer capacity, considering the new department of Children's Services had recently been set up. Members requested a view on this from the Director (Designate), Patrick Scott, as the availability of Officers may affect the decision as to which areas of the topic to consider.
5. It was agreed that the topic should be accepted in principle but that Patrick Scott should answer questions about officer availability. It was agreed that the topic should be prioritised with other suggested ad-hoc topics before being progressed.

## Comments from Director Designate

6. The Director Designate, Patrick Scott, will attend the meeting to give a short briefing on plans for the new Children's Services and to answer Members concerns in relation to the proposed new topic.
7. Members are reminded that the Director Designate has made the following comments in relation to this topic:-
  1. *Does this overlap with work in your area or another area of the Council you are aware of and if so what?*

This is work that we are currently engaged in with the Healthy City Board and as part of the work on the Children and Young People's Plan and the Education Plan.

2. *Can you see the positive potential in progressing this topic? Please give reasons.*

It is clearly an important issue and, as the proposers suggest, one of immediate concern.

3. *Can you see any immediate pitfalls to progressing this topic?*

We know that much of the data referred to in the proposal is not available (we have been trying to gather it for the Education Plan). There is, for example, no data on obesity and it has proved impossible to establish the kind of benchmarks that are referred to in the proposal. We are working with the Healthy City Board to establish whether we have missed anything but it was commented at a recent meeting that the PCT has much less data than people imagine. Central Government is struggling even more seriously than us. All the data that we currently have is in the full Education Plan. The other problem is that our Healthy Schools Co-ordinator is about to go on maternity leave, and we would struggle to find the capacity to service a scrutiny as we do not have the funding to backfill her position.

4. *If the topic were progressed would you encourage officer support from your area?*

Please see above. It is very new territory for us and would, perhaps, be more easily dealt with once we are a department of children's services. Clearly decisions have yet to be taken about the composition of the department, but I think that, as a general point, councils are going to have to increase the capacity for gathering management information and increase the scope of the current teams (which have no brief or capacity to gather data on health).

5. *Are you aware of existing papers or research documents that might help Members? If so what and could you provide them?*

The Education Plan and the Children and Young People's Plan.

### **Recommendations**

8. In the light of the briefing and response to Members' questions by the Director Designate of Children's Services, Members are asked to decide whether or not the topic should be kept on the list of possible topics for progression by an ad hoc scrutiny panel, either in its current form or in an amended form.

### **Contact details:**

Author of the report:

Rachel Rushforth  
Scrutiny Manager

Tel: 01904 552063

Email: [rachel.rushforth@york.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.rushforth@york.gov.uk)

Chief Officer responsible for the  
report:

Suzan Hemingway  
Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal  
Services

For more information please contact the author of the report

### **Annexes**

Topic registration form: Children's Health: The role of Education, Leisure and Partnerships (no. 99)

### **Background Papers**

None