

<i>item:</i>	7
<i>report:</i>	CYP22/07

## **CHILDREN'S CHAMPIONS**

### **By Bill Alexander**

#### **Summary**

This report sets out proposals for a continued model of Children's Champions in Highland. It includes the role of the Youth Convenor to represent the voice of young people on the Committee.

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council Administration has acknowledged the valuable role that political Children's Champions have played to date in the development and governance of integrated children's services. It has pledged to consider, with partner agencies how the role of Children's Champion might best continue.
- 1.2 NHS Highland members of the Joint Committee have also raised questions about how the Children's Champions role might best be reflected within the NHS Highland Board, Community Health Partnerships and Specialist Services Unit.
- 1.3 The role of political Children's Champion was formally introduced to the Joint Committee in June 2003. It was intended to promote a local focal point and understanding of children's issues across a range of policy agendas, and to reinforce the local perspective at the Joint Committee.
- 1.4 The role has generated significant national interest, and is considered to have enhanced the leadership of children's services in Highland. It is recognised in a range of national policy documents and in inspection and audit reports.
- 1.5 Given the new structure of the local authority, it is necessary to review the role and operation of Children's Champions in the new Council Administration. This should take account of the role of the Youth Convenor to represent the voice of young people on the Committee.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Joint Committee agreed to the establishment of Children's Champions within Highland Council at its meeting in June 2003.

2.2 The role was confirmed in May 2004, as being to promote an understanding and recognition of the needs of children and young people across all Services, and to promote consideration of these needs in policy and strategic developments. As part of this, particular account should be taken of looked after children, and children who are deemed to be 'in need' or 'at risk'.

- 2.3 Accordingly, it was also agreed that the remit was likely to involve:
- representation on the Joint Committee for Children and Young People;
  - promoting understanding of children's needs, rights, participation and services with other members, including at Area Committee and Highland Council Committee's;
  - supporting and contributing to local area governance arrangements for children's services, including liaison with Area Service Managers on local matters;
  - acting as a focal point within the Area for those matters relating to children's services that might otherwise fall between organisational boundaries, and contributing to Area developments to promote children's services;
  - being a member of the Area Childcare & Family Resource Partnership;
  - developing means to enable young people to become involved in local decision making, including through links with Pupil Councils and other youth forums.

### 3. Membership of the Joint Committee

3.1 There are now three administrative areas within Highland Council, which are largely coterminous with three of the NHS Highland Community Health Partnerships.

3.2 The Highland Council membership of the Joint Committee is as below:

	Nominated By	Area
Convenor	Administration	I, N, B&S
Vice-convenor	Administration	R, S, L
Chair of Housing & Social Work	Administration	I, N, B&S
Chair of Education, Culture & Sport	Administration	C, S, ER
Mrs L MacDonald	Administration	I, N, B&S
Mrs B McAllister	Labour Party	I, N, B&S
Mr A M Millar	Liberal Democrat Party	R, S, L

- 3.3 Given the political representation of the Joint Committee, there are not an equal number of members from each administrative area.
- 3.4 There is a member of the Council Administration from each Area on the committee, but this includes members with very significant other remits (such as the Vice-convenor and Chair of Education, Culture & Sport).
- 3.5 The NHS Highland membership of the Joint Committee is as below.

	CHP/SSU
Vice-chair	South East CHP
Ms P Courcha	SSU
Mrs A Bethune (Non-Exec)	Mid & West CHP
Ms G McCreath	South East CHP
Mr R Gibbins (Chief Executive)	Executive member
Mr G Farmer (Clinical lead)	Executive member

- 3.6 Accordingly, the CHPs are not all represented on the Committee.

#### **4. Role of the Children's Champion**

- 4.1 It is proposed that the role of Children's Champion should remain largely as before. This can be carried out by elected members within the Council, and by NHS Board members within the Board and the CHPs/SSU.

- 4.2 While there are no formal governance arrangements in the Council's administrative areas, there can be a dialogue between Area/CHP Service Managers and Children's Champions about area matters that can helpfully inform local decision making.

- 4.3 Accordingly, it is proposed that the role should be:

*to promote an understanding and recognition of the needs of children and young people within the various strategic and governance forums of which the Children's Champion is a member, and to promote consideration of these needs in policy and strategic developments. As part of this, particular account should be taken of looked after children, and children who are deemed to be 'in need' or 'at risk'.*

- 4.4 It is proposed that this role might be undertaken through a range of approaches, including:
- attendance at the Joint Committee for Children and Young People;

- promoting understanding of children's needs, rights, participation and services with other members, at Highland Council and NHS Highland committees, boards and other appropriate governance groups;
- supporting and contributing to local management decision making for children's services, including liaison with Area Service Managers and the Service Managers Groups on local matters;
- acting as a focal point within the Area for those matters relating to children's services that might otherwise fall between organisational boundaries, and contributing to local developments to promote children's services;
- being a member of the Area Childcare & Family Resource Partnership;
- developing means to enable young people to become involved in local decision making, including through links with Pupil Councils, Highland Youth Voice and youth forums.

## **5. Proposal for Children's Champions**

- 5.1 It is proposed that each Council area should have one Children's Champion for that area. The Champion should attend the Joint Committee on a non-voting basis.
- 5.2 It is further proposed that each Community Health Partnership and the Specialist Services Unit should have one Children's Champion, but also that current voting arrangements should continue.

## **6. Role of the Youth Convener**

- 6.1 The Highland Youth Convener represents the views of young people on the Joint Committee.
- 6.2 It is proposed that she should act in this capacity on her own behalf, and not as a member of any other constituent groups within the Joint Committee.
- 6.3 This role will build on the links that the Youth Convener is currently making with Council Services through the Service Nominated officers Group (SNO Patrol). This group involves a nominated officer from each Council Service, who identifies issues, policies and developments that are likely to be of relevance to young people, and ensures that they are discussed through forums with the Youth Convener and other Highland Youth Voice representatives.
- 6.4 It is proposed that NHS Highland also nominate an officer, who can act in this capacity with regard to Child Health services.

## **Recommendations**

Members are asked to agree:

- (i) the proposed role of the Children's Champion;
- (ii) that each Council area should have one Children's Champion, and that each Community Health Partnership and the Specialist Services Unit should have one Children's Champion;
- (iii) that the Champions should attend the Joint Committee, but that current voting arrangements are continued;
- (iv) that the Highland Youth Convener represents the views of young people on the Joint Committee, on her own behalf, and not as a member of any other constituent groups within the Joint Committee;
- (v) that NHS Highland nominate an officer to the SNO Patrol for Child Health services

**Bill Alexander**

Head of Integrated Children's Services