



meeting      ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

date            7 November 2007

agenda item number

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES)

## **Participation conferences, combined school council events and single school council events**

### **Purpose of item**

1. This report formalises the arrangements for participation and school council events from the new academic year 2007.

### **Information and advice**

### **Background**

2. In 2002 citizenship took on statutory status in secondary schools with a corresponding increase in importance in primary schools. The former Director of Education started the programme of school council visits as a direct consequence from visiting schools to look at attainment, citizenship and the full remit of services provided in schools. Since the development of Children's Services it is now mainly County Councillors who make a request to have a school council meeting at County Hall.
3. Central to citizenship provision is an understanding of local democracy and how it relates to pupil participation in school life. The Local Authority schools consultants have supported schools in delivering interesting and innovative sessions on local government. Alongside this and recognising the inherent citizenship opportunities schools have also devoted time and energy to improving the effectiveness of their pupil councils. This is also partly a response to the increasing importance that Ofsted place upon a dialogue with school councils during the inspection process. It also reflects growing national evidence that effective and responsible participation by students impacts positively on school performance.
4. Equally as important in school improvement terms is the wider involvement of children and young people in school life. A school council is an obvious embodiment of this but mechanisms such as peer support schemes, buddy and volunteer systems also have a vital role

to play. Children and Young People's Service have a strong track record in promoting and supporting this aspect of school practice.

5. Two distinct groups of events now happen at County Hall: participation conferences - lead and organised by Children and Young People's Service and school council visits - usually prompted by county councillors since the introduction of Children's Services.
6. County Councillors play a part in pupil participation; giving councillors an opportunity to see how pupils in schools have an effective voice is central to good holistic citizenship. At the heart of the matter is the increase of pupil involvement in life - affecting decision making, whether it be at county or school council level. Impending changes to the curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 emphasise the need for adult participation champions – again councillors are well placed to fulfil this role.
7. At grass roots level the need is for elected members to maintain a high profile in schools. Indeed, many county councillors already have an active relationship with their local schools. The Local Authority has also been very active in encouraging schools to make links with their County Councillor(s). As a best practice example over 40 schools recently participated in the 'Take your councillor to school' day. This ongoing dialogue between pupil representatives and County Councillors has many benefits including a sharing of expertise in how to get things done using the democratic process.
8. Understandably, alongside increased visits by councillors to schools there has been an increase in interest in bringing school council members to County Hall. These events are highly valued by schools which recognise the educational value of meaningful offsite visits and will doubtless form a key part of the schools work around democracy. Above all else it gives pupils and staff a chance to see how and where local government works.
9. In general terms the County Hall visits fall into three sections (not always in this order):
  - (1) Civic reception/buffet in the civic suite
  - (2) School council meeting in one of the committee rooms (Council Chamber or the Rufford Suite for larger participation events)
  - (3) Tour of the building
10. Section 2 is the business end of the visit and requires careful structuring in order to make it as meaningful as possible. Valuing the very special meeting space schools usually want part of the session for their usual pupil council business. County Councillors will play an active part in the meeting and where possible draw parallels with their world. In addition an explanation of the workings of the political process is provided.

11. Where more than one school is involved (combined schools visits) scale dictates that for section 3 pupils are split into smaller groups. The session in the Council Chamber varies according to the needs of the schools, in one recent visit the three schools discussed the implications of a hard federation and in another the schools met with local decision makers for a question and answer session.
12. Participation conferences are stand alone events with a clear focus on Every Child Matters outcomes. Coordination will be via the Participation Workstream and the Local Healthy Schools Programme. Up to 20 schools are represented at each of these one day major events with wider Local Authority and outside agency involvement. The focus is on responsible participation via a range of workshops and keynote speeches highlighting best practice in school involvement. Students consider how their school might benefit from increased participation, create plans for action which they then take back to their respective schools.

### **Suggested approach or way forward**

13. In regard to school council visits a quota system is introduced with clear protocols. Only one combined schools visit is permitted per term with additional monthly single school visits. Thus a total number of visits per year are set at ten. All slots are agreed well in advance of the academic year (September for 2007/08) and clear guidelines for allocation ratified and broadcast to elected members. Due to issues of capacity agreement is sought with Members that no additional schools are invited. Since June 2002, a total number of 66 single school council visits have been held. Four collective school council events have been held since March 2006.
14. In 2007/08 three major participation conferences are planned – one for a secondary school and two for primary schools. These events play a key role in implementing the county participation strategy. Two conferences will take place at County Hall and one in a north county venue (to be confirmed). Each event will involve around 80 children and young people from a total of 120 schools. Workshops promoting best practice in participation (led by young people) plus whole conference activities designed to consider ‘why participate?’ take up most of the day plus key notes from adult champions and local youth MPs.

### **Statutory and policy implications**

15. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material, they have been described in the text of the report. Attention is however drawn to the following:-

### **Financial implications**

16. It is estimated that the costs of the events will be:

		£
Combined school events	3 x £350	1,050
Single School events	10 x £120	1,200
Participation conferences	3 x £3000*	9,000

\*This amount comprises £1,500 for lunch and break time refreshments for the 130 delegates and £1,500 resources for participants.

17. It is recommended that the combined events be funded from the County Hospitality budget and the single events from the Children and Young People's Hospitality Budget which is £2,629 in 2007/08, of which £806 has already been committed in the current year. The participation conference on 11 December 2007 and the remainder of the participation events will be funded from the Children Fund.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

18. That three Participation conferences and thirteen (3 combined and 10 single) School Council visits be held each academic year.

### **DR ROBERT GARNETT**

Strategic Director (Children and Young People's Services)

### **Legal Services' comments (LM/12.9.2007)**

19. The Administration Committee has delegated authority to approve the recommendations in the report.

### **Strategic Director of Resources financial comments (NDR)**

20. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 15.

### **Background papers available for inspection**

Nil.

### **Electoral division(s) affected**

Nottinghamshire

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