

 Executive 3rd September 2014		Agenda Item No. 8
Title	Member Children's Champions	
For further information about this report please contact	Bill Hunt Deputy Chief Executive 01926 456014 bill.hunt@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 29 th July 2014. Draft minute number 29	
Background Papers	Children's Safeguarding and the future role of member Children Champions – Overview and Scrutiny 29/7/14; WSCB s11 self assessment audit tool	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	No
Equality and Sustainability Impact Assessment Undertaken	n/a

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Deputy Chief Executive		Author
Head of Service		n/a
CMT	13/8/14	Chris Elliott, Bill Hunt, Andrew Jones
Section 151 Officer	13/8/14	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	13/8/14	Andrew Jones
Finance	13/8/14	Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)	18/8/14	Cllr. Mobbs
Consultation & Community Engagement		
n/a		
Final Decision?		Yes
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report makes proposals relating to the potential future role that elected member Children's Champions could undertake within the context of the Council's Safeguarding Children responsibilities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Executive agrees to appoint two Member Children's Champions to undertake the role set out in paragraphs 3.5 to 3.8.
- 2.2 That Executive agrees that one of these Member Children's Champions should be a member of Executive, appointed by the Leader of the Council and the other should be a non-Executive member, agreed and appointed by the Group Leaders.
- 2.3 That Executive agrees that for the remainder of this administration the two member Children's Champions will be Cllr. Mrs. Gallagher and Cllr. Mrs. Falp
- 2.4 That Executive agrees that new Member Children's Champions will be appointed after a new administration is formed in 2015 and that, in future, those appointed will remain in that role for the duration of the administration and that these arrangements should be formalised as part of the review of the Constitution that Council will be considering later this year.
- 2.5 That Executive agrees that the Member Children's Champions should make an annual report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 A report elsewhere of this agenda, entitled 'Self-assessment audit of compliance with Children's Safeguarding duties', sets out the statutory responsibilities of this Council, created by Sections 10 and 11 of the Children's Act 2004. In order to fulfil those duties the Council has been a member of the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) since its inception in October 2005. The WSCB's purpose is to coordinate the activities of its members in relation to all safeguarding and child welfare issues within the county and to ensure the effectiveness of the work being undertaken by each individual organisation. Further information on the WSCB and its work is available at: <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/WSCB>
- 3.2 The Council has a senior officer (Deputy Chief Executive BH) as its Children's Champion, who attends the WSCB and is responsible for ensuring the Council is fulfilling its Section 10 and 11 responsibilities. However, the recent self-assessment audit referred to above, highlighted that although the Council has informally identified 2 Member Children's Champions, one, Councillor Mrs. Gallagher, a member of Executive and the other, Councillor Mrs. Falp, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, their role is currently ill-defined.
- 3.3 The self-assessment audit concluded that Member Children's Champions can undertake an important role in ensuring that the Council is promoting the safeguarding and welfare of children but that, in order to do so, their role needs to be formalised and defined. This issue was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their July meeting and their views have enabled the current proposals to be formulated.

- 3.4 It is, therefore, proposed that the role of the Member Children's Champions would be to:
- Assure themselves that the Council has sound arrangements to protect children and promote their welfare are in place within the district council and that the Council is promoting and engaging in effective interagency cooperation and collaboration in these fields;
 - Undertake reasonable investigations so as to be able to form a view of the quality of the Council's child safeguarding activities and work with the officer Children's Champion to assist the Council to improve the quality and/or effectiveness of those activities whenever appropriate;
 - Act as a 'critical friend' to constructively challenge officers and elected members on child safeguarding and welfare issues as appropriate;
 - Promote awareness of child safeguarding and welfare issues and the activities and processes undertaken by this Council amongst elected members.
- 3.5 It is further proposed that the Member Children's Champions must work within the existing political and managerial structures of the Council and will, therefore, not have any formal decision making powers or delegated authority. The responsibility for ensuring the Council fulfils its children's safeguarding responsibilities is an officer responsibility with the role of member's being to satisfy themselves that suitable arrangements are in place. Consequently, it is important that the Member Children's Champions do not commit the Council in any way to particular safeguarding or welfare activities or arrangements and do not act in a manner that could be interpreted as being contrary to any established policy or practice. However, they may, with the consent of the Leader of the Council be a media contact in respect of children's safeguarding or welfare issues.
- 3.6 The self-assessment audit, referred to elsewhere on this agenda, identified a number of areas where the Council needs to develop its systems and processes in relation to children's safeguarding. As a result there are a number of areas where it is envisaged that the Member Children's Champions may wish to work with the officer Champion to assist in the development of specific actions or activities, for example:
- Assisting in the development of a robust training programme for elected members and provide feedback on its effectiveness;
 - Assuring themselves that children's safeguarding and welfare issues are given due weight in the induction programme for newly elected members after the May 2015 elections and that refresher training is provided to re-elected members;
 - Assisting in the development of a formal Child Protection Policy
- 3.7 Following the discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee it is proposed that the two current self-nominated Member Children's Champions, Councillors Mrs. Gallagher and Mrs. Falp, are formally confirmed in this role for the remainder of the current administration, i.e. until the Council elections in May 2015.
- 3.8 However, after a new administration is formed subsequent to those elections it is proposed that new Member Children's Champions are selected to serve in that role for that administration's four year term and that this process is repeated at the start of each subsequent new administration. Members of the Scrutiny Committee felt that it was important that one member Children's Champion should always be a member of Executive, selected by the Leader of the Council but that the other should be a non-executive member, selected by

the Group Leaders. It is proposed that future appointments should be formally ratified by Council and, subject to approval of recommendation 2.4, that officers are instructed to build these arrangements into the Council's Constitution during the current review process that will culminate in a report being brought to members later this calendar year.

- 3.9 Subject to the approval of the recommendations in this report it is proposed that the Member Children's Champions formally report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis, setting out the work they have undertaken in their role and providing an assurance statement setting out their views as to the robustness or otherwise of the Council's children's safeguarding arrangements. This would enable the Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to determine whether or not it wished to undertake any further in-depth scrutiny and/or make recommendations to the Executive. The Executive will, in any case, be aware of the views of the Member's Children's Champion selected from within its own ranks.

4. POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 4.1 The Council's statutory duties are set out within the Children's Act 2004. However, the principles of child safeguarding and the promotion of children's welfare are relevant to all the Council's activities.

5. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 There are no budgetary implications arising from this report.

6. RISKS

- 6.1 Whilst there is no specific or statutory requirement for a local authority to have Member Children's Champions there is a risk that, if they don't, elected members will become disconnected from and unaware of the Council's statutory responsibilities and the actions and activities that the Council has in place to fulfil them.
- 6.2 There is a risk that formally appointed Member Children's Champions could be perceived to be operating outside of the Council's recognised political and managerial arrangements. This risk can be mitigated by the adoption of a set of principles governing the work of the Champions, as set out in paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5.
- 6.3 There would be a significant reputational risk to the Council were it to come to light that anyone formally appointed to be a Member Children's Champion had a previous conviction for a child-related offence and/or had or was publically promoting views that were inconsistent with the spirit of the role. This risk could be mitigated by the introduction of suitable checks as and when members are selected for the role and for these to be completed prior to any formal appointment.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S) CONSIDERED

- 7.1 One alternative option would be for the Council to operate without any Member Children's Champions. However, this has been discounted for the reasons set out in paragraph 6.1.

- 7.2 Subject to approval of the recommendation to formally appoint Member Children's Champions a range of options exist as to what their role within the organisation should be and how they should be selected and appointed. However, the proposals set out in this report have previously been discussed with, and supported by, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.