

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Social Work and Health

Council: 26 November 2008

Subject: Elected Member Representation on West Dunbartonshire Council Adoption and Fostering Panels

1. Purpose

This report is to seek the nomination of two Elected Members to serve on the Adoption Panel and the Fostering Panel for this council area.

2. Background

2.1 West Dunbartonshire Council is an approved Adoption Society and therefore requires to have in place an Adoption Panel under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance on Adoption and Parental Responsibilities Orders.

2.2 Adoption Panels have three types of cases about which they must make recommendations to the agency decision maker. These are:

- whether adoption is in the best interests of a child with or without a Freeing Order;
- whether a prospective adopter is suitable to adopt; and
- whether a prospective adopter would be suitable for a particular child.

2.3 Panels may carry out other functions, for example approving plans for Parental Responsibilities Orders.

2.4 It is up to Adoption Agencies to satisfy themselves about how many panel members they have to call upon and what their qualifications and experience should be. Each time an agency panel meets there must be at least one male and one female member. Every panel must include an appointed Medical Adviser and an appointed Legal Adviser.

2.5 The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance states that each Local Authority must appoint a Fostering Panel in order to consider whether to recommend approval of foster carers. Some agencies choose to have some or all of the membership of their Adoption and Fostering Panels in common. This is acceptable, provided that their role and function are distinguished and that the meetings are minuted separately. West Dunbartonshire has chosen to do this, using the same panel members for both our Adoption Panel and Fostering Panel.

3. The Current Position in West Dunbartonshire

3.1 When considering the composition of the Adoption and Fostering Panels agencies need to consider how they can achieve a panel which:

- demonstrates a child focused approach;

- has a breadth of expertise and experience;
- has representation from the local community, relevant agencies and a gender balance; and
- commands credibility and works thoroughly and effectively.

3.2 Within West Dunbartonshire the members of the Adoption and Fostering Panels are drawn from within the Social Work Department, Education and Health as well as members who are themselves adopters and foster carers. In the past, Elected Members have also served on the Adoption and Fostering Panels. During discussion at the most recent Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, when the Annual Report on the Adoption and Fostering Service was being considered, it was suggested that consideration should again be given to having Elected Members serve on these panels.

3.3 Input from Elected Members was valued in this role previously and it is particularly opportune to re-consider this now given the renewed emphasis being placed by the Scottish Government on the role of Elected Members in being corporate parents to our looked after children.

4. Personnel Implications

4.1 There are no personnel implications.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 There is no risk to the Council in appointing elected members to these Panels. Those members nominated will receive training and support in order to carry out this important function.

7. Recommendation

7.1 Council is requested to nominate two Elected Members to serve on the Adoption and Fostering Panels for West Dunbartonshire Council.

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Appendices:

Background Papers:

Wards Affected: