



**Information Pack for
Partnership Board Members
of Children's Centres**

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Hampshire
County Council

SureStart



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What we hope you will get out of being a children's centre partnership board member:

- ▶ the knowledge that you are helping children;
- ▶ the satisfaction of giving something back to the community;
- ▶ a sense of purpose and achievement;
- ▶ new skills which may be useful elsewhere;
- ▶ broader horizons;
- ▶ new friends and contacts;
- ▶ training and support in order to help you fulfil your duties and responsibilities.

What we hope you will be able to offer:

- ▶ time;
- ▶ commitment;
- ▶ a willingness to learn;
- ▶ a listening ear;
- ▶ the ability to take in information, make judgements and advise;
- ▶ flexibility;
- ▶ tact;
- ▶ ability to work as part of a team.

Partnership board members are appointed to provide:

- ▶ strong links between the children's centre and the community it serves;
- ▶ a wide experience of the outside world;
- ▶ an independent view;
- ▶ a team focusing on long term development and improvement;
- ▶ accountability to the community for the use of resources and standards;
- ▶ support for the centre manager/co-ordinator and staff.

Partnership board members are expected to:

- ▶ attend the regular and special meetings of the partnership board;
- ▶ work as a member of the partnership board (not as an individual) in the best interests of the centre;
- ▶ show an interest in centre activities;
- ▶ become well-informed about the centre;
- ▶ become familiar with the rules of partnership board members;
- ▶ attend necessary training courses.

Partnership boards are the strategic advisers of centres

In order to fulfil their adviser role, a partnership board:

- ▶ has an operational manager (centre manager or co-ordinator) who is responsible for the day to day management of the centre;
- ▶ advises on the employment of others to carry out the work of the centre;
- ▶ agrees policies and principles which guide the centre manager/co-ordinator in carrying out the day to day management of the centre;
- ▶ agrees a centre strategic plan which sets targets for improvement;
- ▶ supports and challenges the centre manager/co-ordinator to achieve these targets;
- ▶ receives and discusses reports on the resulting practice and conduct of the centre; and
- ▶ reviews its own working practices.

Decisions of the partnership board are made in formal meetings. Partnership boards may have smaller groups which meet once or twice a quarter to explore issues in more depth than is possible at full meetings. Where the partnership board has given these groups the right to advise on behalf of the board, they have the status of committees. They are required to:

- ▶ carry out tasks specifically given to them by the partnership board;
- ▶ aid the work of the partnership board; and
- ▶ report back to the partnership board.

The number of committees depends on the partnership board and its needs.

All members, once appointed, share the responsibilities and work as a team

- ▶ Individuals are part of the partnership board.
- ▶ Duties are carried out as part of the team.
- ▶ Members are not legally liable as individuals.

Principles of working as a member of a partnership board

Partnership board members, once appointed, are representing the public interest and, although volunteers, should be prepared to work to the same principles as any paid public official. This is true both as an individual and as a whole board.

▶ **Selflessness**

Partnership board members should advise solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

▶ **Integrity**

Partnership board members should not place themselves under any financial or other obligations to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in their advisory role.

▶ **Objectivity**

In carrying out their advisory role in public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, partnership board members should offer advice based on merit.

▶ **Accountability**

Partnership board members are accountable for their advice and must provide an account of their work to the community and the Local Authority.

▶ **Openness**

Partnership board members should be as open as possible about all their advice. They should give reasons for it and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands this.

▶ **Honesty**

Partnership board members have a duty to declare any private interest relating to their public board role and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

▶ **Leadership**

Partnership board members should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Adapted from (The Seven Principles of Public Life from the *Second Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life* - The Nolan Committee CM3270 - 1 May 1996).

Hampshire County Council and its centres

Hampshire is one of the largest local authorities in the country. Its Children's Services Department divides its administration between three local offices in Fleet, Havant and Bartley and its headquarters in Winchester.

- ▶ There will be 60+ children's centres in the County serving all communities by 2010.
- ▶ All centres have a partnership board whose job it is to work with the centre manager/co-ordinator and the County Council, to ensure that the children and their families receive the best possible support, care and education at that establishment.

Partnership boards vary in size but they all have the same requirement - to work together with the centre manager/co-ordinator in agreeing the aims and conduct of the centre, ensuring that the children have a full entitlement to the agreed services and managing the centre within its allocated budget.

There are regulations and guidelines within which the partnership board must work. These are laid down by central government and the Local Authority.

Supporting our partnership boards

All centres receive support from the County Council and have a Quality and Performance Officer (QPO) to work with the centre manager or co-ordinator to identify priorities through effective consultation; agree objectives and development plans; monitor progress through performance management; and ensure the services on offer meet local needs and contribute towards improving children's lives.

Specialist advice and support for centres and partnership boards is also available to cover financial and personnel issues, children's welfare and special needs. Hampshire Governor Services (HGS) provides training, clerking, advice and support services to partnership boards across the county. These services are paid for by the centre budget, or in some cases, for example induction training, by the Children's Services Department. Training for new members is offered, and a range of other courses are available to help members develop in their role. Skills acquired as a partnership board member can also be of benefit in everyday life. HGS has been awarded the Charter Mark, a national award for excellence in public service, four times in succession.

The service promises to:

- ▶ provide a friendly and welcoming response to all enquires;
- ▶ provide access to its services in a variety of ways to suit different partnership board members' circumstances;
- ▶ provide effective training and support for the partnership board member role;
- ▶ provide prompt, accurate and understandable information in response to queries from centres;
- ▶ provide an efficient and responsive booking and administration service for training events;
- ▶ provide, through HGS staff across the County, access to advice and support etc, reassurance, where possible, and mediation, if required;
- ▶ ensure that the expertise and skills of the staff providing the service to partnership boards are commensurate with the work being undertaken;
- ▶ ensure absolute confidentiality in its relationships and dealings with partnership boards;
- ▶ maintain a database of partnership board memberships.

There is a Governor Services department in Fleet, Havant and Bartley local offices as well as at the County headquarters in Winchester. More information about the service and the role of the partnership boards is available on the Hampshire Governor Services website www.hants.gov.uk/education/governors.

Making an application to be a partnership board member

Some vacancies, e.g. for parent and provider members, are dealt with by forums. Others, e.g. for local authority members, are dealt with by the County Council. When HGS staff receive an application form they will make sure the right people are made aware of it. Prospective members may be invited to discuss their applications. This may be with the Local Governor Services Co-ordinator, existing members and centre manager/co-ordinator and/or elected members of the County Council. The names of suitable people are held in a 'pool' by Hampshire Governor Services until suitable vacancies occur.

Children's centre staff and County Councillors may all use the pool to fill vacancies. When suitable vacancies (community and local authority members) arise in centres across the County, people from the pool are contacted and asked if they wish to be considered. This does not stop individuals contacting their local centres if they want to do so.

Hampshire County Council pursues a policy of equality of opportunities and wants partnership boards to be representative of the communities they serve. Our application form asks you to give us information about your ethnic origin, gender, age and any disability so that we know whether or not we are being successful in attracting applications from all sections of our diverse community. If you become a partnership board member we keep a note of any disability so that we can help you access our services.

What you should do next

If you are interested in becoming a partnership board member, complete the form and send it to your local Hampshire Governor Services office or take it to your children's centre if you are applying for parent or provider membership.

The form asks you to explain why you are applying for membership as this helps in the appointment process.

Any information you can give about your interests, skills and expertise, will be extremely useful. This should not be restricted to paid employment, and should include voluntary work, hobbies and any clubs and societies to which you belong or have belonged.

If you have a specific centre in mind, please feel free to give the name of the centre. It is usually easier to 'place' a partnership board member if candidates are prepared to consider any centre in an area (e.g. within 8 mile radius of Basingstoke) rather than one specific centre.

Hampshire Governor Services keep in contact with all those people in the 'pool' to ensure that they still wish to be considered as partnership board members, but it should be understood that acceptance to the pool does not automatically mean that individuals will be appointed as members. Not all centres have vacancies at the same time, and it is not always possible to place a person if only one choice of centre is given.

And finally...

No one partnership board member is expected to know it all.

The strength of a board lies in its ability to attract and rely upon members from a wide variety of backgrounds, share out the duties amongst its members, and be able to offer advice as a group. No one member is responsible for the partnership board, not even the chairman.

All partnership board members share the responsibility of making the children's centre effective and efficient by contributing to the work of the board and any committees, being well-informed and attending the meetings.

Governor Services, Children's Services Department, County Office, The Castle, Winchester Hants SO23 8UG

Telephone: 01962 845846 Fax: 01962 846403

Email: claire.e.bailey@hants.gov.uk

www.hants.gov.uk/education/governors www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-centres



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