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My reference CC/Governance Consultation/Revised Model

Your reference Governance of Children's Centres

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## Governance of Children's Centres in Hampshire

Please find attached the proposed working model for the governance of children's centres in Hampshire. As you are aware, the County Council has been working to develop a model of governance that is both robust (in terms of accountability to the local authority) and flexible in meeting community needs. The proposed model, which has been approved by the Executive Member for Children's Services, has been informed by:

- existing governance arrangements within the national Sure Start Local Programmes
- guidance within the DfES discussion paper – *'Governance and Management of Extended Schools and Sure Start Children's Centres'* (November 2006)
- feedback from Hampshire's consultation process

**Outcomes from consultation** - the consultation process closed on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2007. 1,126 consultation packages were distributed and 43 (3.82%) were completed and returned. Of the responses received 33 (76%) considered that the governance document clearly defined the difference between governance and management and agreed with the overall approach to governance, as set out in the consultation document. Comments on how the model could be improved included the 'requirement for more flexibility', particularly in relation to how schools and third party organisations could be involved in the management of children's centre. The suggestions have subsequently been reflected in the revised model.

The consultation exercise also asked for expressions of interest for the role of co-ordination in the management of a children's centre. 16 (37%) of the organisations who responded stated that they may be interested in the role.

It is recognised that those organisations who responded to the above process, made an important contribution, as the outcome has resulted in a significant step forward in the development of children's centres across Hampshire.

Director of Children's Services  
**John Coughlan**

**Considerations** - other options considered and rejected included the *delegation of financial and personnel functions to partnership boards* and the *expansion of a school's governing body remit to include children's centre*. The DfES discussion paper, *'The Governance & Management of Extended Schools and Sure Start Children's Centres'* (November 2006), states that as the local authority is the accountable body, a Partnership Board cannot be given delegated financial and personnel powers - "partnership/advisory boards have no legal status, cannot hold a budget or enter into contracts or legal arrangements and cannot be held legally liable should things go wrong".

The paper also makes it clear that a school governing body cannot expand its remit to include the governance of a children's centre - "the governing body cannot take on the formal role of the board [children's centre partnership board], as this would be outside its statutory powers".

**Summary** - the following summarises the underlying principles of Hampshire's working model of governance:

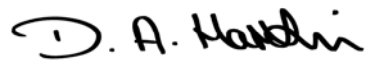
- The County Council would expect all children's centres to operate with a centre manager working with a Partnership Board. The Partnership Board should be informed both by a Parents' Forum and a Practitioners' Forum. Where there are a number of small children's centres, these forums may represent several centres serving a wider community. The Parent's Forum should enable the voice of centre users to be heard and will elect at least one member of the Partnership Board. The purpose of the Practitioners' Forum is to represent the views of the range of people delivering services through the centre and will elect at least one member of the Partnership Board.
- For County Council managed centres, accountability for the work of the centre and its outcomes will be through the Centre Manager working with the Partnership Board. The Centre Manager will be line-managed through a professional support and performance management system overseen by an appointed senior officer within Children's Centre Services (CCS).
- For school managed centres, the County Council will contract with the school's governing body through a Service Level Agreement, recognising the governing body's extended schools powers (i.e. its powers under the Education Act 2002 ) to enter into arrangements or agreements with other bodies to provide community services. Contractual responsibility for the work of the centre and its outcomes will be with the school's governing body, working with the Partnership Board. The Centre Manager will report through, but not be line managed by, the same professional support system as in County Council managed centres.
- In other third-party managed centres, contractual responsibility for the work of the centre and its outcomes will be with the third-party working with the Partnership Board. The Centre Manager will report through, but not be line managed by, the same professional support system as in County Council managed centres.
- Where children's centres are developed within Maintained Nursery Schools, those schools will be required to have regard to this model and to act in accordance with its principles. Further clarification on the position of maintained nursery schools, designated as children's centres, is awaited from central Government.

The proposed model is to be implemented with immediate effect. It will be reviewed in the light of final DfES guidance on governance (due Summer 2007) and continuing feedback of the model in practice. However, it is expected that any changes are likely to be minimal, as Hampshire's model has already received national recognition as an example of good practice.

Those partners currently involved in negotiation with the County Council to establish management arrangements of the children's centre on their site, will be contacted individually to agree next steps.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact the Children's Centre Team on 01962 813877 or [childrenscentres@hants.gov.uk](mailto:childrenscentres@hants.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. A. Harkin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

**Deborah Harkin**  
**Children's Centres Project Lead**