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Divisions Affected – All

EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 21 NOVEMBER 2025

Co-optee Recruitment Update

Report by Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to: -

- 1.1 **NOTE** the update on activity undertaken to fill the Committee's vacant co-optee post for a parent governor;
- 1.2 **AGREE** to terminate Hana G's appointed as a co-opted young person members; and, if agreed,
- 1.3 **AGREE** to begin a recruitment process for the subsequently vacant post.

Executive Summary

2. Co-opted members have a dual function to the operation of a Scrutiny committee. Not only do they bring specific, relevant expertise but, coming from outside both the Council and the party-political system they provide greater public assurance of the independence and non-political output of the Scrutiny function. This report seeks to update the Committee on efforts made to date to identify nominees for co-option onto the Committee, and to recommend that one of the co-opted young people should be replaced.

Background

- 3. Within the Council's constitution it is outlined that the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership includes space for six co-opted members, four of whom relate to education, and two to young people.
- 4. When the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee was established by Council in December 2023, its terms of reference included the following in relation to co-opted members:

“In addition to the county councillors the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee shall include in its membership the following voting representatives:

- (a) one Church of England representative appointed by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education;
 - (b) one Roman Catholic representative appointed jointly by the Archbishop of Birmingham and the Bishop of Portsmouth to represent the Roman Catholic Church;
 - (c) two persons who shall be parent governors of maintained schools elected in accordance with a procedure approved by the Council.
 - (d) two persons who, at the time of their original appointment, shall be aged 25 or under and either living in Oxfordshire or working for an organisation in Oxfordshire supporting or representing children and young people.”
5. The committee currently has filled the co-optee positions for the Church of England and Roman Catholic representatives, and has one vacancy for a parent governor.
6. The use of the word ‘shall’ in reference to the membership of the Committee means that the Committee does not have discretion to do otherwise, and must seek to fill these vacancies. Officers have been seeking to do so.

Progress Updates

Parent Governor Nominees

7. The need to include co-opted members from parent governors is set out in legislation. Under s. 3 of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001 it is a requirement that ‘a local education authority shall appoint at least two but not more than five parent governor representatives to each of their education overview and scrutiny committees and sub-committees.’ Since its inception, the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has become the scrutiny committee responsible for education and therefore must include opportunity for at least two parent governor representatives.
8. The 2001 Regulations prescribe the process for selecting these representatives, which is to hold an election amongst parent governors between those who are eligible and have put themselves forward for nomination.
9. Peace Nnaji was co-opted to sit as a co-opted member of the Committee from the February 2025 meeting. There remains a vacancy with periodic advertising attempting to fill it. Most recently, in November 2025, all parent governors were contacted using the Council’s communication tool, Governor Hub, and also Schools News to publicise the opportunity. Parent governors have been invited to apply by 18 December 2025 in order to be part of the election. If only one parent governor were to apply then, in the absence of further applicants, it would not be necessary under the 2001 Regulations to run an election. Subject to formally establishing their eligibility and completing formalities around becoming

a co-opted member, this individual would become a co-opted member of the committee.

10. It is unlikely, given the historic and national challenges in securing parent governor co-opted members, but if more governor representatives come forward before the deadline than there are vacancies, an election will have to be run amongst parent governors to establish the nominees.
11. Under the 2001 Regulations, if no or insufficient numbers of nominees are received, the Council must attempt to fill the vacant position(s) every six months.

Young People

12. Two candidates were interviewed by a panel in November 2024 and the Committee agreed to their appointment from February 2025. Those appointments were for two years
13. Both co-opted young members have made strong contributions but a change of circumstances has meant that Hana G is no longer able to attend the Committee's meetings. As a result, it is recommended that her appointment be terminated and recruitment be undertaken to appoint another co-opted young person to membership of the Committee whose term of office would also be two years.

Next Steps

14. In addition to the recruitment of a parent governor, a recruitment process to seek expressions of interest from eligible young people will be undertaken. This will be undertaken taking into account advice from Oxfordshire Youth. An interview panel would be likely to consist of the Chair of the Committee, the Scrutiny Manager, and a representative of Oxfordshire Youth.
15. The Committee should remember that a co-optee is not merely an external advisor to the Committee, but a full member of it. This means they have access to the same information provided to other committee members, and can participate on equal terms. The only difference is that, in the rare instances that the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee wishes to vote on an issue, unless that topic relates to education provided by the Council, the Constitution determines they will be unable to do so. As a consequence of this status, it is necessary that co-opted members are bound by the Members' Code of Conduct, and sign a Declaration of Interest form.
16. The agreed terms of reference for the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee state that 'Co-opted Members shall normally serve for a period of 2 years. Co-opted members may serve for one further consecutive period of 2 years with the agreement of the Committee. After this, the Committee must run an open recruitment process for any further two-year extensions. No co-opted member may serve for longer than eight years in

total.' Any appointment made, therefore, should be for 2 years in the first instance.

17. As referenced above, the specific inclusion of younger people on a committee is relatively novel, and it is not without risks. This is particularly the case if those younger people are members. A full schedule of safeguarding measures has been developed as part of the support package provided by Oxfordshire Youth.
18. In addition to the issues of safeguarding, support to understand and fully participate in the formal and rule-based environment of a committee has also been established. Oxfordshire Youth, who have provided support to young people involved in the Youth Parliament, provides a support package to cover: co-optee and member training on working with one another; support in understanding the papers, drawing up lines of enquiry and ways to express those views safely in a public environment; attendance at pre-meetings in support of the co-optees, attendance at committee meetings as a source of support, and support in helping the co-optees reach out to groups of young people to understand their views better. The scope of this was put together with the input of the Consultation and Engagement team, who have experience of working with young people through youth engagement.

Corporate Priorities

19. The primary corporate priority served by the appointment of co-optees to the committee is 'Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy'. However, in strengthening the quality of Scrutiny provided towards the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee's remit it is expected that there will be positive impacts on 'Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents', 'Support carers and the social care system' and 'Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential'.

Financial Implications

20. The role of co-optee is not a paid position, but co-optees do qualify for the same rights to travel and subsistence as Councillors, as detailed in Part 10.1 Sch 1 of the Constitution.
21. Any decision to appoint a young person to be a co-opted member of the committee will require services to help them understand, navigate and be safe in a public environment, as detailed above. This funding is drawn from the Council's provision for Future Generations and, barring the additional costs of seeking Oxfordshire Youth's support to identify suitable candidates, carry no additional costs.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson
Strategic Finance Business Partner – Resources, FRCS and TDCE

Legal Implications

22. The legal implications are detailed within the body of this report. There are no further implications to highlight.

Comments checked by:
Jay Akbar
Head of Legal & Governance Services

Staff Implications

23. Support for co-opted members will create additional demands around understanding, navigating and remaining safe. However, as referenced, additional, specialist support has been brought in to support this work. There is also limited coordination work involving the Scrutiny team. However, the level of additional work can be absorbed.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

24. As younger people, potentially with additional support needs, it is incumbent on the Council to ensure that adequate support is provided. The package of support and work coming out of it, training for members for instance, is designed to provide such support.

Risk Management

25. As alluded to elsewhere in the report, co-opting young and potentially vulnerable young people onto the committee is not without risk. The primary risk being safeguarding and support of their welfare. The primary steps being taken to mitigate these risks are the provision of an external support package (as detailed above) and the development of specific safeguarding protocols for the delivery of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
26. The final details of the protocols include:
- DBS checks for all Scrutiny staff
 - Enhanced training for all Scrutiny staff on safeguarding
 - A named safeguarding lead (the Scrutiny Manager) and an escalation point (their line manager)
 - Training for members on working with vulnerable young people in a committee environment
 - A 'no phone call' policy for staff and members with young people

- Only staff holding co-optee e mail addresses and all communications going through them. For minors, e mails to copy in a parent or other nominated person.
 - No one to one engagement with members and the co-optees
27. Failure to fill the co-optee vacancies on Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee would not only reduce the experience and knowledge available to the Committee and impair the public's confidence in the apolitical nature of Scrutiny, but it would also mean the Committee would be operating outside the membership determined by Council in the Constitution.

Consultations

28. None arising from this report.

Anita Bradley
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: None

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

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Scrutiny Officer,
November 2025