

North Yorkshire Council

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17 September 2025

Consideration to Appointing a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic Services

1.0 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To outline the key factors to consider if a Member Champion for Neurodivergent Young People was appointed.
- 1.2 For the Committee to review the issues presented within this report to help determine whether to recommend the appointment of a Member Champion role to focus on supporting Neurodivergent Young People.

2.0 Background

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 June 2025, members received the Young People's Champion Annual Report. The committee recognised the significant contributions and ongoing commitment of the Young People's Champion. During the discussion, it was suggested that an additional member champion with specific experience of supporting or working with neurodivergent, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and autistic individuals and families could complement the support already being provided by the Young People's Champion.
- 3.2 It was agreed that the Senior Scrutiny Officer would undertake research and present a report at the next committee meeting to help members decide whether to recommend that the Council appoint a Member Champion for Neurodivergent Young People.

4.0 Factors to consider

- 4.1 As stated in the Council Constitution (Appendix A), Member Champions are elected Members who act as an advocate or spokesperson for a specific area of the Council's business. The main responsibility of each Member Champion is to encourage communication and positive action over the issue they represent. There are three Member Champion positions that receive a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA): Young People's Champion, Older People's Champion and Climate Change Champion. The Leader may, from time to time, in cases where no SRA is to be payable, designate an elected Member as a Champion for a particular issue. There are currently five Member Champions not in receipt of a SRA. Should a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion be appointed, there will be no SRA attached to it. However, discussions could take place around splitting the allowance with the Young People's Champion, as this may be considered appropriate once the remit of the role has been agreed. There is no legal requirement to apply the political

balance rules when appointing Member Champions, and they will be made based on their skills, knowledge and suitability for the role.

- 4.2 The Young People's Champion is fully committed to the role and amongst other obligations, is engaged in discussions around the [2025-2030 North Yorkshire Autism All Age Strategy](#). The aim of the Strategy is to respond to feedback from consulting with the North Yorkshire autistic community, and a set of priorities have been developed to improve the lives of autistic people and their families and carers. Although the Strategy comes under the portfolio of Public Health, all services within the Council played a key role in the development of the strategy, as well as partner agencies such as Autism diagnostic providers and individuals with lived experience.

The Young People's Champion is also a member of the Corporate Parenting Members' Group, where neurodivergent issues are often raised. When required, she escalates queries to Executive Members and senior council officers. The workload is manageable, though there is the possibility that it could increase in the future. Members are therefore invited to consider the merits of an additional Champion appointment in the context of there already being an established Champion role covering a range of cross-cutting issues for children and young people.

- 4.3 Should a new champion be appointed that also has the scope of supporting young people, a clear remit outlining the distinction in roles and responsibilities between the two will have to be developed so that there is no crossover.
- 4.4 Member Champions do not have authority to commit the Council in any way that could be interpreted as conflicting with established policy and practice. However, they can endorse and promote positions that are explicitly set out in published Council policies and ensure that lived experiences are reflected.
- 4.5 Whilst other local authorities have appointed Autism Champions, their remits and responsibilities vary. For example, Cumbria County Council have 6 Autism Champions made up of councillors from each Local Area Committee. They are supported by Community Development Officers and the Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor. Whilst their aim is to raise awareness and advocate for autistic adults and children and their families, they focus on community cohesion, inclusion and integration, rather than service delivery.
- 4.6 Although local authorities and partnerships are actively developing and implementing autism and neurodiversity strategies, few have formally appointed elected member champions specifically for autistic or neurodivergent individuals that focus on service improvement and delivery. These roles may exist informally or be embedded within broader responsibilities.
- 4.7 Appointing a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion could be considered to be primarily a health issue and therefore be the responsibility of the Scrutiny of Health Committee, and not Children and Families.
- 4.8 A request to appoint a new Member Champion would, in the first instance, go to the Leader of the Council, followed by the Executive and Full Council.

5.0 Consultation undertaken and responses

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6.0 Contribution to Council Priorities

- Safe, healthy and living well.
- Maximise the potential.

7.0 Alternative options considered

7.1 Options include:

- To recommend that the leader of the Council considers appointing a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion, with clear terms of reference outlining the role and responsibilities.
- For the Committee to agree that a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion is not required.
- For the Committee to review in 12 months whether a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion is required.

8.0 Impact on other services/organisations

8.1 There will be no impact on other services/organisations.

9.0 Financial implications

9.1 There are no financial implications. If a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion is appointed, the options will be to either a) not allocate a SRA to the post, or b) to allocate some of the Young People's Champion SRA.

10.0 Legal implications

10.1 There are no legal implications.

11.0 Equalities implications

11.1 Appointing a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion will complement the equality considerations that the Council is already giving.

12.0 Climate change implications

12.1 Not applicable.

13.0 Performance implications

13.1 Not applicable.

14.0 Policy implications

14.1 Not applicable.

15.0 Risk management implications

15.1 Not applicable.

16.0 Human Resource implications

16.1 Not applicable.

17.0 ICT implications

17.1 Not applicable.

18.0 Community safety implications

18.1 Not applicable.

19.0 Recommendations

19.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- i. Note the report and consider the information provided to help decide if a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion is required.
- ii. If the Committee agree that a Neurodivergent Young People's Champion is required, to decide if this is the responsibility of Children and Families or Scrutiny of Health.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Excerpt from the Council Constitution re: Role and Responsibilities of a Member Champion.

Barry Khan
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4 August 2025

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.

Appendix A: Role and Responsibilities of a Member Champion

Member Champion Role

Member Champions are elected Members who act as an advocate or spokesperson for a specific area of the Council's business. The main responsibility of each Member Champion is to encourage communication and positive action over the issue they represent.

Appointment of Member Champions

The Council may, from time to time, in cases where a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) is to be paid, appoint an elected Member as a Champion for a particular issue. Currently, such Member Champion positions attracting an SRA are:

- Young People's Champion
- Older People's Champion
- Climate Change Champion

The SRA based Member Champions are members of Scrutiny Board and take an annual report to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader may, from time to time, in cases where no SRA is to be payable, designate an elected Member as a Champion for a particular issue. Currently, such Member Champions not attracting an SRA are:

- Armed Forces Champion – Councillor Kevin Foster
- Digital Champion – Councillor Gareth Dadd
- Flooding – Councillor David Jeffels
- Cycling/Active Travel – Councillor Keane Duncan
- Road Safety – Councillor Steve Watson

A register of Member Champions will be kept by the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services.

There is no legal requirement to apply the political balance rules to the appointment of Member Champions and as such they will be made based on skills, knowledge and suitability for the role.

Should such Member Champions wish to issue a press release on matters relevant to their role, they should do so in accordance with the Council's Protocol for Official Press Releases in the Constitution.

Responsibilities of each Member Champion

Each Member Champion will:

- a) represent their area of interest both within and outside the Council in line with Council policy;
- b) contribute to the review and development of policies pertaining to their area of interest;
- c) challenge and question the Council, the Executive Members and the Chairs of Committees on issues relevant to their area of responsibility;
- d) monitor the Forward Plan and seek information from the Leader, Committee Chairs and Officers about forthcoming business and exert influence on behalf of the interest;
- e) keep Members of all parties up to date with activities in relevant to the area of interest;
- f) provide positive support and on occasions constructive challenge to Officers on relevant issues; and
- g) act as the Council's representative on relevant external bodies where appointed to by the Council.

Scope of Member Champion role

Member Champions are entitled to have appropriate access to information held by the Council relating to the interest being championed and also have access to support from senior Officers.

Officers will ensure there is appropriate engagement or consultation with the relevant Member Champion where the issue clearly relates to the interest.

The Member Champion's programme of activities should reflect the Council's overall priorities.

A Member Champion cannot make decisions which bind the Council and must not commit the Council in any way or in a manner that could be interpreted as being contrary to established policy and practice. They may however confirm a position as stated in a published policy.

The Council, Executive, Committee Chairs and Officers will take account of any views offered by the Member Champions prior to making decisions relating to their area of interest.