

ACADEMY/FREE SCHOOL SPONSOR PROCESS

The Education Act (2011) states '*... that when a Local Authority identifies the need for a new school, that this school should be promoted as either an Academy or a Free School. It is required to publish a notice inviting proposals to this effect and to specify a date for academy/free school proposals to be received. After that date, it must forward all proposals received to the Regional Commissioner outlining the steps taken to secure applications from potential academy or free school sponsors or advise them of the fact that none have been received.*'

The Council has a well-established commissioning process. Prior to launching a competition under the free school presumption legislation and inviting proposals from potential sponsors to establish and run a new school, it undertakes a pre-launch consultation lasting approximately 4 to 5 weeks ensuring that potential school sponsors, local schools, academies, the wider community, local dioceses are all aware of the reasons why a new school is required, where it will be located and the timeframe for its opening.

A full specification is published as the competition, which runs for between 4 and 8 weeks, is launched. It will include details on:

- Character and ethos of the school
- Proposed admissions arrangements and planned initial Published Admission Numbers
- Catchment arrangements
- Community use; and
- Funding and costs

The executive summary of all proposals received, with the exception of the financial plans, are published on the Council's website.

The Council's established procedure is to invite the potential sponsors whose proposals meet the Council's shortlisting criteria to attend:

- a public meeting to enable the existing community to learn about the individual applications and their vision for the new school and to ask questions of the representatives of the applicant trusts (this does not happen where the new school will be the first in a new community).
- a question-and-answer session with an Assessment Panel comprising County Councillors (Members) (including the local member and Children & Young People's spokespersons), Council Officers (including education professionals) and a representative from the Department for Education (DfE).

Following detailed consideration of all the information available to them, the Assessment Panel will reach a view on which, if any, of the applications received, they would prefer to see implemented. A report on the conclusions reached will then be presented to the Council's CYP Committee. The Committee's recommendation together with all the applications received, will be forwarded to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC): East of England and North-East London.

The RSC, on behalf of the Secretary of State, will consider the Council's assessments and recommendations before deciding which proposer, if any, is in the best position to establish and run the new school. The RSC will inform the Council and the successful proposer of its decision, and the Council will inform those who are unsuccessful.