

REVIEW OF SCHOOLS FORUM

To: Cambridgeshire Schools Forum

Date: 8 November 2019

From: Jonathan Lewis – Service Director Education

Purpose: To outline proposals revisions to the operation of Schools Forum following feedback from members.

Recommendations:

Schools Forum is asked to discuss and agree the proposed changes set out in the report including:

- A) Approval to setting up the following New Subgroups to consider funding under each of the main funding blocks –**
- schools budget (formula),
 - high needs block
 - and early years.
- B) Subject to approval of the above groups, nominations to be sought for them.**
- C) From 2020-21 to agree a reduced Meetings schedule for Forum to meet in the following months:**
- November
December
February
March (reserve date)
July
- D) Operation of the meetings** to start with an informal slot from 9:30 until 10 prior to the public meeting and for there to be a training session offered after the main Forum meeting to support new members / refresh knowledge.
- E) Reports to Schools Forum to be by a short covering report with the main detail included in presentations which will be available as part of the agenda despatch.**
- F) To receive proposals for revised terms of reference and a forward training programme to the December meeting.**

1.0	CONTEXT
1.1	<p>Every Local Authority had a statutory obligation to establish a Schools Forum by January 2003 but many authorities had similar bodies in place prior to regulations. Schools Forum were established as consultative bodies established to –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• give schools greater involvement in the distribution of funding• provide a consultative and advisory role in relation to schools' revenue funding.• ensure that schools in every area have a voice in a range of matters directly relevant to schools funding

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> support the new funding system / greater delegations / targets for passporting.
1.2	Since this time, the regulations for Schools Forum have been updated many times and the role and requirements of the Forum have varied significantly. These changes have resulted in updated terms of reference and Cambridgeshire has remained compliant with these regulations.
1.3	Following feedback from members of Schools Forum on the operation of the meeting, there has been significant dialogue between officers and the chair and vice chair of Forum to propose a number of changes to the operation of Cambridgeshire Schools Forum. This paper outlines the proposed changes.
2.0	CHANGES PROPOSED
	Subgroups
2.1	The role of Schools Forum has been very focused on meeting the core duties and roles we have in relation to the financial oversight of schools funding in Cambridgeshire. This has been a successful model but given the challenges we have both financially and in terms of standards, we perhaps need to consider ensuring a wider focus for Schools Forum as we never consider outcomes of our children and areas such as pupil premium are never considered in overall decision making.
2.2	Decision to allocate funding should be both principled and in the “best” way for all our children. There has been a reduction in flexibility under the National Funding Formula (NFF) but a broader approach would illustrate more effectively where we need to press Government for additional funding. Given the generic nature of Forum and the fact representation comes from many different areas of Education, detailed conversations are challenging.
2.3	It is therefore proposed to create three subgroups to consider funding under each of the main funding blocks – schools budget (formula), high needs block and early years. Each of these groups would have a role to have a wider discussion away from the main Forum meeting and then feedback via reports to the main Forum on their discussions and suggestions for Forum. Nominations for membership of these standing groups will be sought if these proposals are agreed.
	Meetings
2.4	Cambridgeshire Schools Forum has historically met 6 times a year. As the calendar for Forum business has become more condensed into the autumn and early spring, this has meant some of the meetings have had small agendas and more information papers. Given the cost of running a Forum meeting, we are therefore proposing moving to meeting 4 times a year with a reserve date if business demands.
2.5	<p>It is therefore proposed to operate meetings in the following months -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> November December February March (reserve date) July
	Operation of Meetings
2.6	To support effective discussion in the main meeting, each meeting will have an informal

	slot from 9:30 until 10 (or the first half an hour prior to the meeting) which will be an informal private session for members of the Forum with officers and limited to asking questions of clarification / facts relating to reports on the agenda but not engaging in general discussion on report contents. A training session will also be offered after the main Forum meeting to support new members / refresh knowledge. A programme will be developed in the Autumn and presented to the December meeting for approval.
2.7	Officers did approach the Department for Education (DfE) to see whether the agenda for Forum could be split into different sections i.e. maintained schools balances being only for maintained schools member consideration. However their feedback made it quite clear that all parts of the meeting needed to be quorate regardless of whether the agenda was applicable to only a small part of the membership.
	Reports to Schools Forum
2.8	To make the agenda of Forum more accessible for Heads and the public, we are proposing to move away from writing formal reports to producing presentations which outline the issue being considered. They will not be presented formally in the Forum meeting but instead it will be assumed that all reports are read in advance and the presenter will cover only the key points as we do with existing reports. Cover reporting sheets will be produced for each agenda item so it is clear on the background and proposals to be considered. As with existing reports, all reports (including presentations) will be in the public domain and published at least 5 working days in advance of the meeting. Minutes will continue to be produced to a timescale of final publication no later than 12 working days after the meeting. This approach has been piloted on the Funding report on the current agenda.
	Term of Reference
2.9	A formal piece of work is needed to update the term of reference for Schools Forum and it is proposed this takes place over the autumn. However a number of key issues need consideration -
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substitutes – it is proposed that each member of Forum will need to identify a named substitutes for each member of the Forum from their representative groups. Papers will be sent to these members so they can keep up to speed with Schools Forum business. This will ensure all groups continue to be represented and keeps attendance high. • Election processes to each of the roles on Schools Forum needs to be documented for all groups to ensure transparency. The Service Director will develop these and present in December. • At that meeting it will be proposed to set up a group to deal with communication from Forum and the agreed process will be included in the terms of reference for the meeting.
3.0	UPDATE ON MEMBERSHIP
3.1	There are currently three identified vacancies for members from academy representatives. The Service Director for Education is currently consulting with the proprietors of Academy Trust on seeking new members. An update on member and the terms of reference will be presented in December.
4.0	FUTURE VENUE CONSIDERATIONS
4.1	Forum 's attention is brought to the fact, that following a well publicised Council decision, the intention is for the County Council to move out of Shire Hall towards the end of 2020 /

	early 2021 and to relocate its main hub to Alconbury. This being the case, the KV room will no longer be available as a meeting venue and Forum may wish to start considering possible alternatives e.g., members volunteering their own meeting room facilities perhaps through rotating between different schools/academies or hiring a meeting room at a venue, the latter very much depending on costs and availability)
	Background papers: None