

## SCHOOLS FORUM

### Schools Forum Membership Update

18 June 2015

Content Applicable to;		School Phase;	
Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools	X	Pre School	X
Academies	X	Foundation Stage	X
PVI Settings	X	Primary	X
Special Schools / Academies	X	Secondary	X
Local Authority	X	Post 16	X
		High Needs	X

#### Purpose of Report

Content Requires;		By;	
Noting	X	Maintained Primary School Members	
Decision		Maintained Secondary School Members	
		Maintained Special School Members	
		Academy Members	
		All Schools Forum	X

1. This report presents the current membership of the Schools Forum and sets out some concerns raised by some schools on its operation.

#### Recommendations

2. That Schools Forum note the 2015/16 membership, changes between membership groups and vacancies.

3. That Schools Forum members consider the methods used to feedback to the groups they represent.

### **Introduction**

4. Local authorities were required to establish Schools Forums to engage schools in school funding in 2003. The constitution for Schools Forums is one for Local Authority decision, taking into account stakeholder views, any changes to the Leicestershire Schools Forum constitution must be approved by the County Council's Cabinet.
5. The operation of the Schools Forum is governed by the Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 and certain requirements under the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2014. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) also issue operational guidance on practical issues such as membership, conduct of members, issue of reports and practical operation of meetings.
6. For School Members the regulations require that membership is proportional to pupil numbers, school phase and type of school i.e. maintained & academy, primary & secondary. The Director of Children and Family Services has delegated powers to amend membership at the commencement of each academic year to ensure that membership reflects the pattern of schools.
7. The 2014/15 membership has been reviewed taking account of expected pupil numbers in maintained schools and academies for the 2015/16 academic year. There is no necessity to change membership significantly, however the movement between maintained schools and academies results in some movement between groups. Schools Forum should note that vacancies exist.
8. There remains a view, largely in secondary schools, that information on school funding is not being effectively communicated despite briefings, emails alerting heads to funding consultations and Schools Forum being an open public meeting for which all reports are issued one week in advance of each meeting and issued on the Leicestershire County Council website. This report reaffirms the operational understanding (the relevant extract from the constitution is set out in Appendix 1) of the Local Authority and Schools Forum Members and asks for Members to consider to what extent these expectations are fulfilled.

### **2015/16 Membership**

9. No changes to the membership numbers are required for 2015/16, the membership will remain as follows;

<b>Primary</b>	<b>10</b>
Maintained School Governor	2
Maintained School Headteacher	3
Academy Governor	2
Academy Headteacher	3
<b>Secondary</b>	<b>9</b>
Maintained Headteacher / Governor *	1
Academy Governor	4
Academy Headteacher	4
<b>Special</b>	<b>2</b>
Maintained Headteacher / Governor *	1
Academy Headteacher / Governor *	1

Where these categories of school exist within the Local Authority these schools must be represented irrespective of pupil numbers.

It is also necessary to ensure that the current details held on members is correct, the membership list has been sent to members under separate cover and will be published following the meeting.

10. Members cease to be eligible if they are no longer able to represent the group they were elected to represent, a match has been undertaken against current membership to determine whether the maintained school/academy split remains valid. This also needs to be balanced against the complexity of the issues that Schools Forum are required to consider where it is accepted that it takes a period of time for new members to acquire the links and the knowledge to allow for an effective discharge of responsibilities. 2 current members were elected to represent one group but their positions are in another but still have a term of office remaining, current vacancies allow for membership to be switched, these are;

David Thomas	Switch from maintained primary governor to academy primary governor
Bill Nash	Switch from academy governor to fill the longstanding vacancy to maintained school governor  <i>It should be noted that from the academic year following the conversion of the remaining maintained secondary schools to academy this membership will cease. If academy vacancies are present it may be prudent to make a further switch</i>

11. The following vacancies are present;

2 Primary Academy Heads – In accordance with the constitution LPH have been approached to elect members

1 Maintained Primary Governor – In accordance with the constitution ALG have been approached to elect a member

Academy Special School – In accordance with the constitution LSSH have been approached to elect a member

Early Years - In accordance with the constitution PVI providers have been approached to nominate a member.

12. The length of office for members is 4 years and a number of elections will need to be undertaken by groups in both 2016 and 2017. Length of office is detailed on the membership list which will be forwarded to LPH, LSH and LSSH in order that they consider what actions they may wish to take regarding elections to membership. In considering the action they need to take in relation to elections, membership groups should also consider what approach they wish to take in relation to both succession planning and substitutes. The constitution makes the following provision for substitutes;

*Each body electing or nominating representatives will be entitled to maintain one member who is able to act as a substitute for Schools Forum Members*

*Substitute members may attend meetings of the Leicestershire Schools Forum, Substitutes may attend meeting to accompany their elected member, in this capacity substitutes are not entitled to speak or vote at the meeting. Substitutes, when actively representing their elective group, will be entitled to speak at the meeting and have voting rights.*

The effective use of substitutes will allow a greater spread of knowledge, provide succession planning and ensure that all groups will be able to be represented at all meetings.

13. It will also be necessary to elect a Chair and Vice-Chair for 2015/16 at the September meeting of Schools Forum.

## **Communication**

14. LSH has raised a number of concerns related to communication and consultation, the latter relates largely to timescales set out for changes in school funding which are outside the control of the Local Authority and there is no expectation that the timetable set by the Education Funding Agency (EFA) will change.
15. Schools Forum meetings are open to the public and publicised on the Leicestershire County Council website in the same manner as all other Council meetings. Forward dates are also published and any member of the public, including schools, can access that information 1 week in advance of each meeting. The website also sets out names of members who can be contacted through the clerk. Information is therefore widely available and as the Local Authority has a responsibility to ensure that it is there and is understandable, schools also have a responsibility to ensure that they are aware of the issues and make their views known.
16. The Local Authority has clearly set out its expectations of Schools Forum members and its own commitment to ensuring the business taken through Schools Forum is clearly articulated, open and transparent through the operational understanding within the constitution which is shown at Appendix 1.
17. To ensure the voice of schools is taken into account in Schools Forum business working groups are set up to consider specific issues, these are often required to work through the school summer break as a result of the timescales set by the Department for Education and the EFA. This allows for the direction of the Local Authority to be validated, or not, and model proposals before taken to consultation and processed for approval. These groups include governors, headteachers and business managers across school phases but are dependent upon a willingness to work with the Local Authority over this time period.
18. A number of business managers have approached the Local Authority to lobby for membership on the Schools Forum. Maintaining membership across three school phases (primary, secondary, special) and across two school types (maintained and academies) whilst maintaining membership proportional to pupil numbers is a significant challenge and one that would un necessarily increase complexity if a third group of stakeholders were to become members. There is no evidence to show that communication systems are any more robust in business managers groups than those currently in place through LPH, LSH and LSSH. The Local Authority currently engages business managers on working groups when formulating school funding proposals and this approach will continue. At recent finance briefings the attendees were asked whether they would be willing to work with the Local Authority on formulating solutions to funding issues, to date only three have volunteered.

19. Whilst there is no national data upon which the performance of Schools Forums can be evaluated, discussions with colleagues in other authorities suggest that the Leicestershire Forum operates well, it is well attended, recognises the complexity of the national funding system and its constraints, it works with the Local Authority to develop solutions best for Leicestershire and provides significant challenge to it in doing so.
20. In terms of consultations, these have been issued through email alerts to all headteachers either as a specific item or through the Director's termly update and are issued on the County Council website. Schools Forum members are asked to consider alongside the groups they represent what methods of communication are best placed to ensure that the business conducted through the Schools Forum is disseminated to those groups.

#### Background Papers

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-forums-england-regulations-2012>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-forums-operational-and-good-practice-guide-2013>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/341924/The\\_School\\_and\\_Early\\_Years\\_Finance\\_England\\_Regulations\\_2014.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/341924/The_School_and_Early_Years_Finance_England_Regulations_2014.pdf)

<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=1018>

#### Officers to Contact

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**LEICESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM**

**OPERATIONAL UNDERSTANDING**

The purpose of the operational understanding is to define the expectations of, and responsibilities of the Local Authority and Schools Forum Members in undertaking the business of the Schools Forum.

**Local Authority**

The Local Authority will:-

- 1) Ensure that reports and other documents to be discussed at Forum meetings to be published 1 week in advance of meetings and minutes within 1 week of the meeting.
- 2) Ensure that all Forum meetings will be supported by appropriate senior officers relevant to the items to be discussed at the meeting.
- 3) Provide a pre meeting briefing for the Forum Chair and Vice Chair in the week preceding the meeting.
- 4) Publish reports, other relevant documents and minutes of meetings on the County Councils' intranet
- 5) Ensure that Forum is informed of any proposed changes in legislation that will impact upon the work of the Forum.
- 6) Provide appropriate training and induction to new Forum Members and provide appropriate on-going training to Forum Members to ensure they are able to effectively discharge their responsibilities.
- 7) Ensure that in presenting formal budget proposals for approval that the meeting is a single agenda to ensure sufficient time for discussion of proposals.
- 8) Keep Forum informed of strategic developments and service issues which may result in a request for additional funding where the financial impact would fall to be met from the Schools Budget.
- 9) Facilitate and support workshops and working groups necessary to support both the consultative and decision making responsibilities of Forum.

## **Schools Forum Members**

Schools Forum members will:-

- 1) Follow the principles as set down in the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 2) Ensure that any personal interest in any item for discussion at Forum meetings is declared at the beginning of all meetings. Personal interest is deemed to be a discussion or decision that affects an individual school, and not a decision that has an equal application for all or specific group(s) of schools.
- 3) Ensure that they are representative of, and present the views, of their elective / nominating group at meetings.
- 4) Ensure that all reports and other papers tabled at meetings are reviewed prior to each individual meeting.
- 5) Consider the needs of the whole educational community rather than advancing issues pertaining to a particular school phase or an individual school.
- 6) Gather views and provide feedback to individual elective / nominated groups in advance of and after School Forum meetings.
- 7) Are responsible to their elective groups for the feedback of items discussed at, and decisions taken, by School Forum.
- 8) Identify any training requirements to the Local Authority to inform the Forum induction and training programme.
- 9) Ensure, through the use of substitutes, that each elective / nominating group is represented at all meetings.
- 10) Within their representative group, consider nominations for the Chair and Vice-Chair prior to the elections to this position held annually at the first meeting of the Forum at the commencement of the academic year.