

TO: SCHOOLS FORUM
DATE: 19 OCTOBER 2017

PROPOSALS TO REVISE THE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS OF THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Director of Children, Young People and Learning

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider revised working arrangements of the Schools Forum including the introduction of an informal pre-meeting in advance of each main meeting and whether the chair of the Forum should be an independent person and not linked to any of the statutory representative groups of the Forum.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 To AGREE:

- 1. Whether any changes should be made to the operational arrangements of the Forum;**
- 2. That David Cook is appointed by the council as an Independent member of the Forum to be elected as chairman at the next meeting;**
- 3. A potential vice chairman.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To facilitate an open, efficient and engaging format for the operation of Forum, to encourage debate and reach decisions from a consensus of views. An independent chairman will aid these objectives, allowing all other members to fully represent their groups.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Continue with existing arrangement. Options other than those set out in this paper will be requested from Forum members at the meeting.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Schools Forum has been operating under current arrangements for many years and the outcomes from the Department for Education (DfE) self assessment exercise by members in 2015 concluded that the suggested good practice levels identified by the DfE were being achieved by the council in 16 out of the 21 areas (76%). For 4 of the questions, members "didn't know" whether best practice was being met, and for one - Is it clear to observers who attendees at the forum are representing? (e.g. by use of name plates, indicating sector) – there was a clear "no".
- 5.2 Whilst the overall arrangements in place are therefore considered a good basis of operation, it has become more difficult to recruit members to the Forum, especially school governors, and attendance levels have suffered. Additionally, over the last two

meetings, attempts have been made to appoint a new chairman, but this has been unsuccessful and a temporary, time limited appointment has been made to October 2017. Without these key elements in place, the effectiveness of the Forum reduces.

- 5.3 We are now facing a period of considerable change during which it is important to have a strong and effective Schools Forum to advise the council on the key issues from the point of view of stakeholders and to be at the heart of decision making. In particular, the government is making significant change to school and education funding through national reforms, including the introduction of a Schools National Funding Formula and there are considerable financial pressures to overcome, not least the rising cost of supporting high needs pupils and the on-going strategic review of needs and provisions.
- 5.4 These issues were discussed at the last Forum meeting where a number of suggested improvements were identified that it was agreed should be brought forward to this meeting for formal consideration and agreement:
1. The council chamber as a venue is not considered conducive to open and engaging meetings. The previous Forum meeting was held in the Function Room at Easthampstead House which was agreed as a much better setting. As meetings must be held in public venues, it is proposed for future Forum meetings, when available, that these are held in the Function Room. The new council chamber being constructed at Time Square may present a more suitable venue in the future.
 2. To facilitate a better understanding of issues outside the formal meeting setting, and to encourage questions and proposals from members, it is proposed to introduce pre-meetings. These would best be held in schools, without a meeting record being maintained.
 3. The day and time was discussed and a 4 pm session the Thursday prior to the meeting was suggested. However, with meeting papers unlikely to be available earlier than the day of the pre-meeting, members would have little time to prepare. A pre-meeting on the Monday immediately prior to the formal Forum meeting is considered likely to be more effective.
- 5.5 Members are requested to consider the potential changes set out above together with any other suggestions that may arise and agree the way forward.
- 5.6 As set out above, as well as discussing the operational arrangements for the Forum at the last meeting, members also considered a proposal from the LA to source a range of Independent candidates for the Forum to consider for the role of chairman. This would allow all members to fully represent their group and fill a hard to recruit position.
- 5.7 Whilst acknowledging that the number of suitable candidates was likely to be low, this approach was agreed and 4 potential candidates have been identified. Schools Forum Regulations require Forum Members to elect the chairman – it cannot be an LA appointment – and to facilitate a potential appointment, the previous Forum meeting agreed to amend the membership structure to include an Independent person.
- 5.8 On review, 2 candidates were not considered suitable due to limited knowledge and direct experience of current education issues (one of these potential candidates was also not resident to the borough) and a further candidate declined the offer to be considered. Therefore, one suitable candidate is available for consideration.

- 5.9 The Forum is recommended to agree the appointment of David Cook as the independent representative on the Forum and to fill the vacant position of chairman through a vote at the next meet Forum meeting. A detailed profile is attached at Annex 1 that sets out a wide range of public and private sector experience and a keen interest in education.
- 5.10 The appointment of a vice chairman also needs to be considered. The main purpose of this position is to cover for the chairman should he be unavailable, and also to chair particular reports should the chairman declare a conflict of interest. Whilst the incidence of needing to cover the chairman is considered to be rare, a procedure needs to be in place to allow for the conclusion of business. Members are therefore requested to consider whether they would be prepared to take on the position of vice chairman.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The relevant legal issues are identified within the body of the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The Borough Treasurer is satisfied that no significant financial implications arise from this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Not required.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 None identified.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Not applicable.

Background Papers

Schools Forum Operation and Good Practice Guidance:

Schools Forum powers and responsibilities

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-forums-operational-and-good-practice-guide-2015>

Contact for further information

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David Cook Profile

Background

30 + years working at 3M United Kingdom PLC, 15 years at board level, running a P&L Business portfolio of up to £200 million. (1978- 2011)

Chairman of Bracknell Forest Economic & Skills Partnership (6 years, stepped down February 2017)

Represented the partnership at Council Oversight & Scrutiny Committee

Board Member Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (Stepped down 2014)

Vice Chair & Governing Body member of Wokingham NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (3 years stepped down in May 2017) – Chaired Meetings in Public & Public Meetings

Careers Advisor – Careers & Enterprise Company (Stepped Down September 2017)

Currently

Chairman of Bracknell & Wokingham College Corporation

Chairman of Optalis Ltd (LA Trading company of Wokingham Borough Council & Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead)

Governor of University of Winchester

Role of Chairman

To set by example the business and efficiency of the board, and ensure effective relationships with all the major stakeholders.

Enhance the reputation and standing of the organisation represented and ensure there is clarity and transparency of results and activities.

Recognise the responsibilities to the tax payer in the allocation of public funds and live by the Nolan principals of accountability.

Sector Interest & Personal Statement

I believe in the right of every child to have the access to good education and to develop their individual ability and capacity to succeed in whatever career pathway they choose. Hence my various roles in the education sector. I continue to develop my understanding of the public sector and the opportunity in knowledge exchange between public/private enterprise.