TO: **SCHOOLS FORUM**
DATE: **14 JANUARY 2016**

SCHOOLS FORUM: OPERATIONAL AND GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE
Director of Children, Young People & Learning

1   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   This report presents feedback from Forum Members on the effectiveness of the Bracknell Forest Schools Forum as recorded on the recently completed self-assessment toolkit developed by the Department for Education (DfE) to support the *Schools Forum: Operational and Good Practice Guidance.*

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1   That the Forum COMMENTS on the responses from the Council to the self-assessment returns.

3   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   It is appropriate for the Schools Forum to comment on these matters and make recommendations for improvement.

4   ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1   None.

5   SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

5.1   The *Schools Forum: Operational and Good Practice Guidance* has been designed by the DfE to provide members of Schools Forums, local authority officers and elected members with advice and information on good practice in relation to the operation of Schools Forums. The latest version was released in March 2015, with no significant changes, and was reported to the Forum in December 2015.

5.2   A review by officers of the guidance identified the following areas where changes are considered beneficial and relatively straightforward to implement and would therefore be progressed:

- Improve the flow of information to governing bodies, including on the outcomes of consultations with the Schools Forum, such as those in respect of contracts to be funded from the Schools Budget and other financial issues.

- Improvements to induction of new members to ensure appropriate background information are made available in a timelier manner.

- Improvements in communications to non-school partners, in particular private, voluntary and independent sector providers of early years childcare and education.

5.3 To gather other views, Members of the Forum agreed to complete the DfE self-assessment toolkit and return to the LA for reporting back to this meeting.

<u>Update from self-assessment returns</u>

5.4 The DfE self-assessment toolkit contains 21 questions and by the publication date for this report replies had been received from 12 of the current 17 Forum Members. This represents a 70% response rate. 6 of the respondents represented the primary phase, 3 the secondary phase with one each from special, alternative education and the trades unions.

5.5 Annex 1 presents the questions posed with a simple analysis of the responses which shows that for 16 questions, at least 50% of respondents agreed that the suggested good practice level was being achieved by the council. The remaining responses indicated the best level is not achieved, is partially achieved, or it wasn't know.

<u>Response from BFC</u>

5.6 There was a good response rate from Forum Members to the self-assessment questionnaire with most areas being reported as being met by the Council. Of the 5 questions where less that 50% of respondents agreed that best practice was being met:

- for 2 questions, the majority response was "don't know" (questions 4 and 7)

- for 1 question, the majority response was "no" (question 14)

- for 2 questions, both "don't know" and "no" scored equally (questions 11 and 17)

5.7 In response to the "don't know" replies:

<u>Question 4 (42% "don't know")</u>: Is there a dedicated website link for the schools forum, is it current and regularly updated?

<u>Council response</u>: There is a dedicated website and members are emailed the link to meeting agendas in advance of each meeting. 3 comments were received that indicated that the website was difficult to find from the BF public website homepage. The Council's Digital Services Team is in the process of a re-design and re-launch of the BF public website and will take this into account.

<u>Question 7 (67% "don't know")</u>: If papers are tabled at the meeting, are they published on the website promptly after the meeting?

<u>Council response</u>: Papers on new issues are not tabled at meetings. All papers are published 5 clear days before the meeting to allow for matters to be properly considered and colleagues consulted, if required. Sometimes it is necessary to table amendments to published reports.

5.8   In response to the "no" reply:

        Question 14 (50% "no"): Is it clear to observers who attendees at the forum are representing? (e.g. by use of name plates, indicating sector)?

        Council response: Other than the Executive Member, it is unusual for an observer to attend the forum. The current practice is to provide desk name plates only but that can be expanded to include the body being represented.

5.9   In response to the joint "don't know" and "no" replies:

        Question 11 (42% "no" / "don't know"): Is there an induction pack or training programme available for new members?

        Council response: Agreed this is not currently covered consistently or to the required standard and was highlighted as a weakness at the last meeting. An induction pack will be developed and provided to new members to cover key responsibilities and duties, the constitution, cycle of meetings etc.

        Question 17 (33% "no" / "don't know"): Do members actively canvass views and objectively represent their whole peer group at the forum and provide feed back after meetings?

        Council response: Views on this question seem to differ depending on which group the respondent represents. Headteachers tended to respond that this is being met, whereas governors tended to think not or didn't know. This is to be expected with well established and regular Headteacher meetings taking place but with no equivalent structure in place for governors, who are volunteers and much more difficult to bring together on regular occasions. However, developing a group of governors to canvass views from, possibly via email in the week between papers being published and meetings being held will be explored. The possibility of updating the Governor Services section of the School Management Website with web links and sending all Chairs of Governors web links to Forum papers direct will also be explored. This would facilitate gather views before and updating governors after Forum meetings.

5.10   Annex 2 lists all the comments made on the self-assessment returns.

6   **ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

        Borough Solicitor

6.1   The relevant legal provisions are addressed within the main 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   There are no specific impact assessments arising from this report.

<u>Strategic Risk Management Issues</u>

6.4   There are no specific strategic risk management issues arising from this report

<u>Other Officers</u>

6.5   There are no issues arising from this report that are relevant to other officers.

7   CONSULTATION

<u>Principal Groups Consulted</u>

7.1   Schools Forum.

<u>Background Papers</u>

None

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Responses to Schools Forum Self-Assessment Toolkit (12 out of 17 responses)

Question	Yes	No	Partially	Don't know
1. Are meeting dates set in well advance and details (including time and venue) published in an accessible manner to enable interested parties to plan their attendance?	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
2. Are meetings timed to coincide with key dates? (e.g. reporting of funding formula)	91.67%	0.00%	0.00%	8.33%
3. Are meetings held in an accessible venue to enable observers to attend easily?	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
4. Is there a dedicated website link for schools forum, is it current and regularly updated?	41.67%	16.67%	0.00%	41.67%
5. Are the agenda and papers publicly available on the authority's website at least 6 working days in advance of the meeting?	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%
6. Are the papers published as a single document, so that users can download easily?	66.67%	8.33%	0.00%	25.00%
7. If papers are tabled at the meeting, are they published on the website promptly after the meeting?	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%
8. Are draft minutes published a reasonable time (e.g. within 2-3 weeks) after the meeting, rather than waiting until the following meeting?	75.00%	8.33%	0.00%	16.67%
9. Are the minutes clear and unambiguous, with sufficient detail to illustrate the discussions, without reporting verbatim every point made?	91.67%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%
10. Is the constitution clear and appropriate? Including eg a clear process for ensuring proportional representation - the process for electing members and their tenure - the timescale for review is clearly set out - the process for dealing with repetitive non attenders	83.33%	0.00%	8.33%	8.33%
11. Is there an induction pack or training programme available for new members?	16.67%	41.67%	0.00%	41.67%

Question	Yes	No	Partially	Don't know
12. Is the election process clear and transparent? i.e. representatives are elected only by the group they are representing, whether phase-specific for maintained schools, or by the proprietors of academies for academy members.	91.67%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%
13. Do the papers contain clear recommendations and indicate in a consistent manner whether the item is for information, consultation or decision?	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
14. Is it clear to observers who attendees at the forum are representing? (eg by use of name plates, indicating sector)	41.67%	50.00%	8.33%	0.00%
15. Does the chair manage the meeting well, ensuring that all are able to contribute to the agenda items, that no bias towards any sector is evident and that no single person or organisation is able to dominate the discussion?	91.67%	0.00%	0.00%	8.33%
16. Is there inclusive participation in discussions for all phases and types of members?	75.00%	0.00%	8.33%	16.67%
17. Do members actively canvass views and objectively represent their whole peer group at the forum and provide feed back after meetings?	25.00%	33.33%	8.33%	33.33%
18. Where votes are required, is it clear who is eligible to vote for different items?	83.33%	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%
19. Where votes are required, are the arrangements for recording the votes clear and unambiguous?	83.33%	8.33%	0.00%	8.33%
20. Is there a system in place for a decision if votes are tied?	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%
21. Is the operational & good practice guide used to regularly review the forum's adherence to good practice?	50.00%	8.33%	0.00%	41.67%

Comments made with self-assessment submissions

1. Are meeting dates set in well advance and details (including time and venue) published in an accessible manner to enable interested parties to plan their attendance?
• As a new member of the forum, I have been made aware of these and have been able to plan my attendance.
• Secretary does a particularly good job of email advice, posting of agenda/documents. Meetings are planned a year in advance, including extras that will be cancelled if not actually needed.
2. Are meetings timed to coincide with key dates? (e.g. reporting of funding formula)
• Extras as above help this, because government data is NOT always as timely as hoped.
• Mostly
3. Are meetings held in an accessible venue to enable observers to attend easily?
• BF Council chamber
4. Is there a dedicated website link for schools forum, is it current and regularly updated?
• Not easy to find directly from BFC website. Had to use Google search
• On the Bracknell Forest Council website.
• Difficult to find
• The only way I get the information is via email
• Not that I could find. Searching for Schools Forum on BFC homepage didn't work. Finally accessed it via Your Council/Councillors, democracy and elections/committees/statutory bodies/schools forum
• The BFC site covers this topic and its content is current and regularly updated.
• Minutes and agenda are accessible on BF website but not aware of a dedicated website. If thought desirable a section could be created on School Management Finance Pages
5. Are the agenda and papers publicly available on the authority's website at least 6 working days in advance of the meeting?
• On the Bracknell Forest Council website.
• As far as I know
6. Are the papers published as a single document, so that users can download easily?
• And they are supplied in hard copy also.
• Don't know
• Documents are often multi-paged and can take time to download except for Forum members who received copies.

7. If papers are tabled at the meeting, are they published on the website promptly after the meeting?
• As a new member, I have no knowledge of this.
• Don't know
• I'm not aware of this happening
• Rarely happens. Not checked this but papers are always forwarded.

8. Are draft minutes published a reasonable time (e.g. within 2-3 weeks) after the meeting, rather than waiting until the following meeting?
• As a new member, I have no knowledge of this.
• As far as I am aware they are published with the new agenda for the next meeting.
• "waiting until the following meeting" – certainly not.
• Draft minutes are checked by the Chair and Paul Clark prior to issue.

10. Is the constitution clear and appropriate? Including eg   **a clear process for ensuring proportional representation** **- the process for electing members and their tenure** **- the timescale for review is clearly set out** **- the process for dealing with repetitive non attenders**
• Follows statutory guidance etc.
• Not entirely sure about process, tenure is clear

11. Is there an induction pack or training programme available for new members?
• If there is, I wasn't made aware
• I haven't been made aware of an induction or training programme.
• Have been a member for a number of years. Not aware of current training materials. Perhaps we need refreshers.
• Some time since I was one
• I Believe that the LA issue details to new members prior to them taking their place on the Forum
• Might be helpful.
• Not received one

12. Is the election process clear and transparent? i.e. representatives are elected only by the group they are representing, whether phase-specific for maintained schools, or by the proprietors of academies for academy members.
• Very difficult to attract diverse, qualified membership
• except, as in my case my election was by default in the absence of candidates. I'm not actually sure how well the forum canvasses for new members.

13. Do the papers contain clear recommendations and indicate in a consistent manner whether the item is for information, consultation or decision?
• Always very clear and reiterated by the Chair
• A verbal reminder is given when papers are being discussed on whether the item is for information, consultation or a decision is required
• Papers are always well thought through, informative and clear.

14. Is it clear to observers who attendees at the forum are representing? (eg by use of name plates, indicating sector)
• Name cards don't indicate sector but this is shown on the agenda
• Name plates do not show sector / representative group, although it easy via the attendance list to find this information out.
• Nameplates contain names only. However representation clearly set out in agenda
• Although name cards are provided and used they do not detail the representatives sector as far as I can recall.
• Nameplates provided though I don't think they show the sector. Observers sit away from forum members so obvious who is a member and who isn't
• Name plates say names, but not roles. Though, after a while, many faces get familiar I sometimes have to scrabble through the invitees on the agenda to tell who's who.
• Members have name plates but their sector is not shown. However, their sector is shown on the list of attendees on the minutes, including absentees.
• Sometimes not clear who is a member and an observer due to seating arrangements

15. Does the chair manage the meeting well, ensuring that all are able to contribute to the agenda items, that no bias towards any sector is evident and that no single person or organisation is able to dominate the discussion?
• Very good chairmanship
• The Chair is extremely clear and runs the agenda in a very organised fashion. He makes it clear to everyone the purpose and the recommendations checking that all present have had the opportunity to contribute and question.
• Sometimes a bit repetitive
• The meetings seem to work.
• The Chair remains neutral whenever a vote is taken on papers presented at the meeting. The Chair would have a casting/deciding vote in the event of a tie.

16. Is there inclusive participation in discussions for all phases and types of members?
• Up to individual members to contribute. Attendance not always as high as would be desirable.
• Free and open discussion
• Not always
• Except those deliberately excluded because they have declared interests. It would be inappropriate for a rep of a group such as "secondary schools" to canvas on behalf of their own school.
• Depends on the item

17. Do members actively canvass views and objectively represent their whole peer group at the forum and provide feed back after meetings?
• Others may but I only feedback relevant information to my own school meetings
• Members have reported back to PHAB meetings in the past and have canvassed views prior to meeting when appropriate.
• Not aware of any active counselling, especially between schools
• Only very occasionally on a specific item
• Don't know. I don't.
• I know that I am bad at this. Maybe there should be a process for me and/or Brian Fries to contact relevant secondary govs. Similar in other groups.
• The Head teacher representatives meet with their colleagues in their respective associations.
• Teacher reps are likely to report back to colleagues; it's more difficult for governors.
18. Where votes are required, is it clear who is eligible to vote for different items?
• As a new member, I have no knowledge of this.
• Chair makes it clear
19. Where votes are required, are the arrangements for recording the votes clear and unambiguous?
• As a new member, I have no knowledge of this.
• Secretary and Chairman count the hands. 1) Secretary is not a member of the forum. 2) It is not difficult to count the hands in the Council Chamber.
• Meeting is usually content with a show of hands
20. Is there a system in place for a decision if votes are tied?
• I don't know but assume it is the chair
• As a new member, I have no knowledge of this.
• Chair's casting vote?
• As mentioned above the Chair would have a casting vote.
21. Is the operational & good practice guide used to regularly review the forum's adherence to good practice?
• Not sure
• But it was tabled at the last meeting and we agreed to change procedures etc in light of this audit!
• Updated guide included at last meeting.
• Don't know
• The Forum are regularly informed of any reviews and/or changes as to the format of the Forum etc.
• Not by the committee
• Not sure