

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

9th September 2014

Report of the Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults

Schools Forum Constitution

1. Purpose of Report To seek approval to minor changes to the Schools Forum's Constitution.
2. Information and Analysis

There are several refinements to the operation of the Schools Forum which need to be addressed.

The period of office of school and academy representatives on the Schools Forum is four years, and the current periods of office are due to end on 31st December 2014. As a result of the national changes to the timescale for completing schools' delegated budgets, the timing of the Forum elections is problematic. Not only will the process of conducting an election to establish a new Forum take place at one of the busiest times of the year, there is a risk of losing a wealth of experience from existing members at a critical time in the budget process. Whilst the Forum's role in respect of mainstream schools' 2015-16 budgets should have been completed by 31st December, the Forum will have a key role to play still in respect of Early Years and High Needs budgets.

These problems are exacerbated by the fact that the Forum has recently received a number of resignations, due mainly to the retirements of members from their school roles. In the short term this will further impact on the knowledge base of the Forum.

The Forum has also been considering its structure and operations against the DfE's guidance, "Schools Forum: A guide for schools and academies on its role and their responsibilities". Several issues were identified including the size of the Forum, with Derbyshire's Forum having 40 places which is substantially larger than those of neighbouring LAs. The size of the Forum needs to be reviewed to ensure that the Forum is both effective and economical to support.

In order to deal with the above issues it is proposed that the current membership's period of office be extended by eight months to 31 August 2015. This would allow more time for both the Forum and the County Council to consider the long term structure of the Forum from September 2015 and retain existing expertise for the 2015-16 budget process. Elections would be arranged over the summer of 2015 with new members taking up office for a four-year

period commencing 1st September 2015. Future four-year cycles would then run from September to August.

There are two other matters to consider. Firstly, pursuant to Regulation 6 of The Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 (S.I. 2261), representation on the Forum from academies should now be by election from the proprietors of the academies. This will require a change to the existing Constitution which currently allows the Authority to nominate academy representatives.

The second is that the current Forum Constitution requires the Authority to ballot individual governors rather than governing bodies whenever a school governor vacancy needs to be filled and where an election is required i.e. when there are more candidates than vacancies. This is a disproportionately time-consuming and expensive process as ballot forms and pre-paid envelopes have to be sent to several thousand individual governors. The Authority has previously attempted to use electronic media for this process but this has elicited very low levels of responses.

It is proposed therefore that governing bodies rather than individual governors be invited to vote on governor elections, either by direct e-mail to Chairs of Governors or via the Schools Extranet. This would be a much quicker and less expensive process and one which is consistent with the arrangements for consulting schools on other funding matters.

This change has been considered by the Schools Forum and was unanimously supported.

3. Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: - prevention of crime & disorder, equality of opportunity; environmental, financial, health, human resources, legal & human rights, property and transport considerations.

4. Officer's Recommendations

The Cabinet Member is asked to approve that:

- (i) The current period of office be extended as set out in the report;
- (ii) The required change to the election of academy representatives be approved;
- (iii) Governing bodies and/or Chairs of Governors be balloted in respect of school governor vacancies in accordance with the proposed arrangement as set out in this report;
- (iv) The School Forum's Constitution be amended to reflect the changes set out in this report; and
- (v) If required, a further report be brought in summer 2015 setting out additional changes to the membership and/or operation of the Schools Forum.

Ian Thomas
Strategic Director Children and Younger Adults