

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Schools Forum

Report of Director of Children's Services

Schools Forum Working Group

Purpose of Report

To advise Schools Forum of the Working Group's recommendations about improvements to the conduct of Schools Forum business and related processes.

Action for Schools Forum

To approve the recommendations.

Schools Forum 9 May 2006

Report of Director of Children's Services

Schools Forum Working Group

Purpose of Report

To advise Schools Forum of the outcomes of the Working Group's discussions.

Background

Schools Forum agreed to set up a Working Group to reflect on how business was conducted and what improvements could be made. The Working Group met on 25 April 2006 to consider ways in which Schools Forum could improve the conduct of its business and related processes.

The meeting was attended by Lucy Griffiths, Brian Patterson, Jim Conway, Ray Watson and Richard Jewkes. Apologies were received from Philip Rhind-Tutt and Brian Heavisides.

Recommendations

There was general agreement about areas where improvements should be made. These are as follows:

1. Schools Forum business items often require an understanding of how local government finance operates particularly in the context of Directorate of Children's Services and individual schools. Issues requiring decisions must be considered by Schools Forum members with experience of financial planning and budget management in schools. The current process of Headteachers considering these matters at Headteachers Consultative Forum Budget Working Group is effective but other Schools Forum members do not currently have opportunity to consider matters in the same depth. Options of establishing further groups or allocating further time to Schools Forum meetings were considered impractical.

Recommendation

Schools Forum should continue to meet as now with papers considered initially at HTCF BWG.

2. Schools Forum Agendas were considered to be too long with insufficient time for some items. The content of agendas should be based wherever possible on a programme for 12 months.

Recommendation

Schools Forum Agendas would be structured with items for discussion and items for information only.

3. The frequency and scheduling of Schools Forum meetings should be based on the established timescales for financial planning and management. This is likely to require around 6 meetings per year.

Recommendation

The dates of Schools Forum meetings are published for each financial year setting out the anticipated business.

4. Some reports contain significant amounts of detail which can divert Schools Forum members attention from the main issues.

Recommendations

Reports should be short with a clear executive summary and relevant detail e.g., financial data should be contained in additional appendices unless it can be included easily within a short report.

5. Agendas and papers should be sent out 7 working days in advance of meetings. If this is not achieved Schools Forum members have additional pressure in preparing for meetings.

Recommendations

Agendas and papers will be sent out 7 working days in advance or earlier if possible.

6. Schools Forum members have acknowledged the importance of training. The positive start made in 2005 regarding the new financial arrangements for 2006/07 should be continued for new members and more experienced members.

Recommendations

Schools Forum agendas should wherever appropriate include elements of training as business is conducted e.g. as part of specific agenda items or specific training events.

7. The current constitution allows for Schools Forum members to serve for 3 years. The potential for all Schools Forum members changing at the same time is a business continuity risk. A more managed approach would minimise the number of Schools Forum members changing in any single year. This could involve removing the 3 yearly block appointment of the whole Schools Forum with new members appointed as vacancies arise. Alternatively Schools Forum could amend the constitution to introduce a one third membership change each year. It is suggested that the one third change is representative of the whole Forum rather than from any single group.

Recommendations

The constitution should be revised to allow one third of the membership to change each year. Schools Forum members would still be required to serve for 3 years.

8. Schools Forum minutes are not currently published on www.dudley.gov.uk. In the move towards transparency in local government and in the need for effective communication with stakeholders minutes should be available.

Recommendations

Schools Forum minutes should be published on www.dudley.gov.uk



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26 April 2006