

To: Schools Forum - Meeting 28th March 2017

From: Hugh Boulter (Governor Representative) Chair of Working Group to review Forum processes and procedures.

Working Group Membership: Heidi Swidenbank, Isabel Cooke, Amanda Hough, Alison Penny, Nick Stevens, Hugh Boulter

Summary

Following Schools Forum representatives agreeing to a Work Group to be established to review Schools Forum governance, processes and procedures at the meeting held 13th December 2016, the above group have had a number of discussions subsequently and have identified the following areas for consideration. The Work Group would therefore request the Forum membership and other stakeholders as appropriate to agree to evaluate the feasibility of making changes to the way the Forum operates as soon as possible. The Work Group requests that all such feasibility work is completed in time for approval at the Schools Forum meeting in May in order for any new or changes to processes can be in place by September 2017.

Background

Continuing funding constraints leading to more complex financial evaluations having to be undertaken and decided upon by the Schools Forum increases the need to ensure the Forum is operating effectively and is able to decide on specific financial proposals that deliver optimised results in a balanced way across the school community within RBWM. It is also felt that the Forum needs to be more inclusive of all schools in its decision making processes regardless of whether they are represented directly or not at the Forum meetings. The Work Group have therefore studied, reviewed and evaluated all aspects of the Forum processes and have identified the following areas which we believe could deliver a significant improvement in the quality of decisions made and also enabling all schools to have a direct input into the way decisions are made.

Proposals for consideration, feasibility assessment and subsequent action:

- **Distribution of pre Schools Forum meeting paperwork** - recommend distribution to all Forum members, invited attendees and all headteachers at the latest 2 weeks prior to the Forum meeting. The work group would request the local authority to decide how best (should they wish to) adopt a similar distribution process for Private/Voluntary attendees.
- **Headteacher Cluster Meetings** - proposal to reschedule these meetings one week prior to the Forum meeting, thus enabling all heads to review and discuss the key agenda items and agree a set of views on critical items which will then be communicated to the Forum by the appointed representatives. All heads should be kept up to date as to who their representatives are.
- **Schools Forum agendas and associated papers** - the local authority representatives are requested to consider how all pre meeting paperwork can be explicit on course of action required at the Forum meeting identifying those items that require a formal vote together with clarity on who is eligible to vote on a particular issue.
- **Schools Forum minutes** - the local authority representatives are requested to consider how to explicitly identify actions required by whom and when, with a follow up process instigated between Forum meetings on critical items. All Forum members and attendees together with all heads should receive a copy of the minutes within 2 weeks of the Forum taking place.

- **Annual report** - the local authority are requested to consider producing an annual report summarising actions undertaken by the Forum over the previous 12 months together with a high level summary of issues likely to be brought before the Forum over the next year (including any emerging budgeting shortfalls). The report should also include where relevant how effective the financial decisions made by the Forum have been in terms of value added and impact on schools and the overall budget.
- **Budgetary processes** - the Work Group feel it is imperative for an improved alignment of RBWM budgeting processes and those that exist across the whole school community, together with a need for any major budgeting shortfalls to be brought to the attention of Forum members earlier in the process. A separate discussion needs to be held between all parties to agree on a precise budgeting timetable. The Work Group would also request that a budgetary summary is presented at each Forum meeting in order for any major issues to be identified as early in the process as possible,
- **School Forum meetings timelines** - the Work Group felt that the current dates when Forum meetings are held are fine, although members are asked to consider cancelling either the January or March meeting. However, in relation to the above item on Budgetary processes, this would only be feasible if draft budget decisions were made at the October meeting and the final budget was approved at the December meeting - if this was to be adopted this would go a long way towards aligning major budgetary work with the timescale schools are committed to adhere to.
- **Decision Making** - the Work Group request that all decisions made at School Forum meetings should be binding until such time Forum members are formally invited to consider changes to original decisions made or make a new decision should the financial position change and/or new information become available. In practice all decision making should be made at planned Forum meetings, in exceptional circumstances extraordinary meetings may need to be set up additionally to review or change decisions. It may be appropriate in certain circumstances for Forum members to be asked to provide a view on specific items via e mail that may result in a revised decision being made.
- **Data/Information** - the local authority representatives are requested to provide at all times to members, relevant data/analysis to support any proposals/actions/decisions that need to be made on a financial issue. Ideally, the Work Group would ask that members are provided with a suite of options to resolve a particular financial issue with high quality financial data supplied thus making the task of members to fully understand the scale of the issue and therefore making it easier to make an informed decision.
- **Voting** - the Work Group is aware that strict governance surrounds voting procedures at School Forums. However, as covered above it is important for all parties to be clear in advance items that require a vote and who is eligible to vote on that issue.
- **Forum Membership** - the Work Group feel the current membership of the Forum meets all needs.

Next Steps - the Schools Forum is asked by the Work Group to consider these proposals and agree as far as possible to adopt them into future Forum working practices with a target date for implementation September 2017.