

**Agenda Item: 12**

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**Meeting:** Schools Forum

**Date:** 28<sup>th</sup> June 2010

**Subject:** Good Practice and Future of Schools Forum

**Report of:** The Chairman of the Schools Forum

**Summary:** A small sub group met to draft some proposals to present to Schools Forum as to how we might manage Schools Forum business more effectively.

The discussion centred on three main areas:

- 1 Meeting structure
- 2 Representation and Communication
- 3 Admin support and training

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**Contact Officer:** Dawn Hill, Borough Hall, Bedford

**Public/Exempt:** Public

**Wards Affected:** All

**Function of:** Council

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**1. that the Schools Forum**

- (a) increase the number of meetings to 5 per year and hold three during business hours;
- (b) introduce a pre-meeting to allow members to discuss technical aspects of the business agenda with officers.

**2. that the Schools Forum**

- (a) produce a newsletter that raises awareness of what the Forum does and aids communication about the work of the School Forum;
- (b) agree that the Local Authority advise of how Lower School meeting structures might best allow School Forum representation to be effective.

**3. that the Schools Forum**

- (a) produce an audit that highlights training needs and allows a suitable training programme to be developed.

## Meeting Structure

1. The sub-group believes that it would be beneficial to increase the number of meetings from three to five times per year. There are some particular reasons why it would be beneficial to do this:
2.
  - the length of the agenda can often be too long and if we were able to spread the items the agenda would be more manageable;
3.
  - business would be more easily scheduled in 5 meetings rather than three and would allow recommendations to be considered at the most pertinent time.
4. The sub-group also believes it would be useful to change the timings of the meetings. For some members of the Forum meeting at 6pm on Monday is convenient and for others it isn't. The sub group wishes to recommend that if we move to 5 meetings per year then 3 of those meetings should be held in business hours.
5. The sub-group believes that it would be beneficial to introduce a pre-meeting attended by the officers and any member of the Forum who wishes to clarify technical points to the papers to be discussed. This proposal recognises that the business discussed at the school forum is very complex and technical. There are times when our discussion is taken up in answering questions about the detail behind a paper rather than focusing on the decision that has to be taken. It is felt that having a pre-meeting with the chance to clarify points with officers would mean that a greater amount of time can be spent on making the decision. It is not envisaged that this would cause extra work or demand extra time from Officers and members. To exemplify how this might work; officers presenting papers at the meeting would be present from 5.30 to provide the opportunity for members to ask questions before the business starts at 6.00. Only members who had questions about the technicalities of a paper would need to be present for this pre-meeting.

## Representation and Communication

6. The sub-group recognised the challenge of communicating Schools Forum business with such a large number of schools and stakeholders. It was felt that there is still more to do to raise awareness of what the Schools Forum does and to engage stakeholders more fully in the process.
7. The sub-group considers that publishing a newsletter to schools twice per year might provide a useful way of raising awareness of what the Forum does and communicate important decisions that the Forum has taken.
8. The sub-group believes that some groups of schools are more difficult to represent and communicate with. This is thought to be particularly difficult with Lower Schools as there does not seem to be a clear structure of headteacher meetings across the authority. This makes the job of Lower School representatives on the School Forum challenging as there is no clear mechanism to allow dialogue to take place. The sub-group feel that this issue should be addressed.

## Administration Support and Training

9. The sub-group discussed the area of administration support and training. It was felt that there is a need to provide greater administration support to the forum as there is a need to be more active in our communication with the wider school community. It was felt that some further investigations were needed to establish the scope of this.
10. With regard to training the sub-group believe that it is important to offer a programme of training over time that accommodates the needs of members. To facilitate this a brief audit could be used to see what training needs there are.

<b>CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS</b>
<p><b>Council Priorities:</b> (How do the recommendations contribute to achieving CBC's policy aims and objectives?)</p> <p><b>Financial:</b> Z</p> <p><b>Legal:</b> Z</p> <p><b>Risk Management:</b> Z</p> <p><b>Staffing (including Trades Unions):</b> Z</p> <p><b>Equalities/Human Rights:</b> Z</p> <p><b>Community Safety:</b> Z</p> <p><b>Sustainability:</b> Z</p>

**Appendices: None**