



Schools Forum Date: 23 January 2014 Time: 8.30 am Venue: Shrewsbury Training and Development Centre, Monkmoor, Shrewsbury	<u>Item</u>	<u>Paper</u> C
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OBSERVER GUIDELINES

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Summary

The Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 resulted in a number of changes to the constitution of Schools Forums, in particular requiring that the meetings to be open to the public. In seeking to make the meetings of Forum more open and accessible, but also to enable Forum to conduct their normal business effectively, it has been proposed that general guidelines for the participation of observers be drawn up to provide a framework for enabling this to happen.

Recommendation

To approve the guidelines for participation of observers at Schools Forum meetings.

REPORT

Background

1. Shropshire Schools Forum was reconstituted in October 2012 in line with the requirements of the Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2012. The revised Constitution included reference to Forum having to meet in public at least four times every 12 months.
2. Since October 2012 no members of the general public or from schools have taken the opportunity to attend a Forum meeting, though there have been observers at most meetings. These observers have either been local councillors from the opposition political groups who lost their place on Forum as a result of the 2012 regulations, or from school representatives attending meetings prior to becoming members of Forum. The Education Funding Agency has a formally constituted place on Forum as the representative for the Secretary of State and attended the meeting on 7 November 2013 in this observer role.

3. With a view to making Forum meetings more open and accessible it has been proposed that guidelines be produced to facilitate the participation of observers at Schools Forum meetings. The guidelines seek to fit in with and complement the effective management, conduct and discussions in Forum meetings. The guidelines relate to the full Schools Forum meetings and not to meetings of any Task & Finish Groups or any other groups constituted to carry out work on behalf of Schools Forum unless there are specific arrangements in place for wider participation and access.
4. Schools and other stakeholders are of course able to continue to participate in the work of Schools Forum via their elected/nominated representatives. The proposed guidelines are seeking to complement this access route. Equally, non-Forum members are able to correspond with the Chair of Forum, elected members and/or Council officers on any aspect of the work of Schools Forum.

Proposed Guidelines

5. Observers are not required to formally advise that they intend to attend a full Schools Forum meeting and so are free to attend without prior notice. However, in this context, they would not be able to formally participate in the meeting, for example, by asking a question.
6. Schools Forum papers are generally posted on the internet on the Friday before the meeting the following Thursday, which allows little time for questions to be tabled in advance of the meeting. However, it is proposed that any questions forwarded to the clerk of Forum by the close of business on the Monday of a Forum meeting week will be considered and responded to at the meeting. The observer would be required to be present at the meeting to ask the question(s) in person.
7. The Chair will invite the observer to ask their question(s) at the appropriate point in the meeting. They will be provided with the opportunity to briefly comment to the response to their question(s) and to participate in any discussions among Forum members arising specifically from their question(s). The Chair will make it clear when their participation in the meeting has ended.
8. In the event that the deadline for tabling questions is missed but an observer is still keen to ask a question, it will be at the discretion of the Chair on the day. The Chair will require advance notice, preferably at the beginning of the meeting, that the observer would like to ask a question(s) on a specific agenda item, to enable the Chair to invite them to ask the question(s) at the appropriate part of the meeting.
9. Under no circumstances will the normal business of Forum be adjourned to allow an observer to raise a question, make a comment or a statement. However, there may be occasions when, given the confidential nature of the business, observers will be required to leave the meeting. Every effort will be taken to appropriately agenda such items to minimise disruption to the meeting.