

Schools' Forum Task and Finish Group: Governance Review

Report being considered by: Schools' Forum on 13th October 2025

Report Author: Schools' Forum Task and Finish Group

Item for: Decision **By:** All Forum Members

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To set out the proposals of the Schools' Forum Task and Finish Group tasked with reviewing the governance of the Schools' Forum and Heads' Funding Group (HFG).
- Number of meetings and meeting format
 - Work Programme for both groups
 - Schools' Forum and HFG Constitution and Terms of Reference

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That meetings of the Schools' Forum continue to take place online with one in-person meeting per year (location to be confirmed).
- 2.2 That the number of Forum meetings be reduced to five with the addition of a training session for Forum Members.
- 2.3 To approve the Schools' Forum Work Programme for 2025/26 (Appendix B), which has been revised as set out in paragraphs 6.5 to 6.8 of this report.
- 2.4 To approve the proposed report template, which has been revised as set out in paragraph 6.9 of this report, (Appendix C).
- 2.5 To approve the Schools' Forum membership as set out in paragraphs 6.10 to 6.14 of this report (Appendix D).
- 2.6 To approve the Constitution (Appendix E) including the proposed changes set out in paragraphs 6.15 to 6.19.
- 2.7 To approve the establishment of the HFG as a formal sub-group of the Schools' Forum, and to endorse the proposals outlined in section 6.20 of this report (*if approved a section will be added to the Constitution following the meeting, setting out the HFG as a formal sub-group*).

Is the Schools' Forum required to make a decision as part of this report or subsequent versions due to be considered later in the meeting cycle?

Yes: ☒

No: ☐

3. Implications and Impact Assessment

Equalities Impact:	Positive	No Impact	Negative	Commentary

A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		The report aims to review and where necessary update the governance of the Schools' Forum. The refreshed Constitution, membership and work programme will be published on the Schools' Forum's webpage.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	x			There will be no adverse impact caused upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees or service users as a result of the decision.
Data Impact:		x		
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>A survey was carried out with Members of the Schools' Forum from 16th July until 15th August. The Schools' Forum Task and Finish Group met on 26th June and 4th September to review the governance and result of the survey.</p> <p>The Heads Funding Group (Meeting on 1st October 2025) WBC officers: Neil Goddard (Service Director – Education), Lisa Potts (Finance Manager), Toby Bradley (Service Lead – Finance) and Jessica Bailiss (Democratic Services Officers)</p>			

4. Introduction/Background

- 4.1 At the Schools' Forum meeting held on 14th June 2025, it was agreed that a working group would be established to review the Constitution and Terms of Reference of both the Schools' Forum and the Heads' Funding Group (HFG), along with the work programmes, number of meetings, and reporting deadlines for both groups. In July 2025 it was agreed by the Schools' Forum that the current version of the Constitution and Work Programme remain in place whilst this work was underway.

5. Supporting Information

Schools' Forum Survey Headline Results:

- 5.1 The Task and Finish Group coordinated a survey over the summer from 16th July until 15th August with all Forum members. The findings from the survey were shared with the Task and Finish Group and discussed at its meeting on 4th September.
- 5.2 The headline results were as follows:
- There were 19 responses to the survey in total.
 - The preferred meeting format was via Zoom (8) followed by hybrid: in-person and via Zoom (7).
 - The majority of those responding would do their best to attend one in-person meeting per year (16).
 - Shaw House was felt by the majority of those who responded (16) to be an appropriate location for an in-person meeting. It was noted however from the comments (3) that this location was more difficult for those travelling from the east of the district.

- 5pm on a Monday was deemed a suitable time for meetings of the Forum by the majority of those who responded (17).
- 9 of those who responded would prefer six meetings per year. The remaining 10 said they would prefer either 4 or 5 meetings.
- The majority of those who responded (14) would like agendas to be reorganised so that items for maintained schools were dealt with last allowing other members to leave.
- The majority of those responded (16) felt that the current size of the Forum was right.
- 9 of those who responded were not sure if there should be other non-school members on the Forum membership and 7 did not believe there should be other non-school members in attendance.
- The majority of those who responded felt that their views were being heard and their expertise was enabling the Forum to come to the correct decision (11). 4 of those who responded were not sure and 4 did not feel this was the case.
- The majority of those who responded (16) understood the role of the Forum and felt that the Forum provided the appropriate forum so that mandated requirements were met.
- The majority (16) felt the Forum discusses what they believed was relevant or needed to be discussed.

5.3 At its meeting on 4th September, the Task and Finish Group used the results of the survey to form a number of proposals, which are set out in section six below.

6. Proposals

Meetings of the Forum:

- 6.1 Based on survey responses it is proposed that meetings of the Forum remain online with one in-person meeting per year (time of year for this meeting tbc). Shaw House was considered to be an appropriate location however, it was noted from the comments that this location was more difficult for those working in the Reading area. Six schools were willing to host an in-person meeting, so the location would alternate between Shaw House and one of these other locations.
- 6.2 The majority of those who responded to the survey were in support of there being six meetings per year. To help increase and support understanding of the role of the Forum, it is proposed by the Task and Finish Group that there be five meetings and one training session per year to be led on by an external body such as the LGA. This training session would also help to reflect on some of the answers provided in the survey around ensuring views are being heard and improving understanding about the role of the Schools' Forum.
- 6.3 It is proposed that the March meeting is removed from the work programme as this is a particularly light meeting in terms of agenda items and does not align with budget Council on 26th February.
- 6.4 Removing the July meeting was also considered however, it was acknowledged that this would be more difficult due to the need to bring the surplus balances and Scheme for Financing Schools items to this meeting.

Schools Forum Work Programme and Agendas:

- 6.5 The work programme for the Schools' Forum was reviewed by the Task Group and items have been re-designated as items for 'decision' or 'discussion/consultation'.
- 6.6 The majority of those responding to the survey wished for agendas to be reorganised so that items for maintained schools were dealt with last, allowing other members to leave. The work programme has therefore been re-organised in line with this.
- 6.7 Items have been reviewed by finance and education officers to ensure that the right items are being brought to the Forum at the right time and to avoid repetition. Changes made to the work programme accordingly. As well as DSG budget monitoring reports there will also be education budget monitoring brought to the Forum going forward.
- 6.8 The proposed new format for the work programme, in line with that set out above, can be seen in Appendix B. *(note: draft for 2026/27 included for information only, and final version will be brought to the Forum in January for consideration and agreement)*

Schools' Forum Report Template:

- 6.9 The Task Group have drafted a revised report template with the inclusion of an executive summary to make it clearer what action is required from the Forum and what information the Forum needs to consider. This report template will need to be used flexibly depending on the nature of the information being presented. The proposed report template can be viewed in Appendix C.

Schools' Forum Membership:

- 6.10 The Schools' Forum currently has 26 members and survey responses suggested that the size of the group was right. Based on this the Task and Finish Group were of the view that the membership should not change at this stage however, this will be reviewed annually as part of the annual review of the membership and Constitution.
- 6.11 It was also noted from the survey that many members of the Forum were unsure if more non-school members should be in attendance or were of the view that this group of members should not be increased in size. The non-school membership is currently in line with the Schools' Forum Regulations and will be reviewed as part of the annual review of the Constitution to ensure this is still the case.
- 6.12 In line with previous years the membership of the Forum has been reviewed to see if the split based on pupil numbers is still correct or needs to be changed. The current breakdown in pupil numbers between the three main groups can be seen in Appendix D (section 1) and the data for 2025 shows that overall, the percentage of pupils in each sector has remained almost the same.
- 6.13 Brookfields Special School converted to an academy in March 2025, and the Schools' Forum Regulations set out that if there are any special academies in the authority's area, at least one academy member must be a representative of a special academy. In line with the Regulations, Brookfields School has therefore been assigned a place on the Forum going forward.
- 6.14 In order to avoid increasing the size of the Forum further, it is proposed that the new special academy representative takes the place of a vacant position within the academy group. This vacancy has remained unfilled since it was added in 2023, and this approach would ensure compliance with the Regulations without expanding

the Forum's overall membership. The proposed updated membership structure for 2025/26 can be seen in Appendix D (section 2).

Schools' Forum's Constitution:

- 6.15 The Schools' Forum's Constitution is reviewed on an annual basis and was last reviewed and approved by the Forum in July 2024. The current Constitution complies with The Schools' Forums' (England) Regulations 2012. There have been no legislative changes over the last year requiring a change to the Forum's current practice.
- 6.16 As part of the Task Group's work the items for decision and consultation listed in the Constitution under Section A, were cross referenced with the DfE's Schools' Forum Powers and responsibilities document for accuracy. It was concluded from this that Section A of the Constitution was largely accurate and only some minor changes were made. The draft areas for decision and consultation can be viewed in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 in Section A of the Constitution, attached to this report under Appendix E.
- 6.17 Paragraph 2.1 (Section B Membership of the Forum) has been added to the Constitution to clarify the role of Forum Members.
- 6.18 The Constitution has been amended to include detail on the new academy special school representative under paragraph 2.3.
- 6.19 No further amendments are proposed to the Constitution at this time, but Forum Members are invited to suggest any further changes which they deem necessary or desirable.

The Heads Funding Group:

- 6.20 The Task and Finish Group were of the view that the HFG meetings are currently too close to the meetings of the Forum, reducing their effectiveness and creating repetition. The work of the HFG is recognised and valued and the purpose of this review was to ensure the HFG could be as effective as possible whilst adding transparency. It is therefore proposed that:
 - The HFG be established as a formal sub-group of the Schools' Forum.
 - HFG minutes record only action points and recommendations, and these should be shared with the Schools' Forum.
 - HFG meetings take place earlier in the cycle, enabling the group to provide timely and influential input on matters reported to the Forum. The revised schedule will commence from January 2026 (dates to be confirmed).
 - The Terms of Reference for the HFG be discussed and agreed at both the HFG and Forum meetings in December.
- 6.21 These proposals were discussed by the HFG at its meeting on 1st October:
 - (a) Members of the HFG were in agreement with these proposals, as it adds an additional layer of clarity and oversight to the decision-making process.
 - (b) Members of the HFG agreed that minutes should be short and reflect decisions made for recommendation, rather than full information about discussions that have taken place.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The Schools' Forum is invited to approve the recommendations in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.7 of this report.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A: Equalities Impact Assessment
- 8.2 Appendix B: Schools's Forum Work Programme
- 8.3 Appendix C: Revised Report Template for the Schools' Forum
- 8.4 Appendix D: Membership Data
- 8.5 Appendix E: Schools Forum Constitution

West Berkshire Council
Equity Impact Assessment

TEMPLATE
March 2023

9. Contents

Section 1: Summary details.....8

Section 2: Detail of proposal9

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics10

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts.....11

Section 4: Review.....11

10. Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	West Berkshire Schools' Forum
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	The governance of the Schools' Forum and Heads' Funding Group.
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	Existing
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	<p>A review of the Schools' Forum in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of meetings and meeting format • Membership • Work Programme for both groups • Schools' Forum and HFG Constitution and Terms of Reference <p>Only a positive impact from carrying out this work can be identified.</p> <p>An annual review of the membership helps to ensure that pupils are fairly represented at the Schools' Forum. The refreshed Constitution will be published on the Schools' Forum's webpage.</p>
Completed By	Schools' Forum Task and Finish Group
Authorised By	
Date of Assessment	September 2025

11. Section 2: Detail of proposal

Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.	<p>The Schools' Forum Constitution, Membership and Work Programme are reviewed annually and brought to the Forum each July for consideration.</p> <p>At the Schools' Forum meeting on 16th June 2025 it was felt that following a period of change within the Local Authority (LA) and schools, it was a good opportunity to review the Schools' Forum work programme, terms of reference, number of meetings and reporting deadlines. It was proposed that a working group be established to review the terms of reference and work programme for presentation at the July meeting of the Schools' Forum (this was subsequently delayed to the Forum meeting in October to allow more time for the work to take place).</p> <p>A review of the membership was also undertaken to ensure if the split based on pupil numbers is still correct or needs to be changed.</p>
Proposals Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.	<p>Set out in Section 6 of the report.</p>
Evidence / Intelligence List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals,	<p>Set out in Section 5 and 6 of the report.</p>

Schools' Forum Task and Finish Group: Governance Review

communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.	
Alternatives considered / rejected Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.	Forum Members will be invited to suggest any changes which they deem necessary or desirable.

12. Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pupils across the school phases are fairly represented at the Schools' Forum.		Jessica Bailiss	The membership will be reviewed again in 2026.
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			.	
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Schools' Forum Task and Finish Group: Governance Review

Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sexual Orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

13. Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Areas of deprivation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Displaced communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Care experienced people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The Armed Forces Community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

14. Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	September 2025
Person Responsible for Review	Schools' Forum Task and Finish Group
Authorised By	

