

Dorset Schools' Forum

Date of Meeting:	27 March 2026
Report Title:	Annual Review of Schools' Forum Constitution and Election Procedure
Executive Director:	Paul Dempsey, Executive Director for People - Children
Corporate Director:	Jen Furnell, Corporate Director Education & Learning
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Presenting Officer:	Tom Easterbrook, Schools Forum Officer, Schools Finance and Support, People – Children Directorate
Report Status:	Public
Reason for Submission to Schools' Forum:	For CONSULTATION Under Forum power/responsibility: 2(g) Schools' Forum membership issues.
Recommendation(s):	Maintain the constitution of the Forum as currently drafted to protect against falling numbers on roll, thus ensuring the widest possible array of views contributes to the work of the Forum (see Appendix A) The cap on the number of representatives from each academy trust introduced from 1st September 2020 be updated in line with academy conversions (see Appendix B) Adopt proposed timelines for the election of Maintained Headteacher and Academy Representatives to ensure they can take up their seats in September 2026(see Appendix C) Forum members note the forthcoming election of chair and Vice chair and submit any nominations to the clerk no later than 26th June 2026
Reason for Recommendation(s):	To ensure continuous arrangements are in place for the Council to consult with a legally constituted body over decisions relating to the Schools' Budget as required by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and the Schools' Forum (England) Regulations 2012. To ensure academies and maintained schools are treated equally, and that the broadest possible spectrum of views of schools are represented at Schools' Forum meetings. To mitigate the risk to the smooth functioning of the Dorset Schools' Forum as it cannot conduct business without a chair or vice-chair in post. Should no

	members come forward, it is not possible under the regulations for officers to take these posts.
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	Schools' Forum members are reminded of their responsibility to make a declaration of interest in any agenda item in which they have an interest, to the Chair or the Clerk, preferably in advance of the meeting.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Review of Constitution

A review of the Dorset Schools' Forum Constitution is undertaken annually to make sure the legislative principles under the Schools' Forum (England) Regulations 2012 as amended by the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations continue to be observed. Numbers of seats to which each sector is entitled are adjusted annually as appropriate based on the prior October School Census.

The legislation makes clear that following sectors be accounted for within the makeup of a Schools' Forum:

- a) primary schools, middle schools, secondary schools and academies must be broadly proportionately represented on schools' forums, having regard to the total numbers of pupils registered at them.
- b) schools' members and academies members must together comprise at least two thirds of the membership of the forum.
- c) where the authority maintains one or more maintained special schools, at least one schools' member must be a representative of a maintained special school;
- d) where the authority maintains one or more learning centres, at least one schools' member must be a representative of a learning centre;
- e) the authority must appoint non-schools members comprising at least one person to represent early years providers, at least one person to represent post 16 providers, and may also appoint additional non-schools members to represent the interests of other bodies including trades unions, the Church of England and Roman Catholic dioceses in their area, and, where there are schools or academies in the area with a different religious character, the appropriate faith group.
- f) Schools' forums must have at least one member representing any special academies and at least one member representing alternative (AP) academies in a local authority's area.

The outcome of this year's review is attached at Appendix A. Although the review indicates that the number of school member places should be reduced from 15 to 14 the Schools Forum Operational Guide states that "Authorities will wish to take various issues into account in deciding the actual size, including the need to have full representation for various types of school". The Authority feels it is important to ensure that the good balance of views is brought to bear by the existing structure of School Members is maintained as Forum continues to grapple with complex challenges such as high needs funding and falling rolls.

The voluntary agreement to balance academy seats by phase will continue. While this is a statutory requirement when considering maintained representatives, the regulations do not set the same stipulation for academies.

On non-school members We propose no changes.

Term of Office and Mid-Cycle Appointments

As part of this year's review, Forum is invited to consider revisions to both the length of member terms and the treatment of mid-cycle appointments. The current two-year term often results in members developing expertise only towards the end of their tenure, leading to frequent reappointments and increased administrative effort. To strengthen continuity and ensure members have adequate time to engage with the increasing complexity of Forum business, the Authority proposes extending all terms of office to four years, aligning with standard school governance practice.

Forum is also asked to review the current approach to mid-cycle appointments. At present, members appointed part-way through a cycle serve only the remainder of the existing term. This can lead to disproportionately short service and limits the opportunity to build the knowledge required to contribute fully.

To ensure fairness and consistency, it is proposed that any member appointed mid-cycle is offered a full four-year term, with the usual option to resign earlier should circumstances require.

Forum is invited to discuss these proposals.

Academy representation

There are 14 academy trusts operating in Dorset, including single converters (for more detail see Appendix B). It was agreed in the March 2020 meeting that a cap on academy seats per academy trust be applied. This should reflect the proportion of the Dorset academy pupil population attending the academy trust.

Appendix B proposes the cap to be applied for 2062- to ensure the cap remains proportionate accounting for new academy conversions. Whilst most Dorset academy trusts would be restricted to one seat, there are 3 trusts where the cap be set at 2 seats.

The decision whether to introduce a restriction needs to be balanced against the difficulties always encountered recruiting academy representatives and engaging academy trust boards in the recruitment process.

Maintained Headteacher and Academy Representative Election

The biannual election of Maintained Headteacher and Academy Representatives is proposed to take place in line with the timeframe set out in Appendix C. The results will be shared at the next meeting in July 2026. Should no nominations be received, or vacancies remain after the closure of nominations, officers would seek to appoint eligible colleagues in line with the regulations.

Election of Chair & Vice Chair

In accordance with the Schools' Forum Working Practice, the Chair and the Vice Chair are elected at the last meeting of each calendar year, and re-elections are due at the next meeting in July.

Re-election of the same person on successive occasions is at the discretion of the Schools' Forum.

Nomination and voting procedures for both positions are attached at Appendix D, and elections will take place at our next meeting on 3rd July 2026

The core duties and responsibilities of Chair are as set out on page 2 of Appendix D, the Vice being required to deputise as necessary.

2. Financial Implications

None

3. Climate Implications

n/a

4. Other implications

Not Applicable

5. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: low

Residual Risk: low

This is a legislative issue in relation to the constitution of Schools' Forum which requires us to ensure that continuous arrangements are in place for the Council to consult with a legally constituted body over decisions relating to the Schools' Budget as required by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and the Schools' Forum (England) Regulations 2012, as amended

6. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

Not Applicable

7. Appendices

Appendix A: Annual Review of the Dorset Schools' Forum Constitution 2024

Appendix B: Proposed cap on occupation of seats by Dorset academy trusts from September 2024

Appendix C: Deadlines for election of maintained Head Teacher and Academy representatives to take up seats from September 2024

Appendix D: Voting and Nomination Procedures for the Election of Chair & Vice Chair

8. Background Papers

[Schools' Forum \(England\) Regulations 2012 as amended by subsequent School and Early Years Finance \(England\) Regulations](#)

[DfE Schools' Forum Operational and Good Practice Guide \(March 2021\)](#)

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.