

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Executive Director of Finance and Resources
Executive Director of Children and Public Health

To
Education Board
(School Forum Matters)
On
12th December 2023

Agenda
Item No.

Report prepared by:
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Review of Education Board and proposal to establish School Forum and Education Strategy Group.

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek to agree a decision in principle with regard to the setting up of Southend's School Forum, which will continue the work of the Education Board aligning with the existing school resources sub-group and a newly established Early Years Forum.
- 1.2 To support the establishment of the Education Strategy Group and associated forums including a new Head teachers SEND and Alternative Provision (SENDAP) Forum to run alongside the vulnerable learners and school performance sub-groups.
- 1.3 To agree a timescale which will see the elections to the School Forum taking place over the summer term 2024 with the new School Forum operating from September 2024.

2 Recommendations

Education Board (EB) are asked to note for 2023/24:

- 2.1 Education Board Business will continue to the end of the academic year 2023/24 and then transfer to the School Forum, following elections held in the summer 2024.
- 2.2 The Local Authority will hold an information workshop for all heads/principals/managers of education settings in the Spring term to ensure that providers understand the roles and responsibilities of sector representatives on the school forum so that nominations and potential representatives are fully informed of their roles and responsibilities.
- 2.3 The SENDAP and Early Years Forum will be established in the spring term to ensure full contribution to the new arrangements in September 2024.

2.4 The Education Strategy Group will also commence in September 2024.

3 Background

3.1 This paper follows on from the request to review the Education Board and its associated sub-groups. Southend Education Board has largely undertaken the function of a School Forum and has, through the work of sub-groups, enabled a degree of joint consultation regarding inclusion reviews, education actions, performance and strategic initiatives.

3.2 School Forum Purpose

The School Forum is established under powers contained within the Education Act 2002 and its powers and responsibilities are in accordance with The Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 and The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2021 which amended The Schools Forums (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

The School Forum is a statutory consultative body where Schools and Early Years Providers have decision-making powers which the Local Authority does not hold. The Local Authority has a duty to consult and propose changes, but decision-making largely falls to schools and providers. The exception to this is decision-making relates to the DSG High Needs Block expenditure, which falls under the Local Authority's remit. It is good practice, however, for the Local Authority to inform the School Forum of its decision-making in regard to High Needs arrangements and to provide a forum for collaborative working regarding high needs arrangements and funding. The School Forums powers and responsibilities are set out in appendix 1.

3.3 In discussing the Education Board functions with school leaders, it has become clear that there is a general lack of understanding across the sector in regard to the School Forum functions. The Southend Education landscape has changed in terms of its proportion of academies and community schools, and this is resulting in a need to review the membership of the Education Board, as School Forums must follow DFE guidelines in regard to representatives of the sector.

3.4 Given the need for re-elections to the board, it would seem timely to provide an information workshop to Education leaders to raise awareness of the School Forum Functions and representative roles and responsibilities. Workshops could also be provided for governors and trustees.

3.5 Education Board sub-groups

Southend has, through the sub-groups of the Education Board, developed consensus and collaboration around a number of key priority areas for schools. The resources sub-group has proved to be an effective mechanism for developing guidance and consultation in relation to the Dedicated Schools Grant budget planning, monitoring, and expenditure. The Vulnerable Learners sub-group and School Performance group have shown where collective action

can add value, over and above the efforts of individual schools, academies, colleges and MATs.

3.6 However, following consultation with Heads and leaders in education it is recognised that the current Education Board structure which combines all the education strategic work with the statutory functions of the school forum roles does not allow for full engagement of leaders in strategic work, particularly in regard to the development of citywide strategic education policy and actions. There are requests to establish an Early Years Forum to enhance EYFS/setting engagement and a SENDAP forum.

3.7 As such the review proposes to revise the Education Board into a School Forum alongside the establishment of a broader representative Education Strategy Group. Establishing an Education Strategy Group is also in response to the changing role of the local authority in the new educational landscape alongside a national emphasis on the development of system leadership within schools and trusts. Appendix 2 outlines the proposed structures of the forums and associated groups.

3.8 **Educational Strategy Group Purpose**

The purpose of the Education Strategy Group (ESG) will be to provide strategic direction to educational partnership activity across the city of Southend, working with the Primary and Secondary Headteachers Forum, Education School forum and other partnership groups. It will provide strategic direction for identified partnerships, collaboration programmes and funded projects. The ESG will promote high standards and inclusive practice to support educational progress and outcomes for all, including the most vulnerable children, children with special educational needs and disabilities and those with additional needs.

The ESG will respond to and seek to influence national policy and share local and national best practice with partners, pursue opportunities to work together to develop practice in Southend on Sea. The group will replace the functions of the Education Board that are not captured by the designated school forum terms of reference. This will enable the ESG to have a greater number of schools and Trusts directly involved in strategic decision making as all schools and colleges will be invited to join. The ESG will seek to influence relevant wider local authority and community issues and provide input from an education perspective as appropriate, for example input to the Area SEND Partnership Board and the Health and Well-being Board.

Conversations with Schools and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) have shown that there continues to be a desire to maintain and build on relationships between schools, trusts and the local authority. There is an appetite locally to further develop local collective arrangements and the ESG will provide a vehicle through which education providers and wider stakeholders can take forward well founded joint projects, hold arrangements to account and ensure that system resources can be effectively deployed across Southend for the benefit of children and young people.

It is proposed that in addition to the vulnerable learners and school performance sub- groups which will feed into the ESG, a SENDAP Forum for Headteachers/ CEO/ Principals is required to capture the work around High Needs Block resource deployment and associated projects. The SENDAP Forum will build upon the work of the inclusion review and link with the Area SEND Partnership Board.

- 3.9 An Early Years Forum for settings will also be established. This will form the mechanism for consultation around the DSG Early Years Funding arrangements and therefore feed directly into the School Forum. All Early Years Settings, Childminders and Nurseries will be members of the Early Years Forum, along with partnership groups. The forum will provide a vehicle through which Early Years citywide strategic developments, projects and policy can be developed. The Early Years forum will also have a representative presence on the Education Strategy Group and nominated representatives on the School Forum.
- 3.10 The establishment of the Education Strategic partnership will support greater ownership of citywide education policy and practice, enabling a greater number of education settings to be actively involved and represented. The ESG will continue to provide updates to School Forum, where appropriate

4 Appendices

Appendix 1 - School Forum Information
Appendix 2 - Infographic