



**Shaw  
Education  
Trust**

# **Information for new or prospective Academy Councillors**

## **ACADEMY COUNCILLOR INTRODUCTION INFORMATION**

This document briefly outlines the roles and responsibilities of being an academy councillor in the Shaw Education Trust, and some initial information that may be useful to you as a new councillor or perhaps as someone considering applying for the role. There is obviously a great deal in terms of other documentation that you can refer to in due time when/if needed and you don't need to know it all straight away. There is lots to familiarise yourself with but there are plenty of support mechanisms you will be able to use. There is always someone who can direct you to what you want and your Academy will run you through an induction, if you choose to apply and are successful in that application.

The key people for you to liaise with will be:

- Chair of the Academy Council
- Governance Professional (clerk)
- Principal and/or other Academy staff
- SET Director of Governance

Your Council will help you with any contact information you need to use. Whether you have applied already and have joined one of our Academy Councils, or are considering doing so, we thank you for your interest.

## **OUR GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

We believe in transparency and accountability within our academies and between each Academy and the Trust. The Board will provide support and challenge as required, with the aim of enabling each Academy to work towards earned autonomy.

Local governance and accountability is secured through our system of Academy Councils, with the Trust Board retaining overall legal control of its academies in line with Department for Education and Education Funding Agency expectations.

### **Our three levels of Governance**

#### **Members**

Our Trust Members are 'guardians of the governance of the Trust'. They are tasked with assessing if the Board of Trustees is performing well and ensuring that the charitable object is being fulfilled. Whilst they have a limited and distinct role, it is nevertheless an important one.

## **Trustees**

The Shaw Education Trust Board and its sub-committees, are responsible for delivering the three core governance functions, making key decisions and conducting the business of the Trust.

## **Local Academy Councils**

Each Academy within the Trust has a local Academy Council which meet during the academic year to carry out its core function, as below.

## **PURPOSE OF GOVERNANCE**

In its [Academy Trust Governance Guide](#) the DfE note that the purpose of governance in trusts is to provide:

- Strategic leadership
- Accountability and assurance
- Strategic engagement

Within Shaw Education Trust, we have encapsulated these core functions into our own single core function which not only covers the DfE expectations, but rightly, in our view, incorporates the link to our stakeholders. Our core function of governance at local level is therefore:

“To be responsible for supporting and challenging our Academy and Trust leaders, ensuring that decisions made at a local level are for the benefit of pupils, and directly linked to the strategic vision of the Academy and Trust. To ensure these decisions consider the views of our other stakeholders (parents, staff and local community) and effective communication exists between all. These decisions centre mainly around areas of educational standards & provision, and operational functions, as detailed in the Scheme of Delegation.”

The effectiveness of our Academy Councils rests and depends on the skills, commitment and knowledge of its members and how they work together and with Trust and school leaders.

To support our Academy Councillors, both new and experienced, we have a range of information which can be accessed via your Chair and Governance Professional (clerk) and on our 'Governor Hub' platform.

## ETHOS, VISION AND VALUES

It is important that every member of the Academy Council understands the Trust's values; these are:

- To be pupil and people centred
- To act with integrity
- To be innovative
- To be best in class
- To be accountable

There is further information about our values [here](#).

It is assumed that all Academy Councillors will fulfil their role in line with legal requirements as per the [DfE Academy Trust Governance Guide](#) as well as [The Seven Principles of Public Life](#).

<b>Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)</b>	<b>Competency Framework Personal Attributes</b>
Selflessness	Committed
Integrity	Confident
Objectivity	Curious
Accountability	Challenging
Openness	Collaborative
Honesty	Critical
Leadership	Creative

## OUR ACADEMY COUNCILS

### What is an Academy Councillor?

Each Academy within SET has a local governing body known as an Academy Council that has a set of delegated powers from the main SET Board of Trustees (the 'Board'). The duties and responsibilities are always set out in the Scheme of Delegation which is different in every Academy Trust. The Academy Council is accountable to the SET Board through the chair and minutes of its meetings. Trustees are kept informed of progress at each Academy through summaries from Academy Council meetings.

Information about our Trustees can be found [here](#)

## **Composition of our Academy Councils**

The expectation is that an Academy Council will comprise of:

- Two elected parents of pupils at the Academy known as Parent Academy Councillors,
- Two employees of the Academy known as Staff Councillors. This should be one teacher and one support staff member, elected by employees of the Academy.
- At least two other\* Academy Councillors, whose appointments must be nominated by the Academy Council and then authorised by the Shaw Education Trust. \*Other in this context refers to non Parent or Staff Academy Councillors.
- The Principal of the Academy (ex-officio)

The Shaw Education Trust reserve to the right to add any number of Academy Councillors as they see fit in addition to these categories.

## **The role of a Parent Councillor**

A Parent Academy Councillor is a representative of the parent body at the school and is not a representative for the parents. This is an important distinction.

Effective governance relies on active participation and curiosity and the role of the Parent Academy Councillor brings an important voice to the board.

The role of Parent Academy Councillor is not – and should not – be any different to that of any other Academy Councillor.

Parents are not elected to lobby the Academy Council (AC) or to argue the case for their own child(ren) but to bring a parent perspective to the discussions and activities undertaken by the AC. This is sometimes not easy which is why the Parent Academy Councillors need to be fully cognisant of the Trust's Code of Conduct, confidentiality, have undertaken governance training and commit to attending meetings which are mostly after school hours. The role is unpaid. The role can also be very rewarding in terms of increasing and widening your knowledge of the school and the role the Academy Councillors should play in school improvement.

### What does an effective Academy Councillor need to do?

This isn't a limited list but some of the basic expectations are set as below. Councillors need to:

- Attend meetings (and offer apologies if unable to attend)
- Participate in questioning and discussions
- Participate in relevant training/knowledge enhancement
- Engage fully with expectations using Governor Hub (online platform) in preparation for meetings and in general role
- Engage and support in the life of the school by attending event(s) as appropriate
- Understand the context of the school including:
  - Ofsted grading and relevant 'assessment' reports
  - Development priorities of the school and areas of risk
  - Scope and nature of curriculum taught
  - Safeguarding processes
  - Financial position of the budget
  - Headline performance data, i.e. exam results etc.

(Don't worry about what looks like a long list of 'things to know'. We have mechanisms which allow councillors to have summary information and ensure this is not an overwhelming task. You will develop knowledge over time and have lots of support. Part of that support is membership of online resources and learning tools, such as NGA (National Governance Association) and Flick Learning (online training modules mainly around safeguarding, H&S, and data management))

- Adhere to the Trust's Code of Conduct and all relevant policies
- Adhere to the Trust's safeguarding policy
- Act for the benefit of stakeholders (pupils, parents, staff and community)
- Respect confidentiality
- Keep their business and pecuniary interests forms up to date including any governor roles in other schools and settings

## Information for new or prospective Academy Councillors

All Academy Councillors have:

- A duty to act in the best interests of the pupils and young people at the school
- No legal authority to act individually except where the Academy Council has given explicit permission, and this is clearly referred to in the minutes; equally
- No Academy Councillor has the right to make staffing decisions independently of the Academy Council unless they have the express permission of the executive leadership team e.g. the removal of a senior member of staff
- Equal status and equal voice
- A responsibility for determining, monitoring and keeping under review the broad policies, plans and procedures of the school
- A duty to ensure that governance is open, transparent and fair
- To only make decisions which are affordable, legal and necessary

### What Academy Councillors should NOT do:

- Discuss their own child's (or those of friends and family) problems or issues at a meeting, (if a parent of a school pupil)
- Discuss the business and decisions discussed at the meetings with other members of the school community or breach confidentiality in any way
- Engage in negative social media about the school
- Act on behalf of the school (unless delegated to do so)

### Link Academy Councillors

The Trust requires that each Academy Council shall appoint from among its members, individuals with specific responsibilities i.e. link councillors. The assigned areas where there must or should be a link councillor are as follows:

- Each AC **must** have a Safeguarding link;
- Each AC **should** have a SEND link (Special Schools may decide to have a particular aspect of SEND allocated to this councillor);
- Each AC **should** have a 'Statutory grants', i.e. Pupil Premium and/or Disadvantaged Pupils link.

## Information for new or prospective Academy Councillors

Link areas are assigned/confirmed at the start of each academic year, with one councillor allocated to each of the above areas carrying out the following 4 steps each term for their chosen/assigned area:

1. Pre-read documentation uploaded onto Gov Hub, especially comparing previous dashboards, on the assigned aspect prior to a meeting.
2. Prepare up to 3 questions to ask during the meeting.
3. Participate in one aspect of training/knowledge development on this area each term/year.
4. Share information on any relevant training/meeting attended on this aspect onto Gov Hub which may be useful to AC.

Your Chair will discuss this with the Council. Don't worry about volunteering for an aspect that you aren't very experienced in. This will help you develop your skills and knowledge and there is always plenty of support around you.

## USEFUL DOCUMENTATION

(Don't panic! You don't have to read them all. Some guidance on each is also given to help) Your Chair or GP will direct you to where you can find these.

Document	Notes
Governance Guidance	The DfE has produced an <a href="#">Academy Trust Governance Guide</a> . SET have their own Governance Handbooks and Part 3 is all about Local Governance and covers composition of Academy Councils, responsibilities, etc.
Code of Conduct	Covers the 'do's' and 'don'ts' of how we all conduct ourselves in our roles and there is a specific one for Academy Councillors
Scheme of Delegation	This lays out all the responsibilities across the Trust and highlights who takes lead role and what actions each carry out, including Academy Councils.
Conflict of Interest Policy	Worth reading so you know if you have to declare anything that may put you in a position of conflict with governance business
Acceptable Use Policy	This covers use of information technology by all adults, including social media used privately.



## Information for new or prospective Academy Councillors

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE)	The KCSiE is a DfE document and familiarisation of this document is important. Councillors declare at the start of each year that they have read parts 1 & 2.
SET Safeguarding Policy	This is similar to KCSiE and will be on your Academy's website. It's a little more bespoke to our Trust and your Academy than KCSiE.