



Information for new or prospective Academy Councillor

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 Safeguarding & 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.

1. 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

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

2. Purpose of Governance

The recognised core functions of governance as stated by the DfE are:

1. *Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.*
2. *Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff*
3. *Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.*

Within SET we have 'reshaped' these statements to encapsulate not only these functions but also embracing our community engagement. Therefore, within our SET Academies, the core function of governance is as follows:

"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.

At the Shaw Education Trust, part of the overall governance is delegated to the Academy Councils and this is set out in our Scheme of Delegation which can be viewed alongside other aspects of our work on our [website](#).

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 (see below).

3. Ethos, Vision and Values

It is important that every member of the Academy Council understand 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](#).

The Department for Education has a Competency Framework for Governance

comprising of 16 competencies. Do not be put off by believing you will personally need to do everything in the framework!

These competencies are based on the Nolan Principles – [Seven Principles of Public Life](#)

Selflessness / Integrity / Objectivity / Accountability / Openness / Honesty / Leadership

In turn, these principles are underpinned by the following “7 C’s” which all Academy Councillors should demonstrate to a greater or lesser extent and you will grow in confidence over time.

Committed / Confident / Curious / Challenging / Collaborative / Critical / Creative

It is a good idea to think about what these principles and values mean to you personally as this will help the Academy Council demonstrate a range of perspectives.

The DfE governance competencies are grouped under the headings of the six features of effective governance practice, which are set out in the handbook. The elements of effective practice are:

Strategic leadership / Accountability / People / Structures / Compliance / Evaluation

4. What is an Academy Councillor?

Each Academy with 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 SoD 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 the role of the SET Representatives who attend full Academy Council meetings termly and SET’s Director of Safeguarding & Governance.

Information about our Trustees and our sponsor the Shaw Trust can be found [here](#).

5. Composition of our Academy Councils

The expectation is that an Academy Council will comprise of:

- At least two **Co-opted Academy Councillors**, whose appointments must be agreed by initially the Academy Council and then authorised by the Shaw Education Trust. (Whilst two is a minimum, in most ACs co-opted councillors make up the highest percentage.)
- Minimum of two elected parents of a pupil at the Academy known as **Parent Academy Councillors**,
- Two employees of the Academy known as **Staff Councillors**. This usually

comprises one teacher and one support staff member, elected by employees of the Academy.

- 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.

6. 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 and the parents can play a key part in helping the Local Advisory Board fulfil its various responsibilities.
- 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 and other 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.

7. 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)
- Participates in questioning and discussions
- Takes responsibility for an aspect of school governance reading relevant material prior to meetings
- Participates in relevant training/knowledge enhancement
- Engages fully with expectations using Governor Hub (online platform) in preparation for meeting and in general role
- Engages and supports in the life of the academy by attending event(s) as appropriate
- Understand the context of the school including:
 - Ofsted grading and relevant 'assessment' reports
 - Development priorities of the Academy 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

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 academy
- A duty to ensure that governance is open, transparent and fair
- To only make decisions which are affordable, legal and necessary

8. 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 an Academy 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)

9. Link Academy Councillors

The Trust requires that each Academy Councillor supports their Council by taking responsibility for at least one aspect of school 'performance/life' and carries out the four following steps:

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.

You 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.

A Link Councillor that must exist is **Safeguarding**, and it is strongly recommended to have **SEND** and **Disadvantaged Pupils** links.

10. 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 Handbooks	The DfE has a Governance handbook and so do we. The SET one is the better to familiarise yourself with. It is in various parts of which Part 3 covers Academy Councils, and covers composition of 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 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 ACs. (Formerly Delegated Accountability Framework up to summer 2022)
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.
Keeping Children Safe in Education	The KCSiE is a DfE document and familiarisation of this document is important. Councillors declare at start of each year that they had 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.



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**Pupil &
people
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**Act with
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**Be
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**Be best
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**Be
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