

STATUTORY PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES TO SCHOOLS AND THE WORK OF THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE

1. What is a Statutory Proposal?

The Local Education Authority (or the Governing Bodies of Foundation and Voluntary Schools) are under a duty, when considering certain changes such as the change in standard number, reorganisation, enlargement, closure or establishment of a school, to consult formally on the proposal. This takes the form of the publication of a legal notice: a statutory notice, which has to be published in local newspapers and posted in, and in the vicinity of the school(s) affected for a period of two months. During this two month period, objections can be made to the statutory proposal and can be sent either to the proposing authority or to the secretary of the School Organisation Committee. The proposing authority is also required to provide background information explaining why the proposal is being made.

2. What is the School Organisation Committee?

The Buckinghamshire School Organisation Committee (SOC) has the responsibility of making decisions on proposals relating to changes to schools and also has the responsibility to approve the Buckinghamshire School Organisation Plan. The SOC is not a committee of the LEA. It is a separate statutory body which brings together the key partners in the provision of education at a local level, giving each an equal voice. The representative groups on the SOC are:

- The Local Education Authority
- The Local Church of England Diocese
- The Local Roman Catholic Schools Commission
- The Learning and Skills Council (for changes affecting post-16 education)
- Schools

3. Who is the Schools Adjudicator?

School Adjudicators are appointed by the Secretary of State to take decisions on School Organisation Plans, individual proposals for changes to schools or issues relating to school admission arrangements where it has not been possible to resolve the matter at a local level. If, for example, the SOC has not been able to come to a unanimous decision on proposals to close two schools and to establish a new school different size and character taking their place (an "amalgamation"), then the matter is referred to the Schools Adjudicator for decision.

4. What consultation is required prior to a change in school organisation?

The practice in Buckinghamshire is to carry out an initial informal phase of consultation which, in the case of a proposed school amalgamation, would involve the wide circulation of a document setting out the proposals and the reasons for those proposals along with the opportunity for staff, parents and members of the community to meet with the Governors, Authority (and Diocese if appropriate) to talk about the proposals, to gain more information and to ask questions.

Subsequently, and if it appears that the proposal is a sensible one which has widespread support, the proposing authority will then publish a statutory notice along with supporting information and there will be an objection period of two months in which objections to the proposals may be made. Depending on the nature of the proposal, and whether there have

been any objections received, the matter will be decided either by the LEA or will be referred to the Buckinghamshire SOC.

5. How do I object to a statutory proposal?

The proposing authority is obliged under the regulations to set out the arrangements through which an objection may be made to the proposal. Objections should be sent to the secretary of the School Organisation Committee, Legal Department, County Hall, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP20 1UZ.

6. Who decides on the proposals?

For all proposals, other than those relating to changes in standard numbers, the proposing authority may decide the proposal, provided no objections have been received during the statutory objection period. For proposals relating to a change in standard number, or for proposals where there has been an objection received, the matter comes to the Buckinghamshire SOC for decision. For such proposals, a unanimous decision on the part of all five representative groups is required. If this cannot be achieved, the proposal must then be sent to the Schools Adjudicator for a decision.

7. How do I find out about meetings of the School Organisation Committee?

The Buckinghamshire SOC meets in public on a regular basis in order to carry out its work, including the approval of the School Organisation Plan and the determination of statutory notices.

Details of future meetings may be obtained from Helen Wayland, Clerk to the School Organisation Committee, County Hall, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP20 1UZ, tel. (01296) 382101, e-mail hwayland@buckscc.gov.uk .

The Committee is also prepared to receive verbal input at its meetings from members of the public and, to this end, a Buckinghamshire School Organisation Committee Speaking Protocol has been drawn up which is available upon request from the Clerk to the School Organisation Committee.