

**Reminder Letter**  
**Spring Term 2005 Meetings for Headteachers with Director of Education/  
Director of Children's Services**

Here are the dates for the spring term headteacher meetings. The meetings begin at 4.30pm with refreshments available from 4.15pm.

Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> January	Attleborough High School
Thursday 27 <sup>th</sup> January	Easton College
Tuesday 1 <sup>st</sup> February	WNPDC, King's Lynn
Wednesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> February	Reepham High School
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> February	The Imperial Hotel, Great Yarmouth
Wednesday 9 <sup>th</sup> February	PDC, Norwich

The agenda:

**Local Issues**

- For local Headteachers to raise via your local School Improvement Support Officer.

**Norfolk Issues**

- Pupil Management Information System – E1 to replace Phoenix Gold (paper attached).
- Freedom of Information – Law in place from 1 January 2005 (paper attached).
- Future Ways of working/communicating (paper attached, for group discussion at the meeting).

Paper copies of these three papers will be available at the meetings if you require them.

If you have not already done so, would you please inform Melanie Waite of which meeting you will be attending, on telephone 01603 223397, fax 01603 223838 or preferably by email to [melanie.waite@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:melanie.waite@norfolk.gov.uk).

## Briefing Note

### **PUPIL MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM – E1 TO REPLACE PHOENIX GOLD**

- Phoenix Gold is being upgraded by the supplier Pearson Phoenix. Phoenix Gold will stop being supported by the supplier during 2006.
- Norfolk has started the process of upgrading the existing Phoenix Gold product to the new Phoenix E1 product.
- The upgraded product, Phoenix E1, retains all the existing user functionality of Phoenix Gold and also contains some additional functionality. E1 has a similar look and feel to Phoenix Gold.
- Technically Phoenix E1 is significantly different to Phoenix Gold as it is web based rather than being based on software that is run on each school's local system.
- The most significant advantage to a school of Phoenix E1 is therefore its technical simplification whilst retaining its range of functionality and flexibility.
- The main benefits of Phoenix E1 could be described as:
  - web based thus centrally managed/upgraded system
  - single pupil record thus easing pupil record keeping
  - local flexibility of reporting retained
  - similar functionality including curriculum delivery and personalised learning plans
  - a "whole school" system including facilities for managers, administrators and teachers
  - web based delivery enables access outside of the school
  - improved information flow between schools and between schools and the LEA
  - integrated with new personnel/payroll system
- It has been agreed with the Schools Forum that a trial should be undertaken to confirm the benefits of Phoenix E1, identify Norfolk specific issues and assist with the planning of the roll out to other Norfolk schools.
- A selected group of schools have been invited to participate in the initial trial. The trial will be undertaken this term and next.
- It is expected that the roll out of Phoenix E1 upgrade will commence in the Autumn Term 2005.
- Karen Atkinson will be managing this phase of the project. Any questions can be addressed to her on [karen.atkinson@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:karen.atkinson@norfolk.gov.uk) or at 01603 638004.

## **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT**

### **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION - CHECKLIST FOR ACTION ON RECEIPT OF A REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

- Decide whether the request is a request under DPA, EIR or FOI
- Decide whether the school holds the information or whether the request should be transferred to another body if the information is held by them
- Provide the information if it has already been made public
- Inform the enquirer if the information is not held
- Consider whether a third party's interests might be affected by disclosure and if so consult them
- Consider whether any exemptions apply and whether they are absolute or qualified
- Carry out a public interest test to decide if applying the qualified exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information
- Decide whether the estimated cost of complying with the request will exceed the appropriate limit (still to be agreed but expected to be around £500)
- If a request is made for a document that contains exempt personal information ensure that the personal information is removed by applying the redaction procedure
- Consider whether the request is vexatious or repeated

#### **Remember**

Schools are under a duty to provide advice and assistance to anyone requesting information.

The enquirer is entitled to be told whether the school holds the information (the duty to confirm or deny) except where certain exemptions apply.

A well managed records and management information system is essential to help schools to meet requests.

Requests should be dealt with within 20 working days excluding school holidays.

Wilfully concealing, damaging or destroying information in order to avoid answering an enquiry is an offence. A valid FOI request should be in writing, state the enquirer's name and correspondence address and describe the information requested.

Expressions of dissatisfaction should be handled through the school's existing complaints procedure.

#### **Earlier comprehensive advice from the DfES**

In late October 2004 the DfES sent all schools the following comprehensive guidance.

- Freedom of Information Act 2000 - **Guide for maintained schools on full implementation from January 2005.**

- Freedom of Information - **Checklist for action on receipt of a request for information.**
- Freedom of Information - **What does it mean for us?** (An introductory training session).
- Freedom of Information Act 2000 - **Summary guidance for governing bodies**
- Records Management Society - **Retention guidelines for schools**

**The information previously provided by the DfES is available on esinet by going to MI Sheet 255/04**

(<http://www.esinet.norfolk.gov.uk/cadmin/misheet/display04.asp?ID=76>)

### **Dealing with requests for information from 1st January 2005**

Schools currently deal with numerous requests for information from parents and others.

- You may receive requests for information contained within your Publication Scheme. These can be dealt with simply by advising applicants where they may obtain information already published.
- Some requests may be for personal data relating to individual pupils. These will need to be dealt with, as at present, under the Data Protection Act.
- It is important that requests for information continue to be dealt with as normal on a day-to-day operational basis. If a request is for information that you would normally supply, continue to do so and do not treat it as an access request under Freedom of Information.
- Freedom of Information access requests are likely to arise if they relate to information you hold but do not normally supply.
- If you decide to refuse a written request for any information you hold this will immediately fall into the scope of FOI and you will need to refer to the guidance above.

### **Further help and advice**

General advice and guidance on Freedom of Information issues will be available from the Education Department by sending an e-mail to **FOI.edu@norfolk.gov.uk**. Legal advice on more complex access issues relating to specific requests will be provided by the Council's Legal Services as part of the subscription service purchased by schools. Schools not in the subscription service will need to contact the alternative sources of legal advice that they currently use.

## **Improving Our Communication Channels (Discussion Paper)**

As we change on 1<sup>st</sup> February from an Education Service to a Children's Service, we will be working more closely with new partners. This gives us an opportunity to reflect on what we currently do to communicate with each other and to consider what we could do to improve communications between schools and other schools and also between schools and the County Council and other agencies. This discussion paper describes the communication channels that we currently use for sharing, discussing and consulting on issues. It then makes some suggestions for future arrangements and invites comment.

### **Current Channels of Communication**

A description of some of the ways that we currently use to communicate with each other is set out in annex 1.

### **Challenges for the Future**

The creation of a Children's Services Department and a greater expectation of local working provides an opportunity to think about new structures to facilitate the dialogue required.

The model for local working is now being defined with 5 areas. A map showing these proposals can be found on Esinet. The thinking and discussion will need to reflect

- the multi-agency approach set out in the Children Act and involving, amongst others, health and voluntary agencies.
- the Strategic Area Review of Post 16 Education that is proposing a collaborative curriculum model where the secondary schools and FE colleges and other providers will work together to provide a co-ordinated curriculum entitlement for the young people in their areas.
- the Special Needs Review that is looking at how to set up Centres of Excellence for special needs provision and area SEN partnerships and the model has a local dimension.

The Audit Commission school survey shows some areas for improvement based on your answers to their questions. These include involving more Headteachers in policy development, improving communications about SEN, improving access to services and management support.

Feedback from Headteachers about the Headteacher meetings and the partnership groups suggests:

- twilight meetings are not the best time for fruitful discussion.
- Information shared by representative Headteachers at a meeting is not always getting back to Headteachers as a whole.
- there is poor attendance at Headteacher and partnership meetings.
- Communication around the representative groups can be slow.
- Secondary Headteachers do not attend the Headteacher meetings because they perceive the agenda and attendance is dominated by primary phase issues.
- We could make more use of the Cluster Chairs' meeting.

We have an opportunity to look at the nature and pattern of meetings that take place.

Proposals to address identified issues include :-

- meetings in the five local areas or 13 localities to reflect the proposed new local working arrangements and discuss local operational issues that can come together in wider area groupings from time to time for more strategic discussions.
- more time spent looking at strategy, policy and service improvement issues to ensure a wider engagement in these matters
- residential conferences for headteachers, possibly in area groups and with other agencies to give more time for in depth discussion about important issues.
- daytime rather than twilight for meetings in three sections - primary phase/both phases/secondary phase.

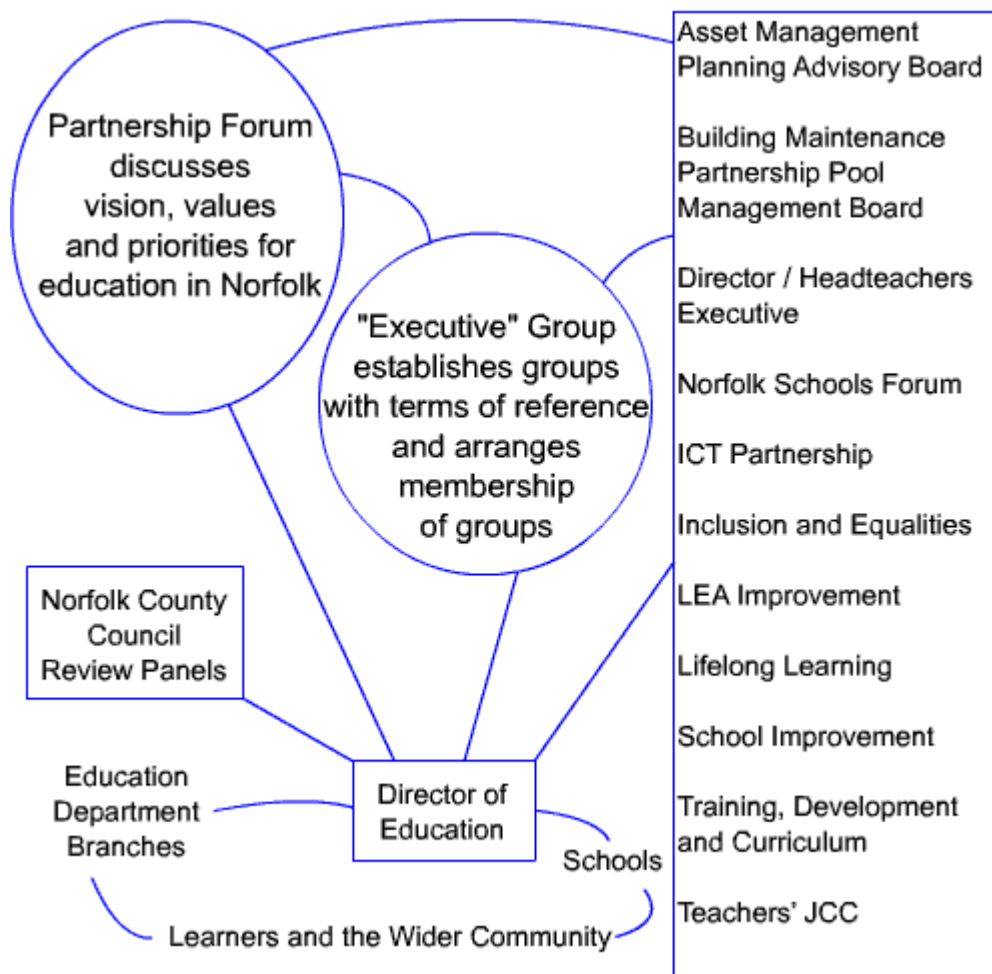
#### Some questions for discussion

1. What improvements/suggestions could be made to improve Headteacher meetings?
2. What improvements could be made to the Improvement Partnership structure to revitalise it and include the other agencies who are not currently included?
3. What could be done to improve the internal communication within representative groups?

David Lennard Jones  
6 January 2005

## Annex 1

The structure for the partnership is as follows:-



All the details for the Partnership can be found on esinet, ([www.norfolkesinet.org.uk](http://www.norfolkesinet.org.uk) > school management and Governance > Improvement Partnership)

- ◆ Six area headteacher meetings are held each term with an open invitation to all Headteachers to attend. These meetings have provided a forum for the sharing of information and also for dialogue between the Director of Education and Headteachers. Attendance is about 30%
- ◆ There is an annual headteacher conference that brings headteachers together for a shared experience at the beginning of the school year. Attendance has been about 60%.
- ◆ Cluster chair meetings are held once a term and provide an opportunity for each local cluster of headteachers to send a representative to a county meeting with Senior Officers. Attendance is usually more than 70%.
- ◆ Most school cluster headteachers meet on a termly basis, some meet more often. These meetings are organised by local headteachers. During the summer and autumn of 2004 a senior officer offered to visit each of the 45 clusters to provide information and answer questions about the emerging Children's Act and the implications for Norfolk. With a handful of exceptions, all the clusters were visited.

- ◆ Every school has its regular meetings with its Review and Development Adviser and contact when required with the local School Improvement Support Officer.
- ◆ GLEAP meetings are held 10 times a year and provide an opportunity for governors to meet with senior officers and local county councillors to discuss matters of mutual interest.
- ◆ Norfolk Education Improvement Partnership provides a framework of meetings (see diagram overleaf) within which Headteacher representatives elected through the Norfolk Association of Secondary Headteachers (NASH), Schools in Norfolk at the Primary Phase (SNAPP) and Norfolk Association of Special School Heads (NASSH), Joint Consultative Council (JCC), Norfolk Governors Network (NGN) and Senior Officers meet together to share thoughts about emerging policy, strategy and operational issues that affect schools and the County Council as a whole. Each of the representative organisations has its own internal communication channels for ensuring that its constituents are kept informed and involved in the discussions as they take place.
- ◆ Teacher and Governor organisations representatives sit on the Education and Cultural Services Review Panel and on the Member Area Working Groups. These groups provide an interface between elected members and schools.
- ◆ The weekly e-courier provides information for schools, this can be accessed by Headteachers, Governors and other staff and is no longer password controlled so can be reached from any computer with internet access.
- ◆ Norfolk Agenda is produced by the Governor Support Service and is circulated to all Governors on a termly basis.
- ◆ Norfolk Agenda is produced four times a year by the County Council Communications Unit for circulation to County Council staff. Schools are included in the circulation.
- ◆ Your Norfolk is the County Council publication produced 5 times a year and delivered to every household.