

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Children and Young People

**SUBJECT:** Standard School Year Joint Consultation with Greater Merseyside Local Authorities

**WARDS:** Borough-wide

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

**1.1** To provide information regarding a proposed joint consultation with the Learn Together Partnership to implement the standard school year from September 2010.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDED: That**

**(1) Halton participates in the joint consultation process.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**3.1** The standard school year, which is championed by the Local Government Association (LGA), requires splitting the school year into six terms of roughly equal length and fixes them, regardless of the Easter celebration.

The benefits of this are as follows:

- o Schools can plan more effectively and teachers have more time to deliver the curriculum, which is essential in examination years.
  - o Achieve greater predictability for schools.
  - o Achieve greater predictability for parents to plan holidays, therefore avoiding clashes with school term time. This may have a positive impact on attendance.
- 3.2** In May 2008, Liverpool City Council tabled a proposal at the Greater Merseyside Directors of Children's Services meeting to conduct a joint consultation across all Greater Merseyside Local Authorities (LAs) to implement this change. The Director's present agreed in principle to this proposal.
- 3.3** The principles of the proposal are as follows:

- o All terms will start on a Monday (except where a bank holiday prevents this, in which case term will start on a Tuesday).
  - o October half term will always be the last full week in October.
  - o February half term will always be third full week in February.
  - o The Easter Break will be moved and replaced by fixed holiday at the beginning of April, and will be known as the Spring Break. This will always be the first two full weeks in April and will not move with the Easter celebration. Where the Easter celebration falls outside the spring break, it will still be observed by the two bank holidays for Good Friday and Easter Monday
  - o Where the school is open for part of the week it will be for a minimum of 3 days.
- 3.4 Liverpool City Council is piloting this system for 2009-10 academic year.
- 3.5 All Local Authorities in the Learn Together Partnership have been invited to be part of this joint proposal. At Halton's request, Cheshire has also been invited.
- 3.6 Progress by Local Authorities so far is as follows:
- o Knowsley, Sefton & Liverpool have agreed to participate in joint consultation for 2010-11.
  - o St Helens have submitted a report to Executive Board on 1<sup>st</sup> October for permission to participate in joint consultation for 2010-11.
  - o Wirral – No decisions have been made.
  - o Warrington – A working group has been set up with Head Teachers and Trade Unions representatives to discuss.
  - o Cheshire- No response received to date regarding their position on this issue.
- 3.7 The Learn Together Partnership group convened specifically to discuss this proposal and have agreed it is crucial to have consistency across all those LAs involved. It has also been agreed that each LA will coordinate its own consultation but based on agreed joint documentation and timescales. Therefore a consultation letter has been drafted for all LAs involved to use. This will be headed with all LA logos and have a pro-forma for stakeholders to return. (Draft attached in Appendix 1).
- 3.8 It has been agreed that the consultation process will begin the week commencing 3<sup>rd</sup> November, with a coordinated press launch, and a closing date of 18<sup>th</sup> December.
- 3.9 Business Support and Commissioning Department will take the lead on this consultation with stakeholders in line with the agreed plan with other LA's.

- 3.10 The following methods could be utilised for this consultation process:
- Pupil post
  - E-Circular for schools
  - CYPD Link
  - In Touch magazine
  - Article in local media
  - Centralised email address for comments
  - Section on Internet with interactive on-line pro-forma
  - Section on Intranet with interactive on-line pro-forma
  - Flyers/Posters in key locations
  - News article on Intranet and Internet
  - Inclusion of issue on Halton 2000 Citizens Panel
  - Letter to Chair of Governors
  - Letter to Diocese and Archdiocese
  - Letter to Trade Unions
  - Letter to PCT
  - Letter to local Chamber of Commerce
- 3.11 Liverpool and Knowsley intend mailing all parents via the pupil post. But may consider posting this to the home address. All to be discussed on 10<sup>th</sup> October, Learn Together Partnership meeting.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The consultation exercise would incur a cost in printing and stationery. It is proposed that the letters be distributed to every pupil to every pupil as this will cost approximately £1400, as opposed to in excess of £6,000 were letters to be posted to each parent.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Halton would need to liaise with the Diocesan Authorities as to their intention and timescale for their consideration.
- 5.2 If Halton implemented this change and Easter ever fell outside the fixed spring break in April this could have an additional financial implication to parents. Currently, the holidays incorporate the Easter bank holidays, but in this instance, there would be the bank holidays plus two full weeks where childcare could be an issue. As a result, an extra two days childcare may be needed. Looking ahead to the next eight years, this would be the case in 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2016.
- 5.3 As part of the "Every Lesson Counts" initiative, Liverpool City Council currently has an arrangement with several travel agents so that if parents book their holidays within the agreed school holidays, they receive a

discount. This will be investigated with the intention to extend it across all LAs involved with this proposal.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCILS PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children and Young People**

Coordinating school holiday patterns across the region will enable children and families who cross boundaries to have the same holiday patterns.

### **6.2 Employment Learning and Skills in Halton**

Establishing set holiday periods with the principles proposed may have a positive impact on school attendance which in turn may bring improved achievement and attainment for pupils.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

Establishing set school holiday periods will even out the length of school terms, which benefits children and young people and school based staff with regard to work-life balance.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

A joined up approach to school holiday patterns may benefit police and emergency services, as they will always be aware of when school premises will be empty.

### **6.5 Halton's Urban renewal**

N/A

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 Halton's geographical location puts it in the middle of both Merseyside and Cheshire. Therefore, this could create difficulty if Cheshire does not participate in this consultation as Halton has children and families who move across Cheshire boundaries.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 This standard school, year would promote diversity and choice to parents and may retain more pupils within Halton.

## 9.0 REASONS FOR DECISION

To be part of a wider consultation across the region and co-ordinate school holiday dates with neighbouring Local Authorities.

## 10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Not to participate in the joint consultation.

## 11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

The joint consultation would commence in the first week of November.

## 12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

<b>Documents</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Name</b>
The Rhythms of Schooling – Independent Commission on the organisation of the School year: LGA	Grosvenor House	Karen Mitchell
Guide to the Standard School Year: LGA	Grosvenor House	Karen Mitchell
Standard School Year statement May 2007: LGA	Grosvenor House	Karen Mitchell
Learn Together Partnership, School Term and Holiday Dates meeting. Copies of minutes and agendas: 20/6/08, 14/7/08, 17/9/08	Grosvenor House	Karen Mitchell

## **APPENDIX 1 – Agreed draft of consultation letter**

### **The Standardised School Year**

Discussions between our Local Authorities have been taking place with regard to introducing a standardised school year across the region from 2010/2011.

It is proposed that future term dates are changed, particularly around the Easter break, to benefit children, their families and the staff in schools. The proposed changes will allow for better work/life balance as the school terms will be more evenly spaced out and the standardised approach will help with improved school attendance, forward planning, holiday booking etc.

The proposals were agreed, in principle, at a meeting between the Directors of Children's Services, and it has been agreed that a consultation exercise will take place across the region in the autumn term 2008 to obtain the views of parents, staff, governors, trade unions, elected members, the Diocese and Archdiocese and any other stakeholders.

This consultation exercise will give you all the chance to let us know what you think about the proposals and what you feel would be the advantages and disadvantages of moving to a standardised school year across the region.

In addition to the consultation process, Liverpool City Council has agreed to pilot term dates based upon the standardised school year in 2009/2010. During that year, feedback will be obtained from parents and staff to identify whether the new approach has been beneficial, and this information will be considered alongside the feedback from the consultation process before any final decisions are made.

The principles for the calculation of standardised term dates are based on 195 days which includes 190 teaching days and 5 days in-service training:

- All terms will start on a Monday (except where a bank holiday prevents this, in which case the term will start on a Tuesday).
- October half term will always be the last full week in October.
- The term dates surrounding the Christmas / New Year Break will remain unchanged
- February half term will always be the third full week in February.
- The Easter Break will be moved and replaced by fixed holiday at the beginning of April and will be known as the Spring Break. This will always be the first two full weeks in April and will not move with the Easter holiday.
- Easter may still fall in the Spring Break, but where it doesn't, it will still be observed by the two bank holidays for Good Friday and Easter Monday. This will give a more even distribution between terms, thus providing a

- better balance for children and staff in schools and avoiding exhausting long terms that are caused by early (2008) or late (2011) Easters.
- Where the school is open for part of a week, the school will be open for 3 or more days to encourage good attendance.

Under the current system, even slight variations in terms dates between the Authorities can have a serious impact on some families who live, work and go to school across our boundaries. This is not an ideal situation, as the children will potentially have different holiday patterns which is further complicated if the parents work in school settings too.

We recognise that some families have concerns regarding the cost of taking a family holiday during the official school holiday periods, but Liverpool City Council is already in agreement with some local travel agencies to provide a discount to people in the region who book holidays at that time. If this consultation process is successful it is hoped to extend these arrangements still further across the area.

If the school year is standardised across the region, it should provide greater consistency and improved work/ life balance for the children, their families and for staff in the schools.

If you would like to share your views please give your comments or suggestions on the attached tear off slip below:

Please write to **NAME** at the address below by **Friday 18th December**:

**COUNCIL ADDRESS**

**EMAIL**

Please return to **NAME** ..... **By Friday 18th December**

I agree / disagree with the proposals about the standardised school year [please delete]

Comments.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Name .....

Address.....

Contact number.....

Which of the following education sectors are you responding for? [Please tick]

Primary

Secondary

Special

Are you responding as [Please tick]

Parent

Archdiocese

Governor

Diocese

Staff

Employer

Other

**Thank you for taking the time to respond to these proposals**