



## The Gosforth Schools' Trust

### The Consultation Process

The formal consultation period has now ended and the responses have been collated and analysed by members of the Steering Group (Head Teachers and Governor Representatives).

Consultation packs, including a document with basic information, a response form and a link to a very detailed Frequently Asked Questions document were circulated to all parents, to staff and to a number of others; Ward Councillors, Parish Councils, Trade Unions, Schools in neighbouring Local Authorities, senior officials at Newcastle and neighbouring authorities, Sure Start and the Universities. The consultation pack was also posted on the Newcastle Schools Extranet to allow all schools in the City to comment.

Meetings were held in each of the ten schools involved. In all **427 forms** were returned from parents and carers, with **418, (98%), supporting the proposal** (some asking for further information) and **9, (2%), opposing the proposal**. Of the other groups and individuals consulted there were 7 responses, all in favour of the proposal. This included comments from teaching and non teaching trade unions (at least one had arranged its own sessions with members in schools).

A detailed analysis of the responses for each school and a joint report on the overall position have been produced. On the strength of this level of support, much of it unqualified, the Steering Group asked each Governing Body to agree to proceed to the next stage which is the issue of Statutory Notices. This has now been agreed by all of the Governing Bodies. The Statutory Notices will be published in the Journal on 11 November and will be posted in schools and other public places.

A number of comments were made on the response forms, many of which would have been covered at the meetings or answered in detail in the FAQ document. Some requests for information are difficult to meet at this time as they are to do with detail which is still evolving. Of necessity this is an incremental process and thinking evolves over time and is shaped by comments from interested parties along the way. It would have been quite wrong to present the detail fully formed at this stage, not least because it would have appeared as a *fait accompli*, which it is not. The final decision on whether to go ahead will be taken by each of the 10 Governing Bodies in December following the close of the Statutory Notice period.

However, there were recurring themes both in the response forms and at the meetings which hopefully can be addressed here.

### **If we are doing so well why change things now?**

We are doing well individually, but if we are to continue to improve and provide the best education we can to both current and future students we need to work together. We can do this more effectively by sharing expertise and good practice and make best use of diminishing resources by buying services together. These are uncertain times and formal collaboration can offer significant strength and protection in a changing educational landscape. Eleven schools together (this includes Archbishop Runcie C of E First School) have a stronger voice than eleven individual schools.

### **What about admissions?**

The Governing Bodies of each of the schools will take responsibility for admissions within the National Code of practice. This means that we can work on a common policy which makes sense for all of us. The Trust has nothing to do with admissions but provides an umbrella arrangement to enable Governors to engage with each other in a formal way which currently does not exist. This will not affect the relationship with Gosforth Academy; relations with the Academy Trust can only be strengthened by a joint approach.

### **Funding**

School budgets will continue to come via the Local Authority and we can continue to buy into their Budget Management service and other services so long as they are offered. However we are rapidly moving to a National Funding Formula for all schools in England which is likely to reduce the amount per pupil in the North East as there will no longer be any weighting for social deprivation factors. In the past, Newcastle Local Authority has always been very generous in trying to top up school budgets over and above basic formula funding, however this will no longer happen as Council budgets are reduced further.

Funding for the management of the Trust will be minimal and it is expected that any costs incurred would be met through savings accrued from joint procurement.

Parental contributions through PTFA or contributions for out of school activities and trips will continue as before, they will not be affected in any way by the proposals. We are currently exploring the potential benefits of Gift Aid following the acquisition of charitable status.

## **Curriculum**

Schools will still follow the National Curriculum, the existence of the Trust can only enhance the curriculum by enrichment and best use of resources. The existence of the Trust is also likely to make our schools even more popular to prospective staff.

## **The Trust**

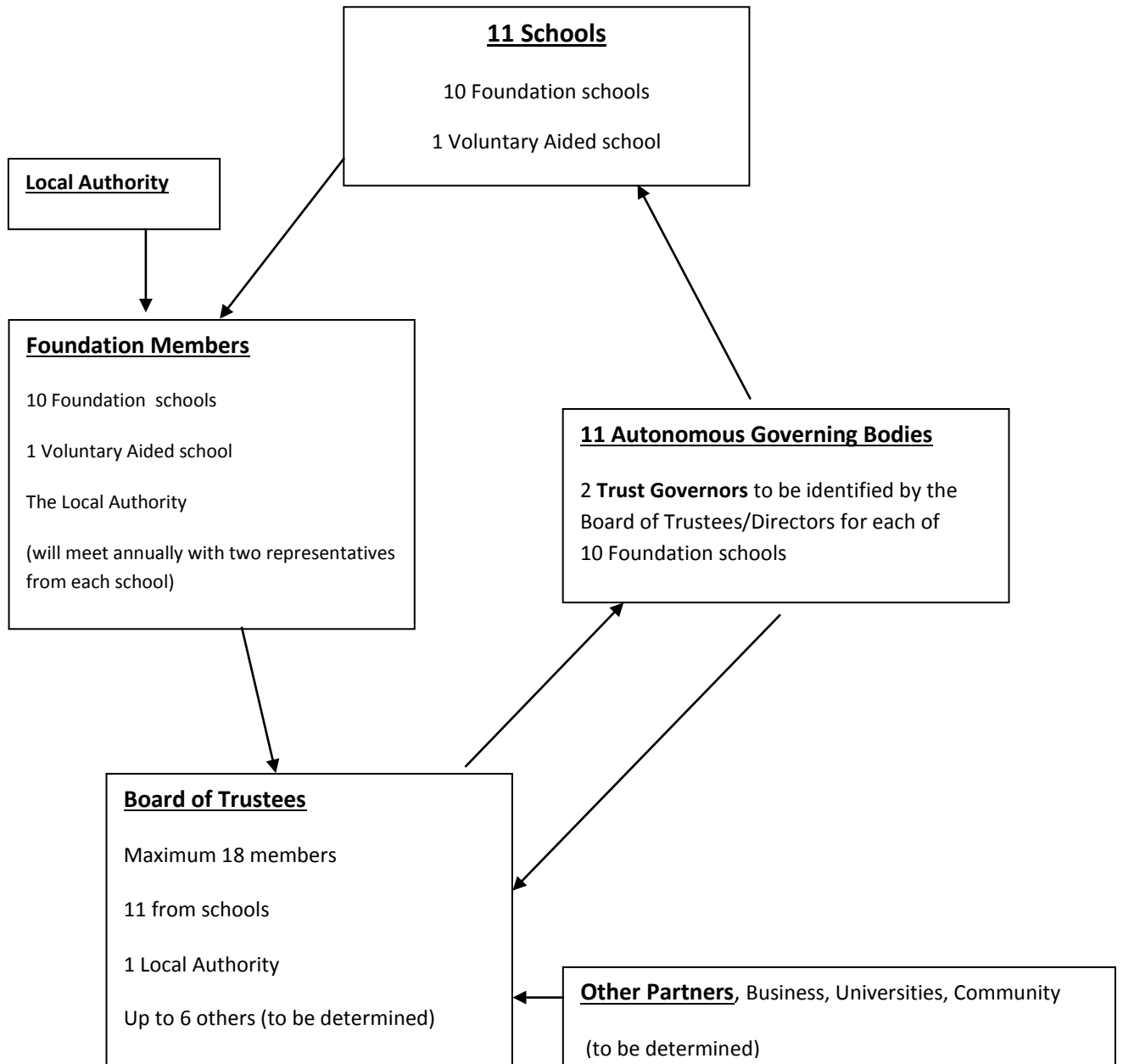
The Trust will have Foundation Members who are like shareholders in a company. Each school will be a member as it is quite acceptable for an entity, as opposed to an individual, to be a Member. Liability is limited to £10. Each school will nominate two people to represent the 'entity' and they will probably meet once a year, initially to appoint the Trustees of the Charity.

At the Trustee/Director level there will be no more than 18 Trustees, again with a representative from each school (either a Head or a Governor), one from the Local Authority and the possibility of other members from outside. The steering Group is in the process of composing a Code of Ethics for the selection of outside partners. They will be challenged to identify what they will bring to the table. The appointment of other members will not take place immediately; it is part of the evolutionary nature of this process. The Trustees will identify two Governors on each Governing Body as Trust Governors, they will not be new people they will simply be existing Governors asked to take on that role.

The Trust should be seen as a support mechanism for the schools, a way of allowing them to collaborate formally which they cannot do as individual schools. A specific example would be the employment of the Sports specialists currently working in the First schools. No individual school could afford this service, collectively they can. However, one school has to employ this person and take the risk that the others can and will pay their contribution. Under the trust this kind of joint procurement will be much easier and less risky. Plus the collective purchasing power of a group of schools will allow better value for money through bargaining power and economies of scale.

This can all be achieved without giving up autonomy or individuality in our schools. The Trust is not accountable to our autonomous Governing Bodies and they are not accountable to the Trust. The operation of the Trust will be governed by Memorandum and Articles of Association, currently being drafted on our behalf by a Senior Solicitor from North Tyneside Council, paid for in a reciprocal arrangement with Newcastle Council. The future workings of the Trust will be transparent as are the current workings of each Governing Body.

On the next page is a very simple representation of the structure as currently envisaged, arrows indicate relationships not lines of accountability.



It should be noted that as **Archbishop Runcie CE First School**, as a Church of England voluntary aided school, is already part of a Trust and therefore will not be changing status. However, Archbishop Runcie is already an active partner of the community of schools in Gosforth and would be an active partner of any Trust established by the Gosforth schools.

