

# THE STANDARD SCHOOL YEAR PROPOSAL FOR 2005/2006

Report By: **SCHOOL SERVICES MANAGER**

## Wards Affected

Countywide

## Purpose

1. To seek the Committees views on proposals for the standard school year for 2005/2006.

## Financial Implications

2. None.

## Report

3. The Local Government Association (LGA) continues to propose standardising the school year across LEA boundaries in England.
4. The LGA's most recent document issued in March 2004 (Appendix One) attaches a letter from the Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Charles Clark MP, to The Cabinet Member (Education) Councillor Rule, in his capacity on the LGA, stating that he was attracted to the arguments in favour of standardising the length of school terms. The LGA has continued to have meetings, especially with the NASUWT, and have agreed a number of basic principles. The most recent meeting, held on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2004, has decided the following –
  - The school year to begin on a September date as near as possible to 1<sup>st</sup> September;
  - Equalise teaching and learning blocks across half terms (roughly 2 x 7 weeks and 4 x 6 weeks);
  - Establish a 2-week Spring break in early April irrespective of the incidence of the Easter bank holiday;
  - Maintain a summer holiday of at least 6 weeks except for those LEAs that customarily determine a period of less than 6 weeks.
  - Identify annually designated periods, including the summer holiday, during which LEAs and Heads are recommended not to arrange training days.
5. The Committee has been advised previously of the commitment within the West Midlands to produce term dates that will be uniform across the region. On the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2004, a group of West Midlands Regional Education Officers met in

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Worcester to discuss the LGA proposals for 2005/6. The group decided the following—

- The 195-day programme be retained by those LEAs who have previously adopted that model. It was noted that Herefordshire will continue with its 190 day programme because of the savings on 'Home to School Transport'
  - Half-term breaks should be kept to 5 days
  - More-even terms were preferable, where possible
  - The Easter break be 'fixed' along the lines of the LGA model, although it was noted that some union reservations could be anticipated
  - Having a 2 or 3 day week to end or start a term was not a major issue
  - The group should meet again, if required, to report progress on agreeing dates with Headteachers and Unions
  - Each LEA should circulate to all other authorities in the group, the options they are considering
6. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2004, the School Services Manager met with the local teacher unions and submitted the LGA package that had been agreed the previous week in Worcester. The Unions were not satisfied with the proposal, especially the suggestion that schools should return on the Tuesday following the Easter Monday holiday. The School Services Manager agreed to produce 3 further options and seek the views of all schools and the Diocesan Authorities. The 4 options attached as Appendix Two were distributed on 28<sup>th</sup> January with a closing date of 27<sup>th</sup> February.
  7. The results of the survey gave a clear signal that Version 'C' was the preferred option, with Version 'B' the next most acceptable timetable.
  8. During the same period, which has continued up to the present date, negotiations have continued across the region with many Councils receiving rejections of the LGA proposal about the return date after the Easter break. The following Council's appear to have agreed a 7<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April holiday break - Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, Stoke, Birmingham, Walsall, Dudley, Wolverhampton, Staffordshire and Sandwell. It is believed that Worcestershire will make a decision by mid-June and will clearly be moving towards the 7<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April date because of its neighbours.
  9. On the 28<sup>th</sup> April, the School Services Manager attended a meeting of the Herefordshire Association of Secondary Headteachers and submitted details of the consultation proposals. The Headteachers decided to support the Version 'C' timetable.
  10. On the 20<sup>th</sup> May, the teacher unions were again consulted and were given information about the results of the 4 options, together with information on the known position in each of the Council's within the West Midlands. The unions were unanimous in proposing that the Education Scrutiny Committee accept Version 'C' school year dates for 2005/2006.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**THAT the Committee consider the action taken to date and advise on whether or not the term dates for 2005/2006 should be approved, as now proposed under Version 'C' in Appendix 2.**

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