

# Community Council Handbook

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## **A Welcome from Hugh Greenway**

### **CEO of The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust**

First, let me say thank you for your optimism and your selflessness. Anyone who volunteers to support schools is, by definition, an optimist. No one involves themselves in education to make tomorrow worse than today. And with that belief in a better possible future for all our children, you join a growing family. The Elliot Foundation was conceived to help all children achieve beyond even their own expectations and perhaps your most important function as part of our community councils is to help schools sustain that aspiration and optimism on behalf of ALL their pupils.

Primary schools are the cornerstones of communities; they bring people together in a way that almost no other public function can. To function properly schools must understand the communities they exist to serve but they must also be helped to communicate effectively with all of their stakeholders. Community councils exist to support this and to help our schools shape a vision, ethos and curriculum that meet the needs of their children and prepare them for continuing education, work and life.

Best wishes,

Hugh

[www.elliottfoundation.co.uk](http://www.elliottfoundation.co.uk)



## **Elliot Foundation Academies Trust Values**

### **1. Put children first**

- a. We trust and value your professionalism
- b. We share the responsibility for the learning and welfare of all of our children
- c. Our purpose is to improve the lives of children

### **2. Be safe**

- a. Don't assume that someone else will do it
- b. Look after yourself, your colleagues and all children
- c. We are all responsible for each other's safety and well being
- d. Discuss any concerns with an appropriate member of staff

### **3. Be kind & respect all**

- a. People are allowed to be different as are you
- b. Kindness creates the positive environment we all need to flourish
- c. This kindness should extend to ourselves as well as to others

### **4. Be open**

- a. If you can see a better way, suggest it
- b. If someone else suggests a better way to you, consider it
- c. We exist to nurture innovators and support those who take informed risks in the interests of children

### **5. Forgive**

- a. We all make mistakes
- b. Admit them, learn from them and move on

### **6. Make a difference**

- a. Making the world a better place starts with you
- b. Model the behaviour that you would like to see from others

## 1. Introduction

- a. This handbook should be read in conjunction with the Community Council Terms of Reference and Ways of Working. It is designed to support Community Councils to carry out their role effectively by providing guidance, templates and signposting to other resources to support the effective set-up, induction of councillors and ongoing running of Community Councils.
- b. This handbook is reviewed annually. In the meantime if you have any suggestions as to how to improve this handbook or any questions about Community Councils more generally then please contact the Community Council Coordinator at [cccoordinator@elliottfoundation.co.uk](mailto:cccoordinator@elliottfoundation.co.uk)).

## 2. Trust wide governance functions and structure

- a. The Board of Trustees has considered carefully how they will exercise their governance and oversight and this is explained further in the document, TEFAT Governance Functions and Structures.
- b. The diagram below is taken from this document and shows how Community Councils fit into the Trust's governance structure, and the role / remit of other groups.

### Trust governance functions

Body	Function	How appointed
Sponsor	Founder and initiator of the vision and purpose	Appointed by DfE
Members	Custodians of the organisation's purpose; appoint and dismiss Trustees	Appointed by Sponsor
Trust board	The responsible body; agrees and oversees strategy; appoints and dismisses CEO, Trust committee members and community council chairs	Appointed by Members
Trust committees & advisory boards	Support Trust board in holding executive to account, approve and recommend policies, challenge performance	Appointed by Trust board
Executive (Ops. Group)	Formulates, recommends and implements Trust strategy, policy and planning; Trust operational management	Appointed by Trust board
Work groups	Support the Executive in the implementation of organisational plans and review of their effectiveness across the Trust	Convened by Executive
School Principals	Shaping, articulating and leading a vision for their school, operational school management	Appointed by Executive
Functional groups	Self managed groups with common interests and/or roles that feedback to the executive on effectiveness of plans	Reviewed by Principals' Council
Community councils	Advisory committees that support and challenge school leadership on school vision, values and curriculum	Chairs appointed by Trust board

## 3. Terms of Reference

- a. Please see the Community Council Terms of Reference for further information on the following:
  - i. Purpose and scope of the Community Council
  - ii. Schedule of Responsibility
  - iii. Role in supporting compliance
  - iv. Membership

## 4. Membership

- a. Community councils should have 9 members, including:
  - i. The Principal;
  - ii. A minimum of 2, ideally 3, parents;
  - iii. 2 staff members employed by the academy; and
  - iv. Community members - this can include pupils.
- b. Each year, the community council should nominate a chair for appointment by the Trust Board.
- c. Where it is useful, the community council may appoint link councillors to oversee and develop the community council's knowledge of a particular area. This is a strategic, not operational, role.
- d. Members are required to adhere to the Ways of Working Agreement. Breaches / suspected breaches of the expectations outlined in 'Ways of Working' must be raised with the Principal and escalated to the Trust; suspension or removal will be a last resort if issues cannot be resolved constructively.
- e. Where a Community Councillor has consecutively missed six months of meetings / commitments and not sent apologies in advance or has not been heard from, the Principal and / or Trust may consider disqualification. The Chair of the Community Council should try to make contact and investigate the reasons for non attendance.

## 5. The Recruitment and Appointment of Community Councillors

- a. The principles and personal attributes that individuals bring to a Community Council are as important as their skills and knowledge. These qualities enable councillors to use their skills and knowledge to function well as part of a team and make an active contribution to effective governance.
- b. All members are appointed by the Trust. Some are appointed directly by the Trust to meet an identified skills or knowledge gap and others are appointed following election. Support and training enables those who are elected to be as effective as those chosen specifically for their skills.
- c. It is vitally important that Community Councils reflect the diversity of the school community that they serve. Parent and staff elected representatives help to ensure that Community Councils stay accessible and connected to the academy community and provide a diverse range of perspectives around the table.
- d. **Parent and Staff Elections**
  - i. Responsibility for the holding of parent and staff Community Council elections in individual schools is delegated to the Principal, as returning officer.
  - ii. The Community Council Recruitment Guide provides more information on the nomination and election process. Elections should be conducted in accordance with the Trust's procedure.
  - iii. Any dispute shall be dealt with and, if necessary, determined by the Legal, SEND and Governance Director.

## 6. Safeguarding Requirements

- a. As set out in the [Trust's Safeguarding Policy](#), safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who comes into contact with children and their families has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt appropriate action.
- b. Each councillor will be required to have an enhanced DBS check.
- c. Councillors must be aware of their school's local safeguarding arrangements and complete mandatory safeguarding training. (Please see Community Councillor Safeguarding Training Requirements for a full list of training requirements.)

## 7. Declaration of Interests

- a. All Community Councillors are required to annually register all business and financial interests, which could interfere, or be perceived to interfere, with the exercise of independent judgement.
- b. In accordance with the Academies Trust Handbook the following should be declared:
  - i. Directorships, partnerships and employment with businesses.
  - ii. Trusteeships and governorships at other educational institutions and charities.
  - iii. For each interest: the name and nature of the business, the nature of the interest and the date the interest began.
- c. Councillors should also consider any potential conflicts of interest, such as relationships with staff members.
- d. If the declaration requires changes, councillors are requested to notify the school and the Trust of the relevant update.

## 8. Ways of Working

- a. The Trust has high expectations of all those involved in governance across the organisation; they should be ambitious for all children, have a passion for education and a commitment to continuous school improvement that enables the best possible outcomes for all pupils whatever their circumstances.
- b. Councillors are required to act in the best interests of the school rather than act as a representative of their group, and should adhere to the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#).
- c. Members should not bring the school into disrepute as a result of their actions: this includes through their online / social media presence.
- d. In exercising governance functions all must act with integrity, objectivity and honesty; be open about the decisions they make and the actions they take and be prepared to explain their actions and decisions.
- e. The Ways of Working Agreement lays out these expectations in a clear and concise manner. It is not a statement of responsibility but aims to ensure a mutual understanding of the role, expectations and commitment required from all Community Councillors.
- f. Community Councillors must adhere to the Ways of Working Agreement and give consideration to the agreement throughout their term of office.

## 9. Administration

- a. Community council business will be supported by a staff member who works at the school where the community council is based. They will be responsible for:
  - i. Arranging and supporting meetings;
  - ii. Ensuring the community council information on the school website is kept up to date;
  - iii. Communicating membership changes to the Community Council Coordinator, including contact information, any interests declared and the election of a new Chair; and
  - iv. Overseeing the [Key Deliverables](#).
- b. Community Council members are required to use a tenancy Google account that will be provided to them by their academy. Members must use the tenancy email address for all community council business. Members should note that these accounts are subject to online monitoring by Lightspeed Systems, which further supports the Trust's commitment to safeguarding.
- c. Meeting documents will be stored on Google Drive and made accessible to councillors through their tenancy account.
- d. All documentation must be retained within the Trust tenancy account.

## 10. Training and Support for Community Councils

- a. All new members will receive a full induction into the role from their academy, including copies of relevant policies and information. A template induction checklist is available to support academies.
- b. In order to ensure that councillors feel equipped to carry out their role, TEFAT will provide a range of support and training, including:
  - i. Access to a Trust wide Community Council Site for guidance documents, in-house training videos (including guidance on using Google Workspace) and templates;
  - ii. Safeguarding training;
  - iii. Access to online learning through Flick Learning: (<https://www.flicklearning.com/courses/>); and
  - iv. Regular social media updates from the Trust recognising and celebrating success across all of our schools.
- c. The central governance team is also available for continuous support. At any point please feel free to contact the Community Council Coordinator ([cccoordinator@elliottfoundation.co.uk](mailto:cccoordinator@elliottfoundation.co.uk)) with any questions or queries.

## 11. Role in broader school life

- a. The Trust's intention is that Community Council members are recognised and supported to add significant value at a local level to an academy / federation with local governance being meaningful, effective and enjoyable.
- b. As such it is hoped that Community Council members will be able to actively contribute to the broader life of the school; be that through attendance at class and whole school events, supporting identified local initiatives and positively promoting the school amongst the wider community.



- c. It is also hoped that the Chair of a Community Council will act as a sounding board for the Principal and by so doing provide support and proportionate challenge within the recognised role of critical friend.

## 12. Meetings: Schedule, Agendas and Attendance

### a. Meeting Schedule

- i. Community Councils are required to meet 4 times across the academic year; twice in the Autumn term, once in the Spring term and once in the Summer term.
- ii. TEFAT recommends that meetings should be limited to 2 hours and visits 1 hour.
- iii. Community councils are free to determine the dates and timings of their meetings locally.
- iv. Where possible, mindful of workload and work life balance for all, meetings should be scheduled during the school day or shortly thereafter. This supports the Trust's priority of reducing workload and supporting staff wellbeing, enables pupils to actively contribute, and allows members to actively engage with the school community.

### b. Meeting Agendas:

- i. Agenda items should be agreed in advance of the meeting, ideally at the start of the academic year.
- ii. The agenda should demonstrate how each item is linked to the 3 key areas within the scope of the community council and the related Schedule of Responsibilities, with visits allowing an opportunity to explore a particular aspect in more detail.
- iii. Please see the Community Council Annual Agenda Cycle Planner for an overview of what items may be discussed at Community Council meetings over a typical academic year.
- iv. The Lines of Enquiry document provides examples of the questions members may ask or evidence / data that could be made available to them to support them to fulfill their responsibilities.
- v. A tailored agenda should be distributed to all members of the Community Council in advance of the meeting: it is good practice to share the agenda and any supporting documents 7 days before the meeting to allow everyone to prepare.

### c. Attendance:

- i. Meetings can only take place if the Principal and at least 3 additional councillors are in attendance.
- ii. Attendance of councillors must be recorded at each meeting and the Membership and Attendance Record updated. This document should be uploaded to the school website.

## 13. School Visits

- a. Visits should be pre-arranged and agreed with fellow councillors, the Principal / Head of School and relevant staff as part of a planned programme for the year.
- b. There is an expectation that at least two of the Community Council's meetings will be directly linked to visits by councillors during the school day.
- c. Visits should take place as a group where possible, however it is not expected that every member attends all school visits.

- d. Members and leaders should think creatively about school visits to ensure they are purposeful, clearly linked to the scope of the community council and allow opportunity to engage directly with staff and pupils.
- e. Visits should be strategic in nature with councillors focused on asking questions within their remit. Specific questions should be sent ahead of the visit so everyone feels prepared.
- f. Please remember that visits are not inspections or observations.
- g. Following a school visit, councillors should give feedback to the community council and discuss their findings. A Note of Visit Report template is available for this purpose. It may be useful to complete the Note of Visit form as a whole council to discuss and reflect on the visit

## 14. Key Deliverables

- a. **Meeting notes and action logs:** formal minutes are not required. The administrator will make notes of the discussion in the meeting and any actions arising. Templates are available for both meeting agendas and notes: please see the Community Council Site.
- b. **Actions:** Community councillors are expected to complete any actions assigned to them. Actions will be reviewed at the next meeting.
- c. **Key messages:** at the end of each meeting the Community Council will agree on up to **three key messages** that they wish to bring to the attention of the Trust. This may include positive assurances about the experiences of pupils, staff, and parents, as well as any other matters they would like the Trust to be aware of. These messages should be communicated to the Community Council Coordinator via a Google Form and will be available for discussion at the regional termly Chairs' Forum (from September 2025).
- d. **Website requirements:** In accordance with the Academy Trust Handbook September 2024, academies are required to make available certain information about their governance arrangements. A template is provided for each academy to personalise.
- e. **Annual summary:** The Community Council must produce an annual summary of the school's success and achievements over the academic year from the Community Council's perspective and scope. The Key Messages can be used to inform this summary which is also shared with the Trust Board. Please see the template provided for guidance.

## 15. And finally, a big thank you

Thank you for stepping up to support your school in this voluntary role. Whilst the remit is advisory that does not mean that councillors are not valued or that you are not governing; quite the opposite.

The model of Community Councils is based on a desire to ensure that discussions about arguably the most important aspects of school life - vision, values, curriculum, well being and the threads of aspiration and expectation that should run through each and every school - take place at a local level and with time to consider them properly.

Community Councils also provide a vital annual feedback loop to the Trust Board and back again, drawing the attention of trustees to the successes but also to the challenges that a particular school and community may be facing. This is essential to the overall effectiveness of the Trust governance model.

**We wish you all a successful year!**