

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet Member for Children And Family Services

Date of Meeting	11 July 2011
Report of:	Director of Children and Families
Subject/Title:	Standardised School Term Dates
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Hilda Gaddum

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 The report summarises the outcomes of a public consultation into a proposal that Cheshire East standardise school term dates on the basis of nine principles agreed and adopted by six of the nine Local Authority members of the Learn Together Partnership (LTP). If adopted in Cheshire East, all Community and Controlled Schools would be required to abide by them. They would also be recommended to Aided and Foundation schools, and Academies. All nine principles were supported by the majority of the respondents to the consultation.

2.0 Decision Requested

- 2.1 That, with effect from the school year 2012/13, Cheshire East Council will set school term dates for all Community and Controlled schools in line with the principles of the Learn Together Partnership standardised year, and will recommend this term date pattern to other maintained schools and Academies in the Borough.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The proposals are in the interests of children, parents and staff and should:
- provide for a more even pattern of teaching and learning throughout the year;
 - assist in improving patterns of attendance;
 - Will give improved clarity and consistency for schools and parents in planning ahead
 - Will contribute to the process of better aligning term patterns with neighbouring Authorities
 - Have been supported by the majority of respondents to the Council survey

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications

6.1 None

7.0 Financial Implications (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

7.1 None

8.0 Legal Implications

8.1 The Council has a statutory duty to set school term dates for all Community and Controlled schools.

9.0 Risk Management

9.1 Of the nine proposals in the consultation paper, seven received very strong support, ranging from 72-86%. However there was significant concern expressed around two of the issues: the removal of the option for primary schools to have an additional week's holiday at Whitsun (54% supporting, 36% opposed), and fixing a holiday in first two weeks in April, irrespective of the actual Easter dates (54% supporting, 41% opposed).

9.2 The concerns expressed around the Whitsun break came almost entirely from the minority of primary schools (35 in total) who have exercised this option this year, and who wish to continue to have the right to exercise it. The main reason given was that this allowed families and school staff to take cheaper holidays as most schools were in session, and travel firm's prices consequently dropped. A consequence of this can be that siblings in High schools are absent from school, with the potential detrimental impact this can have on keeping up with school work, and, of course on attendance itself.

9.3 It is likely Aided and Foundation schools, who at present take two weeks, will continue to do so. A decision to remove the right of Community and Controlled Governing Bodies to exercise this option may well be resented, and as seen as out of step with the general thrust of Government policy to allow and encourage greater individual autonomy for schools.

9.4 The proposed removal of automatically linking the Easter Christian Festival with a longer break, generally of two weeks, brought a significant amount of criticism from respondents who perceived it as undermining this most significant Christian celebration. At the same time, it should be noted that both Chester and Shrewsbury Dioceses had no

objection, as they prefer all Church schools to be in session during Holy Week. This is not currently the case with all Church of England Controlled schools.

- 9.5 It will continue to be the case that there will be variation in the dates children attend schools in the Borough as all schools have discretion when to allocate in service training days, and because schools other than Community and Controlled will still set their own term dates. Additionally there is no immediate prospect of aligning dates with all neighbouring Local Authorities, although it is understood Cheshire West and Chester are undertaking a consultation of their own, around the same principles as those detailed in this paper.

10.0 Background and Options

- 10.1 The Authority statutorily sets term dates for all Community and Controlled schools within the Borough. Aided and Foundation schools governing bodies set their own dates, but are encouraged to follow the Council pattern as far as possible. There is a further statutory requirement that schools are open for 190 days (380 sessions) per school year for the purpose of teaching pupils, and teachers must also be available for an additional 5 days, normally designated as INSET days. Both the LA and Aided and Foundation schools are required to consult before confirming dates, which are normally set about 4 terms in advance. The consultation process for the LA has been to share proposed dates with Headteacher Associations and the Schools' workforce trade unions, and taking account of any comments, then to publish the agreed dates.
- 10.2 In practice the term pattern in Cheshire East has followed the same broad pattern as that applied over many years by the County Council, and without any clearly established principles other than to "follow" Easter so as to ensure the Bank holidays were included within a two week holiday, and to allow Primary schools the option of having an additional week holiday at Whitsun.
- 10.3 In the light of the above a full consultation process has been undertaken with over 800 online responses, some media coverage, and face to face discussions with LA officers at various "drop in" events organised by the Council, and held in conjunction with consultation events on schools transport. Of the responses received, 88% came from parents and significant numbers from school staff also. No objections have been received from the school workforce Trade unions.
- 10.4 The principles of the LTP standardised year are as follows, with % consultation responses in favour alongside each.
- All terms to start on a Monday (or a Tuesday if so necessitated by a Bank holiday) (73%)

- October half term to always be the last full week in October (77%)
- A break as now around Christmas and the New Year. (86%)
- February half term will always be the third full week in February (72%)
- The Easter Break will be renamed the Spring break and will always be the first two full weeks in April. (54%)
- Easter will always be observed via the bank holidays for Good Friday and Easter Monday. (N/A)
- The Whitsun half term break will be one week across all phases (54%)
- Where a school is open for part of a week to pupils, this will be for a minimum of three school days (to encourage attendance) (67%)
- The five "INSET" are all to be designated by the individual school governing body, but there will be no more than two days set consecutively for this purpose (72%)

10.5 This is the first time Cheshire East Council has conducted any sort of survey or consultation around term dates, and no similar exercise is understood to have been undertaken by the County Council. Given the concerns and issues detailed in paragraphs 9.1-9.5 above, an alternative option would be to proceed to implement the proposals as reflected in 10.4 above, but to retain the option for Primary schools to choose to have a n additional week's holiday at Whitsun, and/or to ensure that the Easter holiday is retained as now, with every effort being made to broadly balance the length of school half terms.

11.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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