
THE SCHOOLS FORUM

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the work and responsibilities of the Schools Forum.

Information and Analysis

2. All authorities in England and Wales had to establish a Schools Forum by 15 January 2003. The Forum membership comprised Headteachers and Governors from all phases of schools, non-school members (from local Diocese) and observers from the local council and other statutory bodies like the Learning and Skills Council. Forums were introduced as part of the Fair Funding agenda. Their role was essentially a consultative one to ensure a conduit of information between the local authority and schools. Regulations require that once a year the Forum should be consulted about:

- (a) The School Funding Formula and any changes to factors used in the local formula and up-rating non Age Weighted Pupil Unit data across a multi-year period
- (b) Contractual issues, specifically any proposed contract for public services where the proposed contract is greater than a threshold laid down in regulations
- (c) Financial issues as follows:
 - (i) arrangements to be made for the education of pupils with special educational needs
 - (ii) arrangements for the use of Pupil Referral Units and the education of children otherwise than at school
 - (iii) arrangements for early years education
 - (iv) arrangements for insurance
 - (v) prospective revisions to the *Scheme for Financing Schools*
- (d) Administrative arrangements for the allocation of Central Government grants paid to schools; and
- (e) Arrangements for free school meals.

Authorities are free to consult their forum on “... any other matters concerning the funding of schools they see fit”.

3. The opportunity for development and debate in Schools Forums has been welcomed. In addition, from 2006, Schools Forums were also vested with some decision-making powers, which had previously been the preserve of the Secretary of State. The Forum needs to give its agreement for:
 - (a) Changes to the overall level of the Central Expenditure Limit
 - (b) Permission for prudential borrowing
 - (c) Premature retirement and redundancy costs
 - (d) SEN transport
 - (e) Combined budgets (following the Every Child Matters agenda), and

(f) Schools' contingency funding

4. The Schools Forum also has the power to approve changes to the *Scheme for Financing Schools*.
5. Although the Forum may be consulted about the Standards Fund or the School Development Grant, the Forum has no powers to make decisions on how grants should be distributed, or the priorities to which they should be applied. That being said, the Director of Children's Services would wish to take into account the views and experience of Forum members, before reaching a view on the disbursement of grant funding.
6. Elected Members cannot be full members of the Schools Forum but it is possible for a nominated Elected Member (usually the Lead Member for Children's Services) to join the Forum as a non-voting observer, and to have the right to speak.
7. The minutes of the meeting of the Schools Forum held on Tuesday 12 February 2008 are attached to this report for information (**Appendix A**).

Legal Implications

8. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

9. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Impact on Looked After Children

10. It is in line with good practice for Schools Forums to appoint one member to represent the interests of Looked After children and young people. This is particularly important when considering formula changes that could affect a school's ability to respond flexibly to the needs of children who are 'Looked After'.

Recommendation

11. Members are asked to note the content of this report

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Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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