

Schools Forum

Remit and Responsibility of the Schools Forum

Members of the Schools Forum are requested to note this report for information

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the Report is to remind members of the remit and responsibility of the Schools Forum, particularly with regard to decision making powers.

2. Background

2.1 Establishment of Forums

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:

- School Funding Formula:

- (a) - changes to factors or criteria used in the local funding formula
- (b) - up-rating no AWPU data across a multi-year period

- Contractual Issues:

- (a) - the terms of any proposed contract for public supplies or services where the estimated value of the proposed contract is greater than a specific threshold laid down in regulations

- Financial Issues:

- (a) - arrangements to be made for the education of pupils with SEN
- (b) - arrangements for the use of PRUs and the education of children otherwise than at school
- (c) - arrangements for early years education
- (d) - arrangements for insurance
- (e) - prospective revisions to the Scheme of Financing Schools
- (f) - administrative arrangements for the allocation of Central Government grants paid to schools
- (g) - arrangements for free schools meals

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

2.2 Decision Making Powers

The opportunity for development and debate in Schools Forums has been welcomed. In addition, from 2006, Schools Forum were also vested with some decision-making powers, which had previously been the preserve of the Secretary of State. From 1 April 2006, the Forum's agreement needs to be sought in relation to:

- (a) - Changes to the overall Central Expenditure Limited i.e. the limit on the amount of centrally retained funding allowed in the Schools Budget **
 - and to individual headings within centrally retained expenditure:
 - (i) - Prudential Borrowing
 - (ii) - Premature retirement and Redundancy costs
 - (iii) - SEN transport
 - (iv) - Combined budgets (following the Every Child matters agenda)
 - (v) - Schools' Contingency Funding
- (b) - minor variations to the operation of the Minimum Funding Guarantee
- (c) - variations to the local funding formula for a funding period that falls into an already notified multi-year budget

** note where a local authority needs to revise the amount of centrally retained expenditure it had originally planned to spend in 2007/2008 and the amount is more than the originally planned, Forum's approval will be needed even if the increase does not breach the CEL for 2007/2008.

2.3 Further Powers for the Forum

From April 2007, the Government intends to extend the role of Schools Forums, by giving them the power to approve Local Authority proposals to vary the operation of some specific School Funding regulations, or put in place arrangements other than those in the regulations, that otherwise would have to be approved by the Secretary of State. Essentially this means that the forum will be able to make decisions on:

- to vary the date of delegated budgets for new schools
- approve changes to the Scheme of Financing Schools.
(A copy of the new regulations will be available at the meeting.)

It should be noted that the power provided to Schools Forum under regulation States the Forum can only exercise their power in relation to proposals put forward by the LA. They have no power to initiate proposals.

2.4 Grant Funding

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 priority to which they should be applied. That being said, Education Walsall would wish to take into account the views and experience of Forum members, before reaching a view on the disbursement of grant funding. (For example, the Forum's views on the mechanism for the distribution of EMAG

funding was essential in managing a reduction of funding in a fair and transparent way).

- 3 Recommendations**
- Forum members are recommended to:
- note areas over which they have decision making powers
 - note their new powers from April 2007
 - note that the Forum has no remit to make decisions on grant funding
 - note that, from time to time the Authority may seek the Forum's views on topics relating to funding for schools or issues of school improvement.

Background Papers

The Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2002

The Schools Forums (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2005

School Finance (England) Regulations 2006

DfES Schools Forum Good Practice Guide

