

The future of Schools Forum

At the final Schools Forum and YSAB meetings of the 2023/24 academic year there was discussion about the future of these authority wide groups and how they will work together in the future. There is further discussion to be had at the first meetings of both groups, but what is clear is that we have an opportunity to refocus the purpose of the Schools Forum.

As a starting point it is worth us looking at the Power and Responsibilities that Schools Forum has -

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6058932ad3bf7f2f0cd61ccb/2021_Schools_forums_powers_and_responsibilities.pdf.)

The powers and responsibilities for Schools Forum are different to YSAB and it should be noted that

- maintained schools have decision making powers in relation to some functions of the forum, based on phase
- Schools Forum is required to scrutinise financial and budgeting information about Maintained schools, but does not do this for academies
- Schools Forum has decision making powers for some of its functions, but is only required to give a view for others

Key to the success of the Schools Forum is the strength of the working relationship between members of the Forum and CYC. This and other key aspects of the work of Schools Forum are captured in the DfE document Schools Forum: operational and good practice guidance:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6058931a8fa8f545d995f141/Schools_forum_operational_and_good_practice_guide_amended_March_2021.pdf

In this document a number of characteristics of this relationship that are particularly important are noted:

- partnership: having a shared understanding of the priorities, issues and concerns of schools, academies and the local authority
- effective support: the business of the schools forum is supported by the local authority in an efficient and professional manner
- openness: it's important that a schools forum feels it is receiving open, honest and objective advice from its local authority
- responsiveness: local authorities should as far as possible be responsive to requests from their schools forums and their members. Schools forums themselves should also be aware of the resource implications of their requests
- strategic view: members of schools forum should consider the needs of the whole of the educational community, rather than using their position on a schools forum to advance their own sectional or specific interests
- challenge and scrutiny: schools forums may be asked to agree to proposals from their local authority that will have an effect on all schools and academies in the local

area. The extent to which schools forums can scrutinise and challenge such proposals is an important aspect of their effectiveness

Whilst it feels that these characteristics are in place, it is worth us reviewing these as we start our work on refocusing Schools Forum.

There are also some key areas we need to consider to ensure we are meeting the requirements of the Forum, so that it runs effectively and meets all aspects of the operational good practice guide.

To do this I would like to set up a small working group with representatives from each phase of education and the local authority to review the current position of Schools Forum, consider what else we would like to ask members to contribute outside of this guidance (if anything) and help create a plan for the year ahead and future years.

To help us do this we will use the documents referenced above but will use the following audit tool to help us assess the current position and plan what changes we need to make -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ecfb300e90e0754cc92fb20/Schools_forum_self-assessment_checklist.pdf

Dave Hewitt

Chair of Schools Forum