BRIEFING PAPER

SUBJECT: Best Practice Review of the Role of Schools Forum

DATE: 18th July 2012

RECIPIENT: SCHOOLS' FORUM

SUMMARY:

This paper reviews the recent research produced by Local Government Association on good practice review of the role of Schools Forums.

BACKGROUND and BRIEFING DETAILS:

- The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to explore the current role, operation and impact of Schools Forums in England.
- 2. The research included confidential and anonymous interviews with representatives from schools forums across the country. The report published in May 2012 provides recommendations on best practice.

KEY FINDINGS:

- 3. The research concludes that:
 - Schools Forums were generally perceived to have a strong influence on funding decisions and provide a platform for discussion at the strategic level about funding decisions at the local level.
 - Effectiveness of schools forums was characterised in terms of connected, proactive and child centred behaviour, including effective communication within forums with Local Authority staff as well as the wider educational community.
 - In the most proactive Schools Forums there was clear evidence that the funding formula was developed through consultation.
 - Schools Forums valued the contribution of councillors and cabinet members as this
 provided a council perspective, expert advice, feedback on education issues.
 Information and advice.
 - Although Schools Forums' meetings were 'open', members of the public were not actively invited and rarely attended meetings.
- 4. Looking to the future, interviewees expressed a lack of clarity about the role and status of Schools Forums in general, there was uncertainty about whether the changes around the outcome of the national funding consultation will result in a strengthened or reduced role for schools forum.

CONCLUSIONS:

95 Schools Forums play a significant role in influencing and shaping local education funding. They provide a collaborative and consultative platform for strategic discussion and contribute to local decision making.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS:

- 6. Schools Forum might want to consider the recommendations:
 - Training should be provided to all School Forum members to ensure that they have confidence and competence to effectively engage in and challenge local education funding decisions.
 - The process they adopt to disseminate, with clarity, decisions to constituents, stakeholders and the wider community
 - Periodically reviews of effectiveness should include a review of the remit and role of subgroups to maximise their contribution and ensure its relevance.
 - Continuous review of membership to ensure the forum is representative of the local community.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAS:

- 7. Local authorities might want to consider the recommendations:
 - Periodically review the level, type and frequency of involvement that senior managers and officers have in Schools Forums given that the changing policy and priorities for the education, support and well-being of children and young people.
 - Increased promotion of the schools forum and its role and remit within the LA, and more widely among constituents, is recommended in order that the wider understanding and recognition of its responsibilities is achieved.

Supporting Information:

LGA research report - A best practice review of the role of schools forums

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