
Education Scrutiny Committee

5 December 2007

School Governors – Interim Report

Background

1. In coming to a decision to review this topic, the Education Scrutiny Committee recognised certain key objectives. Due to the work involved in examining these objectives, Members agreed to split the review into two parts, and the following revised remit was suggested:

Remit

2. In regard to Governing Bodies, to encourage an improved level of community involvement and maximise their diversity and skills

Part A - Key Objectives

- i. Investigate the current composition of governing bodies with an effort to find ways of improving the diversity of governing bodies to better reflect the community
- ii. Identify ways of increasing the number of community Governors
- iii. Identify ways of increasing community involvement with Governing Bodies
- iv. Investigate ways of maximizing the skills that individual members of governing bodies bring to their role

Part B – Key Objective

- v. Investigate the role of Governors and current clerking arrangements in extended schools

To investigate the current composition of governing bodies with an effort to find ways of improving the diversity of governing bodies to better reflect the community

Information Gathered

3. At a meeting on 30 October 2007, Members considered a scoping report for the review which identified the current composition of governing bodies and

gave a snap shot of the number of vacant seats at the time of providing the information.

4. A recent report from the ODPM identified York as having one of the fastest growing BME communities in the country and the most recent Pupil Levels Annual School Census (PLASC) provided the following statistics:
 - There are at least 49 languages spoken by children in York schools
 - There are 1340 minority ethnic pupils in York schools
 - All York schools have minority ethnic pupils
 - Until recently the largest ethnic group were Travellers, but this is an overarching term that includes several distinct groups
 - There are significant Bangladeshi, Chinese and Turkish/Kurdish communities in York
 - Only 27 out of 1578 teachers in York schools are from minority ethnic backgrounds (1.7%)

Issues Arising

5. In order to identify ways of improving the diversity of governing bodies, to better reflect their community, Members recognised it would first be necessary to clarify their current level of diversity. It was agreed that a survey of individual governors be carried out in order to confirm the validity of the information currently held on the Governance Service database, and to identify any other information pertinent to the objectives of this review. In regard to this particular objective, the survey would need to identify the age, gender, ethnicity, skills etc of all current school governors.
6. Information provided by Marketing & Communications on the council's approach to surveys was taken into consideration when producing a first draft of the survey. A copy of this together with a draft covering letter and example of a database printout is attached at Annex A. The proposed timetable for the survey in relation to its production, circulation and collation of responses is as follows:

Meeting - 5 December 2007	Consider draft survey, and covering letter and agree any amendments
7 December 2008	Send out survey etc requesting responses by 4 February 2008
5 –22 February 2008	Data from responses received to be entered into database and report produced detailing the findings
Meeting - 26 February 2008	Consideration of report

6. There will be print, postal and database costs incurred in carrying out this survey but there is some money available for this work within the Governor Support & Development Service budget. The remaining cost would have to

be funded from the scrutiny budget available for this review. Annex B provides a outline of the costs involved.

To identify ways of increasing the number of Community Governors

Information Gathered

8. At the meeting on 30 October 2007 the Governance Service Manager explained that the criteria for being a community governor was the same for primary and secondary schools, with people being drawn from the local area to the school, for example from the parish council or local churches, community groups or organisations. In practice though, people with links to organisations with an interest in the education of older children such as youth groups or local businesses, were more likely to be attracted to places on secondary school governing bodies.
9. It was noted that governing bodies are responsible for recruiting their own community governors but often struggle with this and require help from the Governor Support & Development Service. As an example of the level of support given, the Governance Manager confirmed that in the last six months the Service have provided between 8-10 governors for community vacancies.

Issues Arising

10. Having considered the information provided within the scoping report on the previous and current methods used to attract applicants to the role of governor, Members suggested the following alternative methods:
 - Via Resident Associations, particularly for community governors
 - On local radio stations i.e. Radio York & Minster FM
11. In order to reduce the number of vacant seats on governing bodies, be they community governor vacancies or any other, Members agreed it would be helpful to identify the reasons why governors stand down and why some schools have a bigger turnover than others.
12. Members therefore suggested that the Governance Service consider issuing an exit questionnaire to governors standing down, and that the findings be fed back to the governing body.

To identify ways of increasing community involvement with Governing Bodies

13. In order to identify ways of increasing community involvement with Governing Bodies, Members agreed it would be necessary to understand the methods used and level of involvement attained currently. Members considered how best to gather this information and agreed that a report explaining the work of this committee and a questionnaire be presented at a full governors' meeting of each school.

Issues Arising

14. As this report may require the involvement of other council officers, it was agreed that work on the first two objectives be progressed first and that this report not be finalised and presented until the new year.

Investigate ways of maximizing the skills that individual members of governing bodies bring to their role

Information Gathered

15. The committee were informed that the Governor Support & Development Service have a pool of applicants that they can draw on when there is an Local Authority (LA) vacancy to fill. The Governance Manager confirmed that occasionally this pool is used to supply individuals to fill other vacancies e.g. community governors. In the last six months the Service has provided approximately 15 LA governors and on appointment, all new governors are given training.

Issues Arising

16. Members suggested that new governors may benefit from receiving training earlier in the process and that perhaps this should commence when they first go into the pool rather than waiting until they are in post. The Governance Manager agreed that once in the pool there was no reason why they could not start to attend meetings to begin their training and to get a feel for the type of business that governing bodies deal with.
17. Members agreed to include a number of questions in the survey for individual governing body members that would help to identify their skills. It was hoped that this information could then be used to clarify the following:
 - What skills were currently being utilised to the advantage of their governing body
 - What skills were available but not currently being utilised
 - What skills were lacking within each governing body
 - What additional training was required for each governing body member to support them in their role

Options

18. Having considered the suggested revised remit and the information contained within this report, Members may choose to:
 - Agree the revised remit or amend and agree a further revision
 - Agree any further questions to be added to the draft survey for individual governing body members, in relation to objectives (i) and (iv) of this review
 - Request that a draft exit questionnaire be presented for consideration in regard to objective (ii), at their next meeting on 9 January 2008.

- Agree the issues to be covered by the questionnaire to Governing Bodies in relation to objective (iii), in order to identify ways of maximising their involvement with their community.

Implications

19. There are no known Legal, Financial, HR, implications associated with the recommendations within this report. However, Members should be aware that there may be equality implications associated with the suggested survey of governors and therefore care should be taken in the way the survey questions are presented.

Corporate Priorities

20. Although the remit for this review does not fit directly with any of the Corporate Priorities, it could indirectly have a positive effect in relation to Corporate Priority No.7 – 'improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children, young people and families in the city'.

Risk Management

21. Without the thorough engagement of current governors the findings from this review could be limited which in turn, could have a negative effect on the number of new applicants. Also, not keeping to the timetable agreed at the meeting on 30 October 2007 could affect the focus of the review and the progress of the Scrutiny Workplan.

Recommendation

22. In light of the above options, Members are asked to consider and agree the revised remit, and methods for progressing the review.

Reason: To ensure compliance with scrutiny procedures, protocols and workplans.

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Interim Report Approved Date 21 November 2007

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: Scoping Report dated 30 October 2007

Annexes: Annex A – Draft survey & covering letter
Annex B – Outline Costs for Survey