
MEETING	EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE	5 DECEMBER 2007
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS KIRK (CHAIR), BROOKS (VICE-CHAIR), ALEXANDER, GUNNELL, HYMAN, MERRETT, MORLEY AND DR D SELLICK
APOLOGIES	MR J BAILEY

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare at this point in the meeting any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in the business on the agenda, in addition to the list of general personal interests circulated with the agenda.

Cllr Hyman asked that the list be amended to record that he was now a governor at Huntington Primary School and that Mr Bailey was now Chair of Governors at Huntington Primary school and a governor of Huntington School.

Cllr Merrett declared a general personal interest in the business of the Committee, as a member of the committee of the York Chinese Cultural Association, and asked that the list be amended to incorporate this.

21. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2007 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

22. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was reported that Ken Beavan had registered to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme, in relation to agenda item 4 (School Governors – Interim Report: Minute 23 refers).

Mr Beavan expressed the view, as a former school governor, that introducing a questionnaire into the governor selection process risked putting off some potential applicants, who might consider the questions intrusive and irrelevant. The Council should not be introducing bureaucratic obstacles nor using the Equalities agenda to 'micromanage' the process and should be aware of the consequences before going down this route.

In response to these comments, Members stressed that the purpose of the questionnaire at this stage was to gather information about the current make-up of governing bodies, with a view to ensuring that they reflected

the communities they worked in. It would not be compulsory to complete the questionnaire and all information would be treated as confidential.

23. SCHOOL GOVERNORS - INTERIM REPORT

Members considered a report which presented further information in relation to the Scrutiny topic on School Governors and sought agreement for a revised remit and methods of progressing the review of this topic.

At the last meeting, Members had agreed revisions to the remit and had suggested that it be split into two parts, with part B relating to the role of governors and clerking arrangements in extended schools. The report outlined information gathered and issues arising in respect of each of the revised key objectives within the remit. A draft questionnaire to be used to survey individual governors, as agreed at the last meeting, was attached as Annex A to the report, together with a draft covering letter. An example of a printout of from the Governance Service database, to be sent with the questionnaire seeking confirmation of the accuracy of information currently held, was circulated at the meeting. A draft timetable for completing the survey exercise was set out in paragraph 6 of the report and estimated costs were attached as Annex B.

In respect of the information provided at paragraph 4 on the ethnic make up of schools in York, Members commented that this did not seem to reflect the City's growing Eastern European population, a point which might need to be picked up in the review report. In respect of the draft questionnaire, Members discussed a number of issues, including whether to seek information on the social (as well as ethnic) diversity of governors and whether to ask about languages spoken. It was agreed that the latter could be dealt with more appropriately in the questionnaire to governing bodies as a whole.

It was noted that, for data protection purposes, there was a need to be clear about what the information from the questionnaire would be used for. It might be necessary to clarify this if there was a dual reason for the survey (i.e. to verify information on the database and to find out further information for the review).

RESOLVED: (i) That the questionnaire and covering letter at Annex A to the report be amended as follows:

- Question 3 – change 'office' to 'offices' and add the main committees of governing bodies to the list of offices.
- Question 4 – add 'local knowledge', 'child care', 'fundraising' and 'teaching' to the list of skills.
- Question 10 – include a section on social background.
- Question 11 – delete existing question and substitute a more open-ended question, explaining the reasons for the survey with reference to the review remit (to be annexed to the questionnaire) and seeking additional comments.

- At the end – include a question asking whether the governor would be prepared to participate in a further survey.
- Covering letter – re-draft to emphasise that the information received will be treated as confidential, that it is not compulsory to complete the questionnaire but that the results will assist the Council in ensuring that all schools have a full complement of governors.

(ii) That the amended questionnaire and letter be circulated to Members before the next meeting of the Committee, with any further comments to be made directly to the Scrutiny Officer, who, in the absence of any comments, will consider the questionnaire to be approved.

(iii) That the proposed timetable at paragraph 6 of the report be amended to include consideration of an exit questionnaire for school governors as an item on the agenda for the meeting on 7 January 2008.

(iv) That, subject to the above amendments, the revised remit and methods set out in the report be approved.

REASON: To progress the review and ensure compliance with scrutiny procedures, protocols and work plans.

Action Required

Amend and circulate draft questionnaire and covering letter. GR

Cllr M Kirk

Chair of Scrutiny Committee

[The meeting started at 5.00 pm and finished at 6.40 pm].