

Interim Report For School Governors Review (Part A)

Background

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

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
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. In December 2007, Members were provided with information which identified York as having one of the fastest growing 'Black, Minority & Ethnic (BME) communities in the country, and the following statistics from the most recent Pupil Levels Annual School Census (PLASC) :
 - 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%)

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

5. In an effort to identify ways of improving the diversity of governing bodies, to better reflect the population of their school and their community, Members recognised it would first be necessary to clarify their current level of diversity. In considering the best way to do this, the Committee were informed of the planned work of the Governor Support & Development Service to upgrade their database and check the validity of the information currently held on each Governor. The Committee recognised the opportunity to support this work and at the same time gather information pertinent to the objectives of this review.
6. The Committee drafted a survey which would identify the age, gender, ethnicity, skills, and economic background of all current school governors. For example, to understand the correlation between the governing bodies of the schools within each ward and each ward's local community, the ethnicity information provided by governors was grouped on a ward basis and then compared to the ethnic balance of school pupils within each ward.
7. The survey was sent out to all 1090 Governors at the beginning of January 2008 and 1050 responses were received. The data was then fed into the database to generate a number of reports for the Committee's consideration at their meeting on 26 February 2008.
8. The Committee also held an informal consultation session for Governors on 26 February 2008 and those who had indicated an interest in participating further in this review were invited to attend to give their views.

Issues Arising

9. It was clear from the results of the survey that there were a number of questions that a majority of governors had chosen not to answer. For example, it was not possible to carry out a true comparison between the governor responses and the ethnic balance of pupils within York schools due to the limited number of governors who chose to answer that particular question. At the consultation session, the Committee took the opportunity to investigate why that and other questions had not generated a response. They identified that some Governors were still unclear as to the reasons for the survey, and others felt some of the

questions were intrusive and that by giving a response it could not benefit their ability to successfully carry out their role - see Annex A for those comments and the committee's responses.

10. Some governors provided additional information in their completed survey and this has now been collated and is attached for information at Annex B.
11. Irrespective of the completeness of information provided by governors, it is recognised that if governing bodies are to truly reflect the local community and attract a more diverse mix of individuals to the role, the Committee will need to identify improved methods for advertising all types of governor vacancies and ensure that these are accessible by hard to reach groups within local communities.

To identify ways of increasing the number of Community Governors

Information Gathered

12. In considering ways to increase the number of Community Governors, Members recognised the need to identify the reasons why governors stand down and why some schools have a bigger turnover than others.
13. As a result, Members suggested that the Governor Support & Development Service issue an exit questionnaire to governors standing down so that the information gained could be used to highlight any issues within the governing body, or with the training / level of support provided.
14. A draft of the exit questionnaire was considered by the Committee at their meeting in January 2008 and following a number of amendments was sent out to all governors who have resigned since the start of the academic year 2006-07. Feedback will be provided by the Governor Support & Development Service Manager on any completed questionnaires received, at this meeting.
15. Members also acknowledged that some governing bodies may be more successful than others at finding community governors. They recognised that the level and type of support available to new community (and parent) governors by existing governing body members, could directly affect whether individuals were attracted to the role. It was clear from the feedback at the consultation session that different governing bodies used different methods and the Committee considered how best to gather information on the different methods used.
16. It was agreed that this interim report explaining the work of the Committee be presented at a full governors' meeting of each school, together with a questionnaire (shown at Annex C), requesting further information to support the review. The results and any ideas etc could then be shared with all governing bodies at the end of the review.

Issues Arising

17. The Governor Support & Development Service Manager has advised that each Governing Body will be holding a full governor's meeting during the next half term (7 April – 23 May 2008). In order to allow them the opportunity to consider the report and complete the questionnaire, the deadline for responses could be set as 19 May 2008, as it is likely that a majority of full governor's meeting will be held before the last week of half term. This should allow sufficient time for the responses received to be collated for presentation at the meeting of this committee scheduled for 27 May 2008.

To identify ways of increasing community involvement with Governing Bodies

18. 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. Questions have therefore been included in the Governing Body questionnaire in order to gather the relevant information.

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

Information Gathered

19. A number of questions were included in the survey for individual school governors to identify their current skills and what additional training they require to support them in their role. Indirectly, the information they provided would also highlight the skills that were available but not currently being utilised, and those which were lacking within each governing body.

Issues Arising

20. As the information provided by the individual governors is covered by the Data Protection Act, this Committee has been very careful not to request statistical information which could identify individual governors i.e. information was not requested on a per school basis but instead on a ward by ward basis.
21. However, the changes that were instigated to the Governor Support & Development Service database to support the work of this review, will allow the Governor Support & Development Service team to look specifically at the members of each governing body to identify gaps in the skills currently available within each governing body and identify any future training requirements. The information on the database can also be provided to Governing Bodies on request to assist them with their skills audit and to inform their discussions about their training needs, in conjunction with the governing body self-review exercise that many are carrying out.

22. The Governor Support & Development Service Manager will also use the information to help when placing new governors into Local Authority governor vacancies (or community where appropriate), and all new governors appointed, will then receive all of the relevant training identified, to enable them to fulfil their role.

Options

23. Having considered the information contained within this report and associated annexes, Members may decide to:
- i. Carry out further consultation with Governing Bodies
 - ii. Identify any additional questions to be included in the questionnaire
 - iii. Identify improved / alternative methods for advertising all types of governing body vacancies

Implications

24. Financial – In order to support the work of the review as described in this interim report, additional funding over and above the available budget was required. Following a formal request to SMC that funding was made available.
25. There are no known Legal, Equalities, HR, implications associated with the recommendations within this report.

Corporate Priorities

26. 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

27. 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. It is recognised that some schools have difficulties in attracting community governors and therefore it is important that governing bodies are supported in attracting applicants for vacant seats, and retaining governing body members.

Recommendation

28. In light of the above options, Members are asked to:
- i. Note and provide comments on the interim report
 - ii. Agree any amendments to the governing body questionnaire

Reason: To ensure work can proceed as planned for this review whilst complying with scrutiny procedures, protocols and workplans.

Contact Details

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Interim Report Approved **Date**

17 March 2007

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: N/A

Annex A – Governors comments and Committee responses from the Consultation Session

Annex B – Additional comments provided by Governors via the survey

Annex C – Draft Governing Body Questionnaire & Covering Letter