

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 Part A of 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 issued a survey to all 1090 governors at the beginning of January 2008, which would identify the age, gender, ethnicity, skills, and economic background of all current school governors. The survey was aimed at understanding 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. Data from the 354 responses received was fed into the database to generate a number of reports for the Committee's consideration at their meeting on 26 February 2008. The meeting was followed by an informal consultation session for Governors and their views were gathered presented at the next formal meeting of the Committee held on 3 April 2008.

Issues Arising

7. Irrespective of the completeness of information provided by governors either at the consultation session or in their completed surveys, it was recognised by the Committee that if governing bodies were truly to reflect the local community and attract a more diverse mix of individuals to the role, improved methods for advertising all types of governor vacancies would need to be identified to ensure they were 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. At the governor consultation session it also became clear that some governing bodies were more successful than others at finding community (and parent) governors, and providing support to their new governing body members and that this could directly affect whether individuals were attracted to the role and retained in post.
13. Members suggested an exit questionnaire be issued to all governors who had resigned since the start of the academic year 2006-07, so that the information gained could be used to highlight any issues within the governing body, or with the training / level of support provided. A summary of the responses is attached at Annex A.
14. It was also agreed that the Committee's interim report dated 3 April 2008 be presented at a full governors' meeting of each school, together with a questionnaire requesting further information to support the review. Much thought was given to the content of the questionnaire in an effort to support and confirm the information already gathered as a result of the individual governor survey. Copies of both documents were sent out to all schools and a number of responses have been received.

Issues Arising

15. A summary of the responses to the questionnaire and any comments made on the interim report are attached at Annex B (to follow). The next stage in this process will be to consider all of the findings gathered to date, in order to identify the most successful methods used for attracting individuals to the role of community governors. Information on best practice could then be collated as part of this review, and shared with all York schools.

To identify ways of increasing community involvement with Governing Bodies

15. 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 were therefore included in the Governing Body questionnaire to gather the relevant information.

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

Information Gathered

16. Some of the questions included in the individual school governor survey were included in order to identify each governor's current skills and highlight any

additional training they might require to support them in their role. Indirectly, the information received could also be used to highlight the skills that were available within each governing body that were not currently being utilised, and those that were lacking within each governing body.

Issues Arising

17. It is recognised that the improvements made to the Governor Support & Development Service database as a result 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 their skills and identify any future training requirements.
 - Enable the Governor Support & Development Service team to provide information from the database to Governing Bodies to assist them with their skills audit and to inform their discussions about their training needs,
 - Support the governing body self-review exercise that many carry out on a regular basis.
 - Inform the Governor Support & Development Service Manager decision-making process, when placing new governors into Local Authority governor vacancies or when suggesting possible candidates for community governor vacancies.
 - Identify all of the relevant training required for new governors to enable them to fulfil their role.
18. As the information provided by the individual governors is covered by the Data Protection Act, the Committee was 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.
19. For this Committee to be confident that the improvements they've made to the database are yielding results, they may wish to request an update on the training requirements that have been identified together with a timetable for the provision of that training.

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, or;
 - ii. Agree that no further information is required from Governing Bodies in order to progress this review

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:
 - a. Note and provide comments on the interim report
 - b. Agree whether or not the current composition of governing bodies reflects the local community
 - c. Agree what if any, further information is required to identify ways of increasing community involvement with Governing Bodies
 - d. Identify improved / alternative methods for advertising governing body vacancies in order to:
 - i) attract community governors to the role
 - ii) attract interest from within hard to reach groups

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

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Interim Report Approved **Date**

16 May 2007

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: Interim Reports dated 26 February 2008 & 3 April 2008

Annex A – Responses and comments from the Exit Questionnaire

Annex B – Summary of the findings from the full Governing Body Questionnaire together with any comments on the interim report