



Education Scrutiny Committee

30 July 2008

Final Report For School Governors Review

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) :

- b) 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%)
5. At a meeting in May 2008, the Committee considered a scoping report for Part B of this review, having received an update from the Head of Early Years & Extended Schools. Members acknowledged that that was no issue around the current clerking arrangements in extended schools and therefore agreed not to proceed with part B of the review. Instead they agreed that the broader issue of governance of extended school provision should be considered as a possible separate topic in the future. Members agreed to consider this along with other topic suggestions at their next meeting in June 2008.

Consultation

6. As part of this review the Committee carried out a number of consultation exercises:
- The Committee issued an individual survey to all 1090 governors at the beginning of January 2008, to 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. 354 responses were received and fed into the Governor Support & Development Service database to generate a number of reports for the Committee's consideration.
 - Members created an exit questionnaire for use by the Governor Support & Development Service, in order to identify the reasons why governors stood down and why some schools have a bigger turnover than others. This was issued to all governors who had resigned since the start of the academic year 2006-07, to information on any unresolved issues within their governing bodies, or with the training / level of support they had received.
 - In February 2008, an informal consultation session was held for all Governors. Attendance was good and the Committee explained the reasons for carrying out this review and gathered insight into some of the different methods used for recruiting new members and how governing bodies were coping with their ever increasing workloads.
 - In April 2008, the Committee sent a copy of their latest interim report together with a questionnaire to each school's governing body requesting further information to support the review. Much thought was given to the

content of the questionnaire in an effort to the information already gathered as a result of the individual governor survey.

Information Gathered

7. In cases where individuals had been governors for many years, the information originally gathered when they first became a governor had never been recorded electronically. For more recently appointed governors, only some of the personal information they originally provided had been entered into the Governor Support & Development Service database, due to the restrictions of the electronic system. At the beginning of this review, 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 and therefore agreed to finance a number of additional improvements to the database.
8. Throughout the review the Committee gave much consideration to how the information gathered would be presented to them, as any personal information provided by individual governors was covered by the Data Protection Act. The Committee was careful not to receive information in such a way that it would identify individuals. Instead, the Committee sought information on a ward by ward basis and by school type i.e. primary or secondary.

Objective (i) - 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

9. A recent report from the ODPM identified York as having one of the fastest growing Black, Minority & Ethnic communities in the country. All York schools have minority ethnic pupils, and although it was thought that the Governing Bodies of York schools reflected their local community, there was no evidence to support this. Historically in York, the role of governor has attracted white middle class, middle aged applicants. To encourage a more diverse mix that better represented the school's local community, the Committee wanted to identify the barriers e.g. language, work commitments, childcare issues and look at ways of addressing those issues.
10. 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 and therefore a number of questions were included in both the survey and the Governing Body questionnaire.
11. The ethnicity information provided by governors was grouped on a ward basis and by school type, and then compared to the ethnic balance of school pupils within each ward – see Annex A.

Analysis

12. As a high number of governors did not identify their ethnicity in their completed surveys etc, it was not clear from results whether the ethnic diversity within the schools in each ward was equally reflected in their governing bodies. The committee concluded that irrespective of the completeness of information provided by governors, if governing bodies were truly to reflect their 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 everyone within the local community particularly hard to reach groups.

Recommendation

13. That the Governor Support & Development Service (GSDS):
 - (a) continue to develop improved methods for advertising governor vacancies, e.g. by targeting specific organizations, in order to attract a more diverse mix of individuals to the role of governor; and
 - (b) regularly maintain, update and develop its database to ensure it captures the information necessary to reflect changing circumstances and monitor diversity.

Objective (ii) - To identify ways of increasing the number of Community Governors

14. Through the various consultation exercises it became clear that some governing bodies were more successful than others at finding community (and parent) governors and providing support to new governing body members, and that this was directly affecting whether individuals were attracted to the role and retained in post.
15. The Committee were informed that at any given time there would generally be a higher percentage of vacancies within the community governor category than any other category. The responses to the exit questionnaire showed that governors left their post for a number of reasons and that the number of community governors leaving their post was no higher than the number from other categories of governor. In fact a high number of governors took up the role of Community governor having previously been a governor from a different category - see Annex B.

Analysis

16. The information gathered suggested therefore that there was not a problem with retaining community governors but that the difficulty lay initially in recruiting into the post. The Committee therefore recognised the need to identify the most effective methods for finding and recruiting potential community governors and a number of questions were included in the governing body questionnaire to identify the methods currently in use – see Annex C.
17. The information provided showed that the method yielding the most results was through existing governing body members approaching their personal contacts.

The committee recognised that this approach was not ideal as it relied heavily on the good will of existing members (and their knowledge of the skills of those they approached) it ran the risk of duplicating the existing profile

Recommendation

18. That the Governor Support & Development Service (GSDS):
 - (a) continue to develop improved methods for advertising governor vacancies, e.g. by targeting specific organizations, in order to attract a more diverse mix of individuals to the role of governor; and
 - (b) create an information guide to identify the most effective methods for finding and recruiting potential community governors and distribute it to all York schools.

Objective (iii) - To identify ways of increasing community involvement with Governing Bodies

19. In order to identify ways of increasing community involvement with Governing Bodies, Members agreed it would be necessary to understand the methods used and the level of involvement attained currently. Questions were therefore included in the Governing Body questionnaire to gather the relevant information. The responses are shown at Annex D.

Analysis

20. Many schools take advantage of their local parish council's newsletters and ward committee meetings to circulate information about what is happening in their school. Others are more adventurous, using local press and radio to advertise events etc. The Committee recognised that other schools could benefit from trying alternative methods and that sharing information and raising awareness, could be facilitated by the Governor Support and Development Service. Information on best practice could then be shared with all York schools.

Recommendation

That the Governor Support & Development Service (GSDS) ensure information on best practice be shared with all York schools.

Objective (iv) - Investigate ways of maximizing the skills that individual members of governing bodies bring to their role

21. In order to identify each governor's current skills and highlight any additional training they might require to support them in their role, a number of questions were included in the individual school governor survey. The responses are shown at Annex E. The information gathered was then used to populate the upgraded Governor Support and Development Service database.

Analysis

22. The committee recognised that a fully populated database would be a really useful tool for identifying training needs. The Governor Support & Development Service Manager subsequently provided an update on the training requirements identified as a result of the improvements to the database – see Annex F.
23. The Committee recognised that in order for the database to continue to be a useful tool, the information contained therein would need to be regularly revised to include up-to-date information. This could then be used to:
 - look specifically at individual governors to identify gaps in their skills and identify any future training requirements.
 - highlight the skills that were available within each governing body that were not currently being utilised and those that they were collectively lacking
24. It is recognised that the improvements made to the Governor Support & Development Service database and the information gathered as a result of this review will also allow 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 to ensure the new appointee brings the relevant skills required to the governing body .
 - Identify all of the relevant training required for new governors to enable them to fulfil their role.

Recommendation

That the Governor Support & Development Service (GSDS) be encouraged to consider the most applicable form of training for maximizing skills, whether that be whole governing body or online training.

Options

25. Having considered the information contained within this report and associated annexes, Members may decide to amend and/or agree the recommendations within the report

Implications

26. There are no known legal, Financial, Equalities, HR, or other implications associated with the recommendations within this report.

Corporate Priorities

27. 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

28. 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

29. In light of the above options, Members are asked to note the contents of the draft final report, agree any amendments and recommend to the Executive that:
- i) the significant voluntary contribution of school governors to the successful running of York schools, be acknowledged;
 - ii) the work of the Governor Support & Development Service Team be noted, in particular in supporting this scrutiny review and the resulting benefits gained to their service area as referenced in Annex F.
 - iii) the Governor Support & Development Service Team be instructed to:
 - a) Continue to develop improved methods for advertising governor vacancies i.e. by targeting specific organisations, in order to attract a more diverse mix of individuals to the role of governor and ensure it captures the information necessary to reflect changing circumstances and monitor diversity. (*objective (ii)*)
 - b) Create an information guide which identifies the most effective methods for finding and recruiting potential community governors and distribute it to all York schools (*objective (ii)*)
 - c) Continue use of the ‘Exit Questionnaire’ in order to investigate governors motivation for leaving their post (*all objectives*)
 - d) regularly maintain, update and develop their database to ensure it remains an effective tool (*objective (i)*);
 - e) share information on best practice with all York schools (*objective (iii)*)

- f) be encouraged to consider the most applicable form of training for maximizing skills, whether that be whole governing body or online training. *(objective (iv))*

Reason: To ensure this review complies with scrutiny procedures, protocols and workplans.

Contact Details

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Interim Report Approved



Date

6 June 2008

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: Interim Reports dated 26 February 2008, 3 April 2008 & 27 May 2008

Annex A – Ethnicity Information

Annex B – Information From Completed Exit Questionnaires

Annex C – Information Relating To Community Governors

Annex D – Information On Community Involvement With Governing Bodies

Annex E – Information On Training Requirements

Annex F – Update From governor Support & Development Service