

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Monday, 27 January 2014 at 7.00 pm in Ground Floor Meeting Room 5, Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

(NB These minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting)

Present

Councillors Sandra Stockdale
Luke Stubbs
Ken Ferrett

1. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Terry Hall. In the absence of both the Chair and Vice Chair, the Panel agreed that Councillor Stockdale Chair this meeting.

2. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Stubbs declared a personal non prejudicial interest as he is a governor at Milton Cross School.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 December 2013 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on 16 December 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

4. Review of school governance arrangements (AI 4)

The chair welcomed all guests to the meeting and introductions were made around the table before evidence was given.

(a) Mandy Parsons, Hampshire Governor Services

A paper had been circulated with the agenda on the Hampshire Clerking Service to Governing Bodies. Mandy Parsons said that the role of the clerk was crucial to the success of a school and that the national profile of the clerk has risen considerably in recent years. An experienced clerk who is brought into a struggling school could make a huge difference to the performance of the school. The role of a clerk is to organise meetings, offer guidance and provide support to the chair of governors. Hampshire Governor Services in partnership with the Southern Education Leadership Trust is currently involved in writing a training programme for clerks and this would come to the market in June this year. This will complement Hampshire's existing accredited programme for clerks. Hampshire Governor Services have been

running a clerking service for 15 years and the traded clerking service now had 136 clerks providing a clerking service to 250-260 schools. There is also a bank of skilled clerks that are available when schools were having difficulty finding someone to clerk a meeting.

Clerks are highly skilled and an average clerk will clerk for two schools. As the role is part time it often attracts mothers with young children or retired people. Therefore the turnover is often high for example mothers may decide to return to work. The administration of the clerks was also complicated. They work under the same terms and conditions as full time staff but there was an additional complication with many performing the role at home and there were sometimes problems with finding cover when a clerk was off sick.

The performance of clerks is important and meeting performance was a matter for the chair of governors to monitor. When performance issues are raised, Hampshire Governor Services work closely with the chair of governors and manage the situation with the school. All clerks have an annual performance review.

The following additional information was given in response to members' questions:

- With regard to making the clerking role full time, Mandy Parsons advised that governing bodies typically meet six times a year and usually meeting dates cluster in the same week or two. It would therefore be very difficult to make the role full time for those clerks who look after multiple schools. Some clerks also have day jobs and clerk in the evening. A few clerks are employed on annualised hours¹, to provide cover at short notice when a school finds they do not have a clerk for a meeting.
- The clerking service is fully traded and not funded by Hampshire County Council. The service costs in the region of £1,500 a year dependent on the number of hours that a clerk works.
- The National College for Teaching and Leadership is currently developing a national development programme for Clerks which will initially be delivered through the license holders. It does not directly deliver the programme for clerks. The training will be certificated to acknowledge that the clerk has participated in the development programme. Hampshire's Accreditation programme assesses clerks against a competency framework and once achieved means that the clerk is competent in their job. These two programmes are complimentary.

¹ Contractual working hours are expressed in the total number of hours to be worked per year, allowing flexible working patterns throughout the year.

- Once clerks are recruited they are required to undertake an e-learning course and two day development programme. They are then linked to a school. Their minutes are monitored by Hampshire Governor Services for the first few meetings to ensure they are accurate and to provide quality assurance in the early stages. The service meets with clerks bi-annually to provide relevant CPD and also to review their training needs.
- Clerks are expected to attend clerk support meetings and they have access to the governor training programme. They need to keep abreast of changes to legislation to perform their role effectively.
- The clerking service gives benefits to both the local authority and schools. For the local authority the income provides capacity for services and acts as a lever for improving schools rapidly and supporting schools. It gives the Governor Support Service much information so that they are able to act quickly if an issue arises. Schools often have difficulty in finding clerks and the cost of advertising and recruiting clerks can be high so they find the clerking service beneficial. The working relationship between Hampshire Governor Services, clerks and schools is very effective.
- Clerks are given training on data protection and Freedom of Information request. They are supplied with encrypted memory sticks that are password protected on their internal system and clerks can only access their own records on the database.
- Other authorities have a clerking service, although it is more common in larger authorities because it requires capacity to run and manage it effectively.
- Hampshire Governor Services would be willing to discuss establishing a SLA with Portsmouth City Council regarding a clerking service and would want to work directly with governor services to achieve this.
- Mark Mitchell said that his experience was that it was not currently hugely difficult to recruit clerks. He gave his experience of this and said that the candidates had ideally wanted a full time position. Mandy Parsons said that in Hampshire it was a problem and there was also an issue with recruiting clerks with the right skills and experience. Tony Quinn added that in Portsmouth some schools often struggle to recruit and retain clerks and advised that his team often had chairs of governors coming to them asking for assistance in finding a clerk. It was particularly a problem with infant and junior schools who usually have their meetings during the day so clerks are unable to attend as they often have a day job.

(b) Mark Mitchell, Chair of Governors The Harbour School and Mary Rose Special School

Mr Mitchell said that appraising head teachers was very important as this was linked to their pay and progression. Governors therefore needed to be both knowledgeable and objective. New governors often find it very difficult to understand all the acronyms and how to interpret data to actively challenge head teachers. The Governors Forum Steering Committee coordinates the work of governors and shape the agenda for the governors forum. Every school governor in Portsmouth is entitled to attend Governor Forum meetings and Governor Services provides the secretariat for this. It was noted however that approximately a half to a third of schools are not represented at these meetings which was disappointing as this is a useful way of sharing information between the local authority and governors. The minutes are circulated to all governors however these are a précis of the meeting and important discussions on good practice could be missed by non-attendance.

The following additional information was given in response to members' questions:

- The key to an effective governing body is that governors learn to work with their head teacher to establish a relationship of trust but also to feel able to challenge them and to resolve issues on a one to one basis.

(c) Rev. Charlotte Hetherington, Chair of Governors and Karen Stocks, Headteacher, Arundel Court Primary School

A paper had been circulated on the Governance arrangements of Arundel Court Primary School. Rev. Hetherington summarised the governance arrangements at Arundel Court Primary School and said that the school had benefited from stability in its governing body over the last few years. The school had recently re-constituted² allowing for a smaller number of governors. It was noted however that it was important to still have enough governors if there was a dismissal and a subsequent appeal meeting as a different panel of governors would be needed for each.

She said that she supported the idea of new governors shadowing established governors. She felt it was important to induct new governors slowly, particularly parent governors as it could easily become overwhelming and the school had seen a high turnover in the number of parent governors. The induction pack given to new governors gave just enough information for them to get started and not so much as to overwhelm them. She circulated an example to the

² Under the School Governance (Constitution)(England) Regulations 2012 schools can exercise their right to re-constitute and significantly reduce the size of the governing body.

Panel which contained a leaflet a welcome booklet and some information on the school. The school carried out a buddy system for new parent governors and in her experience she found some parent governors who had been in post for a year or more still needed additional support such as simplifying the data. The governing body worked hard with governors to understand data and as a result they were now asking more focussed and challenging questions.

Arundel Court governing body was very proactive and focussed. Learning walks, which included listening to children read, talking to pupils and talking to staff, take place at the school to obtain information. The focus of these is agreed at the start of each term.

Self-Review questionnaires have been completed and collated by the chair. Governors are asked to reflect on what they gained from the meeting and consider what difference they have made to the school.

Further information was given in response to members' questions:

- With regard to reconstituting governing bodies, Tony Quinn advised that the government implemented the *School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012* with effect from 1 September 2012. The government is also proposing to make all maintained school governing bodies reconstitute under the 2012 Regulations by September 2015. Currently only a few schools had reconstituted their governing body and reduced the number of parent governors. The minimum size for a governing body was seven members made up of two parent governors, one head teacher, one staff governor, one local authority governor and two co-opted governors. Schools need to be proactive and look at where the gaps are in the governing body and recruit new governors on their skills base. It is important that the local authority works with schools.
- The governing board had discussed succession planning. The Chairs of the sub committees were very competent in their role and they were ensuring that governors were taking on different responsibilities so that if someone was to leave, another governor could quickly fill their role. Mark Mitchell advised that he stood down from his governor's role at Priory School once he was confident that his successor was up to speed and felt this was a good way of doing it if time allowed.

5. Dates of Future Meetings (AI 5)

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 24 February at 7pm. Officers would meet with the Chair to discuss how many more meetings were required to complete the review.

The meeting concluded at 8.40 pm.

.....

Chair