

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Monday, 16 December 2013 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 Will Purvis (In the Chair)
Darron Phillips
Luke Stubbs

Also Present

Karen O' Connor, Education Officer
Tony Quinn, Senior Governor Support Officer
Nicola Waterman, Strategy Advisor

18 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ken Ferrett, Terry Hall and Sandra Stockdale. Apologies were also received from education representatives Emily Fletcher, Richard Wharton and Rosemary Olivier.

19 Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 2)

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

20 Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 July 2013 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children & Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on 2 July 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

21 Consideration and approval of the draft scoping document for the review into governance arrangements (AI 4)

(TAKE IN SCOPING DOCUMENT)

The Panel referred to the scoping document which was previously circulated and made the following comments:

- Members asked whether they could attend a secondary school full governors meeting as part of their evidence gathering. They also felt it would be interesting to attend a governors' meeting for both a school that was rated as excellent and an underperforming school for comparison purposes. Nicola Waterman advised

that she could provide details of the Ofsted site where comments made could be viewed. Tony Quinn advised that he would contact some schools and ask them on the Panel's behalf to see whether they would be receptive to this request. The dates of the meetings would then be circulated to members to see which meeting(s) they would be able to attend. The Panel felt it was important to attend governors meetings early in the review and it was agreed it would be best to complete this before the February half term towards the end of January or early February 2014.

- With regard to the benefits of local authorities operating a clerking pool, the Panel asked whether a witness from a local authority who operated this could be invited to a future meeting. This would allow them to give evidence on whether this had been successful for them and to advise of any challenges they had overcome. Tony Quinn said that Hampshire Governor Services operated a clerking pool and he would approach them to see whether they would be willing to send a representative. Members added that they would be willing to visit Hampshire County Council if preferred.
- Members said that they were not clear whether it was governors or head teachers who had ultimate responsibility for overseeing school governance. Tony Quinn explained that every head teacher is entitled to a place on a governing body, but governing bodies had overall responsibility for head teachers and there should be a mutual trust between the two.

RESOLVED

That the scoping document be approved.

22 Review into Governance arrangements

Karen O' Connor, Education Officer, Tony Quinn, Senior Governor Support Officer, and Nicola Waterman, Strategy Advisor were present to give evidence and answer questions from members.

(TAKE IN REPORT)

The Education Officer explained that she had a range of primary schools in her portfolio. School governors are always invited to her termly visits to schools; however the uptake of this was minimal, which was a concern. Governors then had to wait for the report to come to the school before they could see how the school was performing. In addition to this some governing bodies did not include the reports on the agenda for their meetings, which was also of concern. In terms of school governing bodies she said there was a mix of good and bad examples in the city. Being a school governor was a huge commitment and getting time off work to attend meetings was sometimes an issue for school governors. There was also an issue with a lack of challenge, which was partially due to governors not understanding how to interpret the data before them and not knowing what questions to ask to challenge head teachers. A good head teacher would ensure that governors

are trained in analysing data. The Education Officer explained that as part of her role she offers training for governing bodies, bespoke to their school, on how to analyse data and advises on what challenging questions they should be asking. The key to the training was that it needed to be evidence based. Education Improvement officers also supported the whole training of governor services. There was a varied take up of this despite the training being offered at various times during the day.

In response to a question regarding what could be done about poor governance, officers explained that there was an interim executive board in place to deal with poor governance. They felt that the best solution however was to empower governing bodies and to take a proactive rather than a reactive approach by undertaking self-review.

In response to a question regarding reconstitution of governing bodies, Tony Quinn explained that following the introduction of The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 that came into force on 1 September 2012, governing bodies had the opportunity to reduce in size. Regulation 13 (2) states that the governing body of a maintained school must be no fewer than seven governors and at least two parent governors. The reduction in the number of parent governors required for a governing body meant that parent governors could be recruited on their skills base. Nationally few numbers of schools were reconstituting and many had remained the same size after reconstituting¹. There was no evidence to suggest that governing bodies were more efficient after reconstituting and it was felt that they would only be successful if the governors selected had the right skills.

The Education Officer said that the most successful governing bodies were those who were actively involved and were empowered to do so by their head teacher. This included gathering evidence such as talking to pupils, looking at extracts of their work, listening to them read, monitoring behaviour in the school playground and talking to parents to judge how well the school was performing. Some governors felt reluctant to do this as they felt they should not be interfering and required support to have the confidence to do this. The Education Officer advised that on her visits to schools she encourages head teachers to empower their governing body she asks head teachers to empower governing bodies to gather evidence to be actively involved in the monitoring of the school. Officers work with governors on preparing for Ofsted inspections to ensure that they are confident as head teachers are not always taking this responsibility.

In response to a question regarding academies, officers advised that the Council did not have any responsibility or influence for governing bodies of academies and they are entitled to choose any system they wish. If the Council had concerns regarding the governance of academies they would go directly to the Department for Education. Governing bodies of maintained schools do not need to have sub committees but often have one that reviews finance and one for standards. If there are proposed changes to teachers pay and conditions the governing body may also look to set up a sub committee to review this.

Leadership is at the heart of improvement and is entwined with governance. The papers for governing bodies meetings are legally required to be published seven days before the meeting to allow for the papers to be read and questions formulated. This provides an evidence trail and is very effective. There needed to be an honest relationship between the head teacher and the chair of the governing board for school governance to work effectively.

Peer review should be factored into the training plan. A networking event was included in the training plan and 12 schools attended when it was last held with the feedback concluding that a lot of value was obtained from the session. In response to a question regarding whether there was enough effective governing bodies in the city to do a peer review, officers advised that they could do a short straw poll to ascertain what methods of review they are using. There were good examples of good governing bodies in the city but it was uncertain whether there were enough to allow for self-review.

Nicola Waterman advised that expressions of interest to become school governors had been received from the business community. Officers were trying to remove barriers to encourage more people to become school governors and members felt it was important to showcase business people who are school governors. The Education Skills Group were also working on providing training however this was currently not resulting in people becoming governors. Tony Quinn advised that he would contact Steve Piper and Alistair Gray from the Education Skills Group to establish whether they would be willing to attend a meeting to provide evidence on what work they were doing to encourage people to become a school governor. Officers advised that a concept needed to be sold to businesses in order for them to release their staff to act as school governors.

A question was raised regarding how many naval personnel were school governors and officers replied that there are quite a few naval governors and also staff at BAE who worked together to promote governance. Members said that officers at the Council would make ideal school governors. Officers replied that the rules had been relaxed around officers becoming school governors and the Council was supportive to staff wishing to become school governors. It was difficult for education officers to become school governors due to potential conflicts of interest.

23 Discussion on next steps for the review

The Chair suggested proceeding with the review with fewer meetings but with more witnesses at each meeting. Members also said that they could be flexible with the times of the meetings. Members said it was useful to receive any written information in advance of meetings and that a short paper with bullet points was preferable. The next steps were agreed as:

- Review Ofsted reports and identify schools in the city with good, poor and mediocre governance.

- A brief list of training courses governor services offer is provided to the Panel by officers and also to advise whether these are accredited.
- Invite governors and head teachers, not necessarily from the same school, to the same meeting, to provide evidence.
- Invite a representative from governor services at Hampshire County Council to a future meeting.
- Invite Steve Piper and Alistair Gray from the Educational Skills Group to a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 8:12pm

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Chair

LMG

ⁱ The consultation launched on 13 January 2014 is to have all schools reconstitute by September 2015.