



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY PANEL

**A REVIEW OF SCHOOL GOVERNANCE
ARRANGEMENTS**

Date published: 15 May 2014

Under the terms of the Council's Constitution, reports prepared by a Scrutiny Panel should be considered formally by the Cabinet or the relevant Cabinet Member within a period of eight weeks, as required by Rule 11(a) of the Policy & Review Procedure Rules.

PREFACE

The Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel's topic for the 2013-14 municipal year has been 'A Review of School Governance Arrangements'. In January 2014 Cabinet approved the School Governance Strategy and the aim of this review was to feed into the development of the strategy. Effective governance is vital for the city to achieve its ambition to improve the quality of schools' attainment for the city's children and young people.

During the review which was carried out between December 2013 and May 2014, the Panel received evidence from a number of sources, and compiled a questionnaire which was sent by email to all head teachers, chairs of governors and clerks of schools that buy into the governor services Service Level Agreement. The panel used this evidence to draw up a series of recommendations to improve school governance to submit to the Cabinet.

I would like to convey, on behalf of the Panel my sincere thanks to all the officers who contributed to making this review a success. In particular the Senior Governor Support Officer who gave valuable guidance and advice during this review. I would also like to thank all the governors, head teachers and clerks who either responded to our questionnaire or took time to attend one of the meetings to provide evidence.

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Councillor Will Purvis
Chair, Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel.

Date: 15 May 2014

CONTENTS

	Page
Executive Summary.	3
Conclusions.	7
Recommendations.	8
Purpose.	10
Background.	10
To consider whether there is sufficient capacity within Portsmouth City Council to provide the necessary support to governing bodies in the city.	11
To consider recruitment and retention of school governors in the city.	15
To consider the skills of school governors, take up of training by governors, their ability to understand and interpret school data and ability to hold senior leaders to account.	22
To consider how effective the existing arrangements are for governing body self-review.	25
To consider how effective clerking of governing bodies currently is and what can be done to strengthen clerking in the city.	26
To consider good practice from other local authorities.	32
Equalities Impact Assessment.	35
Legal Comments.	35
Finance Comments.	36
Budget and Policy Implications of the Recommendations.	37
Appendix 1 – A list of meetings held by the Panel and details of the written evidence received.	41
Appendix 2 - A glossary of terms used.	42
Appendix 3 – Panel’s questionnaire for head teachers and Chair of governors	43
Appendix 4 – Panel’s questionnaire for Clerks	52
Appendix 5 - Effective School Governance Strategy	55

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. To consider whether there is sufficient capacity within Portsmouth City Council to provide the necessary support to governing bodies in the city.

There is evidence to show that there are links between the effectiveness of the governing body, school improvement and pupil performance. The current Governor Services Team at the council consists of 1 senior governor support officer, 1 FTE governor support officer and one part time governor support officer (1 day per week). Standards of governance are variable in the city and Ofsted had previously been critical of the quality of governance in schools in the city. The team is responsible for supporting governing bodies with improving their standards of governance which would be a factor in helping to improve Ofsted results in the city.

The Panel heard from a number of governors as part of their review, the majority of whom felt that the team provides a valuable support service for governors that buy into the governor support Service Level Agreement (SLA). 53 schools currently buy into the SLA, including some academy schools, generating an approximate annual income of £52,810. Six schools had decided against buying into the service. The Governor Services Team is responsible for delivering a range of training opportunities and in 2013/14 offered 57 training courses as well as access to the Governor E-Learning (GEL) programme.

The council's Internal Audit Team undertakes audits of schools where they request a SLA with the council, at a cost to them and review certain activities in school to ensure that they are being properly controlled. In 2013/14 Internal Audit had 15 schools buy in to the Internal Audit SLA and for 2014/15 15 schools have expressed an interest. Those schools who buy into the service do not request specific help with the audit but most schools (regardless of whether they buy into the council's services or not) contact the Internal Audit Team for help on an ad-hoc basis throughout the year. The recruitment and retention of governors is not currently an area that Internal Audit monitors as part of the schools audit. This is discussed as part of wider issues at the termly interlock meetings. The Internal Audit team already monitor the take up of training of governing bodies.

2. To consider recruitment and retention of school governors in the city.

There is a genuine shortage of governors in the city, with the largest group of vacancies in the parent governor category. Predominant reasons and barriers to recruitment raised were the time commitment involved, perception of many that they do not have the necessary skills and too much responsibility being placed on governors.

Under the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012, governing bodies have the authority to review their composition and reduce in size. The aim of this being to make governing bodies more

effective by concentrating on the relevant skills set of governors. If schools decide to undertake this, it would reduce the number of vacancies. The evidence received from the panel's questionnaire showed that over half the schools who responded were considering this option and of those who had re-constituted, the governing body had reduced slightly in size.

The Panel heard from a representative of the Education Group of Shaping Portsmouth about the work they are doing with the council to promote the role of school governor to the business community. There are many benefits to employers if their staff become school governors including that they will acquire new skills that will be useful in their workplace and would account towards their continuing professional development (CPD). The Group is running a buddying initiative where local business leaders are paired with a head teacher to offer help and advice. This helped build a connection to the school. They had also produced leaflets and posters and were considering establishing a Facebook group for people interested in becoming governors. The group were also informing potential governors that they do not have to commit to the role for the full four year term, although this was preferred. Further work was continuing with the Council and Shaping Portsmouth including whether a more targeted approach could be introduced for skills matching of potential governors to vacancies.

The evidence obtained from the Panel's questionnaire indicated that the majority of governors and head teachers felt that once appointed governors were not sufficiently equipped to become fully involved in the running of the school. It was therefore felt that the governor induction process needed to be improved. The evidence from the questionnaire showed that just over half of the governors who responded had procedures in place to ensure for the continued professional development of governors. This was being completed by ensuring that governors are active and involved in the school and that the governing body is developed as a team.

3. To consider the skills of school governors, take up of training by governors, their ability to understand and interpret school data and ability to hold senior leaders to account.

The most effective governing bodies are those who are actively involved in the school and are empowered to do so by their head teacher. The Panel heard that the Governor Services Team encourages this and work with governors on preparing for Ofsted inspections to ensure they are confident. However, new governors often find it very difficult to understand all the acronyms and how to interpret data effectively in order to actively challenge head teachers. It is also vital that head teachers help governors by putting school data into an easier to understand format and governors should support their colleagues if they are struggling.

The Panel received evidence on reasons for governors not accessing training. The predominant reasons for this is due to them having other commitments and not being able to attend the training sessions.

Examples of good practice to make the governor induction process less daunting were given to the Panel. This included carrying out focussed learning walks in the schools and talking to staff, parents and pupils to gain an understanding of the school.

4. To consider how effective the existing arrangements are for governing body self-review

Governors are most effective when they are fully involved in the school's self-review and use the knowledge gained to challenge the school. The Ofsted framework emphasises that schools need to have a robust system of self-review in place and that regular self-review and using this information to improve practice will improve governance. The Governor Services Team provide governors with a self-review template and recommend governing bodies to carry out this process annually.

The majority of governors who provided evidence for this review advised that they followed the guidance and undertook self-review annually. The information obtained from this is used to assess training needs and develop the governing body over the next year. The majority of respondents used the governor services template to complete this; however some commented that they were not aware of the template or used their own processes. With regard to how completing self-review has improved the governing body, the Panel heard that for some it had helped stimulate some of the more passive governors and encouraged them to get more involved and for others they felt that the governing board was now more equipped to ask challenging questions.

5. To consider how effective clerking of governing bodies currently is and what can be done to strengthen clerking in the city.

An effective clerk is one of the governing body's most valuable resources. It is vital that the clerk has a good working relationship with the chair of governors and head teacher and they are expected to attend regular training sessions. To ensure that a governing body gets the right clerk for the job it needs to be clear about what it wants the clerk to do and should develop a role specification that details the roles and responsibilities.

The Panel received evidence on the Hampshire County Council clerking service that provides a service to 250-260 schools. It is a fully traded service that schools buy into. The service provides training and support for all clerks and offers a National Accreditation Programme for clerks and Portsmouth City Council (PCC) offer this to their clerks.

The turnover for clerks is often high due to the role being part time and the circumstances of people carrying out the role can be variable. The clerking service operates within its own income and so pays for the staff costs in administering it and delivering it, adding capacity to the overall team. Schools often have difficulty in finding clerks and the cost of advertising and recruiting for them can be high so many schools prefer to buy in to the traded service offered by Hampshire County Council.

All schools in Portsmouth are responsible for recruiting their own clerks. The Governor Services Team offer induction training for all new clerks and offer other training throughout the year which is part of the enhanced SLA.

Just over half of the questionnaire respondents thought that their clerk was effective, some however could not respond as their clerk had only recently been appointed. The majority of head teachers' chairs of governors and clerks indicated they would be in favour of operating a clerking pool within the city if this were feasible; however it was vital that clerks were of a high standard.

Clerks should be regularly performance managed and the main responsibility for managing the relationship between the clerk and the governing body should rest with the chair of governors. From the evidence the Panel received it was noted that the majority were performance managed by their chair of governors.

6. To consider good practice from other local authorities.

The Panel compiled a number of questions to put to other local authorities, who either are in the same comparator group as the Council or that officers had advised had good standards of governance. Responses were received from three of the local authorities.

The panel were advised that Milton Keynes Council offers a fully traded service and offer a number of features for governors a number of features including a welcome pack and an advice helpline. They offer a clerking pool and also offer a clerking service for hearings and disciplinary hearings. Milton Keynes Governor Services Team promote the role of governor at job fairs and are working with universities to recruit governors.

In addition to the standard services provided, Plymouth City Council Governor Services Team assist governing bodies with reviews of their practice, working with them on Ofsted evidence, portfolio evidence and the questions that Ofsted may ask. They have ceased their clerking pool service as this was operating at a loss.

Buckinghamshire Learning Trust who manages the Governor Services Team at Buckinghamshire County Council offers a comprehensive service to governors. In addition they offer a clerking and advice service that schools can buy into. This provides a full clerking and advice support from a professional clerk and this service is purchased by 90% of governing bodies. In addition the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust also offer a lay clerking service that supports school based clerks. A pay as you go service is also available to governing bodies to provide clerking support to hearings.

Conclusions

Based on the evidence and views it has received during the review process the Panel has come to the following conclusions:

1. Standards of governance are variable in the city and it is important to spread good governance in the city. The Panel recognise the importance of good governance in relation to Ofsted results and that previously Ofsted have been critical of the quality of governance in schools in the city (section 3.2)
2. The Governor Services Team at PCC is providing excellent support and is recognised by head teachers, chairs of governors and clerks as being a vital, effective and highly valued service. Some academy schools have chosen to commit to buy into the governor services SLA and only six schools have opted not to use the service (section 3.3, 3.13.1-3.13.2).
3. The governor services' section of the council's website could be used further to provide information for governors. Currently a generic role description of a governor or clerk is not included on the website. In addition a social media support model where governors can discuss problems/solutions and share best practice is currently not available for governors (section 3.13.3).
4. The Panel were pleased to note that the Education Group within Shaping Portsmouth are providing valuable work in promoting the role of school governor to the business community and that PCC will continue to work with the Group to promote governors to the business community. The PCC School Governance Strategy includes this as an action point to be completed by the end of the spring term 2014. Further work however is needed to promote the role of the school governor, especially to parents (section 4.13-4.20).
5. Reconstituting under The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 may help schools focus on the skills sets needed on their governing bodies. A small number of schools have already reconstituted and a larger number are considering this (section 4.4-4.6).
6. The Council's Internal Audit team review activities of schools that buy in to the SLA if they ask them to do so. They do not currently monitor the recruitment and retention of school governors in the city but carry out audits in the take up of training of governing bodies. Termly meetings are held with Governor Services, Education, Finance and Internal Audit where the recruitment and retention of governors is discussed. Exit interviews are carried out with retiring governors by the Governor Services Team (sections 3.8-3.10).
7. At present, there is no effective way of matching the skills of potential governors to the vacancies in the city. In addition a clear role specification for governors is not currently available (section 4.16).

8. The take up of training offered by governor services is variable among schools. Just over half the questionnaire respondents are regularly accessing training available from governor services and this needs to be further promoted. The predominant reason given for governors not accessing training is that they have other commitments. With regard to the GEL online training over half of the questionnaire respondents did not know whether their governors were accessing this (section 5.15.1).
9. Many new governors feel overwhelmed with the amount of information received when they are first appointed as governor. New governors also find it difficult to understand and interpret school data and are therefore unable to actively challenge this. The governor induction process is not as effective as it could be and needs to be improved (sections 4.21.1-4.21.3,5.4)
10. Clerks provide a vital role to the governing body but the evidence shows that the quality of clerking in the city is variable (7.14, 7.19.2).
11. Self-Review is an effective method of assessing the skills gap of governing bodies if implemented properly, and the majority of governing bodies who provided evidence completed some form of self-review annually. Not all questionnaire respondents were aware that the Governor Services Team provide a template for this. In addition peer review among governing bodies does not take place (sections 6.5-6.8.4).

Recommendations

1. That all schools in the city, including academies, be encouraged to buy into the governor services SLA (conclusion 2).
2. That the governor services section of the council's website be developed to provide more information and guidance for governors. It should include an agreed generic description of the role of a school governor and role description of a clerk. In addition that consideration be given to develop a social media support model for governors to discuss problems and solutions and share best practice (conclusion 3).
3. That awareness of the role of school governors in the business and wider community be promoted, emphasising that they do not necessarily have to commit to the role for four years, although this is preferred. The Chamber of Commerce and *Flagship* magazine be used as ways to promote this. Information stalls manned by experienced governors at appropriate events such as school fetes, should also be considered to raise the profile (conclusion 4).
4. That schools be encouraged to reconstitute under the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012, to help governing bodies become more effective by concentrating on the relevant skill sets of governors (conclusion 5).

5. That the council's Internal Audit team consider a shared piece of work with the Governor Services Team, to monitor the recruitment and retention of governors. In addition the Governor Services Team to use the information obtained from retiring governors' exit interviews to help governing bodies understand why governors are not staying in post and how to rectify this (conclusion 6).
6. That work is undertaken to better match skills of governors into governor vacancies, for example governor services should consider keeping a database of skills to quickly match these with governor vacancies in the city (conclusion 7).
7. That the Governor Services Team consider offering training courses on Saturdays to give more flexibility for governors who have other commitments to be able to attend training sessions (conclusion 8).
8. That the Governor Services Team provide a training pack for every governor to keep a portfolio of their training that they wish to pursue. This to include their identified learning outcomes and keep a record of their continued professional development (conclusion 8).
9. That online forums for training or an online portal showing slides and further information on training courses be explored. This would allow governors to fully understand what the session involves before deciding if a course is relevant (conclusion 8).
10. That the Governor Services Team actively target governors via email when new courses are organised to ensure that courses offered are well attended and that governors are adequately trained (conclusion 8).
11. That the Governor Services Team create a generic induction pack for new governors with a separate pack for infant, junior and senior school governors. This should contain only the essential information to allow them to start their role as governor. That governing bodies also be encouraged to give newly appointed governors a mentor for a short period of time to provide support and the opportunity to shadow them as part of their induction process (conclusion 9).
12. That head teachers be encouraged to put school data into an easier format. The Governor Services Team should work with head teachers to present school data as simply as possible to allow governors to become fully involved (conclusion 9).
13. That the council consider setting up a clerking pool in the city and look to develop a SLA with Hampshire County Council for the clerking service (conclusion 10).
14. That the Governor Services Self-Review Toolkit be further promoted to schools and that schools be offered training on how to carry out effective self-review. That in addition peer review between governing bodies in the city be encouraged (conclusion 11).

The budgetary and policy implications of these recommendations are set out in section 10 on pages 37-40.

1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to present the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel following its review of school governance.

2. **Background.**

- 2.1 Portsmouth has 65 schools, with each school having between 10 and 20 governors. There are approximately 840 school governor positions in Portsmouth, however this fluctuates due to schools amalgamating, federating, becoming an academy or re-constituting. Since 1988 school governing bodies have assumed greater responsibilities and their role has become more important as schools have gained increasing autonomy.
- 2.2 The governing body complements and enhances school leadership by providing support and constructive challenge, agreeing and monitoring school budgets, ensuring that all statutory duties are met, appointing the head teacher and holding him/her to account for the impact of the school's work on improving outcomes for all pupils. It is an extremely responsible role seeking to ensure that children and young people receive the best education possible.
- 2.3 Cabinet resolved to adopt the Effective School Governance Strategy (*appendix five*) at its meeting on 6 January 2014. The role of the Panel is to make recommendations for on-going development of the action plan.
- 2.4 The review of school governance was undertaken by the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel, which comprised:

Councillors Will Purvis (Chair)

Ken Ferrett

Terry Hall*

Darron Phillips

Sandra Stockdale*

Luke Stubbs

Standing Deputies were: Councillors David Horne, Robert New, Steve Wemyss and Matthew Winnington.

***At the Council meeting on 11 February, Councillors Margaret Adair and Stephen Wylie replaced Councillors Sandra Stockdale and Terry Hall on the Panel. This decision was made to maintain the required political balance.**

- 2.5 At its meeting on 16 December 2013, the Education, Children and Young People Panel (henceforth referred to in this report as the Panel) agreed the following objectives for a scrutiny review of school governance arrangements:

- To consider whether there is sufficient capacity within Portsmouth City Council to provide the necessary support to governing bodies in the city.
- To consider recruitment and retention of school governors in the city.
- To consider the skills of school governors, take up of training by governors, their ability to understand and interpret school data and ability to hold senior leaders to account.
- To consider how effective the existing arrangements are for governing body self-review.
- To consider how effective clerking of governing bodies currently is and what can be done to strengthen clerking in the city.
- To consider good practice from other local authorities.

2.6 The Panel met formally to discuss the review of school governance arrangements on five occasions between 16 December 2013 and 15 May 2014.

2.7 A list of meetings held by the Panel and details of the written evidence received can be found in *appendix one*. A glossary of terms used in this report can be found in *appendix two*. The minutes of the Panel's meetings and the documentation reviewed by the Panel are published on the council's website www.portsmouthcc.gov.uk.

3. To consider whether there is sufficient capacity within Portsmouth City Council to provide the necessary support to governing bodies in the city.

3.1 The Panel received evidence from a number of head teachers, chairs of governors and the Governor Services Team at Portsmouth City Council to consider whether there is sufficient capacity within the council to provide the necessary support to schools.

3.2 The Panel were advised by the Senior Governor Support Officer that effective school governance is crucial if Portsmouth is to achieve its ambition to improve the quality of schools' attainment and wider educational outcomes for the city's children and young people. Standards of governance are variable in the city and it is important to spread good governance in the city. In the past Ofsted have been critical of the quality of governance in schools in the city and the impact of this on the educational achievement of pupils.

3.3 The current Governor Services Team at Portsmouth City Council consists of 1 senior governor support officer and 1 governor support officer plus 1 part time governor support officer (1 day per week). The team is responsible for ensuring that the local authority exercises its statutory duties towards governing bodies. It provides advice and guidance to all governors that currently buy in to the Governor Support Service Level Agreement (SLA). 53

schools currently buy into the governor services enhanced SLA. The following 6 schools do not: Admiral Lord Nelson (rated as good by Ofsted at their recent inspection), Copnor Junior (rated as good by Ofsted at their recent inspection) Devonshire Infant (rated as good by Ofsted at their recent inspection) Medina Primary (rated as Requires Improvement by Ofsted at their recent inspection) Meon Infant (rated as outstanding by Ofsted at their recent inspection) and St George's Beneficial (rated as good by Ofsted at their recent inspection).

- 3.4 The Governor Services Team receive £42,600 funding from the local authority and the remainder of the income is derived from schools buying the SLA which equates to approximately £52,810. The team also income generate by providing training under license to the National College for Teaching and Leadership which brought in approximately £4,000 last financial year. The Senior Governor Support Officer controls the budget but there is limited flexibility as the bulk of the budget is used for staff salaries. The money spent on training is predominantly on room hire and printing materials for delegates to use. This is likely to change with many parts of the organisation now charging for their time when delivering training for governors and this will have an impact on spending and potentially, ability to run as wide a range of courses in the future.
- 3.5 There are seven schools in the process of moving to academy status which may have an effect on the number of schools that buy into the governor services SLA in the future. Flying Bull Primary and Admiral Lord Nelson Secondary are scheduled to become academies from 1 April 2014. Charles Dickens Primary, Priory Secondary and Miltoncross Secondary schools are scheduled to become academies from 1 September 2014. Newbridge Junior and Isambard Brunel Junior are also expected to convert to academies in the near future.
- 3.6 Devonshire Infant school and Meon Infant School buy the council's services on an ad-hoc basis. Admiral Lord Nelson School is in the process of academy conversion and have not bought into the councils governor services SLA for the past three years. Copnor Junior does not buy in, however they are in the process of converting to become an all through primary school and the adjacent infant school does buy in. St George's school does not buy in but again, this has been the case for the past three years. Reasons why the schools have chosen not to buy in are unknown by governor services.
- 3.7 The Governor Services Team is responsible for delivering a range of training opportunities for governors including whole governing body training sessions, chairs development and data training as well as external governance reviews. In 2013/14 the team offered a total of 57 courses and also access to the governor e-learning programme. In 2012/13 59 courses were held and 935 governors attended these sessions. Courses were led by a combination of Portsmouth City Council staff and external trainers with extensive experience. None of this training is currently accredited but this is something that the team are looking at. The council is part of South East Co-ordinators of Governor Services (SECOGS) who have a licence to deliver training on behalf of the National College for Teaching & Leadership (NCTL). The council delivers training under licence for the Chairs Development Programme, Performance

Related Pay for Governors and RAISEonline (data). The team also provide Effective Communications training for governors to help develop their soft skills.

PCC Internal Audit Team

- 3.8 The Council's Internal Audit Team review activities in schools to ensure that they are being properly controlled. However it is not their role to be the control. The team only carry out checks as part of an overall risk assessment of all the authority's activities to target the council's resources to the areas of greatest risk. These risks change from year to year so the activities the team review will change from year to year. The Internal Audit Team do undertake audits of schools where they request an SLA with the council, at a cost to them. Of the 55 schools under the remit of the local authority the Internal Audit Team have SLAs as per the following:

- Financial year 2013/2014 - 15 schools bought in to the Internal Audit School SLA
- Financial year 2014/2015 - 15 Schools have expressed an interest in purchasing an SLA
- Financial year 2015/2016 - 1 school has requested an audit - it is anticipated that the majority of schools who were last audited 3 years ago will purchase an SLA (15 schools)

Those schools who buy into the service do not request specific help with the audit, but most schools (regardless of whether they buy into PCC's service or not) contact the Internal Audit team for help or advice on an ad-hoc basis during the year.

- 3.9 Recruitment and retention of governors is not an area that is monitored by the Internal Audit Team as part of the standard school audit. Currently termly interlock meetings are held with Governors Services, Education Finance and Internal Audit where recruitment and retention of Governors is discussed as part of wider issues.
- 3.10 Currently the council's Internal Audit Team review the following; a full financial year of full governing body and finance committee minutes and agendas (including budgetary reports), the Governing Body Competencies Skills Matrix, Governing Body training, take up with the Governor Services SLA and Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) return. Any areas of weakness are highlighted in an exceptions report and discussed with the Head teacher and Chair of Governors / Finance.
- 3.11 With regard to expectations from the Governor Services Team, April Owen-Jones Chair of Governors at Highbury Primary School said she expected regular updates guidance, advice, and training for governors. She felt it was good to have school specific training at school rather than centrally. Day conferences are usually more informative than short day sessions. It was suggested that these might sometimes be held on Saturdays to obtain better attendance. Mrs Owen-Jones said more specific advice on the governor

induction process would be useful, as would courses that were tailor made. She also suggested that a mentor scheme for new chairs and clerks be established, as even very experienced governors can take over the chair and need help. The mentors could be newer chairs that are in good schools and not necessarily someone who has been in the same school for a long period.

- 3.12 Alison Beane, Head teacher of Mary Rose Academy and Cliffdale Primary Academy said that both schools had decided to continue to buy into the governor support service of the council. She said they had found the Governor Services Team very effective and there was a good range of training available.

Data obtained from questionnaire

- 3.13 A questionnaire was sent to head teachers and chairs of governors of all schools in the city that buy into the governor support service SLA. A copy of the questionnaire is included in *appendix 3*. This sought views on a number of areas linked to the objectives of the review. The results are broken down under the question headings within each of the objectives. There are a total of 109 head teachers and chairs of governors that the questionnaire was sent to and 32 responses were received to the questionnaire, a response rate of 29.35%. A second questionnaire was sent to clerks to gain their perspective and a copy of this is included in *appendix 4*. There are 54 clerks and 18 responses were received, a response rate of 33.33%.

3.13.1 What services offered by the Governor Services Team at Portsmouth City Council do you use and how would you rate these?

The most prevalent services used by governors were the range of training courses, support and guidance and regular updates. The table below summarises the results given to this question.

Services	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	No answer (%)
Range of training courses	87.10	0.00	12.90
Support and guidance	87.50	9.38	3.12
Regular updates	87.10	6.45	6.45
Self-evaluation kit	63.33	10.00	26.67
Assistance with finding a clerk	33.33	13.33	53.33

Clerks were also asked the above question. 50% responded that the support received was very good, 38.89% said it was good and 11.11% said it was poor.

3.13.2 Do you feel the support from the Governor Services Team is needed?

78.13% of respondents said they felt the support from the team was needed and 21.88% felt that it was not needed. Respondents were given the opportunity to add comments and these are listed below:

- We have looked outside to online governor support and other local authority training.
- Without the support of the Governor Services Team at PCC I would not be able to fulfil my role as Chair of Governors - they are essential and invaluable.
- Some form of support to governors is needed. It does not necessarily need to be provided by the team.
- Support is vital to helping governing bodies operate within the wider city programmes and agendas - the specific training and advice is critical to the success of many bodies.
- Support not needed at present, but only because we are now an experienced team, we always take the full SLA so that new members who may need support have access to it.

3.13.3 Do you have any alternative ideas for how support is provided?

34.48% of people said they had alternative ideas for how support is provided. Respondents were given the opportunity to add comments and these are listed below:

- Training offered to clusters of schools.
- Website with access to articles/updates from other governing bodies.
- Special tailored courses i.e.: Guide on how to become outstanding with special advice on your school.
- Outsource the service.
- Local authority buy into Hampshire Services for the city.
- A local authority clerking system would be helpful.
- Make governors aware of alternatives such as other courses by other providers - we are all in this together to improve governance.
- In addition to the traditional support mechanisms - establish a "social media" support model, where chairs and governors can collaborate electronically sharing problems, solutions, best practice etc. This could be Twitter, Facebook based etc. - and/or integrate to a dedicated "community" space in a web tool. This "social business" model is extremely popular and successful in the business world - and would play well into the self-starting, motivated, people who tend to volunteer for governorship.
- Better website with information (2 respondents).
- Mentoring by experienced chairs to new chairs in similar schools.

4 To consider recruitment and retention of school governors in the city.

- 4.1 The Panel invited chairs of governors and head teacher to hear evidence. The Panel's questionnaire was also sent to all head teachers and chairs of governors to obtain data regarding recruitment and retention of governors.

- 4.2 Recruitment and retention of governors is a serious issue for many governing bodies across the country. There is a genuine shortage of governors in the city with 17%¹ of existing governor positions in the city that are currently vacant. The breakdown of vacancies suggests that parent governors are the hardest to recruit as 35% of the vacancies were for parent governors. The Panel were advised that education improvement officers were trying to remove the perceived barriers around recruiting governors, including people thinking they do not possess the correct skills and that it will take up too much of their time.
- 4.3 Governing bodies vary in their size and composition, with representatives of a number of different categories or stakeholders. All categories of governor have the same responsibilities and status on the governing body. Governing bodies generally do a lot of their business through committees such as curriculum, staffing and finance. The governing body can delegate decision making powers to committees and this can reduce the amount of work which is done by the full governing body. Each committee must be clerked by a member of the full governing body but the head teacher may not clerk a committee. The different categories are listed below:

Authority Governors are appointed by the Local Authority. A potential governor submits an application form to the Governor Services Team which includes a précis of their skills, experience and knowledge.

Parent Governors are elected by parents of registered pupils at the school. Vacancies are advertised through the school and the head teacher conducts the election. Parent governors do not need to be parents of a child currently attending the school. If no suitable candidates are found they may recruit from parents of former pupils or a parent of any child of school age. Parents appointed in this way can be removed from their position by a majority vote of the governing body.

Community Governors are chosen and appointed by the governing body. A governing body chooses people to be community governors to bring additional experience and/or develop links with the local community served by the school. The LEA does not need to be consulted.

Staff Governors are elected from the teaching and non-teaching staff in the school. The head teacher is a governor by right, but can decide not to undertake the role.

Foundation Governors are appointed by sponsoring bodies, usually Church authorities, for certain schools.

Sponsor Governors are appointed by the governing body if they wish to do so. The governing body can appoint as sponsor governors persons who give substantial assistance to the school, financially or in kind, or who provide services to the school.

¹ Correct as of 24 March 2014.

Associate members are not governors. The governing body can benefit from being able to draw upon expertise and experience from outside their formal governor membership. The governing body can appoint associate members to serve on one or more governing body committees and attend full governing body meetings.

- 4.4 The issue of recruitment and retention of governors could be significantly reduced if all governing bodies exercised their right to re-constitute. Following the introduction of The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 that came into force on 1 September 2012, governing bodies have the opportunity to reduce in size. The aim of the regulations is to make governing bodies more effective by concentrating on the relevant skill sets of governors which differed from the existing stakeholder model. Regulation 13 (2) states that the governing body of a maintained school must be no fewer than seven governors and have at least two parent governors. The change in regulations means that governors can be recruited to fill perceived skills gaps.
- 4.5 Nationally, few schools were reconstituting and many had remained the same size after reconstituting². The education officer from the Governor Services Team advised that there was no evidence to suggest that governing bodies were more efficient after reconstituting and felt that this would only be successful if the governors selected possessed the right skills. In addition, a minimum number of governors were required for a governing body to be available to cover obligations such as serving on a disciplinary committee. The governors who sit on these committees must not have previously heard the case and or have an interest. Therefore it was difficult to reduce the size of a governing body significantly.
- 4.6 The results of the questionnaire showed that 24.14% of schools in the city had re-constituted and 65.52% were considering doing so. These respondents were then asked how the composition of their governing body had changed following reconstituting. The following answers were given:
- Reduced in size by two
 - Slightly less in number
 - One less local authority governor and replaced by a co-opted member
 - Last time we reviewed this was some time ago and we are considering this again because we have a large number of parent governors who do not stay long.
- 4.7 From the evidence the Panel received from governors and head teachers who attended their meetings, the predominant reasons for the shortage of all groups of governor was the role taking up too much time and too much paperwork to read and absorb. There is a huge time commitment involved in being a school governor and getting time off work to attend meetings was sometimes an issue for governors. Many parent governors also feel that they

² The national consultation launched on 13 January 2014 is to have all schools reconstitute by September 2015.

do not have the right skills to become a governor. The Council's current form for people to register an interest to become a governor could be daunting for some, asking if they have any skills in HR, finance etc. which a lot of parents do not possess. Officers advised that they are currently working on improving the form to make it less daunting.

- 4.8 The Panel received evidence from Mr Hanna, a parent governor at Portsdown Primary School. He explained that he felt becoming a parent governor was an important way to help improve the school and was the easiest way that parents can make a difference to their child's education. It was down to the governors of a school to help the children's future and they all needed to work together to do the best that they can. As a parent governor Mr Hanna said he always tried his utmost to attend governors meetings. However, as many parent governors have full time jobs, attendance at meetings was often an issue for them. He felt that parent governors did make a huge difference to the running of the school and that it was a shame there were not more parents willing to become governors.
- 4.9 With regard to barriers to recruitment of parent governors, Mr Hanna said he felt the main reason was a lack of understanding from the parents' point of view on what the role involves. He felt that many parents consider they do not possess the right skills or have an academic background. Many parents also do not have the confidence and understanding of the school terminology. He mentioned that parents can get quite irate if teachers assume they understand the vocabulary or talk down to them. Parents can be put off talking to teachers because of this despite the teachers not meaning to be discouraging. The Senior Governor Support Officer added that the Governor Services Team carry out exit interviews for retiring governors to understand the reasons that they have decided not to continue with the role.
- 4.10 Mr Hanna advised he had previously suggested a parent governor surgery for parent governors to talk to parents to explain their role, which may help to remove these barriers and get more parents interested in applying to become a governor. He also felt it was important for governors to attend meetings of other schools to learn from each other and share good practice. This however was not easy due to parent governors having their own work commitments but he said he would be very interested to see how things are done in other schools. Teachers have a job and are bound by the curriculum. Governors are responsible for the school and parents need to bring the two together.
- 4.11 Mr Hanna said he felt having pre agenda meetings might be a useful way to encourage the more reticent governors to ask questions and clarify anything they are unsure of before the main meeting.
- 4.12 There was 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.

Education Group, Shaping Portsmouth

- 4.13 The Panel heard from Alistair Gray from the Education Group, part of Shaping Portsmouth who is working to fill governor vacancies in the city. As part of the

overall activities of the group, representatives from the business community held a major annual careers fair at the Guildhall and carried out frequent visits to schools to promote job opportunities in the local business community, with the intention of raising the aspirations of students. In respect of governors, the group promoted the merits of getting their employees involved to employers. The group recognise that within the business community there are people in different stages of their careers. Some want to develop and are looking for a leadership role which the school governor role can help them achieve. The group were promoting this message to businesses and had produced a poster that was being displayed in offices in the city to target business leaders and this had received a positive effect. The group had also created a flyer which gave information about the work of the group and directed people to the school governors' website. A new leaflet was being developed which was aimed specifically at the business community. This was due to go live in the next month or so and would be accompanied with a letter giving advice on where they could get more information and the merits of becoming a school governor. It was hoped this initiative would have a positive effect.

- 4.14 The Education Group is working closely with officers at the council helping them to develop their website in respect of governors' content. In addition they were also considering setting up a Facebook page to capture the interest of people to become school governors. The group is running a buddying initiative where local business leaders are paired with a head teacher to offer help and advice. The Governor Services Team would highlight specific vacancies and skills needed in schools to the group who could then promote these back to the organisation. It was hoped that this would create a better take-up of governors.
- 4.15 The Education Group representative advised the Panel that there was a misconception that people must sign up for the role as governor for four years. It is preferable that people do sign up for the full term, however it is not essential and the group are keen to promote that the minimum requirement is to commit to one year. People are more likely to sign up as a governor for a specific project for one year. There was then the possibility that they find the role to be so rewarding that they commit to staying on longer.
- 4.16 The Education Group representative was unsure whether there was the appetite from schools to have more business people as governors as the group did not have much direct dialogue with schools. However, there were people involved in education as part of the group. The buddy scheme and school visits also helped to build a connection with schools. A more targeted approach to recruiting governors could be used to set out more clearly the skills people could offer as governors and match the skills to specific needs in schools. There was more that could be done in this area and the Education Group were considering this. The Panel felt that it was very important to explore a better way of matching potential governors' skills with vacancies in schools.
- 4.17 There was also the issue of people having the requisite skills to be a governor but not having the time commitment and vice versa. The Education Group representative said that this was another strand of the buddy scheme. In

addition to recruiting governors with the right skills, it was also important to recruit governors with the right temperament who it is thought will fit in well with the current staff structure.

- 4.18 The group encouraged business leaders to become school governors and the nature of their work was such that a lot of this work would be done in their spare time. Being a school governor meant that new skills are gained that are also useful to their workplace and continuing professional development (CPD) is a driver for business people to volunteer as governors. The group are promoting this as an incentive for both business people and other able people to sign up as governors.
- 4.19 Potential governors are not interviewed prior to being appointed as potential governors could view this as an additional obstacle and be deterred from applying. The group were encouraging people with backgrounds in business support, HR etc. to become governors as they have valued skills, however 'ordinary' parents and grandparents also had valuable skills to offer and are appointed as governors.
- 4.20 In practice initial engagement with the public is easy but getting people to sign up is more of a challenge as people are very busy and it is difficult for them to fully commit. Business colleagues could be encouraged to do more to promote the role. Once the leaflet is launched the education group will ensure that businesses receive copies and business leaders would be encouraged to champion this to their staff.

Data obtained from questionnaire

- 4.21 The questionnaire sent to head teachers and chairs of governors asked questions around recruitment and retention of governors.
- 4.21.1 What do you think are the issues for governors not staying in post?
89.66% of respondents felt that the main reason for governors not staying in post was that they find the role taking up too much of their time. 62.07% felt that there was too much reading/paperwork involved and 48.28% said that the training offered was not at times suitable to them. Other issues mentioned were too much responsibility being placed on governors, governors not understanding the role before committing and governors finding it difficult to balance the role with a full time job.
- 4.21.2 Do you think new governors feel sufficiently equipped to become fully involved in the running of the school?
72.41% of respondents felt that governors were not sufficiently equipped to become fully involved. Many of the reasons outlined in 4.21.1 were mentioned as a cause of this and two respondents suggested a trial period. The issue of education having its own specialised language for governors to learn was also mentioned as a reason why new governors do not feel fully prepared to take on the role. The respondent commented that new governors, particularly those with little experience of education post-school, find that it takes time to understand the role and it takes time for them to feel confident enough to offer robust challenge to senior leaders. Another respondent commented that they had found success when new governors

had first been involved with something straightforward, so that they could easily see how their decision led to changes being made. This empowers them to think and act independently and other matters such as true understanding of the school, governance and local practices comes later.

4.21.3 Do you think the induction process for governors could be improved?

71.43% of respondents said they felt the governor induction process could be improved. Several respondents felt that there should be mandatory induction training within a governor's first three or four months. Shadowing experienced governors was also suggested by several respondents as a method for improving the induction process. One respondent said they felt better trainers and training content was needed making better use of case studies, practical examples and using trainers who are experienced in the subject matter and have provided training experience as governors. A further respondent said that all schools should offer a standard induction pack and activities such as a learning walk in their school at the start of each new governor's term of office. Another respondent commented that too many new governors come away from induction intimidated by the mountain of information they feel they need to understand. However, in reality these matters are spread across the governing body. The core aspects should be shared but it would be good to set up a simple 'getting started' action sheet that a new governor can take away that will help make a difference and boost confidence, for example 'complete a visit with a subject lead of your choice next term and report back to the full governing board'.

4.21.4 What do you think the barriers are to recruiting governors?

41.38% felt that the main barrier to recruiting governors was that they do not fully understand the role. 31.03% of respondents felt that the main reason was the amount of time involved in being a governor. Respondents were also given the opportunity to raise other issues and these included:

- The increasingly corporate nature of governance puts many off.
- Commitment, particularly those in business.
- Too much responsibility – especially under the new Ofsted framework
- Not interested

4.21.5 What is your school doing to actively recruit governors?

51.85% of schools were not actively recruiting for governors when the survey was carried out. 40.74% of governing bodies were using the support offered by the Governor Services Team to recruit for their governor vacancies. 25.93% were advertising through their school website and 18.52% were advertising through the School Governors One Stop Shop (SGOSS) Schools Service website. 11.11% of schools were advertising through a leaflet campaign.

4.21.6 Is recruitment and retention of governors a problem with one group of governor in particular? i.e. parent governor, local authority governor etc.

51.85% of respondents answered yes and 48.15% answered no. Of those who answered yes, 60% said that they had found parent governors the most difficult group to recruit, and this was closely followed by local authority governors and community governors.

4.21.7 Have you found an issue with recruiting governors with skills suitable to perform the role of school governor?

57.14% of respondents answered no and 42.86 answered yes. Several respondents commented they had struggled to find people with the relevant financial skills, with some seeking the help of governor services to fill these vacancies.

4.21.8 What are you doing to ensure succession planning for your governing body is in place?

The most prevalent answer to this question was that governing bodies were ensuring that governors are active and involved in the school to ensure succession planning. Other common answers were developing the governing body as a team and valuing and retaining effective leaders on the governing body.

4.21.9 Do you have procedures in place to ensure continued professional development of governors?

57.14% of respondents did have procedures in place. Active training liaison governors, self-evaluation, and regular training were all methods governing bodies are currently using for their continued professional development.

5 To consider the skills of governors, take up of training by governors, their ability to understand and interpret school data and ability to hold senior leaders to account.

5.1 The Panel received evidence from head teachers, chairs of governors, the council's Internal Audit Team and members of the Governor Services Team in order to consider the skills of governors, training and the ability to understand and interpret school data.

5.2 The Panel heard from the education officer, Governor Services Team at the Council, 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 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 training despite it being offered at various times of day.

5.3 The education officer, from the Governor Services Team said that the most successful governing bodies were those who were actively involved and were appropriately empowered 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 required support to overcome their reluctance to do this as they often felt they should not be interfering. The Governor Services Team encourages head teachers to empower their governing body to gather evidence so as 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 do not always undertake this responsibility.

- 5.4 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 shapes the agenda for the governors' forum. Every school governor in Portsmouth is entitled to attend Governor Forum meetings and the Governor Services Team 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 could be a useful way of sharing information between the local authority and governors. The governors forum is non-statutory and is designed to inform governors of relevant governance and education matters and to provide a link to governor involvement in other areas of the council's functions such as representation on schools forum and education scrutiny.
- 5.5 With regard to training, Mark Hanna, parent governor at Portsdown Primary School said he was offered huge amounts of training from the Governor Services Team which he had taken up on a variety of issues including sessions on understanding data. However, he said that he had not been able to attend as much training as he would have liked as the training courses had usually coincided with the date of the governing board meetings. The date of the training sessions had now changed so he was now able to attend more training sessions.
- 5.6 Mark Hanna advised that governor services send their training programme to governors at the beginning of the year which contains all the training sessions required including refresher courses. He said that he found that training courses were more beneficial once he had attended a few governors meetings first. The training provided was very good and built on knowledge gained by attending governor meetings.
- 5.7 The parent governor at Portsdown Primary school advised that there were parents with the right skill sets to become parent governors but they do not have the time to dedicate to the role. The governing body did not target parents to become governors. The governing body were considering reconstituting and looking to rearrange the cohort of governors.
- 5.8 The education officer said that 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.
- 5.9 Rev Hetherington, chair of governors at Arundel Court Primary School and Karen Stocks, head teacher Arundel Court Primary school provided evidence to the Panel. The chair of governors 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 the school had seen a high turnover in this category of governors. The induction pack provided for new governors gave the key information required for them to start in their role and the school had been careful not to include too much information which could be overwhelming. She circulated the school's induction pack to the 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 explain the data and as a result they were now asking more focussed and challenging questions.

- 5.10 The chair of governors said that 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.
- 5.11 The Panel received evidence from Alison Beane, head teacher of Mary Rose Academy and Cliffdale Primary Academy. The governing body had carried out a skills audit of governors to assess the current position and identify where improvements were needed. One of the most important things is induction of governors and having a CPD plan in place for them. A training session of half an hour at the start of each governing board took place and there was a targeted CPD plan for each governor and committee. Most of the training sessions were carried out by a member of school staff but on occasion external people facilitated these such as Ofsted.
- 5.12 The school was about to implement *Blue Sky* software which is web based. This will be used to manage staff appraisals and build on the CPD plans. It would allow teachers to interactively identify training and staff development opportunities and upload documentary evidence of their achievements. One of the most important skills of a governor was to quickly become 'Ofsted savvy' to understand their terminology and to ensure that the school is meeting the expectations of Ofsted.
- 5.13 The Panel received evidence from Mark Hanna, parent governor at Portsdown Primary School. He explained that he had found it useful to use the first six months of his role to absorb all the information and understand the school. He said it took him approximately six months to become fully involved in the running of the school. It was important for governors to ask challenging questions of the head teacher and query any data that they do not understand.
- 5.14 He advised that it was important for parent governors to ask the head teacher to put the data into an easier format to comprehend or if this was not possible for them to explain this to governors. Governors also need to help each other understand the data and provide support to their colleagues to help the school.

Data obtained from questionnaire

- 5.15 The questionnaire sent to head teachers and chairs of governors asked questions about training of governors.
- 5.15.1 Are your governors accessing the available training provided by governor services?

57.69% of respondents said that their governors are regularly accessing the training available. The predominant reason for governors not accessing the

available training was that they are not able to make sessions due to other commitments. Other reasons included time pressures and the location of training. For those who are regularly accessing the training, 50% attended 8 or more sessions in 2012/13. With regard to the GEL e-learning, 56% of respondents did not know whether their governors were accessing this and 24% said they were and had completed nine or more hours on e-learning.

6 To consider how effective the existing arrangements are for governing body self-review.

- 6.1 The Panel asked some questions around self-review on their questionnaire. They also obtained evidence from the National Governors Association (NGA) and received evidence from head teachers and chairs of governors, to consider the effectiveness of governing body self-review.
- 6.2 There is evidence from the *SGOSS School Governor Impact Study, 2012*, to show that there are links between the effectiveness of the governing body, school improvement and pupil performance. The effectiveness of governing bodies is judged by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's (HMCI's) Annual Report for 2009/10 identified that:
'Governors are most effective when they are fully involved in the school's self-evaluation and use the knowledge gained to challenge the school, understand its strengths and weaknesses and contribute to shaping its strategic direction. In contrast, weak governance is likely to fail to ensure statutory requirements are met, for example those related to safeguarding. In addition, where governance is weak the involvement of governors in monitoring the quality of provision is not well enough defined or sufficiently rigorous and challenging.'
- 6.3 The Ofsted framework emphasises that schools need to have a robust system of self-evaluation in place and advise that it would help to strengthen governance if governing bodies were undertaking their own honest self-review process and using the information to improve their practice. This is recommended but not a requirement. Portsmouth City Council provides a self-evaluation template for schools to complete and recommend that governing bodies complete their self-evaluation form annually.
- 6.4 The education officer, part of the Governor Services Team at the Council, advised the Panel that peer review should be factored into the training plan of governing bodies. A networking event was included in the training plan when it was last held with the feedback concluding that a lot of value was obtained from the session. There were good examples of good governing bodies in the city but it was uncertain whether there were enough to allow for peer review.
- 6.5 The head teacher of Mary Rose Academy and Cliffdale Primary Academy said that self-evaluation is very important and the governing board at both her schools evaluate the schools progress once a year and review progress against the governor school plan.
- 6.6 The chair of governors at Highbury Primary School advised that self-review is undertaken at least annually at Highbury Primary School. They use this information to assess training needs and to develop as a governing body over

the next year.

Written submissions from the NGA relating to self-review

- 6.7 The NGA was contacted and provided the following written submission with regard to self-review.

'The effectiveness of governing body self-review depends very much on what the governing body does with the information. For example, if the self-review identifies that the governing body is poor at reporting to parents and carers, the governing body should follow up by establishing a strategy to better communication with this group. Similarly, the review might identify an area in which the governing body as a whole has little expertise - to follow up, the governing body might undergo training in this area. '

Data obtained from questionnaire

- 6.8 The questionnaire sent to head teachers and chairs of governors asked questions about self-review.

6.8.1 How often do you undertake self-review?

85.71% of respondents said they completed self-review annually and 14.29% said they undertook this bi annually.

6.8.2 Do you use Portsmouth City Council's self-evaluation toolkit? If yes how effective is this?

75% of respondents used the Council's self-review toolkit. Of those who responded all of the respondents rated the toolkit as good. Three respondents commented that they were not aware the council provided a template for this. Several others said that they either used their own processes or used Governor Mark.

6.8.3 How do you use the information gained from self-review?

91.30% of respondents said that they used the information to help develop as a governing body throughout the year.

6.8.4 How has completing self-review improved practice?

The majority of respondents said that it helped to identify training needs and had focussed their governing body. One respondent said that it helped to galvanise some governors who had been fairly passive and encouraged them to get involved in governing board matters. Another respondent mentioned that their governing body was now more equipped to ask the challenging questions that are needed to drive school improvement.

7 To consider how effective clerking of governing bodies currently is and what can be done to strengthen clerking in the city.

- 7.1 The education offer advised the panel that the national profile of the clerk has risen considerably in recent years. An effective clerk is one of the governing body's most valuable resources. It is important that the clerk is trained and has a good understanding and working knowledge of governance law so that they can advise the governing body. Being able to provide advice and

establishing good working relationships with members of the governing body (in particular with the chair and the head teacher) is all part of being an effective clerk. 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.

Clerking Service at Hampshire County Council

- 7.2 The Panel heard from Mandy Parsons, Head of Governor Services at Hampshire County Council about the clerking service at Hampshire County Council. 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. The clerking service is fully traded and not funded by Hampshire County Council. Schools buy in to the service and it costs in the region of £1,500 a year dependent on the number of hours that a clerk works. 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.
- 7.3 Where a school directly employs a clerk, the authority has provided a job description and pay rate which they are recommended to use. This was developed to try to bring consistency across the authority. The service provides training and support for all clerks and offers a national Accreditation Programme for clerks and Portsmouth City Council offer this to their clerks.
- 7.4 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 complementary.
- 7.5 Clerks are highly skilled and an average clerk will clerk for two schools. As the role is part time it often attracts retired people or mothers with young children. 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.

- 7.6 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.
- 7.7 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 hours³, to provide cover at short notice when a school finds they do not have a clerk for a meeting.
- 7.8 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 twice a year to provide relevant CPD and also to review their training needs.
- 7.9 The clerking service gives benefits to both the local authority and schools. The clerking service operates within its own income and so pays for the staff costs in administering it and delivering it, thus adding capacity to the over-all team. For the local authority the service 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.
- 7.10 Other authorities have a clerking service, although it is more common in larger authorities because it requires capacity to run and manage it effectively.
- 7.11 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. All schools in Portsmouth are responsible for recruiting their own clerks. The Governor Services Team offer induction training for all new clerks and provide clerks training throughout the academic year which is included in the enhanced SLA. We do not have any clerks attend our training whose governing body does not subscribe to their SLA.
- 7.12 Mark Mitchell, Chair of governors at Mary Rose School and The Harbour School, said that his experience was that it was not currently hugely difficult to recruit clerks in Portsmouth. He gave his experience of this and said that the candidates had ideally wanted a full time position. The Head of Governor Services at Hampshire County Council said that in Hampshire it was a problem and there was also an issue with recruiting clerks with the right skills

³ Contractual working hours are expressed in the total number of hours to be worked per year, allowing flexible working patterns throughout the year.

and experience. The Senior Governor Support Officer 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 that usually have their meetings during the day so clerks are unable to attend as they often have a day job.

7.13 The Chair of Governors at Highbury Primary School provided evidence to the Panel on this subject. She said that her governing body had recently appointed a new clerk who required training and support. She felt an effective clerk is one who knows the school and the governors and understands the way a governing body works best. Clerks also need to be proactive and good communicators.

7.14 The parent governor of Portsdown Primary School advised he had worked with two clerks at his school, both of whom were excellent. He felt the clerk performed a vital role and provided valuable support to the governing body. Their clerk downloads all the relevant paperwork governors need to read from the Governors Virtual Office (GVO) otherwise the governors would be swamped with paperwork. They are also invaluable at meetings taking the minutes and knowing where to find information, otherwise the governing body would fall into disarray. Mr Hanna advised that he is the deputy chair of curriculum standards and he finds having the clerk at these meetings invaluable as they can advise on the agenda and what was agreed and have a mine of useful knowledge to help support him.

Written evidence from the NGA relating to clerks

7.15 To ensure that a governing body gets the right clerk for the job it needs to be clear about what it wants the clerk to do and develop a job description that details the duties and responsibilities. The NGA have developed an updated model job description which can be altered to suit the needs of individual governing bodies.

7.16 The NGA recommend that governing bodies should not employ an individual as a clerk who is also employed in the school in another capacity, as this can lead to conflicts of interest for the clerk. The NGA recognises that this is the situation in a number of schools and suggest the following ways to manage the situation:

- Ensure that there is a clear separation of functions. This can be achieved by having two separate contracts, one for the role in school and another for the role as clerk.
- Where this is not the case ensure that the contract builds in time during the clerk's working day for clerking responsibilities – i.e. while many governing body meetings will take place after school hours and this will be built into the contract, the writing up of minutes and sending round agendas should also be part of the clerks working hours and allowed for within the working day.
- Make sure that responsibility for line-management is clear – for duties relating to the operation of the school this will be a member of the school staff, and for clerking facilities this should be the chair of governors.

7.17 Other things that can be done to strengthen clerking:

- Ensure clerks are adequately remunerated according to their roles/duties.
- Ensure clerks are regularly performance managed and appraised. The main responsibility for managing the relationship between the clerk and the governing body should rest with the chair of governors.
- Ensure clerks receive continuous professional development and training and that they are paid for this time.
- Creation of an association/network for clerks.
- Recognise good clerking through awards and publicity, to spread good practice.

7.18 Not all of the above is necessarily within the control of the local authority, but it can encourage its governing bodies to appoint properly skilled clerks. If the local authority does not run its own clerking service it could hold a list of suitably skilled clerks which governing bodies could use if they need to recruit a new clerk.

Data obtained from questionnaire

7.19 The questionnaire sent to head teachers and chairs of governors asked questions about clerks.

7.19.1 What do you consider are the qualities of an effective clerk?

65.38% of respondents felt that the most important quality of a clerk was that they understand how a governing body works. This was closely followed by being a proactive and organised individual. When asked what other skills a clerk should possess several respondents felt that being an effective minute taker was an essential skill and one person said being accredited was beneficial.

7.19.2 How effective do you think your clerk is?

59.09% of respondents said that they felt their clerk was very good. For those respondents who didn't answer the reason this was because their clerk was relatively new so it was too soon to answer this question fairly.

7.19.3 Have you found problems with recruiting a suitable clerk?

28% of respondents had encountered an issue with finding a suitable clerk. The main reason for this was a lack of people applying for the position.

7.19.4 What do you think the benefits are of operating a clerking pool in the city?

The majority of respondents felt that this was a good idea, providing that clerks are of good quality. Comments included:

- Not sure this would help solve the problem of a shortage of clerks.
- Very good idea as many schools are finding difficulty in recruiting. It is important that the quality of candidates is taken into consideration.
- Could also recruit professional clerks to be used across schools and ensure these are well trained
- Preference is a strategy to get accredited clerks as this has been invaluable.

7.20 A separate questionnaire was sent to clerks to obtain their perspective.

7.20.1 Have you completed the accreditation qualification?

47.06% had completed the qualification 41.18% had not and 11.76% were in the process of completing it.

7.20.2 How many schools to you clerk for?

The majority of respondents (78.57%) clerked for 1-2 schools, as opposed to more than two schools.

7.20.3 How many governor services training courses have you attended?

All respondents answered this question with 50% of respondents who had attended six or more training courses. 27% had attended 1-2 training sessions and 23% who had attended between 3 and 6 training courses since their time as a clerk.

7.20.4 What do you think the benefits are of operating a clerking pool in the city?

The majority of respondents thought this was a good idea and comments included:

- I'm in the Hampshire Clerking Pool already and have been since 1999.
- Seems to work for Hampshire so might be worth a try - and would give more certainty to schools who cannot find a permanent clerk
- For consistency new permanent clerks need to be appointed.
- Good idea although governor services does email clerks when there is a vacancy.
- This is a good idea. Also it would be useful if the pool could provide clerks to cover for meetings where regular clerks cannot attend for reasons of sickness etc.
- Good idea. It would enable governing bodies to be able to draw upon experienced and trained people who can advise them correctly until they get their own clerk.
- Really good idea, it would be a way of standardising procedures, sharing good practice and therefore raising standards.
- I think it is a good idea; sometimes clerks are unable to attend meetings at short notice and it would be helpful to have a pool of clerks to call upon.
- OK, but it is likely to be the small minority of current clerks who do their best to help out when required.

7.20.5 Are you performance managed?

73.33% of respondents were performance managed. The majority were performance managed annually by their chair of governors, however other answers included:

- Only had one in nine years.
- With the school business manager.
- The Hampshire Clerk's scheme is set against the Clerk's Accreditation criteria and we self-assess and the Chairs agree, or not. I adapted it for my school and they use this for my performance review.

8 To consider good practice from other local authorities.

Evidence regarding governance arrangements was received from the following local authorities:

8.1 Milton Keynes

8.1.2 Milton Keynes Council run a fully traded service that schools buy into and offer new governors:

- A welcome pack
- Foundation courses for newly appointed governors
- Special interest courses on particular subjects
- Courses for specific skills
- Individual governing body training sessions
- Governors seminars
- Governors conferences
- Advice/helpline
- Clerking service

8.1.3 Milton Keynes Council offer a fully comprehensive training programme which is added to throughout the year with approximately 40-50 courses a year and access to the GEL online. In addition the Council offers the governing body chair and vice chair termly meetings with the Director of Education and other key officers in the Council so they are kept informed of any issues.

8.1.4 Milton Keynes Council offer governing bodies a skills audit service and whole governing body training sessions. Each school is linked with a learning partner.

8.1.5 Milton Keynes Council offer a clerking pool and have nine clerks who work part time and clerk for 110 schools. They also provide a clerking service for hearings and disciplinary matters. They also offer a lay clerking service and have 7-9 lay clerks.

8.1.6 Milton Keynes does not currently have a business mentoring scheme but are considering introducing one. Their Governor Services Team attend job fairs and are forging links with universities to recruit governors. They have produced a leaflet for governors on how many hours a month the role will require and listed the qualities needed to become a school governor. Anyone who had expressed an interest in becoming a governor was invited to a coffee evening to find out more from the team and existing governors. Several potential governors did decide the role was not for them after this. However, the team felt it was better to lose them at this stage rather than using time and resources to appoint and train them and them standing down at a later stage as they did not fully understand what was expected of them.

8.2 Plymouth City Council

8.2.1 Plymouth City Council, one of the Council's comparator local authorities were also contacted.

8.2.2 Plymouth City Council offer governors advice on governance matters, training courses provided (70 per year), assistance and support with complaint handling and 1-2-1 training where required. With regard to improving standards of governance their Governor Services Team are assisting governing bodies with reviews of their practice, working with them on Ofsted evidence, portfolios of evidence and the questions Ofsted may ask.

8.2.3 Plymouth City Council offer a suite of courses across the year – Chairing Skills, Clerking Skills, minute taking, Health and Safety, Performance Management, Young Carers, Early Years, Special Education, Medicines, RAISE Online, Finance, HR, Working with Co-ordinators, Engaging with Parents, Induction Training, Moving from Good to Outstanding, evidencing the work of the governing body, Service Families and Pupil Premium, Social Media, Use of the School Website, Ofsted for New Governors. Update sessions are run 3 times per year for Chair, Vice Chair and Clerks to attend. They also offer bespoke short sessions run at the Governing Body meeting e.g. Ofsted Framework, Governor Visits, Asking Challenging Questions. Some prove very popular, and others not so, with specialist areas in some cases, not well attended.

8.2.4 Plymouth provide templates for skills audits when governing bodies wish to carry out Skills Audits.

8.2.5 Plymouth do not currently offer a self-review toolkit, although would be interested to see the content of other authorities' toolkits.

8.2.6 They no longer operate a clerking pool as this was making a substantial loss.

8.2.7 They are not currently looking at the business mentoring scheme to recruit governors from the business sector but advised they may consider this in the future.

8.3 Buckinghamshire Learning Trust

8.3.1 Buckinghamshire Learning Trust offer governing bodies:

- General advice and support to governors about education law by telephone or email – there is a general helpline number
- Termly Leadership Briefings for Chairs and Head teachers in three locations
- Termly meetings of the School Governance Consultative Board to discuss policy, initiatives and challenges in relation to schools and governance
- Production of model agendas and supporting appendices giving details of the decisions that need to be taken and/or the recommended action
- Regular Development Governor meetings to support governor development and share good practice

- Dissemination of news and information via monthly editions of Governor Times, and through the Governor Zone website.
- Resources such as information booklets, standing orders, model terms of reference for committees, model policies and guidance via Governor Zone www.learningtrust.net/governors
- Support with the governing body constitution for new LA-maintained schools and schools undergoing federation or amalgamation.

8.3.2 With regard to recruitment and retention of governors the team assist with:

- Provision of appointment letters and welcome packs to new governors
- Pre-appointment checks on all governors
- Recruitment and appointment of LA governors
- Support for schools in recruiting governors via a countywide recruitment strategy
- Maintenance of a governor database.

Governor Services works with the School Governors One Stop Shop and community groups to encourage potential governors to come forward and maintain a pool of experienced governors to support governing bodies in challenging circumstances. These statutory services are available to academies if they purchase one of Governor Services' support packages (see below).

Two main services are offered which can be purchased separately or together at a discount:

- Clerking and Advice. This service provides full clerking and advice support with governing body meetings from a professional clerk who is able to give advice and guidance on governance/education issues as appropriate. It is purchased by 90% of governing bodies and this compares to a national average of 69% (COGS' benchmarking data 31 March 2012).
- In addition, Buckinghamshire Learning Trust provide a Lay Clerk Service which supports school-based clerks and this is purchased by 8 governing bodies. This provides access to support and advice and twice termly training sessions.
- A pay as you go service is also available to governing bodies to provide clerking support to hearings such as pupil exclusions and staff disciplinary hearings.
- Governor Development. By subscribing to this service governing bodies have unlimited access to Buckinghamshire's comprehensive training and development programme, an annual conference, as well as access to online training through their e-learning website GEL. [GEL is delivered in partnership with the Eastern Leadership Centre and Governor Services is on the editorial board].
- Courses can also be accessed on a pay as used basis.

- Governing bodies can purchase a whole governing body training session on a subject of their choice and this is available at a discounted price when purchased with Clerking and Advice and Governor Development.
- Data shows that in the financial year to 31st March 2013, 100% of governing bodies purchased the Governor Development Programme either through subscription or as pay as used. This compares to a national average of 84% (COGS' benchmarking data 31 March 2012).
- New governors in subscribing schools are pre-booked on to the governor induction programme which consists of 2 whole days of training, plus 2 evening sessions, one on data monitoring and the other child protection. 96% of new governors attended induction training in the year to 31 March 2013 and this compares with a national average of 56% (COGS' benchmarking data 31 March 2012).
- Email communication is used to target governors when new courses are organised and this is very effective in leading to bookings.
- For academy governors a bespoke Day 2 induction day is provided that includes their additional responsibilities in governing an academy. This year they are also providing 2 new academy workshops on managing risk and working in partnership.
- Buckinghamshire's programme is comprehensive and, as well as induction for new governors, includes: Performance Management, Safer Recruitment, Curriculum Developments, Cyber Safety, Human Resources Workshops, Managing Allegations, Financial Management, Governing Body Self-evaluation, etc.

8.3.3 Governor Services has produced a Framework for governing body self-evaluation that is based on the Ofsted Inspection Framework and has been updated to take account of changes in the September 2013 Handbook and Subsidiary Guidance. It is available to all LA maintained schools as well as academies that purchase governor services and supports governing bodies in assessing their own effectiveness against the Ofsted inspection criteria. There are additional sections on governing body organisation, recruitment and succession planning. It is a unique product and Buckinghamshire have had some very positive feedback on its usefulness.

9 Equalities Impact Assessment.

An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required as the recommendations in this report do not raise any equality issues.

10 Legal Comments.

10.1 Section 13A of the Education Act 1996 imposes a duty on Local Authorities to promote high standards in schools and promote the fulfilment of learning potential for children and young people. Governing bodies in schools

play an important part in contributing to school improvement and the recommendations set out in this report will assist the Local Authority in compliance with this duty.

- 10.2 The School Governance (Constitution) (England) 2012 Regulations set out the arrangements for the constitution of governing bodies of maintained schools and these provisions must be adhered to by governing bodies when considering reconstitution.

11 Finance Comments.

- 11.1 Where there are direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report, these will need to be managed within the financial resources available to the service. In respect of the proposal to consider setting up a clerking pool within the city and developing an SLA with Hampshire County Council, it will be necessary to undertake a detailed financial appraisal prior to implementing these arrangements.

10 BUDGETARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS.

The following table highlights the budgetary and policy implications of the recommendations being presented by the Panel :

Recommendation	Action by	Policy Framework	Resource Implications
1. That all schools in the city, including academies, be encouraged to buy into the governor services SLA.	Head of Education, Governor Services Team, Strategy Team, Governors Forum	On-going work, within Budget and Policy Framework.	Within existing resources.
2. That the governor services section of the council's website be developed to provide more information and guidance for governors. It should include an agreed generic description of the role of a school governor and role description of a clerk. In addition that consideration be given to develop a social media support model for governors to discuss problems and solutions and share best practice.	Head of Education, Governor Services Team, Strategy Team, Governors Forum	On-going work, within Budget and Policy Framework.	Within existing resources. To be in place by new academic year.
3. That awareness of the role of school governors in the business and wider community be promoted, emphasising that they do not necessarily have to commit to the role for four years, although this is preferred. The Chamber of Commerce and <i>Flagship</i> magazine be used as ways to promote this. Information stalls manned by experienced governors at appropriate events such as school fetes, should also be considered to raise the profile.	Head of Education, Governor Services Team, Governors Forum and Shaping Portsmouth	On-going work, within Budget and Policy Framework.	Within existing resources.

Recommendation	Action by	Policy Framework	Resource Implications
4. That schools be encouraged to reconstitute under the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012, to help governing bodies become more effective by concentrating on the relevant skill sets of governors.	Head of Education, Governor Services Team, Governors Forum	On-going work, within Budget and Policy Framework.	Within existing resources.
5. That the council's Internal Audit Team consider a shared piece of work with the Governor Services Team, to monitor the recruitment and retention of governors. In addition the Governor Services Team to use the information obtained from retiring governors' exit interviews to help governing bodies understand why governors are not staying in post and how to rectify this.	Head of Education, Internal Audit Team, Governor Services Team, Strategy Team	Unknown - On-going work -The Head of Education in discussion with Audit Team. The Strategy Team are monitoring this. A process review will be completed by the end of the current term.	Within existing resources and based on sample interviews.
6. That work is undertaken to better match skills of governors into governor vacancies, for example governor services should consider keeping a database of skills to quickly match these with governor vacancies in the city.	Head of Education, Governor Services Team	On-going work, within Budget and Policy Framework.	Within existing resources.
7. That Governor Services consider offering training courses on Saturdays to give more flexibility for governors who have other commitments to be able to attend training sessions.	Governor Services Team	On-going work, within Budget and Policy framework depending on if there is the appetite of this.	Within existing resources.
8. That Governor Services provide a training pack for every governor to keep a portfolio of their training that they wish to pursue. This to include their identified learning outcomes and keep a record of their continued professional development.	Governor Services Team, Portsmouth Governors Forum	On-going work, within Budget and Policy Framework.	Within existing resources.

Recommendation	Action by	Policy Framework	Resource Implications
9. That online forums for training or an online portal showing slides and further information on training courses be explored. This would allow governors to fully understand what the session involves before deciding if a course is relevant.	Governor Services Team, Portsmouth Governors Forum.	Not within Budget and Policy Framework.	Not within current resources - look to develop with the Portsmouth Governors Forum. Time equivalent of £5k.
10. That the Governor Services Team actively target governors via email when new courses are organised to ensure that courses offered are well attended and that governors are adequately trained.	Governor Services Team	On-going work, within budget and policy framework.	Within existing resources.
11. That the Governor Services Team create a generic induction pack for new governors with a separate pack for infant, junior and senior school governors. This should contain only the essential information to allow them to start their role as governor. That governing bodies also be encouraged to give newly appointed governors a mentor for a short period of time to provide support and the opportunity to shadow them as part of their induction process	Governor Services Team, Portsmouth Governors Forum, Governing bodies responsible for mentoring scheme.	On-going work, within budget and policy framework.	Within existing resources.
12. That head teachers be encouraged to put school data into an easier format. Governor services should work with head teachers to present school data as simply as possible to allow governors to become fully involved.	Governor Services Team, Head of Education, Seconded Head	On-going work, within budget and policy framework.	Within existing resources.

Recommendation	Action by	Policy Framework	Resource Implications
13. That the council consider setting up a clerking pool in the city and look to develop a SLA with Hampshire County Council for the clerking service.	Governor Services Team	Unknown if within Budget and Policy Framework - The Head of Education will investigate this with Hampshire CC	Potential huge resource implications on the team. Annual subsidy approximately £150k - £200k
14. That the governor services self-review toolkit be further promoted to schools and that schools be offered training on how to carry out effective self-review. That in addition peer review between governing bodies in the city be encouraged.	Governor Services Team	On-going work, within Budget and Policy framework.	Within existing resources.

Meeting Date	Witnesses	Documents Received.
16 December 2013	<p>Tony Quinn, Senior Governor Support Officer</p> <p>Nicola Waterman, Strategy Advisor</p> <p>Karen O' Connor, Education Officer</p>	<p>Scoping document.</p> <p>Background information.</p> <p>Briefing note on governance arrangements</p>
27 January 2014	<p>Mandy Parsons, Hampshire Governor Services</p> <p>Mark Mitchell, Chair of Governors The Harbour School and Mary Rose Special School</p> <p>Rev. Hetherington, Chair of Governors Arundel Court Primary School</p> <p>Karen Stocks, Head of Arundel Court Primary School</p>	<p>Briefing note on Hampshire County Council clerking services</p> <p>Briefing note on the governance arrangements of Arundel Court Primary School</p>
24 February 2014	<p>Alistair Gray, Shaping Portsmouth and lead on the Education Skills Group</p> <p>April Owen-Jones, Chair of Governors Highbury Primary School</p> <p>Alison Beane, Executive Head of Mary Rose Primary Academy and Cliffdale Primary Academy School</p>	
7 April 2014	<p>Mark Hanna Parent Governor, Portsdown Primary School</p>	
15 May 2014	<p>Formal sign off of the panel's report</p>	

GLOSSARY

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
LEA	Local Education Authority
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership
SECOGS	South East Co-ordinators of Governor Services
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SFVS	Schools Financial Value Standard