

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

MINUTES of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Monday, 24 February 2014 at 7.00 pm in Ground Floor Meeting Room 5, Civic Offices, Portsmouth.

Present

Councillors Will Purvis (in the Chair)
Darron Phillips
Margaret Adair
Ken Ferrett
Luke Stubbs
Steven Wylie

6. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

No apologies for absence were received for this meeting.

7. Declarations of Interest (AI 2)

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

8. Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 January 2014 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on 27 January 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

9. Review of School Governance Arrangements (AI 4)

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

(a) Alistair Gray, Education Group

Mr Gray explained that the Education Group was one area of work of the Shaping the Future of Portsmouth group. Mr Gray and Mr Steve Piper were leading on this and are working with Portsmouth City Council to reduce the number of 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. They also carried out frequent visits to schools to promote job opportunities in the local business community, hopefully also raising the aspirations of students. In respect of governors, the group promoted the merits to employers of getting their employees involved. The group recognise that within the business community there are people in different stages of their careers. Some people in the business community are looking for more flexible roles; some retired people are looking to share their

skills and some want to develop and are looking for a leadership role which the school governor role can help achieve. The group were promoting this message back to businesses and had developed a poster (which Mr Gray tabled) 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.

The Education Group is working closely with officers at the city council helping them to develop their website in respect of governor 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.

It was difficult for the group to quantify how effective their work had been as they do not track referrals and Mr Gray suggested that governor services could monitor this and report on progress to the group. He reported that at the Shaping Portsmouth 2013 conference one of the award winners was a business operations leader for IBM and also the chair of governors for Wimborne Junior School. He had joined the school in 2008 as a community governor to give something back to the community and has used his commercial skills and experience from the business community in his governance role within the school. He won the award for his contribution to school governance.

With regard to barriers of recruitment he said 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 a minimum of one year.

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

- Mr Gray 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. Mr Gray advised there was more that could be done and he would take this back to the group. Members felt that it was very important to of having a better way of matching

potential governor's skills with vacancies in schools.

- There was also the issue of people having the requisite skills to be governors but not having the time commitment and vice versa. Mr Gray said that this was another strand of the buddy scheme. People are often discouraged from committing to sign up to be a governor for four years. They are more likely to sign up as a governor for a specific project for one year. There was then the possibility that they find they are getting so much out of the role they commit to staying on in the role. 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.
- The group encouraged business leaders to get involved in being a school governor 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 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.
- Potential governors are not interviewed prior to being appointed and they relied on the system to ensure that governors are fully prepared and briefed. Pre-screening potential governors is seen as another obstacle. The group were encouraging people from business support, HR etc. backgrounds to become governors as they have valued skills, however 'ordinary' parents and grandparents also had valuable skills to offer and are appointed as governors.
- In practice the initial engagement is easy but getting people to commit to sign up is more of a challenge as people are very busy and it is difficult for them to fully commit. It was possible business colleagues could be encouraged to do more. Once the leaflet is launched the group will ensure that each representative has one and business leaders would need to champion this to their staff.
- The group had a representative from the Education Business Partnership on the group who they worked with directly.
- With regard to careers advice for schools lacking in some schools, Mr Gray said that the group were looking at interview skills development and organised sessions where people in the business community visit schools to talk to children about their jobs. They were focussing attention on getting people in the early stages of their careers to present to children aged 7-8 years, to tell them of their role and children are encouraged to guess what their career is. It was hoped this would raise their

aspirations. Mr Gray said there is more that could be done and he would take this back to the group. It was also pointed out that some pupils did not have the motivation to seek a suitable work experience placement and were not receiving support for this. Mr Gray said the group attend the opportunity fairs to promote careers advice but there was more that could be done to provide quality work experience for schools and he would report this back to the group.

- It was agreed that governor services 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.

(b) April Owen-Jones, Chair of Governors, Highbury Primary School

Mrs Owen-Jones had circulated to the panel prior to the meeting a paper answering some questions from the panel. She advised that she was previously on the Interim Executive Board (IEB) for the school. The subsequent shadow governing body carried out self-review to establish what skills governors had. The city council helped with this. The school was now rated as good by Ofsted and they are now in the process of developing a new governing body. She had found the support from the governor services team at Portsmouth City Council very robust during this time. She made the following points in answer to the questions from the panel.

- Her expectation of the governor services team was that they should provide guidance, advice, regular updates 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 differentiated to experience. 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 be baffled. The mentors could be newer chairs that are in good schools and not necessarily someone who has been in the same school for a number of years.
- With regard to retention of governors she felt barriers include the large time commitment which has gradually increased over the years. Also the amount of reading and paperwork often discouraged people from being governors. At her school she had a number of people who were very keen, were appointed then resigned due to the amount of work involved. Mrs Owen-Jones said it would be useful to have some guidance on what paperwork actually needed to be read and acted upon and what was just for information. Governors also feel that they were

taking the brunt over schools failing and don't want the additional responsibility on top of their day job.

- She felt that the campaign for industry by the education group was very good. She knew someone who had moved to Portsmouth because they had seen Portsmouth's ten year plan and the business campaign on the governors' website. Which showed this was being looked at wider than just the city.
- Their governing body was proactive and were working well as a team. They had advertised governor vacancies for parent governors and targeted people that they thought might be interested and good at the job. Governor services and the governors' website had also been used to recruit new governors but she had still found this challenging. This all took additional time and resources.
- Their governing body currently needs someone with skills in finance in order to effectively monitor finance systems.
- With regard to training, this varied from governor to governor. She said she had one who attended every session going who probably did not need to and one who had rarely been to any due to the time involved. She believed that some governors would appreciate e-training whereas some, e.g. those who worked in their day job on computers, may appreciate a different method of training. There were plans to complete an e-learning course on safeguarding. She felt that courses could be advertised more widely to governors. It was also a challenge to find a time that everyone can attend governors meetings.
- Training received from governor services was sometimes too generic and governors need to know that the training will be relevant so that they attend and have a positive outcome.
- Mrs Owen-Jones felt an effective clerk is one who knows the school and the governors and understands the way a governing body works best. They need to be a good communicator and proactive. Her governing body had recently appointed a new clerk who required training and support.
- Self-review is undertaken at least annually. They use this information to assess training needs and to develop as a governing body over the next year. The governing board are working with Highbury College. They are working on succession planning for the governing board by trying to establish clear systems and strategic plans.
- She stated that induction training for new governors at her own school needed improvement and this was currently being

reviewed and issues addressed.

- A level of trust and partnership working between the chair of governors and head teacher was essential. It was also important that both are clear on their roles and this could sometimes be a challenge for some governors. It was important that the head encourages governors to be fully participative. Mrs Owen-Jones agreed that training for heads and chairs together was valuable.
- The school were beginning to share best practice with other governors in the city. She felt that this governing board would need another year to be fully confident in this role. The governing body had met with governors from local schools. However, this was not always possible due to time constraints. They were also considering having joint training with other governing bodies. In addition they attend governor conferences where best practice is shared and the head also feeds back information concerning good practice from other schools.
- The governing body did not have specific job descriptions for governors and Mrs Owen-Jones said this was something that would be worth investigating.
- Governors did not have their own laptop. Mrs Owen-Jones had a governor's email address but said that not all governors had this. Mr Quinn added that the council had investigated setting up a generic email address for all governors after this was recommended at a governor's forum meeting. He explained this would be set up by the council and when emails reached the school they would be diverted to individual governors email addresses. However following changes to the governing body membership this would need to be redone. Every school has the capacity to set up a specific email account for their governors and the responsibility lies with the school.
- Mrs Owen-Jones felt that many of the changes to her school had been good and had allowed for more focussed governance.

(c) Alison Beane, Executive Head teacher Mary Rose Academy and Clifffdale Primary Academy

Ms Beane explained that Mary Rose had received its second outstanding rating from Ofsted however Clifffdale Primary Academy was in special measures. Both schools were members of the Portsmouth Teaching Alliance and Ms Beane was a member its strategic board.

She said that recruitment of governors is key and is linked to what the school needs at the time. It is important when recruiting governors to have people who have a concrete understanding of the role. The

amount of time a governors inputs in to the role differs amongst the governing body.

The governing body had carried out a skills audit of governors to assess where they thought they were. 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 governors and committee. Most of the training sessions were carried out by a member of school staff but sometimes external people facilitated these such as Ofsted.

The school were 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. Self-evaluation is very important and the governing board evaluate the schools progress once a year and review progress against the governor school plan.

One of the most important skills of a governor was that they quickly become 'Ofsted savvy' to understand the language to show that the school is operating at those levels.

Ms Beane made the following points in answer to the questions from the panel.

- 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.
- Having a good clerk was vital and could have a big impact on the success of the governing body. The relationship between the chair of governors and head is critical and the head needs to have full confidence in the chair to ensure they know their role so they can challenge the head.
- It was important that governors have a clear and distinctive role and also that they have a presence in the school.
- The governors at Mary Rose school had become good enough to monitor how the governing body was performing and carefully thought about how it could support the school better. There were some governors who were happy to 'coast along' who have been with the school a number of years and it was important to challenge these governors as gently as possible.
- Both Mrs Owen –Jones and Ms Beane felt that the business mentoring scheme sounded very helpful.

Way forward for the review

The panel agreed on the following:

- The questions previously agreed by the panel be turned into a questionnaire using *Survey Monkey* and be sent to all headteachers and chair of governors. A separate questionnaire be created for clerks. Where possible questions to be made quantitative to enable easier analysis of the results.
- Once the information is received this be analysed to see where the gaps are for the review.
- Tony Quinn would encourage schools to complete the questionnaire at the Governors Forum on 10 March.
- It was agreed that one more formal meeting should be arranged and the date of this was agreed as 24 March 2014 at 7pm.
- Written evidence to be obtained from comparable local authorities.
- Tony Quinn advised that exit interviews are held for former governors and he could feed back information from these to the panel.
- Councillor Wylie advised he was attending an Education Business Partnership later this week and he would raise the idea of business mentoring and report back to the chair.

The meeting concluded at 9.00 pm.

Councillor Will Purvis
Leader of the Council