



Minutes

EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE - SCHOOL GOVERNANCE INQUIRY

**MINUTES OF THE EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE - SCHOOL GOVERNANCE INQUIRY
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER 2013, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL,
AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 1.30 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 2.35 PM.**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chris Adams, Margaret Aston, Dev Dhillon, Paul Irwin, Valerie Letheren, Mark Shaw, Robin Stuchbury and Ruth Vigor-Hedderly

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT

Rebecca Burchell, Michael Moore and Monique Nowers

GUESTS PRESENT

David Letheren, Heather Mintern and Andrew Walker

OFFICERS PRESENT

Michael Carr

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from David Babb, Katrina Wood, Wendy Mallen and John Chilver.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 ORAL EVIDENCE: CLIVE PARKER - DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

Mr Parker provided the following evidence:

- Democratic Services use a database system called 'modern.gov'.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



- Modern.gov enables agendas to be created into a pack, which means reports and appendices are kept together. Modern.gov also stores documents electronically which means they are easy to retrieve should they be needed at a future date
- Modern.gov has a 'subscribe to updates' facility. Updates can be searched by Committee or subject
- If governor clerks are based in County Hall it may be possible for them to use modern.gov
- There are other web based systems which the governor clerks could use
- Democratic Services work strictly to Acts of Parliament and Regulations in relation to the publication of agendas, minutes and decisions etc. Agendas for example are published 5 clear working days prior to the date of the meeting
- There are provisions for urgent decisions, however these again are strictly regulated
- Within the governing body regulations there is a requirement that papers should be sent at least 7 days prior to the meeting date.
- Modern.gov is an expensive system and it may not be a priority for governing bodies

Members had a discussion and made the following comments:

- Mr Walker said that most governors' clerks were good at influencing and were invaluable. He advised that as Chairman of governors he had also required the assistance of Legal and Democratic Services who provided a really good service.
- The Governors website is very useful and has model agendas for meetings
- It cost money to access software systems. Governing bodies should be asked if they are happy with their current process and enquires about the costs for governing bodies to access modern.gov should be made.
- There is a cloud based system for retaining governing body records called GSET and the licence cost approximately £250 a year
- There is also a system called openhive which Aylesbury High School have
- It would be good if all schools used the same systems
- There is not the facility to file the self-evaluation framework document electronically and this is done paper based
- Modern.gov is a very good system. Could resources be pulled together so that all governing bodies use one system
- There needs to be some market testing of governing bodies to see if there is appetite for modern.gov
- The easier things are made for governors and governing bodies the better.
- If you ask members of the public how they think they are able to obtain copies of governing body minutes they would probably think they had to go to the school office to request a copy.
- There may be a confidentiality issue in future as governing bodies responsibilities for pupils are increasing
- There is also an issue regarding email accounts. If governors use their home email account these can be audited. There needs to be clear understanding from governors about what business should be transacted by email. Should governors have email accounts for governor business?

Action: Clive Parker to speak to other colleagues to enquire what other systems are being used and contact Nicola Cook to ascertain if there would be appetite from governing bodies.

4 ORAL EVIDENCE: DAVID LETHEREN - CHAIRMAN OF HIGH WYCOMBE SCHOOL

Agenda items 4 and 5 were taken together.

Mr Letheren introduced the item and invited questions.

Has the advent of Academies had a bearing on the BAL governors? Are you finding any difficulty in engaging with governors in Academies?

Mr Walker said that by and large Academies are choosing to maintain their links with the LA for Governor Support Services.

Mr Letheren said that Academies are free to choose what services they purchase from the LA and there are some schools which choose not to purchase from the LA. He said that Property Services may outsource the work to a local company. Schools can therefore cut out the middle man and go direct to the local supplier.

Mr Walker commented that governing bodies in the main are continuing to purchase educational services but are looking elsewhere for HR, IT and legal services. Generally they are not purchasing from the LA the services which do not relate to standards.

Is it harder to recruit governors for Academies?

Mr Walker said that there are the same pressures with recruitment whether the school is an Academy or not. The only difference with Academies is that terminology is being used interchangeably such as member, governor or trustee.

Mr Letheren said that the Articles of Association can limit personal liability and at Wycombe High School personal liability for governors is limited to £10.

From your experience, to what extent are school governors involved in narrowing the attainment gap?

Mr Letheren advised that tracking is extensive and said that governors would consider this information.

Mr Walker said that at the Primary Academy where he is governor there wasn't a gap. He said that pupil premium funding is spent on teaching assistants and said that this can be very effective in narrowing the gap if the resource is properly managed.

A Member commented that many schools spend money on teaching assistants but do not involve them. She said the Sutton report flagged up to schools that they cannot expect to put another adult into a classroom and expect magic to happen. She said teaching assistants need to be part of team who are monitored effectively.

How do teaching schools work?

Mr Walker said that when teachers and other staff go to other schools there is also consideration of the benefits to the pupils at their own schools. Mr Letheren commented that the schools whose teachers go to other schools benefit just as much as the schools that the teachers go to. He said initiatives such as these contribute to the development of teachers and said it has a positive impact on recruitment of staff.

A Member commented that newly qualified teachers also benefit from the exchange of ideas.

How do you feel the new payment system for teachers will work?

Mr Walker said that there is a lot of apprehension about the new system and said that some schools are expecting an increase in appeals.

From your experience, what are the key aspects of effective school governance that some schools need to enhance? What can the Council/BLT do to support this?

Mr Letheren said that the programme of courses for governors in Bucks was excellent. He said that the Chairman of governors want to attract good teachers to their schools. If anyone is unable to attend the one day training event there is also a very good online course.

Mr Walker said that there are three National Leaders of Governance in Bucks and said that the objective was that every new Chairman of Governors has someone experienced to mentor them.

A Member commented that the biggest issue for governors is isolation and commented that the Clerk to the governors is very important as they are experienced and have access to other partners and services.

What more could be done to ensure governors do not feel isolated?

Mr Walker said that the Bucks Association of Local Governors is not informed about changes to Chairs of Governors due to data protection. He said that if this could be remedied it would be helpful.

Are you aware of any support to Headteachers?

Mr Walker said that there is a lot of support and said that the National College ran a session for Headteachers and the Chair of Governors.

Is there any support BLT/County Council could provide?

Mr Walker said that the BLT/County Council are already doing a lot and said that it is upto the Chair of Governors to work on the relationship with the Headteacher. He said that governing bodies should be recognised as key stakeholders by the LA.

Mr Letheren commented that some support could be more outcome focussed.

The Chairman thanked Mr Letheren and Mr Walker for their contribution.

5 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL GOVERNORS

This item was discussed under agenda item 4.

6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no any other business.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman said that the information received would be considered and another meeting arranged if necessary.

CHAIRMAN