

12th March 2012**Agenda Item: 6****REPORT OF COUNTY COUNCILLOR LIZ YATES****RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SCHOOL GOVERNORS****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report outlines the investigation undertaken by the Education Review Group on behalf of the Education Standing Committee into the recruitment and retention of school governors, and details the findings and recommendations of the committee.

Information and Advice

2. Education Standing Committee determined to explore the issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of school governors in Nottinghamshire schools, with a view to identifying good practice and considering opportunities for improvement.
3. The committee which met between July 2011 and February 2012 comprised the following members:
 - Councillor Liz Yates (Chair)
 - Councillor John Allin (Vice-chair)
 - Councillor Vincent Dobson
 - Councillor Sybil Fielding
 - Councillor Rev Tom Irvine
 - Councillor Mel Shepherd
 - Councillor Brian Wombwell
 - Mr David Richards

The Review group would like to thank all those who attended to give information and share their experience, including:

Chris Parker from One Stop Shop, Helen Bent Head Teacher of Jeffries Primary and Nursery School, Alison Jacobson Education Administrative Officer from the Diocese of Southwell, Cllr Philip Owen Cabinet Member for Children and Young Peoples Services, Cllr Lynn Sykes, Jane Mansell Governing Body Services.

The Review Group was supported by Leonie Meikle Team Manager Governing Body Services and Gill Thackrey Group Manager Business Development and Support, Children Families and Cultural Services.

4. Over the course of a series of meetings, the group explored a range of issues and themes, beginning in July with an overview of the role of school governors and the composition of a school governing body. The group considered the legal framework for governing bodies, the

national standards for governor recruitment and took evidence from officers about the strategy and approach adopted by Governing Body Services in Nottinghamshire. This service provides advice and information for subscribing schools; a clerking service which is purchased by 93% of Nottinghamshire schools; a headship appointment service in collaboration with Education Improvement Services and commissions governor training and development. Members discussed the future direction for school governors in the light of increased school diversity and the recent Education Act. From this broad picture, the Review Group planned a sequence of more in depth study, on each occasion investigating areas of particular interest, hearing from colleagues with experience in the field and identifying potential for further action.

5. The group considered information about the different categories of governor; parents, staff, community, foundation, sponsor and Local Authority governors, and how appointments are made in each case. The County Council is responsible for the appointment of Local Authority Governors, where all other categories are either a matter for the schools, individual trusts and Foundations or Diocesan Authorities. Data was received regarding vacancy rates and turnover. Performance in this area is good overall, with vacancies in Nottinghamshire of 8.4% as opposed to the national average of 11.7%. There are approximately 325 vacancies per annum from a total of approximately 4500 posts in the county. The category with the greatest 'turnover' of governors is that of parent governors. Districts with the highest vacancy rates are Mansfield and Ashfield. Governors are invited to provide some personal information via questionnaire on a voluntary basis to help the County Council identify under-represented groups. 9.2% of governors are recorded as being from black or minority ethnic groups (BME) against a population of 3.9%. Members noted:

- the value of comprehensive data to enable officers to consider priorities for action. Further monitoring regarding the number of governors from black and minority ethnic groups and governors with a disability would be a positive step.

6. Chris Parker Regional Manager from the organisation 'School Governors One Stop Shop' (SGOSS) was invited to discuss recruitment issues from both a local and national perspective. He gave an insight into a range of promotional work to encourage recruitment of community governors, many of whom bring specific skills which can be of benefit to governing bodies.

As one of 14 area managers in this independent charity, Mr Parker spoke about work with local businesses, recruiting directly from companies at their invitation. The Review Group learned that in Nottinghamshire, visits conducted by Governing Body Services to employers in the area are currently few in number, but could possibly be developed subject to available resources. Members heard that schools can create their own school profile on line and get help from SGOSS with their own recruitment campaigns. Bright ideas, hints and tips for schools are available from SGOSS or through Nottinghamshire's Governing Body Services as part of the recruitment packs produced for schools. Where SGOSS receives expressions of interest in becoming a governor locally, these are notified to Governing Body Services for follow up. The Review Group acknowledged that the Council has been actively encouraging volunteering, and that the energy of this corporate approach to promote community involvement could specifically focus on volunteering to be a governor. The group noted:

- the importance of learning from the experience of current governors and from those who step down from office.

- the value of quality advice and helpful materials to assist schools with their own recruitment drives

- the potential which lies with employers in the county to promote engagement by their workforce

7. The Review Group next heard about examples of good practice in relation to recruitment and retention of parent governors, and gained insight into the challenges of retaining governors particularly in the Ashfield and Mansfield districts. Across the county 8.6% of parent governor places were vacant compared to 12.8% nationally. However of the 132 parent governor vacancies in September 2011, 51 were in the Mansfield and Ashfield districts. Members heard from Helen Bent, Head Teacher at Jeffries Primary and Nursery School in Ashfield. Ms. Bent spoke about some of the issues which can make it difficult to attract parental involvement. Pupil mobility is high in the area and eligibility for free school meals stands at 42% at this school. It is generally the case that where parents join the governing body of an infant, junior or primary school, they are inclined to move on when their children progress to the next phase of their education.

8. Ms Bent indicated that the rewards of working closely with parents and carers are great and the commitment and support from governors is very positive. The Group heard that the school is proud of its proactive approach to build the confidence of parents and understand its community. The Governing Body ensures new governors have a mentor, and involves the school council in governor recruitment. Personal contact and use of informal parents' events have all made a difference. The Review Group noted some potential barriers to both recruitment and retention in terms of the demands of the role, including the level of literacy required to fully engage. Members recognised the efforts of many schools and Governing Body Services to recruit to vacancies but that this also needs to be matched by measures to nurture and retain governors for their term of office of 4 years and beyond. The Review Group noted the following:

- the creative use of letters by children as part of the recruitment pack by the school

- the value of a support system for governors through mentoring or pairing with a supportive 'buddy' on the governing body

- information presented at all stages needs to be accessible and easily understood

- opportunities for school governors to join in INSET days and work as part of a team with staff can build confidence and mutual understanding

- opportunities exist for parent governors to continue to offer their services even after their children have moved to other schools or left school.

9. Recruitment and retention of Local Authority (LA) Governors was considered by the group, including policy, procedures, information available and the application form in use. Cllr Owen and Cllr Sykes attended to offer their advice and information about their roles and the decision making process with regard to these appointments. Examples of procedures adopted by other Local Authorities were considered. Some, as in Nottinghamshire, maintain these as political appointments, others operate politically neutral recruitment policies. There are fewer LA Governor vacancies in the county than is the case nationally, and it is the intention that all are filled swiftly and at least within a twelve week period from the date of

notification. All are advertised in the Nottinghamshire Governor publication. Appointments reflect the political balance of the Council. Members were informed that the Education Act 2011 makes provision for schools to specify the skills and attributes they are seeking from LA governors and enables schools to accept or decline the appointments made by the Local Authority in the light of those criteria. Detail and underpinning regulations regarding these new provisions are awaited from the DfE. Members noted the following:

- application forms and their ease of use merited further consideration
- availability of information and publicity about how to apply could be revisited
- bureaucracy in and around the process and in the governing body meetings may be a disincentive to potential applicants and so was worthy of review.

10. Members invited the Education Administrative Officer for the Diocese of Southwell, Alison Jacobson to attend to discuss procedures and issues in the appointment of Foundation governors in Voluntary Aided schools. Dialogue and support between the Dioceses and the County Council is good and Ms Jacobson reported that she too is involved in a review of their recruitment strategies. It can prove a challenge for large governing bodies to fill their vacancies. Some Foundation Governors are currently required to be parents in order to be eligible for appointment, which may be a barrier to otherwise suitable recruits. Members noted:

- the similar issues which different appointing bodies face in relation to governor vacancies
- the value of sharing strategies and materials to promote good practice

11. Members considered the issues and impact of federated or collaboration arrangements between schools and of Academy status in relation to school governor recruitment. It was noted that Academies need not choose to have LA governor appointees, and that there is no requirement for governors to remain on the Governing Body of a new Academy school. Opportunities do exist across soft federations for joint recruitment drives, and to share experiences more readily across governing bodies. Where there is a multiple academy model involving clusters of schools, the possibilities for skill sharing are increased. Equally with the increased diversity of schools members noted the value of capturing the experience of governors involved in new governance arrangements as a source of advice and help for others.

12. The group received further information about the local governor recruitment and retention strategy now and for the future. Jane Mansell, Senior Professional Practitioner Governing Body Services was invited to discuss with members the work of a newly established Recruitment and Retention working group comprising governors from across the county. She also spoke about her experiences as a clerk to a number of governing bodies. Data analysis formed a basis for discussion, and is used by the group to identify priorities. Work already in progress steered by the group includes: promotional activity such as workplace visits; advertising in local press and radio; considering an award scheme for governors; greater use of the County Council website to celebrate good governance and encourage

community involvement; revisiting use of the exit questionnaire for LA governors leaving the service. Members noted;

- the take up of governor training in the Mansfield and Ashfield areas exceeded that in other districts, and that overall 81% of schools buy into the training package
- the role played by the chair, the head teacher and the 'training coordinator' on the governing body to support new governors with their induction
- how the role of the clerk to governors can be used to help governing bodies navigate the complexity of information they receive

Summary of key issues and themes

13. From this investigation the Review Group recognised the emergence of the following four themes and issues as a basis for its recommendations:

a) Information Advice and Guidance

- the need for accessible and straightforward information about how to apply to become a governor, with application forms and the process for applying in plain English and as clear as possible.
- appreciation of the value of the existing parent governor 'Election Pack' and some innovative ideas as to how it could be refreshed as a general recruitment information pack with exemplar letters, bright ideas and tips on good recruitment practices and school based induction.
- ideas for schools to promote the involvement of children and young people in the recruitment of governors and in governing body meetings as appropriate.
- use of the successful clerking service to welcome new governors and thank existing governors for their service.
- reducing unnecessary bureaucracy which can impede both recruitment and retention.

Publicity and Marketing

- the potential for a governor recruitment campaign linked to 'one council' events and utilising the County Council website.
- ways to celebrate good governance using the web and social networking sites, radio and other media

Data and information

- the importance of reliable data to provide more accurate reports eg: regarding numbers of governors from minority groups
- the need to learn from the experience of governors both joining and leaving the service

Local Authority Governor Appointment Procedure

- the importance of transparency and a simple application and appointment process with clear information and guidance.
- the need to consider any amendments to the LA governor appointment procedure which may be required in response to the Education Act 2011, and which enable governing bodies to set criteria for LA governors.

Other Options Considered

14. The Education Review Group recognises that issues of recruitment and retention of governors are not solely a concern of the Council through its Governing Body Services, but are also the responsibility of partners themselves, in schools, Foundation and Trusts and the Diocesan Authorities. This exploration of the issues has provided an opportunity to look at examples of good practice and identify areas where improvements may be made for the benefit of schools, children and young people and their communities.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

15. The Education Review Group took into account a range of supporting documentation and background papers regarding all aspects of the issue. The group considered the roles and responsibilities of schools, trusts, dioceses and the County Council in relation to statutory duties and the offer the council makes to schools through Governing Body Services and its sold service. There is much successful practice to be celebrated. Where the Group considers it may be possible to bring about some positive developments directly or influence the direction of travel in partnership with others, it has made specific recommendations.

Statutory and Policy Implications

16. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

17. School Governors provide an essential service to the community, our schools and our children and young people. Improvements to all aspects of recruitment and retention of governors, increases the effectiveness of our schools and creates greater opportunities for valuable skills in the community to be developed and utilised. This review recognises the importance of encouraging more involvement in this rewarding work.

Financial Implications

18. Governing Body Services is fully financed by school subscriptions.

Equalities Implications

19. Engagement and involvement in school governance by all members of the community

including those in minority groups is essential. Recommendations take into account potential improvements which can be made to monitor representation and promote the participation of under-represented groups.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Education Review Group makes the following recommendations:

- 1) Governing Body Services to ensure that the materials it provides for schools and to the public are accessible and clear. This will include reviewing information about how to apply to become a governor, model application forms which can be used by schools, and the documentation used by the County Council regarding the application process for Local Authority Governors.
- 2) Re-design the exit questionnaire to allow governors to record further reasons for leaving and ensure it is routinely sent to all governors on resignation. A follow-up telephone/ face-to-face interview with a sample of leavers to be undertaken.
- 3) Improve data collection to provide more accurate reports eg: regarding numbers of governors from minority groups. Take measures to encourage existing governors to complete disability and ethnicity data monitoring forms.
- 4) The existing parent governor 'Election Pack' be revisited and refreshed as a general recruitment and retention information pack with exemplar letters, bright ideas and tips on good recruitment and retention practices and some frequently asked questions.
- 5) Governing Body Services to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, and lead by example.
- 6) Through training opportunities and briefings, encourage Head Teachers to promote and develop the role of governors in the life of the school.
- 7) Provide further advice to promote the involvement of young people in the recruitment of governors.
- 8) Make further use of the successful clerking service to welcome new governors and thank existing governors for their service.
- 9) Consider an annual governor recruitment campaign linked to 'One Council' events
- 10) Creative use of the County Council website and social networking sites.
- 11) A celebration 'Recruitment and Retention' edition of the Nottinghamshire Governor available electronically with interviews with both new and experienced governors.
- 12) Consider any amendments to the LA governor appointment procedure which may be required in response to the Education Act 2011, and which enable governing bodies to set criteria for LA governors.

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Background Papers

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected All