

1st December 2014

Councillor Julia Magill,
Cabinet Member for Education and Skills,
County Hall,
Atlantic Wharf,
Cardiff,
CF10 4UW.



Dear Councillor Magill,

Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee Phased Inquiry – High level of Local Authority Governor Vacancies in Cardiff and the Appointment and Effectiveness of Local Authority Governors

As you will be aware the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee recently agreed to undertake a phased inquiry into Local Authority School Governors (LASG). The Committee also agreed that the Inquiry Chairman would report directly to you, following each phase, to enable recommendations to be identified and reported to the Cabinet in a timely manner for prompt consideration and implementation.

The first report from the inquiry is contained in this letter, and covers the recruitment and appointment of Local Authority School Governors in Cardiff. The first meeting of the Inquiry was held on 20th November 2014 to agree the Scope of the Inquiry and:

- gain an understanding of the role of school governors;
- assess the level of local authority governor vacancies (LASG) across Cardiff's schools;
- receive evidence on the present LASG recruitment and appointment process and to assess this against a selection of other local authorities processes; and
- discuss and agree changes to the current system to improve the effectiveness of Cardiff's schools governing bodies.

The first meeting was arranged for Members to receive, in advance, background information on the role of governors, relevant output from a survey of Cardiff's School Governors, details of the current number of school governor vacancies, and an analysis of other local authorities' processes for the recruitment and appointment of their LASG. The information included:

- A draft scope for the inquiry, as discussed at Committee;
- A copy of a handbook for governors of schools in Wales published by the Welsh Government and Governors Wales. This handbook provided Members an explanation of what a governor is, categories of governors, support and training, how to fulfil their responsibilities and the role of a school governor;
- Details of the numbers and vacancies of each type of governor across Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Special Schools, Nursery Schools and Welsh medium Schools;
- The Welcome pack for new Governors;
- Comparative information from a number of other Welsh and English Local Authorities on their recruitment, application form, processes and marketing and promotional process for Local Authority Appointed School Governors; and
- Extract from the school governor survey commissioned for this inquiry, covering: what is important for new governors, how easy is it to recruit new governors and what would help the recruitment of new governors.

In attendance for the inquiry meeting were Councillor Richard Cook (Elected Chair of the inquiry), Councillors Boyle, Murphy and Rees.

The Members were briefed at the meeting by the following officers and witnesses:

- Marie Rosenthal; County Clerk and Monitoring Officer
- Paul Jefferies (Secretary to Cardiff Governors Association)
- Julia Ellis, Governor Services Manager

- Ruth Lock, Governor Services Officer

Members were informed that unfortunately, you and Nick Batchelar were not able to attend but other witnesses were fully aware of your views.

On behalf of the Members who attended I would like to thank all of the witnesses who attended the meeting, provided information, advice, answered the questions and contributed to the discussions, Members found their input into the inquiry very helpful.

After the meeting Members considered the background information, answers to Members questions and advice and evidence from witnesses and the Inquiry agreed to highlight a number of key findings and recommendations. This letter, reports the key findings and recommendations on this phase of the inquiry for the Cabinet, Constitution Committee and Officers to consider for implementation.

Key Finding 1 – Cardiff’s Recruitment and Appointment process

- The Members were informed that the current recruitment and appointment process for Local Authority School Governors was not fit for purpose, there was no formal process, and no assessment or checks on applicants ;
- The Group noted from the papers provided that there were around 2,000 school governor places in Cardiff with around 250 vacancies. There was also a ten percent (38) vacancy level for Local Authority appointed Governors.
- The Members learnt that a lack of self assessment of skills, by school governing bodies, did not enable effective appointment of Governors to aid in school improvement;
- Members noted from the analysis of other authorities governor appointment processes, that more formal recruitment, interview, appraisal and transparent systems had been implemented in most Local Authorities;
- Members considered that within any appointment process appropriate checks should be made about each candidate prior to their consideration for appointment;
- Members heard from the Council’s Monitoring Officer that a more formal appointment system should implemented through Constitution Committee and could include:
 - Appointment through a Committee of Council Panel to meet on a regular basis, say six monthly.
 - Chaired by the Cabinet Member for Education with the Director of Education, Monitoring officer and a representative from the Cardiff Governors Association acting as advisors
 - Candidates assessed for suitability, maybe through interview
 - Candidates should be sought from various backgrounds to meet the skill needs of particular schools
- Members were also informed that the current appointment process is supported by the Governors service and this should continue with any new process, including an Appointment Panel.

- Members identified by the analysis of other Local Authority's processes that many encourage people to apply to be a school Governors using specific recruitment campaigns, Members noted that Cardiff does not presently have a campaign.

Recommendation 1 to 4

1. An Appointment Panel should be formed, as a Committee of Council, with appropriate Terms of Reference, to meet quarterly, Chaired by the Cabinet Member for Education, and politically balanced, perhaps including Group Whips. The Director of Education, Monitoring Officer and a representative from the Cardiff Governors Association must be allowed to act as advisors to the Panel,
2. The Panel should have in its Terms of Reference the implementation and monitoring of a School Governor recruitment campaign.
3. That appointments should be made based around any identified skill gap need within a school.
4. That the Clerking of the meetings should continue to be undertaken by the Governors Service Staff.

Key Finding 2 –School Governing Bodies must have the appropriate skills

- Members were informed that the role of governing bodies has become much more complex over the last few years.
- Members were aware that considerable resources are now delegated directly to schools, requiring schools to undertake many tasks that were previously managed by the local authority;
- Members were informed that Governing Bodies are now actively involved in managing, monitoring and challenging school performance, attendance, exclusions, recruitment and teacher performance; and
- Members were also informed that many school governing bodies do not undertake a skill analysis of their governors, to enable any skill gaps to be identified, to which new governors can be appointed.

Recommendation 5 to 7

5. That all school governing bodies must ensure that they include governors who have the skills and knowledge to ensure that they can work effectively across all aspects of the school.
6. That School Governing Bodies should annually undertake a skills assessment of the Body and inform the Council of any skill gaps, when they have LASG vacancies.
7. That the Director of Education must check annually that the skill mix of each school governing body, meets the needs of the school and its improvement plan.

Key Finding 3 – Ward Councillors

- Members were informed that the current practice is for two Ward Councillors to be automatically appointed to each school in their Ward;
- Members commented that with the changes in the role of Governors this tradition was becoming less relevant to the needs of a school;
- Members also commented that with the increase in Governor meetings and training it was becoming difficult for Councillors to attend all events for the schools that they were governors of; and
- Members were informed that as funding was being delegated directly to schools there was less of a need for the link between each School and the Council that the ward Councillors previously provided.
- Members did raise a concern, that in mixed party wards, there may be a need for both parties to be represented on the Governing Body, unless agreement can be made for only one to be appointed.

Recommendation 8 to 10

8. That the Cabinet, Party whips and Constitution Committee agrees that the new appointment process will only allow one Ward Councillor to act as LASG on each school, in single party wards.
9. That the appointment of Ward Councillors will follow the same appointment process as other LASG.
10. That in mixed party wards, two Councillors should be appointed unless agreement can be had to appoint one Councillor.

Key Finding 4 – Role of Governors

- Members were informed that the role of governors was becoming very complex and their appointment to a School Governing Body was a considerable commitment, particularly if they were appointed due to a particular skill that was needed;
- Members noted that there was a considerable amount of mandatory, and discretionary training, as well as the large number of meetings to attend, visits to be made, and the complex decisions that have to be made; and
- Members were surprised to hear that Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checks were not routinely undertaken and the Group agreed that this must be compulsory for all appointed LASG, with the Council paying for the basic check for all LASG.

Recommendation 11 and 12

11..That the Director of Education in consultation with the Cardiff Governors Association should develop a leaflet providing clear guidance and information for prospective Local Authority Governors.

12. That all new LASG have the basic DBS check undertaken prior to their appointment, paid for by the Council.

I would be grateful if you, the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning and Monitoring Officer would consider and respond to the key findings and recommendations reported in this letter. Should you require clarification or have any questions about any of this letter do not hesitate to contact me.

Finally at the meeting the Members agreed to amend the Scope of the Inquiry so that it did not now cover the Clerking of School Governor meetings and that the Effectiveness of Governing Bodies would be considered next.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Cook', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Councillor Richard Cook
Chair of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

Cc to:

Nick Batchelar, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning
Marie Rosenthal; County Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Paul Jefferies, Secretary Cardiff Governors Association
Gareth Newell, Operational Manager
Joanne Watkins – Cabinet Business Manager
Cheryl Cornelius, Cabinet Support Manager
Members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee