

# Scrutiny review: Role of School Governors

## Review of Improving Lives Select Commission

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The review was initiated to examine the increasing responsibilities of school governing bodies and the local authority's changing role in light of the 'Importance of Teaching' White Paper and subsequent Education Act, 2011.

### **The aim of the review was:**

To assess the role of the local authority in supporting governing bodies to undertake their leadership and challenge role in schools and achieve the best outcomes for pupils.

The review group was made up of the following members of

- Cllr Ann Russell (Chair)
- Cllr Neil License
- Cllr Thomas Fennoughty<sup>1</sup>
- Cllr Chris Read
- Cllr Simon Currie

The review based its evidence on the following:

- Consultation with key officers with overview of Rotherham context;
- Desktop based research - looking at national and local good practice and Government Legislation;
- Outcomes of the Key Stage 2 Performance Clinics;
- Issuing a questionnaire to 150 chairs and vice chairs of school governing bodies;
- Interviews with Cabinet Members Chairs and Vice Chairs of School Governing Bodies, and CYPS Officers

The help and co-operation of all who participated in the review is gratefully acknowledged.

### **Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

All contributors agree that governors have a key role in addressing underperformance and improving outcomes for children and young people in Rotherham. The review also acknowledges the financial constraints experienced by schools and education support services within Rotherham. However, whilst attainment in many areas is improving, Rotherham faces some entrenched areas of difficulties in some of its schools, indicating that there is still a gap in leadership and effective challenge.

There are sixteen recommendations, detailed in Section 7 of the report. The recommendations address the following areas:

- School Governor's Taskforce
- Recruitment
- Local Authority Governors
- Induction and Training
- Role of the Clerk of Governing Bodies
- Services provided by the Council

The responsibilities and expectations of governors are changing and growing; the report sets out some practical steps to consolidate their skills, knowledge and understanding. The relationship between schools and councils is also shifting. In light of this, the local authority will need to make decisions on how it can maximise its influence and what leadership, services and support it should offer to governing bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> stood down as a councillor May 2012  
Governors Review: July 2012

## **1 ORIGINAL CONCERNS – WHY MEMBERS WANTED TO LOOK AT THIS ISSUE**

In January 2011, the former Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel received a report examining proposed changes set out in the Government’s Importance of Teaching White Paper 2010.

Specific areas of interest raised at this meeting were around the White Paper’s proposals to clarify the accountability and responsibilities of school governing bodies and the local authority’s changing role.

At its first meeting in July 2011, the Improving Lives Select Commission Members agreed to examine the role of school governors in relation to their leadership and challenge role and to examine the support provided to Governing Bodies by the Council.

Each of the review group were currently or had previously been school governors; either as Local Authority appointees, community or Parent Governors. All were able to comment and questions from a position of knowledge and understanding of the role.

## **2 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The primary objective of the review was:

To assess the role of the local authority in supporting governing bodies to undertake their leadership and challenge role in schools and achieve the best outcomes for pupils.

The scope of the review included:

- Assess the impact of the changing policy context for education and the Education Act 2011;
- The current role of Governing Bodies;
- Consideration of the current support, training and development opportunities available to governors;
- Establish the views of existing governors on their own expectations of the role and effectiveness of governing bodies in respect of their leadership and challenge responsibilities;
- Make recommendations to support and enable Governing Bodies future role and development.

### **2.1 Methodology**

The review began its evidence gathering in September 2011, concluding in April 2012. This included:

- Consultation with key officers with overview of Rotherham context;
- Desktop based research - looking at national and local good practice and Government Legislation;
- Outcomes of the Key Stage 2 Performance Clinics;
- Issuing a questionnaire to 150 chairs and vice chairs of school governing bodies;

- Interviews with Chairs and Vice Chairs of School Governing Bodies, and CYPs Officers;
- Interviews with the Cabinet Member for Safeguarding Children and Adults and Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning and Culture.

### 3 BACKGROUND

The Government sees the current system of school education as seriously underperforming. They evidenced this by England's fall in the OECD's PISA<sup>2</sup> international rankings; the failure to raise attainment of the 20% most deprived pupils; and loss of confidence in the secondary curriculum and qualifications.

In response to this, the Government's 2010 Schools White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching' set out its intention to enact 'profound structural change' and 'rigorous attention to standards', with schools given greater autonomy to determine the structure of support they require in the future.

In this document, the Government states its intention to "Make it easier for schools to adopt models of governance which work for them – including smaller, more focused governing bodies, which clearly hold the school to account for children's progress." (p13, 2010)

The subsequent Education Act 2011 makes some fundamental changes to the way in which Governing Bodies may be constituted; reflecting the Government's aim to increase local accountability and the autonomy of schools. The Act supports the Department for Education's commitment to reduce bureaucratic burdens on schools by removing a number of previous legal requirements on governing bodies, teachers and schools.

In a recent speech to the National Governor's Association, Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, OFSTED reiterated the important role school governors have in challenging poor performance and improving outcomes. He suggested that the OFSTED regime will support leaders and governors who are focusing on these key issues (and confront those who are not). He also observed that underperformance is often prevalent in more deprived communities (which is reflected in Rotherham); and to tackle this, there is a requirement to recruit "the best governors in these schools".

Against this backdrop, there is a debate about the role LAs can play, particularly as more schools adopt academy status or are established as free schools. The Department for Education (DfE) has yet to clarify which functions should stay with local authorities in the long term, but has established a Ministerial Advisory Group on the role of LA's which is due to report shortly.

In its 'think piece' "The future role of the local authority in education" (2012), the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), examines how this

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<sup>2</sup> OECD'S PISA – Programme for International Assessment - More than 70 countries and economies have taken part in PISA so far and the surveys, which are given every three years, allow them to track their progress in meeting key learning goals, to measure the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds, an age at which students in most countries are nearing the end of their compulsory time in school.  
*Governors Review: July 2012*

relationship could develop over the next five years and the changes that LAs will have to make if they wish to continue to exert an influence. It concludes that “there is a huge opportunity here for local authorities if they can meet schools’ needs.”

These issues are fundamental to this scrutiny review. To ensure that educational outcomes for the borough’s children are improved, it is vital that there is a supply of governors who possess the skills and knowledge to challenge underperformance and raise standards. As the relationship with schools change, the local authority will need to make decisions on how it can maximise its influence and what leadership, services and support it should offer to governing bodies, in the light of reduced funding, current local partnership arrangements and legislative steer from the DfE.

## **4 SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES IN ROTHERHAM**

### **4.1 What Do Governing Bodies Do?**

All community, foundation and voluntary schools in England have a governing body. Governors are volunteers, comprising more than 300,000 school governors in England. They are one of the largest groups of volunteers and one of the best examples of civic engagement in the country.

Governing bodies are corporate bodies with a legal identity separate to that of its individual members. Because of this, individual governors are generally protected from personal liability as a result of the governing body’s decisions and actions. Provided governors act honestly, reasonably and in good faith, any liability would fall on the governing body rather than on individual members.

A governing body has a range of duties and powers and a general responsibility for the conduct of the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement, including setting targets for pupil achievement, managing the school’s finances, appointing staff and many more. They are held to account by OFSTED via school inspection.

The Governing Body fulfils its responsibilities in three main ways:

- By working strategically to set the school’s values, vision and aims and agreeing challenging targets, policies and plans; and making creative use of the school’s resources
- By acting as a “critical friend” to the head teacher and senior leadership team - monitoring and evaluating progress towards achieving the school’s vision, aims and targets; providing support to the head teacher and staff as well as challenging their expectations
- By holding to account the head teacher and staff for the school’s performance and for the decisions they take by asking challenging questions where appropriate.

### **4.2 The Local Authority Role in Governing Bodies**

The local authority has a number of specific roles in relation to governing bodies:

- Appointment (and removal where appropriate) of local authority governors
- Ensure that governing bodies have access, free of charge to the individual, to the information and training they need to operate effectively

- In Maintained Nursery, Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools, determine the arrangements for electing parent and staff governors
- Ensure that each school (with the exception of Academies) has an Instrument of Government that complies with statutory regulations
- Conduct elections for Parent Governor Representatives onto appropriate local authority scrutiny committees

In addition, the local authority has powers of intervention where a school is causing concern and specifically where there has been a serious breakdown in the way the school is being governed. These powers of intervention include:

- The appointment of additional governors
- Suspension of the school's delegated budget
- Requiring the governing body to enter into partnership arrangements i.e. collaboration or federation
- Appointing an Interim Executive Board

As stated earlier, the Government has established a Ministerial Advisory Group to on the role of the local authority which is expected to report shortly. This may lead to changes in the relationship between Governing Bodies and the Local Authority.

### **4.3 Local Framework for School Governing Bodies**

In Rotherham, 14 geographical and 2 faith-based "Learning Communities" have been developed which cover the 123 schools in the Borough. These groups of schools establish formal and informal agreements to work together in partnership. The Learning Communities are overseen by the 'umbrella' Rotherham School Improvement Partnership (RoSIP), a collaboration between the small School Effectiveness Service, schools and other key partners, set up to progress the Transforming Rotherham Learning principles. In Rotherham, there are 123 governing bodies, one for each school. There are 1867 governor places, with 241 vacancies (as at 31 March 2012) representing an overall vacancy rate of 12.96%

In Rotherham, most schools still retain the 'single school' standard model with one school, one head teacher and one governing body. However, other leadership models have now emerged. These include:

- Five formal partnerships using the Collaboration Regulations, with powers delegated to them by the constituent governing bodies.
- A Federation where two or more schools are governed collectively under a single governing body.
- Four Secondary School Academies in Rotherham, along with one Foundation Secondary School.

The composition of each school's governing body is set out in the school's Instrument of Government (or the Articles of Association for an Academy).

For the majority of schools in Rotherham, the governing body consists of parents, staff, community or co-opted and local authority (LA) governors. They may also include representatives from private sector companies or sponsor governors. For Voluntary Aided Schools (or 'faith school'), there will be additional representatives from the sponsoring faith body.

Academy Schools have different arrangements. These are state funded independent schools receiving its budget directly from central government in accordance with its funding agreement. The composition of the governing body can be flexible and is determined by the governing body of the school, in consultation with the DfE, prior to conversion. Free schools will also have the flexibility to determine the composition of their governing bodies. In Rotherham, each of the academies have committed to continue to work collectively with each other and the Local Authority into the future; supported by the Transforming Rotherham Learning core values and principles.

There is no maximum size for the governing body. However, when negotiating the size of a governing body the Department for Education (DfE) advise that large numbers can make governing bodies unwieldy and difficult to manage. The DfE also advises that membership of the governing body should include at least two parent governors and the principal, but academy trusts are free to choose whether to have a local authority governor, staff governor or co-opted governor.

Importantly, the Education Act states that in order to ensure that LA proposed governors have the right balance of skills and knowledge, that governing bodies of maintained schools may set an 'eligibility criteria'; in effect reserving the right for governing bodies to reject 'unsuitable candidates'. In order to maintain the link between LA and governors and to maximise the LA's influence, it is suggested that there should be a dialogue between the school and local authority, prior to appointment, as to the skills and experience being sought. This will ensure that a suitable candidate or pool of candidates is available.

## **5 FINDINGS**

In light of the changing role of Governors and emerging new relationships with schools, the review group asked some key questions to RMBC officers and Cabinet Members to ascertain:

- The role of Governing Bodies in school improvement? How do Rotherham Governors match up to this?
- The leadership qualities that differentiate a Governing Body in a high performing school compared with a school which is not performing well?
- How do we recruit and retain governors of the right 'calibre'?
- The support is given to Governing Bodies? From LA? From schools? How do we know if the support is effective? Gaps and areas of improvement?
- How does the LA hold Governing Bodies to account for pupil progress? What action do we take to support Governing Bodies in poorly performing schools?
- Given the changes outlined in the "Importance of Teaching" White Paper and the Education Act, what is the future role of Local Authorities in supporting Governing Bodies? What influence can the local authority exert?

The responses to these questions were wide-ranging. It is clear from the discussions that whilst there are some good examples of effective challenge and leadership from governing bodies (as evidenced by OFSTED inspections and the progress made in raising attainment at Key Stage 2 in schools such as Thornhill); however, this was not consistent across the board. Particularly issues were raised about supporting chairs and other governors to question and challenge; enhancing



skills and understanding and how learning and development opportunities are cascaded amongst governors.

The reduced role of the school effectiveness service was highlighted repeatedly. Schools still have a duty to cooperate with the LA (with the exception of Academies), but the LA may not become aware of difficulties within a school until they present as substantial issues. This means that communication and good working relationships are paramount. In Rotherham, it was acknowledged that this working relationship is positive and is reflected through the work of the Rotherham School Improvement Partnership (RoSIP).

## **5.1 Supporting underperforming schools**

Within these discussions, the role of the Governor Development Service (GDS) was raised. The role of the Governor Development Service is essential. Yet service reductions have meant that the resource is extremely stretched (one officer is undertaking this role). The review group recognise and value the role of the GDS and would ask that appropriate investment is made by both the LA and schools to ensure that the service has the sustained capacity to provide appropriate and quality support and guidance to school governing bodies. The review group also acknowledged that the wider learning community also needs to be involved in building capacity of school governing bodies, in partnership with the GDS, to provide the level of challenge and leadership required to ensure improved outcomes and attainment; whether this is through inter-school collaboration, cluster events or other interventions. Suggestions for additional models of support included:

- Collaboration between schools/clusters to identify underperforming schools and generating support from an effective Governing body in a nearby school; an example of good practice was given as Hilltop and Kelford schools, where joint working has worked very well and a good working relationship has been achieved.
- Encouraging Peer Challenge/skills audit;
- Encouraging schools to self-evaluate against set criteria (via National Governors Association or via websites such as “The Governor”).

The Previous Government developed a “Governor net” website for governing bodies. Although this had been withdrawn following the formation of the Coalition, it was suggested that many of the resources on the site could be used as a basis for local guidelines. It was felt that these could be used alongside self-evaluation tools, to set out a checklist of expected performance and standards for governing bodies. Ideally this would cover expectations in terms of strategic responsibilities for finance, human resources and performance issues as well as complementing guidance issues on other roles such as pastoral care, safeguarding or responsibilities to looked after children.

One area for training in this respect was identified as Governors needing the ability to capture information from the Head Teacher’s reports and be able to ask relevant questions and challenge. The issue around Governors understanding of their strategic role was discussed at length. Indications were that not all Governors understand this, with some Governors attending meetings and whilst supportive, did not ask questions and challenge school practices and outcomes. OFSTED also highlight this lack of challenge amongst school governing bodies.

Drawing on the notion of peer support, the review group were keen to explore if it was feasible to establish of a taskforce of governors enabling and supporting other

governing bodies to learn and improve their role. Clearly how this is to be resourced is a key issue – however, the review group consider there is merit in exploring this further.

## **5.2 Recruitment and retention**

School improvement was seen to be closely linked with recruitment and training of school governors; this means that governors are required to be confident and committed to asking challenging questions. The review group felt strongly that in the interests of children and young people in our schools, it was essential to recruit governors in line using a person specification to ensure the right mix of relevant experience and skills.

The review discussed with witnesses the recruitment process for selecting school governors. There was a consensus that a simple person specification or role description would be a useful tool; allied with a selection procedure which would assess skills and understanding required to fulfil the role. A connection to the local community was considered to be a priority requirement.

Representation of young people on the Body was also raised as an important issue to address in many Governing Bodies. It was suggested we have a bank of Governors drawn from existing bodies to enable additional support and skills to be allocated schools as required. We need to fully communicate to prospective governors how time consuming the role is and the effort involved.

As the relationship between the LA and schools is shifting, the review group were of the view that the ability to appoint LA governors could be an area where influence and support could be consolidated. This requires clarity about the specific role and responsibilities of LA appointees. It is incumbent on the LA to ensure that its appointees are of high calibre and possess the skills, knowledge and commitment to undertake this responsibility effectively; with appropriate measures taken to support those who are not meeting expectations or in some circumstances remove them from governing bodies.

## **5.3 Governor development**

Local authorities can offer other services to governing bodies. These services can be offered on a traded basis, usually via a Service Level Agreement. However, governing bodies are free to determine how much support they require and where to obtain that support from.

The School Effectiveness Service, via Governor Development, offers a package of support to governing bodies in Rotherham to support the development of their own effectiveness. This package consists of:

A training and development programme, incorporating:

- Induction training for new governors
- Training for chairs and vice chairs of governors
- A blended range of training opportunities aimed at individual governors, governing bodies and Learning communities
- A range of E-learning opportunities via Modern Governor, complementing the LA training and development programme

- Training and continued support for clerks to governing bodies
- A range of guidance documents aimed at increasing governing body effectiveness, including an Induction Pack for newly appointed governors and Governing Body Self Evaluation materials
- On-going development of a website to support effective governance
- Support to head teachers

A range of other providers of governor support are available nationally that governing bodies can access. The National Governors Association (NGA) is an independent organisation representing school governors in England. Governors can join the NGA as individuals or as members of a governing body. In addition there are a range of websites which enable governing bodies to access a range of support and advice. For example, the Department for Education (DfE) website contains a section for school governors, as does the National College for School Leadership. The Schools White Paper “The Importance of Teaching”, gave the National College a role in developing training for Chairs of Governors. Discussions are underway with the DfE regarding the focus of this work and the funding available.

Over the 2010/11 financial year, there were a total of 1007 attendances at training and development events offered by Governor Development. In addition, over the same time period 251 governors accessed E-learning opportunities via Modern Governor. However, attendance at courses is not mandatory and take-up of some development opportunities is poor. Whilst appreciating that governors are a volunteer body and meet their commitments in their own time, often taking time from paid employment to do this; there needs to be a co-ordinated approach to learning and development with schools and clusters taking the lead, to consolidate core skills. The review group felt strongly that the role of governor was of sufficient importance that development activity isn't an 'optional extra'. Governors should be strongly encouraged to undertake development to support their role, with governing bodies agreeing a programme of continuous personal development, with expectations of participation levels.

#### **5.4 The Role of the Clerk to Governing Bodies**

Rotherham ceased providing a clerking service to governing bodies a number of years ago, and each school currently determines its own clerking arrangements, for which purpose funding is provided as an element of the funding formula used to determine schools' delegated budgets.

Members of the review group felt that the clerk has an important part to play in making sure the governing body's work is well organised. It is helpful if the clerk is able to offer information and advice to the governing body, particularly on matters involving the law and procedures to be followed at meetings. The role of the Governing Body Clerk is seen by the NGA as a means of providing expertise and professionalism to Governing Bodies.

As part of its desk-top review, the review group noted that a number of local authorities have supported the expansion of the clerk's role, in recognition of the increased complexity of school governance arrangements. Manchester City Council for instance, has introduced a dedicated Adviser to attend all meetings of the Governing Bodies across a 'patch' of schools. The Adviser assists the Chair in setting the agenda and act as a source of accurate advice to the governing body on constitutional matters and its duties, powers and responsibilities. This would include ensuring that governing bodies receive and consider reports from the Council on

matters relating to their duties. It would also be the part of this role to challenge ineffective arrangements and breaches of Regulations.

In this instance, schools retain a clerk to minute meetings as a separate arrangement. Manchester City Council operates a Service Level Agreement with schools to fund the enhanced role; with schools buying back services from the LA. Members of the review group supported this approach and suggest that this model for clerking arrangements would be beneficial to the future development of our own governing bodies. This is reflected in the review recommendations. However, it acknowledges that the funding mechanism would require further exploration with the School's Forum as it would not be possible to support this through the current Children and Young People's Services' budget.

## 5.5 Results from questionnaire

In addition to conducting face-to-face interviews, the review group also sent a questionnaire to 150 Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Governing Bodies to gain an insight into the perceptions and experiences of local school governors. The summary below is based on a response rate of 46% (69 responses).

### How long have you been a Local Authority Appointee/Non Local Authority (community/professional/parent)?

1-4 years	4-8 years	8+ years	
22.9% (8)	22.9% (8)	54.3% (19)	Local Authority
11.9% (5)	28.6% (12)	59.5% (25)	Non Local Authority

### Why did you become a school governor?

Many of the responses were similar and have been grouped together under the following five themes:-

- To contribute to school improvement and quality of teaching (28 responses)
- Loyalty to local school or community (21 responses)
- Invited by LA, school or elected by political party (5 responses)
- Wishing to get involved in school as a parent (12 responses)
- Personal professional development (3 responses)

### What support do you receive to help you in your role?

Regular Meetings(teacher/head)	91.3%	(63)
Literature	84.1%	(58)
Seminars/Conference invites	78.3%	(54)
Induction	63.8%	(44)
Peer support (other Governors)	52.2%	(36)
Regular appraisals	7.2%	(5)

In addition to the above, other responses included references to the support network provided by the Rotherham Association of School Governors (no longer in existence); support from the clerk to Governors; Diocese of Hallam Schools' service; the Chair and Vice Chairs Governing Body and the Governor Development Service.

**Have you received any training whilst in post? If yes, where**

Local Authority	87%	(60)
In school	72.5%	(50)
External	30.4%	(21)

Other sources included: Continual professional development in the workplace; Diocese of Hallam; Modern Governor Website; other training centres.

**How well do you feel you can influence the management of the school?**

<b>(as a School Governor)</b>			<b>(as a Governing Body)</b>		
High impact	49.3%	(34)	High Impact	47.8%	(33)
Medium impact	37.7%	(26)	Medium impact	37.7%	(26)
Average	7.2%	(5)	Average	8.7%	(6)
Limited impact	4.3%	(3)	Limited impact	4.3%	(3)
No impact	1.4%	(1)	No impact	1.4%	(1)

**Do you feel governing bodies can influence recommendations or key decisions made by the Head/Management**

Very well	50.7%	(35)	Rarely	10.1%	(7)
Often	37.7%	(26)	Not at all	1.4%	(1)

Have you ever challenged recommendations or decisions?

Yes 62.3% (43) No 37.7% (26)

Has a major recommendation ever been rejected by the Headteacher/Management?

Yes 7.2% (5) No 92.8% (64)

**5.6 Emerging Themes**

Interestingly, a large majority of respondents suggested that they worked in partnership with headteachers and senior management in schools, and were able to exert an influence on key decisions. In earlier Key Stage 2 Performance Clinics, the issue of strengthening leadership and governance in schools was a key area for development. It was noted that in underperforming schools, governors had not provided challenge consistently and were often unaware of areas of weakness.

The review group were surprised at the relatively low rate of induction provided to incoming governors. Although the induction is not mandatory (although the review group would argue that it should be), governing bodies should ensure that each new or returning governor understands their role; particularly around areas of responsibilities such as safeguarding or looked after children. A number of chairs suggested that they felt that they required further support to carry out their responsibilities. It is clear that there are a large number of governors with great experience and commitment; many with several years experience. To ensure that governors keep pace with the shifting education environment, it is vital that support and learning opportunities are in place and take-up is encouraged robustly.

“I became chair of governors and I am very proud to carry out the role for the school and children of my local community. I feel there is very little support when you are new to such an important role”

“I undertook Induction when I first started, after that nothing, even now in the role of chair there is nothing available.”

One respondent stated “I feel the LEA are failing in providing the training necessary for all governors to be effective, many governing bodies pay for the gold standard support but never get any, when courses are advertised they seem to get filled up quickly.”

Overall, most governors had received training at some point in their governor career, but this is not consistent or necessarily available/communicated to all.

Many respondents (whether relatively new or longer serving) had experience of challenging a key decision/recommendation. The desired outcome had usually been achieved through regular meetings, negotiations and coming to a consensus. Although this is reassuring to observe, we received other evidence from Performance Clinics that this is not consistent across the board, and is an area requiring further consolidation.

- “I have worked hard to ensure that confrontation is avoided, although this is not to suggest that we have not had to deal with challenging issues”.
- “I consider the relationship between the head and the governing body is very important. It should be based on mutual trust and respect for the positions they hold. In addition, the head must feel that the governing body has the experience and knowledge of the school to support and challenge appropriately. The aims and objectives of the school and the governing body should be concurrent and a team approach throughout school, SLT and governors is paramount to the success of the school and its leadership.”
- “In an ever changing environment we need to ensure that as governors we are up to date/fully briefed and have channels/network/training to ensure we offer the schools our best and work in partnership with the head teacher, staff and management. We must ensure we are an effective governing body for the school - be a critical friend.”

The responses demonstrated range that there was a range of experience and skills spread amongst existing school governors, with many respondents indicating that they would be willing to offer peer support to others. This is an approach supported by the review group

- “We are a strong governing body who supports and challenges the leadership of the school. We feel supported by SLT and in turn support them. Children are at the forefront of our decisions and I am proud to be a governor of a Rotherham School. I feel that we are in a position to support less successful governing bodies”.
- “Induction is offered to new governors and refresher courses for more experienced governors. I am happy to offer peer support to other governors and within our cluster”

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

All contributors agree that governors have a key role in addressing underperformance and improving outcomes and it is clear that there is a shared commitment to these ideals amongst all respondents. However, whilst attainment in many areas is improving, Rotherham faces some entrenched areas of difficulties in

some of its schools, indicating that there is still a gap in leadership and effective challenge.

The responsibilities and expectations of governors are changing and growing. The report sets out some practical steps to consolidate the skills, knowledge and understanding of governors to support them in this vital role.

By the same token, the role of the Local Authority has also changed and its relationship with schools has altered dramatically. In recognition of this, the report sets out recommendations to consolidate its position and influence to provide strategic co-ordination and oversight of governor development; strengthen the role of LA appointees and continue to provide quality advice and support to governing bodies. Through these steps, it is hoped that the local authority will continue to work in partnership with schools to ensure that opportunities for Rotherham children are maximised across the board.

## **7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **School Governor's Taskforce**

- 1** That a Taskforce comprising of representatives of governing bodies already accredited with developing good practice is established. Their role and responsibilities should include:
  - Create local Good Practice Guidelines, including a checklist of the elements that comprise an effective governing body
  - Benchmark and cascade good practice, knowledge/skills to others and train new governors
  - Provide peer support and high challenge through the Learning Communities
  - Working with the School Improvement Partnership Board/Teaching School Alliance to look at barriers to improvement e.g. removing ineffective governors
  - Encourage governing bodies from underperforming schools to collaborate with their peers from high performing schools;
  - Specifically support governing bodies to tackle safeguarding issues in schools.
  - Commission support and development activities through Rotherham School Improvement Partnership (RoSIP)
  - Identify and seek funding for Governor support and development through National Leadership Fund

### **Recruitment**

- 2** A generic person specification is developed by the LA Governor Development Service in consultation with Governing Bodies. As a minimum, prospective governors must display confidence to ask questions and query outcomes.
- 3** Each school be encouraged to develop a more specific role description, detailing the expectations attached to any specific responsibilities (e.g SEN, Safeguarding, improving outcomes for Looked After Children or finance).

- 4 Consideration be given to encourage Local Authority officers to become Governors, with appropriate time off for attendance for meetings during the school day;
- 5 Consideration should be given (by both schools and the LA) to the payment of expenses arising from undertaking the role, such as child care or travel;

### **Local Authority Governors**

- 6 That the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families clarifies what expectations the Local Authority has of its appointees, including attendance at learning and development events
- 7 That prior to recruitment, LA appointed Governors complete an expression of interest form and undergo a recruitment process that clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of LA Governors.

### **Induction and Training**

- 8 That the induction programme, co-ordinated and delivered by the Governor Development Service, should include council and school processes that impact on governing body and information on support services. Each new or returning governor should be strongly encouraged to attend induction.
- 9 A programme for Continued Professional Development (CPD) be developed, including the greater use of e-learning and resources from the National College. This programme should include learning resources to support any specific roles or responsibilities (eg performance management, HR, chairing skills)
- 10 Head Teachers to receive training or guidance in working with Governing Bodies
- 11 Training in Self Evaluation techniques should be undertaken by all Governing Bodies with a view to undertaking this exercise every two years in line with National Governors Association criteria (or other resources)
- 12 A Personal Development Review (PDR) to be undertaken (by appropriate staff/governor in school or through peer arrangements) ideally every two years with each Governor to ensure training and skills are kept up to date.
- 13 Greater use should be made of online training by all school governors through the NGA and Modern Governor. Assessment and targets for online training should be discussed and agreed through the PDR process;

### **Role of the Clerk of Governing Bodies**

- 14 The Review recommends that further work is undertaken by the Governor Development Service, with the School's Forum, to look at options to provide enhanced support to clerks. The review group suggest that this role could be undertaken across a cluster of schools by one 'adviser', whilst each body retains its clerk to undertake administrative tasks.

### **Services provided by the Council**

- 15 The review supports the continuation and strengthening of the Governor Development Service within the current learning communities and other partnership arrangements.



- 16 That the webpages hosted on the Council's own and associated websites (eg Rotherham Connected Learning) are updated to ensure that relevant resources (such as role descriptions, guidance and links to other sites) are available online.

## 8 THANKS

- Cllr Paul Lakin, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Family Services
- Cllr Amy Rushforth, in previous portfolio role of Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning and Culture
- Dorothy Smith, Director of Schools and Lifelong Learning
- Paul Carney, Co-ordinator of Governor Services
- Karen Borthwick, School Effectiveness Service
- Iain StJohn, Chair of School Governing Body
- Susan Gladwin, Chair of School Governing Body
- Violet Chapman, Chair of School Governing Body
- Bronwen Moss

## 9 INFORMATION SOURCES

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