

Meeting:	LifeLong Learning Scrutiny
Date:	4 April 2006
Subject:	Governing Body Recruitment and Retention
Responsible Officer:	Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer:	Patrick O'Dwyer
Portfolio Holder:	Bill Stephenson
Key Decision:	No
Status:	Public 1

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

None

Reason for report

This information circular item updates members about the progress made against the recommendations made by Scrutiny Sub Committee at the meeting of 20 January 2004 and follows the update of 12 January 2005.

Benefits

Good recruitment and retention practice will support the establishment of full membership of governing bodies and enhance their key school improvement role.

Cost of Proposals

Costs of progress have so far been contained within existing budgets. The proposed Service Level Agreement between Governor Services and schools

should provide additional funding from September 2006 to expand existing activities and explore new strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of school governors.

Risks

A shortfall in school governors may place additional burdens of responsibility on existing governors and may impair school improvement and effectiveness over time.

Implications if recommendations rejected

NA

Section 2: Report

2.1 Brief History

At the meeting of 22 April 2004, Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee agreed that:

1. the recommendations set out in section 6.5 of the Scrutiny Review of Recruitment and Retention of School Governors should be implemented, and;
2. both the current limited capacity and allocated resources provided to support governors are reviewed as part of the current re-organisation of Learning and Community Development.

An information circular was provided in January 2005 to update members on progress at that point. This report provides a further update against each recommendation.

Progress to Date:

The following action has been undertaken against each of the Scrutiny Review Recommendations.

Recommendation 1:

The LEA should encourage Governing Bodies to adopt flexible arrangements in relation to the timing of meetings and input into meetings.

The Local Authority (LA) has sought examples of innovative practice from Governing Bodies and has disseminated these. In particular, the LA has disseminated ways of providing school-based governor training, through the termly newsletter and on the Governors' website. A key component of both the national training programme for Chairs and the equivalent for Clerks to Governing Bodies includes a review of the use of committees, prioritizing agenda items and retaining a focus on the governing body's key issues. This continues to be an element of in-house and central governor training programmes.

Governor Services has now developed a governing body self evaluation tool (*'What is Good Governance?'*) to support governing bodies review their effectiveness. A facilitated workshop based on this evaluative tool is available to governing bodies.

Where appropriate, Governor Services has encouraged Governing Bodies to consider reducing the length of the term a group of governors may serve in order to ease recruitment and improve their effectiveness. Governor Services have also encouraged Governing Bodies to allow prospective governors to be observers at Governing Body meetings and therefore to see them at work before choosing to become governors. Governor Services has also advised governing bodies, where appropriate, to consider the use of Associate Members to support their work. However, Associate Members are not governors and their involvement will not affect the vacancy rate.

Recommendation 2:

The LEA should publicise the availability of the DfES Governors' Helpline service to all Governing Bodies.

The availability of "Governorline" as a means of support to individual governors and governing bodies has been advertised in all termly newsletters and is linked from the Governors' website. There is anecdotal evidence that governors are using this service.

Recommendation 3:

The LEA should publicise to community groups the availability of speakers to talk to them about the role of a governor.

The Harrow Commission for Racial Equality (HCRE) has promoted governorship through its use of the LA governor recruitment leaflet. Initial contact has also been made with the Harrow African-Caribbean Association.

Governor Services has proposed the establishment of a focus group to help develop an overall strategy to recruit and retain governors from the full spectrum of ethnic minority communities in the borough. The process to identify existing governors from ethnic minorities to help recruit governors through formal and informal links has begun. It has proved difficult to obtain ethnic minority monitoring data of existing governors in order to establish an accurate baseline. The request for this data from new governors is now automatic.

Recommendation 4:

Governing Bodies should be encouraged to establish mentoring schemes for new governors and the LEA should consider establishing a pool of mentors for Chairs of Governing Bodies and members with specific responsibility for finance issues.

Guidelines have been produced to support schools in recruiting, electing, inducting and retaining governors. These are referenced to DfES guidance on the in-house induction of new governors. These guidelines are to be updated to

include more practical advice on setting on a mentoring system. Governors Services will establish a mentoring offer in the near future for new Chairs.

Support for Chairs has been provided by the *Taking the Chair* central training programme which includes an option for distance learning. A group e-mail system allows participants to communicate outside the formal training sessions. One session was arranged for distance learners to explore their individual issues and it is intended to repeat this when appropriate.

The LA provides regular opportunities in each school term for the training of new governors, which include twilight sessions, Saturday sessions and distance learning options. A training session on budget management was also provided and attended by several governors.

Recommendation 5:

The clerking course should continue to be run on a regular basis, as required. The LEA should encourage Governing Bodies to take advantage of this facility.

The national governing body clerks' training programme has been run by the LA on a number of occasions, most recently in November 2005 when Clerks from Hillingdon also took part. The training was well received. Several Clerks are following the distance learning option with on-line and telephone support from the trainer. Governor Services extensively updated the guidance to Clerks in 2005. Governor Services are currently exploring ways to enable Clerks to gain the National Qualification, which has been recently launched, if they so wish. A workshop on the role of the Clerk was held at the Governors' Conference on 4 March 2006.

Recommendation 6:

The LEA should establish initiatives to recognise the valuable work being done by school governors. Options include:

- *asking the Mayor to hold a reception for school governors each year, with governors being invited on a rotating basis at least once in their terms of office, and appropriate directorial attendance and press publicity also being arranged*
- *a card or letter to recognise 10 years' service*
- *special letters of thanks for long serving retiring governors*
- *recommendation for Honours for long public service.*

The Mayor held a special reception and buffet for long serving governors on 28 September 2005. 58 governors attended and the Mayor presented them with certificates in recognition of their valued service. The current governor database does not allow easy identification of long serving governors and nominations are sought from Chairs and Headteachers.

The LA has recommended governors for recognition through the national Honours system but without success. However, one Harrow governor was recently awarded an O.B.E. and the Chair of the Harrow Association of Governing Bodies recently attended a reception at the Prime Minister's home.

Governor Services has encouraged governing bodies to nominate governors for the new *Governor of the Year 2006 Awards*. The LA has also nominated a small number of governors for this award and will continue to do so in the future.

Recommendation 7:

The LEA should provide Governing Bodies with an annual 'forward plan' of forthcoming consultations or major issues. Where complex information is to be disseminated to parents, the communication should come directly from the LEA.

Governing Bodies are provided with an annual planning calendar through the DfES termly newsletter. The procedure for informing governors, especially Chairs, about the key local issues and consultations has been reviewed in the light of experience in the autumn term 2004. The revised procedure was circulated to all schools early in the spring term 2005.

When the LA wishes to consult with large groups, especially parents, there will be new arrangements for distributing consultation materials and convening consultation meetings.

Regular communications to all governors now contain recommendations for agenda items to be covered at future governing body meetings. These letters also contain answers to specific questions to help keep governors abreast of local developments. The governing body self-evaluation tool also prompts governing bodies to consider a range of agenda items.

Recommendation 8:

The LEA should consider the production of a simple LBH leaflet, promoting the role of school governors for distribution with admission letters to parents of rising fives and those transferring to High School.

A leaflet promoting governorship is now available. This has been distributed widely to schools, libraries and through community information points, such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux, the reception desk at the Civic Centre and HCRC. The leaflet has also been distributed through the 'Work in Harrow Day' and the Kenmore Park Schools' Community Day.

Governor Services is currently working closely with the One Stop Shop for Governors. They have sent out around 30,000 flyers into Harrow households and produced a press release. They are also making contact with the top 25 employers in Harrow to promote governor recruitment. All volunteers are contacted and their details passed to schools. Governor Services are also working to support elected members in their efforts to identify and nominate LA governors. Governor Services has offered to support governing bodies that have high vacancy levels.

Recommendation 9:

The Publications Panel should be asked to consider establishing a separate web page and message board for school governors.

Recommendation 10:

The Publications Panel should be asked to explore the promotion of governors' role on the website and in 'Harrow People' and to consider the provision of some of the website information in minority languages.

The governance website at www.harrow.gov.uk/schoolgovernors is live and is regularly updated. Information is currently provided in the following areas:

1. a public area containing information about the role of governors, how to become a governor and the training and support that is available.
2. information and resources for governors and governing bodies, set out as:
 - Support and information for governors
 - Organisation and clerking of governing bodies
 - Dealing with key powers and duties
 - School governors recruitment, induction and training

Each folder contains a number of guidance documents and reference materials including the LA training programme and recent newsletters. They also include links to other relevant sites such as www.governor.net.co.uk and the London Grid for Learning. An index of support materials on the website is currently being added.

3. A recruitment article on being a governor appeared in the *Harrow People* in November 2005. The article featured the Chair of Governors at one of our voluntary aided schools and generated new enquiries about becoming a governor. Another recruitment article is planned for the summer.

Audit Commission Survey in 2005

The 2005 Audit Commission Schools' Survey reported that schools responding to the question on the effectiveness of governor support found the service to be always satisfactory and often good or better. This made Governor Services one of the highest rated services. However this rating was still relatively low compared to other local authorities nationally. As a result of feedback from schools through this survey and from other evaluations, for example of training, Governor Services is proposing to formalise existing support and propose enhanced support.

As part of the Consultation Paper on the Proposal to develop the Achievement and Inclusion Division (November 2005), governing bodies are being consulted on the nature and scope of support offered to them through a proposed Service Level Agreement. This was sent to all Chairs and was copied to headteachers for consultation in February 2006.

Other support

Governor Services is also providing support to governing bodies on reconstitution and, where appropriate, on federation and amalgamation.

Four off-the shelf training packages have been provided for Attached Advisers working with individual schools or clusters of schools. This will help to ensure the consistency of messages to governing bodies and good quality training.

Technical advice is provided to governing bodies by Governor Services, Harrow's legal and human resources teams and by an educational consultant of long standing who is very experienced in school governance matters.

2.2.1 Options considered

NA

2.2.2 Consultation

Governor Services is consulting with all governing bodies (copied to all headteachers) on a Service Level Agreement for September 2006. The period of consultation finishes on 7 April 2006.

2.4 Financial Implications

The work of Governor Services' has been restricted by a small budget allocation. It is intended that the financial security and increased budget generated through the Service Level Agreement will enable Governor Services to improve its effectiveness regarding the recruitment and retention of school governors through a more extensive programme of recruitment and support to governing bodies.

2.5 Legal Implications

NA

2.6 Equalities Impact

NA

2.7 Section 17 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Considerations

NA

Section 3: Supporting Information/Background Documents

'How to Become a School Governor in Harrow' (November 2004)

Information Circular to Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Sub-Committee (12 January 2005)

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Appendix A:

Governor Services Service Level Agreement (proposed for September 2006)

Appendix B:

Vacancy Rates by Governor Type in March 2006