



LIFE LONG LEARNING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

**REVIEW OF RECRUITMENT AND
RETENTION OF SCHOOL
GOVERNORS**

REVIEW GROUP MEMBERS: Councillors Mitzi Green, Miss Bednall, Gate, Ismail, Lent, Marie-Louise Nolan, Mary John, Jean Lammiman, Janet Mote, John Nickolay, Vina Mithani, Omar and Mr Russell Sutcliffe (Co-opted Member)

Report of the Scrutiny Review Group
Harrow Council

January 2004

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This report has been compiled by the Members named on the front cover of this report. The views expressed are solely theirs.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee carried out a review of the recruitment and retention issues related to school governors. Particular emphasis was placed on the recruitment and retention of governors from Harrow's diverse community and how this could be improved.

The review involved the consideration of written submissions from current school governor officers in other authorities, data and information provided by the Principal Education Adviser (Professional Development) and a single evidence-gathering meeting to which witnesses were invited and questioned.

We heard evidence from a number of current school governors and a representative from Harrow Racial Equality Council.

This report sets out the methodology that we used for the review, the scope of the review, the Sub-Committee's findings and its recommendations.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee agreed that the review would be carried out using a Select Committee-style evidence-gathering meeting.

11 June 2003

- The Sub-Committee met to determine the arrangements for the review, the evidence-gathering meeting, the witnesses to be invited and to request data and information from the Principal Education Adviser (Professional Development).

7 October 2003

- Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee received and considered desktop research materials supplied by Senior Advisor (Professional Development).

17 October 2003

- Councillor Mitzi Green, Chair of the Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee and Councillor Miss Bednell, Vice -Chair of the Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee and Chair of the Evidence Gathering Meeting, met to establish line of questioning for the evidence gathering meeting.

22 October 2003

- 6.30pm – Pre-meeting with all Members of the Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee to brief them on procedure for the evidence gathering meeting.
- 7.30pm – Evidence Gathering Meeting at Harrow High School – questioning of witnesses.

11 December 2003

- Review of key findings and documentation, formulation of recommendations

4. SCOPE OF REVIEW

PROJECT SCOPING - SCHOOL GOVERNORS REVIEW

1	SUBJECT	Review of the recruitment and retention process for school governors.
2	COMMITTEE	Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee
3	REVIEW GROUP	All Members of the Lifelong Learning Sub-Committee. Chair of Evidence Gathering Meeting – Cllr Miss Bednell.
4	AIMS/ OBJECTIVES	To examine:- 1. the processes and issues relating to the recruitment and retention of school governors, with particular regard to the recruitment and proportion of ethnic minority representation on governing bodies; and 2. the level of support provided to governors and to identify good practice areas from other Local Authorities with a view to strengthening Harrow's own governor recruitment and support processes.
5	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	1. An increase in the number of school governors recruited, leading to a reduction in vacancy rates. 2. Improved retention rates of school governors. 3. Increase in the representation of ethnic minority governors on governing bodies.
6	SCOPE	Included: 1. To review recruitment and retention processes with particular emphasis on ethnicity issues. 2. Support provided by the LEA both to newly appointed and more experienced governors, including developmental opportunities. 3. External factors (including employers' attitude to release of staff) impacting on the recruitment of governors. 4. Best practice in other LEA's
7	SERVICE PRIORITIES (Corporate/Dept)	Supports the corporate priority of promoting Harrow as a centre of lifelong learning.
8	REVIEW SPONSOR	Michael Hart, Interim Director of Education

5. KEY FINDINGS

ISSUE	FINDINGS	COMMENT
<p>Recruitment and Retention of Governors generally</p>	<p>Witnesses had experience of a number of parents who were interested in becoming a governor, however, found it difficult to find the time. When looking at work/life balance, many perceived governorship to be on the 'work' side.</p> <p>Some governing bodies encouraged potential governors to observe meetings.</p> <p>It was believed that, for many, childcare provision was an issue that hindered governorship but governing bodies did not financially support it, despite having funding allocated to do so.</p> <p>None of the witnesses had experienced a governor resigning because they did not like or want to be a governor anymore. The reasons for resigning were due to changes in circumstances and time constraints.</p> <p>Written evidence was submitted by the Governor Support Officer at London Borough of Brent detailing its recruitment initiatives, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supplying recruitment literature to libraries, Council One-Stop shops and Education Information shop. - Sending literature to around 80 local community organisations - Receiving referrals from the School Governors One-Stop Shop (SGOSS) - Schools extranet has list of SGOSS and local volunteers seeking appointment. - Free taster courses for those interested in becoming governors - Advertisements in various publications - Speaking at Brent Refugee Forum 	<p>The time demands of the role were largely beyond the control of Governing Bodies.</p> <p>Difficult to find an ideal time to meet the differing needs of all Governors involved e.g. parents, teachers, business community</p> <p>Employment laws allowed employee to have time off but not a right to pay for time taken off for community activities</p> <p>Some Governing Bodies had successfully adopted flexible arrangements for meeting times e.g. early morning, supported by alternative input arrangements for those unable to attend (e.g. written representations)</p>
<p>Training and Support</p>	<p>Overall, witnesses felt that they received a good level of support from the LEA and their individual schools, particularly during times of OFSTED inspections and headteacher recruitment. Responses to queries were helpful and timely.</p>	<p>Not all Governors were aware of the valuable support from the Governors' Helpline.</p> <p>A Mentoring scheme would provide support particularly for new Governors. Governing</p>

	<p>However, there were times when they felt isolated and suggested that it would be encouraging if they received a call periodically to check how things were going. The writing of the Annual Report was felt to be a particularly tough time for Chairs and ideas on different ways of presenting it to parents would be welcomed. Some governing bodies had started to experiment with the format of these meetings.</p> <p>The DFES Governor Help Line was a good source of support, particularly at times when the LEA was not contactable. The Help Line helped to give a valuable outside perspective.</p> <p>It was felt that a mentoring scheme would be very helpful, both to experienced and inexperienced chairs and governors. It was believed that members of governing bodies could do a lot to support each other such as implementing 'buddy' systems. There was a potential role for the LEA in providing mentoring for chairs and matching people.</p> <p>All governors present regretted the loss of the governing body officer attendance, which was felt to be supportive of the governing body itself and an important link to the LEA.</p> <p>Some governing bodies regretted the loss of centrally provided clerks and had experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining clerks. The clerks provided by the LEA had brought with them much knowledge and skill. On the other hand, another witness reported that since her governing body had employed its own clerk it had much more control over its minutes and the way in which they were written</p> <p>It was suggested that a 'Buy Back' service might be useful.</p> <p>It was generally agreed that the training provided by the LEA was highly appropriate, especially when it was provided on-site, during the governing body meeting.</p> <p>Witnesses agreed that they were volunteers but wanted to take a professional approach, therefore, they needed training and the</p>	<p>Bodies should generally be responsible for establishing such schemes themselves</p> <p>An LEA-established bank of mentors for chairs and those with a finance responsibility would be valuable.</p> <p>The LEA course for existing clerks was proving very successful. (11 of the Council's 28 Governing Bodies clerks were currently benefiting from this training)</p> <p>The loss of automatic LEA officer attendance at Governing Body meetings was regretted.</p>
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	funding for that training.	
Influence of Governors in the Running of a School	<p>A witness observed that many of the items in the School Improvement Plan had arisen due to comments and concerns of governor's. However, the document did not reflect that.</p> <p>Governing bodies worked in isolation and therefore were unable to assess whether they were doing things well or had sufficient influence and involvement. One governing body was shortly to undertake a self-review with the assistance of the LEA to try and establish this.</p> <p>It was felt that some governors influenced but others took little or no part in meetings.</p> <p>Governors felt that they had particular influence in the performance management of the headteacher and the appointment of the headteacher.</p>	<p>Although AHGB had a role in supporting networking/sharing good practice, in reality many Governing Bodies were working in isolation. Councillors serving on Governing Bodies could play a valuable role in reducing isolation.</p> <p>As an alternative to an annual meeting for all Governors, which would add to the already heavy time commitments of governors, consideration could be given to initiating a separate web-page & message board as a means of supporting communications between governors in different schools</p>
Valuing of Governors	<p>Since the demise of the Education Committee and the co-opted governor representatives that sat on it, governors believed that they had less opportunity to be heard.</p> <p>It was generally agreed that schools valued the input of their governors, encouraged them to come in to school and visit when appropriate and were made to feel welcome.</p> <p>It was observed that it was important for governors to understand the boundaries and not to make unreasonable or inappropriate demands.</p>	<p>There were options for how the LEA could be more proactive in developing a positive profile for the Governors' role e.g. Mayoral involvement, long service recognition, nomination for honours.</p> <p>The need for all governors to be Police checked reinforces the importance of the role.</p>
Consultation and Communication from the LEA	<p>This was a difficult balance to achieve as governors felt that there was too much paperwork which was too verbose. They did, however, want to be consulted.</p> <p>Witnesses felt that Governing bodies needed to take a firm line on what matters needed to be dealt with at the full meeting and to find creative ways of managing the paperwork.</p>	<p>There was a need for better timetabling for consultations & more realistic deadlines.</p> <p>LEA needed to take a role in relation to the presentation of consultation information, which was often complex, to public and staff, rather than leaving this to individual</p>

	<p>It was felt that the use of e-mail exacerbated the problem as it then needed to be downloaded at personal expense.</p> <p>A range of consultation methods needed to be explored and the timetabling of local consultation could be planned better. This would ensure that governing bodies were not receiving numerous consultation documents at the same time.</p> <p>A witness suggested that a 'Forward Programme/Plan' might be effective and help governing bodies to plan ahead.</p>	<p>Governing Bodies. Previously support was provided to Governing Bodies through officer attendance</p>
<p>Recruitment and Retention of Governors from Harrow's Diverse Community</p>	<p>The witness from HREC explained that for many ethnic minorities, voluntary work was a new concept. Many were busy with family commitments and in establishing themselves. Little was known about what being a governor meant or entailed.</p> <p>Language was a barrier to many. They felt uncomfortable sitting in formal meetings and feared that they might not be understood.</p> <p>It would be useful for information about governors and their role to be available when a child started at a school. This should stress the influence that governors have on the running of the school and how they can contribute to making improvements. Parents' evenings and sports days could also be used to inform in this way.</p> <p>Media could be used, information aimed at certain groups and displays in libraries. The HREC could help in distributing information to individual groups.</p> <p>Talks could be given at the full meeting of HREC and also at the monthly Executive meetings.</p> <p>Governing bodies could encourage membership from ethnic minority groups and when on the body, give a particular focus to them at meetings.</p> <p>Witnesses felt that it was incumbent upon governing bodies to market the role and go directly to community groups. Also, to encourage all parties to recognise the</p>	<p>There was a need to establish records relating to ethnicity of governors</p> <p>It was important to empower ethnic minority groups. Initiatives adopted by Brent could be considered, particularly the provision of DfES literature and a simple Council leaflet at appropriate public access points. Also, making groups aware of the availability of officers to make presentations to minority group meetings.</p>

	transferable skills of many people. Governing body members could network in other capacities to find people.	
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6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The LEA should encourage Governing Bodies to adopt flexible arrangements in relation to the timing of meetings and input into meetings.
- 6.2 The LEA should publicise the availability of the DfES Governors' Helpline service to all Governing Bodies.
- 6.3 The LEA should publicise to community groups the availability of speakers to talk to them about the role of a governor.
- 6.4 Governing Bodies should be encouraged to establish mentoring schemes for new governors and the LEA consider establishing a pool of mentors for Chairs of Governing Bodies and members with specific responsibility for finance issues.
- 6.5 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. (Some sharing of the course cost (£75/person) had taken place where a clerk serviced a number of bodies).
- 6.6 The LEA should establish initiatives to recognise the valuable work being done by school governors. Options include:
 - asking the Mayor each year to hold a reception with appropriate press publicity and directorial attendance,
 - 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.
- 6.7 The LEA should provide Governing Bodies with an annual 'forward plan' of forthcoming consultations/major issues. Where complex information is to be disseminated to parents, the communication should come directly from the LEA.
- 6.8 The LEA 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.
- 6.9 The Publications Panel should be asked to consider establishing a separate web page and message board for school governors.
- 6.10 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.