

NOTES OF THE CONSULTATION MEETING BETWEEN ELECTED MEMBERS, OFFICERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OXFORDSHIRE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION (OGA) HELD AT COUNTY HALL ON THURSDAY 16 MAY 2019 AT 4.00pm

Present:

OGA Representatives: Carole Thomson [Chair] (CT), Judith Bennett (JB), Doreen Rose (DR), Brenda Williams (BW)

OCC Elected Members and Officers: Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale (LLG) [Cabinet Member for Education], Allyson Milward (AM) [Head of Access to Learning], Jennie Perry (JP) [Lead Officer – Governor Services] and Cllr Michael Waine (MW).

In attendance: Katie Paxton-Doggett [Clerk].

Apologies for absence: Lucy Butler (LB) [Director for Children's Services], David Clarke (DC) [Deputy Director Education] and Stan Terry (ST).

1. Matters arising from notes of meeting held on 26 February 2019

The notes had been previously approved by email.

1.1 Mental health support for schools: OGA Open Meeting 3rd April 2019

OGA thanked OCC/NHS staff for their support of the Open Meeting which had been very successful and had been well-attended by around 70 people. A comprehensive set of notes had been prepared which would be uploaded to website. CT would email a copy to LLG and MW

Action: CT

1.2 SEND Strategy – target date for completion?

In DC's absence there were concerns about the capacity within OCC for the strategy. CT would email the lead officer to request an update.

Action: CT

A complete strategy for the education department was being developed and it was hoped that this would be complete by July 2019.

4.08pm AM joined the meeting

The SEND strategy had been presented to Cabinet and accepted and the aim was for it to be formally approved for roll out at the start of the new academic year. OGA representatives felt that it would be good for it to go out in consultative form to governors.

BW suggested that the presentation on the SEND strategy given to the last Heads and Chairs briefings had given an inaccurate picture suggesting that it would have additional funding. OGA representatives expressed significant concerns about how the strategy could succeed without additional funding.

Progress had been made on the high needs review and it was hoped that this would be done by the end of term.

Funding for new special schools had been secured.

1.3 Premises maintenance

OGA representatives expressed disappointment at the continuing lack of support for maintained schools.

The post-Carillion report had gone before Education Scrutiny, though this did not include anything about ongoing repairs and maintenance.

There was a new team of people in Property Services which was extremely short staffed. Four senior managers had left since September 2018, three of whom had moved for promotion. AM and LLG held regular meetings with Property Services.

There was a lack of clarity in maintained schools about where to get advice and how to get to the approvals systems. There was a lot of information on the schools intranet but it was extremely difficult to find. It was suggested that a coherent message about responsibilities of the council and the school with an easy reference point was needed.

Action: AM to raise with OCC

Property

Governing boards needed clarity about whether maintenance and repairs would be funded by OCC to enable strategic planning. It was also felt that schools were getting mixed messages when some schools had urgent work done. It was clarified that there was funding for only four or five schemes a year for the worst condition buildings under OCC schools' structural repairs and maintenance.

It was noted that schools were no longer given an allowance for maintenance as funding was allocated according to the National Funding Formula. There was only a small capital allocation, a lump sum of £4,000 p.a. plus an amount per pupil. This could not be spent on routine maintenance and also had to fund replacement of ICT equipment.

1.4 Dynamic Procurement system

It was noted that it would not be easy for smaller contractors to get onto the dynamic procurement system. AM would share the information that she had about it. **Action: AM**

It was hoped that services for maintained schools, linking with property, would start to flow from the education strategy work.

1.5 Home education

AM would raise with the Head of Learner Engagement, about the possibility of sharing the learning from the recent Serious Case Review which had been offered at a previous meeting.

Action: AM

There were still issues with identification of children when they were not in school. There were weekly meetings between attendance teams when a child disappeared from a school roll. OGA representatives felt that there should be some tracking from birth to avoid children being kept out of the education system entirely. Once pupils were on the system, they would be tracked between primary and secondary phases, although some will go into the independent sector.

It was noted that LB was currently the interim Director of Adult Services in addition to her role as Director of Children's Services

1.6 Working between OCC and schools

OGA representatives expressed disappointment at the length of time it had taken to advertise the Governor Services lead post. It had now been advertised and there were a number of good applicants. An OGA representative would sit on the interview panel.

There was an interim Governor Services lead who would work for two days a week. JP would handover to her and then she was expected to handover to the appointee.

The Team Leader for the clerking service had also resigned and was leaving that week.

A third role of a Governor Services Officer had also been advertised. It had not attracted any interest but it was intended for a September start.

Communications from OGA will continue to be distributed through the clerks' network as well as being uploaded to the OCC part of GovernorHub, noting that this is only available to subscribing schools.

1.7 Communication

A person to lead on communication had not yet been appointed though it was understood that it was being considered. *Schools News* was currently managed by officers, Sandra Higgs and Jamie Carpenter.

1.8 Expenses issue

It was understood that the issue had been resolved. Thanks were offered to the Head of Service for Learning & School Improvement.

1.9 Inclusion

Schools were finding it increasingly hard to find the first £6,000 for children with SEND. There were concerns around the rise in exclusions and it had been raised at MP's briefing. CT had been interviewed about the high needs funding block area; there seemed to be a lack of continuity of staff which had led to weakness. OGA representatives expressed concerns about whether the high needs review was coming together coherently. CT would contact the SEND lead.

Action: CT

CT had attended a constructive F40 meeting which had discussed the amount of funding that was needed. CT and LLG would discuss a letter from Devon about how to lobby MPs.

Action: CT/LLG

2. Could OCC consider the development of a strategic plan for falling rolls in primary schools?

There were very good plans for new builds and where new capacity was needed. However, as estates matured, primary school numbers dropped in established schools so that there was an increasing amount of spare capacity. There had also been a dip in the birth rate.

Falling rolls were a particular problem for smaller rural schools and in KS1 where class size restrictions posed challenges. In this landscape, parental preference could make a dramatic impact on a school.

The cyclical nature of the birth rate was noted and previous surplus place reviews were recalled. However, OCC would make efforts to plot numbers and establish a coherent message. Support should be provided to schools with business modelling for reducing schooling rolls.

OCC had run a seminar with CEOs of MATs around admissions and how systems could be shared. A number of aspects were not running smoothly at the present time.

The issue should be referred to SOSG (School Organisation Stakeholder Group) as it fell clearly within its remit.

Action: AM/MW

Part of the solution could involve smaller schools working more closely together and collaborating.

OGA representatives requested that the topic be raised at a future Heads and Chairs briefing.

Action: AM

CT would include something in the next OGA letter to governors.

Action: CT

3. **How best can Oxfordshire County Council develop to ensure that Headteachers and Governing Bodies are appropriately supported to ensure that Oxfordshire is seen as a county that is a good place to work?**

A number of recent difficulties were discussed that did not portray the county in an attractive light.

OCC was putting in the right resources to move schools forward.

Gareth Alcott had been engaged through the Strategic Schools Partnership for two days per week to show that Oxfordshire was a good place to work. However, it was not possible to overcome the cost of housing in the area. Efforts had been made in the past to get the county included in the London fringe payment benefits. The Early Headship Programme was intended to encourage potential leaders to remain in the area.

There had been quite a lot of headteacher recruitment this year. There was local authority attendance at interviews. OGA representatives did not feel that it was helpful to send someone to the interview who had not been part of the whole process. It was agreed that it was desirable that the same person should be involved from the beginning to end of the appointment process, but where this was not possible they should be careful about commenting on the agreed process.

4. **What, if any, powers of intervention does OCC have to ensure that all schools are following best practice in safer recruitment processes?**

OGA representatives had come across occasions in both academy trusts and maintained schools where safer recruitment processes had not been fully observed. OGA representatives queried whether OCC could intervene. It was understood that there was a system where concerns could be raised about schools.

It was noted that a number of schools with issues had signed off the annual s175 safeguarding s175 audit without querying the contents. Governors should also be undertaking regular checks of the Single Central Register and this was not always being done. This had gone out to schools via a number of routes including *Schools News*, strategy meetings, briefings, etc.

BW had attended safer recruitment training but had not yet received a certificate which was taking a long time to be sent out. It was agreed that certification should be sent out promptly to provide schools with evidence for Ofsted and that OCC should expedite this. **It was agreed that the issue should be shared and discussed within OCC.**

5. **Dates of the future meetings for academic year 2019-20**

AM would arrange for someone to send round some proposed dates for three meetings over the course of the year. JB would provide the dates from the last few years. **Action: JB/AM**

The meeting ended at 5.25pm