

**NOTES OF A MEETING BETWEEN ELECTED MEMBERS AND REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE OXFORDSHIRE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION (OGA) HELD AT
COUNTY HALL ON WEDNESDAY 8th FEBRUARY 2017 AT 5.30pm.**

Present:

OGA Representatives: Carole Thomson [Chair] (CT), Judith Bennett (JB), Lucy Katz (LK), June Nisbet (JN) and Brenda Williams (BW).

OCC Elected Members and Officers: Cllr Steve Harrod (SH), Lucy Butler (LB), Roy Leach (RL), Chris Malone (CM), John Mitchell (JM) and Tim Vinall (TV).

In attendance: David Bramble [Clerk].

Apologies for absence: Cllr Melinda Tilley and Simon Bissett.

1. Notes and Matters Arising from last meeting

Notes of the meeting held on 19th October 2016 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

Matters arising:

- Multi Academy Trust sponsors and the role of the LA RL advised that a briefing paper for SH had been prepared for tomorrow's Cabinet Member Meeting. The issue of a number of small, rural primary schools would be addressed.

BW expressed the view that there was a danger all local accountability would be lost and felt that in some small, rural schools governors were not able to manage the situation. LK thought that the choice of who to join on academisation was very limited – she had attended a 'show parade' the previous week and had not been impressed and felt options were very limited.

CM pointed out that OCC had no existing MAT and RL added that time was required to research how many schools may be interested and to identify resource implications.

LB stated that the urgency in making a decision was appreciated. It was agreed to defer further discussion to the next meeting.

- Admissions Team coverage over Summer holiday period RL would approach schools to ascertain if it was feasible to delegate decision making to someone who would be available or whether schools would be prepared to allow the LA to make decisions.
- Clerking Service TV reported that some new Clerks had been recruited but some had also left. LA was actively recruiting for additional Clerks.
- Update on OCC staffing CM was pleased to report that after a number of interim consultants had been employed some permanent appointments had been made. Simon Bissett would continue until 31st March. Jennie Perry would work 2 days per week and lead on governance strategy and the MAT leadership team. Sara Carey would give support on traded services. Catherine Hayward would lead on Ofsted inspections.

Judith Bennett joined the meeting

1. What are the proposals for the development of an improved partnership between OCC and all Oxfordshire schools?

LB advised that on the day prior to the meeting, she had spent a long but interesting day at DfE. There had been a marked shift in emphasis following the change of Secretary of State – mass academisation had been replaced by ‘mass improvement’. There had been indications that government was interested in retaining LAs.

Communications with the RSC’s office were being established. LB and RL had met Dame Kate Dethridge, the Deputy Regional Schools’ Commissioner and a follow-up meeting was planned in March. It was hoped there would be a ‘bringing together’ of schools and the LA. Chairs of governors and Heads would have their views heard at the termly meetings with the Director. LB intended visiting schools to meet Heads and Chairs of Governors to hear at first-hand the concerns of leaders.

LK felt that LA appointed governors received no support from the LA and suggested that a single point of contact should be nominated that Chairs or LA governors could approach for help. CM advised that the Business Development Team should be the first point of contact when guidance was needed.

2. In view of the increasing numbers of Muslim girls being “home educated” locally apart from an initial home visit to sign off students from school onto home schooling, what support and challenge, if any, does the council give? Is there any scope for getting financial support to enable those students that wish to sit their GCSEs to do so?

CT apologised for an error in the agenda which quoted ‘70 (TBC) Muslim girls’ – this figure came from one governor with a particular interest in this issue and should have been 17. It was thought that the decline of single sex schools had resulted in a growth in the number of Muslim girls not attending school. RL advised that In 2015/16 there were 104 cases where EHE was for Ideological/Religious /Cultural reasons, but only a minority of children's ethnicities were recorded.

A number of Muslim girls living in Oxford attended Didcot Girls' School because it was the nearest single sex school and parents had to make travel arrangements. RL explained that the LA did not have statutory powers to visit places offering home education. There was an initial visit at which follow-up visits were offered. No funding was available for funding tuition or examination fees.

This subject had been raised at Stakeholders’ meeting and a request was made to raise the safeguarding issue with the Government. As a serious case review was underway it was thought more appropriate to wait for the outcome of this review before the issue was progressed. OGA asked to be kept informed.

3. Does OCC have systems in place to ensure they know whether or not newly appointed Headteachers are getting the support they need?

CM confirmed that funding (£1.4M) was in place to provide support for Tier 3 schools and below. When CM took over in September 2016, £150k was available excluding payment of consultation fees paid to former Heads/NLGs who provide the support.

During a discussion it became apparent that recording of changes of Headship was not robust. Despite monitoring of advertisements and liaison with Diocesan Boards, OTSA, who kept the register and arranged training, was not always aware of new appointments. CT added that there was apparently no feedback to Chairs of Governors on Heads' attendance at training sessions and thought this would be helpful. CM advised that a paper for submission to the Operations Strategy Group was in course of preparation and she would welcome an input from OGA. CT and CM would liaise.

Action: CT/CM

NGA publications were commended and CT suggested the LA should help promote schools' membership of NGA.

Action: TV

JB added that a joint paper on the relative 'Expectations' of Heads and Governing Bodies, endorsed by NGA, NAHT and ASCL, had been sent to Adam Arnell (OTSA).

4. Considered together (as the DfE makes clear that we should), the Governance Handbook and the Framework offer both detailed support and challenge to all FGBs. What proof will OCC have and what evidence are they intending to collect to ensure that all governing bodies are undertaking the process effectively and intelligently?

There is a lot of background information to this question which may be found in the draft report written by the Chair of Governors of Five Acres Primary school.

Many issues were raised in LK's report and the LA gave an assurance that the very important lessons learnt would be taken into account when introducing future changes. It was suggested that the LA should write to newly elected Chairs on appointment which could be signposted on Schools' News. The absence of a Clerk at Five Acres school was noted and the presence of a knowledgeable Clerk may have made a significant difference.

JB reported that she had attended a meeting of the Workforce Steering Group earlier in the day, at which the need to communicate quickly warning signs of problems arising at schools had been discussed. Forthcoming problems could be identified by a number of sources: Schools Information Exchange which worked with schools causing concern: officers visiting schools e.g. HR or Finance could often pick up early warning signs.

5. In view of the funding consultation and the developing financial pressures on Oxfordshire schools how will OCC support schools in challenging the expectation that they can continue to do more and more with less and less money?
e.g. Had DfE responded to the issue of the Apprenticeship levy being applied to schools with a payroll of less than £3M?

Schools' Forum was working on a response to the consultation.

*Cllr Steve Harrod retired from the meeting
He was asked to convey OGA's best wishes to Melinda Tilley*

6. In view of the media coverage about the Hampshire Back Office provision with Hants police investing more than £1M to improve the service to its staff, would Oxfordshire consider a more robust assessment of the service being provided to its schools?

RL advised that there were a number of mechanisms in place to monitor services provided by Hampshire CC:

- Schools Working Group – termly meetings
- HR Users Group meetings
- Service Contracts Meetings
- Lead Officers in the LAs informal meetings

Consideration was being given to employing an independent body to review Customer Services.

Governors expressed the feelings of schools that OCC lacked the capacity to provide an acceptable service to schools and there was no point in complaining. There was a lack of response on Financial matters and, generally, a frustration at not knowing who to contact to get something done. The LA admitted that the services provided by Hampshire fell short of expectations and it would continue to press for improvements.

7. What is the latest position in terms of the number of National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) available to Oxfordshire Schools and are any proposals being developed around the idea of developing Local Leaders of Governance(LLGs)?

NCTL had 3 listed NLGs in Oxfordshire. Attempts to promote the appointment of additional NLGs had not been successful to date. CT pointed out that the insistence on recruiting from current Chairs of Governors was a major restriction – recently retired Chairs or proven, experienced governors may be more fruitful sources. To date there was no progress on the development of LLGs.

8. Any other business

CT advised that there was a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the relationship between OGA and the LA, which included the organisation of Elected Members meetings with OGA, and which was over 10 years old but remained valid.

This meeting would be the last attended by John Mitchell and CT paid a warm tribute to him. He had been present at the first meeting in 1996 and had assisted 10 Directors. The efficient, smooth running of meetings and follow-up actions were due to his diligence and organisational skills and his friendly, helpful personality would be missed. He was wished success and happiness in the future.

9. Next meeting Wednesday 24th May 2017 at 5.30pm, County Hall. Meetings for academic year 2017/18 would be arranged with John Mitchell's successor.

Meeting ended at 6.35pm