

**NOTES OF A CONSULTATION MEETING BETWEEN ELECTED MEMBERS, OFFICERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OXFORDSHIRE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION (OGA) HELD AT COUNTY HALL ON THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER FEBRUARY 2019 AT 4.00pm**

**Present:**

**OGA Representatives:** Carole Thomson [Chair] (CT), Judith Bennett [Secretary] (JB), Doreen Rose (DR) and Stan Terry (ST)

**OCC Elected Members and Officers:** Tim Brock (TB) [Lead Officer – Governor Services]; Chris Hilliard (CH) [Deputy Director for Children's Services]; Allyson Millward (AM) [Head of Access to Learning]; Cllr Michael Waine (MW)

**In attendance:** Katie Paxton [Clerk]

**Apologies for absence:**

Lucy Butler (LB) [Director for Children's Services], Rachel Caseby (RC) [Governor Services Officer]; Jane Howarth (JH) [Acting Deputy Director for Education]; Cllr Loraine Lindsay-Gale (LLG) [Cabinet Member for Education]; Brenda Williams (BW) [OGA]; Malcolm Wright (MW) [OGA Vice Chair]

The meeting was chaired by CT.

TB, the new Governor Services Lead, was welcomed to the meeting. Meetings between OGA and OCC elected Members and Officers had been taking place since the late 1990s. Traditionally OGA set most of the agenda, but questions and comments from Officers and Members were encouraged to make it a collaborative process. Issues raised related to all schools or a number of schools rather than one particular school.

TB had prepared written responses to the questions on the agenda which would be shared with OGA.

**1. Matters arising from notes of meeting held on 16 May 2019**

It was noted that formal minutes were not taken and the notes were approved by email prior to the next meeting. The notes of the meeting held on 16 May 2019 had been approved by email.

**1.1 Progress on the Education Strategies**

CH had written a draft document on improving education outcomes which had been shared with the Director of Children's Services and Heads of Service, asking for comments and initial feedback. It set out the context of education in Oxfordshire since 2010 and defined the local authority's responsibilities, some of which were delivered through the Teaching Schools Alliance. It was a complex document which considered how much the local authority had to pay to comply with the statutory duties as well as how school improvement was delivered.

It would be recommended that the document be co-constructed: conversations would be held with schools via the Oxfordshire Secondary Schools, Strategic Schools Partnership and Special School Headteachers. It had been noted that there was no primary association and it was hoped that this could be re-launched. In addition, key stakeholders such as elected members, Diocese, etc, would be engaged. The Chair of the Education Scrutiny Committee would be asked to go through the document in detail prior to going to Cabinet.

It was hoped that a formal document could be built by Christmas 2019 to go out to consultation. A draft three-year plan would be in place by Easter 2020 working down to workplan and performance objectives. The single coherent plan would be subject to annual review.

Some key elements were emerging including the performance of disadvantaged pupils at primary as well as secondary level and issues in maths across the primary sector. The SEND strategy would also be incorporated.

## **1.2 Premises Maintenance**

Decisions around spending on premises management had not gone to Cabinet until July 2019 which was too late to arrange for works to be undertaken over the summer period. It was hoped that this would be rectified for the current reporting cycle. It was noted that value for money could be achieved if building works were undertaken in term time so long as it was safe to do so.

OGA had repeatedly asked for a single point of contact for school. Information about the Heads of Departments needed to be uploaded to the schools intranet. OSSP (Oxfordshire Strategic Schools Partnership) had produced a directory with links to the relevant department which should be included in the intranet. It had been advertised on Schools News.

## **1.3 Dynamic Procurement**

Sarah Carey had produced a summary of how dynamic procurement worked. It was an electronic framework agreement used by the public sector which was due to run until 2022. All suppliers were required to use the process; strands included school improvement, governor services and alternative provision. Sarah Carey had stated that she was happy to assist any contractors who were finding the system difficult.

As an LLG (Local Leader of Governance), JB had been asked to help out a school in Oxford city. It had proved difficult to arrange payment of expenses as there was no existing mechanism to do so. It was understood that there were now 11 LLGs in Oxfordshire and they should be offered expenses at a minimum.

OGA had assisted with providing governors to sit on panels particularly over the summer term. There were some issues with governing board understanding in relation to complaints handling etc. There was also no straightforward way for governors to apply for expenses to cover mileage.

AM would provide instructions about how to get onto the portal to be circulated with the minutes.

**ACTION: AM**

## **1.4 Home Education**

The new protocol had been launched with schools. There was also a new In Year Fair Access Protocol.

OGA had requested a briefing on the serious case reviews and had been told that one could not be shared for confidential reasons. The case had now been published on OSCB together with a thematic review on elective home education; there had been a finding against the local authority. There had been some remediation with the family and systems were being changed. The local authority was also required to undertake a complete audit that no children had been lost, satisfying Cabinet that the work was done.

OGA queried whether there was enough central support to deal with the increase of around 20% in elective home education over the last two years.

The local authority had undertaken work over the last few weeks on the number of these children who had been permanently excluded. There was some mismatch between the information notified to OCC and that provided to DfE.

The local authority had discussed reintegration timetables with Ofsted colleagues during the recent inspection.

OGA requested that findings of the audit be put before Education Scrutiny so that elected members were aware. It was essential that the whereabouts of children was known.

There were particular issues with girls in families that did not value education or who went abroad to be married.

OCC was responsible for Oxfordshire children and their welfare. OGA believed that it was incumbent on OCC to ensure that electively home educated children were cared for and not lost in the system. This had been considered by Education Scrutiny and it was clear that OCC had no legal authority to follow up on these children.

OGA queried whether children were tracked over the transition from primary to secondary school. For the first time this year, OCC had written to every secondary school requesting confirmation of pupils.

Children were tracked quite consistently from nursery into reception.

OGA felt that it should be part of the regular business of the Education Officer that primary pupils were tracked to secondary. It was noted that parents were entitled to decide to home educate. Schools were under no obligation to report a pupil leaving; the local authority had some power to find out with maintained schools but none with academies.

Education Scrutiny was keen to look at reintegration timetables but it was only possible to consider in relation to maintained schools.

It was noted that the amount that schools were prepared to share varied; this year, 13 of 40 secondary schools had chosen not to share their GCSE data. This made it more difficult for the local authority when it was being held to account.

Strategies would eventually come out of the

There had been a review of the performance of elective home education; CT and MW were part of the working group. The report contained a lot of recommendations and strategies could be drawn from it. MW would look into the recommendations.

**ACTION: MW**

The Officer would be asked to come along to the next meeting to discuss elective home education.

## **1.5 Inclusion**

There had been a number of consultations.

There was a nominal figure for the SEN budget which was not ringfenced and was not uniform across local authorities. Schools received top-up funding for pupils with EHCPs; schools had a responsibility to meet the needs of the pupils which had an impact on their budget and the amount of resources available to spend on everyone else.

OCC was recommissioning alternative provision across Oxfordshire and had gone out to tender for new provision from 2021. Legal notice had been given to the Radcliffe Academy Trust, the sponsor of alternative provision Meadowbrook College.

## 1.6 Strategic Plan for Falling Rolls

Education Scrutiny was looking at feedback received and the pupil place plan. Some premises were unlikely to be required for some years and consideration was being given to utilising the space.

Schools that needed support were being identified and offered a package of options. Rather than automatically seeking a new sponsor, consideration would be given to relocations if schools were close enough. Options would be looked at to avoid adverse impact on pupils. Small schools were particularly vulnerable but there were also a lot of town schools where numbers were dropping. Some partnerships had fragmented but some remained strong.

### 2. **In view of the increased profile of the climate change agenda what plans are being considered by OCC to provide a coherent message for schools?**

Work was ongoing with schools in the low carbon hub. OCC recognised that it would play a greater part in supporting schools. The Director for Children's Services was the champion for climate change.

The topic would be brought back to a future meeting for discussion.

There was currently nothing driving the climate change agenda across all schools; it was taught in geography and science lessons but a curriculum needed to be developed that included it across all subjects.

Governors should also question their headteachers about what was being done by schools to encourage pupils.

Larger issues such as the way that pupils travel to school should also be looked at.

The OGA spring Open Meeting would feature a speaker on sustainability. OCC Officers and Members were invited to attend.

### 3. **It is OGA's perception that OCC seems to have moved back to an over-reliance on communications with Governors only through the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, overlooking the corporate nature of governance. Could we discuss how to improve communication in this regard please?**

Briefings were now being referred to as headteachers and chairs briefings again which did not fit with the corporate nature of the governing board.

OGA also queried why meetings had taken place in the mornings. This was a result of feedback from the summer that attendees preferred mornings; turnout had been positive with 170 people coming to the three meetings.

OGA reported difficulty in finding out dates of the briefings and a lack of notification in advance as the dates were included on the agenda only. There were some issues around GDPR regarding communication with individuals. OCC relied heavily on GovernorHub to advertise events, though a significant number of schools did not use it, it reached nearly 2,800 individuals across 218 schools and five MATs. It was thought that details of the Heads and Chairs briefings were not uploaded to GovernorHub. It was advertised on Schools News. In some cases invitations sent to a school email address were not passed to the Chair of Governors. It was suggested that the invitation could also go out through the clerks' network.

There had also been some feedback about the tone used at the briefings and many attendees had felt that they were 'got at' at the last briefing. Care should be taken in delivering difficult

messages and consideration given to whether the 'target' schools that needed to hear the specific messages were in attendance at the briefings.

- 4. There appears to be an increase in the number of Governor panels required relating to complaints, exclusions and staff discipline. OGA has been asked to assist with a number of these for schools to which they had no affiliation during the Summer term. It was clear that not all Governors understand their responsibilities. Could we discuss this please.**

OGA had found that there was a high level of ignorance on some governing boards and a lack of engagement in their responsibility by some governors. The majority of OGA Executive present had been involved in at least one panel; a number of these showed significant failures to follow process and to keep governors untainted from the subject matter of the complaint.

OCC had reviewed and identified gaps in governance across Oxfordshire over the summer especially concerning complaints and was providing guidance and training. Training on complaint handling and monitoring and the way it was handled was now available.

OGA insisted that a message should go out that governors ought to attend training.

There were often times when the involvement of external governors was good and provided an objective viewpoint. However, this was tied up with the question over payment of expenses.

- 5. Is OCC aware of funding for the Leading Governance Programmes? Are they being adequately promoted in Oxfordshire?**

OCC was aware and had been actively promoting them through Schools News. TB had been in contact with the Business Development Manager of the National Governance Association (NGA) and was due to meet with him the following week. OCC was focused specifically on the training for Chairs and Clerks, though it was noted that there was also funded training for boards. Take up appeared quite impressive and feedback on numbers had been requested.

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

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020

The meeting ended at 5.45pm