

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

15TH DECEMBER, 2016

SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY TO THE CABINET IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR E HANAGAN

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide Cabinet Members with the conclusions and recommendations of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Working Group which conducted a review in respect of the effectiveness of the Governing Bodies across Rhondda Cynon Taf

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet Members:-

- 2.1 Note the review provided by the Council's Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee provided in Appendix A of this report.
- 2.2 Agree in principle the recommendations contained within this report, subject to further consideration by the Cabinet Portfolio holders for this area, following which a detailed response is provided to the relevant Scrutiny Committees.
- 2.3 The Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee recommended:
 - That all governing bodies should undertake a process of recognition of existing skills, knowledge, expertise and effectiveness of the individuals that form part of the Governing Body (this could take the form a self evaluation, annual training review, skills audit or needs assessment).
 - That the Governor Support Service and the Central South Consortium should work with and encourage Governing Bodies to facilitate the process outlined as 1 above, by providing template example documents and the necessary support.
 - That the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Education and Skills is asked to write to the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education conveying the concerns of the Working Group regarding recruitment and

proposing that that the categories of school governors be less rigid. *(It is recognised that since the publication of this report Welsh Government has responded with a number of reforms which aim to give governing bodies more flexibility, a response which is welcomed by the Working Group).*

- That the Governor Support Service undertakes a programme of work targeting Jobs Fairs, Chambers of Trade, Professional and Voluntary Organisations, Town Centre Fora, Businesses and Universities to promote the recruitment of governors by targeting the following areas:-
 - That the use of social media be explored;
 - That the Governor Support Service considers how the Council's website can be used to promote and advertise the role of school governors and highlights the skills that can be gained by becoming a governor;
 - That advice is sought from the Council's Corporate Marketing team when embarking on this work.

- That new governors are offered the opportunity to be 'buddied' with a more experienced governor to support them through the early months of their role and that all Governing Bodies should ensure they have appointed a linked mentor governor and have an effective induction process in place

- The Governor Support Service should actively encourage the cooperation and the development of links between Governing Bodies within thauthority and across other authorities in order to share good practice and experiences.

- That as the Welsh Government consider it is important that the contribution of governors is recognised by the Chairs and Head Teachers, that all school governors are thanked by the Chairs and Head Teachers in the following ways:-
 - That letters of thanks are sent to all school governors who come to the end of their term of office;
 - That a letter of thanks is sent by the Head Teacher and/or Chair to the governing bodies at the end of each academic year thanking them for their contributions;
 - It may also be appropriate, on occasion, for thank you letters to be sent from either the Head Teacher and/or Chair of Governors to a governor in recognition of special effort/service

- That the new RCT Governors' Association be asked to consider the introduction of a 'Governor of the Year' award; or if they prefer, that an approach be made to Governors Wales to introduce such an award.

- That each governing body should be encouraged to publicise the work of the Governing Body. This could provide information such as a pen picture of each governor and their role in the school, setting out who are the 'class links' or 'topic links' thereby promoting the work undertaken by governors which might otherwise go unnoticed;
- That progress of the recommendations is monitored by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The need for Cabinet Members to consider the work of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, looking at issues in relation to the Council's governing bodies.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 When identifying potential topics for inclusion on the work programme for the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee for 2015/16, the Governor Support Service was identified as an area which potentially could benefit from Scrutiny's input. As a result, on 16th November 2015 the Committee received a report which provided Members with an overview of the service and the challenges being faced, in particular in attracting and retaining school governors. Following consideration of this report, it was agreed that a working group be formed to consider a number of issues in more detail, namely:

- the development of a new Service Level Agreement between schools and the Governor Support Service;
- explore the further development of federated governor boards;
- explore issues in relation to the recruitment and retention of governors in light of a growing shortage of people prepared to undertake the role;
- explore the training programme for governors, its suitability and effectiveness and whether it is able to develop governors' skills and knowledge.

4.2 Terms of Reference and Scope

The Terms of Reference and Scope for the Working Group were agreed as follows:

- (i) To support improved recruitment and retention of school governors; enabling governing bodies to undertake their leadership and challenge role effectively.
- (ii) To advise the Executive of the findings and recommendations.

Scope:

- To have an understanding of the regulatory requirements which

- underpin the service;
- To have an understanding of the role and work being undertaken by the Central South Consortium, its Consultant Governors and its Governors Steering Group;
- To inform the development of a new Service Level Agreement between schools and the Governor Support Service;
- Consider whether the current support, training and development needs are adequate and identify gaps in provision;
- To consider how the aims and objectives of the re-convened Rhondda Cynon Taf Governors' Association will support the above bullet point;
- Establish the views of existing governors in relation to the challenges of their role and current support;
- Research the operation and effectiveness of federated governing bodies;
- Consider how the recruitment of governors can be supported through raising the profile of the work of governing bodies;

4.3 Methodology

The Membership of the Working Group comprised of County Borough Councillors (Mrs) C Leyshon, S Evans-Fear, M Griffiths and B Morgan; and the following Co-opted Members Mr J Fish, Mr J Horton and Mrs S Jones (Parent Governor Representatives) and Mr M Cleverley (Representing the NASUWT & Teachers' Panel).

The Working Group met on 5 occasions and took evidence from the School Organisation Manager, the Team Leader for Governor Support and Mrs L Rees, the Head teacher of Cwmaman Infants School and Glynhafod Junior School. The Working Group also considered a range of written evidence which included:

- Evaluation of Governor Training for 2014/15
- Data in respect of governor vacancies & reasons for resignations
- 'the state of school governing in England 2014', University of Bath and National Governors Association
- 'the Hidden Givers', University of Bath
- 'Governors' Guide on the Role of the Chair', Governors Wales, February 2016 (Revision 2)
- Chair's Decision Planner for Rhondda Cynon Taf
- 'Recruiting school governors: Top Tips for success', Essex County Council Governors Service

4.4 The Working Group considered 4 themes:

1. Training
2. Recruitment
3. Retention
4. Respect

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 As outlined within Appendix A of this report, consultation was conducted through the reviews carried out by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only and further analysis of each of the proposals will be needed if the recommendations are to be taken forward.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are currently no financial implications aligned to this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED.

- 8.1 There are no legal implications at present.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES.

- 9.1 The Scrutiny report and recommendations link to the Council's Corporate Plan A Top Education for All.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Scrutiny Working Group identified 4 areas for consideration, which they believe will improve the effectiveness of the Governing Bodies across Rhondda Cynon Taf and ultimately improve the quality of outcomes for school children.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee – Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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15TH DECEMBER

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RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR E HANAGAN.**

Item: SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

Officer to contact: Hannah Williams, Cabinet Business Officer.

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY WORKING
GROUP -**

‘EVERY SCHOOL A GREAT SCHOOL’

**A REVIEW OF RHONDDA CYNON TAF’S
GOVERNOR SUPPORT SERVICES**



STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
TREFTADAETH GADARN | DYFODOL SICR

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FOREWORD



When identifying topics for inclusion on the work programme for the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, the Governor Support Service was identified as an area which potentially could benefit from Scrutiny's input. Members felt that as the role of the school governor has changed over the years there needed to be a renewed focus on its importance together with a view to addressing the main concerns of how to recruit and retain school governors.

The Working Group was very much aware of the demand placed upon school governors to fulfil their strategic role and that governors need to be equipped with the correct mix of skills and knowledge to carry out their work effectively. It was also identified that achieving the right composition of governors is vital for the governing body to carry out its duties efficiently. The Working Group learned that more needs to be done to recognise the work of this essential body of volunteers and the level of appreciation for the commitment that they demonstrate needs to be raised in order to secure more governors and more importantly keep them.

As part of its review the Working Group identified a number of areas for improvement which are being addressed by the Governor Support Service but felt that more needed to be done to ensure that all schools across the County Borough benefit from a strong and effective governing body. This review has been fundamental in further examining how the Council can achieve properly balanced governing bodies.

I would like to thank all members of the working group for their valuable contributions to the review as well as the assistance received from the School Organisation Manager and Team Leader for Governor Support. On behalf of the group I would also like to thank the Head Teachers and their staff for providing the group with their views and expertise and I hope they, along with others will find the Working Group's report and recommendations useful when looking to support improved recruitment and retention of school governors and in enabling governing bodies to undertake their leadership and challenge role effectively.

**County Borough Councillor (Mrs) C Leyshon
Chairman of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group has undertaken this work to improve the effectiveness of the Governing Bodies across Rhondda Cynon Taf and ultimately improve the quality of outcomes for school children. It has identified the following 10 recommendations for the Executive to consider and implement. The Working Group believes that these recommendations will further improve and enhance the Governor Support Service in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- (1) That all governing bodies should undertake a process of recognition of existing skills, knowledge, expertise and effectiveness of the individuals that form part of the Governing Body (this could take the form a self evaluation, annual training review, skills audit or needs assessment).**
- (2) That the Governor Support Service and the Central South Consortium should work with and encourage Governing Bodies to facilitate the process outlined as 1 above, by providing template example documents and the necessary support.**
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2. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY

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3. THE GOVERNOR SUPPORT SERVICE IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

- 3.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC offers all its Primary and Special schools a comprehensive Governor Support Service, by means of a Service Level Agreement. Secondary schools may purchase a 'helpline and advice service', which includes the provision of documentation they may use for governors' meetings and training for their staff in the clerking of their governing body. A termly briefing meeting with Secondary school clerks, to apprise them of the details of the agenda and reports to be presented to their governors in that term is also held.
- 3.2 In addition to the clerking provision a comprehensive programme of training for governors is also provided with priority given to those sessions which form part of the Welsh Government's mandatory training programme for school governors. The mandatory element of training includes induction training for new governors, data training for new governors and those reappointed for a new term of office and training for chairpersons. Training is provided for those Secondary schools who appoint their own Clerks to their governing bodies, which again is mandatory.
- 3.3 In Rhondda Cynon Taf at present there are three federated governing bodies which each support two 'associated' or linked schools. There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of these three federations, to judge how they have worked and whether they are successful and to consider whether more governing bodies should be encouraged to consider this option.
- 3.4 The Rhondda Cynon Taf Governors' Association which had not met for a period of over five years has recently been reformed. This decision was taken due to the fact that Rhondda Cynon Taf was the only authority in the Central South Consortium (CSC) without an active Governors' Association. The aims and objectives of the Association include the promotion of best practice in governance in schools within RCT, encouraging governing bodies to bring matters of common concern to the Association for discussion and to promote working partnerships between various bodies including the local authority, parents, school staff, CSC and Governors Wales.
- 3.5 The Team Leader for the Governor Support Service in RCT is currently seconded to CSC for 1.5 days per week at present to act as Lead Officer for Governor Services. The key objectives of this role include:
- Leading the development of strategy and policies which develop the capacity and capability of governors across the region in line with the Central South Wales Challenge;
 - Working with governor services across the five local authorities to develop high quality consistent policies and practice in their work to support governing bodies to better enable effective self evaluation and improvement planning;
 - Developing central high quality capacity across the region to deploy at pace support for governing bodies for schools in intervention;

- Working with governor services across the region to bring consistency to training and governor led improvement work in alignment with the core school improvement function;
 - Leading the central communication, engagement with and strategic delivery of governor services alongside school improvement services across the region;
 - Working across the region to develop the capacity of governing bodies in fulfilling their functions as part of a self-improving school system;
 - Growing a governor-to-governor support infrastructure across the region in parallel with the self-improving schools system developing in Central South Wales Challenge working with governor support teams in the region;
 - Supporting governor services to work with schools, ensuring the legal constitution of those Governing Bodies, their committees and selection panels;
 - Having responsibility for senior level representation at local, regional and national meetings and events on behalf of the Central South Consortium;
 - Being responsible for the operation of the Consortium's Governor training, bringing consistency and high quality training across the Consortium region;
 - Working with governor services to ensure that all policies, objectives and processes are implemented and complied with, being communicated to all Governors' within the Central South Consortium in a timely and effective way.
- 3.6 In order to support this agenda CSC has appointed 11 Consultant Governors, who may be deployed to schools across the region where governance has been identified as requiring improvement either by the challenge advisers, officers from the local authorities or by Estyn during the course of a visit. These Consultant Governors may be deployed to work directly with governing bodies that have been identified as requiring such support as part of an intervention package.
- 3.7 CSC also delivers certain elements of the Governor Training programme on behalf of the five local authorities that make up the consortium including Data and Performance Management training. They also organise briefing sessions for governors to outline and explain the school categorisation system. The CSC has also assisted in the establishment and procurement of the online system for mandatory governor training.
- 3.8 As with all local authority services, the Governor Support Service faces budgetary pressures and the requirement to reduce its back office costs in order to protect front line services, including school budgets. A considerable amount of paperwork is sent to all school governors by post and recently attempts have been made to move toward the more efficient and cost-effective system of electronic communication. However, this has not been without its challenges but all governors have now been given access to the Welsh Government's Hwb portal using their home computers or school facilities and have been provided with a dedicated email address on which they can receive all letters, agendas etc that were previously sent out by post.

- 3.9 One of the most significant challenges faced by the Service is that of governor recruitment and retention and this was the key reason for the creation of the scrutiny working group. In addition, the Working Group was made aware of the need to develop and revise the Governor Support Service Level Agreement to reflect the requirement to support governors in their challenge role and to raise standards in our schools.
- 3.10 At the time of convening the Working Group, Management had already identified a number of priorities to improve the Governor Support Service in the future which included:
- To focus more on supporting schools and their governors through the Estyn inspection process,
 - To provide more tailored training to support governors in their role in the inspection process,
 - To further develop our training programme for governors with the aim of providing them with the right skills to offer challenge,
 - To revise the SLA in light of the above points,
 - To look at ways to actively promote the recruitment of governors and fill the unacceptable number of vacancies we currently have, encouraging the appointment of governors to these vacancies who have the appropriate skills to bring benefit to our schools,
 - To improve the induction pack for newly appointed governors,
 - To improve our webpage for school governors,
 - To improve our communication with governors and reduce costs,
 - To monitor our service provision and provide quality assurance.
- 3.11 The importance of the role of governors is reflected in the 'Governor's Guide on the Effective Governing Body' which sets out the importance of effective leaders and governing bodies. Estyn not only looks at how well the school leadership promotes improved teaching but how effectively governors hold the school to account. Governors need to be able to understand that their role is essential to driving change and improvements within a school.
- 3.12 It is recognised that the contribution of governing bodies to the leadership of the school is strategic not operational and governors are very much part of the Leadership team of their school. In order to do this they must have clarity of their role and therefore the governor role and guidelines should make this very clear.
- 3.13 Due to the variety of functions governors are expected to undertake, particularly in their role challenging the school leadership, a wide range of skills are needed. Most importantly if a governing body is to hold school leadership to account it needs to be equipped with the knowledge and skills in order to do so.

4. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

- 4.1 The first task for the Working Group was to help form the new Service Level Agreement between the Governor Support Service and primary schools. The SLA includes provision to support governing bodies in their challenge role and to prepare governors for the inspection process.
- 4.2 The Working Group recognised that, as the governor role can be a demanding one, the revised SLA would need to be able to provide the detail around what the Governor can expect from the service. The Working Group suggested a number of areas where the existing SLA could be improved, to ensure that the focus on support is geared towards school improvement and more effective school governance and to meet the expectations of Estyn. They were also concerned that the SLA needed to set out more clearly the assistance that schools can access in relation to financial matters.
- 4.3 The new, revised SLA, set out at **Appendix 1**, replaces the agreement that was being provided and offers all primary schools a new inclusive agreement to include the points raised by the Working Group. As a result the SLA is now in place and there has been 100% take-up by primary schools.

5. GOVERNOR TRAINING

- 5.1 The regulations for mandatory governor and clerk training came into force on the 20th September 2013. The Working Group learned that the local authority places great emphasis on governor training and in addition to the clerking provision the Governor Support Service offers a comprehensive programme of training for governors offered on a termly basis. In addition to the mandatory training the Service also offers specialist service providers such as Human Resources, Children's Services, Finance and Building Maintenance to provide support when required. The Central South Consortium also organise briefing sessions for governors which are offered across the 5 constituent authorities, as well as facilitating specific training such as data and performance management.
- 5.2 The Governor Support Service also offers the provision of mandatory on-line training which was initially purchased from a private sector provider (Cynnal) which was developed in conjunction with the North Wales and Powys Governor Support Partnership which comprises of representation from 7 local authorities in North and Mid Wales. The Governor Support Service contributes to its current on-line training service by means of an annual subscription which the Consortium also supports.
- 5.3 The Working Group received feedback from the Autumn Term Training Review 2014 which indicated that on the whole governors felt the training they had received from the Governor Support Service had been a positive experience.
- 5.4 Whilst the Working Group welcomed the sway towards more on-line training which brings with it a flexible and effective way of learning, it also recognised the disadvantages which it may bring such as losing the opportunity to develop as a team, enabling governors to reach an understanding on matters of common

interest as well as the networking and social aspects that a classroom style teaching can bring. It was also considered that some governors may not feel comfortable or confident using technology without the support of a mentor/tutor for guidance.

- 5.5 The Working Group felt that consideration should be given to a training programme which combines the participation of a school-based training through an online package which would provide governors with the benefit of training as a group and having that shared experience whilst delivering the e-learning module. The Working Group explored the availability of other on-line packages, however, it found that the development of e-training modules is currently in the hands of Welsh Government and the Central South Consortium is coordinating the development of specific training, the cost of which is met by both.
- 5.6 It was felt that specific e-training modules should still be delivered which can be tailored to meet specific needs and could take place at a school premises which would be time and cost effective for individual governing bodies or clusters.
- 5.7 The importance of promoting the training is seen as key and on a par with the actual delivery of the training and it was considered crucial that modules are introduced which meet the governor's needs, maintain their interests and allow them to challenge in a more strategic way. It is acknowledged that all governors will each bring their own unique set of skills to the governing body; a diverse collection of governors will bring a more rounded vision to the school. It is essential therefore that the individual needs and any skills gaps are identified and addressed to support the work of the governing body.
- 5.8 The Working Group learned that the Governor Support Service is trying to encourage Governing Bodies to move toward more tailored training to meet their specific needs and cluster based training and the Estyn Inspection process involves their inspectors wanting to see a skills audit and a link to the annual training plan for governors.

6. RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

6.1 Members of the Working Group were keen to examine the factors that contribute to the difficulties in recruiting school governors and were appraised of the make up of the governing bodies as follows:-

- Parent Governors - Parent governors are elected, by the parents of pupils attending the school. Parent governors are able to continue in their role as a governor, until the end of their term of office, even if their child is no longer a pupil at the school.
- Teacher Governors - Teacher governors are employed to work at the school and elected by the teachers within the school.
- Staff Governors - Staff governors are staff employed at the school other than in a teaching capacity and elected from amongst the non-teaching staff at the school.
- Local Authority (LEA) Governors - These governors are appointed by the elected members of the council. LA governors can be elected county councillors or applicants appointed by them.
- Community Governors - These governors are appointed by the governing body. Community governors usually live or work in the community of the school area and bring their own particular expertise to the governing body.

6.2 It became apparent to the Working Group that the difficulties faced by the local authority with recruitment and retention of governors is also a national problem and is due to many reasons such as the increasing volume of work involved and the expectation on governors given the level of legal and financial responsibility placed upon them. Estyn does not look favourably at vacancies as they consider governors as a crucial part of the leadership and management element of their inspections.

6.3 Within Rhondda Cynon Taf it is recognised that recruiting governors is more of a problem in the North of the County Borough and is seen as an issue relating to demographics rather than underperforming schools. The Working group considered that although there is no direct link between school performance and difficulties in recruitment there may be opportunities to use the success of some schools in attracting governors.

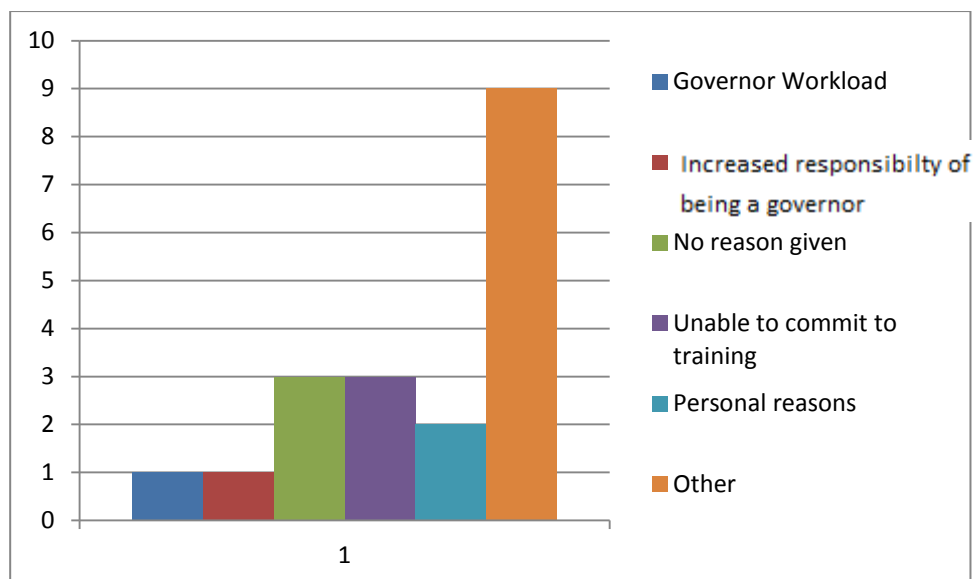
6.4 The Working Group realised that failing to recruit adequate numbers of governors reduces the effectiveness of the governing body, limits the range of experience available to the school and increases the workload of the remaining governors. To try and address the issue at a local level, it was confirmed that the issue of governor vacancies has now been included on the agenda of all the governor body meetings for all schools throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf in the summer term which will raise discussion about the issue of recruitment.

6.5 Members of the Working Group reviewed the numbers of vacancies on all the governing bodies and in particular those on the Local Education Authority

category. Given the shortage of governors the Working Group queried the need for too many categories which could be restricting the ability to recruit more governors. Although it was reported that this would require a change in legislation of Welsh Government the Working Group felt that this could be an opportunity to widen the current rigid categorisation system. The Working Group was also advised that currently there are two governing body models for primary schools; they considered there may be a case for relaxing the current rules to enable options for Primary School governing body size other than the existing two models.

(Since the publication of this report, the Welsh Government has announced a range of planned reforms to governing bodies which, subject to consultation, aims to give governing bodies more flexibility).

- 6.6 The Working Group recognised that governors are individuals who bring with them a whole host of different qualities and backgrounds. When seeking to recruit the Working Group felt that the role and level of commitment and responsibility should be fully communicated and set out clearly together with any particular skills the governing body is looking to recruit.
- 6.7 Whilst the Working Group was mindful of the lack of resources available to the Council with which to run campaigns to recruit school governors it supported the idea that every opportunity should be taken to promote the role of school governors amongst local businesses, professional and voluntary organisations and via those existing links already available to it. The Working Group was mindful of the need to tap into local business expertise to promote positive messages about becoming a school governor.
- 6.8 During its review the Working Group endorsed a draft 'flyer' for the recruitment of a school governor with a view to it being distributed at Council events and throughout the community by the Governor Support Service to promote the role of the governor more widely. It also acknowledged that one of the things that the Council can do is ensure that information, support and advice relating to the role of school governors is available via the Council website and consider promotion of the role via social media.
- 6.9 The Working Group also wished to explore the possibility of a pool of potential governors who could be put forward for election in areas where there is a lack of candidates such as in the North of the County Borough. This could be advantageous for those smaller schools in more rural areas where there are too few recruits.
- 6.10 The Working Group considered the reasons why governors may wish to leave the service and the barriers to retaining governors within Rhondda Cynon Taf. They received and considered the data (set out below) which provided information on the reasons given by governors within the County Borough for their resignations which has been captured since September 2015.



(Other – included changes in personal circumstances, moving home, children moving to another school and in one case, the governor did not agree with decisions made by the governing body as a whole).

6.11 It is recognised that the responsibility, role and level of commitment has changed over the years and yet it remains voluntary role. The complex responsibility of the governing body can range from strategic planning to dealing with budgets and personnel matters which can be difficult and challenging. The Working Group acknowledged that in order to retain school governors, there is a need to emphasise and promote the importance of their role and to make them feel valued and supported.

6.12 The Working Group felt that not enough was being done to publicise the work and commitment of the school governor and not enough was being done to acknowledge their contribution to the schools and the communities they serve. Members wished for this awareness of the role to be raised amongst the schools and the local community and for a form of recognition to be introduced which could be given to recognise long standing governors for their commitment and hard work to the service. It considered the merits of issuing thank you letters during their term of office and following their departure. In pursuing this line of enquiry the Working Group considered that potentially there could even be a ‘Governor of the Year’ award.

6.13 The Working Group also felt that a good, clear induction should be established together with a mentoring scheme which would be useful to both new and experienced chairs and governors in order for them to support each other. They considered that implementing a ‘mentor/buddy’ initiative particularly for those new starters would provide the appropriate guidance, support and understanding required in their early days.

6.14 It is recognised that the Governing Body and the Head Teacher both have a vital role to play in the retention of school governors. It is important that the Head Teacher recognises the role and establishes a good working relationship with the

governing body and develops and maintains effective work practices to work with governors, especially the Chair of Governors. Where the Head Teacher understands the role of the governing body and is open and transparent and readily provides information to them, the governing body can be a powerful tool in supporting the school.

- 6.15 Head Teachers play a crucial role in providing the most appropriate information about the school to the governing body, particularly concerning school performance. The information provided to the governing body should be accessible to ensure the governing body can carry out its role effectively. Head Teachers need to be aware that governors are not experts in data analysis and therefore the information needs to be relayed in a clear and concise way.
- 6.16 As part of their review the Working Group considered the Governor's Guide on the role of the Chair of Governors produced by Governors Wales and endorsed a 'role description' for a Chair of Governors which they feel can be used in conjunction with the Decision Planner document for all governing body members as a guide to undertaking their role. In addition to this it provides some clarity to the role and responsibilities expected of the governor.
- 6.17 It is considered that effective partnership working between the Head Teacher and the Governing Body, particularly the Chair of Governors, will ensure that the individual school governors can develop their skills and work as a team in a way so as to enable them to carry out their role effectively. The commitment shown by the governing body and Head Teacher to ensure new governors are provided with the necessary information and support to fulfil their role can be seen as an investment, leading to more effective governance and ultimately the retention of governors.

VACANCIES

- 6.18 Governors are informed, by means of an item on each termly agenda of any vacancies that may exist on the governing body and are strongly encouraged to ensure that these vacancies are filled, by asking them to seek nominations for the positions, in particular the Community governor and LEA vacancies. LEA governor vacancies are circulated to all Elected Members of the Council and to Chairs of Governors on a termly basis. Parent governor vacancies are reported to the Governor Support staff as soon as they arise and procedures are immediately put in place to provide all parents at the school with nomination forms to enable them to apply for the positions. A ballot is then conducted if necessary, with all paperwork to facilitate this being provided by this Service. Governor Support Officers also undertake regular checks of our governor database to ensure that any vacancies are identified, in order that they can be reported to the governing bodies as detailed above.
- 6.19 The number of vacancies we have on our governing bodies is, however a cause for concern. At the time of beginning this review there was 1,819 positions available, with 1,609 governors in post. The 210 vacant positions represent 11.54% of the total available, an increase from the level in the previous academic year, which was 9.78% of the total.

- 6.20 The Working Group realised that the shortage in governor numbers reduces the effectiveness of the governing body, limits the range of experience available to the school and increases the workload of the remaining governors. To try and address the issue at a local level, it was confirmed that the issue of governor vacancies has now been included on the agenda of all the governing body meetings for all schools throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf in the summer term which will highlight the issue.
- 6.21 Several factors may have contributed for this rise in vacancies, including the mandatory training requirements for governors and, possibly, the increasing level of responsibilities being placed on school governors. The Working Group therefore had to consider how we can actively recruit governors who have the appropriate skills to provide the challenge element that Estyn requires.
- 6.22 The graphs attached at **Appendix 2** show the number of governor vacancies by district as at 4th December 2015.

7. **RESPECT**

- 7.1 Initially the Working Group considered the three main themes, Training, Recruitment & Retention but as the review progressed a fourth theme emerged, that of respect. It was considered that for a governing body to operate effectively there needs to be mutual respect between it and the professional staff.
- 7.2 The relationship between Schools and Governor Support should be one of professionalism, respect and courtesy. School governors make a substantial contribution to their individual schools and therefore their training and development should be supported and encouraged. They commit a lot of time to the role and should feel valued as a member of the school.
- 7.3 The Working Group considered that the following approaches would also go some way in assisting school governors carry out their role more effectively and maintain the mutual respect amongst the governing body and professional staff. The Working Group felt that adequate notice should be provided to school governors in advance of meetings being convened in order to ensure maximum attendance and provide governors with ample time to prepare for meetings. Once in a meeting the use of jargon should be avoided as much as possible particularly with newly appointed governors, or at least explained.
- 7.4 It is considered that mutual respect will bring with it a more successful governing body and where governors are respected as volunteers who bring with them a variety of skills, values and experiences they will respond to the challenges asked of them. It is also expected that the governing body will also respect the Head Teacher and their staff and work openly in a partnership which will bring benefit to the school and its pupils.

8. **THE ROLE OF FEDERATED SCHOOLS AND GOVERNING BODIES**

- 8.1 Federation is a shared governance structure which provides a basis for school-to-school partnership. A Federated approach can benefit two schools which come together for the good of all pupils and their communities. Particularly small schools and those in more rural areas can benefit from shared governance as they work together to raise standards and improve services.
- 8.2 In Rhondda Cynon Taf there are three federated governing bodies which each support two 'associated' or linked schools. In relation to performance, of these six schools, five schools are categorised green and one yellow by the Welsh Government. The Working Group learned that the recruitment of head teachers which can prove difficult for smaller schools such as single phase infants and Welsh medium or Faith schools has improved and has attracted more candidates.
- 8.3 As part of their review the Working Group met with the Head Teacher of two schools situated in a rural setting within the County Borough. As a result of few applications to the post of Head Teacher in one of the schools the federated approach was suggested. Further to the federation the two schools now have a shared vision and ethos, the decline in the number of pupils has reversed and it has offered more flexibility with budgets.
- 8.4 The federated approach has also brought a federated governing body. The original Governing Bodies had the same Chair and shared some of the same governors; therefore the move to a federated governing body was an easier process. The decision was taken to increase the size of the new governing body to 15 to ensure that there was a position for all existing governors. Previously, the two governing bodies had struggled to recruit governors and the concern about whether meetings would be quorate was ever present, however since the new arrangement they have never failed to hold a meeting, although some concerns remain.
- 8.5 The Working Group acknowledged that the benefits of federated governing bodies appear to outweigh any negative aspects although it was recognised that timing needs to be right in terms of its introduction. Although from their research the Working group found that federation does not necessarily solve the issue of governor shortage/recruitment, it can help.

9. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group met to review the work undertaken and form its recommendations. The Working Group has been instrumental in helping to form the new Service Level Agreement between the Governor Support Service and primary schools. The SLA includes provision to support governing bodies in their challenge role and to prepare governors for the inspection process. As referred to earlier, this SLA is now in place and there has been 100% take-up by primary schools.

The draft conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group are summarised below:

The Working Group's Terms of Reference was 'to support improved recruitment and retention of school governors; enabling governing bodies to undertake their leadership and challenge role effectively'.

In carrying out this task, the Working Group initially considered 3 themes, Training, Recruitment and Retention. However, over the course of the review it became apparent that there was an additional element, that of 'Respect'. It also became clear that these issues to some extent interlinked.

Training

The Council provides a comprehensive programme of training for governors and feedback collected from governors to this training is in the main positive. Whilst it is important that our school governors are well trained and supported the Working Group acknowledges that there is a fine balance between overburdening governors and providing them with the necessary skills to carry out their role.

The Working Group welcomes the move to more electronic based training which can provide more flexibility for Members. Governors may also benefit from undertaking on-line training as a group, for example, at school premises which if linked with governor meetings would be time and cost effective and provide the additional benefit of interaction and shared experience.

The Working Group has explored the provision of e-training modules for governors, however, the Welsh Government, through the education consortia has developed a standardised programme of training across Wales. Currently there is no cost to schools for the delivery of these e-training modules which are borne by the education consortia and Welsh Government.

The governor training offered by the Council in addition to the mandatory element includes facilitation by specialist service providers such as Human Resources, Children's Services, Finance and Building Maintenance to provide support when required.

It is acknowledged that all governors will have different skill sets and each governing body will have a unique mix of skills and experience to draw on and it is important that these skills are put to good use. It is also important that any skills gaps are identified and governors given the opportunity to develop new skills which will support the work

of the governing body and may have the additional benefit of increasing their skills set for the workplace.

The Working Group would therefore recommend:

- 1. That all governing bodies should undertake a process of recognition of existing skills, knowledge, expertise and effectiveness of individuals of the Governing Body (this could take the form a self evaluation, annual training review, skills audit or needs assessment).**
- 2. That the Governor Support Service and the Central South Consortium should work with and encourage Governing Bodies to facilitate the process outlined as 1 above, by providing template example documents and the necessary support.**

Recruitment

The number of vacancies held by governing bodies is an area of concern. It is also an issue for Estyn who does not look favourably upon governor vacancies when they undertake their inspections. The Working Group understands that the responsibilities now being placed on school governors is making it difficult to recruit but they understood that the issue of governor vacancies has been included as an agenda item on the Summer Term governing body meetings for all schools. They have been asked to set out their governor vacancies by category and are being encouraged to discuss how these vacancies can be addressed.

The Working Group considered the various categories of school governor and the vacancy levels across both primary and secondary schools and it was noted that the biggest area for vacancies arose in the Local Education Authority Category. Whilst appreciating the need to have some balance on a governing body, given the difficulty in recruitment, the Working Group questions the wisdom of carrying on with such a rigid categorisation system. However, the regulations in relation to Governing Bodies in Wales are controlled by the Welsh Government.

(Since the publication of this report, the Welsh Government has announced a range of planned reforms to governing bodies which subject to consultation aims to give governing bodies more flexibility).

The Working Group therefore recommends:

- (3) That the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Education and Skills is asked to write to the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education conveying the concerns of the Working Group regarding recruitment and proposing that that the categories of school governors be less rigid. *(It is recognised that since the publication of this report Welsh Government has responded with a number of amends which aim to give governing bodies more flexibility, a response which is welcomed by the Working Group).***

Essentially, the role of school governor is a community role and each school and governing body should be encouraged to be proactive in recruiting for governor vacancies.

However, the Working Group also acknowledges that especially across the northern areas of the County Borough, there are a number of schools set within relatively small communities which adds to the difficulty in recruiting governors.

The Working Group met with a Head Teacher of two schools with a federated governing body to learn of her experiences. From the evidence received, the Working Group would conclude that federation brings a number of benefits and in the right circumstances can be a useful option in helping to address the shortage of school governors but also the growing problem of attracting good quality candidates for Head Teacher posts.

The role of school governor has become complex over recent years, requiring a number of important, transferable skills. The Working Group therefore feels that more can be done to market the role of a school governor to emphasise that it is two way process where governors can share their existing knowledge, skills and experience by becoming a governor whilst also contributing to their local community.

The Working Group has also learned that in many areas of the county borough there are opportunities to develop links with the business community in order to recruit governors.

The Working Group would therefore recommend:

(4) That the Governor Support Service undertakes a programme of work targeting Jobs Fairs, Chambers of Trade, Professional and Voluntary Organisations, Town Centre Fora, Businesses and Universities to promote the recruitment of governors by targeting the following areas:-

- **That the use of social media be explored;**
- **That the Governor Support Service considers how the Council's website can be used to promote and advertise the role of school governors and highlights the skills that can be gained by becoming a governor;**
- **That advice is sought from the Council's Corporate Marketing team when embarking on this work.**

Retention

There is little value in recruiting school governors if you lose those that you already have. New governors not only need to be trained but also need to be supported, especially in the early weeks when they are likely to feel overwhelmed. The Working Group is of the opinion that a number of small measures can make all the difference in making newcomers feel welcome and valued.

The Working Group has endorsed a 'role description' for a Chair of Governors, which along with the Decision Planner document, may be useful not only for Chairs but for

other governing body members as it will provide them with an understanding of the duties of a chairperson

The expectations which have been placed on school governors have grown immensely in recent years. The Welsh Government has recognised that the role of the governor needs to be considered as an important role to the activity of the school. It needs to be remembered that the school governor role is voluntary and yet they are expected to attend meetings regularly, contribute to the leadership of their school, deal with complex issues such as staff disciplinary processes and undertake training, some of which is mandatory.

The role has moved away from being a friend of the school and attending the occasional meeting to being responsible for the leadership of a school and making strategic decisions. The level of understanding and challenge which is expected of them to meet the expectations of Estyn is growing and they need to have a level of understanding in order to challenge not only data and but the Head Teachers, who are professionals in their field.

Throughout their review, the Working Group was conscious of the various reasons why governors are leaving the service such as unrealistic workloads, the impact of the role upon work and family life and they felt that the work and commitment of governors needs to be recognised because it provides encouragement and it lets them know that they have the backing and support of the wider community. It may be the difference between a governor staying on or choosing to step down.

It is recognised that the Governing Body and Head Teacher both have a vital role to play in the retention of school governors.

The Working Group would therefore recommend:

- (5) That new governors are offered the opportunity to be 'buddied' with a more experienced governor to support them through the early months of their role and that all Governing Bodies should ensure they have appointed a linked mentor governor and have an effective induction process in place**
- (6) The Governor Support Service should actively encourage the cooperation and the development of links between Governing Bodies within the authority and across other authorities in order to share good practice and experiences.**
- (7) That, as the Welsh Government consider it is important that the contribution of governors is recognised by the Chairs and Head Teachers, that all school governors are thanked by the Chairs and Head Teachers in the following ways:-**
 - That letters of thanks are sent to all school governors who come to the end of their term of office;**

- **That a letter of thanks is sent by the Head Teacher and/or Chair to the governing bodies at the end of each academic year thanking them for their contributions;**
 - **It may also be appropriate, on occasion, for thank you letters to be sent from either the Head Teacher and/or Chair of Governors to a governor in recognition of special effort/service**
- (8) That the new RCT Governors' Association be asked to consider the introduction of a 'Governor of the Year' award; or if they prefer, that an approach be made to Governors Wales to introduce such an award.**
- (9) That each governing body should be encouraged to publicise the work of the Governing Body. This could provide information such as a pen picture of each governor and their role in the school, setting out who are the 'class links' or 'topic links' thereby promoting the work undertaken by governors which might otherwise go unnoticed;**
- (10) That progress of the recommendations is monitored by the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.**



SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE GOVERNOR SUPPORT SERVICE 2016/2017

PROPOSED NEW SLA SERVICE

INDEX

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Service Overview
- 3) Relationship between Schools and the Council
- 4) Charging Arrangements
- 5) Memorandum of Agreement
- 6) Resolving Disputes
- 7) Data Protection

New Schools SLA Services 2016/17

1) Introduction

Rhondda Cynon Taf Governor Support Services is the one stop shop for training and support for governors in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We have been working with you for over 20 years to help you improve the outcomes for the children in your schools by giving you the tools to effectively fulfil your roles and responsibilities in order to deliver school improvement.

Our local team provide professional support, advice, guidance and training to help governors get established in the role and then to develop them as quickly as possible into an effective governor. We will ensure that our SLA meets your needs, and regularly update our service to keep pace with national changes to the education agenda.

The term for this SLA is for the financial year 2016 to 2017.

The main benefits of the revised SLA to schools are:

- To support governing bodies to be Estyn Inspection ready.
- To support in assisting governing bodies to focus on school improvement.
- To assist governing bodies to meet their statutory requirements.
- To provide governors with the relevant training to undertake their role effectively.
- To promote self evaluation within governing bodies.

2) Service Overview

This new SLA replaces the agreement that was being provided and offers to schools a new inclusive agreement.

The services offered comprise the following elements:

- Ensuring the governing body meets its statutory requirements including constitution, advice on constitutional and procedural matters and the monitoring of governor attendance.
- Advice and support on all aspect of governance including managing complex procedural and relationship issues.
- Advice on and assistance with the recruitment and retention of governors.

- Attendance of a senior officer at the termly governing body meeting.
- Production of agenda and minutes for each meeting attended by the senior officer, which will evidence the governor's challenge.
- Financial support, where requested which could include assistance and support with monitoring the budget throughout the financial year and would include:
 - Liaison with the Headteacher and provision of support and advice if required, on all aspects of the initial preparation and drafting of the budget, monitoring and forward financial planning.
 - Assisting the Headteacher with the presentation of financial reports and dissemination of information to governing bodies/finance committees.
 - arranging the distribution of financial reports to governing bodies/finance committees

N. B. (financial reports for chequebook schools must be compiled and distributed by the Headteacher).
- Attendance and support of a senior officer at the meetings of Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher Appointment Panels.
- Support for governing bodies dealing with complaints.

A named Governor Support Officer will be designated to each school as a primary point of contact / service provider. Members of the School Organisation, Planning and Governance Team will be available on days on which schools are in session.

Governor Support Officers (GSO) will support the governing body in ensuring that the school is Estyn Inspection ready by making sure that the governing body meets its statutory requirements, all documentation including agendas are legally compliant and minutes of meetings reflect support and challenge.

Facilitation of governing body self evaluations and review sessions, will be available on request. The reviews undertaken will be an independent review of governance practice and make recommendations for strengthening governance in the school. This will be a collaborative process tailored to the needs of the school and undertaken by a team member who is not the named GSO for the school, to ensure the process is objective and independent. A clear concise Action Plan will be drawn up following a self evaluation.

3) Relationship between Schools and Governor Support

Clients will be treated with professionalism, respect and courtesy. Appropriate levels of confidentiality will be guaranteed. Telephone calls will be dealt with as soon as possible during office hours.

Agendas and supporting papers will be provided to governors at least 5 working days before each meeting, in line with regulations in force. Headteachers will be required to provide electronic paperwork to be included with agendas to the School Organisation, Planning and Governance Unit at least **10 working days** before the date of the relevant meeting.

Where meetings are held without the senior officer being attendance, please note that governors must have an agenda and minutes for each meeting. The minutes must be forwarded to the School Organisation, Planning and Governance Unit to be included with the agenda for the next full governing body meeting.

4) Charging Arrangements

Service charges for the SLA on offer to schools will be an annual lump sum charge. The fee chargeable for the SLA will be £1,780.00. An additional £50.00 per governing body will be paid as membership to the Rhondda Cynon Taf Governors Association.

5) Memorandum of agreement

Parties

This agreement is made between the governing body of the school and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

Duration

This agreement will run from 1 April 2016 - 31st March 2017. A governing body/committee can terminate this agreement by giving six months notice in writing to the Director of Education.

Intent

The intent is to regulate dealings between the parties by setting out respective obligations relating to performance and payment for services

6) Resolving Disputes

We will always take any complaint or concern seriously and seek to resolve it quickly and fairly. Any concern or complaint about the level or quality of service should firstly be made to the member of staff providing the service.

Clients who consider they have not received an adequate response from the member of staff should contact Miss Non Morgan, School Organisation & Governance Team Leader, Ty Trevithick, Abercynon, CF45 4UQ or non.r.morgan@rctcbc.gov.uk who will investigate the concern and seek

to resolve it. If there are still matters to be addressed, a formal written complaint should be made to Julie Hadley, School Organisation Manager at Ty Trevithick, Abercynon, CF45 4UQ or julie.hadley@rctcbc.gov.uk.

If mutual confidence in the continuation of this service level agreement cannot be restored, it may be terminated by either party by giving six months' notice in writing.

7) Data Protection

Our services will be delivered in line with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council policies and are compliant with the Data Protection Act.

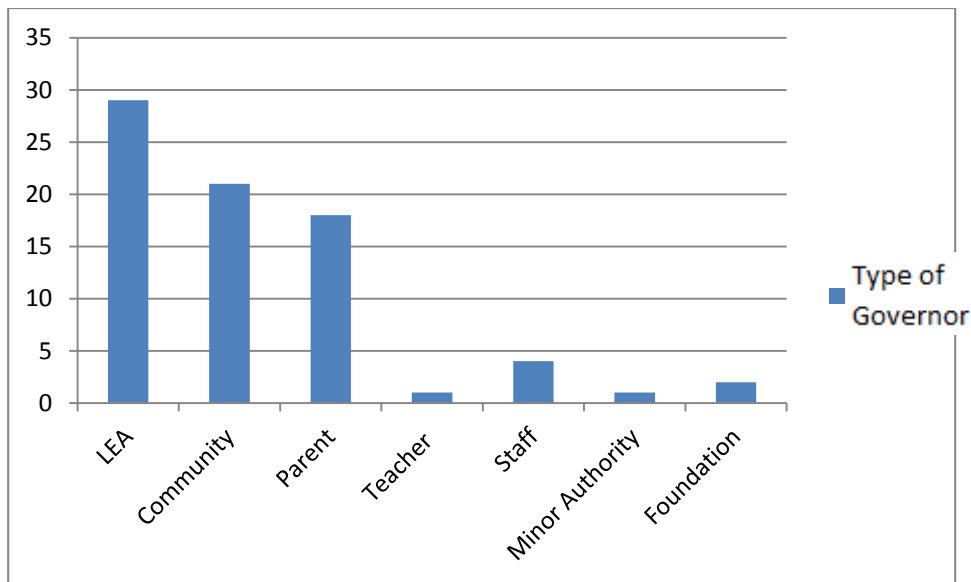


APPENDIX 2

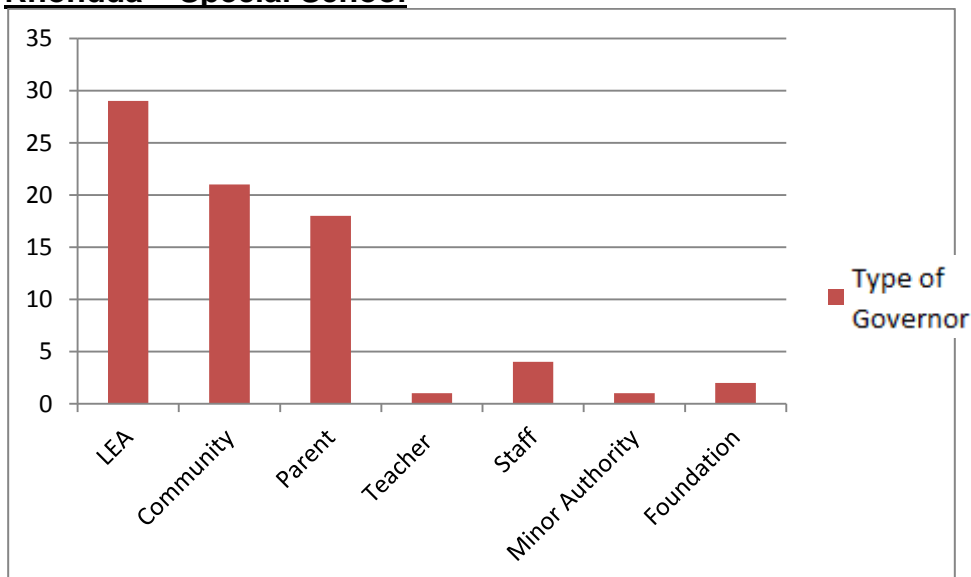
Governor Vacancies In RCT

This report provides information on the Governor vacancies in each district as of 4th December 2015.

Rhondda - Primary

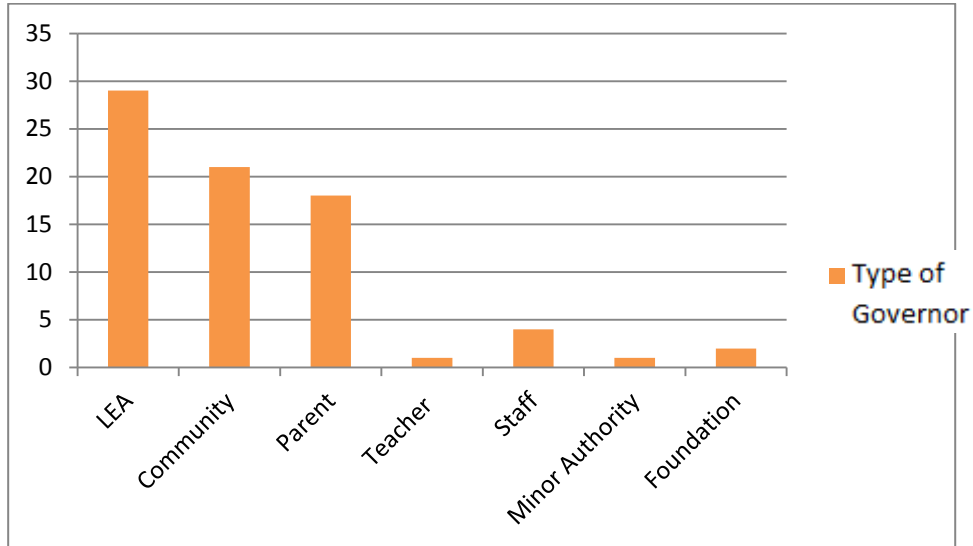


Rhondda – Special School

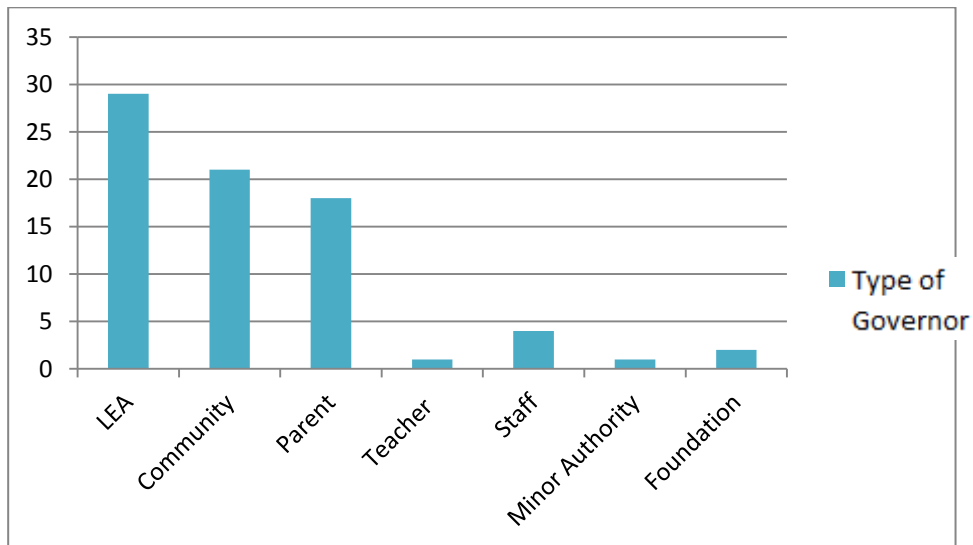


Rhondda – Nursery – No vacancies

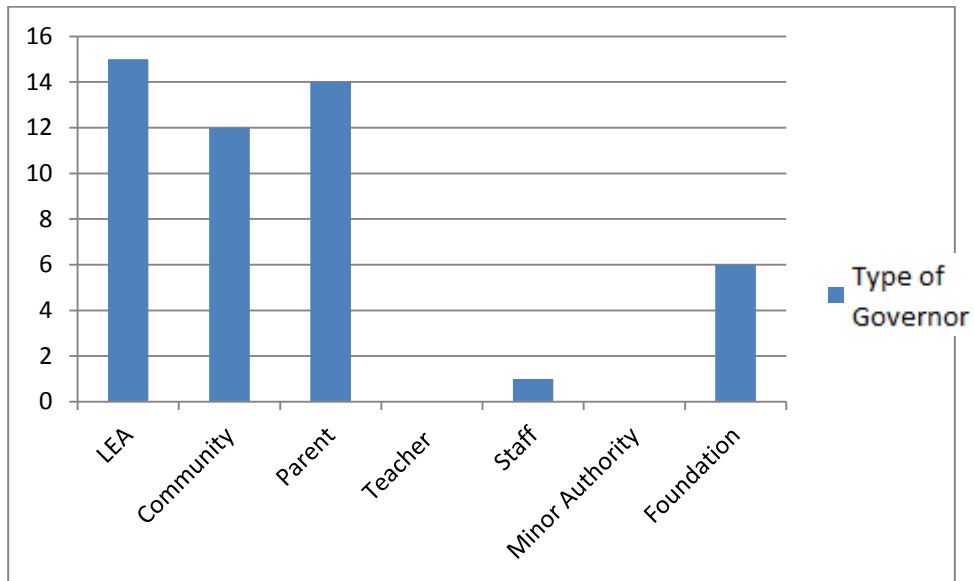
Rhondda – Secondary



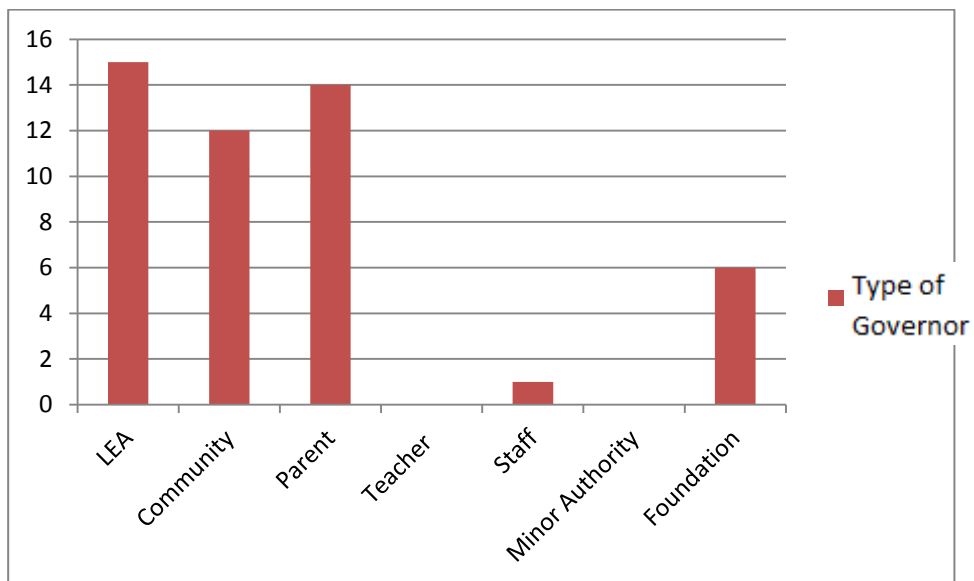
Rhondda – Total



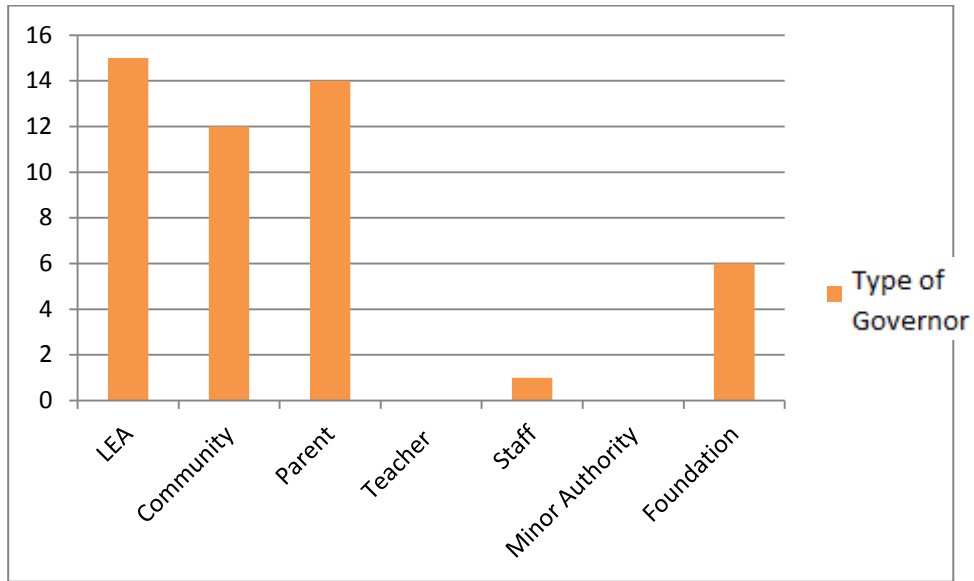
Cynon – Primary



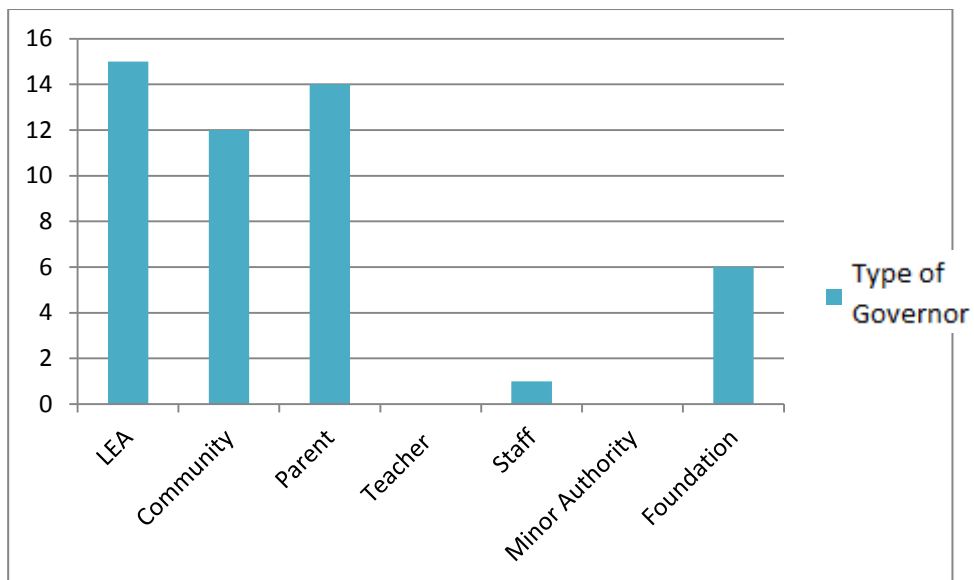
Cynon – Special



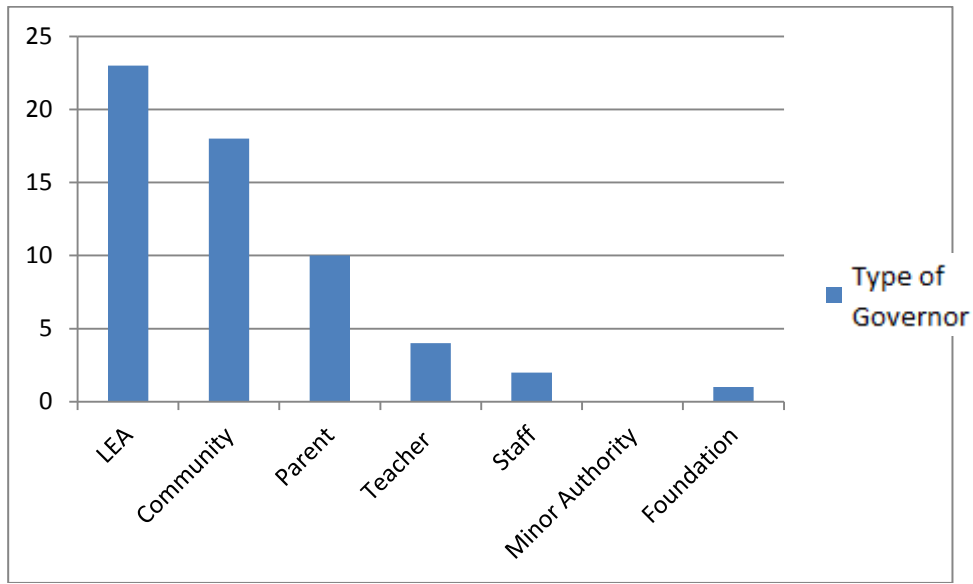
Cynon – Secondary



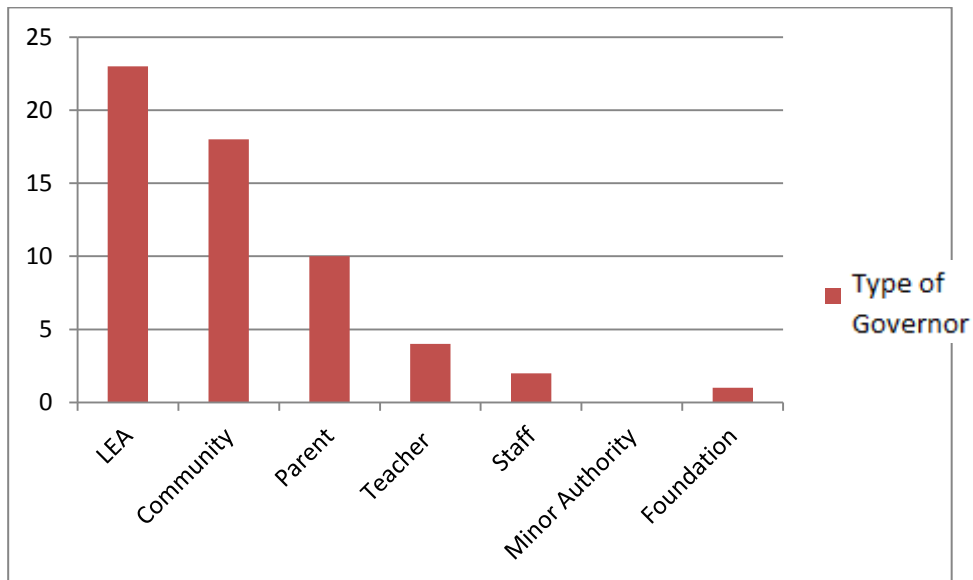
Cynon – Total



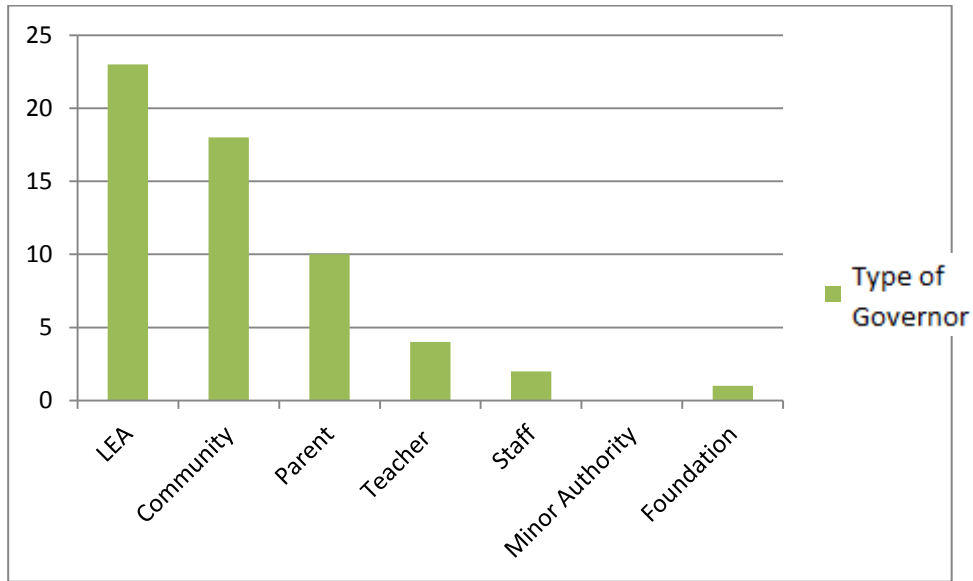
Taf – Primary



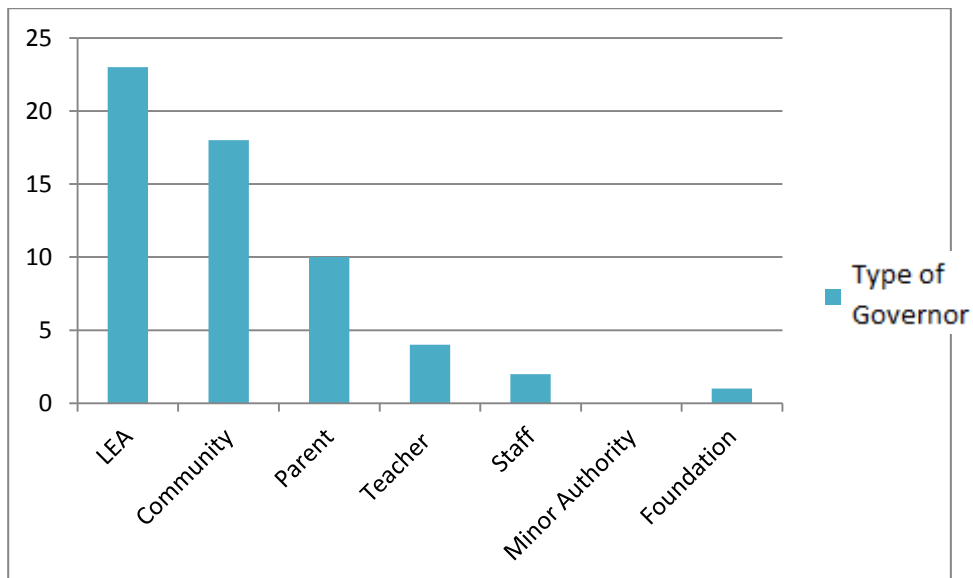
Taf – Special



Taf – Middle



Taf – Secondary (this data does not include Cardinal Newman)



Taf – Total

