

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015/16

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

16th NOVEMBER 2015

AGENDA ITEM 4
THE GOVERNOR SUPPORT SERVICE IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the services provided to schools by the Governor Support Service of the Education Directorate.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information provided and consider whether a working group be established to look into the services provided in more detail.

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. Details of the specific contents of this SLA are attached, as Appendix 1. 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 appraise them of the details of the agenda and reports to be presented to their governors in that term is also held.

- 3.2 The level of take-up of this SLA is extremely high; all 109 Primary and Special schools now participate in it, with 11 of the 17 Secondary/Middle Schools purchasing the helpline and advice service.
- 3.3 The cost recovery from schools via the SLA in respect of this service accounts for approximately 65% of the cost of running the service. The remaining 35% covers the costs of the core statutory functions of the service which are not delegated to schools, such as the assistance with appointment of staff to leadership positions in schools, managing the response to complaints and the provision of mandatory training.
- 3.4 The services provided to schools under the current SLA will be reviewed prior to renewal in April 2016, to ensure that the focus on support is geared towards school improvement and more effective school governance, to meet Estyn expectations in this regard.

4. GOVERNOR TRAINING

- 4.1 In addition to our clerking provision we also offer a comprehensive programme of training for governors, 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. We also provide training for those Secondary schools who appoint their own Clerks to their governing bodies, which again is mandatory. All governors are provided with a copy of the training programme on offer each term; this programme is also advertised on a dedicated page on the Council website. Since September 2013, a total of 346 courses have been offered to governors in Rhondda Cynon Taf and 2,935 governors have taken advantage of these training opportunities offered to them.
- 4.2 We evaluate all training provided by means of feedback questionnaires and on the whole, the feedback we receive from governors in relation to the courses provided is extremely positive.
- 4.3 A system of online training for the mandatory elements was introduced in Rhondda Cynon Taf in September 2015, supported by the Central South Consortium (CSC). This system is supported and provided by Cynnal, a private sector provider and was developed in conjunction with the North Wales and Powys Governor Support Partnership, comprised of representation from 7 LA's in North and Mid Wales.

5. GOVERNOR VACANCIES

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 The number of vacancies we have on our governing bodies is, however a cause for concern. At the current time, we have 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. Several factors may have contributed to this rise in vacancies, including the mandatory training requirements now imposed on governors and, possibly, the increasing level of responsibilities being placed on school governors. We need to give consideration as to how we can actively recruit governors who have the appropriate skills to provide the challenge element that Estyn requires.

6 THE RHONDDA CYNON TAF GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION

- 6.1 We are currently in the process of reconvening the Rhondda Cynon Taf Governors Association, which has not met for a period of over five years. This decision was taken due to the fact that this LA is the only authority in the Central South Consortium (CSC) without an active Governors Association.
- 6.2 The aims and objectives of the Association will 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 LA, parents, school staff, CSC and Governors Wales.
- 6.3 Re-launch consultation meetings have been held in each of the three districts of RCT, following these a working party of 12 governors was established, to review the constitution of the Association. The second meeting to finalise this constitution has recently taken place. In addition, all governing bodies have been asked to nominate an RCT Governors Association link governor, during their Autumn Term meetings. These link governors will be invited to a meeting in the

Spring Term, at which an Executive Committee for the Association will be appointed.

7. THE CENTRAL SOUTH CONSORTIUM

7.1 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.

7.2 In order to support this agenda CSC has appointed 12 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 LA's or by Estyn during the course of a visit. These Consultant Governors may be deployed to work direct with governing bodies that have been identified as requiring such support as part of an intervention package.

- 7.3 CSC also deliver certain elements of the Governor Training programme outlined in Section 4 of this report on behalf of the 5 LA's 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 referred to in Section 4.

8. CHALLENGES FACING THE SERVICE

- 8.1 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. One way of achieving this is to reduce the considerable amount of paperwork that is sent to all school governors by post, replacing it with a more efficient and cost-effective system of electronic communication.
- 8.2 A pilot project has been established this term, with 8 governing bodies across the County, utilising the Welsh Government's Hwb portal, which is available at all of our schools. Governors are provided with a user-id and password to access this system, using their home computers, or the school facilities if they do not have this provision. They will also be provided with a dedicated e-mail address on this portal to receive all letters, agendas etc that were previously sent out by post. The governing body agendas and associated reports are then displayed during the meeting on an interactive whiteboard, with governors also having the option of using school tablets/laptops to display the information in addition to the whiteboard. This pilot will be evaluated at the end of this term, to consider whether this system can be 'rolled out' to all governing bodies next year.
- 8.3 Other challenges faced by the Service include the problems associated with governor recruitment and retention, identified in section 5 of this report. The need to develop and revise our Service Level Agreement to reflect the requirement to support governors in their challenge role and to raise standards in our schools is a priority.

9. FEDERATION OF SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

- 9.1 In RCT at present we have three federated governing bodies which each support two 'associated' or linked schools. We need to evaluate the effectiveness of these three federations, to judge how they have worked and whether they are successful and to consider whether we should be encouraging more governing bodies to consider this option.

9. **CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD**

9.1 The priorities for improvement for the Governor Support Service in the future include the following:

- 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 we present to 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.

**GOVERNOR SUPPORT SERVICE
PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

1. Outline of the Service

The provision of a comprehensive advice, support and clerking service, which complies with statutory requirements, for governing bodies of Nursery, Primary and Special schools.

2. Key Features of the Service

- 2.1 Ensuring that the governing body is properly constituted as required by law. Drafting and maintenance, of the governing body's Instrument of Government.
- 2.2 Organising the election/appointment of all governors.
- 2.3 Advice on instruments of government, school government regulations and statutory instruments/circulars associated with school governance.
- 2.4 Advice on eligibility, quoracy and disqualification regulations.
- 2.5 The monitoring of attendance and terms of office.
- 2.6 Guidance on the establishment, composition and (statutory) review of committees (including terms of reference for those committees).
- 2.7 Guidance on constitutional and procedural matters.
- 2.8 The provision of up-to-date advice to governors on changes to education law and other items of legislation that may impact on the role of the governing body.
- 2.9 Attendance of a senior officer at one meeting of the full governing body each term
- 2.10 Preparation / collation and distribution of agendas, reports and associated papers (as appropriate) for termly and special meetings of the full governing body, certain committees and selection panels.
- 2.11 The production of minutes of meetings attended by a senior officer (decisions to act against LA advice will be appropriately minuted).
- 2.12 The undertaking of follow up action and correspondence, arising from decisions taken at meetings attended by a senior officer, within agreed timescales.

2.13 Assistance with the preparation of (in consultation with the headteacher) the annual draft budget for consideration by the finance committee/governing body including:

- staff costs - including anticipated incremental advances, pay awards when applicable (phasing effects) and on costs.
- premises related costs (including utilities and services)
- contract services
- materials and equipment
- expenses and administration costs
- income
- provision of in year general financial advice and guidance to headteachers and governing bodies
- regular presentation of financial reports and dissemination of information to governing bodies/finance committees (non cheque book schools only)
- arranging the distribution of financial reports to governing bodies/finance committees (financial reports for chequebook schools to be supplied by the Headteacher).

2.14 Financial support and advice can be provided to all schools. It is the responsibility of the Headteacher in cheque book schools to ensure that the information is provided on request and is accurate.

2.15 Assistance and support with monitoring the budget throughout the financial year including:

- regular 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 to be supplied by the Headteacher).
- Liaison with the Headteacher and provision of support and advice if required, on all aspects of budget formulation, monitoring and forward financial planning.

2.16 The attendance of a senior officer at meetings of certain committees and selection panels of the governing body, plus special meetings called for specific purposes. (Subject to diary commitments and availability of officers).

2.17 Support on the legal aspects of Head / Deputy Headteacher appointments as appropriate.

2.18 Reprographics - this will include the reproduction of headteacher's reports and school development plans only. Post inspection action plans, policies and any other documentation must be supplied by the school prior to the meeting. Reports will not be

produced in colour; if this is required, they will have to be copied at the school and circulated as indicated above.

3. Service Provision

A total of 9 FTE days per financial year support time will be made available to schools. These days are to be allocated as follows:

- Termly governing body meeting – preparation and production of reports and agendas, attendance at meeting, and production of minutes and any other ‘follow up’ work requested – 1 day per term, i.e. 3 days per annum
- Finance – one initial visit to the school to discuss budgetary issues with the headteacher, which will include assistance in preparing the initial draft budget, if required, plus one termly committee meeting – 3 days per annum in total
- Attendance at certain committee meetings, selection panels, and special meetings of the governing body. To also include visits to schools at the specific request of the headteacher or governing body – ½ day (minimum “cost”) per annum per meeting / visit, up to a maximum of 6 meetings/visits (3 full days) per annum.

4. Financial Arrangements

4.1 Allocation of Finance to Governing Bodies

Schools are given an amount through the formula allocation to fund the purchase of this service. For 2014/15 the allocation is shown below:-

Governor Support Service
£1,780 per governing body

4.2 Charging for Services

Charges for 2015/2016 are as follows

Full service as outlined in Sections 2 and 3	Daily charge of £190 per day, for 9 days = £1710, plus £70 QGP subscription – total charge £1780
Additional Meetings/Visits	per meeting/visit (1/2 day charge) = £100

These charges will be affected annually by way of journal transfer (non cheque book schools) or by invoice (cheque book schools).

5. Quality Assurance

All schools will have a designated senior officer as a primary point of contact/service provider

5.2 Cover arrangements ensure that members of the School Organisation, Planning and Governance team are available on all days on which schools are in session. This will enable a service to be provided regardless of the availability of the designated officer.

5.3 Staff in the School Organisation, Planning and Governance team receive continuous professional development to ensure that they are kept up to date with the implications of new education legislation, statutory instruments, circulars, regulations, relevant legal judgements and measures introduced by the Welsh Assembly Government

5.4 Clients will be treated with professionalism, respect and courtesy

5.5 Appropriate levels of confidentiality will be guaranteed

5.6 Telephone calls will be dealt with as soon as possible during office hours.

5.7 Correspondence will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's policy, namely responses will be provided within 15 working days from the date of receipt of the correspondence

5.8 Agendas and supporting papers will be provided to governors 5 clear working days before each meeting, in line with the regulations in force

5.9 Performance delivery will be monitored and evaluated by means of a periodic client survey

5.10 Any complaints regarding the delivery of the service will receive priority attention in terms of investigation and resolution.

6. Client Responsibilities

- To forward any paperwork, that may be required to be appended to agendas, to the School Organisation, Planning and Governance Unit at least **10 working days** before the date of the relevant meeting. This will include headteacher's reports, budget reports (for cheque book schools) and minutes of any governing body / committee meetings not attended by a senior officer (plus copies of any other reports as required, with sufficient quantities already photocopied at the school).

- To ensure that, in respect of those governing body / committee meetings not attended by a senior officer:
 1. an agenda is issued for each meeting in line with the legal requirements detailed in 2 overleaf
 2. the quoracy, and attendance eligibility regulations are observed
 3. an attendance sheet is produced, and signed by those present at the meeting, and is retained for any possible inspection, or audit
 4. minutes of the meeting are appropriately recorded, and included on the next agenda for the termly meeting of the full governing body.

- To provide, where possible, **at least 10 working days notice** for meetings of the governing body, committees and selection panels (where possible, these dates will be set termly in advance, or agreed as part of an annual work programme).

7. Contact Point

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