

- Chief Executive
- Legal Diane Nation – comments incorporated into the report
- Finance David Clarke, Strategic Director of Resources – no comments to make
- Other Strategic Directors David Carter, Strategic Director of Performance and Development
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals Garry Rollason / Ken Powers – Internal Audit & Risk Management, Performance & Development Directorate

FINAL DECISION **YES**

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Audit and Standards Committee – 20th February 2008

School Governance

Report of the Strategic Director for Children, Young People and Families

Recommendation:

That the Committee scrutinises and comments on the progress of the actions taken by the Directorate to address the issues identified by the 2006 Audit review of school governance.

1. Background

- 1.1 The relationship between schools and their local authority has changed significantly over the past 25 years. With the introduction of local management of schools in the early 1990s and other subsequent reforms, governing bodies and headteachers now have responsibility for many aspects of the work of their schools. The role of the local authority has increasingly changed from one of direct service provider to one of enabler, commissioner and champion for pupils' and parents' rights. The local authority works closely with schools and their governing bodies in carrying out their duties and responsibilities, providing appropriate advice, support, guidance and challenge.
- 1.2 At the Committee's meeting on 4th June 2007 the Audit and Risk Manager reported on the outcomes of an audit review of the effectiveness of the framework within which schools, governors and the Local Authority operate, and of their relationships with each other. This included a review of the training, instructions and guidance given to governors, as well as governance arrangements within schools.
- 1.3 The following key areas for action in respect of school governance were identified:
 - (1) Acting on intelligence: The arrangements within the CYPF Directorate for ensuring all intelligence about schools is effectively collated and communicated to staff at a senior level.

- (2) Role and training of governors: The system for supplying information to governors and the uptake of governor training.
- (3) Whistle-blowing: The arrangements for both staff and governors to report any concerns or misgivings on a confidential basis.
- (4) Monitoring: The arrangements for monitoring schools, including practical arrangements for ensuring compliance.
- (5) Support for schools: The arrangements for supporting governing bodies of schools experiencing serious difficulty.
- (6) Protocol for schools not buying into Warwickshire Education Services (services provided to schools on a trusted basis by the County Council): The arrangements for ensuring proper standards where governing bodies do not purchase County Council services.

2. Response to key areas

- 2.1 In response to the issues raised by Audit the CYPF Directorate agreed an action plan in Spring 2007. Central to this plan was the appointment of a full-time Assistant Head of Service - Governance to provide a whole Directorate strategic lead to school governance. Previously this strategic lead was provided on the basis of one day a week by one of the Area Schools and Communities Officers.
- 2.2 The post holder, who took-up post full-time on 1st September 2007, leads a small team comprising the existing Governance Support Officer and a part-time administrative assistant. This new team works closely with the Governor Development Service which provides training and development services to governors as part of the Education Development Service as well as advice and guidance to the local authority.
- 2.3 This report sets out below action taken or planned in response to the school governance issues arising from the Audit report:

(1) Acting on intelligence

- A review of how local authority information on school governance is collated and shared is currently underway. A programme for the systematic reporting of governance data to the Officer Governance Steering Group has been agreed, along with a process for sharing focused information about schools causing concern.
- Closer working relationships between the Governor Development Manager and the School Improvement Service is enabling more targeted support to governing bodies of schools causing concern.
- Processes have been strengthened for ensuring intelligence and issues identified by Governor Development training tutors during governor training sessions are appropriately fed-back within the Authority.

(2) Role and training of governors

a. Communication

A new governor communication strategy has been agreed between the Authority and the Warwickshire Governors' Association to ensure governors are properly briefed and informed about their roles and responsibilities and have ready access to relevant documents, guidance and support. The following elements are part of this new communication strategy:

- A 'Governor Monthly Briefing', introduced in November 2007, to provide governors with a regular, clear, concise summary of the latest key issues and developments relevant to Warwickshire governors. This Briefing is posted direct to chairs' home addresses at the start of each month (with an email option). It is supplemented by occasional additional 'Governor Ad Hoc Briefings' covering more substantial areas of governor responsibility. Both these briefings have been well received by governors.
- A personal letter from the Head of Service – Education Partnerships and School Development to all newly elected and re-elected chairs of governors identifying Local Authority sources of support and advice, particularly when dealing with complex issues.
- A concise handbook setting out key governor responsibilities, obligations and procedural matters is being developed for issue to all existing and newly appointed governors on a regular basis.
- Improvements to the structure and accessibility of the governor pages on the Warwickshire Website during the Summer 2007 and further development of a 'Useful Documents' section in January 2008 to increase the accessibility of key documents and guidance relevant to governing body responsibilities. Governor and clerk to governors frequently asked questions sections will also be developed during the summer term.
- A regular 'briefing email' to clerks to enable the Local Authority to update and remind clerks about key developments and procedural requirements.

b. Governance training and development

- All new governors are now automatically enrolled on an induction training session. This has increased attendance from 18% in 2005/06 to 80% in 2007/08 financial years.
- The Authority has become a member of a skills-based clerks' accreditation scheme in partnership with five other local authorities and the ISCG (Information for Schools and College Governors). Eight Warwickshire clerks obtained Accredited Clerks status in November 2007 and nine clerks have registered for the next cohort. This accreditation scheme sets a professional standard for clerking in Warwickshire which over time will enhance the overall quality. It will

also provide a pool of qualified clerks able to support clerks in schools causing concern.

- The Governor Development tutor team has been enhanced by the recruitment of three of these accredited clerks.

(3) Whistle-blowing

A whistle-blowing policy for school staff is currently being negotiated between the Local Authority and teacher professional associations and unions. This will be supplemented by a governor scheme or guidance if required. Officers meet regularly with local officials from the Trade Unions where concerns can be raised with the Local Authority.

(4) Monitoring

The Local Authority already operates a system for the monitoring and evaluation of individual schools as part of its school improvement strategy. This system uses information from a range of sources, including assessment data, School Improvement Partner reports and other local intelligence. Compliance against a range of statutory requirements does not systematically form part of this process. Compliance issues will be examined as part of reviews identified elsewhere in this paper and consideration given to the need for a more formal policy during the summer term 2008.

(5) Support for the governing bodies of schools experiencing serious difficulty

- School Improvement Partner 'Notes of Visit' for all schools have been emailed direct to chairs of governors with effect from 1st January 2007. Previously they were only emailed to headteachers who were then expected to pass a copy to the chair.
- A review of support provided to chairs of governors, particularly when dealing with complex issues, including those with potential legal implications for the Local Authority is underway. Following that review a guidance or support pack will be developed.
- A scheme for the provision of mentoring support to chairs of governors of schools causing concern has been introduced. This will be managed by the Governor Development Manager.
- A process for individual governing body reviews has been introduced, particularly for schools causing concern where governance has been identified as an issue. A review includes preparation of a written report by the Governor Development Manager for the governing body identifying governance issues which need to be addressed.

(6) Protocol for schools not buying into WES

A 'statement of understanding' will be developed during the coming term to ensure that governing bodies considering whether or not to buy into WES services can do so on an informed basis. This will set out core

responsibilities to the Local Authority which governing bodies must fulfil irrespective of the service provider.

3. Recommendation

That the Committee scrutinises and comments on the progress of the actions taken by the Directorate to address the issues identified by the 2006 Audit review of school governance

MARION DAVIS
Strategic Director for Children,
Young People and Families

Saltisford Office Park
Ansell Way
Warwick

7th February 2008