

## **Audit & Standards Committee**

**25 July 2018**

### **School Monitoring and Governance Arrangements**

#### **Recommendation**

That the Committee notes the safeguards which support schools to have appropriate governance and assurance arrangements in place.

#### **1.0 Context**

- 1.1 At its last meeting in May, the Audit and Standards Committee requested a report on the arrangements that the County Council has in place to support schools to have appropriate governance and assurance arrangements in place. This followed consideration by the Committee during the course of 2017/18 of the outcome of 4 audits of schools that had been undertaken by the internal audit team.
- 1.2 This report provides information to the Committee setting out the arrangements that the County Council has put in place to support schools with their governance arrangements. Where WCC has particular concerns, Internal Audit may be requested to intervene and complete an audit process. This has been the case in a small number of schools during the past academic year.

#### **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 Schools through their own leadership and governing bodies are responsible for the effective operation of the school. This includes having arrangements in place to ensure sound governance across all areas of the school business, including for example safeguarding, financial management, contracting, HR related processes.
- 2.2 Whilst schools are responsible for the effectiveness of their own arrangements in this context, the County Council also has a role to play in supporting schools with their governance arrangements in the wider context of ensuring that all learners in Warwickshire enjoy a high quality learning experience (as set out in our Warwickshire Education Strategy 2018-2023 which is being considered by Council on 26<sup>th</sup> July).

- 2.3 The main arrangements that the County Council has put in place to support schools with their governance arrangements are set out below. They include a variety of approaches ranging from monitoring schools and interventions at an individual school level to offering training and other support through a WES paid for service offer. The support arrangements set out are intended to support schools whilst at the same time enable the County Council to have a wide understanding of the issues facing schools and take a coordinated approach to offering the right support and interventions and targeting resources to where they can have best effect. The arrangements also reflect the different types of school (eg maintained, academy) and recognise the different role that the County Council plays in that context.

### **3.0 Arrangements In Place**

- 3.1 The County Council has put in place the following key arrangements in support of schools, some of which have a specific focus on governance whilst others have a wider focus but incorporate governance elements;

- (i) *The Education Challenge Board* – this board comprises officers and representatives from schools and ensures that there are robust school improvement arrangements in place. This includes ensuring that appropriate risk assessments are in place for all schools and overseeing support and challenge for the Warwickshire family of schools. This includes maintained schools, academies and free schools.
- (ii) *Governor Services* – the Service continues to offer a programme of high quality support and training to governors of all Warwickshire schools. A clerking service is also offered. This service is part of the WES traded service offer. A copy of the current training offer (contents pages) is attached at Appendix 1. Currently 243 schools subscribe to Governor Services training and support packages (87% maintained schools and 58% academies). The training and support package covers a wide range of subject areas including:  
The effective governance of schools, training for new and experienced governors, GDPR, complaints and exclusions, specific training for the Chair of Governors, school improvement – self-evaluation, monitoring and improvement planning, Ofsted preparation. There is also a range of courses specifically focused upon resources including staffing, finance (budget planning and monitoring) and health and safety.  
  
Targeted invitations are sent to schools (both academies and maintained) identified as vulnerable (see (iv) below) which do not currently subscribe. In addition, the service issues regular bulletins and updates which cover a range of governance related topics and there is close linkage between audit and Governor Services to ensure that any common themes identified in school based audits can be incorporated into the work of Governor Services.
- (iii) *Schools Causing Concern* - Council officers ensure that the Schools Causing Concern process maintains a robust overview of all schools.

Intelligence is fed into that process from a wide range of sources from across the Council to ensure that there is a holistic Council wide view of the schools identified. Information is now recorded on a system called Pendulum which has been introduced this term. Pendulum is accessible to teams across the Council. All schools are risk assessed (categorised A, B, C and D) as a result of these discussions and this information sits alongside the schools' performance data and most recent Ofsted outcome and finance data to enable a comprehensive assessment of the vulnerability of each school. The Schools Causing Concern group meets on a termly basis as school risk assessment is a dynamic process. This ensures that information is updated regularly and support/challenge is offered as promptly as possible when issues are identified. The Council's Schools Finance team feeds into the Schools Causing Concern process and officers now work closely alongside school improvement colleagues to support and challenge schools. With an increasing number of schools facing financially challenging times, focused support is put in place for those maintained schools facing potential deficit budgets with a view to supporting schools to put in place recovery plans and stabilising the financial position as quickly as possible. In the most complex cases, officers may ask the audit team to undertake an audit in order to provide information and help to clarify the situation.

- (iv) *School Improvement* – the School Improvement Team now includes a School Improvement Governance Officer. This is a very experienced Chair of Governors, whose focus is upon supporting governing bodies within maintained schools causing concern. This post is targeted to focus upon schools experiencing financial difficulties. Since September 2017 the team has also included a Senior School Improvement Officer whose main role is to lead finance task groups for schools in financial difficulty.

- 3.2 As highlighted at paragraph 2.3, the responsibilities and nature of the relationship with academies is different to that of maintained schools. School improvement for academies is the responsibility of each school's academy trust board. If the school is part of a Multi Academy Trust (MAT), then the MAT Trust Board is the responsible body. The Council has now established regular Keeping in Touch (KIT) meetings with all MATs within Warwickshire. Senior officers from Education and Learning meet termly with the CEO/Executive Headteacher of each Multi Academy Trust in order for them to share information about their schools and request support if required. The Council risk assesses all schools, including academies. Any serious concerns are passed on to the Regional Schools Commissioner and/or Ofsted, who have the remit to investigate and intervene with academies if necessary.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

- 4.1 The Council has in place a number of arrangements aimed at supporting schools to have appropriate governance arrangements in place. These arrangements, including the newly introduced Pendulum system, will continue

to ensure that as well as supporting schools, the Council has a holistic view of Warwickshire schools and can target resources accordingly. It is recognised that there continues to be a role for audit and it is likely that the audit team will be asked to intervene in those schools which are considered to have particular governance challenges to help identify areas for improvement.

## Background papers

None

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s):

Other members:

Appendix 1 – Copy of current training offer – contents pages