

OXFORDSHIRE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION (OGA)

Notes of the Open Meeting held at 7.15pm on Thursday 29th June 2017 at North Kidlington Primary School

Executive Committee members present: Carole Thomson (Chair), Judith Bennett (Secretary), Pushpalata Chaure, Rosemary Fiander, Stan Terry and Brenda Williams. David Bramble (Clerk).

Apologies for absence: Layla Moran MP, Cllr Michael Waine, Paul Baker, June Nisbet and Malcolm Wright.

54 governors from Oxfordshire schools were present.

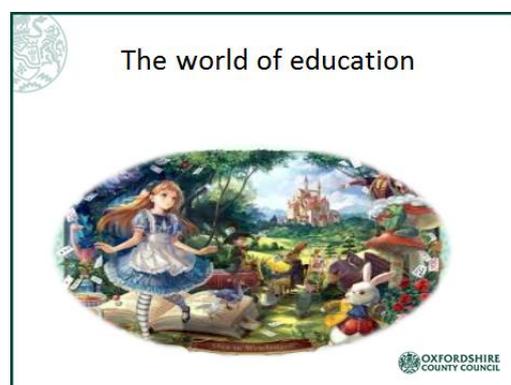
WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION BY CHAIR OF OGA – CAROLE THOMSON

Carole welcomed everyone and was pleased at the number attending. A special welcome was extended to Stuart Smith, Chair of Buckinghamshire's Governors' Association. Layla Moran, recently elected MP for West Oxford & Abingdon, who was a Governor at Botley Primary School, had been obliged to attend a vote in the House of Commons this afternoon and was sorry she could not be present.

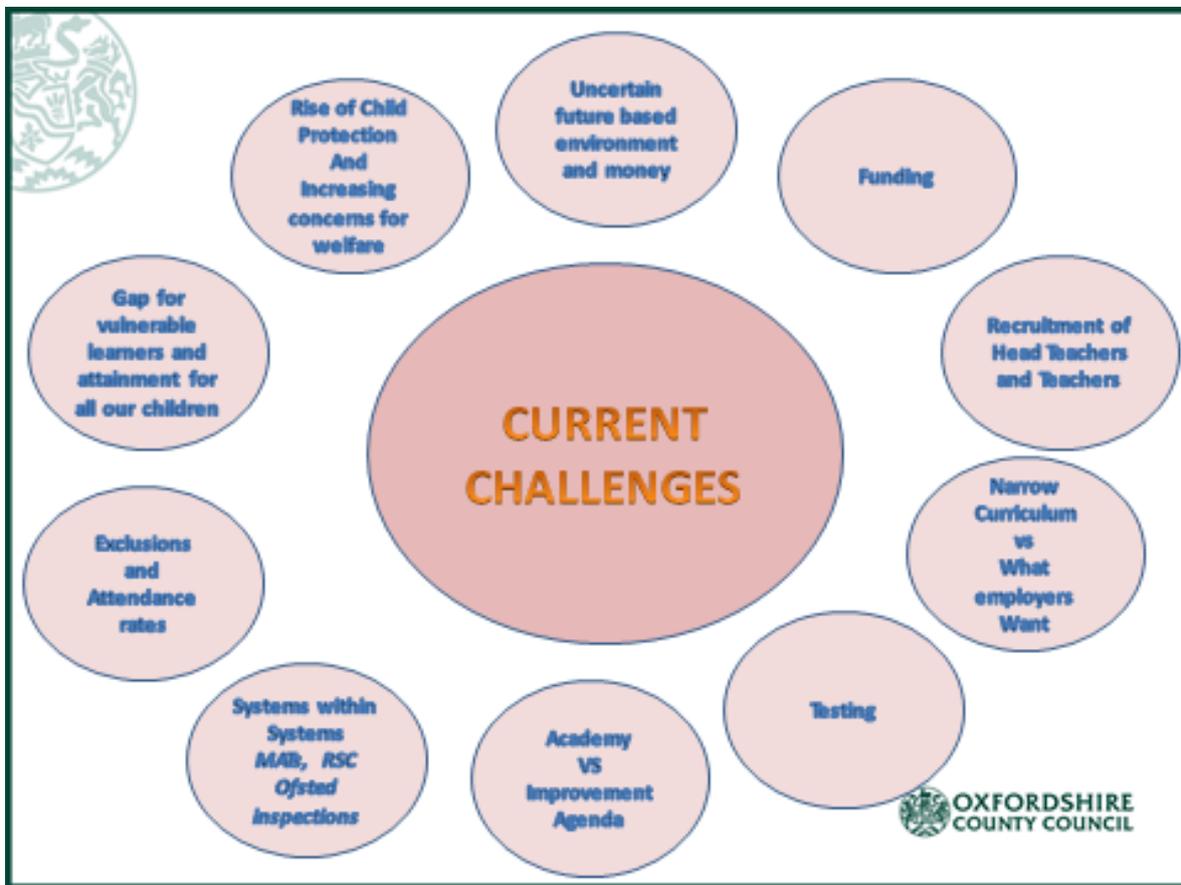
Carole was particularly pleased to introduce Lucy Butler as Guest Speaker. Lucy had assumed the role of Director for Oxfordshire Children's Services in December 2016. Since taking office Lucy had been keen to develop the relationship between all types of schools and the Local Authority, with the goal of making Oxfordshire the best possible place for children to grow up in and helping young people to lead safe, secure and happy lives. This evening's meeting provided the opportunity to hear and comment on Lucy's ideas and to discuss the Governor's role in addressing the current challenges in education.

SCHOOLS AND OXFORDSHIRE: FACING CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Lucy was joined by Jennie Perry (JP) who was the LA's lead on Governance, particularly regarding strategic direction.



Alice's depiction of uncertainty and lack of clear direction under changing Secretaries of State for Education



Many challenges, including worries for future years and doubts over funding formula. LB commented that the DfE was no longer placing importance on the type of school. Current emphasis is on school improvement, wanting to share good practice in governance and having a supportive network for schools and academies.

New relationship

Nothing is more important than the education of our children

We believe the Local Authority, Executive Member & the Education Scrutiny committee, has an important role with Oxfordshire settings/schools/colleges.



Governors

- Key to a school’s effectiveness
- Champion of school improvement
- Strategic leaders and key holders of accountability
- Review role of governors with the LA?
- Work in partnership



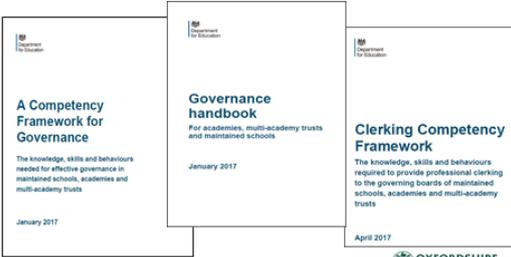
Vital for children to get the best start LA wants to work together with governors in partnership

National context

- An aim to professionalise role of Governors and Clerks with new DfE publications
- Emphasis on 6 features of effective Governance and the need for strong Governor self evaluation
- (Strategic leadership, Accountability, People, Structures, Compliance, Evaluation)
- Increase in Ofsted inspections requesting schools to conduct external Governance reviews where Governance is weak



DfE publications – January and April 2017




Useful documents that contribute to professionalising governance



OCC Governor Services 16/17

- 148 schools in Oxfordshire bought into OCC Governor training in 16/17
- 183 schools bought into OGA in 16/17
- Good uptake on range of other buy back services, including Governor hub, GEL, Modern Governor
- Good feedback from training
- Governor Services reduction in what can be offered = mostly a buy back service now
- Jennie Perry – Lead Advisory Teacher (Primary), taking a lead on Governance from April 2017 – aiming to review the service and be more strategic




OCC Governor Services – Current priorities:

- Work closely with partners in Oxfordshire to enable support for vulnerable schools by developing a local leaders of Governance programme
- Strengthen communication with Chairs of Governors
- Develop a successful strategy for recruitment and retention of high quality Governors
- Create high quality training programmes for Governors, including bespoke sessions
- Collect evidence of good practice within Governing Bodies to share expertise: Please share: Jennie.Perry@oxfordshire.gov.uk




CE&F have created a vision and obsessions for Oxfordshire’s children and families to respond to the recent analysis

**Oxfordshire -
A great place to grow up and be successful**

“We believe that the best start in life requires children and young people to experience a safe and supportive home and school life”

Our four obsessions for children and families are:

1. Increasing school attendance – leading to improved attainment
2. Helping early – most effective, least intrusive, solutions to problems
3. Safely reducing the number of looked after children - providing support to enable families to care
4. Improving the confidence and capability of the whole workforce - to work effectively with families experiencing domestic abuse, parental mental health and drugs and alcohol issues

Success will be measured as:

 Providing a good service	 Delivering financial sustainability	 Reducing family breakdown	 Improving attainment & aspirations
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To deliver the programme’s obsessions, it needs to be:

- Supported & delivered by the whole council
- Supported & delivered by the wider partnership including local communities
- Supported & delivered by frontline staff and
- Shaped & co-designed with children & families – “Nothing about me, without me”



LA partnership

- Role needs to change to adapt to new world
- Still waiting on review by Government
- Autonomous school system
- Self improving – sector led school system
- LA key role in shaping place – includes big ticket items of Education, Skills, Health & Wellbeing
- Members integral – lobbying, championing
- LA can give ‘whole picture’ to fragmented system




Key components

- Partnership with Oxfordshire schools improving the quality of teaching & learning
- Building capacity for a sector led model of school improvement
- Champion the needs of vulnerable children & young people
- Commission home to school transport with schools – promote independence for young people
- Ensure sufficient places for schools, early year provision, childcare & local SEN provision



The Children’s Trust and Safeguarding Board will train their staff to deal with mental health and substance abuse issues amongst parents.



Improving the quality of teaching & learning

- Strategic role with schools to shape education system for Oxfordshire children
- Complex system – Regional Schools Commissioner, Education Funding Agency , Ofsted : LA overall relationship with ALL schools for ALL Oxfordshire children
- Partnership with school leaders to work collaboratively on what matters
- Education Scrutiny Committee




School Improvement

- School leaders now leading across multiple organisations
- We need to create capacity for our leaders
- Strategic Schools Partnership Board



LB asked how many governors had been into classrooms. 'ALL' WAS THE RESPONSE



Vulnerable learners

- Ensure INCLUSION not EXCLUSION (challenges competition, narrow curriculum , inspection practice, funding)
- Meet the welfare needs of this group so schools can focus on their education
- Buck the trend of increasing exclusions
- Reduce the gap
- High needs block review will help us review local provision
- LA will champion the needs of vulnerable children




Home to school transport

- No changes to home to school transport legislation
- We need to ensure that our Home to School transport policy meets the needs of Oxfordshire children
- We don't want our children travelling long distances
- We are reviewing our home to school transport work for SEN children and will be working closer with schools to promote independence



There is an upward trend for both exclusions and persistent absence that must be addressed



Sufficiency

- LA role of strategic place planning
- Huge increase in population of children 2001-2011
- Now hitting secondary schools
- Feels like one hand tied behind back – no control on investment in free schools, can't require academies to expand
- Capital still woeful & far too many schools have inadequate buildings




Skills agenda

- NEET issues – geographical & vulnerable groups
- Harness the engagement of employers
- Ensure strategic leadership of skills agenda for children with the LEP and the Skills Board
- Provide excellence in schools in relation to CEIAG (Careers, Education, Information, Advice & Guidance)
- Actively work towards apprenticeship target of 2.5%




My vision

- We work in partnership as an Oxfordshire system to meet the many challenges we are facing today
- We all work together to ensure that our children get the best education possible, that we hold high aspirations for ALL of our children and that we seek solutions together for any blocks to realising that goal



Questions and comments from the floor

Stan Terry (Icknield Community College/Acer Trust) Oxfordshire had only 3 National Leaders of Governance (NLGs). How did the LA intend improving this position?

JP accepted that the number was disappointing and consideration would be given to offering some training. LA would continue to work with OTSA and OGA in trying to recruit more NLGs and develop LLGs.

Judith Bennett (Acer Trust/Marsh Baldon) added that the stipulation that NLGs would be appointed from current or very recent Chairs of Governors excluded some rich talent of governors who were not current or recent Chairs.

Judith also asked if the mind-boggling procedure demanded by the National College could be simplified for prospective LLGs.

JP said they could try.

CT commented that clear criteria for the selection of LLGs would be essential.

Brenda Williams (North Kidlington Primary School) Does the LA know which schools have vacancies for governors and which Governing Bodies are in most need of support?

JP advised that data was being collected and a priority list would be produced.

Sarah Church (Watchfield Primary School) To what extent can MATs opt into LA provided services?

Was there a threshold for obtaining mental health support for pupils and SENCOs? Teachers were being expected to take on the role of social workers which was very unfair.

JP expressed the view that boundaries between some statutory responsibilities needed clearer identification. Academies can ask for LA support but it would be at a cost.

LB added that there was turbulence in provision of early help support and the closure of Children Centres had compounded problems. In some areas positive outcomes had been achieved but in other areas this was not the case. Maria Godfrey Early Intervention Manager for CEF, Oxfordshire Health Services, CAMHS and the Thames Valley Police were working together to co-ordinate working closer together.

William Powlett-Smith (Northern House School) He was Chair of a Trust that had dealings with neighbouring counties and had been impressed with the across boundary support. What recommendations could be made with regard to governor recruitment particularly from local organisations/companies where business experience could be found?

JP Recruitment of governors was a real challenge with no easy answers. Many completed their 4 year term, felt they had done their bit and did not seek re-election. The increasing expectation on governors could make it feel like a second job.

SGOSS was worth approaching. She confirmed that governor recruitment was high on the list of priorities.

CT added that in her experience some of the best governors with business skills and experience came from among parents and many of them would serve for more than one term. CT raised the difficulty in arranging meetings between governors and Ofsted inspectors. Ofsted inspectors who arrived with little notice and produced their timetable of the visit showing daytime slots for meeting governors were being unrealistic – many governors could not drop work and come to a school meeting without warning but did not feel they were in a position where they could challenge the lead inspector.

LB agreed to raise this with the Ofsted lead for Oxfordshire.

Steve Alman (Hailey C of E Primary School) Hailey was a small school in a rural village and teacher recruitment was a real challenge. He felt improvements in diversity were required across the county.

Sarah Church (Watchfield Primary School) Many of their pupils were from families of HM Forces. She felt there were too many categories of governors. One of the important requirements was to have governors who were available to visit the school during the school day. Induction training was essential.

Sean Taylor (St Mary's Catholic Primary School Bicester) It was a struggle to meet governors from other schools in the area. He felt it was important to get an external view of how his Governing Body was performing.

JP commented that in some parts of the county visits and exchanges between Governing Bodies were working well. She recommended partnerships and forums to facilitate exchange of ideas and practices.

CT strongly recommended attending other schools' Governing Body meetings and OGA Open Meetings provided networking opportunities.

JB added that a nearby Chair of Governors was coming to her school next week to observe a meeting. Clerks had also visited.

Diane Wilson (ATL/BCC) What was the mechanism for building new schools to meet the needs of an increasing pupil population?

LB explained that the population blip leading to increased primary pupils was now moving up to secondary level.

The LA worked with developers to plan new schools or expansion of existing schools and generally this was successful. Increased dwellings in Grove was an example of good planning and a satisfactory conclusion. The LA tried to influence where Free Schools were located but did not always get its way and could not dictate. Long term planning was required and changes in government policy did not help.

Austen Cook (Wolvercote Primary School) The school had recently been expanded to a 45 pupil entry and an extension built but the timing of the pupil census and influence on funding has resulted in underfunding of 6%. Can something be done to rectify this totally unacceptable system?

LB said that sadly the LA could not change government policy and she could only sympathise on a unclear process which prevented planning ahead and a lack of certainty. LA had recently created a new appointment to assist schools with budget planning.

Sarah Church (Watchfield Primary School) Emphasis to point above. School was underfunded by £250k making it impossible to manage the budget. The delay between census date and receiving funding must be changed.

There were plans for 4,000 new homes but no plans for new schools or expansion of existing schools.

LB advised the school could bid for a building development grant or encourage interest in a Free School. Barbara Chillman worked hard to map projected need for school places but mobility, particularly for military education, was an issue.

CT added that the School Organisation Stakeholders Group could pick up some of these concerns.

BW (who attends SOSG for OGA) added that information was available at District and County level regarding planning developments but there was a feeling that DfE sitting in London was totally unaware of such local issues. Many experienced DfE officials had left and the new arrivals were not really aware of what was needed.

4,500 new houses were planned in Kidlington together with 3 new Primary and 1 secondary school.

Steve Alman Hailey C of E Primary) What news on the initiative of an OCC MAT?

LB explained that it was illegal for an LA to have more than a 19% interest in a MAT. Some counties were continuing to explore the position but there was not generally a great appetite for this development. LAs would prefer to continue in their present role giving as much support to all schools as possible. There were a number of healthy MATs operating in the county.

It was suggested that this was not very reassuring for the many primary schools in Oxfordshire which had not converted to academy status. There were rumours that some MATs were going to amalgamate and that the Church of England Diocese was not planning to increase its MAT (ODST) significantly in size. What will happen to the small rural primaries?

LB assured the meeting that the LA would continue to support the many schools that had not converted (currently 150) and would await further direction from the Government.

Austen Cook (Wolvercote Primary School) Was there any evidence that academies were performing better than maintained schools?

CT emphasised that there was absolutely no conclusive evidence. In her personal experience there were some advantages for the pupils in strong links within a MAT or federation between primary and secondary schools including better knowledge of the primary curriculum amongst secondary staff and use of secondary subject expertise in the primary school curriculum.

Jane Zibarras (Great Tew Primary School) Governor Services training appears to be in decline. Jane had enrolled on 3 courses none of which took place because of insufficient applications to attend.

JP was reviewing the training offer which was the reason for the delay in publishing next year's programme.

She would be taking account of evaluation reports from course attendees.

Rachel Carter (Madley Brook Community Primary School) There is a need for more support for children with high needs. CAMHS waiting list was very long.

LA was working with CAMHS but there are limitations to the support available.

Margaret Wolf (Rose Hill Primary School) Suggested that results of Ofsted inspections should be shared amongst schools.

The LA is tracking outcomes of Ofsted inspections and will share these with LGBs.

JP asked, 'what was the best means of communication with governors?' It was generally agreed that dissemination through the Clerks' network was the most successful means. It was suggested that a weekly bulletin be considered.

CT called the meeting to a close and thanked Lucy and Jennie for the presentation and for responding to a wide range of points. JB and RF were thanked for arranging the refreshments and appreciation was given to North Kidlington Primary School for hosting the meeting.