

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
REPORT FOR RESOLUTION

COMMITTEE: Resources and Governance Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 6th March 2008

SUBJECT: School Governance

REPORT OF: Director of Children's Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide an update on action to strengthen support for school governance in Manchester schools including plans for a new clerking service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Members are asked to comment on the proposals for enhancing the range and quality of support services available to governing bodies in the City.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CAPITAL BUDGET

None

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVENUE BUDGET

None

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

WARDS AFFECTED

All

IMPLICATIONS FOR KEY COUNCIL POLICIES

<i>Anti-Poverty</i>	<i>Equal Opportunities</i>	<i>Environment</i>	<i>Employment</i>
Yes	Yes	No	Yes

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In late 2007, the Governor Support and Training Service (GSTS) was brought into the scope of the Education Services Programme (ESP) on agreement of Executive Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services. The decision was made because, as ESP commenced, it became clear that effective school governance was critical to strong school improvement and educational attainment.
- 1.2 Since January 2008, the service has been responsible to Kieran McDermott, Assistant Director for Children's Services (Education), and part of a broader portfolio of services targeted towards school improvement.
- 1.3 Two colleagues from the Manchester Improvement Programme have been commissioned to put into place a new operating framework for governor support with the primary purpose of supporting governors in fulfilling our challenging school improvement objectives. Both have had substantial project and operational experience at the City Council, and will lead service development until June 2008.
- 1.4 The project will report into the broader ESP programme. It will be governed by a Project Board led by Deputy Director of Children's Services, and steered by a Design Authority comprised of colleagues with practical experience of improving schools and developing strategic school leadership. A range of consultation events will be held with various stakeholder groups (including strong involvement of existing governing body members) through the spring, and ongoing through the project.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The project has set challenging review and improvement objectives for the coming months. They recognise the need for a structured, managed approach to change, and also the urgent need to realize improvements quickly. Key to this process is ongoing consultation with key stakeholders.
- 2.2 Many of the issues in relation to governor support have been recognized for a period of time, and therefore much of what is proposed will be of no surprise to Members. One clear difference is the approach to a new City Council run clerking service, the purpose for which is described in section 4.
- 2.3 The challenges to be addressed to achieve good governance are covered by five key themes:
 - Supporting school improvement and Every Child Matters to achieve the best possible educational attainment levels.
 - Developing governor capacity to ensure that there is sufficient challenge and strategic direction to lead school development.

- Ensuring sufficient support for a diverse educational portfolio which is rapidly changing, including new initiatives such as Academies, Federations and Building Schools for the Future.
 - Ensuring sufficient compliance and control to meet key statutory obligations such as Financial Management in Schools standards.
 - Building enough team capacity to support a complex range of governor needs and linking the team firmly into the service post-ESP implementation.
- 2.4 Building strong, effective relationships is critical. We need to develop relationships between individuals on each governing body to ensure that the team can work together to improve their school. The project will use these as principles upon which it develops services and engages stakeholders.
- 2.5 It is anticipated that implementation of the full change programme will take eighteen months, particularly to ensure that it is fully embedded in new ways of working. However, most of the changes will be visible to governors through the summer and autumn terms of 2008. These are described below.

3 CHANGES VISIBLE TO GOVERNORS THROUGH THE SUMMER TERM

- 3.1 Governors will notice that the way in which we communicate with them will change. The Governor newsletter will be re-launched, focusing on content specifically written with Manchester governors in mind.
- 3.2 Whilst recognizing that not all governors have access, we will make efforts to exploit online opportunities via the website, allowing governors to seek information relevant to their role, book or request training courses online; and inform us of changes to their governing body.
- 3.3 Our training programme will undergo the first of a series of changes, advertising for the summer term a core suite of training including the re-establishment of briefings for clerks and chairs of governors, with a commitment that these sessions will be run irrespective of numbers. We will also provide governing bodies with an opportunity to make requests for tailored training based in district clusters.
- 3.4 Governing bodies should notice that the time it takes to handle specific requests such as new LEA Governors, and changes to Instruments of Government, is much quicker as we make a series of process improvements.
- 3.5 We will pilot a new termly agenda and information pack, which will guide governing bodies to what they need to cover during the summer term and provide all the information they need to ensure that this business is conducted easily. This will prelude the launch of the clerking service in Autumn 2008.

- 3.6 Our focus in delivering this will be “develop, listen and learn”. We will seek regular feedback from our consultation groups and individual governing bodies on what has been delivered to date so that we are able to continuously improve.

4 INTRODUCTION OF A TRADED CLERKING SERVICE BY AUTUMN TERM 2008

- 4.1 The project is aware that the lack of an LEA-owned clerking service has been a concern for Members, governing body representatives, and other stakeholders who are keen to ensure statutory compliance and strong strategic management on governing bodies. Schools also regularly request a clerking provision from the LEA, and we believe that there is market demand for this.
- 4.2 It is clear from national guidance that a good clerking service should be able to provide comprehensive, clear minutes which provide an audit trail on how decisions are made within the school. Additionally, the clerk should be the primary source of advice on statutory requirements and regulations, and should be able to guide the governing body in this.
- 4.3 Previous reports to Scrutiny described proposals to provide clerks as “minute takers”, with additional provision of Management Support Advisors at every meeting to provide advice and ensure sufficient rigour.
- 4.4 It has become clear that this approach has no legal foundation, and that provision does not exist for additional LA representation at governing body meetings outside of that made for LA governors. This was also fed back during consultation conducted with governing bodies in last financial year.
- 4.5 The team are exploring several ways of offering a new clerking service (for example independent clerks who are accredited by the Education Service, or clerks employed by Manchester City Council). Each has different advantages and disadvantages, and also risks. They are being carefully considered to achieve the optimum outcome for schools. Schools will be consulted, and the best model will be approved by the Project Board. Irrespective of model, key will be feedback from clerks to the authority to ensure that we are aware of key issues and requirements within schools at governing body level.
- 4.6 Legally, there is no way in which a clerking service can be enforced on a governing body, except where delegated budget has been withdrawn from a school. We are therefore reviewing as part of this how we might target those schools who we believe are most in need of support, whilst being clear that the overall approach to supporting governors is about building trusted relationships with governing bodies where they are keen to engage with us.

- 4.7 It is our intention to bring forward the decision making process about the operational nature of the clerking service within the next month so that schools can be contacted early in the next financial year and given the opportunity to buy into the clerking service from Autumn 2008. This will ensure that sufficient funds are held in school budgets to pay for any clerking service, and that the organization has time to deal with any recruitment issues.
- 4.8 We would be happy to conduct further consultation with Scrutiny members on their thoughts on clerking service requirements, or to return to Scrutiny with our action plan.

5 OTHER CHANGES VISIBLE FROM AUTUMN 2008

- 5.1 We will be rapidly expanding our range of support materials for governing bodies. We expect this to include a new toolkit on school improvement techniques for governing bodies; handbooks for chairs of governors and clerks; and issue-based material such as safeguarding children and guides to FMSiS.
- 5.2 We plan to pilot some of the self evaluation frameworks which currently exist for governing bodies, with a view to rolling these out with governing bodies in the longer term. These help governing bodies identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and put action plans together for improvement.
- 5.3 We will continue to develop our training and learning offer, providing more tailored, locally-based training which fits governors' needs. We will also explore opportunities for online learning, although accept that these may not be accessible to every governor. This work will inform a new Service Level Agreement Framework for 2009.
- 5.4 The Manchester Governors Conference will be relaunched as an opportunity to tell the whole governor community about the range of new services which have been launched in the past months, discuss the implementation of change in the wider Education Service and Children's Services and its impact on governors, and provide opportunities for governors to share their experiences with one another and feed back on future service developments.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 We appreciate that Members have been waiting for some time to see change in the way that Governor support services. We hope that we have demonstrated that whilst planning is still at an early stage in some areas, delivery is practical and already underway, and will be evidenced by Governors experiencing a real difference in the service and interactions they make with the authority.
- 6.2 We welcome comments from Scrutiny and are keen to engage with all stakeholders to ensure that we deliver the best possible service moving forward.