

**BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL
AUDIT COMMITTEE**

19th April 2013

Report of: the Service Director, Finance

Report Title: Support and Training Provision for School Governing Bodies and Clerks to Governing Bodies.

Ward: Citywide

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RECOMMENDATION

The Audit Committee note the findings of the Internal Audit (IA) review of Guidance and Training for members of School Governing Bodies and Clerks to Governing Bodies provided by the Governors Development Service (GDS) and note the areas identified for improvement.

SUMMARY

In January 2012 IA submitted a report to the Audit Committee setting out the outcomes of the investigation into the payment of an honorarium to a Bristol School. One of the findings from this report was the lack of transparency in decision making within the Council and the School.

As a result the Audit Committee commissioned a review of the support and training provided to Governing Bodies and Clerks to Governors. This report provides a summary of the findings and identified areas for improvement.

The significant points in the report are:

- Overall there is a satisfactory system in place to provide guidance, support and training to the Chair of Governors, Governors and Clerks to Governing Bodies to enable them to practice high standards of governance and effectively fulfil their roles and responsibilities for the management of public funds in an open and transparent forum.
- Access to the guidance, support and training is on a voluntary basis and therefore dependent on the individual accessing the resources provided.
- Areas for improvements in arrangements include finalising the revised Clerks Handbook for issuing to Clerks and publishing it on the Governors Development Service (GDS) website, minor changes to guidance in respect of the declaration of business and pecuniary interest and clarification of what constitutes urgent action when the Chair of Governors can act without permission but is required to report this back to the Full Governing Body.

Policy:

School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2007
Education Act 2011

Consultation:

Internal: Governors Development Service

External: None necessary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In response to the IA findings/recommendations arising from an investigation into a payment of an honorarium to a Bristol school, the Audit Committee requested a review of support and training provided by the Governors Development Service to Governors and Clerks to Governing Bodies to ensure that high standards of governance are maintained by Governors in the management and administration of public funds.
- 1.2 The objectives of the review were to consider whether there is guidance, support and training available to all Governing Bodies and Clerks to Governing Bodies.

2. Key findings from comparison

- 2.1 Overall there is a satisfactory system in place to provide guidance, support and training to the Chair of Governors, Governors and the Clerk to the Governors to enable them to practice high standards of governance and effectively fulfil their roles and responsibilities for the management of public funds in an open and transparent forum. However, some areas of improvement have been identified which will help to strengthen the arrangements. In particular, there is a comprehensive Clerks' Handbook that has been removed from the GDS website for an extended length of time, whilst being updated, so is not accessible. In addition, access to the guidance, support and training is on a voluntary basis and therefore dependent on the individual accessing the resources provided.

- 2.2 The following areas of good practice were identified:

- The roles and responsibilities for Governors are clearly defined within the Chair of Governors' and Governors' Handbooks which are available on the GDS website and copies are also provided to new Governors.
- There are clear guidelines for Clerks in the minuting of confidential items and for minutes to be taken at each Governors meeting, drawn up, and signed as approved by the Governing Body at the next meeting.
- The GDS provide specific training for Clerks, Governors and the Chair of Governors which is tailored to their needs including topics on roles and responsibilities.
- There is guidance on the GDS website and in the Governors' Handbook expressing the importance of Governors declaring business and personal interests and the actions they must undertake to ensure that there is no conflict of interests during Governors' meetings. The

Handbook also makes reference to the the availability of advice from the GDS in respect of any potential areas where conflict of interests could arise.

- The Governors' Handbook also contains general principles in respect of restrictions on persons taking part in Governing Body meetings and committees including conflicts of interest and pecuniary interests.

2.4 The following areas have been identified where the Governors Development Service can improve controls :

- The revision to the Clerks' Handbook should be completed and published on-line.
- The pro forma business interests letter should be expanded to include all staff at the School who are required to declare such interests and not just Governors and Headteachers. In addition, the template declaration form should cover both business and pecuniary interests.
- The Chair of Governors Handbook should be revised to clarify what emergency permissions can be undertaken without Full Governing Body (FGB) approval and the requirement to report such actions back to the FGB.
- The requirement to minute that reports have been tabled and that such reports should be retained with the minutes is included in the Chairs' Handbook but should also be reflected in the Clerks' Handbook.

Conclusions

3.1 This review provides Members with some assurance that the Governors Development Service has in place appropriate guidance, support and training for members of School Governing Bodies and Clerks to Governing Bodies.

3.2 Areas identified above where improvements may be required have been discussed and agreed with the Governors Development Service.

Other Options Considered

None necessary

Risk Assessment

None necessary

Equalities Impact Assessment

None necessary for this report

Environmental Impact Assessment

None necessary for this report

Legal and Resource Implications

Legal - none sought.

Resources - none arising from this report