

Good Practice Guide for School Governor Associations or Fora / Governor Networks

Introduction

Representative bodies, such as governor associations or fora, within a Local Authority (LA) area, serve a valuable purpose in at least four respects:

- they provide an opportunity for governors from every school in their LA to form a professional network and share good practice from their own governing bodies and schools;
- they are a vehicle for discussion of the latest education developments in their LA and the education sector nationally;
- they are effective 'sounding boards' for Governors Cymru Services, the LA and the Welsh Government to consult on strategic and policy issues affecting schools, governance and the quality of education provision; and
- they provide a mechanism for governors to become fully engaged with officers of the LA to improve school effectiveness and learner outcomes.

For the purpose of this good practice guidance, the term 'association' will be used to represent local governor associations, governor fora and networks.

This guidance has drawn from existing practice in both England and Wales and is intended as a reference for those wanting to maintain or improve the effectiveness of their governors association.

Examples of good practice

What does a good 'association' look like? The following is an amalgam of current practice taken from existing Associations that are generally regarded as effective.

Number of meetings

Associations meet at least three times a year, i.e. autumn/winter, spring and summer terms; some meet four times: an Annual General Meeting will be scheduled at some point during the year to elect officers etc, though this usually occurs at the first meeting.

Venues

In many cases venues for meetings are funded and supported by LAs. In some areas, the venue is organised by association members and moves around from one cluster of schools to another.

Content of meetings

The chair and vice-chair, supported by the LA governor support officer and Director of Education, will usually determine the meeting agenda at least two weeks in advance of the meeting. Notification of venue and agenda will either be sent to governing body chairs and clerks at least one week before the meeting (a schedule of meetings is sent to all governing body chairs and clerks at the beginning of the academic year), or to the management committee of the association (dependent on the constitution).

A variety of speakers and LA officers are invited to speak on topical issues to update governors and raise their awareness. Many Directors of Education (or the equivalent LA officer), other senior officers and the Education Executive Member, have standing invitations to attend Association meetings; this provides governors with an opportunity to challenge strategic thinking and add value to the discussion on topics that have a bearing on their school's academic performance.

Some meetings have 'break-out' sessions to give more governors the time and opportunity to have their thoughts and opinions considered and represented in a wider forum.

In some circumstances, governing bodies may ask for an item to be included in the agenda for discussion. Such requests are made at least two weeks in advance of the meeting and with sufficient detail for appropriate personnel to be present and prepared for the discussion.

In certain cases, key features of regular meetings are individual governing body concerns forwarded for inclusion on the agenda and an open forum with the Director and Senior LA Officers.

In addition there are standing items, such as 'Governors Cymru Services report', 'training and development programme', 'Director's Report', etc.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

An AGM is held, usually at the beginning of the academic year, to elect association officers, such as chair, vice-chair and secretary. Where a budget is allocated by the LA or subscriptions are to be collected from member schools, a treasurer is also elected. Terms of office are usually for one year. The association constitution and terms of reference are also usually reviewed at this meeting (please note that some associations are funded by voluntary subscriptions).

Governor and governing body development

Training needs are identified through requests from governing bodies and individual governors; training and development programmes are discussed and in some instances jointly developed with LA officers. Training and development events are publicised and promoted. Recent training and development events are reported and evaluated.

Representation

Members are also elected or nominated to appropriate LA committees and representative bodies, such as those considering school budgets, to ensure school governors' views are considered and the activities and decisions taken by those committees are reported back to the association.

Members are nominated to attend relevant national and inter-authority conferences and events and report back as required to the association.

In some instances, the chair and vice-chair will meet with the Director of Education (or equivalent LA officer) and Governor Support Officer each school term to discuss topical issues and plan association meeting content.

Publicity

Meeting schedules, noting venues and start-finish times, are published and circulated to all governing bodies in the LA at the start of the academic year.

A newsletter or bulletin highlighting the activities of the association and school governance related items, is produced and circulated to all governing bodies in the LA three times a year.

Website

Information on a variety of subjects is stored for governors to reference, this will often be in conjunction with the governor section of the LA website or the Governors Cymru Services website, for example:

- Model Policies and Procedures;
- Training and Development programme;
- Training and Development resources, such as presentations;
- Agendas and minutes of meetings;
- Newsletters;
- Sample School Development Plans / Self-evaluation documentation;
- Links to relevant websites, such as 'Family of Schools' performance data, Estyn, LA and Governors Cymru Services.

Conferences and seminars

All governors are invited to attend an annual conference (organised within or for the LA, consortia or region). Speakers and content are determined by the events and topics relevant to the locality. Some local associations will organise their own training session, either during a weekday or a Saturday morning.

Expenses

Most associations do not pay travel or venue expenses. Where this does happen, the association collects appropriate annual subscriptions from member schools or a budget is allocated to the association by the LA to fund its activities. In many cases the LA supports and funds the Association as part of a more general commitment to governor training and development; this usually amounts to the provision of a meeting room, attendance at meetings of key LA personnel, reproduction and circulation of documents, facilities to support presentations or breakout sessions and, in some cases, provision of tea and coffee.

Review and evaluation

An annual review of the association's effectiveness is undertaken by members of the Association to assess its strengths and opportunities for improvement. Officers of the Association use the feedback to plan future meeting organisation and content.

Summary

The foregoing is not intended for governor associations to use as a 'tick-list', rather as a reference document for indicators of good practice and what a significant number of school governors value as an aid to improve their understanding of the intentions of local and national government and to improve their own effectiveness and that of their governing body.

In determining and reviewing their constitution and terms of reference (see Appendix for example), governor associations need to be mindful that the over-riding goal of a governor association should be to improve the effectiveness of school governance and its impact on school improvement across the whole of their LA. This can best be achieved through partnership working with LA officers, Governors Cymru Services and others as appropriate.

Appendix

Typical Constitution and Terms of Reference for a Governors' Association or Forum

1. Title

The name of this group shall be the ***** School Governors Association, hereinafter called The Association

2. Objectives of The Association

- To promote best practice in governance in all schools within the ***** LA;
- To promote partnerships amongst schools in the County;
- To ensure adequate resources for schools by working with stakeholders; and
- To represent school governors' views on issues relating to school governance and the management and resourcing of schools to relevant authorities and organisations.

3. Activities

In furtherance of its objectives, The Association shall:

- As a minimum, hold a termly meeting;
- Hold an annual conference and occasional seminars;
- Liaise with Officers of the LA on all matters concerning the objectives of The Association and those issues affecting school governance;
- Appoint members to liaise with other organisations, e.g. represent The Association at conferences, School Forum etc;
- Promote and encourage governor training organised by the LA and others;
- Liaise with the Welsh Government on matters affecting school governance;
- Encourage representation on The Association from all school governing bodies in the Authority;
- Communicate with all governors and governing bodies in the LA on matters affecting school governance, e.g. through meetings, seminars and conferences;
- Network with other Governor Associations/Fora to share good practice;
- Co-opt members from time to time, as deemed necessary by the members, for The Association to fulfil its role effectively;
- Invite speakers from the LA and elsewhere to inform the members of issues relevant to school governance and encourage communication on these issues; and
- Carry out any other activities consistent with the objectives.

4. Membership

The membership of The Association shall comprise a nominated member of every school governing body from all maintained and nursery, community, foundation, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and community special schools within the LA. Governors will be members of The Association so long as they hold office with their school and are nominated by their governing body to represent them.

5. Officers

At the first meeting in each new academic year, the office of chair and vice-chair. The term of office shall be one year. Re-election of officers to extend their term of office will be at the discretion of members of The Association. The LA will provide secretarial and administrative assistance until such time as The Association wishes to change that arrangement.

6. Quorum for meeting

The quorum of attendance at Association meetings shall be xxx

7. The Annual Election of Officers

An annual election shall be held in the first half of the autumn term to determine who will hold office for that academic year.

- a) A nomination form will be sent to every chair of governors and clerk to governing bodies and a closing date will be given for receipt of nominations. A written report on the activities of The Association during the preceding year will be circulated with the nomination documents.
- b) Every member will be entitled to nominate themselves or put forward their nominee so long as that nomination is supported/seconded by another governor.
- c) The LA will publish the nominee's names, along with pen portraits (no more than 100 words), the office they have been nominated for and a closing date by which postal votes need to have been received by the designated LA Officer. Every member will be entitled to submit one ballot paper.
- d) The names of those elected, and the school they represent, will be published by the designated LA Officer two weeks in advance of the first association meeting for the academic year.

Alternative process

- a) As above
- b) As above
- c) Members in attendance at the first meeting will cast their vote and members subsequently elected will take office for the prescribed period.
- d) The designated LA Officer shall circulate the names of elected officers and the schools they represent, to all governing bodies in the LA.

8. Special General Meetings

A Special General Meeting may be called at the discretion of the elected officers to consider any issue related to the objectives of The Association.

- a) A minimum of three members of The Association must be in agreement that a meeting is required.
- b) A minimum of twenty-one days' notice must be given to all members.
- c) All members are entitled to attend.
- d) The chair shall preside over the special meeting. In her/his absence, the vice-chair will preside and, in the event that both are absent, the members will determine who will chair the meeting.
- e) Voting on issues during the meeting will be decided by a show of hands. In the case of equality of votes, the chair shall have the casting vote. No vote shall be cast by proxy.
- f) The chair's direction on any question of procedure or any point of order shall be final.

9. Alterations to the Constitution or Terms of Reference

Alterations to the Constitution or Terms of Reference may only be made after consultation with all the governing bodies of schools that fall within the responsibility of the LA. Governing bodies shall normally be given six school weeks to respond to any consultation exercise.

The Roles for Officers

Role of the Chair

- To ensure adherence to the Constitution and Terms of Reference for The Association agreed by the members;
- To liaise with LA Officers and approve the agenda for each meeting;
- To ensure that meetings are conducted efficiently and effectively;
- To maintain contact with LA Officers and The Association Officers between meetings to ensure issues affecting school governance are considered by The Association in a timely way;
- To act as a spokesperson, when required, on behalf of The Association;
- To ensure that relevant documents and information impacting on the effectiveness of The Association are shared with the members in good time; and
- To work with other members of The Association and LA Officers to ensure continuity and effectiveness of The Association.

Role of the Vice-Chair

- To support the chair in facilitating meetings;
- To help the chair in any follow-up actions agreed in meetings;
- To consult with the chair and LA Officers on any matters that impact on the effectiveness of The Association;
- To manage meetings efficiently in the absence of the chair; and
- In the absence of the chair, to authorise and co-sign cheques (where The Association manages its own finances).

Role of the Secretary

- To assist the chair or, in the chair's absence, the vice-chair in managing the timely preparation and distribution of documentation and information relevant to association meetings; and
- To accurately record the minutes of meetings and ensure they are distributed to attendees of meetings in a timely way.

Role of the Treasurer (where The Association manages its own finances)

- To efficiently and effectively manage any monies owed by or owed to other parties;
- To issue cheques on behalf of The Association, co-signed by the chair or vice-chair of The Association; and
- To produce a financial report for each meeting of The Association noting any outgoings or incomings of monies to or from The Association over the course of the year and the balance of monies owned or owed by The Association.

References

Wales

Governors Associations: Bridgend, Cardiff, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Monmouthshire, Newport, Neath Port Talbot, Torfaen.

England

Governor Associations: Buckinghamshire, Croydon, Gloucester, Hartlepool, Kent, Lancashire, Medway, Sheffield, Staffordshire.