



A Review of School Governance

**by a working group of the
Children, Young People and Learning
Overview and Scrutiny Panel**



June 2013

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All the chairs of governors, governors, headteachers and clerks to governing bodies of Bracknell Forest schools who completed review questionnaires, met the Working Group to express their views or assisted with the review process.

The following officers from Bracknell Forest Council:

Janette Karklins	Director of Children, Young People and Learning
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Andrea Carr	Policy Officer (Overview and Scrutiny)

All those who have participated in the review have been thanked for their contribution and all schools have received copies of this report.

1. Foreword

- 1.1 The vision for education in Bracknell Forest is for all schools to be “good” schools, in a wider meaning than is used in an Ofsted inspection.
- 1.2 Bracknell Forest has 38 schools and each has its own governing body, representing a huge number of very dedicated volunteers drawn from parents, staff, business and the wider community.
- 1.3 Since 1988, school governing bodies have had increased responsibilities, with a more important role as schools have gained increasing autonomy. They are responsible for the strategic direction of their school, for safeguarding, curriculum, achievement, leadership appointments and financial health. It is an extremely responsible role ensuring children and young people receive the best education possible to enable them to achieve their full potential and aspirations.
- 1.4 The Ofsted inspection framework now places greater emphasis on school governance and the role of the school governors. The Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel therefore agreed that a working group should review school governance in Bracknell Forest.
- 1.5 Members of the group attended and joined in the discussion groups at three different meetings. These discussions provided excellent feedback. Three different questionnaires were issued and responses analysed, our aim being to highlight and share good practice. We reviewed the support provided by Bracknell Forest Governors’ Services.
- 1.6 Taking part in this review was a very enjoyable experience for all members of the working group and has led to a number of recommendations.
- 1.7 This has been a very positive piece of work both for governance and for the local authority. Governors value the support of the local authority and the strong services provided by its Governor Service Team. Bracknell Forest values the input of governors and their views on how to become even more effective.
- 1.8 There are many people to thank but the most important group is the governors themselves for giving us your time and sharing your experiences. We hope we have repaid your participation and enthusiasm by highlighting the importance of your role.
- 1.9 I would like to thank all fellow members of the group for their support and Andrea Carr for providing officer support, attending all meetings both internal and external, and drafting this very full report.
- 1.10 I commend the findings and recommendations to the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning, Councillor Dr. Gareth Barnard.

Councillor Mrs Mary Temperton
(Lead Working Group Member)

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The new inspection framework of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) places greater emphasis on the role of school governors and governance arrangements in schools. Following some concerns regarding school governance arrangements in Bracknell Forest schools raised by Ofsted inspection reports, the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel established this Working Group in autumn 2012 to review school governance in the Borough's schools with a view to identifying areas for improvement and disseminating good practice.
- 2.2 During the course of the review the Working Group gathered information and evidence from many sources in order to evaluate the effectiveness of governance in local schools and identify good practice which could be shared to secure improvements. These sources included Council officers who provided background information and knowledge, and school governors of all types together with headteachers who met the Working Group and completed questionnaires to explain their governance practices and comment on any related issues. The Working Group also attended meetings of the Link Governors Forum and annual Governors Conference to gather information and views. Members had regard to relevant documents including extracts from Ofsted inspection reports concerning local school governance, the statutory guidance on the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012, an Ofsted report relating to good governance practice and minutes of meetings of governing bodies.
- 2.3 This report describes the work of the Working Group between September 2012 and June 2013 and sets out its findings. The report is organised in the following sections and Members hope that it will be well received and look forward to receiving responses to their recommendations.
- Part 3 Gives background information in respect of school governance and summarises how the review was undertaken.
- Part 4 Summarises the information and evidence gathered by the Working Group.
- Part 5 Contains the conclusions reached following the review.
- Part 6 Sets out the Working Group's recommendations to the Council's Executive and to the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
- 2.4 The Working Group comprised:
- Councillor Mrs Temperton (Lead Member)
Councillor Mrs Birch
Councillor Ms Hayes
Councillor Mrs McCracken
Mrs Cauchi (former Parent Governor Representative member of the Panel)
Mr Jackson (Kerith Centre and former Parent Governor)

3. Background

- 3.1 There are in excess of 300,000 school governors across England making them the largest group of unpaid volunteers nationally. Governors are responsible for the conduct of maintained schools in England and they control over £80 billion of public money. Since 1988 school governing bodies have assumed greater responsibilities and their role has become more important as schools have gained increasing autonomy. The governing body complements and enhances school leadership by providing support and constructive challenge, agreeing and monitoring school budgets, ensuring that all statutory duties are met, appointing the headteacher and holding him/her to account for the impact of the school's work on improving outcomes for all pupils. It is an extremely responsible role seeking to ensure that children and young people receive the best education possible.
- 3.2 There is evidence to show that there are links between the effectiveness of the governing body, school improvement and pupil performance. The effectiveness of governing bodies is judged by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's (HMCI's) Annual Report for 2009/10 identified that:
- 'Governors are most effective when they are fully involved in the school's self-evaluation and use the knowledge gained to challenge the school, understand its strengths and weaknesses and contribute to shaping its strategic direction. In contrast, weak governance is likely to fail to ensure statutory requirements are met, for example those related to safeguarding. In addition, where governance is weak the involvement of governors in monitoring the quality of provision is not well enough defined or sufficiently rigorous and challenging.'
- 3.3 The work of governing bodies is largely hidden from public view as it takes place within schools and one aim of this review has been to promote the role and raise the profile of governors to ensure that they receive the recognition that they deserve and to facilitate recruitment of suitable candidates. This is needed to fill the local 10% governor vacancies and to improve schools by strengthening leadership, accountability and capacity for innovation.
- 3.4 Last year Lord Hill, Under-Secretary of State for Schools, stated: *"It is absolutely clear to me that the most important decision-making group in any school is the governing body. We need to ensure that governing bodies have the best possible people, representing a range of different groups and with the right mix of skills."*¹
- 3.5 Also, public pronouncements from the Secretary of State for Education and HMCI have similarly highlighted the crucial importance of appropriately skilled governing bodies to school improvement and the very real dangers of anything less.
- 3.6 Recognising the importance of effective governance in the Borough's schools, which is highlighted by the new Ofsted inspection framework placing greater emphasis on school governance and the role of school governors, the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel appointed this Working Group to undertake a review of school governance, particularly in the

¹ As reported by School Governor One-Stop Shop

light of some criticism of governance in local schools in Ofsted inspection reports.

- 3.7 The key objectives and scope of the review, matters excluded from the scope, key documents, background data, areas of research and specific review questions were agreed at the outset by the Working Group, and are set out in the scoping document attached at Appendix 1.



A Governors' Meeting at Great Hollands Primary School

4. Investigation, Information Gathering and Analysis

Introductory Briefing and Discussion

- 4.1 At its first meeting the Working Group considered the scope of the review in the light of a discussion concerning school governance with the Director of Children, Young People and Learning and the Senior Adviser (Secondary).
- 4.2 The Director advised that a new Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection framework operational from September 2012 placed a greater emphasis on the role of school governors and governance and required schools to evidence their work in this area. The Working Group welcomed this approach as it felt that governing bodies should have a greater involvement in the running of schools and that they needed to demonstrate that they were knowledgeable and capable of challenging and probing performance with sufficient rigour.
- 4.3 As school governors represented the largest voluntary group in the country consisting of approximately 300,000 in number it was unsurprising that difficulties in recruitment to vacancies occurred. The Council assisted with recruitment and provided case studies. The national governor vacancy rate varied between 12% - 15% and at the time of the meeting the local rate was 10% as some governors had retired over the summer and replacements were yet to be recruited. The Bracknell Forest rate subsequently reduced to 9%. Agenda papers for the Education Governor Appointments Committee informed where vacancies lay. Governor exit interviews did not currently take place and the Working Group felt that there would be some merit in recommending the introduction of such interviews in the future.
- 4.4 Parent governors were felt to possess unique knowledge of experiences for pupils and parents and the merits of transferring them to a different category of governor when their children graduated from the school was highlighted. As some governors, particularly parents, were motivated to take on the role in order to tackle a particular issue their child had with the school and did not adopt a school-wide view of governance, the importance of a thorough induction and pre-induction discussion with the headteacher to prevent a narrow view was emphasised. Any parent was at liberty to apply to fill a parent governor vacancy and, in the absence of other nominations, would assume the role without an election. The preparation of a leaflet to explain the role of governors and their responsibilities would be helpful. As 7 new schools were due to be built in the Borough in the future, governance preparation measures were welcomed and would set a standard for self-governing academies.
- 4.5 The majority of Members of the Working Group had been or remained governors and one expressed the view that in their experience the secondary school in question did not actively recruit or encourage parents to become governors at Year 7 and remain as their children progressed through the school. However, governing body meetings were well attended and all governors were actively involved in the running of the school.
- 4.6 Although safeguarding practices had previously involved monitoring playground activity and behaviour, there was now a greater awareness of safeguarding and it was a central theme to all school activities and policies. Some governing bodies made an individual governor responsible for safeguarding and working with a dedicated member of school staff. Whilst schools were previously judged

against the policies and procedures they had in place, there had been a recent shift by Ofsted towards judging the application of them in practice and following a child's journey through the school to ascertain how they were affected. A reminder to draw attention to the importance of safeguarding was due to be circulated to schools shortly after the meeting.

- 4.7 One local primary school had been placed in special measures following its last Ofsted inspection in December 2011 when the inspector had referred to an acting chair of governors. The school had concentrated on improving governance arrangements and safeguarding in preparation for re-inspection. The most recent re-inspection in 2013 was positive and had found that:

"The governing body organises its work more effectively to ensure that the school's leaders are held to account through regular and close checking on the school's progress. They are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and areas of development and have high ambitions for the improvement of the school."

- 4.8 A paper explaining the structure and work of the Governor Services Team was circulated. The Team was managed by the Senior Adviser, Secondary and comprised 1.7 full time equivalent (FTE) officers and 0.7 FTE administrative assistant who worked well together with schools and clerks to governing bodies in a supportive manner. The Team worked to a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and enjoyed 100% buy back of services by the local authority's schools. A separate but similar SLA was in place with the one academy in Bracknell Forest. Membership of the National Governors' Association (NGA) was included as part of the SLA. The current Governor Services Team had been in place for a number of years and prided itself on its close working relationship with the schools in the Borough. There was regular contact with governing bodies by e-mail and telephone, particularly with regard to advice, guidance and queries. Termly meetings/briefings to discuss issues and to disseminate messages and new duties and responsibilities etc. were held for:

- Chairs of governors with the Director of Children, Young People and Learning and the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning
- Clerks to governing bodies
- Link governors

- 4.9 An annual Governors' Conference was held in January which regularly attracted 100 delegates representing the great majority of schools in the Borough. The aim each year was to present a keynote speaker of national standing and workshop sessions which reflected significant issues facing governing bodies.

- 4.10 The Governor Services Team also sought to support school governors and enhance their capacity to challenge schools appropriately through the provision of an extensive training and development programme. This typically offered a choice of 10 - 12 courses per term and also access to the Governor E-Learning (Gel) programme. Governors were able to request additional training events for example in relation to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Courses were led by a combination of Bracknell Forest staff and external trainers with extensive experience of supporting governing bodies. Course attendance was good and the sessions invariably received a high level of very positive feedback.

- 4.11 Induction training for new governors was provided each term. A key aspect of the training programme in the past year had been the introduction of a self-evaluation toolkit which enabled governors to evidence their work and included a portfolio which enhanced the opportunity to demonstrate effectiveness. It was hoped that governing bodies would use the toolkit to critically appraise themselves and all had received initial training in this regard, with two or three representatives from each governing body attending. Subsequent sessions had focused on each of the four sections of the toolkit:
- Strategic leadership
 - Monitoring and accountability
 - Support and challenge
 - School improvement and effective governance
- 4.12 A Member advised that as the toolkit was detailed and lengthy, the school at which she taught was working through it in stages and found that it broadened teachers' and governors' thinking. Another school had appointed a working group of three governors to undertake the self-evaluation. When inspecting schools, Ofsted looked favourably on those using the toolkit.
- 4.13 An Introduction to Human Resources has been supported by specific sessions on Performance Management and Recruiting Safely and Fairly. Link governors were consulted on key elements for inclusion in the programme, which during the current year had also included:
- Safeguarding for Governors and The Common Assessment Framework
 - E-Safety and Cyberbullying
 - Exclusions Impact and Procedures
 - Monitoring and Evaluation
 - Changes to the Ofsted Framework and What is expected of Governors?
 - What sort of Governor am I ... and how does this impact on effective governance?
 - Being An Effective Clerk and Minute Taking
- 4.14 The local authority had also been pleased to support the Development Programme for chairs and aspiring chairs provided by the National College of School Leadership.
- 4.15 The difficulty in assessing the outcomes of the training and toolkit was an issue. Feedback in respect of the training via an evaluation form indicated that governors were very satisfied with the support provided by the Governor Services Team. The Team had been audited and the resulting report was favourable finding that it delivered all that it intended to although there was some scope to adopt a different approach to seek improvement.
- 4.16 There was a concern that schools may not take advantage of the opportunities to share resources and skills owing to an unawareness of the support on offer which could possibly lead to isolation. A review of the SLA in 2013 could address these issues.
- 4.17 Minutes of governing body meetings were gathered by the Team to ascertain attendance levels and the Working Group was provided with copies to gauge attendance and quality of debate. The merits of meeting governors to explore what did or did not motivate them was recognised.

- 4.18 A paper which provided feedback in respect of the Link Governor Forum meeting held on 3 July 2012 was tabled. This indicated what successfully contributed to good governance at schools and what would make governance more effective. Most schools had a link governor and the Forum, which met in different schools to enable link governors to explore other schools for comparative purposes, was valued and normally attended by at least twenty governors. As the Forum represented all schools, a Working Group meeting with link governors as part of a Forum meeting was planned as a beneficial exercise that would be more effective than visiting a selection of schools to meet them. Questions to link governors would be prepared in advance.
- 4.19 The crucial role of chair of governors was highlighted and some were thought to be more effective than others. Some chairs had been in place for very many years possibly leading to a stale and outdated approach. Although the law provided for chairs to be elected for between 1 and 4 years, many were repeatedly re-elected annually by their governing body, possibly in a customary fashion,. Dislodging underperforming chairs or governors was a sensitive issue and providing support and encouragement to enhance governing body effectiveness and discourage under performance was promoted. Although limiting the term of office of chairs was one possibility to boost fresh thinking, there was no legal basis to support this and arrangements would need to be agreed with governing bodies. Succession was considered to be an issue and increased involvement of deputy chairs and mentoring could assist in this area. There was a wish to improve the effectiveness of governing bodies and expand their knowledge and skills base. As the re-structuring of the governing body of a previously failing school had strengthened it greatly, it was suggested that governing body structures and meeting arrangements should be examined to identify any link between structure and success. It was felt that the dynamic between different types of governors could possibly influence the effectiveness of governing bodies.
- 4.20 Subsequent to the meeting, the Working Group agreed the review scoping document (Appendix 1) in the light of the discussion with the Director and the Senior Adviser.
- 4.21 With regard to Key Objective 5 of the scoping document concerning Ofsted comments in respect of governance, the Senior Adviser reported that some Bracknell Forest schools, including the primary school that had been placed in special measures, had now been inspected under the new framework and that the inspections had included some matters that were not part of the framework. This sought evidence of the work of governing bodies and its impact in particular. Inspectors were impressed where self-evaluation by governing bodies had taken place. As there was no longer a 'satisfactory' grade in Ofsted inspections, the importance of attaining 'good' or 'excellent' ratings was highlighted and the extracts of Ofsted inspections provided examples of best practice to achieve these in governance. One Member advised of an inspection experience where the school being inspected had been requested to identify weaknesses, but not strengths, when inspected by Ofsted. Another Member gave an example of a school compiling a file of relevant information including minute extracts to evidence work of governors.

New Legislation Concerning School Governing Bodies

- 4.22 At a subsequent meeting a Governor Services Officer advised the Working Group of the effect of new legislation concerning the constitution of governing

bodies further to Key Objective 7 of the review. Copies of the statutory guidance on the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 were circulated at the meeting for the Working Group's information. The guidance was considered to be informative advice for chairs of governors. Members noted that although the legislation featured minimal requirements in terms of the number of governors on a governing body and removed the maximum number obligation and reduced the minimum number for small and rural schools, its main aim was to make governing bodies more effective by concentrating on the relevant skill sets of governors which differed from the existing stakeholder model. Required skills should be identified by a skills audit of existing governors. However, reducing the size of governing bodies did not necessarily improve their effectiveness as a certain number of governors were required to cover obligations such as sourcing an independent governor without an interest to serve on a disciplinary committee.

- 4.23 Remaining stakeholder requirements consisted of a minimum of 7 governors including at least 2 elected parent governors. Elections were thought to dissuade some potential governors from standing for nomination. In the event of insufficient nominations for parent governors, governing bodies were able to appoint governors of their choice with relevant expertise, provided they met the qualifying criteria set out in regulations. Associate members could be appointed to serve on one or more committees and attend full governing body meetings to bring expertise and experience but with limited voting powers. There was a requirement for 1 elected staff governor in addition to the ex-officio headteacher governor and it was possible to appoint a further staff member as a co-opted governor. In the event that a headteacher chose not to take up his/her ex-officio seat on the governing body it would remain vacant. Local authority governors would be limited to 1 per governing body and under the new constitution they were nominated by the local authority and appointed by the governing body if considered suitable ensuring that no one was imposed on the governing body. Regulations required that foundation governors outnumbered all other types of governor by 2 and there was now no stipulation that they needed to be parents. There were no changes in the case of governing bodies of voluntary aided/controlled schools where there was a requirement for at least 2 foundation governors representing no more than a quarter of all governors. A new model governing body would consist of:

1 staff member

2 parent governors

1 local authority governor

1 headteacher governor

Co-opted governors replaced the former category of community governors.

Governing bodies may have any number of co-opted governors although the number would need to be specified in the constitution.

Plus foundation governors in church schools.

- 4.24 Schools would need to reconstitute their governing body in order to implement the new regulations. To date, 2 schools had indicated their intention to do this and several others, including a secondary school, had expressed an interest in doing so. The decision whether to reconstitute was one for individual governing bodies and if they were operating effectively it was not necessary for them to do so and they could continue to operate under the existing legislation and regulations. However, it was felt that all schools should consider reconstitution as it should facilitate developing the skills sets of governing bodies and filling any gaps. It would also offer the opportunity to refresh governing bodies and it

was possible that there would not be a role for all existing governors following reconstitution. Providing support under two systems would complicate matters for the Governor Services Team.

- 4.25 The merits of having a governing body federation with specialist skills to work with several schools in addition to their own individual dedicated governing bodies was highlighted. There were regulations to govern federations and, although there were presently none in Bracknell Forest, they existed in Hampshire and Kent, the latter having 25 schools in one federation. However, some governing bodies in the Borough undertook some activities in a cluster. Although governors appreciated sharing expertise locally, all governing bodies were different and individual and therefore federations had not been sought in Bracknell Forest to date. The Council encouraged governing bodies to work together as it was felt that there was much to be gained from it.

Skills Audit of Governors

- 4.26 The Working Group discussed with officers the best approach for governing bodies to undertake a skills audit of governors to reflect their strengths and development requirements as a means to improve effectiveness as part of the self-evaluation process. The Council did not hold skills audit information. A Bracknell Forest governor skills audit form had been developed to draw the attention of governing bodies to the importance of skills audits and to assist them with undertaking audits. The form was similar to that produced by the NGA and an example was circulated at the meeting for the Working Group's information. The form provided opportunities for individual governors to promote themselves and their skills and for governing bodies to look afresh at their membership and effectiveness. Although the form had been improved previously, the Working Group felt that it was not widely understood and could be made more 'user friendly' focusing on the skills required of governors by asking governors to set out their skills in place of the current tick box approach.
- 4.27 A skills audit provided an opportunity to upskill governing bodies as identification of skills gaps could inform targeted recruitment of governors, such as community governors who could bring the required business skills and knowledge, to fill the skills gaps. Some local businesses encouraged their employees to undertake community activities and seconding someone from the business sector onto a governing body was to be encouraged.

Meetings with the Link Governors Forum and with Parent Governors and Chairs of Governors

- 4.28 As the next stage of the review, the Working Group compiled questionnaires for link governors, parent governors and chairs of governors. As previously agreed, the Working Group attended the next meeting of the Link Governors Forum. Separate meetings were arranged with parent governors and chairs of governors for the same purpose of meeting them to gain their views on school governance and to obtain responses to the respective questionnaires. A further questionnaire to chairs of governors concerning the structure of governing bodies was subsequently compiled to evidence whether structures had any impact on the effectiveness of governing bodies. Summaries of the responses to the questionnaires compiled for the three types of governors and for information concerning governing body structures are attached at Appendices 2, 3, 4 and 5, respectively. The questionnaires were circulated in advance of the meetings and outcomes shared with all schools via this report.

- 4.29 The Link Governors Forum meeting commenced with a tour of the host school, Uplands Primary School at Sandhurst. The agenda included some standard items such as training and development to be provided in the spring 2013 term and local and national developments leading to a discussion item which would be broadened to include discussing governance with the Working Group. The latter discussion item was mirrored at the subsequent meetings with parent governors and chairs of governors. Feedback in respect of the discussion topic at the previous Forum meeting, concerning what contributed to good governance and what would make it more effective, was also given.

Training and Development

- 4.30 The Forum was advised that Uplands was designated as a Teaching School and was in an alliance with a group of other local schools to provide training. It would be possible for the group to link with other education authorities to increase capacity. The National College was providing training for chairs of governors and those who aspired to assume the role. The development programme, which facilitated self development, consisted of 3 whole days which could be spread over terms and participants received a certificate on completion of the course. The National College provided subsidies for the training of chairs and aspiring chairs with a full scholarship for participants from small schools where the pupil number was 100 or less, and a part scholarship for participants based in schools which were rated as satisfactory or required improvement. As training fees could be an issue for some schools, the Governor Services Team sought to subsidise costs also where possible. Experienced governors were leading training across Berkshire and a leaflet detailing a leadership development programme, which trained chairs to lead governors' meetings, had been circulated to clerks and chairs and was tabled at the meeting.
- 4.31 The draft governor training programme for the spring term was discussed. It was suggested that performance management training sessions should be held in the summer and early autumn to prepare governors for undertaking performance management in the autumn term. The introduction to education finance course had been moved to the summer term and it was noted that previous feedback in respect of this training, which had been delivered by the Council's relevant Group Accountant, indicated that it had been excellent. Outside trainers were also utilised. Safeguarding for governors training would be provided in February and it was acknowledged that all should attend this type of training. Some training in respect of managing sites and buildings, including health and safety, was sought. As there had been mixed feedback regarding the offsite school visits training and suggestions that a greater focus on governors' responsibilities was required, this course would be re-considered. Training in respect of the impact of the self-evaluation toolkit would be developed for the spring term and a request for committee chairing training was made.
- 4.32 It was noted that leadership would be the theme of the next annual Governors' Conference, which would take place on 26 January 2013 at Easthampstead Park Conference Centre. A key note speaker and workshops concerning the family focus initiative, becoming more acquainted with the school and improving teaching would feature.

Update on Local and National Developments

- 4.33 The Forum was advised that under its new inspection framework, Ofsted sought evidence of effective governance and there was a raised profile for governors. Some schools had now been inspected under the new framework and the compiling of an evidence portfolio to demonstrate good governance had been successful. Guidance to inspectors focused on particular lines of enquiry which challenged governance and held chairs of governors, teachers and management to account. Delivery of the pupil premium and fulfilling of statutory duties including safeguarding were also inspected. A link governor who was also an Ofsted inspector advised that schools should consult the inspection handbook on the Ofsted web site. Pages 42 and 43 related to shared leadership and management ambitions and gave descriptions of how these would be graded in an inspection. Governors were advised to ask themselves how Ofsted would question them as a governor in respect of these issues. It was suggested that those governors who had undertaken training could feedback points of learning. The Governor Services Team would consider circulating a questionnaire or similar via clerks to obtain and share relevant information. As clerks would become involved in the self-evaluation process the merits of training them at a later date was highlighted.

Discussion on Effective Governance

- 4.34 The Senior Adviser introduced the discussion concerning the review of effective governance and explained the role of Overview and Scrutiny in local government. The Lead Working Group Member explained the scope of the review and its aims and purpose. It was acknowledged that governors were volunteers and they were thanked for the time and effort they contributed to the role.

Discussions with Link, Parent and Chairs of Governors

- 4.35 All governors attending the 3 respective meetings with the Working Group to discuss effective governance were thanked for their attendance and for responding to the relevant questionnaire. Having received an explanation of the purpose of Overview and Scrutiny in local government, the aims of the Working Group's review and its possible impact on the Governor Services Team, governors were invited to offer views relating to the following in particular: length of tenure and effectiveness of chairs of governors; induction of new governors; the merits of a cabinet of specialist governors to share expertise; the self-evaluation toolkit and evidencing effective governance; local authority support; the merits of encouraging experienced parent governors to remain on governing bodies after their children have graduated from the school; and visits by governors to other schools.
- 4.36 The meetings with governors were well attended and representative of numerous primary and all five local authority secondary schools in the Borough. At each meeting the governors split into small discussion groups facilitated by Working Group members and officers as an effective format to complete the relevant questionnaire and to discuss related matters. Answers and views expressed in response to the questionnaires included the following:

Chairs of Governors and Effectiveness

- a) As some chairs had been in place for many years, succession planning with a limited term of office was welcomed to overcome any staleness and bring fresh ideas and innovation whilst freeing chairs of long terms of office.
- b) Former chairs of governors could assist new chairs by supporting them.
- c) In terms of the effectiveness of chairs and governors, the following factors were identified:
 - Availability of time to attend governors' meetings and school events. This was a particular issue for people in full time employment.
 - An accumulation of experience and knowledge.
 - A six year tenure limit for chairs of governors in the interests of efficiency. Many chairs had been fulfilling the role for considerably more years.
 - The ability of parent governors to distinguish between the roles of governor and parent when required. Chairs of governors could assist to ensure impartiality. This became less of an issue for those who remained governors after their children had graduated from the school as their focus changed and became more objective.
 - Although recruiting governors to fill skills gaps on governing bodies was desirable, the difficulties in recruiting to vacancies often precluded this and governing bodies were grateful for any interest in the role and the skills and experience brought. It was possible to co-opt governors with particular skills to fill gaps such as financial knowledge. Some governing bodies had approached local companies in this regard but had received a limited response.

School Visits

- d) Visiting other schools and governing bodies by invitation would facilitate sharing of knowledge and expertise.
- e) Governors felt that it was courteous to notify headteachers of their intention to visit the school and found that primary schools were more accessible than secondary schools. Links between teachers and governors existed at some schools and consisted of reporting and discussing progress in specific areas although it was felt that the information should be shared with all governors.

Communication and Data

- f) The governors' section of school websites, governors' newsletters, holding open meetings and visiting the school all contributed to beneficial communication.
- g) Having all information on a similar level and in the same format to facilitate comparison was identified as means to increase governing body effectiveness. A governor commented that data should be in a format of governing bodies' choice as the form of that presented to governing bodies frequently changed hampering interpretation, understanding and the ability to challenge performance. Some governors wished to

challenge the effectiveness of their governing body in addition to that of the school.

- h) Few governing bodies had formal systems in place to communicate and interact with parents.

Governing Body Federation

- i) Advantages and disadvantages associated with the concept of governing body federation of specialist and expert governors from outstanding rated schools advising several schools were identified. There was limited support for such a facility as each school was individual with its own culture and it was doubtful whether governors of this calibre with the necessary time commitment and familiarity with many schools could be recruited without the provision of payment.

Serving on Multiple Governing Bodies

- j) The majority of governors served on one governing body only although they acknowledged that once the necessary skills had been acquired, additional governing body membership would merely be a matter of contributing additional hours. However, time constraints and an interest focusing on the school(s) attended by their child(ren) were factors for parent governors.
- k) There was increasing pressure on governors and they held more responsibility than in the past.

Parent Governors

- l) Most parent governors had become aware of the vacancy they filled via word of mouth or contact with the school.
- m) Competition for election as a parent governor varied considerably from 1 applicant in some instances to 6-7 applicants in others. Unusually, there had been no applicants for the most recent vacancy at a Bracknell Forest secondary school. In the event that there were more applicants than positions vacant, parent governors would be elected by other parents and not the governing body.
- n) Learning about the school and the education system with a view to securing improvement and gaining some inside influence were the main aspects that interested parents in becoming governors.
- o) In terms of expectation of the role of parent governor, a governor reported a lack of awareness of the requirements of the role when applying for it and a subsequent realisation that it was more taxing and time consuming than anticipated. Parent governors were generally of the view that there was a 2 year learning curve before they were fully comfortable in their role and felt equipped to contribute and challenge performance.
- p) One new parent governor had been given a contact but little induction material and felt the need to seek information and establish a 'buddy' system. Some schools represented at the meeting had 'buddy' models in

place and a 'buddy' or mentoring system was identified as the most effective and rapid method of inducting new parent governors, particularly when the 'buddy' or mentor was another parent governor relatively new to the governing body and appreciative of fresh ideas and approaches. As there was no standard induction material circulated to new governors and the information provided by individual governing bodies varied significantly, it was suggested that standard material advising on good practice should be made available. Induction training should be expanded to include negative aspects and challenges to improve governors' preparedness for the role and minimise early resignations. The importance of early induction training was highlighted to speed governors' ability to carry out their role. Repeated training to reinforce knowledge and understanding was also suggested.

- q) Parent governors indicated their intention to fulfil their four year term as a governor, having invested two years in becoming familiar with the role they wished to employ their knowledge and experience. However, many were undecided whether to re-apply for a further term, particularly if their child(ren) had graduated from the school. Encouraging them to remain on governing bodies in a different governor role after their children had moved on would be beneficial as expertise and experience would be retained.
- r) Championing the voice of parents and promoting the teacher, parent and child triangular relationship were considered to be importance roles for parent governors. Role issues were identified and reference was made to the 'What Hat are you Wearing?' training for parent governors which explored potential conflicts of interest being both a governor and a parent and how to deal with them. Some parent governors felt that they were often treated as parents and not as governors and advised that difficulties arose where they wished to tackle teaching issues and weaknesses involving their own child. However, when other parent governors were experiencing the same problem it ceased to be a personal issue.
- s) The timing of governor meetings was an issue for some parent governors owing to childcare responsibilities.
- t) Some governors experienced difficulties relating to their fellow governors, some of whom were retired headteachers or teachers, owing to different backgrounds, age and depth of knowledge. As it was thought that teachers could be unaware of the role and purpose of governors, it was suggested that governors should increase their visibility and involvement by attending school events to raise their profile with teachers and parents, possibly wearing identification badges. This was particularly the case at secondary schools where parent governors were less likely to transport their children to school. Early receipt of school calendars of events would assist. Some schools displayed photographs of governors and this was welcomed.
- u) Although one secondary school gave parent governors a membership choice between two committees, they were not permitted to be members of the exclusion panel. As governors' duties were broad, it was felt that they should select their area of particular interest, undertake relevant training and develop some related expertise. At one school a governor oversaw training to ensure that governors received the training relevant to

their committee membership. Committees fed back progress to the full governing body. Governors were seldom aware of the training undertaken by their colleagues or in receipt of feedback. Although e-learning had been found a lengthy and difficult process, it was an option in the absence of the timely availability of other forms of desired training. A skills audit had been undertaken at some schools.

- v) Some schools formed part of clusters with other nearby schools for teachers but there was no similar provision for governors. As parent governors did not have any specific means of networking or interaction, they sought the establishment of a parent governors' forum with termly meetings to share issues, provide mutual support and prevent isolation.
- w) As some parent governors had advised that it had taken up to two years to become fully conversant and confident as a governor, early attendance at an induction course, which were run at least once per term, was considered to be beneficial. It was acknowledged that chairs of governors should seek to identify methods of improving integration of new governors to facilitate their early involvement and contribution and to maintain their initial interest and enthusiasm. Language and jargon could be a barrier. Informal governing body induction processes were pursued by many schools and enabled new governors to attend meetings to decide which committee they could best contribute to. New governors at one school commenced with an informal meeting with the chairs of governors, when their role and commitments were explained to them, followed by a tour of the school and attending all committees as an observer during the first term to decide where their interests lay. Newsletters and school induction material was provided in addition to the local authority induction pack. The adoption of an open door policy by chairs of governors was considered beneficial. As Kennel Lane Special School differed from mainstream schools, it required more specialist training than the generic local authority training provided.
- x) An introductory session provided at the Governors' Conference was praised and it was suggested that it be repeated throughout the year as a form of pre-induction. The take away pack was also appreciated. Details of the itinerary of Governors' Conferences were included in the Bracknell Forest governors' newsletter. Repeating and dissemination of training was welcomed and governors were advised that the Link Governors Forum was intended to be the vehicle to share good practice and training.

Reconstituting Governing Bodies

- y) There was limited support for re-constituting and streamlining governing bodies as governors, particularly those who were members of smaller governing bodies, were already overburdened and a reduction in their number would exacerbate this. Many governing bodies experienced difficulty in recruiting governors to fill vacancies and one school had recently achieved full membership of its governing body for the first time in many years.

Governor Services Team / Training

- z) Governors felt that Bracknell Forest Council was very supportive and the Governor Services Team should be continued and made use of by all

governing bodies as the training it provided was effective and appreciated. A more focused service involving visits to individual schools as in the past was sought as this was thought to have greater effect than individual governor membership of the NGA. However, only two schools had sought individual support and advice visits recently and another school had received support from current and retired Council officers in specific areas.

- aa) Although the local authority provided beneficial training and other support and information, re-structuring of the Council in recent years had led to a department previously dedicated to education being split and becoming multi-functional resulting in fewer education officers being available to advise governing bodies. It was therefore sometimes necessary for schools to consult external advisers which incurred costs.
- bb) Further training, mentoring and support were identified as areas to strengthen governing bodies.
- cc) Training in respect of chairing meetings and the procedures for performing the discipline committee role were identified as benefits. Governors were generally not in favour of permanently excluding pupils unless absolutely necessary.
- dd) Networking opportunities and feedback at the conclusion of training sessions were welcomed by governors, particularly as individual schools could feel isolated.
- ee) Every governor would become a member of the NGA and be eligible to receive its newsletters in the future.

Self Evaluation Toolkit

- ff) With regard to the self-evaluation toolkit, one governing body had found it too cumbersome and had discontinued its use whilst another had observed that not all governors, particularly those not closely involved in its implementation, were supportive of it. A further governing body had approached the toolkit by addressing a module at a time and had identified some positive deliverable actions. Evidence of the outcomes of the actions had been recorded in the absence of a tick list. Three governors at one school had been trained in respect of using the toolkit during its first year of operation and when this was rolled out to more governors during the second year there was greater acceptance of it and progress against all four modules had been measured and traffic light colour coded. The aspects coded red became the action plan. The chairs of governors had been discouraged from involvement in its use. Although some governing bodies had initially felt intimidated by the toolkit, they changed this view when they implemented it and enjoyed the challenge it presented, finding that it united them.

Teacher Appraisals

- gg) As Ofsted inspections now considered teaching quality, teacher appraisals took place. Although governors were not permitted access to appraisal documents, they were able to enquire as to the outcome.

Analysis of Questionnaire Responses and Meetings with Governors

4.37 The Working Group felt that the meetings with governors had progressed very well and had been a valuable source of feedback. In total, 105 questionnaire responses from all categories of governors were received. In considering the outcomes of the meetings and the responses to the governors' questionnaires, the Working Group recognised the following points which had emerged:

Parent Governors

- i) Parent governors had expressed a wish for a forum where they could network with other parent governors and share experiences and remedies to issues. At the last Link Governors Forum the possibility of holding an evening event during the year featuring a keynote speaker had been discussed. A similar event could be arranged for parent governors. Networking time at the conclusion of training events and forums to give parent governors the opportunity to reflect on learning points and how they may be applied by governing bodies was also sought. The Governor Services Team welcomed the opportunity this would provide to receive feedback from governors at the conclusion of training events and the Link Governors' Forum to measure their success and usefulness. Although a past attempt by the Bracknell Forest Governors' Association to establish networking opportunities had failed, possibly due to the lack of a facilitator, it was felt that a similar provision would be more welcome and appreciated at present owing to the increased demands on governors.
- ii) The 'Which Hat are you Wearing' training course for parent governors in respect of role conflict could be utilised as a networking opportunity or organising a follow up session with networking would be an alternative option.
- iii) In terms of parent governor election competition, nominees were deemed to be elected in the absence of other contenders as the role was advertised and election nomination papers circulated. Although governor advertising took place, it did not list specific vacancies and it was therefore suggested that the Governor Services Team should consider whether this was worthwhile expenditure. It was acknowledged that there were alternative methods of promoting the role of governor including stalls at fairs / events and summer activities.

Induction and Training

- iv) The questionnaire response that new governors did not feel sufficiently equipped or experienced to become fully involved until they had been in the role for two years indicated that governing bodies needed to consider how to speed induction and integration of new governors in order to secure their contribution and involvement as soon as possible. Use of 'buddies' / mentoring, individual school induction handbooks including the history and make up of the school and its aspirations, attending a meeting of all committees and web information advising on the basics of the role of governors had been identified by responders as being helpful. Provision of an information sheet to accompany nomination forms was suggested as a means to provide an early indication of the role, requirements and time commitment. Information concerning the latter was not available on

the Council's website. Shadowing another governor prior to committing to applying for the governor role was a further possibility. It was felt that the chairs and clerks of governors were key to successful induction and could put new governors at their ease, introduce them to others and provide information. Inclusion of a list of the most common acronyms in the Bracknell Forest handbook was suggested to assist understanding. As governors benefitted from contact with others, establishing a contact group would give the opportunity for new ones to ask questions and seek information from more experienced governors. Although Council induction sessions had previously consisted of two half day sessions, they now took place over the course of a full day and gave a networking opportunity at the lunch break when governors could exchange contact details as Bracknell Forest was not permitted to do this for confidentiality reasons.

- v) The majority of governors had praised training sessions and e-learning. The latter could be pursued by any governors waiting to attend scheduled training. Separate training in respect of monitoring had been requested. The spring term training programme would include summer sessions and the timing of performance management training.
- vi) All training should deliver key messages and feature a summary sheet of key points of learning for highlighting and discussion at the conclusion of the session and for cascading back to governing bodies.
- vii) Requests for additional governor training had included sessions in respect of use of the pupil premium, roles in the disciplinary committee and dealing with complaints from parents. The number and complexity of such complaints had risen and the Council was spending an increasing amount of time advising in this area. A further session in respect of the quality of teaching and learning had also been sought to enable governors to be clear that appropriate measures were in place to test the quality. Feedback from the first session had been positive and it would be repeated in the summer term. There was a cost attached to individual schools' training as it did not form part of the Service Level Agreement with the Council. It was suggested that training could be tailored to individual schools' level of success. Although a Chairs' Briefing was already in existence, it was brief and operated at a strategic level and perhaps needed to be more interactive to meet governors' needs. There was a requirement of local authorities to provide advice regarding supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and there was a concern for the Council at achieving this without incurring costs. There had been national development in the area of SEN.
- viii) 10 governors were enrolled to undertake the National College's development programme for chairs and aspiring chairs and it was suggested that they could be requested to attend meetings of other governing bodies to share the learning points.
- ix) Preference had been expressed for a whole day induction training session including a lunchtime networking opportunity in place of the previous two half day sessions. The training organised by the Council was generally considered to be very good by governors.

- x) Governors had given a clear message that they would appreciate a time window at the conclusion of training sessions to discuss the implications of what they had learned and how it may be applied by their governing bodies. A previously prepared summary sheet of learning to cascade to fellow governors to maximise learning opportunities was welcomed. It was agreed that this could form a recommendation resulting from the review together with networking opportunities as part of all training sessions and governors' forums. It was suggested that the summarising could include group discussion around delegates' three main learning points which could be captured and subsequently circulated by clerks.
- xi) Reference was made to the Sutton Report which sought to weigh the costs against the benefits and outcomes of training. Although Bracknell Forest training sought to deliver key messages, it was possible for the Council to fund one to one style training to assist individual schools with their particular concerns.
- xii) Many governors had made reference to the value of an acronym sheet and receiving chairs of governors' explanation of unfamiliar matters at governing body meetings.

Self-Evaluation Toolkit

- xiii) There was a view that the self-evaluation process was cumbersome hampering progress and should be pursued by more experienced people.
- xiv) The self-evaluation toolkit facilitated the keeping of records as a central inspection store to evidence effectiveness without reliance on the minutes of governing body meetings. The toolkit guided governing bodies and provided the necessary evidence that they had undertaken self-evaluation and implemented the outcomes. Although some governors had felt that the toolkit was a burden to follow, it was not necessary for them to follow it strictly and it could be adapted to meet individual schools and governing bodies. New governors could look at the toolkit and bring a fresh view as to whether it had been followed. The Governor Services Team welcomed governor feedback on use of the self-evaluation toolkit and saw this review work as the best feedback received on its implementation and would revisit it and consider the next stages to inform future training requirements to build on the initial and unit training already delivered. It was hoped that schools which had developed use of the toolkit would showcase their work to encourage and assist other schools which were at a less advanced stage.

Skills Audit

- xv) Although governing bodies were able to identify skills gaps, there was often limited or no opportunity to fill them owing to a lack of volunteers and they valued commitment, time availability and enthusiasm more highly, particularly as new governors could be trained and developed once recruited. Business professionals released from their place of work to lend their skills to governing bodies as part of their own professional development could be of benefit. Also, governing bodies could appoint governors or associate members with required specialist skills.

Ofsted

- xvi) The Ofsted inspection framework indicated that governance should be reviewed at schools which were graded as satisfactory Level 3. Consultation was taking place in respect of renewing the framework. A new aspect featured local authorities being inspected in the event that there were several schools with poor inspection outcomes in their area to evaluate and challenge support provided to schools and governors and to identify any issues. As only 2 days notice of Ofsted inspections was given, opportunities to make pre-inspection preparations were limited. However, a general programme of pre-Ofsted visits made to schools by trainers who would ask challenging questions similar to those asked by Ofsted to assist schools prepare for inspections was favoured and could form a recommendation of the report. The programme should prioritise schools in most need of improvement. The preparation sessions could vary to reflect the type and size of school in receipt, include a tick list of actions to evidence effective governance to Ofsted inspectors, and feature a workshop with governors to raise their awareness of their role and inspection requirements, provide learning points and act as a self-evaluation tool. Some head teachers in Bracknell Forest were Ofsted inspectors and could assist in this area. Although such support was not included in the SLA with the Council, it could be provided as a bought in service or offered free of cost to schools at risk.
- xvii) It would be beneficial for governors to visit schools whose governing bodies received outstanding Ofsted inspection ratings in order to discover their good practice and emulate it. However, it was acknowledged that arranging learning visits to other schools for a group of governors was problematic to achieve.
- xviii) In order to counteract any Ofsted criticism relating to skills audits, governing bodies would be able to demonstrate that they had committed and enthusiastic governors. Having a board of experts as a skills resource to consult would also help to alleviate criticism.

Website

- xix) It was suggested that the governor related content of the Bracknell Forest website be evaluated and a further recommendation be made as to what aspects the information should focus on to assist the Governor Services Team when it reviewed the content. One responder had commented that the membership of governing bodies often consisted mainly of professional people who did not reflect the make up of the school and community. Although this was considered to be an issue which could be highlighted in the report, there was no obvious solution as the expertise of professionals was also required.
- xx) It was agreed that the Governor Services Team should be requested to explore the possibility of introducing an on-line feedback forum where comments concerning training and valuable learning points could be posted in addition to producing a summary sheet at training sessions.

Clerks

- xxi) Although the majority of governors had stated that their clerks were well trained, knowledgeable and supportive, one governing body had experienced difficulty in recruiting a clerk of suitable calibre. Bracknell Forest was intending to link with Hampshire County Council to offer more in-depth training for clerks leading to a recognised qualification. The cost of the course was £480 per clerk.

Governing Body Membership

- xxii) Very few governors were members of more than one governing body owing to the time constraints involved. It was felt that this would be particularly demanding for new inexperienced governors. The governor information provided on the Bracknell Forest website possibly gave an under estimation of the time that governors needed to contribute to the role.

Governing Body Federations

- xxiii) Governing bodies expressed limited support and enthusiasm for the scenario of governing body federations advising several schools as each school was individual with differing cultures, strengths and weaknesses. However, a Member welcomed the concept of a central pool of governors with specialisms who could be called upon by all governing bodies to advise and remedy issues as required. For example, recruitment advice had benefited one governing body which experienced some initial difficulty in recruiting a new headteacher. The wording of the job advertisement had been found to be crucial and a successful recruitment had been achieved on the second attempt. The Council could be responsible for maintaining a list of such pool governors, who could meet informally on occasions during the year to include networking sessions where all other governors were welcome to attend to discuss issues and obtain advice. It was felt that this could be achieved economically at a convenient time such as Saturday mornings.

Promoting the Role of Governor

- xxiv) Members acknowledged that the Working Group's review had already raised the profile of governors and they sought to promote the role. Trialling the placing of information stalls manned by existing governors at appropriate events such as school fêtes and Borough events was suggested as a means of achieving this and boosting recruitment of suitable candidates to fill vacancies. As the Governor Services Team already possessed promotional leaflets and banners these could form a bank of material which governing bodies could borrow for use at school events to promote the role of governors. One school experiencing difficulties in recruiting parent governors utilised A3/4 posters featuring the strap line 'Your School Needs You' and a number of bullet points to explain what the role involved. Potential candidates were invited to coffee mornings and to meet existing governors to gain an insight into the role.
- xxv) With regard to the time commitment required of a governor, it was suggested that the information disseminated should not refer specifically

to a timeframe in case it discouraged applications but highlight that the role required a considerable commitment.

Succession Planning

xxvi) Although succession planning for chairs of governors could be successful and questionnaire responders had been largely in favour of it, there was nothing in current regulations to enforce a time limit in respect of the tenure of chairs of governors. Responders had acknowledged that it was dependent upon willing candidates with the necessary skills, experience, expertise and commitment being available. Some schools did employ succession planning and approached it in varying manners including potential candidates shadowing chairs towards that latter part of their tenure and training vice-chairs to assume the role. Attending meetings of all committees and becoming familiar with their terms of reference also occurred.

Governor Services Team

xxvii) Findings to assist the Governor Services Team to advertise governor vacancies, explain the role of governors and measure the effectiveness of alternative forms of governor induction training was welcomed. The concept of new governors attending a meeting of all governing body committees to establish which one(s) they were most suited to was valued.

Best Practice

xxviii) The identification of best practice from the questionnaires and meetings with governors would be identified and collated into best practice for recommending for adoption by governing bodies.

Governing Body Structure

xxix) Analysis of the chairs of governors' responses to the questionnaire concerning the structure of governing bodies indicated that:

- Governing bodies had numerous committees and sub groups with responsibilities in areas such as finance; sites and buildings; curriculum, pastoral and pupil progress; staffing; performance management; and strategy. The majority of these met on a termly basis.
- Many chairs of governors inherited a governing body structure, some of which were dictated by a constitution or diocesan rules. However, adjustments were made subsequently if considered necessary.
- Streamlining the structure by reducing the number of committees or by combining them was felt to be effective by sharpening their focus and relieving the burden on governors of attending many meetings.
- Virtually all responding governing bodies had a code of conduct.

School Governance - Learning from the Best

4.38 During the course of the review the Working Group had regard to the above named report relating to good school governance practice published by Ofsted

in May 2011. The aim of the report was to help all governing bodies to become excellent by showcasing examples of highly effective governance that strengthened leadership and contributed to improved outcomes in case studies of 14 schools graded as having outstanding governance. The report considered the principles and practices that contributed to the outstanding governance and explained what outstanding governing bodies, and the headteachers of the schools they served, contributed towards their effectiveness. Although no single model of success was seen, the report identified some of the key characteristics of these 14 governing bodies. It illustrated how they approached their work efficiently and effectively, identified the contribution that they and the schools' leaders consider they made to strengthening school leadership and suggested a number of key questions that governors might want to consider when reflecting on their own effectiveness and journey to excellence.

Ofsted Inspector Comments

- 4.39 The Working Group considered extracts from Ofsted reports of inspections of Bracknell Forest schools concerning governance arrangements and found that, although the quality of governing bodies varied across the Borough, excellent practice had been highlighted in one secondary school and one primary school in particular. Leadership and management of the secondary school were outstanding and the headteacher was ably supported by the senior leadership team and governors who shared a clear vision of how to take the school forward with the needs of individual students at its heart and helped ensure that it was communicated effectively within and outside the school. Governors' contribution to the primary school's success was rated as outstanding because they provided an excellent balance of challenge and support and held the school to account for its performance at all levels. Messages from the inspection report extracts were that the qualities of enthusiasm, belief in the school, commitment and knowledge were required for a school to attain an excellent inspection rating. A summary of the inspection report extracts is attached at Appendix 6.

5. Conclusions

From its investigations, the Working Group concludes that:

- 5.1 School governors carry out a very important role for the community, and particularly the education system. These are unpaid voluntary roles and all governors deserve our thanks for the time, effort and commitment they give for the benefit of Bracknell Forest's children and young people. This review has raised the profile of governors and the meetings with all governors progressed very well and were a valuable source of feedback to supplement the questionnaire responses.
- 5.2 Extracts from Ofsted inspection reports of Bracknell Forest schools' governance indicates that the quality of governing bodies varies across the Borough, but is never less than satisfactory and often good or outstanding. The qualities of enthusiasm, belief in the school, commitment and knowledge are required for a school to attain an excellent inspection rating. Outstanding performance should not go unnoticed and inspection comments should be shared to enable governors to question, challenge, assess and compare their performance with that of other governing bodies.
- 5.3 All governors need to be fully aware of preparations for Ofsted inspections. A general programme of pre-Ofsted visits made to schools by advisers who would ask challenging questions similar to those asked by Ofsted to assist schools prepare for inspections is favoured. The programme should prioritise schools in most need of improvement. The preparation sessions could vary to reflect the type and size of school, include a tick list of actions to evidence effective governance to Ofsted inspectors, and feature a workshop with governors to raise their awareness of their role and inspection requirements, provide learning points and act as a self-evaluation tool. Some headteachers in Bracknell Forest are Ofsted inspectors and could assist in this area. Although such support is not included in the Service Level Agreement with the Council, it could be provided as a bought in service.
- 5.4 The self-evaluation toolkit facilitates the keeping of records as a central inspection store to evidence effectiveness without reliance on the minutes of governing body meetings. The toolkit guides governing bodies and provides the necessary evidence that they have undertaken self-evaluation and implemented the outcomes. Although some governors feel that the toolkit is a burden to follow, it is not necessary for them to follow it strictly and it can be adapted to meet individual schools and governing bodies. New governors can look at the toolkit and bring a fresh view as to whether it has been followed. The Governor Services Team see this review work as the best feedback on implementation of self-evaluation received and will revisit it and consider the next stages.
- 5.5 Governing bodies expressed limited support and enthusiasm for a governing body federation advising several schools as each school is individual with differing cultures, strengths and weaknesses. The concept of a central pool of governors with specialisms who can be called upon by all governing bodies to advise and remedy issues as required has been identified by the Working Group as an alternative. The Council could be responsible for maintaining a list of such experienced governors, who could meet informally on occasions during the year to include networking sessions where all other governors are welcome to attend to discuss issues and obtain advice.

- 5.6 The majority of governing bodies have not re-constituted to implement the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012 as they require a reasonable quorum of members to undertake their responsibilities independently.
- 5.7 The majority of questionnaire responders support a time limited tenure for chairs of governors to promote fresh ideas and approaches. Although succession planning for chairs can be successful and is largely favoured by governing bodies, it is dependant upon the availability of willing candidates with the necessary skills, experience, expertise and commitment being available to assume the role. Some schools do employ succession planning and approach it in varying manners including potential candidates shadowing chairs towards that latter part of their tenure, training vice-chairs to assume the role and attending meetings of all committees to become familiar with their roles and functions. When schools have devoted energies into succession planning it has reaped benefits and one primary school whose governors' contribution to the school's success was described as outstanding by Ofsted had for several years had two vice chairs with different roles to enable the support and succession aspects to be fully effective.
- 5.8 Many qualities required of chairs of governors and of governors have been identified by chairs and include personal qualities such as charisma, confidence, decisiveness, commitment, honesty and a sense of humour, also skills/abilities such as leadership, management, recruitment, organisational, analytical and team building.
- 5.9 Although the Bracknell Forest skills audit form has been improved it is felt that it is not widely understood and could be made more 'user friendly'. It would be beneficial for the form to be reviewed with a view to making it more easily understandable focusing on the skills required of governors by asking governors to set out their skills in place of the current tick box approach.
- 5.10 Although governing bodies are able to identify skills gaps, there is often limited or no opportunity to fill gaps owing to a lack of volunteers and they value commitment, time availability and enthusiasm more highly, particularly as new governors can be trained and developed once recruited. Business professionals released from their place of work to lend their skills to governing bodies as part of their own professional development are of benefit. Also, governing bodies can appoint governors with required specialist skills who are of benefit when they can make a long term commitment to governing bodies.
- 5.11 Information stalls manned by experienced governors at appropriate events such as school fêtes and Borough events would assist with raising the profile of the role of governor and recruiting suitable candidates to fill vacancies. The Governor Services Team has a bank of promotional material and banners that can be borrowed for use at school events for this purpose. There is a possibility that drawing potential applicants' attention to the time commitment required of governors could discourage applications.
- 5.12 The Council provides good training which is appreciated by governors who have given a clear message that they would appreciate networking opportunities included as part of all training sessions and governors' forums. A time window at the conclusion of training sessions to discuss the implications of what they have learned and how it may be applied by their governing bodies

would be welcomed by governors. A previously prepared summary sheet of learning points to cascade to fellow governors to maximise learning opportunities is favoured. The summarising could include group discussion around delegates' three main learning points which could be captured and subsequently circulated.

- 5.13 Parent governors have expressed a wish for a forum where they can network with other parent governors and share experiences and remedies to issues. Although a Chairs' Briefing is already in existence, it is in the form of briefings and operates at a strategic level. Chairs of governors would also welcome opportunities for discussion and networking at the conclusion of sessions.
- 5.14 The governors who have enrolled to undertake training for chairs and aspiring chairs of governors could be requested to attend meetings of other governing bodies to share the learning.
- 5.15 It would be beneficial to review the governor related content of the Bracknell Forest website to ensure inclusion of a description of the role of governors and signposts and links to other sources of information and websites without repeating other information available elsewhere, and to explore the possibility of introducing an on-line feedback forum where comments concerning training and valuable learning points could be posted in addition to producing a summary sheet of training sessions.
- 5.16 Use of 'buddies', individual school induction handbooks, attending a meeting of all committees and web information advising on the basics of the role of governors have been identified by responders as means of integrating and inducting new governors and facilitating their early involvement and contribution. Acronym sheets and receiving chairs of governors' explanation of unfamiliar matters at governing body meetings would also assist induction.
- 5.17 One questionnaire responder has commented that the membership of governing bodies often consists mainly of professional people who do not reflect the make up of the school and community. Although this is considered to be an issue, there is no obvious solution as the expertise of professionals is also required.
- 5.18 The Governor Services Team is responsive to requests for additional training and support, which have included use of the pupil premium, roles in the disciplinary committee and dealing with complaints from parents.
- 5.19 The good governance practice identified by this review is principally: challenging performance, chair of governor succession planning with a limited term of office, strengthening the induction process by providing mentoring, promoting safeguarding, utilising self-evaluation to evidence effectiveness to Ofsted inspectors, and undertaking skills audits to focus governor recruitment to fill skills if possible.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommended to all that every opportunity continues to be taken to recognise and promote the valuable role of school governors, with the aim of ensuring that all schools are good schools and have a full complement of governors committed to the success and wellbeing of the school and its pupils as a means to achieving this status.

It is recommended to the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning that the following recommendations be made to governing bodies:

- 6.2 Governors be regularly encouraged to concentrate on ensuring safeguarding practices are sound, and challenging the performance achieved by their schools. This should include holding the school to account for any issues preventing an excellent Ofsted rating.
- 6.3 All governing bodies be encouraged to implement succession planning. Related to this, the Council explore with governors the introduction of a school policy on the maximum tenure of chairs of governors. This should recognise the value of continuity and knowledge retention, balanced by the need to introduce fresh thinking and approaches periodically.
- 6.4 Building on good practice already in place, the induction of new governors be improved by more widespread: use of 'buddies' or mentors; individual school induction handbooks; attendance of a meeting of all committees to enable the governor to identify which he/she is best suited to serve; use of web information advising on the basics of the role of governors; acronym sheets and receiving chairs of governors' explanation of unfamiliar matters at governing body meetings as means of integrating and inducting new governors and facilitating their early involvement and contribution.
- 6.5 All governing bodies be requested to adopt a code of conduct.
- 6.6 All governing bodies be reminded of the importance that the membership of governing bodies ideally needs to reflect the communities served by the school. Governing bodies should be mindful of this when recruiting new governors.
- 6.7 All governing bodies be asked to carry out 'exit interviews' of governors at the point they stand down, as a valuable learning resource. The knowledge gained should be shared, in non-personalised form, among all governing bodies.
- 6.8 Information stalls be introduced, run by experienced governors, at appropriate events such as school fêtes and Borough events, to assist with raising the profile of the role of governor and recruiting suitable candidates to fill vacancies. Governors note that the Governor Services Team has a bank of promotional material and banners that can be borrowed for use at school events for this purpose.

It is recommended to the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning that the relevant officers implement the following recommendations:

- 6.9 A general programme of pre-Ofsted visits be made to schools by advisers who ask challenging questions similar to those asked by Ofsted, to assist schools to prepare for inspections. The programme should prioritise schools in most need

of improvement, and sessions should vary to reflect the type and size of school. This should include a tick list of actions to evidence effective governance to Ofsted inspectors, and feature a workshop with governors to raise their awareness of their role and inspection requirements, provide learning points and act as a self-evaluation tool. Although such support is not included in the Service Level Agreement with the Council, it should be available as a bought in service or offered cost free to schools at risk.

- 6.10 Consideration be given to the concept of a central pool of governors with specialisms who can be called upon by all governing bodies to advise and remedy issues as required. The Council be responsible for maintaining a list of such pool governors, who could meet informally on occasions during the year to include networking sessions where all other governors are welcome to attend to discuss issues and obtain advice.
- 6.11 With a view to making the Bracknell Forest skills audit form more easily understandable, focusing on the skills required of governors by asking governors to set out their skills in place of the current tick box approach, the Link Governors Forum be invited to identify the skills required of governors as part of a review of the form. The re-designed form must take account of confidentiality and be circulated to all governing bodies in the Borough to assist them with undertaking skills audits.
- 6.12 It be explained more clearly to governors that the self-evaluation toolkit does not have to be followed strictly and it can be adapted to meet individual schools and governing bodies. New governors be encouraged to look at the toolkit and bring a fresh view as to whether it has been followed. The Governor Services Team re-visit the implementation of self-evaluation and consider the next stages.
- 6.13 A forum meeting every six months be established for parent governors where they can network with other parent governors and share experiences and remedies to issues.
- 6.14 The Chairs' Briefing, which is in the form of briefings and operates at a strategic level, be extended to provide chairs with opportunities for increased interaction and for discussion and networking at the conclusion of sessions.
- 6.15 The quality of advertising material for recruiting governors be reviewed. This could usefully include a leaflet to explain the role of governors and their responsibilities. With regard to the time commitment required of a governor, the information disseminated should not refer specifically to a timeframe in case it discourages applications but not understate that either, as the role requires a considerable commitment.
- 6.16 The governor related content of the Bracknell Forest website be evaluated, specifically to: explore the possibility of introducing an on-line feedback forum where comments concerning training and valuable learning points can be posted; producing a summary sheet of training sessions.
- 6.17 The good practice identified by this review be collated and circulated to all governing bodies and they be encouraged to discuss and consider it for adoption.

7. **Glossary**

FTE	Full Time Equivalent post
GEL	Governor E-Learning
HMCI	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector
NGA	National Governors' Association
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PGR	Parent Governor Representative
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLA	Service Level Agreement

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
2012/13**

WORK PROGRAMME 2012 – 2013

Terms of Reference for:

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

Purpose of this Working Group / anticipated value of its work:

- | |
|---|
| 1. To undertake a review of the effectiveness of the governance arrangements in Bracknell Forest schools. |
|---|

Key Objectives:

- | |
|---|
| 1. To develop an appreciation of the respective role and remit of the different types of governors and the importance of sound governance. |
| 2. To evaluate the effectiveness of the chair of governors' role and ascertain how this can be further developed around improved succession planning in particular. |
| 3. To investigate whether the chairs of governors' role should be time limited. |
| 4. To consider the benefits of governing bodies covering more than one school or sharing governors' skills between different schools to make the best use of available expertise. |
| 5. To review Ofsted comments in respect of governance in Bracknell Forest Schools, and the arrangements being made to ascertain and achieve effective governance in all schools. |
| 6. To consider the support and training given to school governors. |
| 7. To review the effect of the new legislation concerning local authority and community representation on governing bodies. |

Scope of the work:

- | |
|--|
| 1. The performance of the governing bodies of all schools in Bracknell Forest. |
| 2. The governing body Self-Evaluation Toolkit. |
| 3. The structure of governing bodies and skills of governors. |

Not included in the scope:

- | |
|--|
| 1. The governance arrangements of academies. |
| 2. |

Terms of Reference prepared by:

Andrea Carr

Terms of Reference agreed by:

School Governance Overview & Scrutiny Working Group

Working Group Structure:

Councillors Mrs Birch, Ms Hayes, Mrs McCracken & Mrs Temperton and Mrs Cauchi (former PGR) and Mr Jackson (Kerith Centre)

Working Group Lead Member: Mrs Temperton

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Dr Barnard

Departmental Link Officer: Martin Surrell

BACKGROUND:

1. Following some concerns regarding school governance arrangements in Bracknell Forest schools raised by Ofsted in inspection reports it was agreed to add this review to the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel's work programme to enable the Panel to establish a working group to undertake a review of school governance with a view to identifying any possible improvements.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL TO ADDRESS:

1. Are school governance arrangements sufficiently robust?
2. Is there best practice in the Borough which can be shared with other schools?
3. What can be done to improve governance arrangements?
4. Should governance practice be amended to enhance succession planning?

INFORMATION GATHERING:

Witnesses to be invited

Name	Organisation/Position	Reason for Inviting
Janette Karklins	BFC, Director of Children, Young People and Learning	To provide information on governance arrangements and any associated concerns.
Martin Surrell	BFC, Senior Adviser (Secondary)	To provide information on governance arrangements and governor support / training provided.
Governor Services Team Members	To advise on new legislation and related matters.	
Headteachers	Bracknell Forest schools	To advise on governance arrangements.
Chairs of Governors (primary, secondary & Kennel Lane)	Bracknell Forest schools	To advise on governance arrangements.
Link governors	Link Governors Forum	To meet governor representatives of most schools and obtain answers to previously agreed questions.
Parent governors	Bracknell Forest schools	To explore any particular issues affecting parent governors.

Site Visits

Location	Purpose of visit
Schools	To gain first hand knowledge of schools' governance arrangements in practice.
Governors' Conference	To explore issues affecting school governors.

Key Documents / Background Data / Research

1. Ofsted Best Practice on School Governance and inspection reports of other schools
2. Table of Ofsted Comments on Bracknell Forest Schools
3. Strengthening Public Accountability on the School Governing Body - Centre for Public Scrutiny Policy Paper April 2006
4. Minutes of local governing body meetings

TIMESCALE

Starting: Autumn 2012

Ending: Spring 2013

OUTPUTS TO BE PRODUCED

1. Report of the review with findings and recommendations.

REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Date
Report to the Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel.	3 July 2013

MONITORING / FEEDBACK ARRANGEMENTS

Body	Details	Date
Reporting to Children, Young People and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel by Executive Member.	Oral or written report	2013

Link Governor Questionnaire Results – Summary

<p>3. How did the governor vacancy come to your attention?</p>	<p>4. What interested you in becoming a governor?</p>	<p>5. Were you the only applicant or elected in contest with others?</p>	<p>6. Are you on more than one GB?</p>	<p>7. Does your school have its own induction book or programme? If so, is it effective?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via school and BFC newsletters. • Council website. • Word of mouth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contribute experience and skills to improve the school and support the community. • To increase involvement in own children’s school and influence its development. • Personal development. • Past teachers wishing to maintain links with the school and education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of link governors were the only applicant for the position and not elected in contest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No link governors are on more than 1 governing bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of schools represented have some form of induction programme. • New governors find the induction useful and seek early diarising and access to it.

<p>8. Is your school using the self-evaluation toolkit? If so, how is it being used & what is the school’s experience of using it? How many governors are involved in the process?</p>	<p>9. Is there a succession procedure in place for the chair of governors?</p>	<p>10. Is the length of time an individual can be chair limited? If not, do you think it should be?</p>	<p>11. How do you communicate and interact with parents?</p>	<p>12. Is there anything that you think could improve school governance in Bracknell Forest? (E.g. a group of trained governors serving on GBs of more than 1 school).</p>	<p>13. Please add any other comments / suggestions for improvement?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools represented are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 schools represented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tenure is limited at a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters, parents’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor virtual office to ensure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure governors with

<p>using the toolkit with the possible exception of two where the respondents are unaware of its use and a third where the headteacher has his/her own self-evaluation process and the governors are yet to become involved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small group of governors are working on the application of the toolkit in the majority of schools. 	<p>have a succession procedure in place and another 5 are working towards it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are in favour of succession planning with regular elections. 	<p>number of schools whilst governors at several other schools are unaware if a limit exists.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most respondents are in favour of having a limit to promote fresh ideas and thinking. 	<p>evenings, school website, events, e-mails, questionnaires and assemblies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One governor responded to the effect that communication and interaction with parents was an issue which needed addressing. 	<p>that key documents and calendars are readily available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice of experienced and trained governors. • Small manageable governing bodies. • Information on important changes / initiatives e-mailed to governors. • More mentoring of new governors and courses tailored to the school e.g. Kennel Lane. • Compensation for the use of consultative governors' specialist skills. • Facilitate visiting other schools' governing bodies and sharing good practice. • More model 	<p>financial, IT & PR/marketing skills and experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proforma for sharing learning from training courses with FGB. • Make the governor role more appealing and less daunting to prospective governors. • More training.
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				policies which can be easily located on websites.	
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Parent Governor Questionnaire Results – Summary

<p>3. How did the governor vacancy come to your attention?</p>	<p>4. What interested you in becoming a governor?</p>	<p>5. Were you the only applicant or elected in contest with others?</p>	<p>6. Are you on more than one GB?</p>	<p>7. Is the role of governor as you expected?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via school e.g. letter, newsletter, notice, parents' evening. • By word of mouth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To give something back to the school. • To get involved in raising school standards. • To be more involved in and learn about the school attend by own children. • To make an impact. • An interest in education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 50% of respondents were elected and the remaining 50% were appointed without competition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No governors are members of more than one governing body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role requires greater time commitment and involvement than expected. • It takes a new governor up to 2 years to become fully versed in the role, possibly leaving only 2 years remaining to make a valid contribution.

<p>8. Are you intending to complete your full four year term of office and would you re-apply following that?</p>	<p>9. What could be done to improve pre-application information, the induction to being a governor and the induction process?</p>	<p>10. Does your school have its own induction book or programme for new governors?</p>	<p>11. Were you mentored or given a 'buddy' governor when you commenced your role?</p>	<p>12. Do you feel that you are a central part of your GB or that you are on the periphery lacking full involvement?</p>	<p>13. Have you ever experienced a conflict of interest in your role as governor?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All governors intend to complete their 4 year term. • Governors are divided around whether they will re-apply for a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The BFC induction is excellent. • Undertaking induction in the early months is vital to effectively resume the role as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of schools have an induction programme for new governors. • Some governors have a mentor or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many new governors were mentored or allocated a buddy. • Those that were not mentored or 'buddied' would 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of effort is required to become proficient and fully involved. • Time is a factor and those with greater time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few governors have experienced a conflict of interest and where they did it was as a result of an issue with their own child

<p>further term – those that will intend to follow their child to secondary school or become a different type of governor when their child leaves the school e.g. community governor.</p>	<p>soon as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wealth of information is provided/available. • Open day/evening welcomed to supplement knowledge. • Would like mentor/buddy. • A summary of what the role involves and the time commitment required. • Links to relevant websites and information on base level of knowledge required. • Opportunity to discuss the role with existing governors and shadow them before applying. • Have a plan for the 1st year concerning training and development. 	<p>buddy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clerks are helpful and supportive. • An individual school guidance book and buddy are sought. 	<p>have liked to have been.</p>	<p>availability can become involved more easily and rapidly.</p>	<p>or one they knew personally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors recognised that the roles of parent and governor need to be split. • Another governor can be called upon to look into an issue in the case of a conflict of interest.
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<p>14 Do you have sufficient knowledge and training to challenge the performance of your school? Is there anything that hampers or eases such challenge?</p>	<p>15. Does the training provided meet your requirements? If not, in what areas do you need further training? Have you undertaken any governor e-learning courses?</p>	<p>16. Do you share your expertise with other governing bodies?</p>	<p>17. Is there succession planning in place for the role of chair?</p>	<p>18. Is the term of office of the chair of governors limited on your GB? If not, do you think it should be?</p>	<p>19. How does your governing body communicate and interact with parents?</p>	<p>20. Any other comments / suggestions for governance improvement.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The on-line tools assist. • LEA training is good. • Visiting and observing other governing bodies would be useful. • Challenge can be perceived as criticisms and it is important to demonstrate that this is not the case. • A head teacher resisted challenge. • Confidence to speak up is a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary of key training points for cascading to the governing body is sought. • Networking time at the conclusion of training sessions to discuss the merits of the training and their impact would be useful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further interaction with other governing bodies to share expertise is welcomed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of schools represented do not have succession planning in place although some are considering it. • Most respondents are in favour of succession planning. • Where succession planning exists it usually involves the vice chair assisting and shadowing the chair. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of chairs are elected for a fixed term but can be re-elected indefinitely at the end of the term. • Some respondents welcome a strictly fixed term whilst others feel it depends on the effectiveness of the chair and quality of possible replacements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters. • Parents' evenings. • Playground interaction. • Questionnaires • Dedicated area of the school web site. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to observe other governing bodies. • Promote information sharing across governing bodies. • Further training opportunities. • A governors' forum / e-mail group to share information, advice and practice. • A parent governors' forum.

<p>challenge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is difficult to accrue the necessary knowledge without an education background.• Data should be presented in a clearer format.• The chair and vice chair are relied on for guidance.• Sub committees of governing bodies allow a greater focus on issues.						
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Chair of Governor Questionnaire Results – Summary

<p>1. Is your governing body considering re-constitution to implement the Constitution Regulations 2012 concerning the make up and role of governing bodies?</p>	<p>2. Does your governing body use the self-evaluation toolkit? If so, how is it used and how effective is it?</p>	<p>3. Has your governing body undertaken a governor skills audit? If so, what skills gaps, if any, have been identified?</p>	<p>4. When recruiting new governors does your governing body seek to fill any identified skills gaps?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 responders are not considering or have decided against re-constitution (including 2 voluntary aided schools). • 5 responders are considering re-constitution although 1 is doubtful that it will be pursued. • 2 responders are unaware of the regulations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 schools are using the toolkit in some form whilst 1 has not commenced its use. 2 schools found it was not sufficiently tailored to the school or focussed on the improvements required and have discontinued its use. • Most schools allocated the self-evaluation to a small group of governors or a committee who worked through the sections, building up a file of evidence and feeding back progress to the FGB. The self-evaluation has been used to highlight areas for training and development including induction, to prepare governor objectives, to identify skills gaps, and to formulate an improvement action plan. • The majority of schools are finding the self-evaluation effective as it promotes 	<p>20 of the 21 responding chairs of governors indicated that they have undertaken, or are in the process of undertaking, a skills audit. The remaining governing body has a skills audit included on its work programme for later this year. The formality of the process varies and the timings of the audits are dictated by membership changes. 7 of the schools identified skills gaps in the areas of human resources, finance, interpreting data, specific school knowledge, project management and architecture/ building/site management. The link governor of one governing body uses the audit outcomes to inform governor training and development. Another governing body feels that its audit had been too focussed on career based skills and will repeat the process with a governor competencies focus. A third feels</p>	<p>The majority of responders indicate that they seek to fill skills gaps when recruiting if possible but are not often in a position to do so and are pleased to recruit keen and competent volunteers with sufficient time who can be trained and developed. The remaining responders place the commitment and enthusiasm of individuals above a skills audit and are prepared to mentor them and work in a team effort. Governors who are elected or appointed via dioceses or the local authority are often outside the influence or control of the FGB.</p> <p>1 Chairs of governors feels it is sad that increasingly governing body membership consists mainly of professionals who do not reflect the school population or the local community.</p>

	learning and awareness of the governing body's role and performance, generates areas for discussion, highlights areas for improvement and offers assurance of good practice where relevant.	that their audit did not give a sufficiently broad picture and intends to investigate further.	
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<i>5. Is succession planning for the chair of governors in place at your school?</i>	<i>6. What qualities do chairs of governors and governors need to be effective?</i>	<i>7. Is sufficient support provided to facilitate effectiveness? If not, what additional support would improve effectiveness?</i>	<i>8. How do you integrate new governors to facilitate their early involvement and contribution?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9 of the responding governing bodies do not have succession planning in place at present but many seek it and hope to establish it in the future. 3 have partial systems and the remainder have succession involving vice chairs or mentoring of a potential candidate. Volunteers to assume the role of chairs and possibly vice chairs are becoming increasingly reluctant owing to the need to commit to the increasing scope, workload, level of responsibility and time commitment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time availability. Personal qualities:- charisma, confidence, decisiveness, commitment, honesty, supportiveness, encouraging, trustworthiness, discretion, diplomacy, sensitivity, patience, sympathy, understanding, inclusivity, positive, reliable, realistic, networker, consensus builder, strategic and clear thinker, enthusiastic, tactful, intelligence, appreciative, professional, objective, consistent, constructive, forward looking, adaptable, informative, strategic, visible, awareness, partnership worker and relationship builder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The local authority provides plenty of excellent training, guidance and support in terms of the Governor Services Team (GST), education and SEN advice, finance, HR, legal, building matters, School Improvement Plans and chairs' briefing. The GST should be retained and there is some concern over the reducing number of education advisers to assist schools. Also, support from other experienced chairs of governors has been beneficial. Additional support that would improve effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GST proactively reaching out to individual chairs of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an induction pack. Offer a school handbook with information concerning the school, expectations and 'do's and don'ts'. Encourage new governors to attend the basic BFC induction training at the earliest opportunity. Treat new governors in a welcoming supportive manner. Introduce new governors to the Chairs of governors, head and clerk. Offer a tour of the school and relevant information. Encourage new governors to become familiar with the SIP. Minimise use of jargon. Mentoring system. Invite new governors to attend

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills/abilities:- leadership, management, recruitment, organisational, analytical, team building, listening and communicating, report and letter writing, data interpretation, performance monitoring, conducting meetings effectively, time management, delegation, questioning and clarifying, people skills and able to challenge without offending. • Knowledge/experience:- good education; understanding of the education system; knowledge of school structure, staff and building layout; dealing with complaints from parents and any capability proceedings; finance; and building/estate management. 	<p>governors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - regular support to monitor governing body effectiveness. - New content to refresh training. - Training tailored to schools' level of success. - In-depth training meetings at individual schools. - New training: to defuse and deal with parental complaints; on the role of the Chairs of governors in capability meetings; on how to conduct meetings; for head and chair jointly every 6-12 months covering important aspects e.g. new Ofsted framework, use of pupil premium and effectiveness. - More work in the area of chair and vice chair partnership to strengthen the leadership role in governance. - Networking between chairs to give support and expert advice possibly through a support mechanism. - Chairs' briefing for new chairs. 	<p>all committee meetings to promote learning and enable them to decide which one to join dependent on skills and interest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage new governors to ask questions at meetings and offer opinions. • Invite new governors to join a working party.
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Governing Body Structure Questionnaire

<p>2. What is the structure and composition of the Full Governing Body at your school? (i.e. the number of committees and sub groups, their areas of responsibility and the frequency they meet.)</p>	<p>3. What made you decide on the structure of the Full Governing Body?</p>	<p>4. What changes could be made to improve the Governing Body's effectiveness?</p>	<p>5. Does your Governing Body have a Code of Conduct?</p>
<p>Although the numbers vary, all respondents have committees, sub committees and ad hoc working groups/ panels of the full governing body with remits in areas including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finance/Resources - ICT - Procurement - Sites/Buildings/Premises - Health and Safety - Strategic Planning - Personnel/Staffing/Pay Review - Curriculum and Standards - Admissions - Attainment and Achievement - Performance Management 	<p>The structure of several of the responding governing bodies is largely historical featuring a logical breakdown and distribution of roles and responsibilities designed to maintain parent involvement and to blend this with the experience, knowledge and skills of other school stakeholders whilst maintaining a good working relationship with senior leadership teams and headteachers. However, they are developing minor modifications seeking to balance efficient</p>	<p>Reduce and/or combine committees.</p> <p>Review and modify the structure when a need for improvement arises.</p> <p>Introduce a governors' Virtual Office to assist with communication and measuring effectiveness.</p> <p>Formalise activities into Governor Objectives and/or establish a full governing body Action Plan which are reviewed regularly to ensure implementation. These would naturally deliver the School Development Plan focusing on the management and running of the governing body as a way of tracking its effectiveness and impact within the school.</p> <p>Identify core competency requirements and implement a skills audit to identify and analyse the gaps to determine if the governing body has the relevant experience and, if not, use the outcomes to inform recruitment and appropriate training to enable governors to be confident in their roles and be constructively challenging as well as supportive.</p> <p>Earlier distribution of meeting papers to facilitate preparation by reading all information relevant and having challenging questions construed in advance.</p>	<p>All but 3 of the 21 respondents have a code of conduct in place and 2 of those that currently do not are preparing to implement a code. 1 respondent annually reviews the code and another is developing a separate code that is specific to the work of governors when they</p>

<p>- Pastoral/Pupil Wellbeing - Discipline/Appeals</p> <p>The questionnaire responses indicate that full governing bodies have between 2 and 7 committees each although the majority have 5-6 with secondary schools tending to have more than primary schools. Full governing bodies typically meet once or twice per term and their committees meet once or twice per term or less often depending on their remit e.g. disciplinary/appeals committees meet as and when required. Full governing bodies and committees may have additional meetings arranged if necessary to consider urgent matters.</p> <p>Those governing bodies with fewer committees allocate their committees a wider remit which can result in the need for more frequent meetings.</p> <p>All governing bodies utilise 1 or 2 ad hoc working groups/panels to undertake</p>	<p>decision-making and effective governance with some concessions to ensure compliance. A number of governing bodies regularly review their structure, some of whom have identified the need for adjustments.</p> <p>The governing bodies of voluntary aided schools are subject to diocesan requirements.</p> <p>Governor vacancies have influenced the governing body structure of 1 school as it sought to avoid overburdening governors with numerous meetings.</p> <p>Some governing bodies have combined their committees in the interests of streamlining, reducing repetition and focusing practices whilst reducing burdens. Others have introduced steering/scrutinising</p>	<p>Focus agenda items towards enhancing effectiveness and awareness of governor actions and how these impact on the school and its well being, including items such as progress against a skills audit and the management of the code of conduct.</p> <p>Establish a “floating member” system for new governors to enable them to experience all governor related activities for the first year. They can then select the committees where they may be best suited to serve. Have a mentoring system in place to support new governors.</p> <p>Ensure that chairs of governors have the necessary ability and willingness to fulfil their responsibilities.</p> <p>Be more strategic and pursue long term planning, possibly with the assistance of a strategic committee.</p> <p>Maximise governor effectiveness by increasing their knowledge of the school and encouraging them to visit school regularly and help in classes, observe lessons, accompany visits etc. Availability of an allowance to cover the cost of baby sitting/carers would assist.</p> <p>Raise governing bodies’ profiles within schools and provide them with a face to promote their identity to staff, pupils and parents enabling them to be more approachable and opening more lines of communication from some who would not previously know whom to speak with. Photographs of the governing body on a photo board in schools’ reception areas would assist.</p> <p>Funds allowing, buy in speakers to address the whole governing body in discussions that are specific to the school.</p> <p>Undertake self-evaluation to identify areas for improvement across the board in preparation for Ofsted inspections given the emphasis it now places on governance in schools. A series of short workshops would enable all awareness, knowledge and skills to be enhanced and shared, and not rest with a small number of governors. Completion of a governor</p>	<p>visit the school for the purpose of observing in classrooms and learning environments.</p>
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<p>specific functions when required and some allocate particular responsibilities to governors such as Special Educational Needs and Safeguarding.</p> <p>The membership of governing bodies varies from 12 to 20 governors consisting of headteacher, staff, local authority, parent, community, foundation and parochial church council governors.</p>	<p>groups to monitor effectiveness and governing bodies' role in the overall strategy for schools.</p> <p>Working groups tend to be given tight focused briefs and the knowledge and expertise gained by their members can benefit full governing bodies.</p>	<p>questionnaire would assist with identification of areas in need of attention.</p> <p>Identify the reasons for, and address, any instances of lack of involvement of governors to ensure a good spread of the workload.</p> <p>Actively recruit to fill governor vacancies.</p> <p>Regularly meet and work more closely with the headteacher and senior leadership team to develop governor skills and good open transparent working relationships.</p> <p>Allocate more time either inside or outside governing body meetings to discuss governor business to facilitate team working to ensure the smooth running of schools.</p> <p>Remove the claw back threshold on year end finances as it curtails planning of capital projects.</p> <p>Place greater emphasis on key issues and school improvement.</p> <p>Give consideration to making meetings more effective and include some time for strategic issues in addition to operational ones. As much of the full governing body meeting is governed by local authority legislation, greater freedom in how governing bodies carry out their business e.g. agreeing minutes on line and make communication of committee business electronic rather than reporting all to the full governing body in order to create time for strategic working in addition to operational working at full governing body meetings.</p> <p>Hold chairs and vice chairs discussions prior to full governing body meetings to provide updates on developments in different areas and sharing of achievements and aspirations.</p> <p>Ensure that clerks to governing bodies are highly effective, knowledgeable and proactive, utilising additional training if necessary.</p>	
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Extracts from Ofsted Inspection Reports of Bracknell Forest Schools Concerning Governance

Number	Date of Inspection	Ofsted	Inspectors' Comments
1.	5 July 2007		"Governors are involved as partners with the leadership team in driving up standards and creating a school where every child feels valued and achieves well."
2.	21 January 2009		"Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides strong leadership and has a clear vision of how to take the school forward with the needs of individual students at its heart. He is ably supported by the senior leadership team and governors, who share this vision and help ensure that it is communicated effectively within and outside the school."
3.	20 May 2009		"Governors support the school well and have improved their organisation and have undertaken training, so that they are now also good at challenging and questioning the school when necessary."
4.	30 June 2009		"Governors' contribution to the school's success is outstanding because they provide an excellent balance of challenge and support and hold the school to account for its performance at all levels."
5.	30 September 2009		"Governors are very supportive of the school and constantly challenge it to develop; they have excellent systems for the monitoring and quality assurance of its work. They have an excellent understanding of its strengths and areas for development. A new school development plan has been produced in consultation with the whole school community and skilled governors have played a major role in its construction."
6.	21 October 2009		"Senior leaders, including governors, have worked effectively since the last inspection to improve the school. Good procedures to safeguard pupils are carefully monitored by senior staff and governors to ensure all requirements are met and that pupils are kept very safe."
7.	27 April 2010		"Governors make an exceptional contribution to the work and direction of the school. They have high levels of insight and are extremely well organised and thorough in their approach."
8.	9 June 2010		"He [the headteacher] has developed a strong network of leadership at all levels and a shared commitment to high expectations for pupils' achievements and personal development. Assisted by the support and challenge of the highly effective governing body, they have a clear view of the school's strengths and have

put in place effective strategies to address any weaknesses that are identified.”

9. 30 June 2010 The headteacher, supported well by governors, staff and key leaders, provides a clear vision for how the school can move forward.Governors, too, are increasingly involved in checking how well the school is doing and playing a key role in developing the school’s extended services.”
10. 3 November 2010 “Governors ensure that safeguarding procedures are of good quality and that all statutory requirements, including child protection and risk assessment, are regularly reviewed and approved. Their work shows they are fully involved in setting the school's priorities. Governors are seeking new ways of monitoring the achievement of different groups of learners so they can hold the school to account fully for its performance.”
11. 23 November 2010 “The governing body fulfils all its legal obligations well and gives good attention to the welfare of pupils and staff by ensuring that safeguarding and child protection arrangements are robust and of good quality. As well as supporting the school, the governing body holds the school to account well for its work.”
12. 1 December 2010 “Many governors are very experienced and knowledgeable about the school. They take a strategic view of the school's development and have risen to the many challenges presented by its rapid growth. They hold leaders to account for performance of the school effectively. They are going through a period of transition and some governors are still developing their understanding of their roles. Governors and the school's business manager effectively oversee the school's extremely robust procedures for safeguarding pupils.”
13. 17 February 2011 “The governing body, which has a good balance of new and experienced members, has a clear understanding of its role. Governors are aware that they now need to evaluate the impact of the school's recent work within the community in order to plan most effectively for the next steps.”
14. 9 March 2011 “As part of the successful efforts to improve its effectiveness, the governing body established a separate committee to monitor closely the outcomes for pupils and to hold the school to account for them.The governing body has ensured that procedures for protecting children and keeping them safe are robust and fully understood.”
15. 30 March 2011 “Close attention is paid by leaders, managers and the governing body to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities and that there is no discrimination. As a result, all groups of pupils are making good progress. The governing body has monitored the school’s activities rigorously, including its procedures and policies for safeguarding pupils. These policies are robust and ensure the site and staff are maintained and

vetted carefully”.

16. 10 May 2011 “The governing body keeps a sharp eye on assessment information and members are quick to question any fluctuations or explore any emerging trends, reflecting the school's strong commitment to equal opportunities and determination to quickly spot and eradicate any discrepancy in the achievement of different groups. Several members of the governing body are recently appointed and finding their feet, but they are building up their understanding through regular visits with more experienced colleagues which focus on current development priorities. The governing body consults parents and invites staff members to its meetings. It ensures that policies for the safeguarding of pupils are implemented effectively by regularly reviewing the compliance with regulations, undertaking risk assessments and ensuring that child protection policies are implemented. Some documents need updating, however.”
17. 24 May 2011 “The governing body is supportive of the school. Since the last inspection, it has seen a considerable turnover of membership and welcomes training opportunities to develop expertise and challenge the school's work. The governing body is closely involved in school improvement, and its awareness of the community and knowledge about pupils' progress provide the information needed to challenge the school's work.”
18. 21 September 2011 “The governing body is effective and governors' regular visits to monitor provision in the school enable them to provide suitable challenge as well as support for the school. The governing body ensures that pupils' well-being and health and safety receive prominent attention. As a result, safeguarding procedures are robust and all vetting and child protection arrangements are of good quality.”
19. 28 September 2011 “The governing body is enthusiastic and fully supportive of the school. While committees are used effectively to ensure governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school, they are not yet fully effective in holding the school to account for its actions.”
20. 3 October 2011 “Support provided by the governors is satisfactory. As a result of recent appointments, the governing body is making good progress towards developing its full capacity. Governors are very committed to raising achievement in the school and have responded well to the recommendations of an external review. These identified greater involvement and links with subject departments and a more robust in-depth approach to self-evaluation.”
21. 5 October 2011 “The effectiveness of the governing body is satisfactory. Members of the governing body are closely involved with the school, frequently coming in and helping with events. They have surveyed parent and

carer opinion, and supported the school in the development of its grounds and entrances, making it safer for pupils. They are developing a clearer understanding of how well the pupils are doing by being linked to subjects and were supportive of the headteacher during recent staff changes. They challenge the school adequately, based on their appreciation of pupils' current needs, and they communicate well with parents and carers. However, they have not always ensured the school has addressed disparities between achievement across key stages, subjects and groups of pupils."

22. 8 November 2011 "The role of the governors has been strengthened considerably. They are well led and organised, know the school well and understand performance data. They provide a well-judged balance between supporting the school and holding it effectively to account."
23. 9 November 2011 "The Headteacher and members of the governing body have a clear and critical vision for school development. Through rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning and careful tracking of pupils' progress, the school recognises its strengths and ensures that weaknesses are properly identified and promptly addressed. Procedures to ensure pupils are safe in school are firmly embedded. The governing body plays an important role in this by visiting the school regularly to check on the effectiveness of the safeguarding policy, and carrying out health and safety audits to the premises."
24. 7 December 2011 "The executive headteacher has a clear agenda for school improvement. Along with the acting Chair of the Governing Body, meetings have been held with parents and carers to begin to communicate their expectations. The governing body has started to put systems in place and develop its skills, but these are at the early stages of being implemented and are not yet adequately driving improvement."
25. 10 January 2012 "The senior leadership team, middle leaders, members of the governing body and key administrative staff are united in their drive to improve standards in all areas of the school's work. Lessons are monitored regularly and feedback is provided against agreed criteria."
26. 18 January 2012 "Members of the governing body are often visible around school, are highly supportive and fully understand its strengths and areas for improvement. Their involvement with pupils is particularly noteworthy and their keen appreciation of the local area, and its families and neighbours, make them a genuine asset across all the school's activities."
27. 6 March 2012 "The governing body provides appropriate challenge to school leaders. It ensures that statutory requirements for safeguarding are met."

28. 21 March 2012 “The governing body provides effective support and a good level of challenge. Governors receive regular updates on the quality of teaching in order to monitor improvements.”
29. 24 May 2012 “Senior leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, have a clear and ambitious vision for the school, which is shared by all staff.”
30. 27 June 2012 “Governors support senior leaders and have effectively challenged them to raise standards of attainment. Reports to governors on the quality of provision and its evaluation are regular but not always challenged and probed with sufficient rigour.”
31. 3 July 2012 “The contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.”
32. 11 July 2012 “The contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
33. 12 September 2012 The governing body is strong and it carries out its responsibilities to evaluate and appropriately challenge the school’s performance to the highest standard.
Governors ensure the efficient management of financial resources. This leads to mostly effective deployment of staff and resources.”
34. 20 September 2012 “Presents sustained challenge to the headteacher and senior team and keeps fully abreast of strengths, weaknesses and developments, on a strict ‘no surprises’ basis.
Has managed the budget through a turbulent period including taking difficult decisions with regard to staffing, such that a tight savings plan is now on course to be met.
Meets statutory requirements, including those relating to safeguarding and the promotion of equalities.”
35. 28 November 2012 “The governing body meets regularly with school leaders and has built a very clear understanding of how well pupils are doing. Members closely involve themselves with all aspects of school life, bringing their own expertise to bear. They forge close links with parents, making sure they are there at consultation meetings. They keep abreast of pupil progress meetings and often question and challenge the school’s leaders on the fine detail of the results of testing. The governing body keeps a watchful eye on school spending, particularly that linked with pupil premium, ensuring this funding has the desired impact. The governing body has good understanding of how the management of staff performance is closely linked with pupils’ achievement and how salary progression is fairly used. They have supported the training of staff where

necessary and monitor closely how successful this has been. Members have undergone training to support the safety and well-being of pupils. They have helped the school to remain a safe and secure environment for children and ensured that all safeguarding requirements are met.”

36. 5 December 2012 The governing body has a good understanding of the quality of teaching and pupils’ achievement and has compared this new school’s initial performance to a similar new school that opened three years ago. The governors challenge and support senior leaders well. Link governors to subjects have recently been appointed. They have planned visits to observe learning and to talk to staff and to pupils. Governors have an on-going training programme in place. Through their processes of self-evaluation they have identified, for instance, the need for training in the analysis and understanding of pupil-progress information. This has been arranged. Governors ensure good value for money. For instance, they monitor the spending and effectiveness of the pupil premium funding as well as the outcomes of the school’s appraisal procedures, ensuring that only the most successful teachers are rewarded. All statutory duties are met, including arrangements for safeguarding.
37. 7 March 2013 “Members of the governing body are a committed and active team. They undertake regular training to support the school through their links with subject areas, and to increasingly challenge school leaders about the impact of their work. They do not challenge the school sufficiently to check initiatives are leading to pupils making good progress. Recent training on the use of school data to analyse the work of the school has raised their ability to challenge the school more rigorously. Their knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching is improving but is not yet detailed enough. The progress of pupils receiving extra support through the pupil premium is as good as other pupils in the school, although governors have not scrutinised achievement data, as measured in average points scores, related to this. Governors are aware of performance management and ensure that staff progression is linked to their impact on pupils’ progress. The professional development of the governing body is enhanced not only by courses but also regular meetings with governors from other schools to share up-to-date information about their roles”
38. 21 May 2013 The governing body is well informed and decisive. Governors set demanding targets for the Principal based on a very good understanding of student and staff performance. They have insisted on changes in leadership in some posts and performance has subsequently improved. They strictly insist that staff progress in pay only when performance targets are met. They pay special attention to the effective use of pupil premium funding to secure equal opportunity for eligible students. They review and revise policies of support development priorities. They review the safeguarding policy

annually. They visit school regularly and keep themselves fully briefed on developments in education. The governing body plays a significant part in maintaining improvement at Garth Hill.

For further information on the work of Overview and Scrutiny in Bracknell Forest, please visit our website on <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/scrutiny> or contact us at:

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