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| Committee:         | <b>Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee</b>                    |
| Date:              | <b>10 June 2014</b>   |
| Title of Report:   | <b>Update on the progress of the Schools Risk Review Group</b>                        |
| By:                | <b>Director of Children's Services</b>  |
| Purpose of Report: | <b>To update the Committee on the progress of the School Risk Review Group (SRRG)</b> |

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**Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to consider the progress to date of the School Risk Review Group**

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### **1. Financial Implications**

1.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report at this stage but the work of the School Risk Review Group (SRRG) informs decisions about allocations and resources.

### **2. Background**

2.1 Whilst school budgets are delegated and managed fairly autonomously by the Board of Governors and Headteacher, the County Council has ultimate responsibility for ensuring sound financial management in schools and providing assurance on this to the Department for Education (DfE).

2.2 As a result of continued weaknesses in school governance and financial management, the Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee (ABVCSSC) formed a joint member reference group with the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee to review the main responsibilities of the Council in relation to schools. The work of this group focussed on understanding the risks to the authority and how school governors can be influenced to ensure appropriate decision-making to help mitigate those risks.

2.3 Across the Council, a number of different teams are involved in providing support to schools, including the Standards, Learning and Effectiveness (SLES), BSD Finance, Personnel and Training and Internal Audit. In recognition of the need to ensure that this support is properly co-ordinated and to improve the use of information and intelligence about schools, a cross-service group, the School Risk Review Group (SRRG), was formed.

2.4 The SRRG, established in the first instance for two years, meets regularly throughout the year. Its objective is to strengthen leadership, governance and financial management across all schools, as well as using a risk based approach to provide an early warning of potential issues at individual schools, with the intention of enabling more targeted support and intervention and to agree preventative strategies, including more focussed training.

2.5 This has been set out in its Terms of Reference including details of membership and is attached at **Appendix 1**.

### **3. Work to date**

3.1. The SRRG meets quarterly and had its first meeting in December 2013.

3.2. A mechanism to capture information about all schools has been developed and is subject to regular update by group members; therefore highlighting areas of risk or potential concern.

3.3. The Chair and Clerk meet prior to each quarterly meeting to analyse the information presented by group members. Brief reports are commissioned for schools whose overall risk is flagged as high. These are discussed in more detail at the meeting.

3.4. A summary of actions and priorities that have been taken and identified to date are as follows:

- Prioritised planned internal audit reviews for those individual schools flagged as high risk. Each audit encompasses an analysis of arrangements for governance, financial management, expenditure, income, payroll and assets. Other areas of concern raised that fall outside of these areas are also reviewed, where appropriate.
- Analysing the cost of completing audits of all East Sussex schools within the next two to three years. This analysis has been completed and a decision as to the availability of funding is awaited from Children's Services.
- A review has been undertaken of training programmes provided for headteachers, bursars, clerks and governors across the service. The information will be analysed to identify duplication and gaps in provision. A co-ordinated and coherent training programme will be devised between key services (SLES, BSD Finance, Personnel and Training and Internal Audit) to address these issues and to ensure the programme of training addresses all level of need.
- In addition, training packages will be developed and targeted appropriately where risks are identified.
- Contact will be made with headteachers and/or chairs of governors as appropriate, for example, to seek clarification and to identify support needs in instances where concerns have been raised.
- Review of processes for managing decisions on behalf of a school when delegated powers have been removed from a governing body.

#### **4. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations**

4.1. The Committee is recommended to consider the progress of the SRRG to date.

STUART GALLIMORE  
Director of Children's Services

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Local Members: All  
Background Documents:

ABVCSSC Report: 2012 Review of Governors and progress to date, 5 November 2013

## SCHOOL RISK REVIEW GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE

### Membership:

- Fiona Wright, Assistant Director, Schools Youth and Inclusion Support
- Alison Rendle, Head of Education Improvement
- Nigel Chilcott, Senior Audit Manager
- Jon Brown, Finance Manager - School Strategy
- Diana Francombe, Senior Manager, Governor Services and Planning
- John Williams, HR Manager
- Elaine Codling, HR Manager
- Catherine Denyer, Project Assistant (SLES)

### Purpose of the group:

- 3 To help and support schools to improve good leadership and governance
- 4 To identify and manage risks in schools, in particular financial management, HR practices, leadership and governance and safeguarding
- 5 To share intelligence on schools
- 6 To agree priorities for action, including training
- 7 To devise preventative strategies

### Frequency of meetings:

The group will meet four times a year:

- 8 February (towards the end of the financial year, and at the start of the busy time for school recruitment)
- 9 April/May
- 10 July (once school budget plans are set)
- 11 November (when outcomes data is available and after the October census)

### Communication and data sharing

- A spreadsheet will be held on Sharepoint which will be updated by group members and by a representative from the safeguarding team two weeks prior to each meeting.
- The clerk and chair will review the spreadsheet and commission brief reports for schools identified as high risk. These schools will be discussed in detail in the meeting.
- Between meetings the group may wish to provide updates on schools that are causing concern. A group email will be established for this purpose.
- Outcomes from the work of the group will feed into the audit planning processes.

### Accountability and reporting

- 12 The group will submit regular reports to CMT and the Audit and Best Value Community Services Scrutiny Committee (ABVCSSC) and the Statutory Officers' Group (SOG)

### Review

The group is established for two years in the first instance. After 18 months the group will review its purpose and terms of reference and make a recommendation to CMT, ABVCSSC and SOG on whether the group is still required.

### **Standard agenda for School Risk Review Group**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of last meeting
3. Review of high risk schools and agreement of strategies to manage risks
4. Review of any other schools causing concern
5. Consideration of common themes and preventative strategies
6. Any other business (notified to chair in advance of the meeting)