

Report to: **Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee**  
 Date: **10 March 2014**  
 By: **Director of Children’s Services**  
 Title of Report: **Evaluation of the Clerking Service**  
 Purpose of Report: **To update Members on the findings of the evaluation of the Clerking Service and the actions that are being undertaken to strengthen the Service**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS: The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note**

- (1) the findings of the evaluation of the Clerking Service; and**
  - (2) the action Governor Services have taken and continue to take to address the recommendations to further strengthen the Service.**
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**1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1. Any costs that have arisen as a result of the work outlined in this paper have so far been met within the existing Governor Services Team budget. Consideration is being given to requesting a Single Status Review of the salary grade for Clerks which may have a financial impact. Any additional salary costs would need to be met by the school budget.

**2. Background**

2.1 The Audit Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee established a joint member reference group with the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee in 2012. A key area for consideration as part of the remit of the group was the role of school governors. One of the recommendations of the reference group in its final report in July 2012 was that the local authority *use the advisory clerking service to ensure that Governing Bodies’ focus on their responsibilities and have access to advice.*

2.2 The review and development of the Advisory Clerking Service is part of a wider set of aims to strengthen the local authority’s support for governors. It was considered timely to carry out such a review as the clerking service had been established for three academic years.

2.3 In April 2013 East Sussex County Council commissioned Pamoja Consulting, an organization that specialises in evaluation and research to conduct an evaluation of the Clerking Service.

**3. Methodology**

3.1 The methodology for the evaluation took the form of a desktop analysis, online questionnaires, telephone interviews and focus group discussions. Participants in the evaluation included clerks, governors, headteachers, representatives from the Governor Services team, senior officers of East Sussex County Council and representatives of the East Sussex Governors Representative Group (ESGRG).

**4. Findings**

3.1 Overall the findings of the evaluation concluded that there is strong causal evidence that the provision of Advisory Clerks through the Clerking Service has, overall, had a major, positive impact on the advice and guidance available to Governing Bodies. The Executive Summary is attached at Appendix 1.

3.2 The evaluation report also included areas for development, recommendations on how these could be addressed by Governor Services and some information on actions already undertaken by Governor Services as detailed in Appendix 2.

## **5. Actions**

5.1 Governor Services will continue to work with Governing Bodies to continue to address areas highlighted for development in order to strengthen the local authority's support for governors through the Clerking Service.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

6.1 The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to note

(1) the findings of the evaluation of the Clerking Service; and

(2) the action Governor Services have taken and continue to take to address the recommendations to further strengthen the Service.

GED ROWNEY

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Local Members: All

### Background Documents

None

## Independent Evaluation : Pamoja Consulting

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### **BACKGROUND**

National guidance from the Department for Education recommends school Governing Bodies appoint suitably trained Clerks who can provide them with expert advice and guidance to support them in their roles. This recommendation is founded on evidence that suggests the most efficient and effective Governing Bodies are supported by equally efficient and effective clerks. The role of the advisory Clerk is critical to ensure that Governing Body members are kept up-to-date with changes in policy, the law and relevant good practices.

In 2010 the Governor Services Team at East Sussex County Council (ESCC) designed and implemented a countywide Clerking Service with the aim of driving up the standards of Clerking across the county to support improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of Governing Bodies.

Under the Clerking Service Protocol, Governing Bodies appoint and employ their own Clerks, while Clerks' salaries are funded, up to a maximum of 130 hours per annum, from additional funding for education, provided by the DfE directly to ESCC to distribute as it sees fit. Known as the headroom fund, it is an element of the schools budget which is managed locally by the East Sussex Schools Forum. The Clerking fund element is administered by the Governor Services Team.

Schools and Governing Bodies which have chosen to work with the Clerking service agree to adhere to the Protocol and must enrol their Clerk on an accreditation Scheme designed and delivered by the Governor Services Team. The Accreditation Scheme, launched in 2011, is equivalent to a BTEC level 3 award and is designed to ensure Clerks have the knowledge and skills they need to do their jobs well from an administrative perspective and as an advisory Clerk.

To establish whether the clerking Service Protocol and its associated Accreditation Scheme are meeting their objectives, this independent evaluation was commissioned by the Governor Services team. The evaluation was conducted between April and July 2013 to assess what observed results, if any, could be reasonably associated with the Protocol, to identify key challenges and document learning. Two hundred and eleven people took part in this evaluation, including 34 Clerks, 171 Governing Body members and 6 other stakeholders.

#### **SUMMARY OF KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS**

Findings from the evaluation reveal that the Clerking Service Protocol, including the Accreditation Scheme, has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of Governing Bodies. This is associated with perceived improvements in Clerks' performance with Clerks now offering more advisory services to Governing Bodies, a key aim of the Clerking Service Protocol.

This evaluation shows that Clerks have increased confidence in their abilities and, correspondingly, Governing Body members have more confidence in their Clerks. The role of the Clerk, since the launch of the Protocol, is now held in higher regard with Clerks feeling more respected and valued. Equally, Governing Body members reported that they believe the Accreditation Scheme has increased the professionalism of Clerks which has contributed to greater efficiency and effectiveness in terms of Governing Body operation.

Of Governing Body members who took part in this evaluation, 69% now view the Clerk's role as more professionalised, while 67% believe that the Clerk's status has been raised since the

Protocol's introduction. Approximately 38 Clerks had either completed the Accreditation Scheme or were due to complete within six months of the evaluation. A further 41 Clerks are due to complete the Accreditation Scheme by January 2015. Feedback from those Clerks on the Scheme and from their Governing Body members is largely positive. Of those Clerks who had completed the Accreditation Scheme, self-evaluation of the Scheme's learning objectives and whether they had been met were rated highly, with 83% of Clerks rating the quality of the Scheme's teaching highly.

There is strong causal evidence that the Clerking Service has contributed to improvements in the professional development of Clerks. As a condition of working to the Protocol, schools and Governing Bodies must provide their Clerks with regular supervision, annual appraisal and complete a professional development plan with them. Remarkably, 100% of Clerks who had completed the Accreditation Scheme had received an annual appraisal and 95% had a professional development plan in place, compared with 39% and 15%, respectively, of those Clerks who had not undertaken the Accreditation Scheme.

The evaluation notes greater cohesiveness between Clerks, Governing Body members, particularly the Chair, and the Governor Services Team. The Protocol has helped to ameliorate a previously reported air of perceived antagonism, especially between the Governor Services Team and Governing Bodies. Yet, there is room for improvement, particularly in relation to communication which can be fragmented at times. Around 43% of Governing Body members who took part in the evaluation believed the Protocol had improved communication between them and other Governing Bodies. The evaluation notes mixed responses, with some key informants feeling the Governor Services Team could do more to share the successes and failures of the Clerking Service.

Improved communication is a key recommendation of this evaluation. It is clear that confusion remains among Governing Body members and among some Clerks too, of the Clerk's role. Mistakenly, some Governing Body members believe the Clerk to be a volunteer, completely misunderstanding that the Clerk is employed by them and is a paid member of staff. Such failures in communication and understanding of the Clerk's role have led to some Clerks not being adequately resourced. In some cases this has caused tensions during Governing Body meetings as each stakeholder tries to assert itself.

Clerks and Governing Body members alike have strongly criticised the low levels of pay received by Clerks and Clerks have highlighted that they work far more hours than they are being paid for. Paradoxically, the Protocol's ambition to attract higher calibre candidates to become Clerks, to provide them with training and to support them to deliver a more professional service without commensurate levels of remuneration or adequate hours to make the job pay, may undermine the entire initiative. Moreover, there is inadequate pay scale progression to incentivise Clerks to make a career of Clerking. These important issues require careful consideration by the Governor Services Team and other stakeholders.

Those Clerks, who have tried to make a career from Clerking, have had to take on multiple schools to gain enough hours for the job to be financially viable. Yet, feedback from Governing Body members who have such a 'Career Clerk' point out this may lead to deterioration in overall quality as the Clerk struggles to juggle a number of schools at once.

Clearly challenges remain and the evaluation has found several. For example, the Accreditation Scheme, for some, has not led to improvements in their Clerk's performance and attrition rates of Clerks not completing the Scheme due to Clerks resigning from their positions are high (33% across the five cohorts). That said, The Clerking Service is clearly having an impact on the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of Governing Bodies and is helping to shape Clerking as a desirable profession. The Service is supporting a gradual transition towards advisory Clerking which is a commendable achievement over such a short implementation timeframe.

## KEY MESSAGES

1. Key informants reported improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of Governing Bodies since the enrolment of Clerks on the Accreditation Scheme. This included greater proficiency in conducting general tasks and handling bespoke situations such as school collaborations.
2. Clerks who have completed the Accreditation Scheme have increased confidence and Governing Body members have increased confidence in their Clerks. A great deal of the improvements in confidence came from better knowledge.
3. Clerking with a Capital C! The protocol and the Accreditation Scheme have changed perceptions of the Clerk's role, which is now seen as more professional and of a higher status. The changes brought about by the Clerking Service have created a virtuous circle – Governing Body members are more aware of the Clerk's role, which has raised expectations and the professionalism of the role.
4. There is greater cohesion between Clerks, Governing Body members and the Governor Services Team since the initiation of the Clerking Service. Informants generally reported an increase in Clerk's knowledge, which has increased advisory Clerking. Clerks reported that they are better equipped to research changes in policy and the law, which enables them to offer advice to their Governing Body. More Clerks are calling the Governor Services Team for advice, which is a proxy indicator that more Clerks are adopting an advisory role.
5. There have been improvements in the professional development of Clerks: 100% of Clerks receive an annual appraisal, the majority have a professional development plan, two thirds receive supervisory meetings, and double the amount of Clerks on the Scheme have completed ten hours or more of training and professional development, compared to those who are not working to the protocol.
6. Clerks and many Governing Body members consider the expectations of the role to be out of sync with the hours and salary grade.
7. Clerks are 'fed up' with working above and beyond their allocated hours and this has contributed to the resignation of some Clerks.
8. For some, perceived communication barriers have resulted in uneven levels of service from the Governor Services Team.
9. There is widespread confusion over the role of the Clerk with many Governing Body members not fully understanding the responsibilities of the Clerk. Misunderstandings remain about whether the Clerk is accountable to the school or the Governor Services Team.
10. Some Governing Body members still view the Clerk's role as voluntary and therefore a 'self-sufficient' role that does not require resources.
11. Some Clerks felt that career Clerking is the only way to make remuneration worthwhile, while some Governing Body members felt that Clerking to multiple schools compromised the quality of the Clerk's work.
12. Seventy two per cent to 83% of Clerks highly rated the content and experience of the Accreditation Scheme. However some had issues with starting the Scheme which they felt was either too fast or too slow. Some Clerks also felt resistance to starting the Scheme, which is likely due to the perceived 'enormity' of the workload.
13. Clerks accessing Governor Services support via email or telephone generally rated the service they received highly.



## **Appendix 2**

### **Independent Evaluation: Pamoja Consulting**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1 - COMMUNICATION**

Respondents had mixed views concerning communication channels between Clerks, Governing Body members and the Governor Services Team. Some were pleased with the levels of communication while others felt that perceived communication barriers have resulted in uneven levels of service. Governor Services need to address these gaps to ensure that all schools understand the role of the Clerk and their role in employing and managing the role.

*In order to address some of the communication gaps, the Governor Services Team have provided information on the roles, responsibilities and accountability of the Clerk on Czone, through the Governor Services newsletter and through the Autumn 2013 round of Governor Area Meetings. The Team are now carrying out a consultation with both Governors and Clerks to explore how existing communications can be improved and to develop new ways to increase opportunities to share information and engage in effective dialogue.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2 - RECRUITMENT**

Recruitment is an on-going issue for Governing Bodies and some informants would like more support with their recruitment procedures. The Governor Services Team should use findings from this evaluation - in particular the weaknesses and successes of career Clerking – to consider ways of developing this area. Another suggestion is that Governing Bodies support each other in the recruitment of Clerks and this could include Governing Body champions that support other schools.

*The Governor Services Team have already begun to address this issue by reviewing barriers that may prevent people from entering into the recruitment process and have held a number of recruitment events where potential clerks can attend to find out more about the role. The Team is also providing advice to schools embarking on a recruitment process and provides interim clerks where a school has a vacancy that has not yet been filled.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION 3 - CAREER PROGRESSION**

The career progression of Clerks was an area of concern for both Clerks and Governing Body members. Progression is restricted by the salary bands and glass ceiling that Clerks hit after completing the Accreditation Scheme. One way that the Service could address this is to focus on staff retention and promote on going career progression with post-accreditation training and establishing senior or regional Clerk positions.

*The Governor Services Team is looking at what post-accreditation Continuous Professional Development could be designed for Clerks. The National College for Teaching and Leadership has recently been funded by the DfE to develop a national clerk training programme and it is possible this could provide a solution for added progression.*

*Governor Services is now providing access to TEN Governor for those governing bodies using the Clerking Service. TEN Governor is an on-line database of guidance on governance issues which Clerks can use to find out information on behalf of their governing body. This is enabling Clerks in East Sussex to develop their understanding and better fulfil their role as an advisor.*

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4 - STRENGTHEN LINKS BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS**

While there have been noticeable improvements in cohesion between Clerks, Governing Bodies and the Governor Services Team, with 89 per cent of Clerks agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt supported by their Chair, this evaluation highlights that there remains

room for improvement. The Governor Services Team should look at ways of strengthening links with the East Sussex Governors' Representative Group (ESGRG). This could be done through the meetings with elected county members and officers that take place three times per year.

*Governor Services continues to work closely with the ESGRG and will be involving them, through County Forum, in discussions on the Clerking Service. The Team is also seeking to strengthen links by working with governors in the School Improvement Alliances, through the Clerking Network and Area Meetings, and also by encouraging the development of Chair's Clusters.*

## **RECOMMENDATION 5 - RESOURCES**

Resources were identified as an important area for change in the evaluation particularly because of the serious implications that poor resourcing has on confidentiality. The Governor Services Team should work with all stakeholders to identify the options available in addressing the resourcing issues that have been highlighted in this report. It is imperative that Clerks are provided with suitable resources to do their jobs well, which will ensure that confidentiality is adhered to at all times.

*The communication work undertaken already has included a reminder for schools that the Clerks is their employee and that they have a responsibility to ensure that the Clerk has the resources to carry out their role, for example a telephone, laptop, secure email and lockable storage space. While some clerks provide their own equipment, the Governor Services Team has asked schools to review whether this provides adequate data protection as much of the information dealt with by governing bodies is confidential in its nature. Schools are their own Data Controllers under the Data Protection Act and so have responsibility for ensuring confidentiality by its own staff but the Team is raising awareness that this includes the Clerk.*

## **RECOMMENDATION 6 - DROP OUT FROM THE ACCREDITATION SCHEME DUE TO RESIGNATION FROM CLERKING**

There continue to be high rates of attrition from the Accreditation Scheme due to the resignation of Clerks. The evaluation has not been able to ascertain the exact causal factors leading to the resignation of Clerks. In order to maximise the benefits of the Service and the Scheme, ensure value for money and make the Scheme attractive for all Clerks, a comprehensive review should be undertaken with those Clerks who failed to complete the Accreditation due to resigning from their position. The findings should be used to learn lessons of how to retain Clerks and to improve the Clerk's overall experience of the Clerking Service and the Accreditation Scheme.

*Initial Investigations by the Governor Services Team has concluded that the reasons behind resignations include lack of recognition, absence of resources, or expectations on the clerk to work many more hours than originally contracted. This can be due to a lack of understanding by the Governing Body of the Clerk's role or that the volume of work is not considered properly when recruiting. Evidence shows that when recruiting, Governing Bodies are defaulting to the number of hours funded by the Clerking Service (Currently schools that are part of the clerking service are funded for a maximum of 130 hours of a clerk's wages), rather than considering how many governors there are, how many meetings and what duties they need the Clerk to undertake. Part of the advice the Team is providing to schools undertaking recruitment is around making the number of hours advertised better reflect the hours required to fulfil the particular role.*



## **RECOMMENDATION 7 - EXPECTATIONS OF THE ROLE AND SALARY**

This evaluation has highlighted changes with the expectations of the role of Clerk particularly as the Clerk becomes increasingly recognised as an advisory figure. The evaluation has also noted that Clerks do not feel that their current remuneration matches the increasing expectations.

Given the high number of key informants who remarked upon the level of remuneration for Clerks in the context of an increasingly professionalised role, the Governor Services Team should work with stakeholders to consider the options available to address any challenges this perception may present. It is not within the scope of this evaluation to recommend salary increases or other measures to alter Clerk's remuneration packages, however the severity of this issue demands attention and is noted here by way of highlighting the issue for further consideration.

It should be noted that the new School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013 will be effective from September 2013. This means that a new obligation will be placed on Governing Bodies that will require them to have greater regard to advice from the Clerk as to the nature of the Governing Body's functions, this will place a greater focus on the expectation of the role of the Clerk.

*Governor Services is reviewing the job description and person specification for Advisory Clerks with the Clerk Trainers to see whether it adequately reflects the changing responsibilities of the role. Once the review is complete it is recommended that the job is reviewed against the ESCC Policy and Procedure for Grading Jobs to ensure the grade reflects the responsibilities.*

