



COUNTY CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (GOVERNORS)

WEDNESDAY, 9 JULY 2025

3.00 PM REMOTE MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

MEMBERSHIP - Councillors Chris Collier, Peter Pragnell, Alan Shuttleworth, Bob Standley and Georgia Taylor

ALSO INVITED - Denis Kong, Margaret Rooms, John Murray, Clare Cornford, Charlotte Johnstone

Minutes - Rosie O'Brien

A G E N D A

1. Minutes of the previous meeting (*Pages 3 - 8*)
2. Apologies for absence
3. Disclosure of Interests
Disclosure by all Members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Members regard the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
4. Urgent items
Notification of any items which the Chair considers urgent and proposes to take at the appropriate part of the agenda. Any members who wish to raise urgent items are asked, wherever possible, to notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. In so doing, they must state the special circumstances which they consider justify the matter being considered urgent.
5. Academies Update
John Murray, Senior Manager: Leadership and Governance, Governor and Clerking Services.
6. Local Authority Governor Appointments and Governor Services Update (*Pages 9 - 12*)
Charlotte Johnstone, Project Officer, Governor and Clerking Service.
7. ESGF Report/Verbal Update for Councillors (*Pages 13 - 14*)
To include:
 - Feedback from Chairs Networking re Mental Health.
 - Feedback on presentation to ESGF re ASEND Improvement Plan.
 - Universal Infant Free School Meals
 - OFSTED consultation.
 - Food Partnership feedback.
8. Any other items previously notified under agenda item 4

PHILIP BAKER
Deputy Chief Executive
County Hall, St Anne's Crescent
LEWES BN7 1UE

1 July 2025

Contact Clare Cornford (Governor and Clerking Officer – Governor and Clerking Service), 01323
466887, Email: clare.cornford@eastsussex.gov.uk

County Consultative Committee - Minutes

Date: Wednesday 19th March 2025 15:00

Meeting: County Consultative Committee comprising of Councillors' and East Sussex Governors' Forum (ESGF).

Present: Councillor's Bob Standley (Chair), Peter Pragnell, Chris Collier, Alan Shuttleworth, Colin Belsey

Members of the ESGF: Denise Kong (DK), Monica Pell (MP)

Other attendees: Cllr Paul Redstone (Governor at The Genesis Federation)

ESCC Officers: Clare Cornford, John Murray, Charlotte Johnstone (Minutes)

1	<u>Minutes of the previous meeting</u> Cllr Standley welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved with no further comments.
2	<u>Apologies for absence</u> No apologies received from Monica Whitehead (ESGF).
3	<u>Disclosure of interests</u> No interests declared.
4	<u>Urgent items</u> No items raised.
5	<u>Academy Update</u> Verbal update from JM. Since the last County Consultative Committee Meeting in November, there have been two new conversions: Robertsbridge Community College, converted on 1 March 2025 to Aquinas Church of England Education Trust and Ringmer Primary and Nursery School converted on 1 March 2025 to Durrington Multi Academy Trust (DMAT). There are three current conversions in progress. St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School (proposed conversion date - 1 May 2025) - BOSCO Catholic Education Trust. St Thomas a Becket Catholic Primary School (proposed conversion date - 1 May 2025) - BOSCO Catholic Education Trust and Grove Park School (proposed conversion date to be confirmed) - London South East Academies Trust (LSEAT). New Academy Orders have also been received for the following schools: • St Richards Catholic College (proposed conversion date to be confirmed) - BOSCO Catholic Education Trust

	• Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School (proposed conversion date to be confirmed) - BOSCO Catholic Education Trust • Grovelands Community Primary School (proposed conversion date to be confirmed) - Wandle Learning Trust • Hellingly Community Primary School (proposed conversion date to be confirmed) - Wandle Learning Trust JM confirmed that the above changes were in motion prior to the national government changes to academisation. Due to technical issues, Cllr Pragnell left the meeting at 15:10.
6	<u>LA Gov appointments and governor services update</u> Verbal update from CJ. Since the last County Consultative Meeting in November, 5 Local Authority governors were nominated for appointment. All of these were approved within their boards for a 4-year term of office. 4 of these were reapplications, 1 was a new application. The Governor and Clerking Service has developed and delivered new information sessions for East Sussex Headteachers, Governors and Clerks on the topic of the Governor Disciplinary Committee (GDC) which takes place following the suspension or exclusion of a pupil. The team confirmed that there has been very positive feedback from Headteacher's and Governors who attended these sessions, and these sessions will be running again in Term 4 and Term 5. CJ confirmed that the team is also working on a new information session for Headteacher's which will outline the full complaints process. CJ confirmed this was to respond to the positive feedback received from Headteacher's who attended the GDC information sessions. CJ spoke of the golden thread of the topics of Belonging and Inclusion which has been at the forefront of the training, networking and briefing programme this year, including an ESGF-led forum and and ESGF-led networking, both on the topic of Belonging. CJ explained that feedback from these sessions indicates governors want to continue discussing this topic, and the team and the ESGF will look at continuing this conversation in future work. CJ also explained that the team are currently developing training around the topic of transition, inc. Transitioning between school settings, between year groups and further. Since the committee last met in November 2024, there have been 52 new governor appointments in maintained schools. This is an increase from the 40 new governors who had joined boards as reported in the November '24 minutes. Since November 2024, there have been 3 clerk inductions provided to clerks at maintained schools.

The Locum Clerk Service has also been used in this term, with East Sussex Locum Clerks supporting 8 meetings across 4 schools.

The second cohort of the ESCC certified course for clerks, Excellence in Clerking, recently completed their final sessions and are currently undertaking the final knowledge test. CJ explained that this group of clerks have been very supportive of one another and engaged very meaningfully with the programme. CJ confirmed the next cohort will begin in Term 5.

Cllr Standley commented on how great it was to hear the positive feedback.

Cllr Standley enquired as to how to target the governors who don't typically attend training and we make all governors aware of its importance.

CJ explained that the team recently asked Clerks to complete checklists and part of that was to look at training gaps in their board.

JM agreed that there was scope to engage with the few boards who don't engage with Governor Services or attend the training programme. JM also highlighted that just because a board has one or two really engaged governors that attend training frequently, it doesn't mean that the board as a whole is highly skilled.

DK spoke of hearing about similar issues when recently attending an NGA conference with governors nationally. DK said that governor engagement seems to be a widespread issue at the moment and that the offer available to East Sussex governors is good.

DK enquired about the possibility of issues with academies who don't want to engage or don't access the offer from Governor Services, and how this can make academies quite insular and how it can impact knowledge and experience. JM confirmed that the academy buy in for the Governor Services traded service is relatively good, esp. with smaller academy trusts, however there are larger trusts who don't buy in to the traded offer and there is low engagement.

JM highlighted CC's work with academy trusts to enable trusts to learn about the traded offer which has led to some more trusts buying in to the traded offer.

JM said some trusts feel that the Governor Services training is only applicable to maintained schools, however JM confirmed this isn't the case and that there is scope to improve communicating this with trusts.

MP spoke of knowing local maintained schools where she doesn't see any governor engagement with training and networking. MP identified the risk of some governing boards with long standing Chairs becoming complacent and feel they do not need training. MP also highlighted the benefit of how easy it is to access training now that it is all delivered online.

MP explained that there are some statutory training requirements, but otherwise you cannot force governors to attend regular training.

PR spoke of it being beneficial for the Clerk and Chair to receive the regular lists of upcoming training, and that an effective Clerk would highlight the training to the Chair, and that the Chair should be telling the governors to engage more with training.

DK explained that it's important to focus on the root of school governance which is to benefit the pupils in the community. DK spoke of her experience in being a governor on complaints or exclusions panels and one of the key takeaways from

	these experiences is that when a complaint or exclusion is handled poorly this can negatively impact on the relationship the child and their parents have with the school. DK added that as a governor, knowing the importance of training also means knowing the importance of the culture and ethos of the school. Cllr Standley agreed and said that without training governors won't know how to handle the problems in front of them. Cllr Standley asked if training could be made mandatory. Governor Services confirmed it cannot be made mandatory. Cllr Belsey explained from his experience as a governor, that training engagement has decreased. Cllr Belsey said knowledge of what it means to be a governor would improve their connection to the school. Cllr Pragnell returned to the meeting at 15:18.
7	<u>ESGF Verbal update for councillors.</u> Verbal update provided by DK on behalf of the ESGF. DK asked Cllrs whether there is an action plan following East Sussex's recent SEN Ofsted inspection to improve the support for children with SEN. DK also asked how councillors are going to assure that the planned actions will take place, esp. given the reorganisation in local government. Cllr Standley explained that East Sussex was rated 2 in the inspection, and that there were things that East Sussex did well and things we know can be improved upon and that we're happy to improve upon. Cllr Standley added that the Cllrs will be holding officers to account. Cllr Standley explained that funding is a much bigger problem, and that transferring from the school budget to the high-needs block is rare, especially compared to other councils who do this annually. Cllr Standley explained that there is high pressure with budgets and that ESCC has been managing budgets better than other councils which has meant we haven't received as much funding from national government as other councils have. Cllr Standley confirmed there will be an action plan. DK asked if this action plan is still being written or if one came out of the Ofsted inspection. Cllr Standley confirmed that there is a general annual plan, however a more specific plan is being developed. DK commented that it will be good to hear how the plan is being developed when the County Consultative Committee next meet. DK spoke of the funding changes and noted that some schools weren't being vocal in opposing the funding changes. DK said these schools were clear they didn't want the transfer to be an annual occurrence. Cllr Standley appreciated the view of these schools as it has impacted their budgets, and that historically this has not been a frequent action and reserves were moved around to lessen the impact of this. Cllr Standley explained that there are

	enormous pressures currently and it would not be possible to rule out having to transfer funds in the future. DK asked if local government reorganisation will have an impact on the SEN action plan. Cllr Standley explained that this change may distract officers' time whilst the new council is formed, however Cllr Standley confirmed that Cllrs will stay focused in Children's Services. DK made Cllrs aware that there is a possibility of some governors writing to MPs about the universal infant free school meals funding, the issue being that the funding doesn't cover the cost of the meal. Cllr Standley said he is happy to be copied in to any emails or communications sent to MPs on this topic. Cllr Standley added that he is especially aware of the impact this funding can have on smaller infant primary schools who are under pressure with their budgets.
8	<u>AOI under item 4</u> No items raised.
9	<u>Next meeting:</u> The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 9th July 2025 15:00

This page is intentionally left blank

Report to: County Consultative Committee

Date of meeting: 09 July 2025

By: Charlotte Johnstone

Title: Local Authority Governor appointments and Governor and Clerking Service Update for Councillors

Purpose: To update Councillors on the nomination for appointment of local authority governors and governor training

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) For information

1 Background

1.1 The local authority has a statutory duty to approve nominations for local authority governors. Once nominated, schools then appoint local authority governors onto their governing board.

1.2 This report provides a summary of local authority governor applications approved for nomination, and information about the level of governor vacancies across the county.

2 Supporting information

2.1 Since the report sent to Councillors on the 19 March 2025, 9 local authority governors were nominated for appointment, all were approved for a 4 year term of office. These were formed of 7 reapplications and 2 new applications.

Helen Fuller	Rotherfield Primary School	Reapplication
Niall Ruiz-Smith	Ashdown Primary School	New Application
Azita Zohhadi	Willingdon Primary School	Reapplication
Peter Chowney	Sandown Primary school	Reapplication
Jonathan Nay	Bourne Primary School	Reapplication
David Barton	St Mary's Catholic Primary School	Reapplication
Denise Kong	West Rise Primary School	Reapplication
Katharine Wenden	St Peter & St Paul CofE Primary School	New Application
Paul Page-Mitchell	Manor Primary School	Reapplication

2.2 When the County Consultative Committee last met, the Governor and Clerking Service discussed that we were developing full complaints training for Headteacher's to take them through the complaints process. The training focuses on what you need to have in place before a complaint is made, and then it explores what the Headteacher's role is across the three stages of a complaint. The intention of the training was to be much more in-depth and focus Headteacher's to the finer details of the complaints policy and procedure. We have now delivered the session three times to East Sussex Headteachers and received feedback following these sessions. Some of the feedback included:

- *"I found the session extremely valuable. The involvement of the Clerk at every stage was something I found new... so I will definitely be ensuring we all do this".* – East Sussex Headteacher.

- *“Thank you for running this excellent session. All speakers were knowledgeable and engaging and having the slides will be a very helpful reference tool”*. – East Sussex Headteacher.

We will continue to run these sessions across the next academic year, and we are already seeing Headteacher's engaging with the training offer and booking their places on the session.

We are particularly proud of the training that was developed on Governor Disciplinary Committees (GDC's). Last academic year, our team did not run training on the topic of Permanent Exclusions (PEX's) or GDC's, but we could see it was a growing area that governors were becoming involved in, and we identified this as a training need.

With support from the Inclusion and Alternative Provision team, we built three information sessions targeted at Clerks, Governors and Headteacher's to triangulate our training and ensure each group understands their responsibilities, and how they intersect. In developing this training, the Governor and Clerking Service also has become knowledgeable and able to provide more bespoke and specific advice to schools, especially for more complex cases. We recognise this was a great achievement for our team and a timely addition to our training programme and we hope this has given governors, clerks and headteachers the confidence to support their schools with GDC's, and the knowledge to perform the task effectively and accurately.

2.3 The Governor and Clerking Service were also invited to attend the Headteacher Induction and Aspiring Leaders' Programme in May. It was a privilege to attend and to have the opportunity to speak to new and aspiring Headteachers, and to draw their attention to the importance of school governance. To echo our new training sessions, we did focus our presentation on the topics of Complaints and Exclusions and engaged the attendees in some case study activities to explore what they would do with the example complaint or exclusion. We also used the opportunity to speak to the attendees about the benefits of encouraging their middle leaders to become governors, as they will gain valuable CPD and experience which will benefit any future applications to be a school leader.

2.4 The Governor and Clerking Service are finalising the plans and topics for the upcoming academic year. New sessions will include looking at Transition, Relationships on the Governing Board, how to have courageous conversations, and succession planning for headteacher's. These topics all support our overarching Excellence for All Vision. The Governor and Clerking Service work closely with Education Division colleagues and our governor consultants to respond to changes within the education landscape, and we await further information and updates from the DfE, especially developments around SEND policy, Ofsted and the curriculum review.

2.5 Since the County Consultative Committee last met in March 2025, there have been 57 new governor appointments in maintained schools. This is a slight increase from the 52 new governors who had joined boards as reported in the previous 3-month gap between the meeting of the County Consultative Committee. Due to the way that tenure dates work on governing boards, and the rapid change that can sometimes occur in board membership it is not possible for us to determine how many governors have left their role. However, where schools have issues with retention our service can support with bespoke recruitment.

2.6 Clerking: Since the County Consultative Committee last met in March 2025, there has been 1 new clerk induction provided to maintained schools. This ensures that new clerks are aware of the basic expectations of their role, the key tasks they need to complete and the training available to support their knowledge and development. This is a lower number than our average, however the Governor and Clerking Service has been working closely with boards holding vacancies for Clerk to Governors to recruit quickly. We have found that some current ESCC Clerks are interested in expanding the number of boards they clerk for. We therefore have put these interested clerks in touch with Chairs and Headteachers who have vacancies to see if they are the right fit. We have supported several schools with recruiting clerks in this manner over the past few months, which reduced the length of time that governing boards were without substantive clerks.

Additionally, we have found that the majority of clerks willing to expand on the number of boards they clerk for have recently completed the East Sussex Excellence in Clerking Programme. We are pleased to see that upon the completion of the programme our clerks are feeling more knowledgeable and confident in their skills, and we are glad to see the positive impact this is having on a number of schools in East Sussex.

The Locum Clerk Service has also been a beneficial service this term, with our locum clerks supporting 5 meetings across 3 schools since the County Consultative Committee last met in March 2025.

Our ESCC certified course for Clerks, the Excellence in Clerking Programme is currently running its third cohort and is scheduled to end at the end of term. As mentioned earlier in this report, we are pleased to see the active engagement from the clerks enrolled the programme, especially sharing how their school settings work and good practice they recommend.

Charlotte Johnstone
Project Officer

Contact Officer: Charlotte Johnstone

Email: Charlotte.Johnstone@eastsussex.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

Report to councillors from the East Sussex Governor Forum

Author: Denise Kong, Chair of the ESGF

Date 11th June 2025

- 1) ESGF Chair networking has taken place. Governors reported back “Mental health is on the forefront of governors’ minds. There is an increasing pressure in schools for headteachers. Especially challenge from governors.”

The notes show that this was a very mutually supportive session. Governors were able to be frank and get support in setting appropriate boundaries, and to provide appropriate professional support.

- 2) Jessica Stubbings presented to the ESGF on the ASEND improvement plan, which was written in April 2025 in response to the Area SEND review (ASEND), which took place in November 2024.

We noted the existence of the SEND Strategy governance board and that stakeholders from many different areas sit on the board. Governors wondered what councillors’ visibility of the board and plan were, and how progress was being reported. ESGF asked that the information be shared with governors more generally, as it seemed there were some good intentions. But there would be a requirement for cultural change. There was a need to work with many different agencies.

- 3) Universal Infant Free School Meals update: DK has written to one MP as a test to see what the response is – ESCC covers about half a dozen constituencies, but we can only write to our own MP. *See Appendix 1.*
- 4) OFSTED consultation – the ESGF ran a session where a facilitator who has an OFSTED background volunteered their time to lead a session. We took notes and submitted a joint response to the OFSTED consultation. We await the response from OFSTED. DK also attended the NGA session (ESGF members are able to attend NGA events) and found it informative regarding OFSTED’s intent to better support leaders’ and teachers’ mental health.
- 5) The Food Partnership have run a series of events to try to get schools and farms linked. A pilot may be starting in the Ringmer area. Many different stakeholders, including governors, were invited to be involved.

Appendix 1 – Letter to MP re Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)

Dear James

I am writing to MPs on behalf of the school governors in the Lewes constituency. I am the chair of the East Sussex Governor Forum, the association of school governors in East Sussex.

There has been discussion recently among governors at the Lewes area network about the cost of Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM). There was recently an increase of 3p in the amount of funding for an UIFSM, from £2.58 to £2.61, a 1.2% rise. The cost of providing a meal is estimated to average £2.91.

Governors are aware that there is a theoretical argument for the funding per meal being lower than the amount that schools are charged, based on census numbers. However, the reality is that schools are having to subsidise their children's UIFSMs, which they are obliged to provide.

2025 research from the School Food Review charity has found that the provision of free school meals had many benefits. https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/FSM%20Evidence%20Pack_A4_2025_FINAL.pdf

For example,

- Boosting attainment and attendance, thus increasing a child's lifetime earnings
- Improving nutrition and helping combat childhood obesity, saving the NHS money in the long term

We would like to make MPs aware of the burden that is being put on schools as they try to provide the best start for their infant pupils. Is there anything that you can do to help address this?

Yours sincerely

Denise Kong