

THE FORUM OF SUTTON GOVERNORS

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Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 19 May 2016 at Civic Offices

Present: There were 17 schools represented as well as Headteachers and Elected Members

The Chair welcomed the meeting.

Apologies

Sandy Gillett – Wallington HS for Girls, Wendy Jordan – St Dunstan's Primary, John Gitman – Manor Park Primary, Barry Russell – Manor Park Primary, David Coomasingh – High View Primary, Simon Collinson, All Saints Benhilton, Angela Baughan – Spencer Nursery, Helen Matthey – Tweeddale Primary, Simon Brown – Glenthorne HS, Julie Adams – Governor Support.

Presentation:

Dominic Herrington – Regional Schools' Commissioner, South East and South London

Andrew gave a short biographical introduction. Dominic had previously worked for 10 years at the DfE as Director of the Academies Group and looking at the 14-19 curriculum. He is also currently a school governor at an East Dulwich Primary School.

Dominic said that he had started at the Primary School as a parent governor. He is now the vice-chair of governors and on the school's Achievement and Curriculum Committee. Previously he had, for 4 years, been a governor at a Harris Academy. With this experience he stressed how critical governance is in a school.

Dominic wanted to 1) explain his role and 2) give his perspective on the White Paper and the regional picture.

The South East and South London Region covers:

- 22 LA areas
- 10 Diocese
- 455 Primary Academies
- 309 Secondary Academies
- 34 Special Academies
- 54 Free Schools
- 133 Sponsors

His role as Regional Schools' Commissioner:

- To help raise standards though he stressed that, in the majority of schools, it is the Headteacher, teachers and governors who raise standards.
- Take action when an academy is underperforming.
- Decide on development of new academies.

- Address underperformance.
- Make recommendations to ministers about free school applications.
- Encourage organisations to become academy sponsors.
- Approve changes to open academies.

He works with the help of a Headteacher Board comprised of 7 members.

The White Paper sets out the Government's wish for Educational Excellence Everywhere. Education is the hallmark of a civilised society and every child in England deserves an entitlement to free world class education. Dominic re-iterated that this can only happen through great leadership. Leadership is at the heart of everything and that improvement in the system will come mostly from within schools rather than LAs or the state. He believes that there will be more executive Headteachers over-seeing more than one school and that MATs (Multi Academy Trusts) can, amongst other things, help create teachers' careers.

The White Paper is about:

- Attracting more great teachers.
- Developing great leaders.
- More school improvement stimulus.
- Everywhere developing Achieving Excellence Areas.
- More parental input.

Dominic acknowledged that Sutton has a very strong education system but he asked why an ambition for every school to be an academy by 2022? This is a professional conversation but on balance there are certain benefits:

- Sharing good practice.
- Economies of scale
- Refreshed governance
- Meeting the challenges of increasing autonomy and the changing roles of LAs.
- Need for future structures for teaching and learning to flourish.

A MAT provides opportunities for leadership succession and teacher recruitment and retention. There are new, harder legal accountability arrangements and they can also be a vehicle to help less secure schools.

Q – We have a hard federation over 2 Boroughs and it is working well. Why should we change?

A – What is the structure that you will have for the future to retain and grow success? A hard federation is very tightly regulated. Academies have more freedoms and choice in governance with a diversity of models.

Q- How does the National Curriculum sit in academies? Do we have to follow it?

A – No, though most do especially in English and Maths which are assessed at KS2 and GCSE. However, there is more freedom of choice. Schools can use it to introduce new things more appropriate and tailored to the needs of the students.

Q – I have a major concern. Is the government creating a huge structure which will just replicate LAs? There are 22 LAs and some of the things you are doing is what good LAs always do. Isn't it more difficult for a body overseeing large numbers to be responsible for improvement?

A – I can't oversee 850 schools as LAs can, but I can bring in the help of those Headteachers, teachers and governors, who most improve schools. I would work with the groups of underperforming schools. They need someone who can step in -

that is me. There will always be LAs as they have a role in place provision, admissions and SEN. Our education system is basically seen as good, however, in the future there will be more Headteachers and governors working together in trusts.

Q – On the disapplication of the National Curriculum. In the past there have been schools that taught creationism rather than evolution and the LA made them change. Now that there are more schools with particular religious character, what's to stop them writing their own curriculum going against the beliefs of most? Under the new model, how will you get them to stop?

A – Creationism is not allowed in the legal agreement nor radicalism or extremism.

Q – How will you know?

A – Parents are often the first source with OFSTED as the second. It is explicit that schools are required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum.

Q – Would you allow schools to buy into a curriculum created by someone else?

A – Schools can, and do, buy in or create their own. It is for the professionals to decide which curriculum best suits their pupils.

Q – It is predicted that there will be an additional 1,100 more schools needed. OFSTED is being reduced but won't there be a need for more inspections or will they be more widely spaced?

A – OFSTED is not being run down. It needs to be more efficient and consequently has had reductions. Gaps in terms of inspections? Maybe there were too many too often. OFSTED is now more proportionate to underperformance. What is the role of inspection in our system? It is to reassure parents and to drive improvement.

Q – What is the future role of the LA? In Sutton is it just place planning?

A – The LA has an important role. It has a good idea of what and where places needed. There will be close dialogue between LAs and central government on time frames and sites needed.

Q – You talk about LAs and local people knowing what's needed. In Sutton the Secondary schools have expanded working in collaboration. Local people have a strong view but, faced with you making decisions as to who will sponsor a new school, how much notice will you take of local lobbying?

A – We do take account of views. Local MPs and councillors can make representations but the decision goes way beyond me and there is not always local consensus. Lord Nash is his own person and makes his own mind up.

Q – There are different types of academies. On stand-alone ones, what is the situation?

A – The preferred model is a MAT. A single academy is not banned but a proposal for one will be closely scrutinised. If it is a strong school it will be allowed.

Q – Is there an optimum size for a group? What would be the number?

A – If it is a small number it can grow. Most are between 1 and 5 schools but they can think about expansion.

Andrew thanked Dominic for his presentation. Dominic then left the meeting.

A copy of his presentation will go out with the minutes and be posted on the FSG web-site.

Minutes of the last General meeting – 2 February 2016

They were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising not covered elsewhere.

Andrew re-iterated that he was still the treasurer, despite requests for volunteers to take on the role. There is currently £495-81 in the bank. He has sent out letters for the affiliation fees and, although some of the schools had already paid, a significant number had not. He asked the meeting to check with their Bursars / School Business Managers.

***Andrew to send invoice reminders to those not having paid**

Schools' Forum

Andrew highlighted the main points from the Forum meeting held the previous day. There has been an increase in the cost of the High Needs Block which has contributed to the SEN overspend of £2 million.

There had also been considerable discussion relating to the 'spin-out' of the LA services. The LA is proposing a Trading Company with the LA as the majority shareholder and inviting schools to join in the partnership for a shareholding of £1. The funding would be coming from the DSG (Dedicated Schools' Grant) as it does currently. There will be a report going to the CF&E (Children, Family and Education) Committee on 16th June and schools are expected to be discussing whether to join at their Summer FGB meetings.

Jane Pascoe asked how this could work given the short time scales and that some schools will have had their FGBs prior to the CF&E committee? Andrew reminded the meeting that there had earlier been discussions on setting up a 'Middle Tier' arrangement and this proposal had many similarities. He hoped that schools will be getting more information in the near future.

Children's Trust Board

Andrew represents the FSG on the Board with Carole Cook as substitute. She attended the last meeting.

Carole reported that the Board is extremely important as it brings together Education and Health with Health taking a more active role. The items discussed were:

- Early Help Strategy
- Children Services Redesign
- Transition – this had focussed scrutiny with senior people questioned
- Post 16 - looking at employability
- CAMHS- although there has been some positive movement the times on the waiting list are still not good enough

Carole also spoke about the Disability Partnership Board where there were questions on Advocacy, Domestic Violence, Public Health and External Funding. She reported that there will be a Mental Health Champion in each school.

It was also noted that a significant proportion of social workers in the borough are locums including all those in the Transition team which has meant a lack of continuity in the service and to the young people.

Jane Pascoe mentioned the Safeguarding Children's Board that had a good Chair who will ask questions. It too is becoming more joined up and consequently working better especially with the advent of Health.

AOB

Andrew mentioned that Dominic Herrington was the only one of the Regional Schools' Commissioners who does not have a professional educational background though he pointed out that he had worked for the DfE and was a school governor. Andrew said that he had hoped that having Dominic coming to speak would have attracted greater attendance. He asked again what would members like that would attract more governors and schools to our meetings? If anyone had any ideas please would they contact him or any committee member.

For our next meeting we would be inviting a speaker from SGOSS (School Governors One Stop Shop) to talk about their work recruiting governors.

Andrew said that, if the proposed Trading Company gets off the ground, we would also be inviting its Chief Executive to speak. Jane Pascoe asked whether any school would be joining the Company? Andrew answered that it was unknown as schools have not discussed it yet. Jane suggested that as there had been no governor involvement perhaps a letter should be written to Tolis Vouyioukas, the Strategic Director, People Directorate . Alan McIntosh asked how could governors be involved? Andrew said that a paper would be going to the CF&E Committee in June. Unfortunately the committee no longer has any governor representation, however, he would be willing to write to Tolis.

***Andrew to write to Tolis with the issues and concerns raised.**

Andrew thanked all those who attended and closed the meeting at 9.00pm.

Date of next meeting

FSG AGM

THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER 2016 7.30-9.30pm at CIVIC OFFICES