

LIVERPOOL GOVERNANCE FORUM

Minutes of Committee Meeting held at 10:00 on:
Tuesday 13 July 2021 via Zoom.

1.0 STANDARD ITEMS:

1.1 Welcome and Apologies

Present: Kathy Desmond (Chair), David Blythe (Hon Secretary), Mary Donohue, John Thornhill, Dave Cadwallader, Cliff Barton, Michael Morris, Pauline Warrington, David Owens, Howard Harris, Cynthia Carmichael, Marlene Taylor

Apologies: A O'Brien, F McFarlane, M McDaid, B Murray, Andy Chadwick, D Azanuwha

Guest speaker: Emma Harris, Senior Partnership Manager, GFS. Please see Appendix A.

1.2 Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

No change.

1.3 Minutes of the June Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 15.6.21 had already been agreed by email and posted on the LGF website.

1.4 Matters Arising

Jonathon Dixon of Resonate to be invited to address a LGF meeting next academic year. Agreed in principle. Date in Autumn Term to be agreed.	DB
Feedback from the Liverpool School's Forum meeting held on 23.6.21. Meeting cancelled and has now been re-scheduled for 13th July at 1pm.	DB
Potential Music Day to be raised at LLP Executive Board meeting 15.6.21. KD confirmed LLP thought it a good idea but no progress yet.	KD
Feedback from Priority Group meeting held on 23.6.21. This is covered by Agenda Item 3.7.1.	MM

2.0 LGF Matters and Events

2.1 Finance

DB reported that the current bank balance is £ 2798.62 which is a reasonably healthy balance considering that schools have not been approached for subscriptions this year.

2.2 Feedback from Events

There have been no events since the last LGF meeting.

2.3 Future Events

Information regarding forthcoming meeting dates had been shared by email. This information will be updated as necessary.

2.4 Website

DB reported that the website is operating well.

2.5 Twitter Account

AO'B continues to administer the LGF Twitter account.

2.6 Others

2.61 Draft 2020/21 LGF Annual Review

The draft review was circulated by email prior to this meeting. KD asked for comments. It was noted, as the financial year does not end until 31.8.21, any amendments and final financial information will be included in the final report before it is published in early September. KD thanked DB for his hard work compiling the review.

3.0 Feedback from Representatives

3.1 Liverpool Schools Forum

Feedback from the meeting held on 23.6.21. – Meeting was cancelled. Rearranged for 1:00 pm 13.7.21.

3.2 LLP Executive Board

There have been no meetings since the last LGF meeting.

3.3 LLP All Learners

There have been no meetings since the last LGF meeting.

3.4 LLP Learners Who Need More

There have been no meetings since the last LGF meeting.

3.5 LLP Maths Group

There have been no meetings since the last LGF meeting.

3.6 Liverpool Safeguarding Forum

There have been no meetings since the last LGF meeting.

3.7 Others

3.7.1 Priority 4 Group Meeting – MM provided feedback from the meeting held on 23.6.21.

Highlighting the new round has just opened for National Leader of Governance. Part of Priority 4 is

to try to get more governors involved and appointed in Liverpool and to involve more people who are able to share their experience of governance. Priority 4 is also involved in providing excellent leaders and teachers in Liverpool schools. SIL is about to launch a recruitment campaign. As part of the priority a process is to be put in place to ensure SIL is aware of the standard of governance in each school. SIL would then be able to offer support if needed.

KD stated she would no longer be part of NLG as she did not want to act as an 'inspector'. She felt the role had changed from the supporting role that had been the case when she first volunteered to be part of NLG. JT generally concurred with this view.

Concern was expressed that future NGL members would be paid a consultation fee and may have to report back to the NGA and thereby the government. This would mean they were no longer independent offering support and advice to governing boards.

It was suggested that this could be an issue for LGF to discuss at a future meeting.

MD made the point that all governors came into governance to support children in their education and gave their time freely.

3.7.2 School Attendance Awards

Each year LLP presents pupils with awards for high attendance. However, it may not be possible this year due to the amount of remote learning that has taken place due to the pandemic. LLP has asked LGF for their comments regarding how and if the awards can go ahead this year.

A discussion took place, and it was agreed that it was the opinion of the LGF that attendance, as such, should be disregarded for this year as lockdown and self-isolating have skewed figures but the award be given on the basis of preceding years. It was felt that it would be unfair to penalise pupils for circumstances beyond their control.

4.0 Other Items

4.1 NGA

CC nothing to report since the last meeting.

CC took the opportunity to resign from LGF after 24 years' service saying she had also resigned from her role as a school governor after 32 years. KD thanked her for her long service and contribution over many years and asked her to attend the LGF meeting to be held on 21.9.21.

4.2 Safeguarding Concerns

HH raised an issue from his recent schools governing board meeting: "Are you ready to respond to Ofsted's question about sexual abuse and harassment in the school?"

There followed an interesting discussion on the matter which included:

- Collection and use of data
- Confidential, sensitive information and Data Protection Act/GDPR

- School and multi-agencies input to cases
- Safeguarding/Behaviour Policies
- Appropriateness of PSHE in curriculum to discuss relationships and
- general agreement we should re-visit the topic at a future meeting

NB: Immediately after the committee meeting, DC e-mailed the 'End of term SIL e-briefing on safeguarding', which addressed and provided clarity on sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence. The briefing summarises the Ofsted report issued in June following their review and consultation with 900 children and young people at 32 schools across the country about the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence.

4.3 Future Planning:

DC, DB and KD are shortly due to hold their annual review and planning meeting and as usual will report to committee in September.

4.4 Bank Account

It was noted that Cynthia Carmichael is a signatory for the HSBC account and in the light of her resignation, it was agreed by the committee that Michael Morris would replace her. As the secretary /treasurer, David Blythe would make the necessary arrangements to progress these changes.

KD thanked all for attending and wished them well for the summer holiday.

Meeting concluded at 11:18

There are no actions to summarise from these minutes.

Next meeting:

The next committee meeting will be at 10am on Tuesday 21 September 2021. It is hoped to be a face-to-face meeting but it may be necessary to arrange a zoom meeting.

Appendix 1

Emma Harris (EH), Senior Partnership Manager, Governors for Schools (GFS) was introduced by KD who explained EH had responsibility for recruiting and supporting volunteers in the Northwest of England and supporting schools in the region. GFS is an educational charity working with schools, local authorities and multi academy trusts to recruit volunteers to sit on their boards as trustees and governors. The volunteers are matched to the needs of individual boards.

EH explained that the organisation had been in existence for 21 years and had originally been originally set up as a DFE pilot project with the aim of working with corporate partners to get skilled volunteers on governing boards. EH stated that she is working with such organisations such as Liverpool of University, John Moore's University, Barclays Bank, Sainsburys, USS etc. As well as working closely with organisations GFS also host social media campaigns and specific head hunting to provide a wide variety of volunteers. EH highlighted that they attract a diverse set of volunteers. Most of the governors are under 45 years of age and 29% of the volunteers placed last year identified as BAME.

It was explained that when a volunteer registers they complete a skills audit as well as providing information on their preferences. This allows the organisation to offer volunteers to the most appropriate governing boards depending on the boards' needs.

The process to fill a vacancy was explained. Schools register a vacancy on the GFS website, they are then sent the details of appropriate volunteers. If the school is interested in any of the volunteers, they then contact the volunteer directly and then follow their own recruitment process. It was noted that GFS do not take up references or carry out DBS checks. Schools are asked to keep GFS informed as to whether they accept the volunteer or not.

It was noted that many volunteers are based in London and so could offer a remote contact. This may suit some governing boards. This can be a good way to diversify the governing board although this may mean it is difficult to arrange physical visits to schools.

GFS provide free training and support to state schools governors via their web site. There are several resources available as well as e-learning courses on topics such as wellbeing, safeguarding, finance etc. as well as a governor induction module which is recommended to all volunteers who are appointed to a board. There is also a monthly webinar series which covers diverse topics. New governors are also given a free years' subscription to The Key for School Governors to help them become an efficient governor.

EH invited questions.

KD asked if many Liverpool school used the organisation. EH replied not as many schools as in Manchester stating that central Liverpool currently have more volunteers than vacancies. The exact figures were not available. DC commented that the schools that have used the service have been happy with the outcome however many schools still rely on appointing governors that they are aware of by word of mouth etc. this reluctance to appoint a person not previously known to governors results in a lack of diversity. It was noted that using GFS could be a way to encourage volunteers from a wider age group and diverse background/skill set.

MD asked if governors should contact EH directly and EH confirmed that it was best for Head Teachers or Chair of Governors to register a vacancy on the website and the process would begin from that point. It was highlighted that this was a free service to state schools whereas independent schools are charged.

MM asked if EH had any experience of hybrid meetings as he had concerns regarding how effective such meetings are. EH agreed that hybrid meetings can be difficult to manage. She highlighted that she has recently placed volunteers in a school that intended to use hybrid meetings and she will be following up with the volunteers to see how effective the meetings are.

JT reported that his school had recently contacted GFS and as a result received information on three volunteers, all of whom were interesting. Unfortunately, due to covid restrictions, their induction had to be conducted remotely and they are yet to visit the school. JT took the opportunity to thank EH for her support in providing the three volunteers who have been appointed to the board of governors at his school who are making a positive contribution. He also noted that hybrid meetings can work and be productive, but the meetings must be well managed. It was highlighted that having governors from more diverse backgrounds was refreshing.

KD noted that hybrid meetings could be useful allowing guest speakers using a screen to address the meeting without the need to travel to the meeting.

KD also asked how GFS approach corporate firms etc. EH replied that it was not always easy and often contact was made through a governor that was already working at the firm. Corporate partners, who are charged, see working with the organisation as a way to upskill their staff. The organisation provides training and networking opportunities for governors within the firms which is beneficial to them. Volunteering is an opportunity for staff to grow and the firms recognise this. EH said she would be happy to receive details of any firms that members of LGF members think may be interested in becoming involved with GFS.

EH is to send a copy of research into Professional Skill Development in the Governors Role conducted in 2019 to DC after today's meeting. EH is also to forward a copy of the slides shown at today's meeting for inclusion on the LGF website.

MT commented that one drawback of new governors attending remote meeting is that they do not get to see or feel the atmosphere in the school or see its ethos in practice. EH agreed that this can be difficult but new governors can also bring much needed skills such as experience in finance etc. particularly if there has been a longstanding vacancy. It also allows governors that may have travel difficulties, disabilities, family commitments etc. that would have previously made it difficult for them to attend meetings to contribute.

JT noted that care should be taken when appointing remote governors to ensure there are enough governors to carry out actions where a physical presence is required so this responsibility does not always fall to a small cohort of governors.

CB suggested that, after covid restrictions, it could be advantageous to ask new governors to make a physical appearance on their first meeting to properly meet their fellow board members.

EH was asked how many governors GFS had provided and replied 1200 new governors nationally and 250 in the Northwest last year. She said that there had been a surge in volunteers during the covid crisis as people had more time to devote and often felt they wanted to contribute to their local communities.

The first online GFS conference is to be held in September. EH is to share information with DC nearer the date.

CB asked how the organisation was funded. EH replied that they were funded by the Family Foundation, and by charging independent schools and corporate business partners and was happy to report that they have sufficient funds to operate presently.

KD thanked EH for her thorough, informative presentation.

NB:

- DC clarified that previously GFS had operated as School Governors One Stop Shop, which was government funded originally. Funding was withdrawn and then they transferred to Inspiring Governance. School Governors One Stop Shop then secured independent funding and changed their name to Governors For Schools.
- The slide presentation and 2019 Professional Skill Development Report mentioned in EH's presentation were emailed to members after the meeting and have subsequently been uploaded onto the LGF website under 'Other Reports'.