

LIVERPOOL GOVERNANCE FORUM

Minutes of Committee Meeting held at 10:00 on 2 July 2024 at
St Julie's Catholic High School, 51 Woolton St, Liverpool L25 7TN

The meeting commenced at 10:01

Guest Speaker: Chris Forrest, Forrest Governance Ltd. – Handling School Complaints' Training
The slides shared at the training are to be emailed to LGF members.

1.0 STANDARD ITEMS:

1.1 Welcome and Apologies

MM welcomed and introduced Chris Forrest who is to deliver Handling School Complaints' Training.

Present: Michael Morris, Richard Lovegrove Maureen McDaid, David Blythe,
Dave Cadwallader, Joyce Smith, Marlene Taylor, Michelle Hayward,
Danielle Azanuwha and Dave Owens.

Visitor: Denise Moongo.

Apologies: Andy Chadwick, Avril O'Brien, Peter Devaney.

AOB

Not Applicable

1.2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

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

1.3 Matters Arising

Actions	
a. Outstanding LGF subscriptions to be chased up	DB/DO
b. List of LGF subscribers to be provided	DB

c. LGF members are to be contacted to confirm attendance at the LGF meeting on 2/7/24	DB
d. IT provision for the meeting to be held at St Julie's on 2/7/24 to be confirmed (NB: Subsequently actioned and confirmed)	MH
e. Danielle Azanuwha is to be contacted regarding LSCP	PA
f. Cost of holding the LGF Conference at Toxteth Annex is to be investigated	DC

- a. Outstanding LGF subscriptions to be chased up (DB)

Special Schools (ALSSH):

11 schools have paid to date and the one outstanding is being processed and should be received by the end of this week. This will ensure the full payment of £300. As usual, all schools paid last year.

Primary Schools (LPHA):

102 schools have paid compared to 108 in 2022/23. The payment of £2,550 has been received.

Schools make a combined LPHA and LGF payment by BACS. DB has requested a list of schools that have paid. However, the LPHA Treasurer is having difficulty identifying some of the schools that have paid due to them not clearly highlighting the name of the school on their payment.

Secondary Schools (LASH):

28 schools have paid compared to 25 in 2022/23. An invoice for £700 has been issued and is being processed. A listing of the schools that have paid is attached in Appendix A.

- b. List of the LASH subscribers to LGF - Please see Appendix A. (DB)

- c. Members to be contacted to confirm attendance at the LGF meeting on 2/7/24 (DB)
Barbara Murray, Avril O'Brian, Danielle Azanuwha, Dave Owens, Joyce Smith, Richard Lovegrove, Michelle Hayward, Michael Morris, Dave Cadwallader, and David Blythe confirmed their attendance.

- d. IT provision for the meeting to be held at St Julie's on 2/7/24 to be confirmed (MH).
Michelle Hayward and Brigid Smith confirmed equipment is available.

- e. Danielle Azanuwha is to be contacted regarding LSCP (PA)
DA's response confirmed no meetings have taken place, meetings have been scheduled but subsequently cancelled.

- f. Cost of holding the LGF Conference at Toxteth Annex to be investigated (DC)
Unfortunately, Toxteth Annex does not open at weekends.

2.0 LGF Matters and Events

2.1 Finance

DO confirmed the LGF bank balance currently stands at £7302.42.

2.2 Feedback from Events

There have been no events since the last LGF meeting.

2.3 Future Events

LGF Conference is to be held on Saturday 16 November 2024. Further details are to be confirmed.

2.4 Website

DB confirmed the LGF website is up to date and currently, there are no issues to highlight.

2.5 X (Twitter)Account

There are 697 followers of the LGF account and LGF are following 553 other accounts. AO'B continues to upload information to be shared on the account. Recently she has uploaded information about the forthcoming LGF Conference, LGF meetings, and vacancies.

2.6 Others

Not applicable

3.0 Feedback from Representatives

3.1 Liverpool Schools Forum

Not Applicable

3.2 LLP Executive Board

Not Applicable

3.3 LLP All Learners

Not Applicable

3.4 LLP Learners Who Need More

The final termly meeting was cancelled. It is understood new committees are to be established but no further information is currently available.

3.5 Liverpool Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP)

See 1.3 e. Matters /arising.

3.6 Ethical Leadership/Other

Not Applicable

4.0 Other Items:

RL asked for clarification on the difference between the role of a governor in an Academy and at a MAT. It was noted that the roles are explained in the Scheme of Delegation must be followed accordingly.

Elaine Rees is to retire. A retirement card was circulated, signed by LGF members and will be forwarded to her.

(Subsequently, DB represented LGF at Elaine's retirement presentation on 15t July, 2024.)

MMc confirmed that she continued to maintain contact with the secretary of Jo McCarthy's of the Archdiocese and is sharing LGF information regarding the conference/meeting dates/venues etc. The Archdiocese has offered to send a representative to a future LGF meeting.

MM shared information regarding the Liverpool Dockland Trail and asked governors to share the information about this free resource with their own individual schools. The information will be circulated with the minutes of today's meeting.

Time and Date of the Next LGF Meetings

Tuesday 17 September 2024 at 10:00 at Hope School, Hartsborne Ave, L25 2RY.

Tuesday 22 October 2024 at 10:00 at Corinthian Primary School, Inigo Rd, L13 6SH.

Tuesday 3 December 2024 at 10:00 at Belle Vale Primary School, Besford Rd, L25 2QF.

LGF Conference is to be held on Saturday 16 November 2024. Venue to be confirmed.

The meeting concluded at 12:40

Appendix A

SECONDARY SCHOOL (LASH)		
No	NAME	SCHOOL
1	Ania Hildrey	Abbots Lea
2	Heather Duggan	All Saints Academy
3	Paul Sterling	Archbishop Beck
4	Claire Madeloso	Archbishop Blanch
5	Juliette Gelling	Bank View High
6	Julie Taylor	Belvedere Academy
7	Scilla Yates	Bluecoat
8	Gerard Preston	Broughton Hall
9	Mr Ratcliffe	Calderstones
10	Karen Smyth	Cardinal Heenan
11	Mark Harrison	Dixons Academy
12	Steven Baker	Everton Free School
13	Gareth Jones	Gateacre
14	Marie McConville	Harmonize
15	Andy Keen	Holly Lodge Girls College
16	Mr Broekman	Liverpool College
17	Jill Davies	Liverpool Life Sciences
18	James McDonald	New Heights
19	Emily Vernon	North Liverpool Academy
20	V. Taylor	Notre Dame
21	Mark Hilton	Sandfield Park School
22	Mr Hayes	SFX
23	Stephen Morris	St Edwards College
24	Jo Code	St Hildas
25	Darren Gidman	St John Bosco
26	Kate McCourt	St Julie's
27	Jen Sing	St Margarets
28	Sian Graham	West Derby

Appendix B

Chris Forrest introduced himself and explained that in addition to delivering training to governing boards, he was also a governor at 3 schools in Warrington and St Helens. He encouraged those present to ask questions during his presentation and highlighted that the links in his PowerPoint presentation were 'live' and would connect to documentation that supported the training. The presentation is to be emailed to LGF members after the meeting.

CH took the governors through the presentation highlighting the following:

There are differences in roles for governors of maintained schools, governors of MATS, and trustees of MATS and CF felt that in the future the role would diverge even further.

CH said that during today's training, he hoped to cover how a complaint can be managed swiftly and confidently, statutory responsibilities, what procedure means, information shared with the board about complaints, respective roles, potential outcomes, and impact.

CF asked the meeting what areas they hoped would be covered by the training. The replies indicated that they wished the following areas to be covered:

Vexatious/malicious complaints, serial complaints, gaps in understanding and expectations, how to handle complaints from parents against Headteachers or Chair of Boards, complaints against the Headteacher from the Chair of Board or vice versa, or complaints from governors against the Chair of Board.

CF stated it was important to separate grievances from complaints as they would be dealt with by different school procedures/policies.

DC commented that increasingly LGF was asked to support schools in forming complaint panels and it would be good for LGF members to have a framework to follow in supporting schools to have a uniform way to proceed.

CF highlighted the need for governors to observe confidentiality even when speaking amongst themselves regarding complaints. As volunteers, they need to be confident in their actions.

Governors were asked to divide into small groups to discuss a particular scenario. They were asked to imagine being an advisor brought in to advise the Headteacher. After discussion, the groups were asked what advice they would have given. Answers included: checking what information had been recorded, gathering information from staff/SLT, check the relevant school policy/procedure. It was noted that governors must be aware of unconscious bias and a complaint must be considered 'legitimate' until it is proven it is not. It was also noted that often when a complaint is upheld for the school there is still a learning opportunity for the school.

CF said the most important thing to remember is the school's Complaints Policy (needed by law) is a public statement of how the school will deal with a complaint. The school must follow its own policy to the letter.

CF said it is imperative that the headteacher, staff, and governors are all using the same version of the policy and that policy is the one published on the school website, and that version is the one given to the parent. CH suggested that it is useful to have a Word version as well as a PDF version of the Complaints Policy available on the school website to assist the parent in making a complaint and it must be noted that there may be language/literacy/communication barriers for the person making the complaint and this must be taken into account.

CH highlighted that governors should not get involved at the first stage of a complaint as this adds power and energy to it and, also to avoid adding informal stages if they do not exist in the school's policy in the hope of avoiding a formal complaint. The complaint has already been made and needs to be dealt with.

CH said that how complaints are managed is tied up in the Ethos of the School i.e. does the school listen? Governors should act as guardians of this ethos.

CH recommended the Model DFE Complaints Policy which can be adapted/adopted by maintained schools. There is also a model policy for use by MATs. Links to these documents are included in slides shared with governors. It was noted that maintained schools must publish complaints policy on the school's website. There is no legal requirement for MATs to publish on the school's website, as yet.

It was noted that in maintained schools any parent/member of the public can make a complaint (up to 3 months after a pupil has left the school if stated in the school's policy). In Mats, only parents can make a complaint.

CH explained the difference between a 'concern' and a 'complaint'. DFE explains a concern as an expression of worry or doubt whereas a complaint is an expression or statement of dissatisfaction. It is reasonable for the parent to be asked if they have a concern or wish to complain. Governors do not deal with concerns, Headteachers deal with concerns.

CH highlighted issues that are not covered by the complaints policy including:

Admissions

Reorganisation Proposals

Statutory Assessment of SEN

Child Protection/Safeguarding

Exclusions

Whistleblowing

Staff Grievance

Staff Conduct Complaint

Services provided by other providers who use school facilities

National Curriculum content

DA asked if a parent would have cause for complaint if the school was unable to meet the conditions set out in the child's EHCP due to the lack of funding provided by the LA. CH replied that there are two parts to this scenario that run concurrently. The parent may have cause to complain as the school is not meeting the child's needs in accessing the curriculum but also the school/parent needs to agree that the school cannot meet the child's needs. Positive, honest communication with the parent should help the situation.

Maintained Schools usually have a two-stage procedure.

Stage 1: Investigated by Headteacher or appropriate staff unless the complaint about
Head then Governors may get involved

Stage 2: Governor Panel

MATs have a three-stage procedure

Stage 1: Informal Complaint

Stage 2: as stage 1 above

Stage 3: as stage 2 above

In trying to resolve the complaint CH suggested, at the earliest stage asking the complainant what they want as an outcome, and what do they wish the school to do. Use neutral language in repeating the parent's complaint in a list format to obtain clarity. This will provide a structure for the response letter.

Admitting the school could have managed the situation better is different from an admission of unlawful or negligent action. Apologies should only be made if they are meaningful, tangible, and specific. An apology is not an admission of guilt/liability.

Set realistic and reasonable time limits for each action/stage of the complaint. If timescales cannot be met the complainant must be informed why, and in good time and new time limits set.

Make sure the policy states the time limit for response/action on school days.
Take exceptional circumstances into account when deciding whether to accept a Complaint that may be outside the normal time limit.

It was noted that governors do not have a legal right to speak with school staff in the holiday period and when speaking with school staff governors must be aware of their work life balance/stress.

Governors were reminded that they can refer the complainant to the policy and refuse to revisit or further discuss an issue that has been dealt with.

Declaration of Interest - it is reasonable to assume the Head may have had a conversation with the Chair of the Board regarding a potential complaint, which means they may have interest/prior knowledge and therefore cannot be involved in dealing with the complaint.

Confidentiality – at Stage 1 is allowed to tell board members that a complaint has been made but not the details of the complaint.

Recording Complaints – Governors should keep records and share them with the school for them to retain with the pupil's records.

Legal Representation - DFE recommends schools not to get legal representation as complaints panels are not a form of legal proceeding. The aim of the panel should be reconciliation and to put things right that may have gone wrong. This is different from getting legal advice. If the complainant brings legal representation to the meeting they are only there as a moral support for the complainant and have no right to speak at the meeting.

DC commented that it needs a strong Head or Governor to set out the rules from the start of the meeting.

DA remarked that the child should always be at the centre of the process. If there is a concern that a crime may have been committed then the complaints procedure should not be used. It should be reported appropriately.

DC said that often the complainant becomes fixated on 'winning' and the art of reconciliation is lost.

It was noted that if a member of staff is being investigated/spoken with they can bring legal representation/trade union representative with them but if the representative's behaviour is disruptive the panel can bring the meeting to a stop. CF commented that it is often useful to have a union representative in the meeting as they are concerned that policy has been followed.

Complaints about governors should be made to the Clerk. If this happens it is possible that an independent governor may need to be sourced to proceed with the complaint. It is useful to have a positive relationship with other schools.

Investigating the complaint – is typically done by the Headteacher at Stage 1. A timeline can prove useful at this stage. If one is not available then it should be requested which can be time-consuming in preparing however a chronological order can be very informative. Record keeping, documents such as emails, contemporaneous notes, etc can be useful in preparing a chronological timeline.

DC comments that many schools are trying to move away from the 'Court Room' approach. CF replied that it takes a strong Chair to prevent cross-examination and it is often better for one person to appear at one time rather than all present in the room at the same time. He noted that it is useful for the Panel to meet prior to the meeting to discuss the role/procedure but not to discuss the content of the complaint.

Panel Members – usually consist of the Clerk, 3 Governors (odd number) who must be impartial and does not usually include the Chair of the Board.

The role of the Clerk is time-consuming as they usually organise the meeting venues, provide admin' support, record minutes, etc.

Role of the Headteacher – complaints against the Headteacher increase the stress endured by the Headteacher. They will need support from the Chair of the Board while ensuring fairness and objectivity. Headteachers must not overstep the boundaries and are not allowed to sit

on the panel nor investigate the complaint once an investigator has been appointed.

Potential outcomes – A complaint can be upheld or dismissed either in whole or in part. If upheld, a decision must be made regarding how the complaint should be resolved. Even if the complaint is not upheld there could be a learning opportunity for the school to help it avoid similar complaints in the future.

Chair of Boards may need to speak with Headteachers re-implementing Action Plans set up as a result of the complaint to improve the way schools handle issues in the future.

If a complainant is not available for the first meeting suggested then a second meeting should be arranged. If the complainant is not available for the rearranged meeting, then the meeting can go ahead regardless.

DFE Guidance states that decisions made by a school should be:

Lawful

Rational

Reasonable

Fair

Proportionate

CH discussed what format the response to the complainant should take and noted that there is an option to take the complaint beyond the school which is a legal right of the complainant.

Audio and Video recordings – are not usually admissible and should not be allowed. Data Protection is also an issue.

Managing serial, persistent, and vexatious complaints – this should be addressed in the school's policy. If complainants try to refer to previous issues the advice is not to engage as it has been previously dealt with although care should be taken that it is not a new, unrelated complaint.

If letters/calls are abusive/insulting Headteachers should refuse to engage and stop correspondence. The Headteacher may consider refusing access to the school site (consult the school policy).

MH expressed concern about the wellbeing of Governors. CH said it sounded harsh but as volunteers' governors can walk away and schools do not have a duty of care to governors whereas governors do have a duty of care to staff.

CF said his advice was to adhere to the core role even though the role has grown. Support between governors was essential.

CF noted that Inspiring Governance remains open until the end of September after which time their funding will cease. They provide a Governor Mapping Tool. He suggested contacting people, who had expressed an interest in becoming governors on the site directly as he had found this a good way of recruiting new governors

CF was thanked for his informative presentation.