



Portsmouth  
CITY COUNCIL

# Chairs survival guide 2010/11

From governor support



# The role of a chair

## Working practices

- Set up and hold meetings to review and set agendas with the headteacher or clerk.
- Meet with the headteacher on a regular basis.
- Deal with correspondence and pass on or report as necessary.
- Manage the meetings of the governing body.
- Monitor the work of the governing body and keep a calendar of events.
- Share the agreed vision objectives and goals of the school.
- Front the governing body meetings with the Local Authority, staff and parents.
- Have knowledge of procedures relating to withdrawal and declaring an interest etc.
- Allow time for any necessary preparation.
- Deal with public relations.
- Be accessible.
- Ensure full participation of all governors.
- Manage time and people.
- Ensure there is a clear outcome to discussions.

## The legal aspects

The chair :

- has the power to make decisions of behalf of the governing body if delay would not be in the interests of the school. Action must be reported at the next meeting of the full governing body
- cannot be an employee or a pupil of the school
- must approve the draft minutes of the governors meeting before they are displayed
- must sign all agreed minutes
- has a casting (second) vote if there are equal votes for and against – although practice is always to vote to keep the status quo
- may call an emergency meeting at short notice
- must be named in the school prospectus, school profile and OFSTED reports
- may be the named person to receive representations from parents on behalf of the governing body
- in the case of exclusions, name must be given in the letter
- receives statements of the headteacher's appraisal
- is responsible for any letters regarding pay review
- can be removed from office between annual elections if the governing body passes a resolution to this effect



### Governor support contact details

**Abbie Eales**

**Senior governor support officer**

Tel: 023 9284 1720

Email: [abbie.eales@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:abbie.eales@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

**Susannah Greenwood / Astrid Brown**  
**Governor support officer**

Tel: 023 9284 1716

Email: [susannah.greenwood@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:susannah.greenwood@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)

Email: [astrid.brown@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:astrid.brown@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)



## Becoming a successful chair

Successful meetings are run by chairs who have grasped the content of the agenda and prepared their provisional views on the issues beforehand. Contentious items should be discussed with the headteacher, or chair of the relevant committee, before the meeting.

During the meeting the chair has two key roles to:

- maintain a positive pace to the meeting and work through the agenda in an organised fashion
- strengthen the cohesion of the governing body.

Governors should come away from the meeting feeling that something beneficial to the school has been achieved, that everyone pulled their weight and that no one took liberties.

No-one, including yourself and the headteacher, should dominate meetings – everyone should have the opportunity to express an opinion and understand the outcomes of any decisions made.

As chair you should reduce any possible tensions between individuals and not to contribute to them inadvertently. Protect those with a minority view and make sure no governors feel put down. The governors and headteacher rely heavily on the impartiality of the chair.

This need for impartiality may call for great restraint in some situations. If an issue has to be voted on, the chair should consider carefully how to use their casting vote. There is no rule that the casting vote has to be used to preserve the status quo.

Check that all follow up action by particular governors including yourself is taken as intended.

Some chairs find that their special responsibilities may make the role somewhat lonely. It helps if you can look to the vice-chair for ready advice and support.

### **The clerk**

It is important that you have a good working relationship with the clerk and work closely together to organise agendas and minutes and keep up to date with the statutory duties of the governing body.

The clerk can be an enormous asset in building a good working relationship with the rest of the governing body. Encourage your clerk to receive training to ensure they are properly informed and feel supported.

# Working together

Do you and your headteacher have an understanding about how you support each other in carrying out your roles?

If either you or the headteacher are new to the role, discussing how you will manage your contact with each other at the start of the relationship will prevent misunderstandings.

Here are some suggestions for a possible framework for working together:



## Frequency of meetings

There are no set rules and some chairs and headteachers like to commit to a regular meeting once a week or once a fortnight. Others are happy to meet on an ad hoc basis when the need arises. Whatever the arrangements, make sure they suit you both.

A governor does not have automatic right of entry to the school during the day, so make sure you have arranged it with the headteacher in advance.

## An agenda

Agendas allow meetings to be focused and businesslike. Look at either having a timed agenda or writing your own timings onto your agenda so you can ensure discussions don't over run. Don't be too rigid with your timings though and try to let things come to a natural conclusion where possible.

## Sharing information with the governing body

Your meetings with the headteacher enable you to keep up to date with school business and more effectively manage the work of the governing body. One of the great benefits to headteachers of an effective chair is that they provide a "safe pair of ears" – someone to listen when the headteacher tests out ideas and proposals. When you are acting as a sounding board you may also play the role of confidante.

Headship can be a lonely occupation and you may be one of the few people connected with the school with whom the headteacher feels able to share sensitive information or let off steam. While you should respect such confidences you also have a responsibility to share other information with the governing body. It is important that your relationship with the headteacher does not exclude the rest of the governing body and they should never feel that issues have been discussed "behind their backs".

## No surprises rule

As chair you will want to run meetings where sound decisions are made based on full consideration of all the available material. This usually means that agendas are carefully planned and all the papers needed are made available to the clerk for distribution in advance of the meeting. You might want to agree a period of notice for raising issues. Governor support recommend that you consider the use of "any other business" as an agenda item as this tends to lead to "surprise" items which governors often aren't prepared for.

## Contact in emergencies

You and the headteacher will want to be available to each other in emergencies but must also respect each other's privacy and work-life balance. What arrangements do you have for contacting each other at work and at home? Make sure that protocols for contact are clear and you are both happy with the arrangement.

# Recruitment of governors

As a chair, it will often fall to you to talk to new potential governors and this may involve letter writing, or initial informal meetings with them. You are not solely responsible for recruiting new governors however and you might want to suggest actions to the governing body to keep things moving.

- Think about your current governors and who will be leaving in the future so that you can plan for succession.
- Develop opportunities for governors to work alongside others to share and develop skills, which might encourage them to take on particular roles in the future.
- Hold a meeting to ask for suggestions on how to recruit governors.
- Establish links with the community and be on the lookout for possible volunteers.

When interviewing a potential new governor it is not expected that you learn everything about them, but gauge whether they will fit in with the rest of the governing body.

The governing body is accountable for:

- the performance of the school.
- planning the school's future direction.
  - Appoints the headteacher.
  - Makes decisions on the school budget and staffing.
  - Ensures the national curriculum is taught.

It is also important to emphasise that:

- There may be a large number of papers to read and meetings to attend.
- They may need to make difficult decisions.

A governor does not have to have specific skills, the best attributes are:

- Common sense.
- Time available.
- A belief in the importance of education.

A good induction is proven to help retain governors, in line with FMSIS requirements, all schools in Portsmouth should have an induction policy in place.

Think about what you can do to keep meetings engaging and interesting; change the room where you meet; invite presenters and students along to meetings; watch suitable DVD's; provide refreshments; include breaks if needed.

Please encourage new governors to attend our induction training as these sessions are beneficial to raising awareness and confidence for governors. This training also provides details about their main roles. We can't however provide information about your school, and that is key to being a successful governor.



# Induction of clerk and governors

## How was your induction to your governing body?

Some clerks and governors are inadequately inducted to the school and key governing body papers.

It is a Financial Management Standard (FMSIS) requirement that an induction process is in place for new governors and the better prepared a clerk or governor is the more effective they can be in helping to raise standards in the school.

This is an example of an induction policy that you could follow at your school. If you need any further guidance please contact governor support.

### **A model induction policy for new governors.**

The governing body and headteacher believe it is essential that all new governors receive a comprehensive induction package covering a broad range of issues and topics. There is a commitment to ensure that the new governors are given the necessary information and support to fulfil their role with confidence. The process is seen as an investment, leading to more effective governance and retention of governors.

#### **New governors will:**

- Be welcomed to the governing body by the chair.
- Be invited by the headteacher to visit the school.
- Have the opportunity to tour the school and meet staff and children.
- Receive an informal briefing on the school from the headteacher.
- Have the opportunity to meet informally with an existing governor who will then act as their mentor.
- Be accompanied by their mentor to their first full governing body meeting (if required).
- Have the opportunity to review their first meeting with the mentor.

#### **New governors will receive:**

- The Department for Education's "Guide to the Law for Governors".
- The school's "Guidelines for Governors".
- The school prospectus.
- The latest governor training information from the Local Authority.
- Details of the governing body committees including their terms of reference.

- Dates for future governors' meetings including committees.
- Details of how to contact the other governors.
- Details of how to contact the school including the email address.
- A calendar of school events.

#### **New governors are also recommended to read:**

- The School Improvement Plan.
- The latest Ofsted report and action plan.
- Policy documents relevant to committee membership.
- The latest school profile.
- The monitoring performance and evaluation policy.
- The school visits policy.

#### **Areas that the headteacher will cover include:**

- Background to the school.
- Current issues facing the school.
- Visiting the school.
- The relationship between the headteacher and governing body.

#### **Areas that the mentor will cover include:**

- An overview of the governor's role.
- How the full governing body and committee meetings are conducted.
- How to propose agenda items.
- Governor training.



## Training

Don't forget about your own personal development as even if you are a very experienced governor things in the world of education change at an astonishing rate.

It is important therefore that you attend regular training sessions to keep yourself up to date. It also sets a good example for your team and staff in school to know that you value your own improvement and are a life-long learner.

A full list of all the training sessions we provide is in your copy of The Portsmouth Governor.

### **Evening for chairs**

5 October 2010, 5-7pm Dame Judith Professional Centre  
15 March 2011, 6-8pm City Girls Training Centre

### **Chairing skills**

4 November 2010, 5-7pm City Girls Training Centre

### **Training liaison governors**

18 November 2010, 4-6pm Dame Judith Professional Centre  
8 March 2011, 5-7pm City Girls Training Centre

### **Portsmouth governors' forum**

22 November 2010, 5.30-7.30pm Dame Judith Professional Centre  
15 March 2011, 6-8pm City Girls Training Centre

### **Introduction to governance**

22 October 2010, 9.30-3.30pm Civic Offices  
4 February 2011, 9.30-3.30pm Civic Offices

## CRB applications

The government have announced they have begun a review of Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). The registration phase of the CRB scheme has therefore been stopped and was not launched as planned in July.

This review is expected to take three months but in the meantime:

- it is business as usual for the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)
- the elements of the Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) put in place back in October 2009 continue
- existing requirements concerning CRB will remain in place and those entitled to such checks can continue to apply for them.

Also, the CRB recently provided Registered Bodies with new purple application forms in readiness for the launch of the ISA registration phase in July.

Although this has been halted, in an effort to reduce inconvenience, the CRB will still launch the new application form on 26 July 2010 as originally planned. Applications may now be submitted using the new form from now. For further guidance, go to:  
[www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk)

A review of CRB will also take place, expected to be over six months and the Department of Education is looking to make the system more consistent, with clearer guidance on who should and should not be checked.





You can get this Portsmouth City Council information in large print, Braille, audio or in another language by calling 9284 1716.



Corporate member of  
Plain English Campaign  
Committed to clearer communication

264