

Internal Audit Services

Internal Management Report

Education Board

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Education Board

Objective

To assess whether the initial governance and operating framework developed for the newly established Education Board, will enable it to deliver its objectives.

Scope

Internal Audit worked with the Director of Learning in a “critical friend” capacity to provide input on the design and where applicable operation of Education Board governance controls to help ensure it:

- is fit for purpose
- allows the Council to retain influence and leverage in education when the majority of schools are no longer maintained.

The work included reviewing documentation associated with the Education Board, including the Terms of Reference, interviews with key stakeholders and attending the Education Board meeting held on the 12th October 2016.

Recommendations have only been made where they are necessary to further strengthen the framework governing how the new Education Board is operating if deficiencies have been identified with the design of key controls. Therefore, they should be implemented within six months unless there is a good operational reason why this is not practical.

Key Themes

The Council has proactively established an Education Board to ensure that it can retain influence and leverage in education, when the majority of schools within the Borough are no longer maintained by the Council. This is a new and very innovative approach and the Council are one of the first Local Authorities to adopt this setup.

The governance structure for the Education Board has been established and high-level documentation is in place outlining its objectives as well as the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. The Education Board aims to undertake the statutory functions currently discharged by the Southend Schools Forum, but in addition, make strategic recommendations on broader education policy and strategy for the Council to consider.

The wider structure and engagement of both Education Board members and stakeholders across the borough was still in its infancy, and as expected, there were opportunities for this to be developed further. Nevertheless:

- the dates of Board meetings are:
 - published in a timetable a year in advance
 - aligned to when key decisions are required, as was the approach adopted by the Schools Forum
- there is a documented operational procedure for the Education Board, which provides an initial outline of its role and responsibilities
- the process for electing Board members is clearly documented and transparent

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- the Board meeting observed in October 2016, was well chaired and the discussion was disciplined and included all members, with no single person or organisation dominating
- although the Board has met only once so far, there is a plan in place to review its effectiveness on an annual basis
- it was noted during the observation of the meeting, that:
 - voting arrangements were clear and unambiguous
 - there was no bias
 - members were able to effectively represent their organisations within the decision making process.

Policies, procedures and terms of reference

Policy documentation and terms of reference were in place. They would be enhanced, by including:

- a definition of the purpose and structure of the Board within the terms of reference.
- appointment procedures in the Education Board's terms of reference.
- appointment procedures outlined the role of the Board Chair however the Education Board terms of reference should be updated to be consistent.
- key details such as when the Board would be quorum or what procedure is required when decisions were tied, in the protocol documentation.

This would help ensure that Education Board and Board members adopt practices that promote and support a strong governance structure.

Engagement with key stakeholders

It was noted that not all interested parties were represented at the Education Board meeting on 12 October 2016.

Through review of Board minutes and papers, it was identified that a number of decisions were made which related to increasing the representation of the attendance at the Board to include representatives from across the education and health sector. We have made a number of suggestions in Appendix 1 which could assist in increasing representation at the Education Board meetings.

With regards to this meeting, Council officers were unable to answer specific questions posed relating to key figures and statistics presented. In all cases, these questions did not relate to items listed on the agenda.

Therefore, the Council should consider holding a pre-meeting prior to each Education Board to:

- identify and discuss potential questions or any issues
- maximise the chances of being able to respond appropriately to them.

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The supporting governance structure

The Council has developed a number of forums that feed into and support the Education Board. The roles and responsibilities of these forums now need to be formalised.

The Terms of Reference had been drafted for the School Performance Sub Group and the Vulnerable Children's Sub Group and include the key elements expected in line with good practice. These now need to be approved and arrangements made for the Groups to meet.

Training of members

It would be helpful for an induction pack and or training programme to be produced and made available to new or existing Education Board members. Members have been recruited from across the Education sector and their knowledge and experience may vary significantly.

In order to ensure that the Board can exercise effective scrutiny, an induction pack, regular briefings or other resources to transfer the knowledge and expertise of members, may ensure appropriate and informed decisions are taken.

Reporting

The report has been:

- discussed and agreed to be factually accurate with the Director of Learning
- finalised with the Deputy Chief Executive (People).

Senior management will monitor and sign off this action plan as part of the department's performance management process.

Corporate Links

Aim Prosperous **Priority** Ensure residents have access to high quality education to enable them to be lifelong learners and have fulfilling employment.

This report can be provided in alternative formats such as Braille, audiotape or in large print.

Translations of this document in alternative languages are also available.

Appendix 1: Education Board Action Plan

	Issues identified	Management action required	Lead officer	When
R1	<p>Governance, voting and decision making arrangements</p> <p>Policy documentation and terms of reference were in place. However, a number of areas were identified where these documents could be improved.</p>	<p>Update the terms of reference to define the purpose and structure of the Board and the roles of each Board member.</p> <p>Update protocol documentation to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when the Board would be quorum • the procedure required when decisions are tied • the manner in which things are done, regulations and etiquette • an organisational flow chart. 	Director of Learning	31 March 2017
R2	<p>Representation at Education Board meetings</p> <p>Internal Audit attended the October Education Board meeting and noted that a number of key representatives did not attend.</p>	<p>Review the approach taken to encouraging representatives and the public to attend the Education Board meetings. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publicly issuing the agenda and meeting papers prior to the meeting; • including an article on the Education Board on the Council's website; or • including reminders on regular communications to stakeholders. 	Director of Learning	31 March 2017

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	Issues identified	Management action required	Lead officer	When
R3	<p>Preparation of Council officers</p> <p>Internal Audit attended the October Education Board meeting and noted that Council members were not fully prepared to answer questions from members.</p>	<p>Hold a pre-meeting prior to each Education Board meeting to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and discuss any potential issues • ensure officers are sufficiently prepared. 	Director of Learning	31 March 2017
		<p>Consider implementing a Key Performance Indicator dashboard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide an overview of the progress made by the Council • allow Board discussion to be focused on issues of greatest concern. 	Director of Learning	31 March 2017
R4	<p>Roles and responsibilities</p> <p>The roles and responsibilities are not clearly documented for the Chair, Vice-Chair and Clerk in the Education Board terms of reference.</p> <p>There was no policy included which outlined how the Board would interact and communicate with the press.</p>	<p>Update the Education Board terms of reference to include clear roles and responsibilities for the Chair, Vice Chair and the Clerk.</p> <p>Update policy documents to include guidance for how the Board communicates with the press.</p>	Director of Learning	31 March 2017
R5	<p>Establishment of sub groups</p> <p>Terms of Reference are in draft for the School Performance Sub Group, Vulnerable Children's Sub Group and Resources, however, they had not been approved and the groups have not met.</p>	<p>Set up sub groups and begin meeting as soon as possible.</p> <p>Agree the sub group terms of references and present these to the Education Board for approval.</p>	Director of Learning	31 March 2017

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R6	<p>Training of members</p> <p>Internal Audit did not identify an induction pack or training programme available for new or existing members.</p>	<p>Prepare an induction pack for new Education Board members.</p> <p>Provide within it, information on key areas of the Board's activities, including finance and financial management.</p> <p>Share the pack with members and request their feedback.</p>	Director of Learning	31 March 2017
		Refresh the pack once a year to action any feedback comments from members.	Director of Learning	Annually
R7	<p>Transparency of Board activity</p> <p>Board papers should be distributed or made publically available at least five working days in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>Internal Audit was unable to locate any published papers for the Education Board meetings.</p>	Create a dedicated Education Board website or webpage, which is easy to locate on a search engine.	Director of Learning	31 March 2017
		Publish the meeting agenda and papers on the website at least five working days in advance of the meeting, in line with operational detail.	Director of Learning	31 March 2017