

governor **space**

Thought Leadership – Being Strategic – How Clerks can help their Board



One area which many Governors struggle is differentiating between strategic and operational. This is not because Governors do not understand the difference, rather in meetings Governors care so passionately about our Schools that they allow discussions to stray into the operational nature. It is lovely to hear about how well the children did at Sports Day and to be a 'Cheer Leader' for the maths department, but actually do these discussions really add anything to the strategic running of the School?

Clerks help with the strategic nature of Governance and effective Clerks should be gently nudging Chairs if they feel that discussions are not of a strategic nature. Clerks are in post to give high quality clerking requirements, and this includes advice on procedural and regulatory matters. Clerks cannot do their jobs effectively if Governors continually stray into operational discussions.

The Clerk should support and challenge the Chair continually throughout the meetings and be allowed to work in a culture where they can flag up situations where the Board are overstepping their role or deviating from their role. This trusting relationship allows the Governing Board to focus on their strategic role and conduct their functions effectively.

In between meetings, the Clerk and the Chair need to work together to ensure all strategic functions throughout the academic year are being carried out, that meetings are being planned to focus on the strategy and all statutory information is sent out to Governors.

Effective Clerks act as the conscience of the Governing Board. They can challenge the Governing Board at times, both in terms of practice and compliance, and this should be viewed as positive. Professionally trained Clerks will be a trusted companion for the Governing Board, at times taking care of some of the basics of the legalities of governance, allowing the Governing Board to make the most effective use of their time and focus on their strategic duties.

At times, the Clerk needs to recognise when conflicts are arising within the Governing Board and diffuse situations. Robust discussions on key strategic issues are to be encouraged and an effective Clerk will be able to facilitate these discussions. The Clerk needs to be able to anticipate negative tensions between Governors and work to mitigate them in the interests of good governance.

The role of the Clerk is multi-faceted. They are an advisor, a leader, a planner, a communicator, a diplomat, a manager and a challenger. Crucial to the role is the ability to work collectively with the Governing Board for the strategic aims of the School.