



Chair's Report to the Annual General Meeting 2019

The BGA has been active in the Borough since Academic Year 2010-2011. We have throughout been committed to supporting and improving governance in Barnsley schools. We remain committed to these core values. Our aim is to support, promote and work towards the improvement school governance in Barnsley.

Members of the Executive are proud to work for and with school governors in Barnsley. Ultimately this is about improving governance which in turn will drive the improvement of the educational offer at each school in the Borough, whatever its status and however it is deemed to be performing currently. Despite those well-worn phrases such as 'Good' and 'Outstanding', the truth is that every school has the capacity to improve and believing the publicity at the expense of the constant need to improve, is the guarantee of failure at some point.

Sound strategic governance plays an important part in the life of all schools. Someone must hold the educationalists to account, to ensure that the children learn with a purpose.

We are not teachers (well, most aren't). We are the wider voice – the community that schools serve. We therefore have an important voice and purpose.

The BGA is committed to the principle of excellent, independent and selfless governance. In this year of great change, it is important that we remember the moral purpose of and the practical benefits of sound governance. Without engaging with current politics, I do think this illustrates the great need for selfless and fearless strategic decision making, whether this is in business or Parliament.

We need to continue our work and campaign to equip governors with the confidence, resilience and skills needed to continue to improve governance in schools and to demonstrate to the wider community that good governance is possible and that it has a function. In our case this is about the improvement of the quality of the education offer across the Borough for all children and young people and to continue to improve the life chances of our children and young people by creating a generation of confident and positive learners. I have said it before, but it is at the heart of why I volunteer.

As part of our core purpose, we continue to organise and provide training courses for governors in conjunction with the Local Authority. We are not in direct competition. Rather we try to provide value-added training to supplement the core offer from the Local Authority and we have tried to do this again this academic year. Details of the offer are available on our website at www.barnsleyga.org.

As stated in previous reports we have been reviewing our offer in this respect to widen it and make it more relevant to people's actual experience of governance. As part of this we have undertaken consultation exercises with governors and governing bodies. We welcome expression of the governor voice in such exercises and beyond.

In 2019, we have offered courses on Solving Problems and Making Decisions, Finance for Governors of Maintained Schools and Academies, The Role of the Chair, Governing Body Self-Evaluation and Review of the Chair, and the Governor's Role in Supporting and Challenging a School. We had also hoped to offer a two-part course on Safer Recruitment but had to cancel this. Regrettably due to ill health, we had to adjourn our Safeguarding course but it is on offer this year.

In addition to these formal training sessions, we held a Forum on addressing need and deprivation on 5th March 2019. More are planned this year. We see this format as one that offers great benefits to serving governors, however experienced. It is about talking about current experience and the challenges we face in a variety of subject areas. We would encourage all governors to attend such forums to meet colleagues doing similar work and to join the wider debate about governance and share their experience, in order to add to the quality of debate. We believe such sessions are perhaps more valuable than formal training, drawing out as they do personal experience and outcomes. We intend to expand this offer over time. Please check our website in this respect.

Governors will have also noted that we have also resurrected our e-mail Newsletter, and this will be circulated as widely as possible. We hope this will inform governors of the work of the Association and current developments in school governance. We hope governors find it useful. If anyone has ideas or material they think we should be talking about please feel free to contact us.

We are still keen to see a wider roll-out of the Local 'Leaders of Governance' programme. These people will be experienced governors in the district who would like to mentor and support other governors and governing bodies in their work.

Such governors would work alongside the National Leaders of Governance (NLG) programme. We believe that additional capacity provided by Local Leaders of Governance (LLGs) in their work with Barnsley governing bodies will further accelerate school improvement in the district.

All member organisations are entitled to nominate potential candidates for membership of the BGA Executive. We are anxious to build on this and widen the scope of experience.

Please visit our website for further details of what we are about and what we are doing. You can also learn what courses and Forums are being sponsored and sign up to reserve a place.

If you would like to receive details of our Conferences, Forum meetings, Training sessions and any other events, along with a regular e-newsletter, please let us have your email address, or register on the home page of our website.

We want to encourage wider participation. If you feel that you have the skills and would like to support the work of governing bodies in the Borough then please feel to contact the BGA through the website or speak to me or any of my colleagues should you attend events such as this. This is an open invitation.

We remain committed to partnership working. Members of the BGA Executive Committee have continued to promote and represent the views of governors at the Schools' Forum, Barnsley Alliance Board and the Children and Young People's Trust Executive Group and continue to advance the voice of governors. This work will continue for as long as you as individual members want to see this happening.

We continue to provide information and articles on our website and regular updates in our newsletters which are sent to any governor who provides us with an email address. We are also happy to support governing bodies by answering questions and advising on individual issues facing a governing body, especially matters concerning improving the effectiveness of governance.

As ever, the profile of the organisation continues to change. We need to change as the education climate changes and that process needs to continue. I would like to encourage all of you to consider whether you feel that you have something to give to the wider debate and as such whether you might wish to join the Executive Committee. You would be most welcome.

In conclusion, I want to thank also all the members of the Executive Committee who work so hard on behalf of the Association. Each of them is driven by their wish to see better educational attainment and achievement in Barnsley to ensure that each child gets a good deal from the schools they attend and are well equipped to deal with the challenges of the modern world. I would also like to say thank you to our other partners Barnsley MBC and the Barnsley Teaching Schools who share this common goal of improvement and enrichment.

I would also like to express my personal thanks for the support offered to me by the various colleagues that I work with in my role of Chair of the Association. I feel proud in the trust placed in me and remain committed to seeing continued improvement both within the Association but more importantly the standard of governance within all Barnsley schools (whether directly maintained or an Academy).

As I have said before, we all have the capacity to improve (including me) and once again I would ask that at this early stage of the new academic year we all re-dedicate ourselves to the principle of self-improvement focused in improving the lives of children and young people in this Borough.

As an Association we remain anxious to provide a framework for such discussions and focused relevant training, and would encourage everyone to let us know what we can do for them to facilitate such improvement.

Stephen Gallagher

October 2019