



# HELPLINE NEWS SEPTEMBER 2007 TO AUGUST 2008



## INTRODUCTION

Governors Wales' confidential helpline provides independent advice and support on any issue concerning school governance in Wales, ranging from legal responsibilities, meetings and committee procedures to target setting and many more.

The helpline is available from 9.00am to 10.00pm during weekdays and 11.00am to 4.00pm at weekends, excluding Public and Bank Holidays. All calls to the helpline are local rate and a bilingual service is available.

The helpline is operated by an expert team of helpline staff and governor volunteers who are supported, when necessary, by independent legal advisers retained on Governors Wales' behalf. Ongoing support and training via regular meetings is provided to all who assist with the helpline.

This report provides an overview of the helpline during the academic year of 2007-2008, looking at the overall usage, summarising key findings and showing trends.

## BACKGROUND

Since the commencement of the helpline in July 2001, calls have steadily increased on an annual basis.

The service was duly extended in January 2002 with the launch of the out of office hours provision during evenings and weekends.

## TOTAL NUMBER OF CALLS RECEIVED

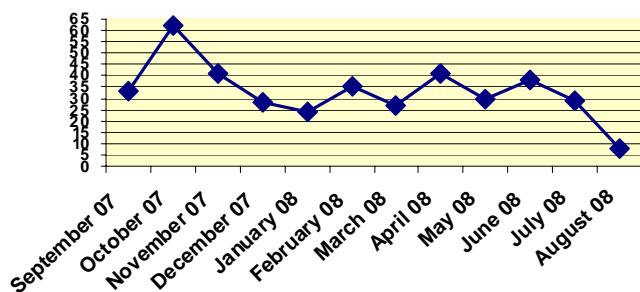
**Calls = 416**

**Number of e-mails = 64**

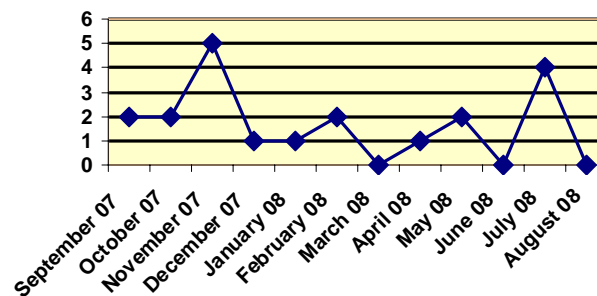
**Overall Total = 480**

Queries have been received from all 22 Local Authority areas in Wales

**OFFICE HOURS  
SEPTEMBER 2007 - AUGUST 2008**



**OUT OF OFFICE HOURS  
SEPTEMBER 2007 - AUGUST 2008**

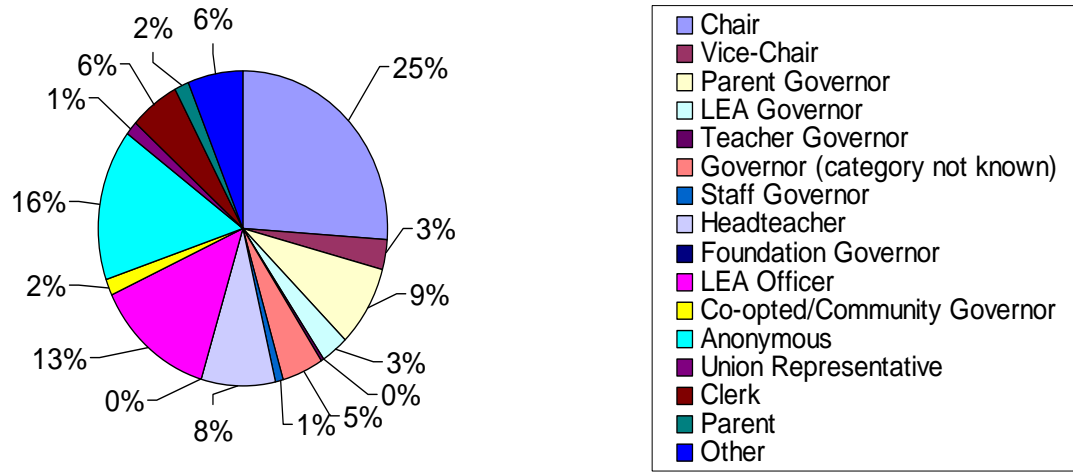


The above charts include phone queries only. E-mails are now logged separately and amount to an overall total of 64. As would be expected, the number of queries received dip during holiday times. This is noticeable in August.

'Follow-up' calls resulting from queries or e-mails are not reflected in the above totals, many of which require considerable research.

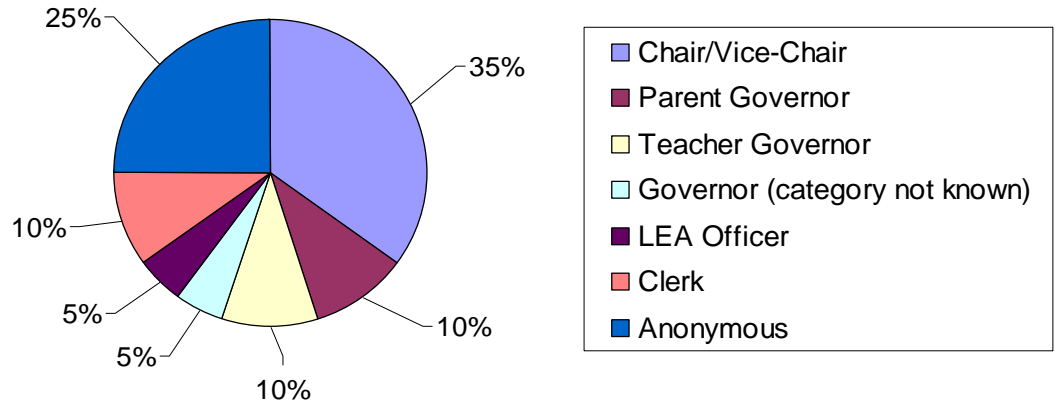
# CATEGORY OF CALLERS

## OFFICE HOURS SEPTEMBER 2007 - AUGUST 2008



*Category of "Governor (category not known)" introduced in April 2008*

## OUT OF OFFICE HOURS SEPTEMBER 2007 - AUGUST 2008



*Category of "Governor (category not known)" introduced in April 2008*

The users of the helpline are not restricted to governors alone. Parents, clerks to governing bodies, Union representatives and officers of Local Education Authorities have used the helpline service. Notably, the most frequent category of caller using the service during the school year 2007-2008 falls to Chairs of governing bodies. This is indicative of both office and out of office hours' services. This trend has not changed since the commencement of the helpline, although it is understandable that Chairs and Vice-Chairs will usually take the responsibility for clarifying issues and concerns before reporting back to governor colleagues at meetings, etc.

There have been occasions throughout the year where Governors Wales' Staff, as a result of a call to the helpline, have had face to face meetings with those concerned in order to resolve difficult problems that have arisen.

## NATURE OF QUERIES

Queries received are varied and sometimes reflect the complexities, personalities and relationships that exist between governors, school staff and parents. All too often, misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the law can lead to problematic situations.

The most frequent issues on which guidance was sought relate to:

### OFFICE HOURS

- Complaints Procedures
- Procedures for meetings and minutes
- Staff Disciplinary Procedures
- Election of Parent Governors

### OUT OF OFFICE HOURS

- Complaints Procedures
- Committees
- Disciplinary
- Election of teacher governors

Advice is frequently sought on procedures relating to governing body meetings and minutes-issues can vary from the number of governors required for meetings to be quorate, terms of reference, confidentiality etc.



**EXAMPLES  
OF AREAS  
IN WHICH  
WE CAN  
HELP**

## INDEPENDENT LEGAL ADVICE

The helpline service is underpinned by independent legal advice provided by a blue chip, nation-wide, legal practice brokered by Judicium Consulting Ltd. Although Governors Wales takes great pride in its ability to respond

authoritatively to queries from helpline calls and e-mails, by reference to statutory regulations and published guidance, a relatively small proportion of enquiries present greater difficulty. These queries will often relate to circumstances that are

at the margins of the law or where regulations and guidance may appear to be ambiguous. Governors Wales is able to obtain independent legal opinion in such circumstances, thus providing callers with a legally informed response, when this is appropriate.

- **Disciplinary issues**
  - **Committees**
  - **Finance**
  - **Legal responsibilities**
  - **Meetings**
  - **Health & Safety**
  - **Admissions**
  - **Target setting**
- and many more**

## PUBLICITY FOR THE SERVICE

Thanks must be expressed to Governors Wales' staff, members of the Management Committee, local governor associations and helpline volunteers for their continued efforts and support in advertising and promoting the helpline provision, not

least Governor Support Officers who assist in the distribution of Governors Wales' publications.

The All Wales Centre for Governor Training and Research also promotes the helpline in its termly publication of Cadwyn.

Additional publicity involves:

- The Governors Wales promotional stand at public events
- Governors Wales' Website
- Governors Wales' Publications



Website address:  
[www.governorswales.org.uk](http://www.governorswales.org.uk)

If you would like to receive copies of the helpline leaflet detailing the service, please phone: 029 2048 7858

#### Contact details

1st Floor,  
 Empire House,  
 Mount Stuart Square,  
 Cardiff Bay  
 Cardiff  
 CF10 5FN

## HELPLINE FEEDBACK

Feedback from callers has been complimentary. It is always encouraging when callers who have contacted the helpline on previous occasions phone or e-mail again for advice on a different issue.

*"Thanks very much - that's really helped me prepare for my meeting."  
 "I feel much better about tackling this now."*

Many of the callers are very grateful to have a confidential helpline facility where they can express their concerns or have their fears allayed and where they can be pointed in the right direction to obtain the necessary information.

## GOVERNORS WALES' WEBSITE

During 2007-2008, the Governors Wales website was redesigned and is now more user-friendly and more comprehensive. As well as up to date news on Governors Wales' work and developments, there are sections on:

- Publications
- Links to LEA Governor Training Programmes
- A FAQ section which is added to and updated regularly

A new feature on the website in recent months has been links to the important regulations that governors need to be aware of and also guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government relevant to school governors' and their work.

## FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- Enhancement of local governor association pages on the Governors Wales website
- Recruitment of additional helpline volunteers
- From July 2008, Governors Wales' Fact File series will be published in issues of Cadwyn as well as being available to download from the Governors Wales website

*Why not ring or e-mail us?*

**0845 60 20 100**

***helpline@governorswales.co.uk***

***We could help you to make a difference***

**The Voice of Governors in Wales**