



NAGAS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
GOVERNANCE ADVISORY
SERVICES



**Workload and Wellbeing
Toolkit 2026
Expanded Case Studies**



Expanded Case Studies for the NAGAS Workload and Wellbeing Toolkit 2026

Providing Additional Context to the Case Study Snapshots

The Case Study Snapshots included within the NAGAS Workload and Wellbeing Toolkit 2026 were deliberately kept brief to illustrate key workload and wellbeing themes. This companion document expands on those snapshots, providing fuller examples based on the original survey responses that informed the toolkit.

Case Study 1

Section 1: Clear Roles and Boundaries (Page 5)

Snapshot: Chair balancing support and challenge with an Executive Headteacher.

Respondent: Chair of Governors, federation of maintained primary and nursery schools

Expanded Case Study

Balancing Support and Challenge as a Chair

As Chair of a governing board overseeing a federation led by an Executive Headteacher (EHT), one of the most challenging aspects of the role was balancing support and challenge. The EHT was highly experienced, respected and successful, leading a complex organisation across multiple settings. However, like many senior leaders, discussions about performance concerns could sometimes feel personal rather than professional.

The governing board needed to address several difficult issues, including outcomes that were below both local and national averages in some areas. The Chair recognised that avoiding these conversations would undermine accountability, but approaching them in the wrong way risked damaging relationships and trust.

To manage this, the Chair deliberately introduced greater clarity into governance conversations. Discussions were signposted from the outset so all participants understood their purpose. Some conversations were framed as "supportive discussions" where the focus was on listening, exploring options and providing a sounding board. Others were clearly identified as "challenge discussions" where governors were seeking assurance, evidence and improvement actions. Decision-making discussions were also distinguished from exploratory conversations.

The Chair also used structured feedback techniques to balance recognition and challenge. Acknowledging successes and operational achievements first helped create an environment where difficult questions could be asked constructively without becoming confrontational.

As a result, conversations became clearer and more productive. The Executive Headteacher better understood the purpose of governance challenge, and governors felt more confident in asking difficult questions. The board strengthened its strategic oversight while maintaining a positive working relationship with school leadership.

A key lesson was that governance challenge is most effective when expectations and boundaries are explicit. Boards should not avoid difficult conversations, but they should create structures that help participants distinguish between personal criticism and professional accountability.

Case Study 2

Section 2: Workload and Governance Efficiency (Page 10)

Snapshot: Ofsted judgement, governor vacancies and increased workload.

Source Survey Response

Respondent: Governor, Primary School

Expanded Case Study

Governing Through a Period of School Improvement

Following a recent Ofsted judgement of Requires Improvement, the governing board faced a demanding period of school improvement. At the same time, the board was operating with a number of governor vacancies, meaning fewer people were available to undertake monitoring, strategic oversight and committee work.

The school also began the academic year with significant staffing challenges, relying heavily on supply staff. Governors recognised that both leaders and staff were under pressure and that governance needed to remain focused on improvement priorities rather than adding unnecessary workload.

To maximise participation and ensure governance remained effective, meetings were offered both in person and through hybrid arrangements. This improved attendance and reduced barriers for governors with work or family commitments.

Governors prioritised activity that would provide meaningful oversight of improvement. This included participation in recruitment processes, monitoring visits focused on literacy and teaching quality, health and safety reviews and learning walks. Care was

taken to maintain appropriate challenge while recognising the pressures school leaders were experiencing.

As staffing stability improved and additional governors joined the board, the workload became more manageable. Governance discussions became increasingly focused on strategic priorities and evidence of improvement. A new Chair also helped sharpen meeting effectiveness and ensure challenge was clear and purposeful.

The experience demonstrated the importance of prioritising governance activity during periods of change. By focusing on what mattered most and creating flexible ways for governors to participate, the board was able to maintain effective oversight without creating unnecessary additional pressure.

Case Study 3

Section 2: Workload and Governance Efficiency (Page 11)

Snapshot: Parent governor struggling with governance commitments alongside work and family responsibilities.

Source Survey Response

Respondent: Parent Governor

Expanded Case Study

When Governance Feels Like a Second Job

A newly appointed parent governor joined the governing board motivated by a strong desire to support the local community and improve educational opportunities for children in the area. As a parent of three young children under the age of five and someone working full-time, the governor understood there would be a time commitment but underestimated the scale of the role.

Meeting attendance, school visits, committee commitments and preparation for meetings quickly became difficult to manage. Large volumes of governance papers required significant reading and consideration before meetings. Finding time during the day was challenging, resulting in preparation often taking place very early in the morning before family and work commitments began.

While committed to the role, the governor described governance as feeling similar to an unpaid part-time job. The pressure was not caused by any single activity but by the cumulative impact of expectations, paperwork and competing responsibilities.

The experience highlighted several important lessons for governing boards. New governors need realistic information about expected time commitments before

appointment. Boards should ensure papers are distributed in good time, focus agendas on strategic priorities and avoid unnecessary reporting that adds to preparation time. Consideration should also be given to the scheduling of meetings and visits so that those with caring responsibilities are not disadvantaged.

This case demonstrates why governance workload should be considered not only at board level but also through the experience of individual volunteers. Sustainable governance depends on ensuring that committed governors can contribute effectively without becoming overwhelmed.

Case Study 4

Section 3: Emotional Load and Risk (Page 13)

Snapshot: Governance professional challenged following a governance review.

Source Survey Response

Respondent: Governance Officer, Local Authority

Expanded Case Study

Maintaining Professional Integrity During a Difficult Governance Review

A governance professional was managing significant workload pressures after staffing changes left them as the sole officer supporting governance across a large district. Alongside delivering governance support locally, they were also providing training and support to another local authority.

One particularly challenging situation arose following a governance review undertaken for an academy. The review identified weaknesses and areas requiring improvement. While school leaders and the Chair had previously acknowledged some of the issues informally, the written report made these findings explicit.

The academy leadership found the conclusions difficult to accept and chose not to share the review findings more widely with governors. For the governance professional, this created a difficult situation. There was pressure to soften findings, yet professional standards required the review to remain evidence-based, independent and honest.

The challenge was both professional and emotional. As a sole officer already carrying a substantial workload, there was a risk of feeling isolated when faced with disagreement or criticism from senior leaders.

Support came through maintaining professional boundaries, relying on evidence and seeking guidance from governance networks and colleagues. Although relationships

with the academy became more limited following the review, professional respect was maintained.

The experience reinforced the importance of peer support, professional networks and clear governance expectations. Governance professionals should never feel they must manage difficult situations in isolation. Honest governance reviews are valuable tools for improvement, and maintaining professional integrity is essential even when findings are uncomfortable.

Case Study 5

Section 3: Emotional Load and Risk (Page 14)

Snapshot: Wellbeing concerns supported through peer support and governance officer involvement.

Source Survey Response

Respondent: Strategic Lead School Support Service

Expanded Case Study

Supporting Wellbeing Through Peer Support

A local authority identified wellbeing concerns among individuals undertaking governance responsibilities. Pressures associated with the role had begun to affect confidence and resilience, creating a risk that individuals might feel isolated or unsupported.

Recognising that governance pressures can often build gradually, the local authority introduced several support mechanisms. Individuals were connected with experienced Chairs who could provide peer support, share their own experiences and offer practical advice. A named governance officer was also made available, providing a consistent point of contact for guidance and reassurance.

Additional support was provided through signposting to wellbeing resources, including specialist services such as Teacher Support Network resources.

The combination of practical advice, professional guidance and peer support helped reduce feelings of isolation and reinforced that seeking help was a positive step rather than a sign of weakness.

As a result, wellbeing improved and individuals reported greater confidence in managing governance demands. The case demonstrated that relatively simple interventions can make a significant difference and that effective support arrangements should be available before issues escalate into more serious wellbeing concerns.

Case Study 6

Section 4: Early Warning and Wellbeing Checks (Page 18)

Snapshot: Monitoring responsibilities concentrated amongst two governors.

Source Survey Response

Respondent: Vice Chair of Governors, Federated School

Expanded Case Study

When Too Much Governance Depends on Too Few People

A governing board faced a common challenge. While all governors were committed to supporting the school, differing work patterns and personal commitments meant only a small number could regularly attend the school site during the day.

As Vice Chair, one governor had sufficient flexibility to undertake monitoring visits, attend meetings during school hours and participate in other governance activities. Over time, these responsibilities increasingly fell to the same two governors.

The board recognised the issue and attempted on several occasions to redistribute responsibilities. However, practical constraints meant that many governors remained unable to participate in daytime activities. Despite good intentions, the imbalance continued.

The result was growing pressure on the governors who were carrying most of the operational governance workload. While committed to the school, they increasingly questioned the long-term sustainability of the arrangement.

This experience highlighted the risks associated with one-person or small-group dependency. Effective governance relies on shared responsibility and resilience. Where activities cannot realistically be distributed equally, boards should actively consider alternative approaches, such as virtual monitoring opportunities, grouping visits together, reviewing expectations or recruiting governors whose availability complements existing board capacity.

The key lesson was that governance sustainability should be assessed regularly. Even when responsibilities are being fulfilled, concentration of workload can create significant wellbeing risks and succession challenges if not addressed early.