

## GovernorLine

### Service Review Documents

This document is made up of three complementary pieces:

**GovernorLine 2001-2003** - this is the first public review of the service, and it contains narratives descriptions of the work of the advisers.

**GovernorLine Update 2004-2005** - this takes the story on a further two years, adding lessons learned from the introduction of the web site and of e-mail access to the service.

**Review Data Supplement 2001-2007** - this looks only at the data for the seven years of the service, but does not add any narrative or extra description.

The Management Board receives monthly reports on the data and it meets termly where more discussion can take place about pressing issues and concerns being raised by governors using the service.

Please contact Worklife Support if you would like to know more.

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GovernorLine offers free confidential e-mail and telephone advice, information and support to School Governors, clerks and individuals involved directly in the governance of maintained schools in England.

Call us on 08000 722 181 from Monday to Friday 9.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m., excluding public holidays, or from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. at weekends. E-mail us from [www.governorline.info](http://www.governorline.info)

GovernorLine is managed by Worklife Support for the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

# GovernorLine Review 2001-2003

*Providing free information, support and advice for all  
governors of maintained schools in England*

*08000 722 181*

*[www.governorline.info](http://www.governorline.info)*

## ***Part One: The GovernorLine Service.***

### **Background**

GovernorLine was developed by Worklife Support in consultation with the National Governors' Council (NGC), the National Association of School Governors (NASG) and Information for School and College Governors (ISCG). Funded by the DFES for an initial three years, the service was launched on 9 January 2001.

The service is aimed at school governors in maintained schools in England. It is free to callers, and totally confidential. Access to the service by a free phone telephone number was supplemented in 2002 by the launch of the GovernorLine web site [www.GovernorLine.info](http://www.GovernorLine.info) and by access to the service using e-mail from April 2003.

This report covers the first three years of the service. The contract to run GovernorLine was again awarded to Worklife Support in 2004 for a further three years, in the first instance.

### **School Governors**

School governors are the largest volunteer workforce in the country. Governing bodies have representation from a number of stakeholders in the local community – parents, school staff, the local education authority, as well as representatives from business and the wider community. It is right to acknowledge that many governing bodies have an impressive and wide range of skills. This breadth of experience is required more than ever as the duties and responsibilities of governing bodies have grown significantly in recent years.

Governors have a pivotal role in directing and accounting for their school's performance. They ensure schools maintain standards and they play a key strategic role with the senior management team. This is especially true in turning around schools experiencing difficulties.

Financial considerations have led many governing bodies to acknowledge that an increased role, responsibility and accountability provide greater empowerment and flexibility but also lead to a greater requirement to seek external advice and support if confronted with complex situations that do not offer obvious and consensual decisions for the governing body.

### **GovernorLine Specification**

GovernorLine is a professional helpline offering telephone advice and support to school governors, clerks and LEA officers or others who provide assistance to governors. It offers free, independent information and advice on education law and recognised good practice within maintained schools to all school governors in England.

The key elements of the service are:

- A single number free phone telephone support service – 08000 722 181
- E-mail access via [www.governorline.info](http://www.governorline.info)
- GovernorLine is available 9 am to 10 pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays and 11am to 4pm on weekends
- The service is subject to full codes of confidentiality. Codes of practice and procedures exist for all aspects of the service, which has ISO 9001:2000 accreditation

All calls are logged with key issues recorded. This ensures that valuable data on the problems, concerns and issues of school governors is available. This data is collated into reports on a regular basis and can be used to inform policy, to use in promotional materials and to train and guide school governors

The GovernorLine website ([www.governorline.info](http://www.governorline.info)) provides a range of on-line support and information for governors. In addition, the website also offers access to the GovernorLine dedicated team via e-mail.

## GovernorLine - Guiding Principles

As well as assisting individual governors to resolve issues that are of concern, GovernorLine is also tasked with fostering and encouraging governors to approach their roles and responsibilities with a positive and constructive outlook. Specifically, the team will always be guided by, and will encourage governors to be influenced by, the following principles:

- understanding the principles of fairness, equality and recognised good practice
- promoting positive and constructive industrial relations
- adhering to sound and fair employment practices and procedures
- being aware of, and follow, procedures laid down for their own school correctly and properly at all times
- better understanding the role played by trade unions in relations between school governors and employed staff
- being empowered to make objective decisions based on the evidence and facts of a situation.
- being aware of, and be informed by, sound financial practice

In more general terms, callers frequently want advice on where the responsibility of a school governor begins and ends. The advisors have indicated that many callers are aware of the correct procedure to take but often lack confidence and are seeking clarification and reassurance.

Advisers can only advise on the issues as presented to them by the governor. They do not discuss personal details of cases with other advisers to protect confidentiality. Nor do they act on behalf of governors, or in any way as an arbitration service.

## The GovernorLine Team

Worklife Support provides the GovernorLine service in conjunction with First Assist, one of the leading providers of advisory services in the UK. GovernorLine operates on three levels.

### **(i) The Dedicated Team**

The vast majority of calls are dealt with by the professional advisory staff based at FirstAssist. Currently serving as school governors, these staff are dedicated to GovernorLine (the dedicated team). It is a requirement of their contract of employment that they continue to serve as school governors and undertake all training that would be required in the course of their duties.

There has been both initial and on-going training of the team on all matters of concern to school governors. The Team has access to up-to-date support material available from the DFES and other support services.

The GovernorLine team is tasked with:

- Giving details on accepted procedures (which specifically includes involvement with trade unions, best practice etc)
- Pointing the client in the right direction or giving practical solutions to the problems which are presented to them
- Promoting the concept of teamwork whilst working in partnership with school staff and the management team

- Looking at the whole school issue (i.e. strategic planning for the future rather than dealing with problems as and when they arise)
- The development of governors and their roles within the school

The dedicated team has established two-way communication with the DFES to discuss emerging issues and gain clarification where necessary. The team produces 'Issue of the Month' reports to draw the Management Board's attention to important trends and areas of confusion for governors. The team has contributed significantly to this review.

### **(ii) Advisory Team**

The dedicated team is supported by a wider advisory team made up of legal, employment, and health and safety advisers with a wealth of experience advising in the education field. A number of members of the wider advisory team are also serving governors.

### **(iii) Support Volunteers**

The dedicated team also has at its disposal a database of experienced volunteer practicing governors (the support volunteers). The support volunteers have been selected by NGC and NASG from their experienced membership, and are available for governors on specific matters of concern that require further discussion and investigation. In addition, these support volunteers provide geographical spread and knowledge of local conditions and practices among LEAs and schools.

## **Management Board**

Management and strategic direction for the service is provided by GovernorLine's Management Board. The Board comprises representatives from the governor organisations – three representatives from NASG, three from NGC, and a co-opted member from ISCG. In addition, DfES School Governor services, as the source of finance for the service, is represented. Worklife Support services and reports to the Board. More information on the members of the GovernorLine board is presented in Appendix One.

The Management Board is responsible for ensuring appropriate consideration and dissemination of regular reports, annual evaluation and on-going monitoring of the service. The board oversees the recruitment, monitoring and training of the GovernorLine team, including the support volunteers.

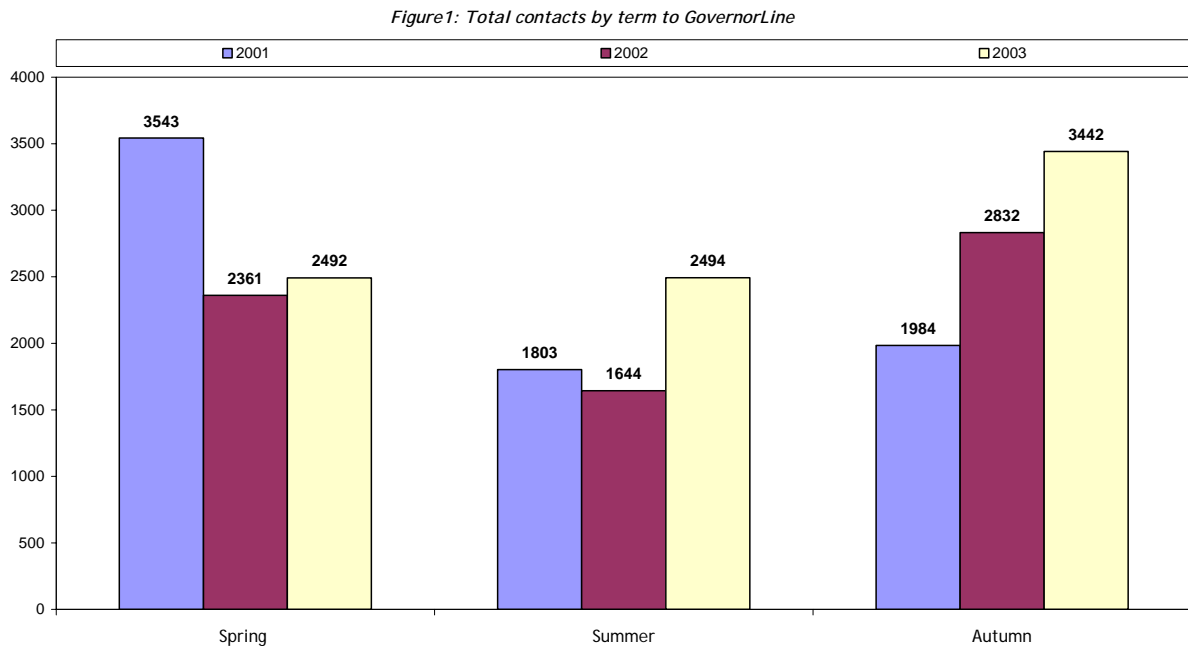
The Management Board receive monthly update reports and meets each term to assess the service with a view to the facilitation of long-term growth and to ensure that the service retains a high level of professionalism and accuracy.

## Part Two: Usage of GovernorLine.

This section of the report provides information on how the GovernorLine service has been used since launch to the end of December 2003.

The Management Board receives detailed monthly reports on service use, broadly in the same areas as those reported below. The information here summarises and to some extent reformulates data in those confidential reports. Data is presented here based on the three school term periods (January to April; May to August; September to December). More information about how the data is calculated is presented in Appendix Two.

### 1. How many governors contact GovernorLine?



GovernorLine has attracted over 22,500 contacts during the first three years of its existence. The launch clearly tapped into a reservoir of uncertainties for school governors, producing very high figures in the early months. Since then, the service usage patterns clearly reflect the flow of the school year. Usage drops significantly during April and December, and to its lowest in August. Even then, however, GovernorLine will still receive an average of more than three contacts a day!

As the service has become more a part of the school governance landscape, the feeling is that awareness is forming part of governors' inductions. This would help account for the increasing usage during autumn terms as new governors come on board.

The highest level of calls during the three years stands at 1156, during March 2001, while the lowest was August 2003, at 115.

As is to be expected, promotional activity impacts on call levels. A noticeable hike followed a push for September 2002, and there can be minor spikes after a notice has appeared in Governors magazine, for example. Call levels have been manageable at these levels, which has obviated the need for major marketing efforts over the more recent months.

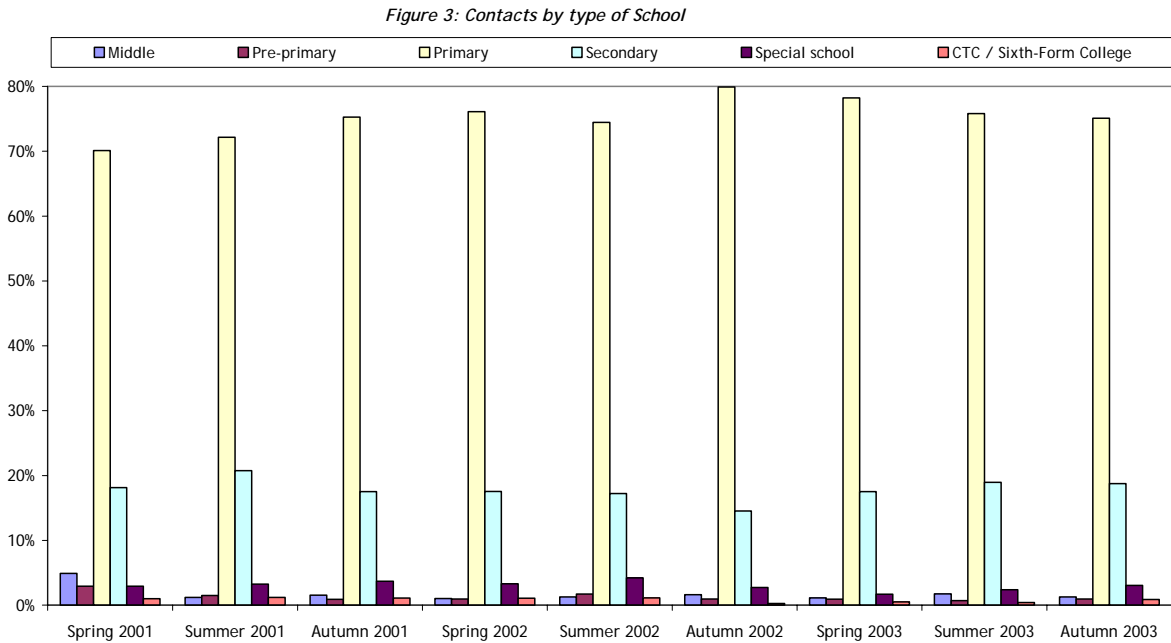
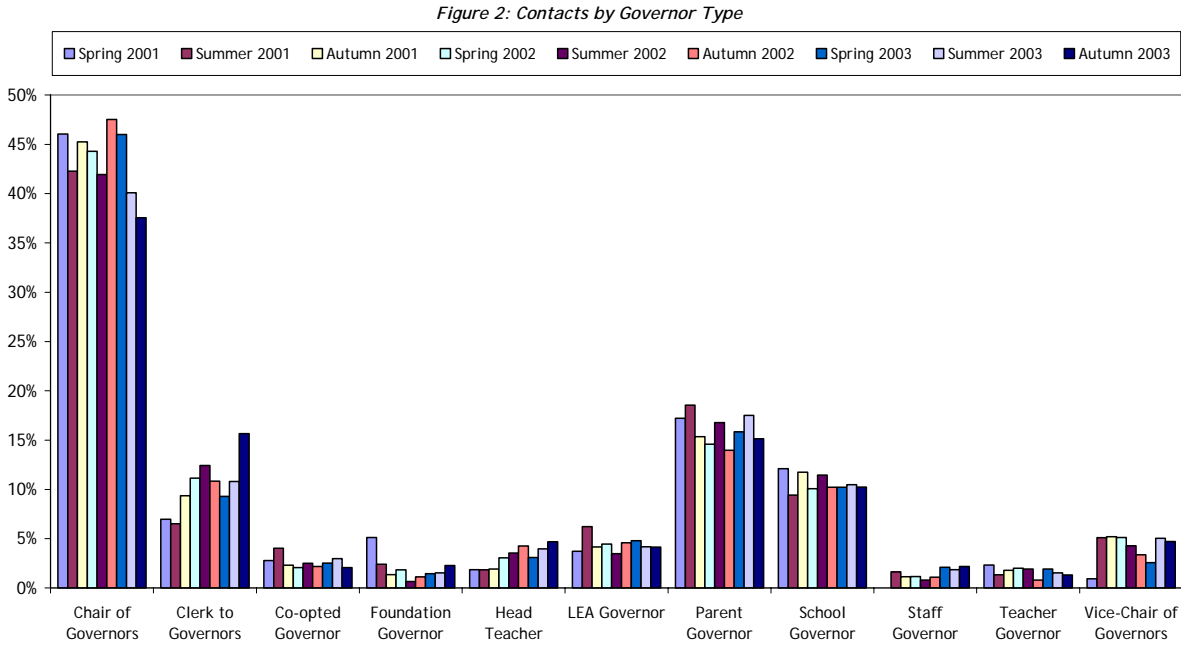
Telephone calls last, on average, between 9 and 12 minutes fairly consistently over more recent months as the service has bedded down. During the learning curve of the early months, calls could last an average of more than 17 minutes.

Most calls are received during the day, although significant numbers come during the evening, reflecting the work governors put in during their own personal time.

E-mails can take longer to process, on average. Introduced in April 2003, they accounted for about 10% of usage by the end of the period. The best guess of the advisers is that this e-mail usage supplements rather than replaces telephone calls.

## 2. Who is contacting GovernorLine?

Callers are asked about what role they are calling under, and from what type of school.



It can be seen from the preceding charts that a ‘typical’ caller to GovernorLine could reasonably be described as the chair of governors of a primary school.

Between them, primary and secondary school governors usually account for more than 90% of contacts, where the information is provided. This is broadly in line with the demographic breakdown of schools in England. Proportions of calls have not varied much over time and it is not expected, at present, that this is likely to change.

It is therefore true to say that the awareness of GovernorLine is reaching all schools across the country, regardless of phase. The chart displaying usage by governor type (figure 2) shows the spread of usage across different members of the governing body.

The high figure for Chairs is to be expected, not least because the governing body will often request the Chair to contact GovernorLine on behalf of the entire board. This can often be in situations where there is not a consensus on the board on particular issues, and GovernorLine is used as a source of external support.

More recently, Clerks to the governing body have also been calling more frequently. This may reflect recent changes in the law, on which Clerks rather than Chairs may be expected to advise.

The figures for Clerks do slightly hide an increasing level of calls from or on behalf of LEA governor services. This can potentially cause difficulties where advisers receive separate calls from a governing body and an LEA in dispute. As mentioned earlier, each call is treated by the adviser on its own merits, and the adviser gives a response based on the information received.

Parent governors are more likely to be concerned with the individual aspects of the role as a governor. Latterly, it may be that individual governors can be surprised by the extent of the commitment needed and responsibilities involved in being a school governor. There may well be an issue in general here for governor recruitment and induction programmes.

It is not our intention to produce a 'league table' of usage by LEA, not least because levels of use will depend on publicity in that area, the effectiveness and availability of other services, rather than indicating a 'problem' LEA.

There are no authorities in which usage is excessively disproportionate in either direction. The service has had contacts from every LEA area in England.

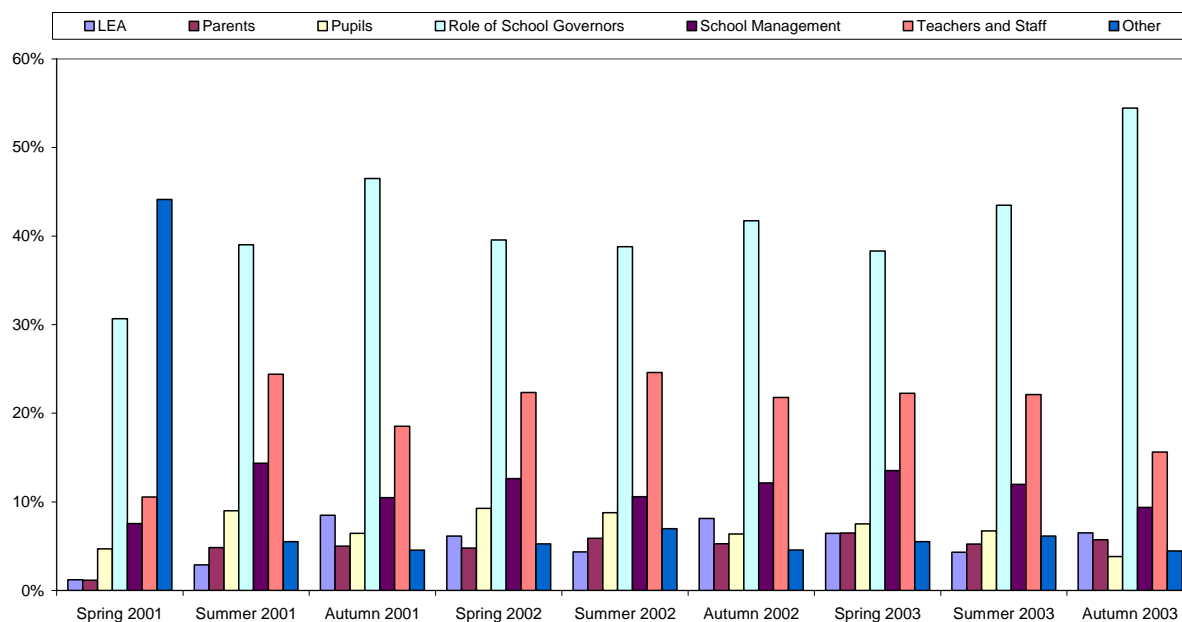
### **3. Why do governors contact GovernorLine?**

Why Governors call the service can be analyzed by looking firstly at broad headings, and then more specifically at issues within them. Governors call with a wide range of issues some of which may not directly relate to schools, such as taxation or probate questions.

These calls are often referred to the back-up advisory team; advisers at FirstAssist who staff other advisory services provided by the company through their employee assistance programmes. These advisers are trained professionals in their fields. Setting the GovernorLine service in the context of a wider support service such as FirstAssist allows GovernorLine to handle quickly and easily non-core issues that come up.

Mostly, however, callers contact GovernorLine to discuss a problem area, their concerns, and their proposed action, and to determine whether an objective, impartial view by an adviser is in line with their own thinking. This section of the review shows data on issues directly relevant to school governance.

Figure 4: Main Presenting Categories

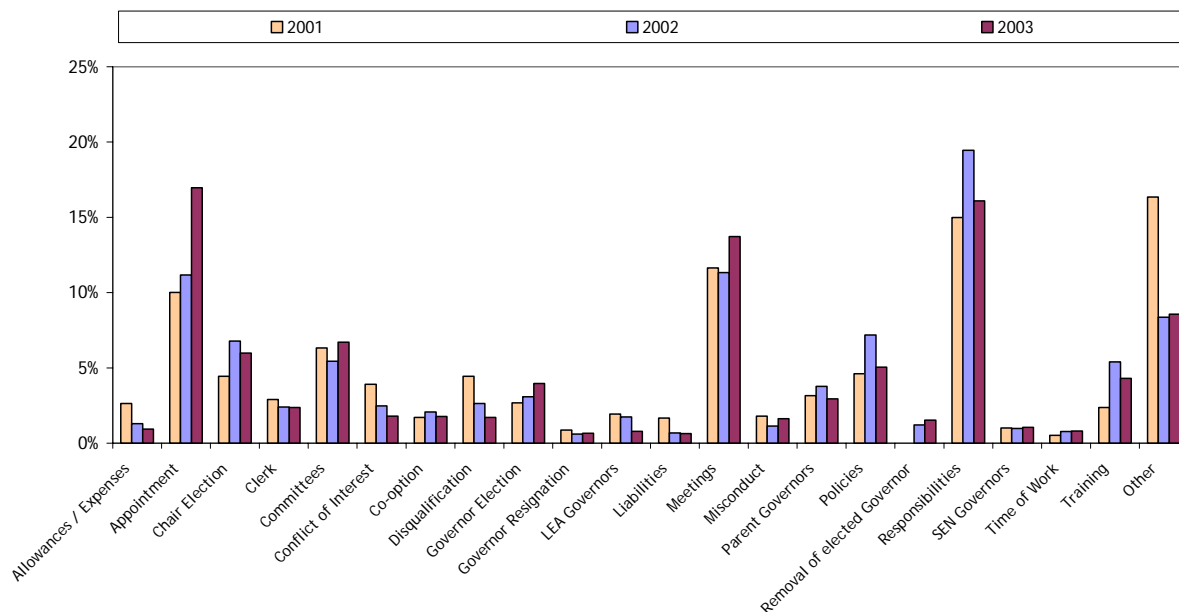


The spread of headline issues has stayed relatively stable once the system had bedded down, with the ‘role of governors’ being clearly the main area of concern. There are some signs that the gap between this topic and the rest widened in the last term of 2003. This, of course, coincided with the introduction of changes in the rules relating to governing bodies, so it should be expected that GovernorLine should get more calls from governors concerned about changes in role.

Another way of judging the issues in which governors are interested is by looking at the pages visited on the GovernorLine web site. Obviously, this is a self-selecting group, but there are seven pages carrying information on key issues where a ‘FAQ’ has been written up. The number of visits for each during the last quarter of 2003 was:

- Electing a chair and vice-chair of governors – 461
- Managing conflict – 453
- Performance management – 490
- Pre-appointment checks for Governors – 338
- Pupil exclusion – 178
- Teacher absence – 191
- Workload – 227

Figure 5: Issues - role of governors

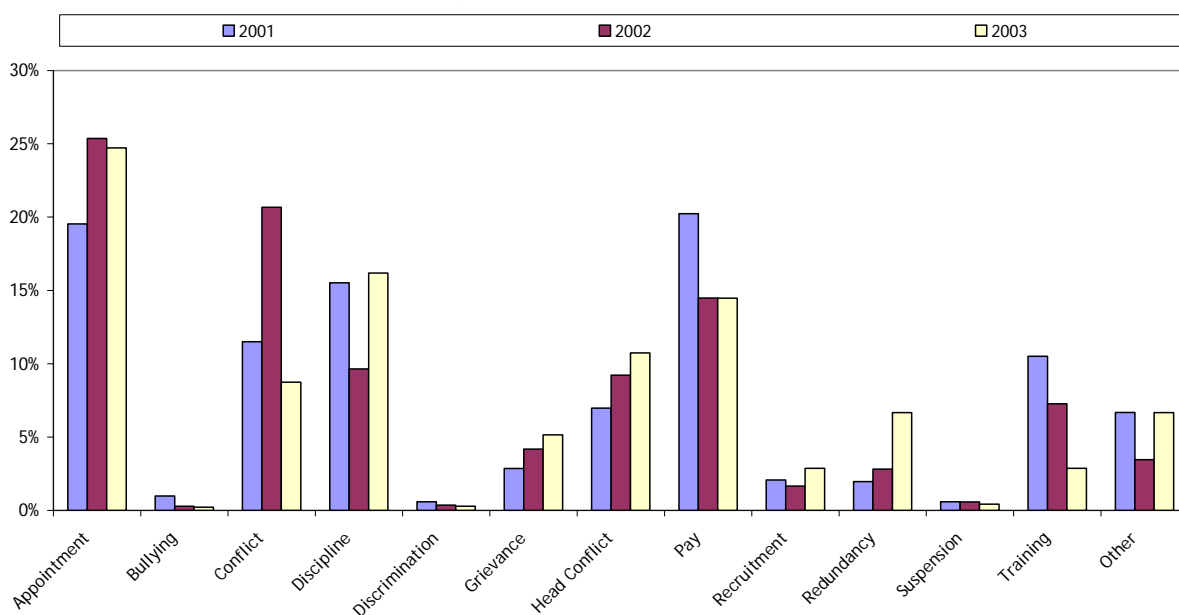


Within the broad category of ‘role of school governors’, three key areas stand out:

- Appointment of governors
- Meetings
- Responsibilities

However, the chart above clearly shows the wide range of issues raised with GovernorLine advisers.

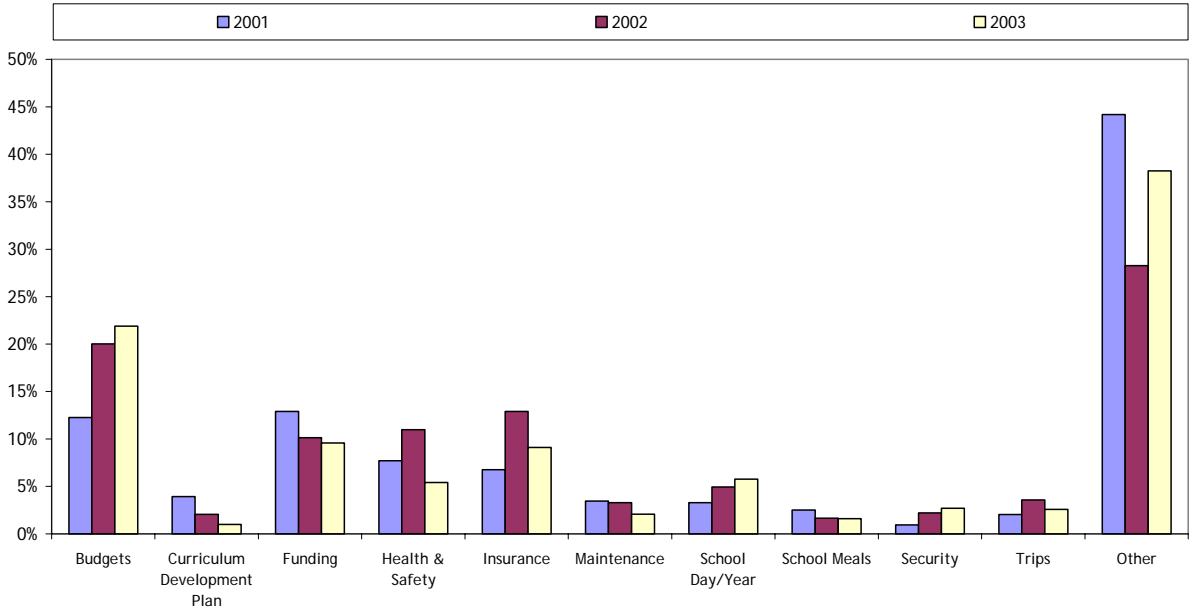
Figure 6: Issues - teachers and staff



Within the broad category of ‘teachers and staff’, there is a wider number of key areas, as shown above. Governors’ role within staff employment is clearly demonstrated, here, not least the relatively steep rise in queries about redundancy.

It is also noticeable that there has been a steady rise of calls covering grievance and head teacher conflicts.

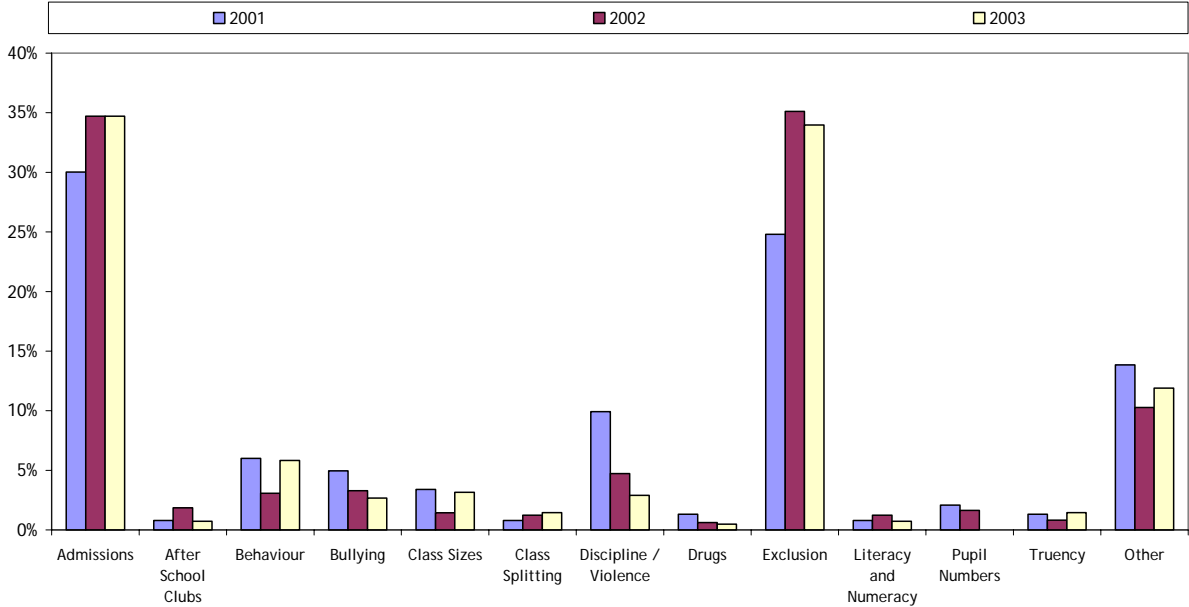
Figure 7: Issues - school management



There is a known issue with the data in the ‘school management’ area, in that there are too many ‘other’ issues. This is at least in part because of the very wide range of school management issues with which school governors have to grapple, and because of a range of new issues that come from LEA and central government that need understanding from the governing body.

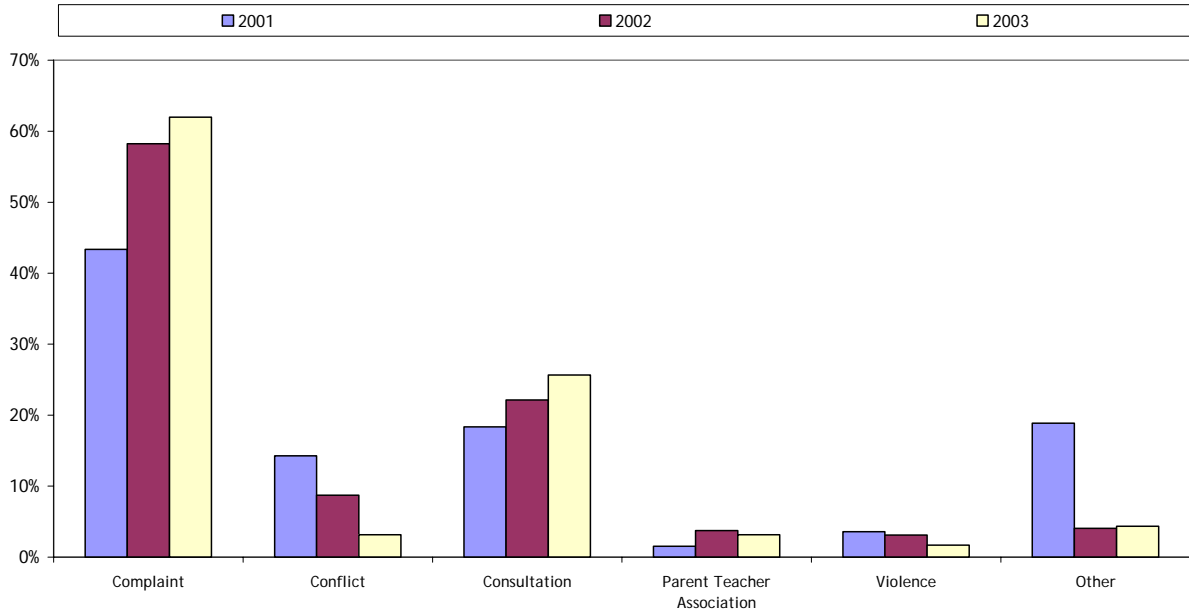
No-one reading the educational press will be surprised that school budgets form the largest single category and one where calls are on the rise.

Figure 8: Issues - pupils



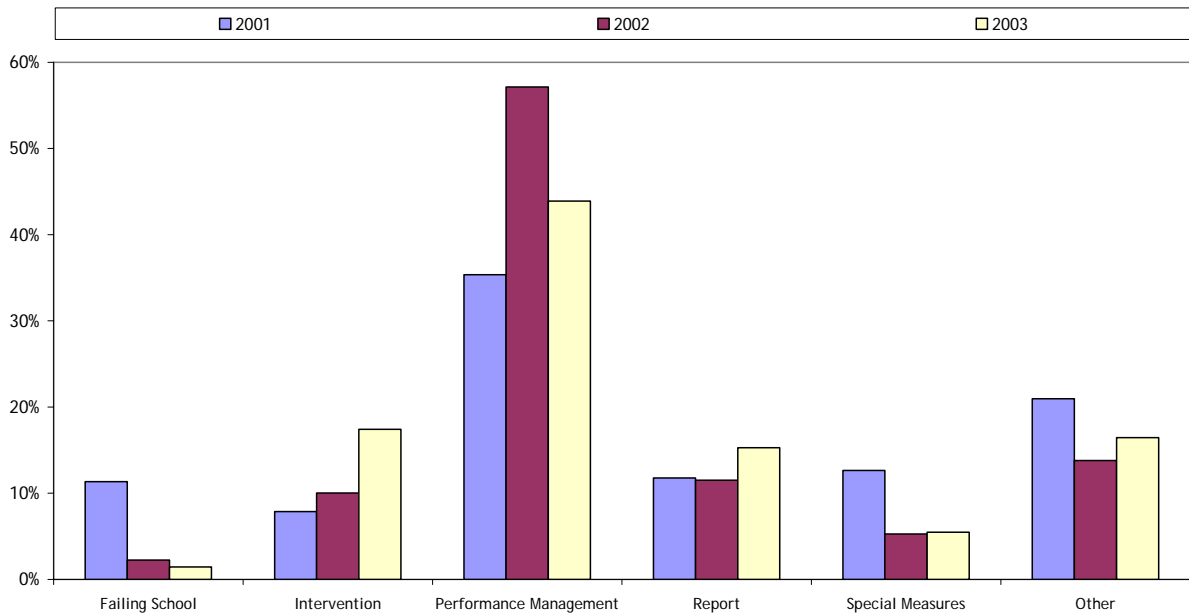
Again, there will not be much surprise that the major pupil issues facing governors cover admission policies and exclusion: between them, they account for more than two-thirds of contacts in this area. There have been declines in both issues of violence and drugs over the time, let us hope that these are small positive signs for our schools.

Figure 9: Issues - parents



Issues regarding relations with parents are becoming proportionally more numerous, and the figures would suggest that parents are becoming more vociferous in their complaining, although fortunately, conflict with parents has declined over the period.

Figure 10: Issues - LEA / Ofsted



Anecdotally, relationships with LEAs are becoming more fraught in general, but in relation to more general management issues. From the figures above, it is plain that the topic of specific joint responsibility, performance management, has raised concerns particularly during 2002.

## ***Part Three: Core issues***

While statistical reports can give a certain flavour of what GovernorLine is about, the real proof of the pudding is in the individual transactions between governors and our advisers. Of course, these remain completely confidential, but our advisers do report on general trends and 'typical' questions and responses. It should be remembered that callers to GovernorLine are governors in some difficulty and needing support. They may not be typical of the overall governor population.

Naturally, there have been 'hot' topics during the first three years of the service, some of which remain constant from launch until now and beyond. In this part of the report, we hope to offer more detail on the three main areas of specific concern for governors as raised with GovernorLine.

### **Fulfilling the duties of a school governor**

A consistent element of the calls has been basic information about the roles and responsibilities of being a school governor: what are the statutory obligations? how much time will it take? and so on. One consistent element throughout the three years has been the need for more and better governor training. There does seem to be some unevenness in practice around the country, and in the support available to governors. This is true not only for local governors' services but also related elements such as personnel and finance.

Situations can become fraught where there is a dispute between the school and LEA. A number of callers have stated that they believe advice they receive should be given with the best interest of the school at heart, and from a Governor perspective. Some do not believe this to be the case as often the advice from LEA staff reflects the LEA's view. This view is not necessarily seen as being in the best interests of the school. The GovernorLine advisers appreciate that the LEA Governor Services have a very difficult job to do, of course, and we try to keep this in mind in such situations.

Governors will often have difficulty in situations where there is a disagreement with the Head Teacher, where the roles of the Head and Governing Body are not clearly defined and understood. This can be exacerbated in situations where the LEA is not as supportive as it could be. In such situations, the chair of governors in particular has a very difficult role in steering the school past the Scylla of a poor Head and the Charybdis of an uncooperative LEA. GovernorLine has had to advise governors through these very difficult journeys.

A typical situation is when a Head retires and the LEA advises the school not to recruit a successor on the basis that the school is being considered for closure or merger. Whilst GovernorLine will advise Governing Bodies of their right under the School Standards and Framework Act to recruit a Head (subject to the approval of the School Organisation Committee), we also encourage robust debate with LEAs. As serving Governors, GovernorLine advisers are always primarily concerned to always ensure the leadership and management of a school is as strong as possible. Political decisions within an LEA to merge schools or "share" heads may be financially beneficial to an LEA, but are not always to the benefit of the pupils of those schools.

Governors can be placed under substantial pressure when not "toeing the LEA line" or when disagreeing with guidance from the authority. This creates additional stress for Governors at a time of potential instability for the school and its other stakeholders. GovernorLine can report however, that our assistance to Governors in these cases often results in the LEA changing its view when faced with Governors who are aware of their rights.

Communication can be an issue too. All too often governors become aware of difficulties in their school only after an Ofsted inspection has reported. This emphasises the need for active communication between the governors, the Head and the LEA.

The same is true at higher levels of policy. For example, there was very little guidance for governors on the issue of threshold progression, and some governors feel that the whole discussion in schools over workforce reform has by-passed them. Governors often possess the skills required by new policy developments, and will often be in agreement with the principles involved, but all too often the place of governors in the policy-making process is ignored.

The areas highlighted are all variations on a theme: prevention. If Governors feel they are prevented from fulfilling their roles effectively, they are unlikely to be able to ensure the best possible delivery of educational services to their school communities.

The new regulations for governing bodies introduced during 2003 are a case in point. Many calls to GovernorLine were seeking clarification of the regulations rather than pursuing real issues. Most Governing Bodies have sought to "keep on keeping on", rather than seeking to take advantage of the opportunities which the 2002 Act has provided.

Considerable commitment is required of Governors. Many callers believe that school governance will never be easy and that it is a constant battle with conflicting forces that have to be managed effectively to attain the best possible outcomes for pupils. Many are of the opinion that they are Governors because of a personal commitment to education and to the education of young people and not for any personal gratification. Many callers feel that their contribution is too rarely acknowledged and appreciated at local, regional or national levels.

## School finance

Governors see finance as being the single most important issue that they have to contend with on an annual basis.

A number of callers have seriously questioned their ability to continue due to the stress they have experienced in this area. Much of the time it has been a matter of talking through the problems with governors, testing and identifying any particular area or measure that could be taken to alleviate what seems to be, in some circumstances, extremely difficult situations.

In this respect, the service fulfils an important role in that it is able to provide a degree of understanding of problems that the GovernorLine advisers themselves are experiencing. This allows governors to unburden themselves by talking through the issues, particularly where redundancies are seen as the only option, and provides a level of support and comfort that problem-sharing can bring.

Governors have been experiencing difficulties with increased salary costs arising from National Agreements, inflation, increased National Insurance and superannuation costs. In addition, many governors have mentioned the perceived substantial changes to the government's formula for supporting education, with changing focus upon priority areas. In combination, these factors have had a marked effect upon individual school budgets and many governing bodies experience considerable hardship in setting a balanced budget.

Governors have admitted that having considered their spending requirements, they have determined that to set a balanced budget is not possible. Some entered into agreements with their LEAs to set a deficit budget during 2002/3 in the hope of improvements in the following year. This, in turn, led to many calls in the Spring of 2003 when these hopes were not fulfilled. We

hope that the move to three-year budgets should help to resolve some of these financial planning difficulties.

Overwhelmingly, the biggest concern for governors is the effect of reducing budgets and for some, the seeming inevitability of redundancies. Some governors see the prospect of redundancies as a spectre that is haunting their schools and one that will adversely affect relationships between the school, staff, and governing body that have been carefully built over a number of years. Some callers have explained that their schools are carrying unfilled vacancies or have not replaced staff lost through natural wastage. Redundancy is also a highly technical issue as well, and governors are concerned about this aspect of the process.

We have noticed an increasing personal effect on governors as a result of the redundancy scenarios. To decide upon a loss of livelihood is not the reason people choose this area of Public Service, and it is clear that the need to take these painful decisions will not aid the recruitment of new governors and may indeed lead to many existing governors leaving their schools.

There can be some exasperation that initiatives that have been entered into in the past will not receive funding for this year. Governors confronting this dilemma explain that these initiatives then become a burden on the budget and governors have said this has resulted in these schemes being ended and staff displaced.

Conversely, budget surpluses within schools are an issue for LEAs and Government, who see relatively large sums remaining uncommitted. However, Governors who have set sums aside for contingencies often now see their longer-term perspective as being justified.

Governors calling the service believe that part of the solution to this problem lies in more information and increased opportunity to plan effectively for the future. Some callers have stated that they will continue to set sums aside to meet contingencies, where there is an area of uncertainty.

GovernorLine does advise schools on a general basis to investigate strategies to raise extra funding for their school. Making greater use of schools for community use, hence accessing available grants etc, is a potential way forward.

However, although many Governing Bodies are willing to explore such initiatives, they feel pressured to complete their everyday business. This, in turn, increases year-on-year, in addition to fundraising strategies in order to keep their school financially healthy.

## Governors as people

There appears to be an increase in pressure on the personal wellbeing of individual governors as a result of the issues outlined above. Many new governors report being 'caught unawares' by the demands of the role. The lack of appreciation that is felt at all levels, as mentioned earlier, exacerbates these feelings. It is hard to see how problems around recruiting and retaining governors can be addressed positively in this climate.

One recurrent theme of calls is a need for better induction of new governors, both from Heads and Chairs, and the concurrent need for much improved support from central and local government.

## ***Part Four: Worklife Support - Managing GovernorLine***

### **Co-operation**

Development, delivery and management of GovernorLine does not lie with one organisation. Funded by the DfES, the service is managed by Worklife Support Ltd and delivered by a team of professionals with governor expertise employed FirstAssist, one of the leading providers of telephone based advisory services.

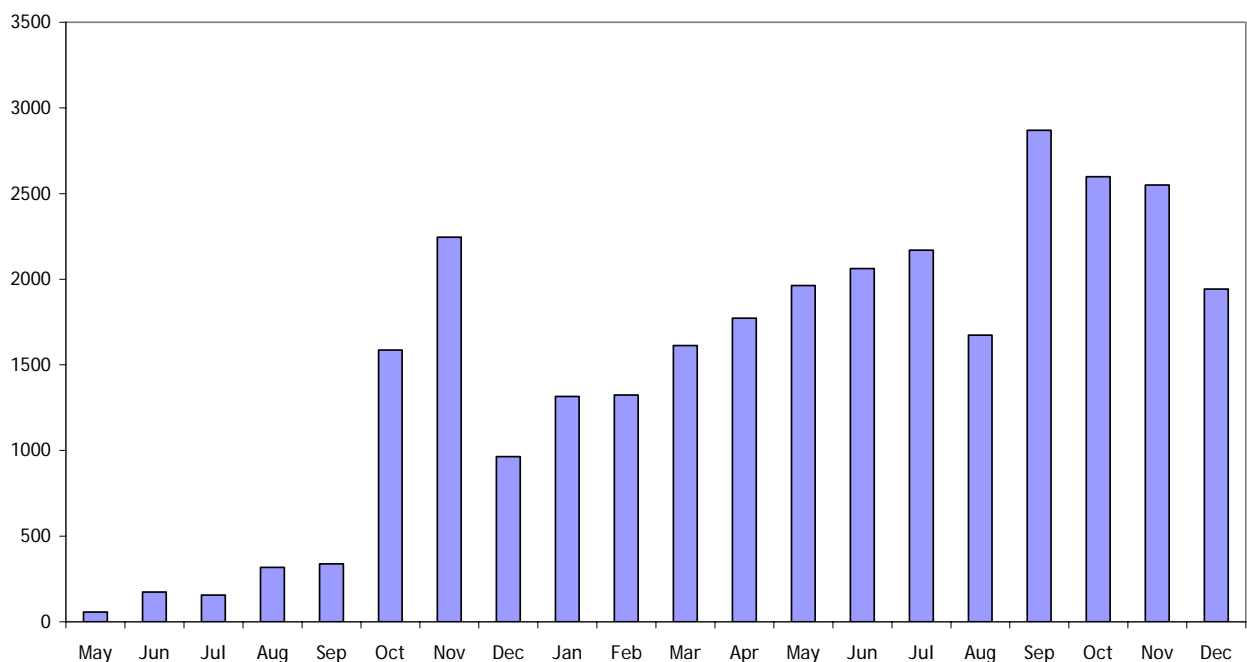
### **Management Board**

Worklife Support Ltd oversees the service's Management Board, which receives monthly update reports and meets on a regular basis, latterly quarterly. Board members include representatives from the NGC, NASG, the DfES, and a co-opted member from the ISCG. The Management Board steers the service, providing expertise, guidance and a critical eye on development and service standards.

### **Internet**

Worklife Support Ltd developed the GovernorLine Internet site and has been responsible for its management thereafter. The company ensures content is current and valuable to governors in partnership with the GovernorLine advisers and with the DfES, both the School Governors team and those managing GovernorNet.

*Figure 11: Visitors per day*



Very little has been spent on marketing the GovernorLine web site beyond the basic search engine placement, as usage of the service has been at a sufficient level. However, site visitors have consistently grown in numbers, albeit with the usual downturns in August and December, common to all education web sites.

The pattern of site visits by day of the week and by hour of the day is also fairly typical. The consistently high figures for the evening show how much work governors do during their personal time, re-emphasising the importance of recognising the voluntary nature of the role.

Figure 12: Visits by days of the week

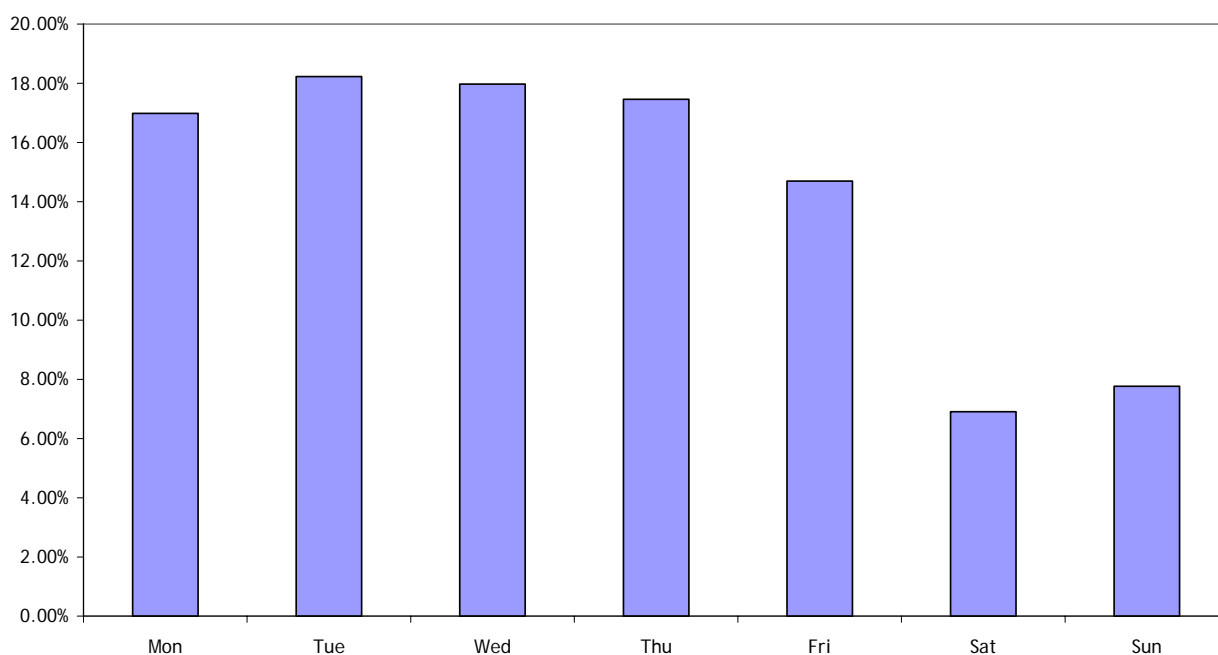
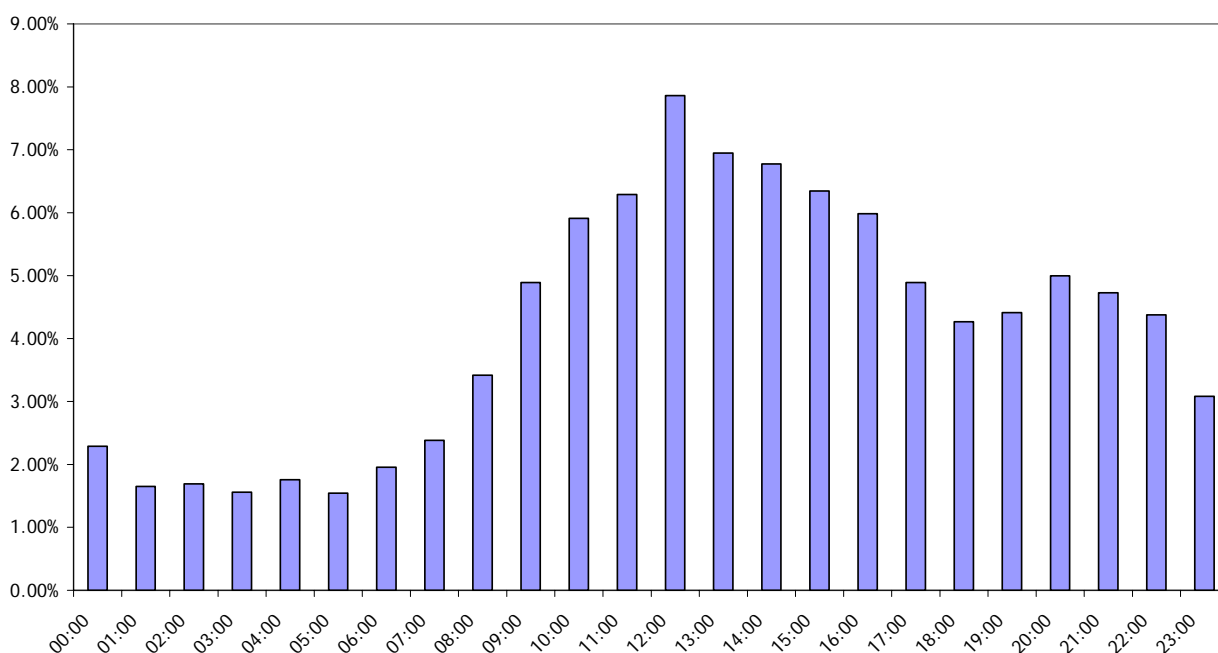


Figure 13: Visits by time of day



## Promotion

Worklife Support has been responsible for all promotion work relating to the service. For example, all chairs of governing bodies in England were mailed with the GovernorLine leaflet and promotional stickers in early 2002, and chairs of governor services are kept informed of the service regularly. As far as possible, all governor services have been contacted and asked to promote the service to governors, including links on relevant web pages.

A complementary relationship has built up between GovernorLine and DfES governor services, without compromising the independence of GovernorLine. The service is regularly promoted in Governors magazine and is featured prominently on GovernorNet ([www.governor.net.co.uk](http://www.governor.net.co.uk)).

Leaflets can be requested from the web site and by phone from Worklife Support.

We are very grateful for the support from the *Times Education Supplement* in publishing advertisements for GovernorLine.

We are also grateful for the support GovernorLine receives from other partner organisations. NASG, for example, mentions the service in its welcoming letter to all new members.

Worklife Support has produced two previous reports on GovernorLine. These are annual reviews of the service for 2001 and 2002. These are again available on the web site or direct from Worklife Support.

## **Appendix 1 - GovernorLine Partners**

### **Worklife Support Ltd**

In addition to GovernorLine, Worklife Support offers a range of full employee assistance programmes for education staff. These programmes offer 24-hour information and support for all staff in schools, including work-life support, advisory services, such as money advice, and personal and professional counselling, by phone or face-to-face. A number of local education authorities are using Worklife Support services and we anticipate significant expansion in this area.

Other Worklife Support Ltd initiatives include the school-based Well-Being programme and a number of new learning and professional development services, aimed at providing a supportive environment for school and education staff that creates a culture of excellence and a positive working and learning environment in schools.

Worklife Support

[www.worklifesupport.com](http://www.worklifesupport.com)

020 7554 5280

### **National Governors' Council**

The National Governors' Council was formed in 1994 to be the national voice for governing bodies. The Council's members are governor associations based in LEA areas, and through them it represents approximately two thirds of the 350,000 governors in England.

The role of NGC is consultative and representational. Through national conferences, regional meetings, local associations and email forums, NGC consults with its members on educational issues. NGC represents its members' views to the DfES, to Government Ministers and to all the national bodies concerned with education. NGC is seen as the key consultative partner for governing bodies and local governor associations.

NGC is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Its 18 trustees are elected from the membership. There is a small staff based at NGC's office in Birmingham. NGC receives no grant funding: it is a self-financing organisation. Apart from membership subscriptions, its income is earned by undertaking consultancy work and by disseminating information to governors on behalf of other organisations. NGC publishes good practice guides for governing bodies and governor associations, and a guide for new governors, "Welcome to Governance".

### **National Association of School Governors**

The National Association of School Governors (NASG) is an independent membership organisation, which is run by governors for governors. Its core purpose is to enable governors to play their part in promoting the best possible education for all pupils in schools. It does this by providing a quality service to its members. The association was known as NAGM – National Association of Governors and Managers until the summer of 2004.

The present service includes:

- a Journal, Governors' News, issued 5 times a year and containing up to date information and advice
- a series of advice papers, NASG Papers on school governance
- a helpline (in office hours)
- a website
- a research facility
- a diverse range of SmartCards (factsheets)

- representing governors' views by providing representation for national and local forums, consulting with members and using our knowledge, expertise and networks to respond to consultation, distributing research results, addressing conferences.

Peripheral business also underpins the core purpose. This includes joint projects and liaison with other individuals and groups and the sale of NASG products.

## **ISCG - Information for School and College Governors**

ISCG is a not for profit company limited by guarantee which provides advice, training, seminars and publications for anyone interested in school governance. As well as the Manual for Governing Bodies and their Clerks, recent ISCG publications include two free training packages sponsored by DfES:

- Admission Appeals Getting it Right
- Exclusion Appeals getting it right

## **FirstAssist Group Limited**

FirstAssist Group Limited is one of the premier providers of 24-hour telephone-based advisory services providing professional advice on legal, education, employment and personnel issues. It is a leading provider of Employee Assistance Programmes and counselling services within the UK, a fact recognised by the wide variety of major UK-based companies, NHS Trusts, Trades Unions, Local Authorities and affinity groups who have all chosen FirstAssist as their provider.

## ***Appendix 2 - Information on the Data.***

GovernorLine has a dual function. As well as providing advice and information, the service is also building a databank of information from the calls it receives. As with most other assistance services provided by phone, while the service is confidential for the caller, the GovernorLine team is nevertheless able to record non-confidential information such as top line demographics and reasons for governors' calls. This information allows the GovernorLine Management Board to keep track of how the service is performing and what issues are of greatest concern to governors, while not compromising the privacy and confidentiality of the caller.

### **Contacts**

The data covers, in the main, contacts recorded on the call management system at FirstAssist. This means that it only covers contacts actually received and processed. Contacts is used to cover telephone calls, e-mails or letters that form individual cases. These are used as the basis of counts in part one of the report.

Part two of the report, looking as it does at issues raised, covers more data than part one, as a contact may involve more than one issue.

Data categories were designed before the service was implemented and recording began a few weeks into the life of the service. As time has gone by, some amendments to the data have been made. Where appropriate, these have been described below, together with more specific information on how figures are calculated.

#### **Figure 1: Total Contacts**

This records the total number of contacts received by term, where a term is defined as being:

- January to April inclusive – Spring;
- May to August inclusive – Summer; and
- September to December inclusive – Winter

#### **Figures 2 / 3: Contacts by Governor Type and School Type.**

These figures are derived by first removing all contacts for which the information was not specified or the answer was "other" Categories are then expressed as a percentage of the remaining total number of contacts for all of the categories displayed.

Some data categories may not be reported as there are very low returns. An example is SEN governor under 'governor type' which has consistent returns of under 1% of contacts. This is the only reason for not covering a category: all categories with any sizeable return are reported.

#### **Figures 4 onwards**

All the data relating to the presentation of issues is based on numbers of issues raised rather than the number of individual contacts. Certain categories have not been included or have been silently elided to make presentation of the data easier. This process has mainly involved putting data where numbers in a category are small into the broader 'other' category.

Presenting issues are collated firstly by a broad topic, and then by more specific detailed issues. The main system was not implemented until Spring 2001, hence some unusual results for that term in the charts. Designing such data categories is always contentious, as the initial design had to guess what governors would call about. This obviously required certain finessing as time went by. For example, main categories for Ofsted and LEA issues were split in late 2003. The system is now undergoing a more radical overhaul in the light of experience gained since 2001. This is the main reason why percentages and not actual figures are recorded.

## GovernorLine Update 2004 - 2005

### A supplement to the Three Year Review

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1. Contacts through the year by month and contact method .....	2
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4. What do Governors call about? .....	7
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## Introduction

This report is intended as a supplement to the review produced during 2004 which is available for downloading from the GovernorLine web site. It is not intended as a full and comprehensive review of the service, but acts as an update and addendum to the 'Three Year review'.

It adds to that report data from the years 2004 and 2005, as well as commenting on some issues that have arisen with the service in that time.

### Note on the data

In part one of this report, we show the actual numbers of all calls and e-mails received in the charts. Some calls are marked as 'not specified' where we were unable to collect data or to do so was inappropriate.

Where a chart shows percentages, these are percentages of totals *with the 'not specified' responses removed*. We have chosen not to try to apportion the 'not specified' calls. The totals still cover the majority of contacts made by the service and so should still be sufficient to show trends in the data.

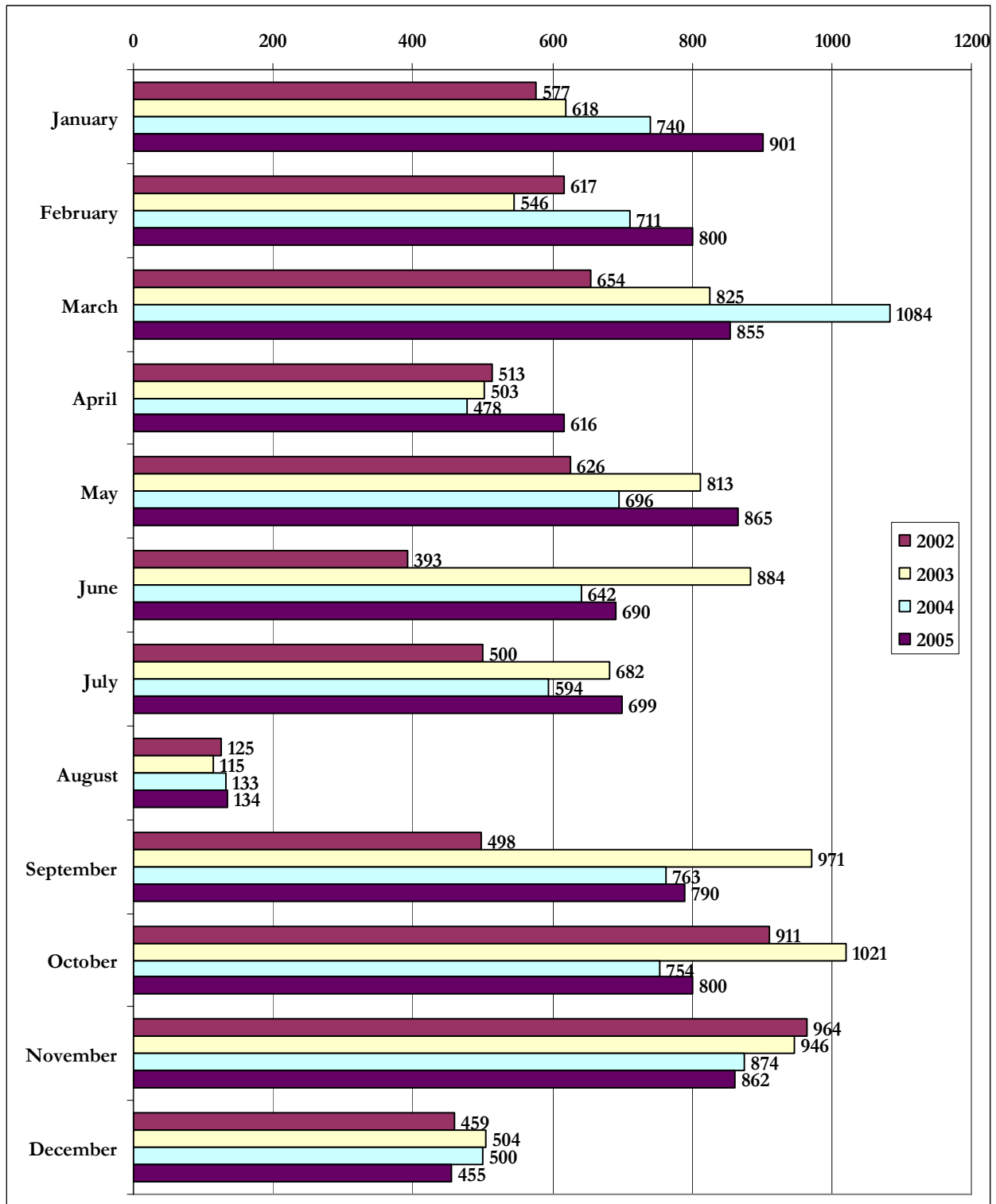
Comparison with previous years is difficult, particularly when discussing call issues, because of the reorganisation of call categories during 2004. I have tried to make it clear in each case exactly which comparison is being made.

Data on the number of schools is taken from *Statistics of Education Schools in England 2004 Edition* / DfES. London, TSO, 2004 ISBN: 0 11 271171 5

### Disclaimer

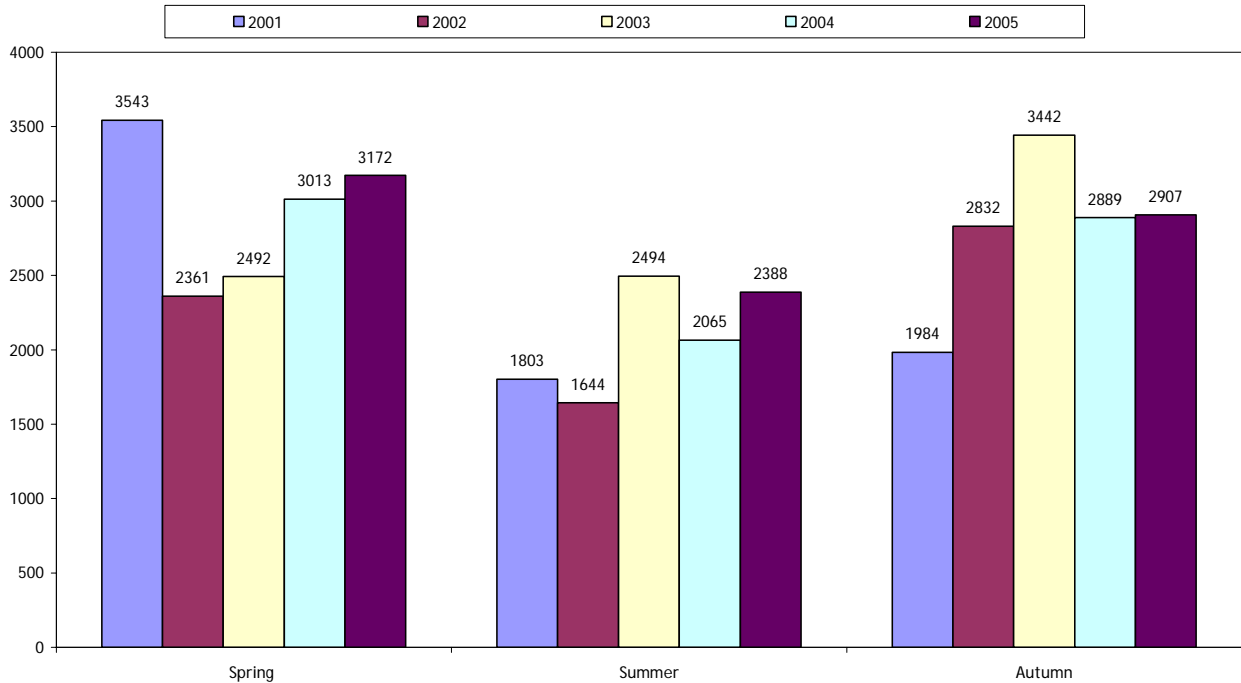
Please note that this review has been compiled by Worklife Support. It in no way represents the views of the Department for Education and Skills. Or of any organisation with representation on the GovernorLine management board.

## 1. Contacts through the year by month and contact method

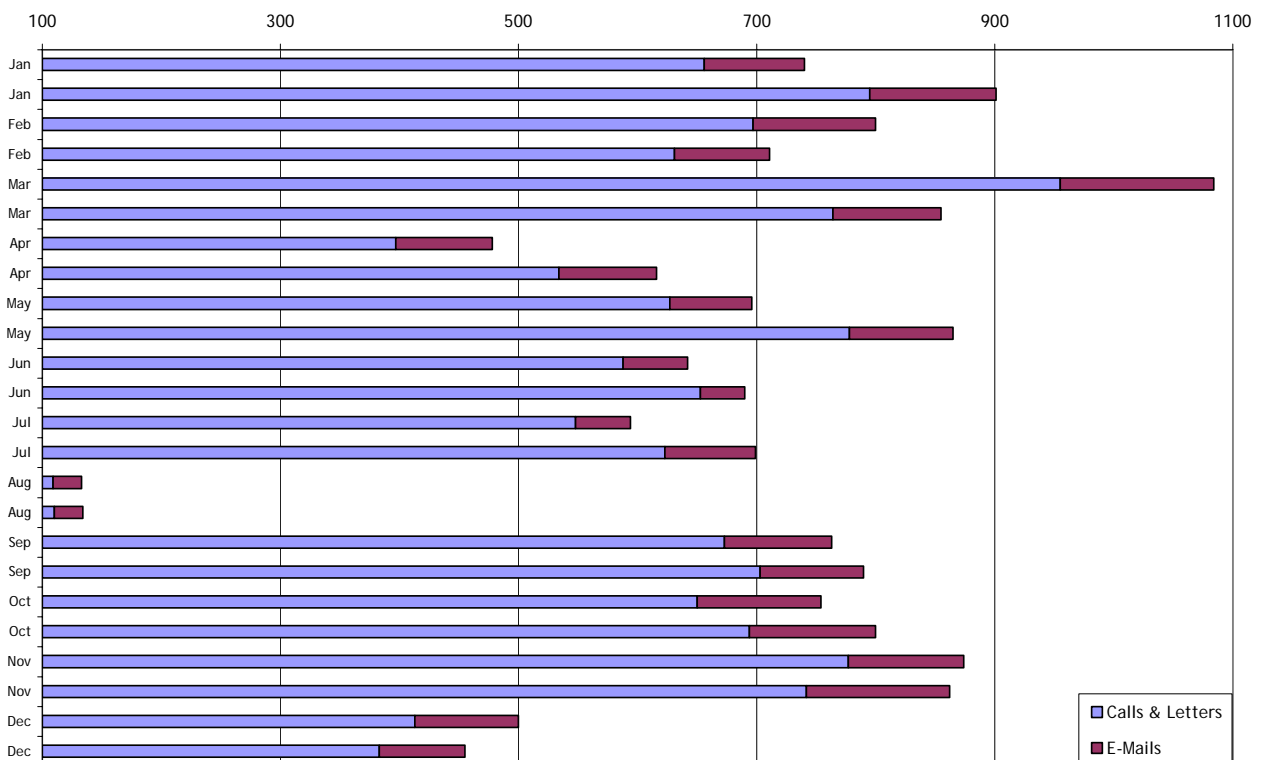


This table shows the total of all contacts received, whether by phone, e-mail or letter. The patterns of use through the year are well established, with peaks at the start of each term, and troughs during holiday periods. This, of course, fits with the pattern of the school year for Governors. 2001 is not shown for reasons of space.

The chart below shows this data aggregated into terms. This shows the greatest variation in call numbers to be during the summer term, while the general increase in contact numbers seems to be generated during the spring term.



The next chart shows the variation in the ratio of contacts each month received by phone and letter; and by e-mail over the past two years. The month for 2004 is shown above that of 2005, so you can see the monthly comparisons.

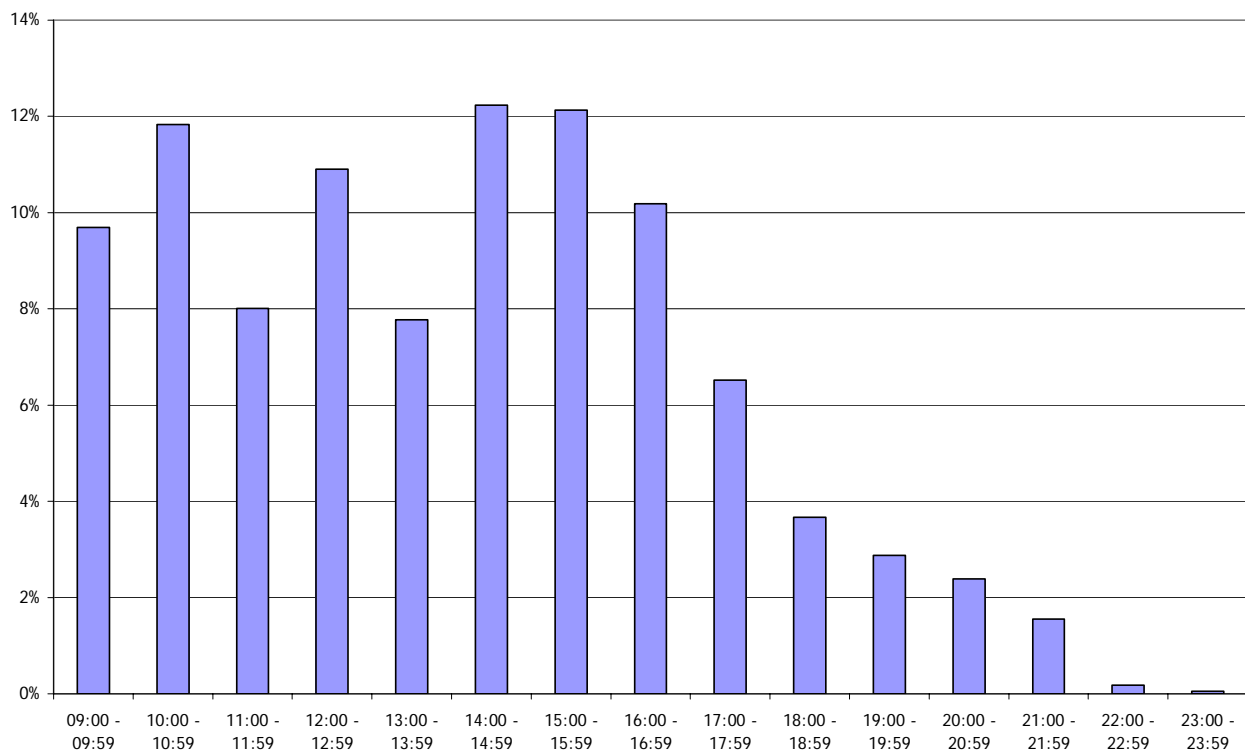


It is noticeable that there are peaks of e-mail usage as a proportion of the contacts fall in the main holiday periods. In percentage terms, August had the highest proportion of e-mail contacts in both years, with around 18% of contacts coming by e-mail in August 2004 and 2005. May seems to be the month with, generally speaking, the lowest ratio of e-mails received.

It appears that the contact method and the question being asked have no link: that is, certain types of calls do not rise and fall in line with the ratio of e-mails. However, chairs of governing bodies are more likely to telephone, while clerks are more likely to e-mail their questions (see the chart under 'Governor type'). There is a similar likelihood that an issue covering teachers and staff is more likely to be the subject of a phone call, while governor responsibilities are more likely to be queried by e-mail.

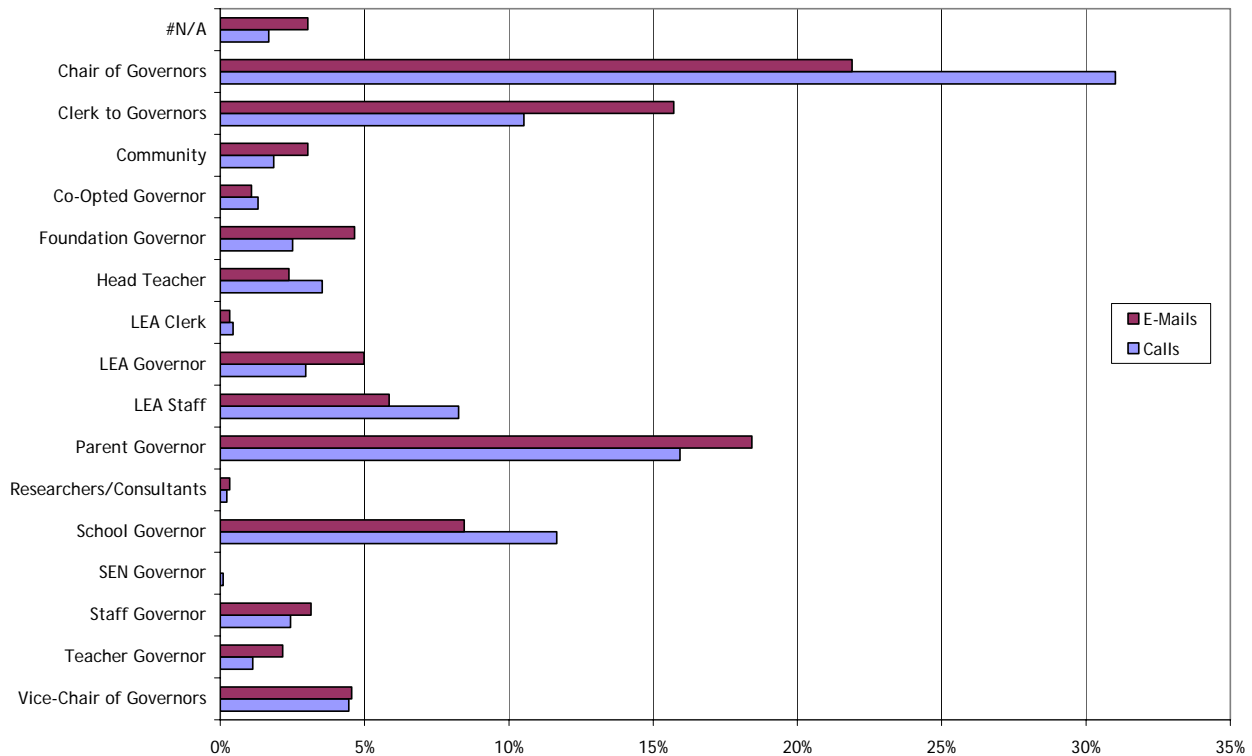
While the 'gut feeling' of the advisers is that e-mail has added to rather than replaced the telephone as a method of contacting GovernorLine, these figures are interesting too. They suggest that Governors do not expect to receive a speedy reply to an e-mail and will therefore use it during quieter times of the year. The telephone will be used when time is more pressing.

About a quarter of calls come out of school hours but otherwise the timing suggests that core use follows a normal working day (some e-mails may arrive after the service closes at 10.00 p.m.:



## 2. Contacts by Governor Type

We count 16 different types of governor in the data system, but by far the greatest use of GovernorLine is made by the Chair of the Governing Body.



The above chart shows the contacts by type of governor. The long-established pattern of Chairs and Clerks being the heaviest users continued in 2005, as did the use by the top five categories accounting for more than three-quarters of all contacts. It is interesting to note that Chairs are more likely to ring, while Clerks are more likely to e-mail GovernorLine.

The top five categories of governor by use account for around three-quarters of the contacts during 2005. It does seem that the general pattern of usage remains fairly stable as this matches the pattern from previous years.

### 3. Use by type of School

The table below compares the percentage of contacts from specific types of school (where the information was supplied) to the percentage of those types of schools in the general population:

School Type	%age of Contacts with GovernorLine	%age of general school population
City Technology College / 6 <sup>th</sup> Form College	0.77%	0.05%
Independent schools	0.79%	9.04%
Middle (i.e. primary or secondary deemed middle)	1.43%	1.61%
Pre-primary	0.95%	1.85%
Primary	70.93%	69.25%
Secondary	22.33%	12.29%
Special school	2.80%	5.91%

This table shows that primary schools accounted for the large majority of use during 2005, as would be expected from their dominance of the general school population. However, we get proportionately twice as many contacts from secondary schools as we 'should' have. This has increased slightly from 2004.

It would be interesting to know if this is because governance in Secondary schools is more complex or governor training is less effective. It may well be a mixture of both. The experience of Worklife Support in other areas does not suggest that secondary schools are likely to be more aware of the service. Indeed, in general, secondary schools are harder to reach than primary schools. Overall, this difference may not be unexpected but the reasons for it may well be worth further investigation.

There were proportionately fewer contacts than could have been expected from special and independent schools, but GovernorLine is intended only for maintained schools.

School status	%age of Contacts with GovernorLine	%age of general school population
Community	70.83%	62.74%
Foundation	8.48%	4.15%
Voluntary Aided	15.68%	20.33%
Voluntary Controlled	5.46%	12.78%

These are the first full-year figures for school governance. GovernorLine receives a higher proportion of calls from community and foundation schools, with a correspondingly lower ration from voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled schools. Presumably this is because VA/VC school governors seek assistance from their parent or supporting bodies, diocesan offices etc and it may well be that VA schools have access to more experienced and well-informed clerks, in general.

## 4. What do Governors call about?

There are seven categories reported on in detail in the monthly reports; all the rest relate to referrals to the back-up team and they account for less than 2% of calls. There are other categories used by the service that show how a call was handled (e.g. referrals to the DfES). These categories are not discussed here.

Main Category	%age calls	%age e-mails
LEA	2.33%	1.58%
OFSTED	0.69%	0.53%
Parents	7.68%	8.03%
Pupils	6.37%	6.84%
Role of School Governors	43.97%	53.95%
School Management	15.90%	13.29%
Teachers and Staff	23.06%	15.79%

It may be that the higher percentage of e-mails received covering the governing body's role reflects the more factual nature of such queries, whereas the fact that issues related to staffing and school management account for a higher percentage of calls suggests that these issues are more complex and specific. In other words, governors and clerks are happy to use e-mail to contact the service when their query is factual in nature. Where there are specific circumstances that need explaining, governors prefer to call so that those circumstances can be explained more easily.

As is often the case, the challenge for the GovernorLine advisors is not in the most common questions relating to law and practice but those involving people. This may well be why the issue of conflict between schools and LEAs or governors and Heads appear to be of such importance despite the relatively low numbers of such calls.

There are 94 sub-categories on the new system. The top 25 by total contacts are listed here. They account for over 70% of the calls and e-mails received by GovernorLine.

Sub-Category	No. of Calls	No. of E-mails	Total
Responsibilities	371	112	483
Meetings	246	41	287
Appointment of Governors	175	53	228
Recruitment	166	36	202
Consultation	145	31	176
Pay	138	23	161
Head Conflict	146	12	158
Discipline	128	15	143
Conflict	110	30	140

Complaint	128	9	137
Chair Election	109	23	132
School structure	108	22	130
Policies	77	43	120
Committees	98	21	119
Governor Election	101	14	115
Grievance	99	11	110
Admissions	89	19	108
Performance Management	88	18	106
Conflict of Interest	92	11	103
Disputes (LEA & School)	74	11	85
Training	65	19	84
Exclusion	75	8	83
Budgets	70	7	77
Appointment of staff	60	5	65
Funding	55	7	62

Each term, the GovernorLine advisors prepare for the Management Board a discussion of the key issues they have handled. Not surprisingly, it is the contentious or controversial issues that get highlighted, rather than the 'bread and butter' calls.

The new School Profile was mentioned in all three terms during 2005, with the service dealing with rumours at the start of the year through to answering questions about 'when will it go live' by the end of the year. This has been an issue of huge importance for Governors. This trend has continued well into 2006.

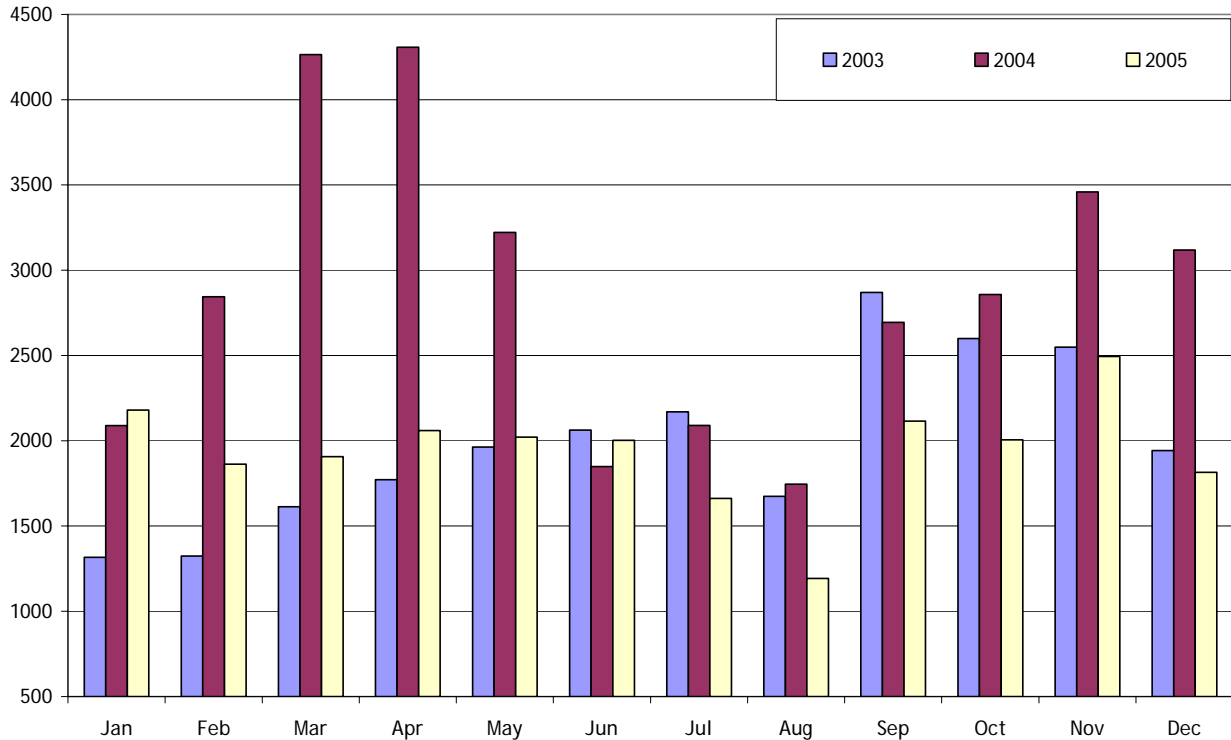
Similarly, the review of staffing structures and the TLR process have caused concern, not least because of the different approaches taken by schools and authorities. It does seem that 'assimilation' has been more of a concern for many, rather than the raising standards agenda.

There have been a number of complex calls covering disputes between the local authority and the school; and covering conflicts with headteachers. These often arise where there is concern about the capacity of the Head involved, although it is still true that many governing bodies are simply unaware of their responsibilities in monitoring and evaluation. The key quote here: [many governing bodies] "still think the place to see a PANDA is in a zoo."

Of course, PANDA has now been replaced with RAISE Online, but this is a nice joke!

## 5. The GovernorLine web site

Visitor numbers to the web site has fallen off during 2005 compared with the previous two years. This disappointing outcome is probably due to the lack of promotional activity during the last twelve months.



Most users found their way directly to the site, but 15% came via *GovernorNet* and only 2% via Google.

The top ten pages or areas of the site in terms of file requests were:

- Information for Governors - 7,860
- A to Z - 4,610
- E-mail us - 4,389
- Enquiry form - 2,956
- Site map - 2,762
- How GovernorLine works - 2,444
- E-mail your query - 1,794
- Help - 1,725
- Governor behaviour - 1,720
- How we work - 1,625

In the area where the information on key issues is discussed, the file requests were as follows:

- Appointing Heads - 1007
- Disputes - 1222
- Election of officers - 1216
- Governor behaviour - 1720
- Managing conflict - 1343
- Performance Management - 1556
- Pupil exclusion - 1021
- Teacher absence - 928
- Workload - 1163

The Three Year GovernorLine review was downloaded around two thousand times during the year. The next most popular download was the guidance on privacy, which was downloaded over 700 times. The article from *Governors* magazine on the service was requested 350 times.

**Mark Lardner**  
**Head of Information**  
**Worklife Support**

## GovernorLine

### Review Data Supplement 2001-2007

#### Introduction

A review of the first three years of GovernorLine was produced during 2004, and this was updated in 2006. These reviews gave a narrative background to the service.

This report is not intended as a full and comprehensive review of the service, but acts as an update and addendum to those earlier reviews. It adds report data up to 2007.

#### Note on the data

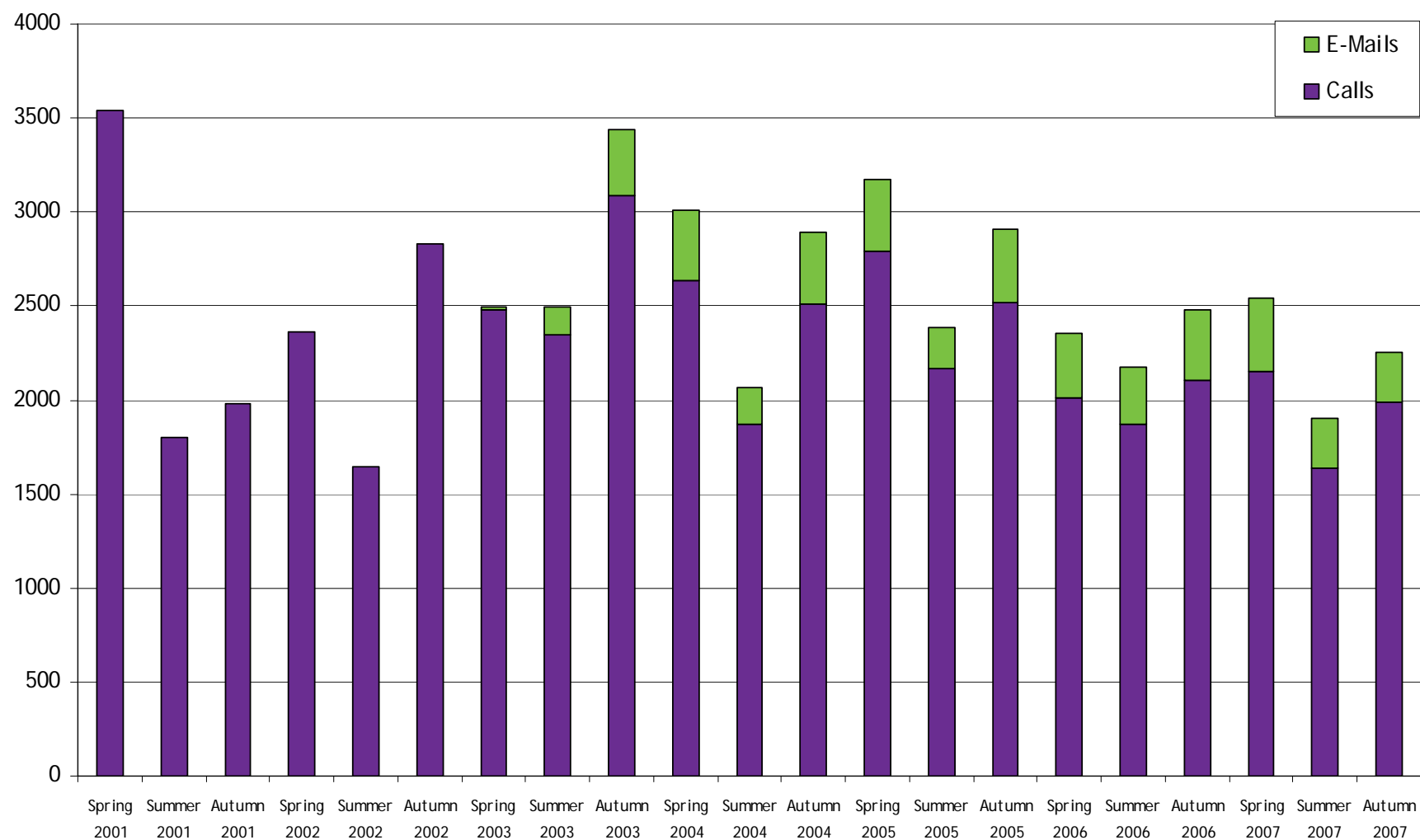
In chart 1 of this report, we show the actual numbers of all calls and e-mails received. Thereafter, the charts show percentages. We have chosen not to try to apportion the 'not specified' calls. The totals still cover the majority of contacts made by the service and so should still be sufficient to show trends in the data.

Comparison with previous years is difficult, particularly when discussing call issues, because of the reorganisation of call categories during 2004. I have tried to make it clear in each case exactly which comparison is being made.

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## 1. Contacts by School Term - 2001-2007



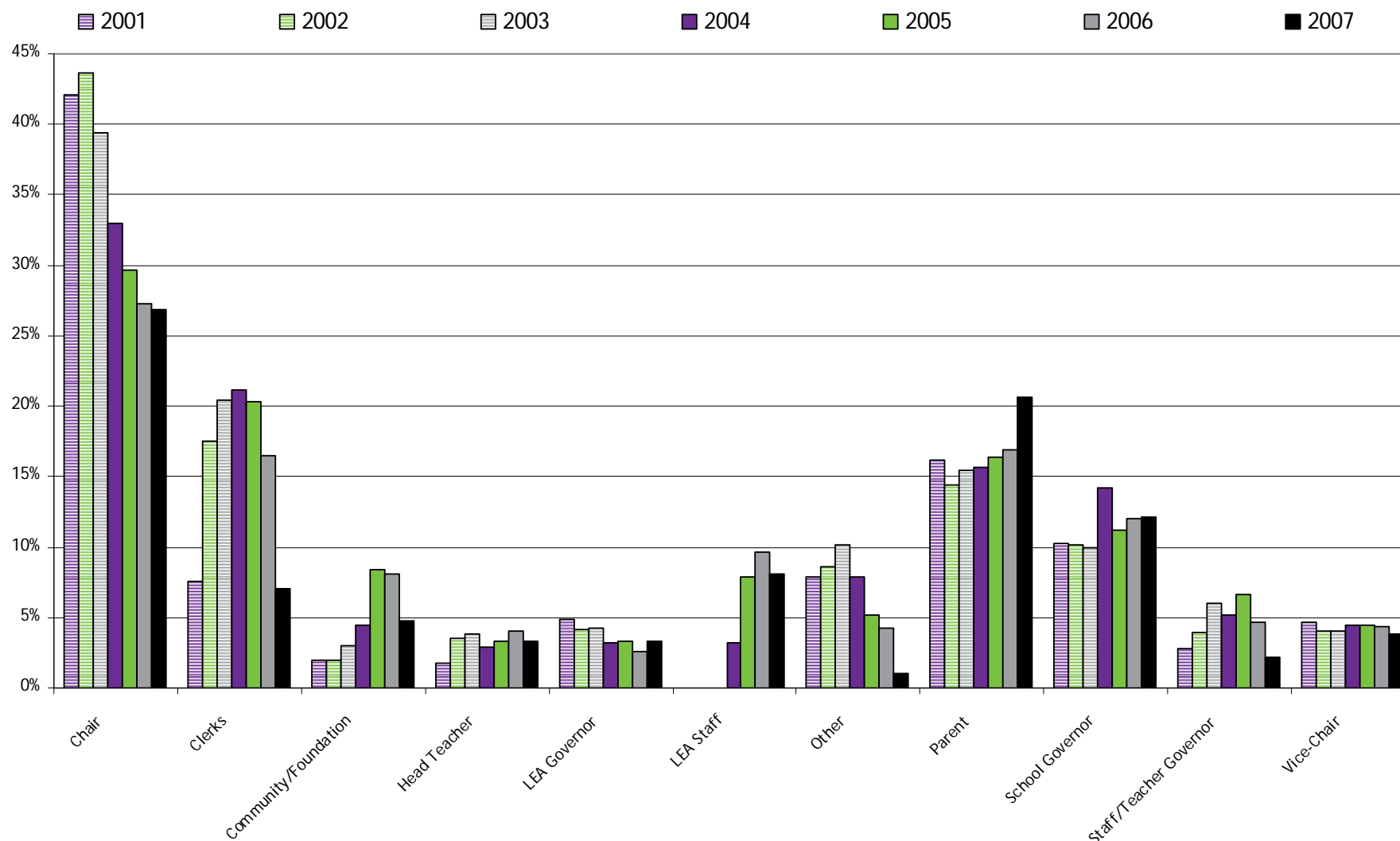
The e-mail service was introduced in April 2003, which is why no enquires are shown before that date.

GovernorLine offers free confidential e-mail and telephone advice, information and support to School Governors, clerks and individuals involved directly in the governance of maintained schools in England.

Call us on 08000 722 181 from Monday to Friday 9.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m., excluding public holidays, or from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. at weekends. E-mail us from [www.governorline.info](http://www.governorline.info)

GovernorLine is managed by Worklife Support for the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

## 2. Contacts by Type of Governor 2001-2007

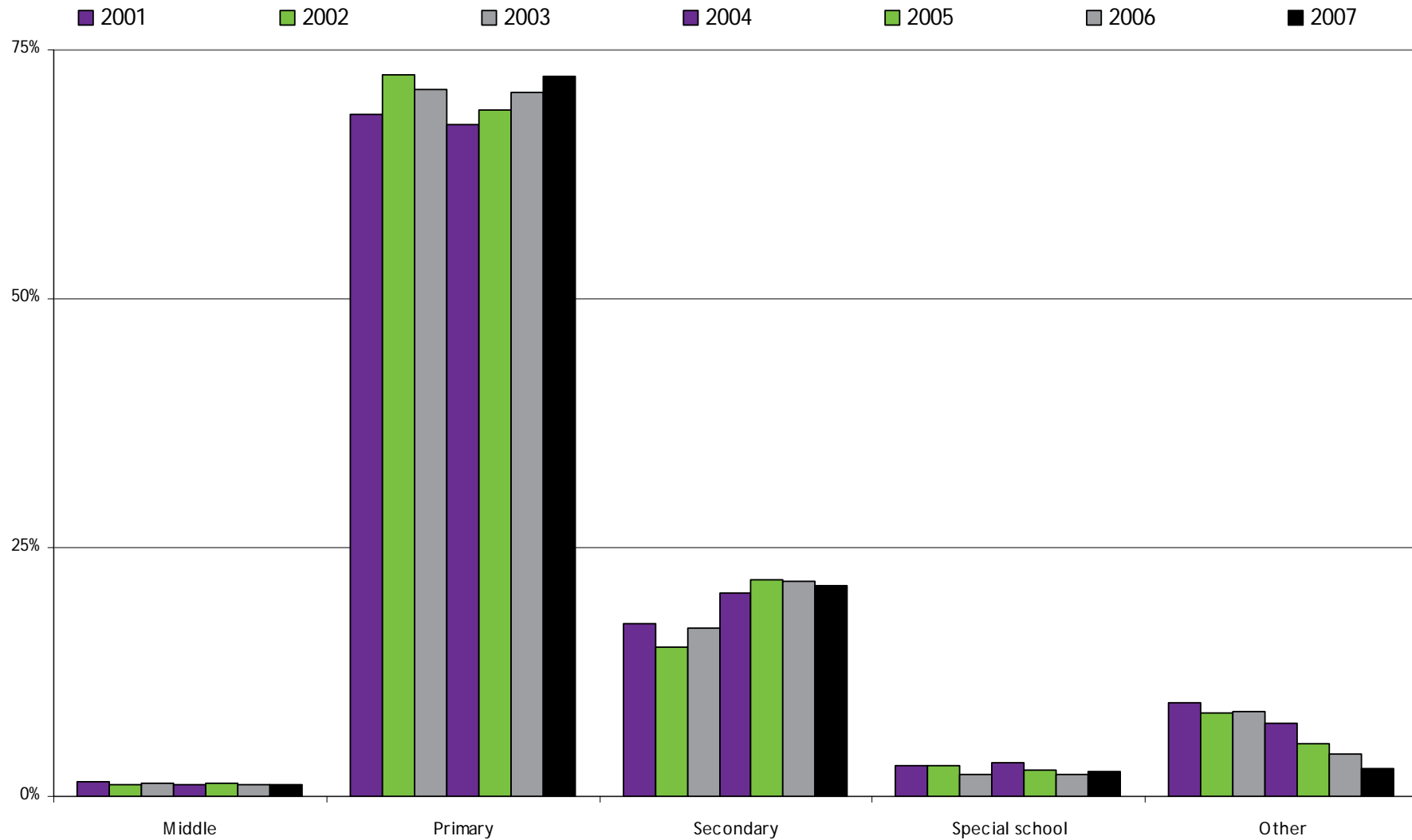


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### 3. Contacts by Type of School 2001-2007

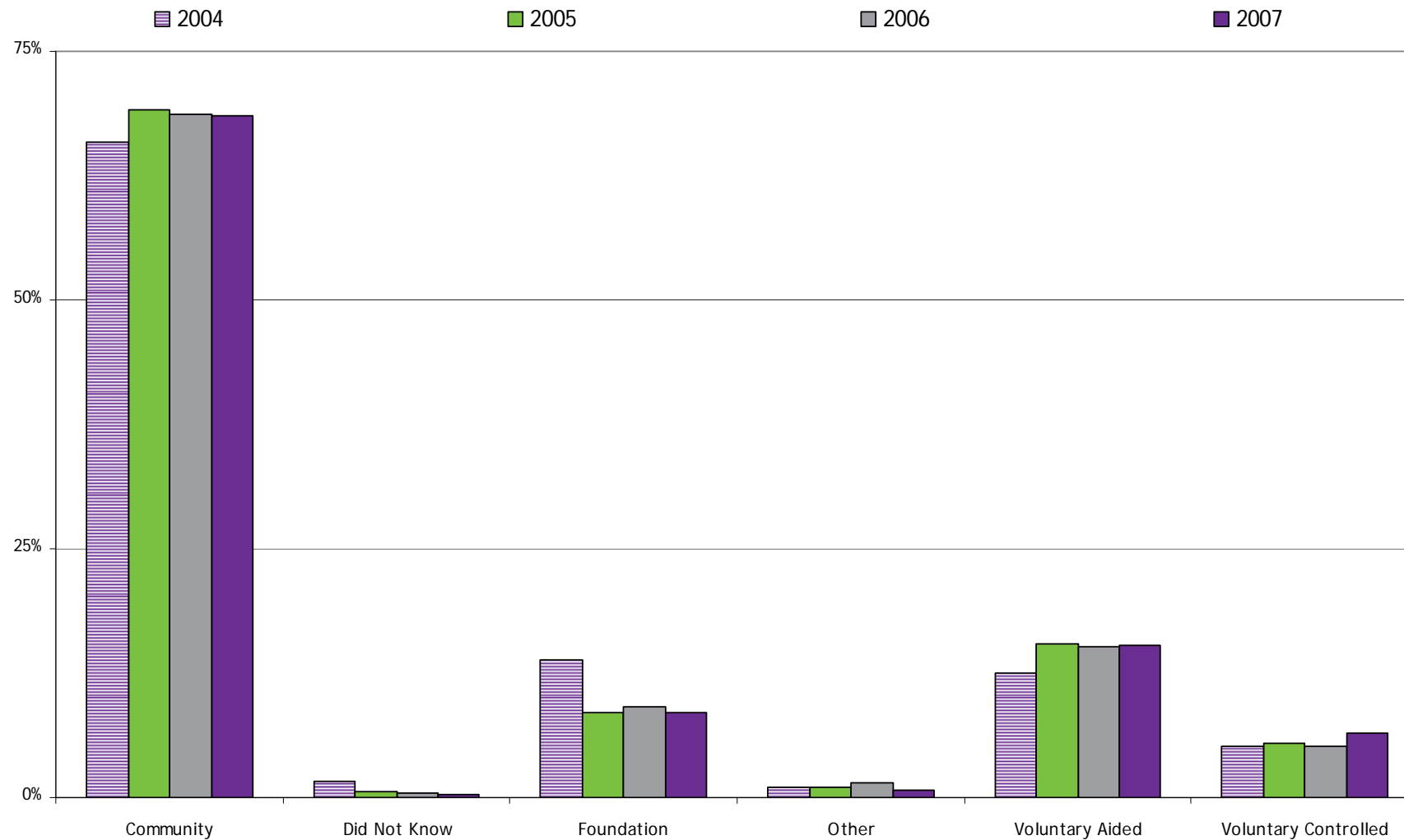


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## 4. Contacts by School Governance Arrangements 2004-2007



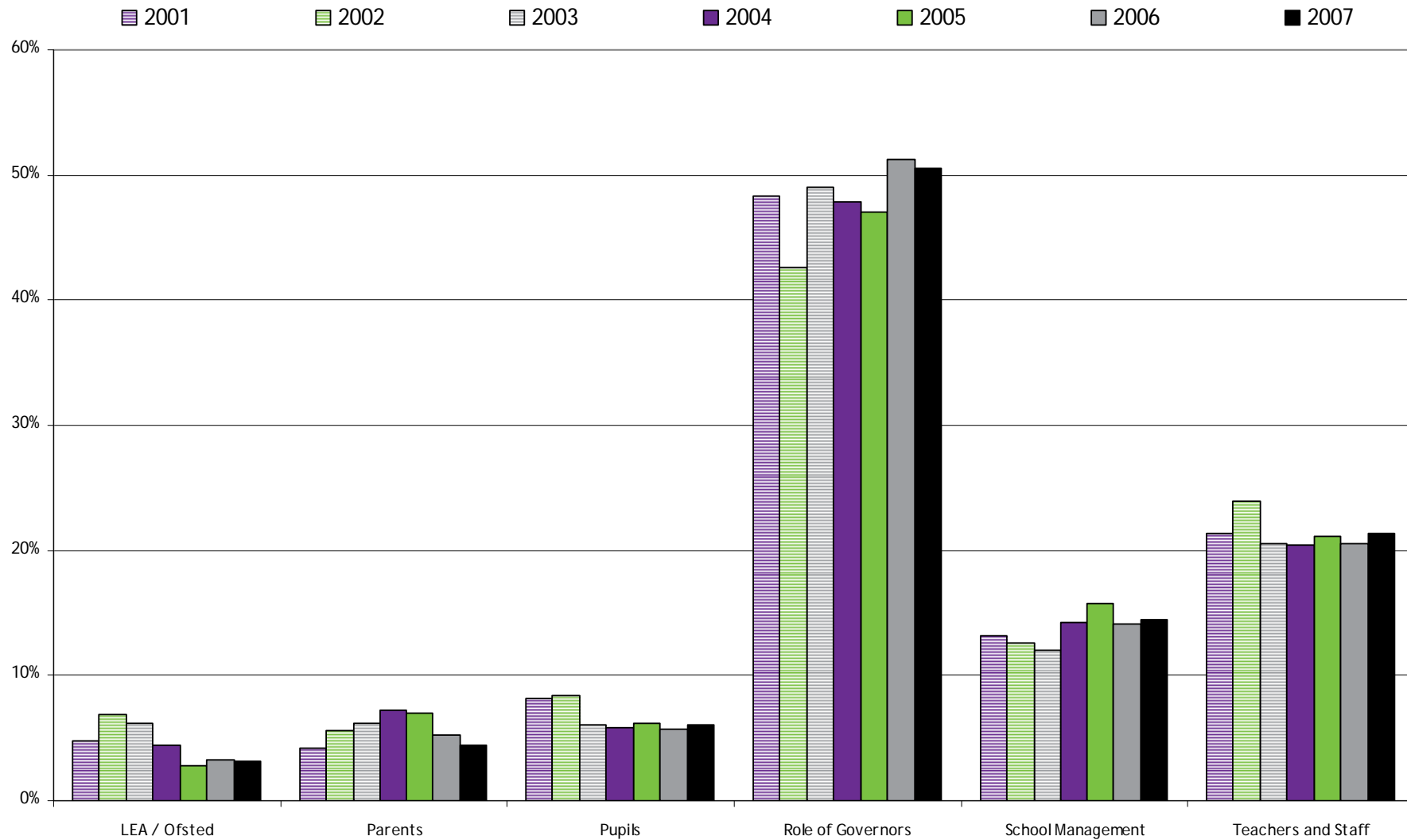
NB - this data was recorded from September 2004 onwards.

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## 5. Contacts by Main Issue 2001-2007

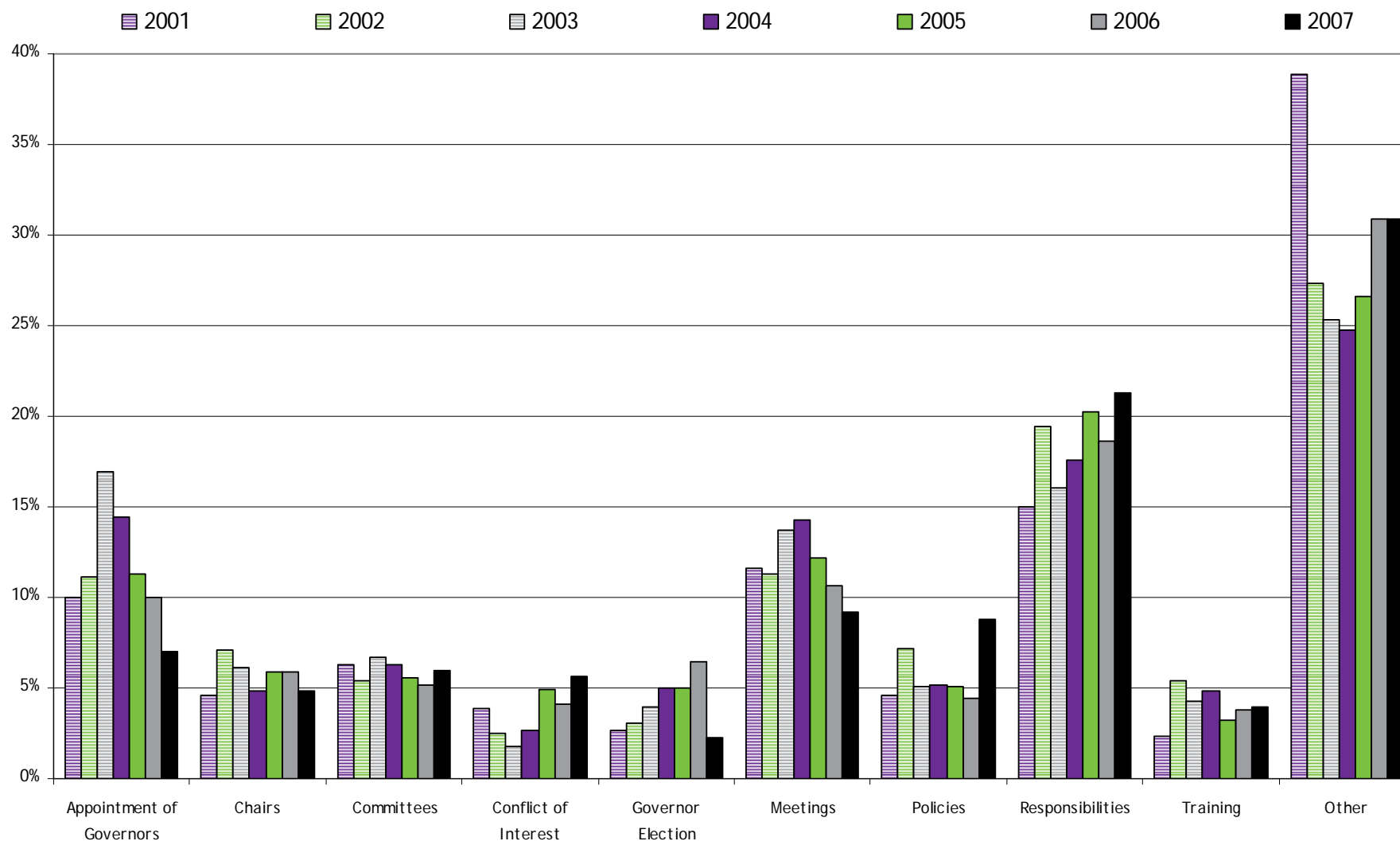


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## 6. Contacts within the Role of Governors category 2001-2007

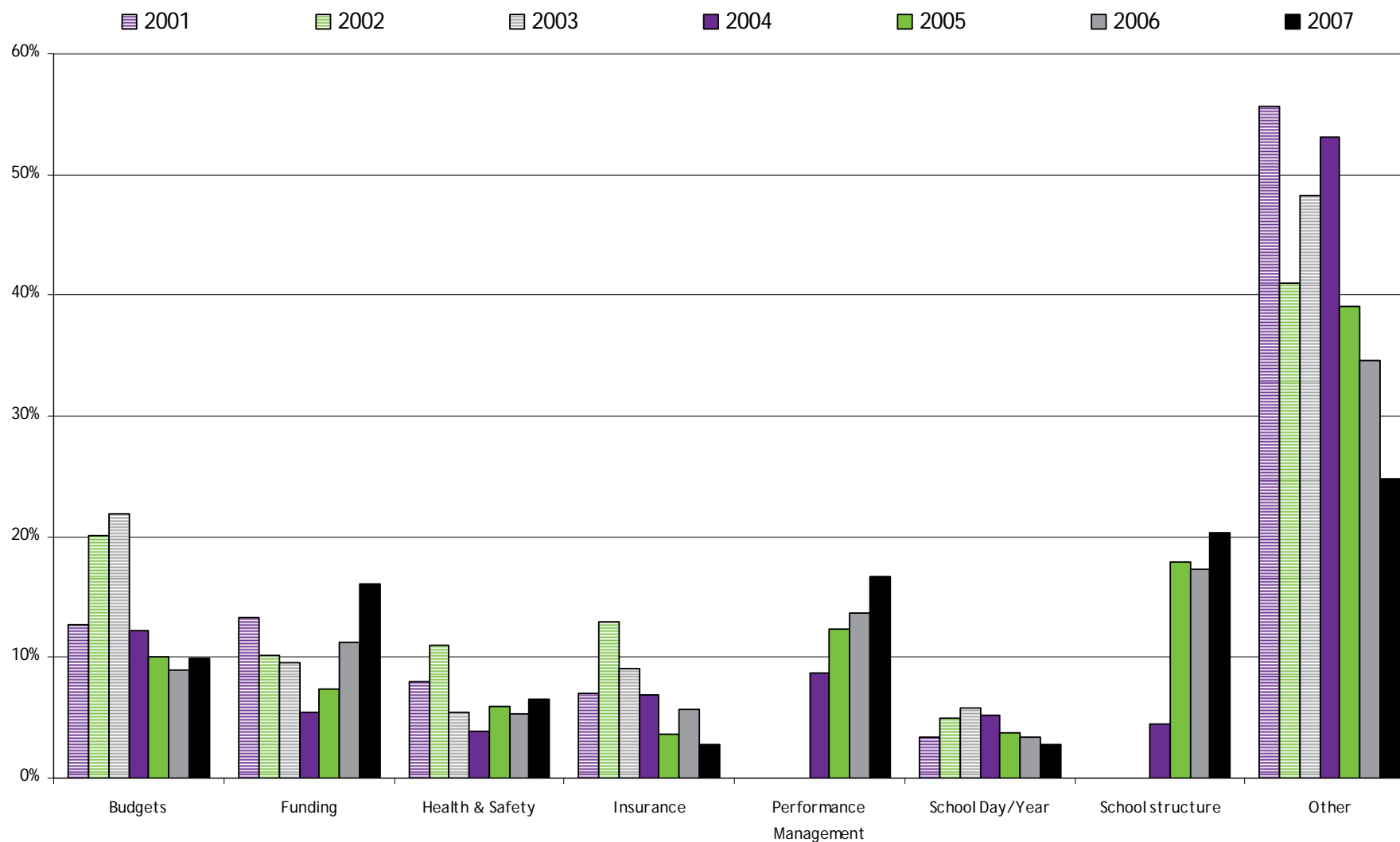


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## 7. Contacts within the School Management category 2001-2007

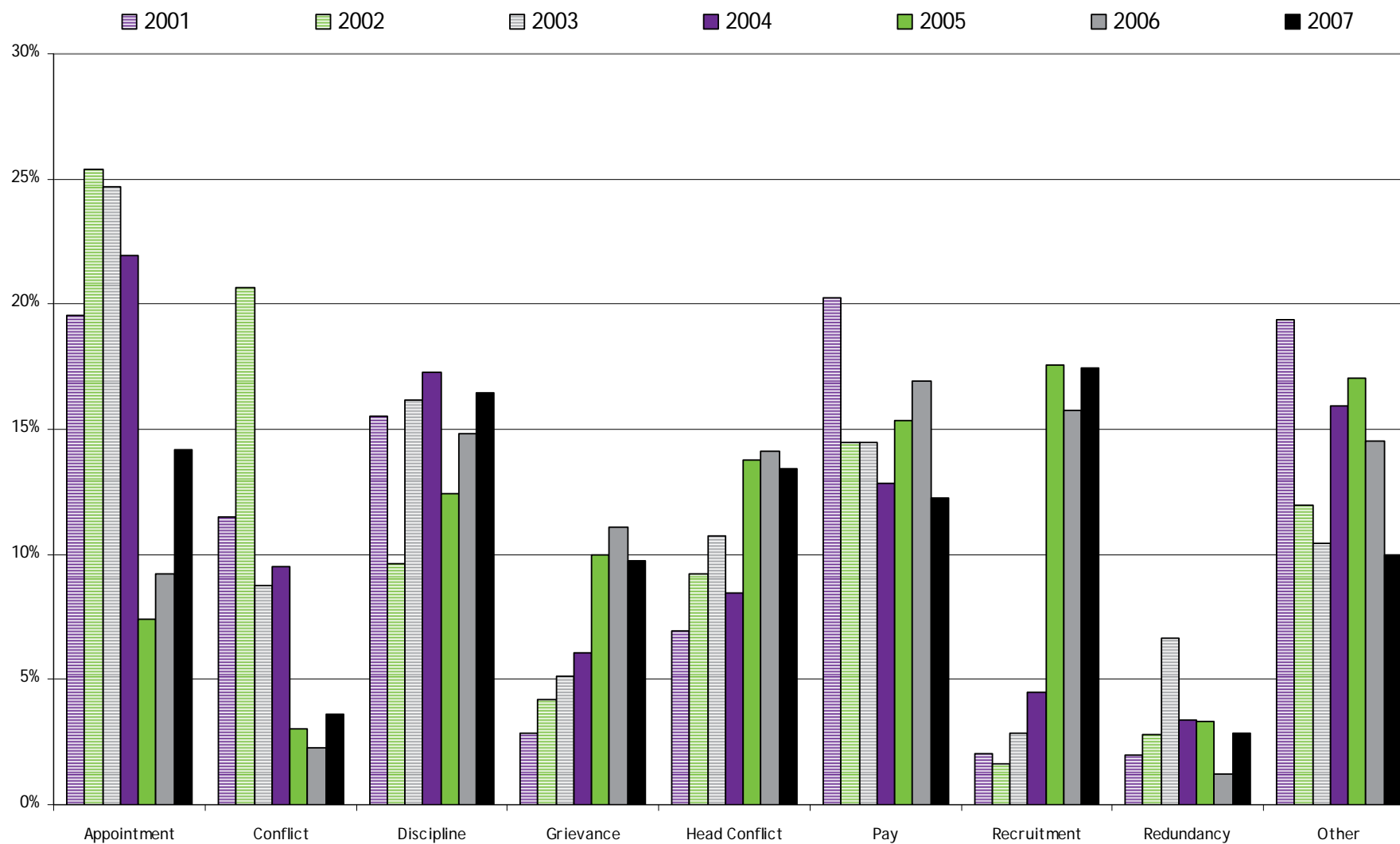


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## 8. Contacts within the Teachers and Staff category 2001-2007

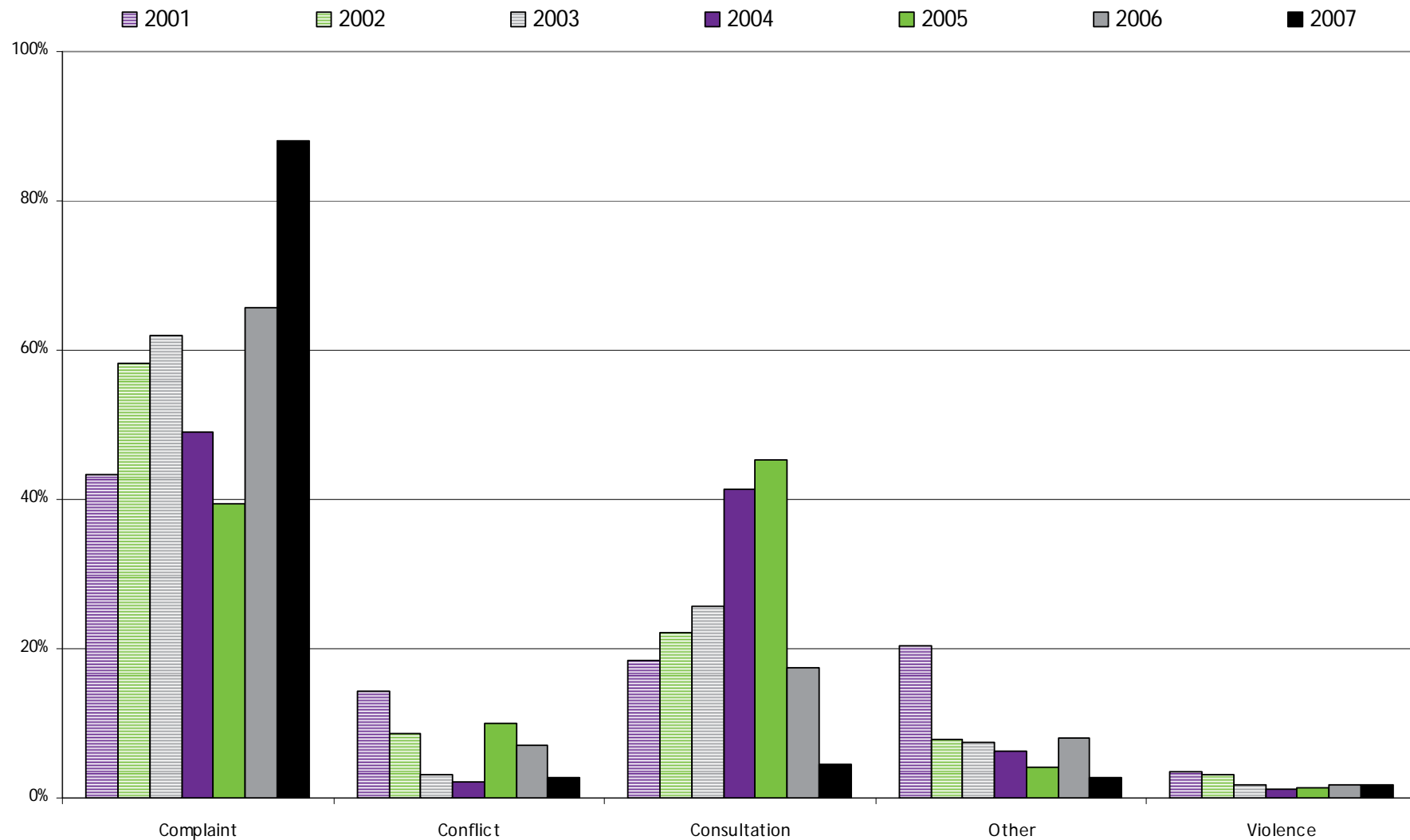


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## 9. Contacts within the Parents category 2001-2007

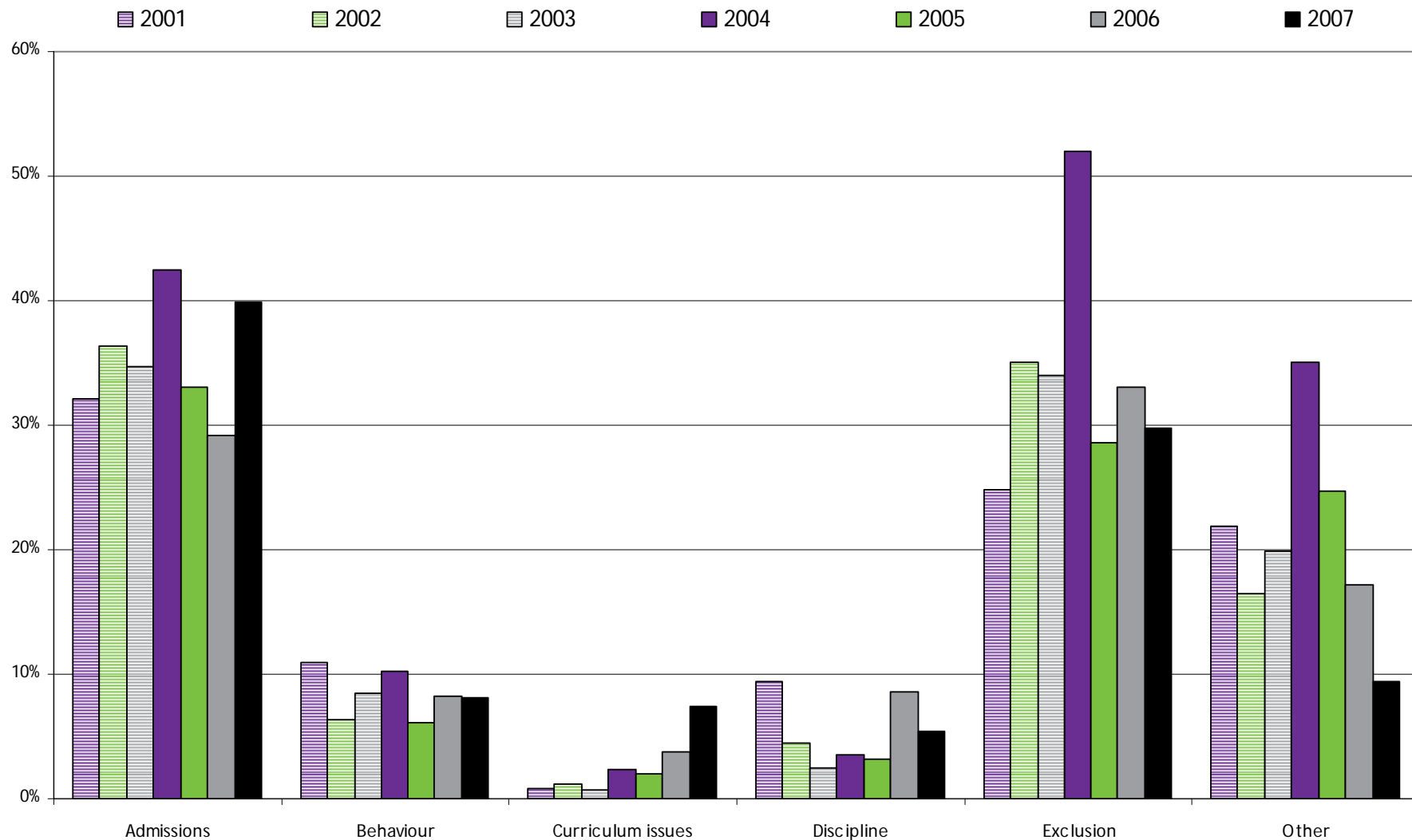


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## 10. Contacts within the Pupils category 2001-2007

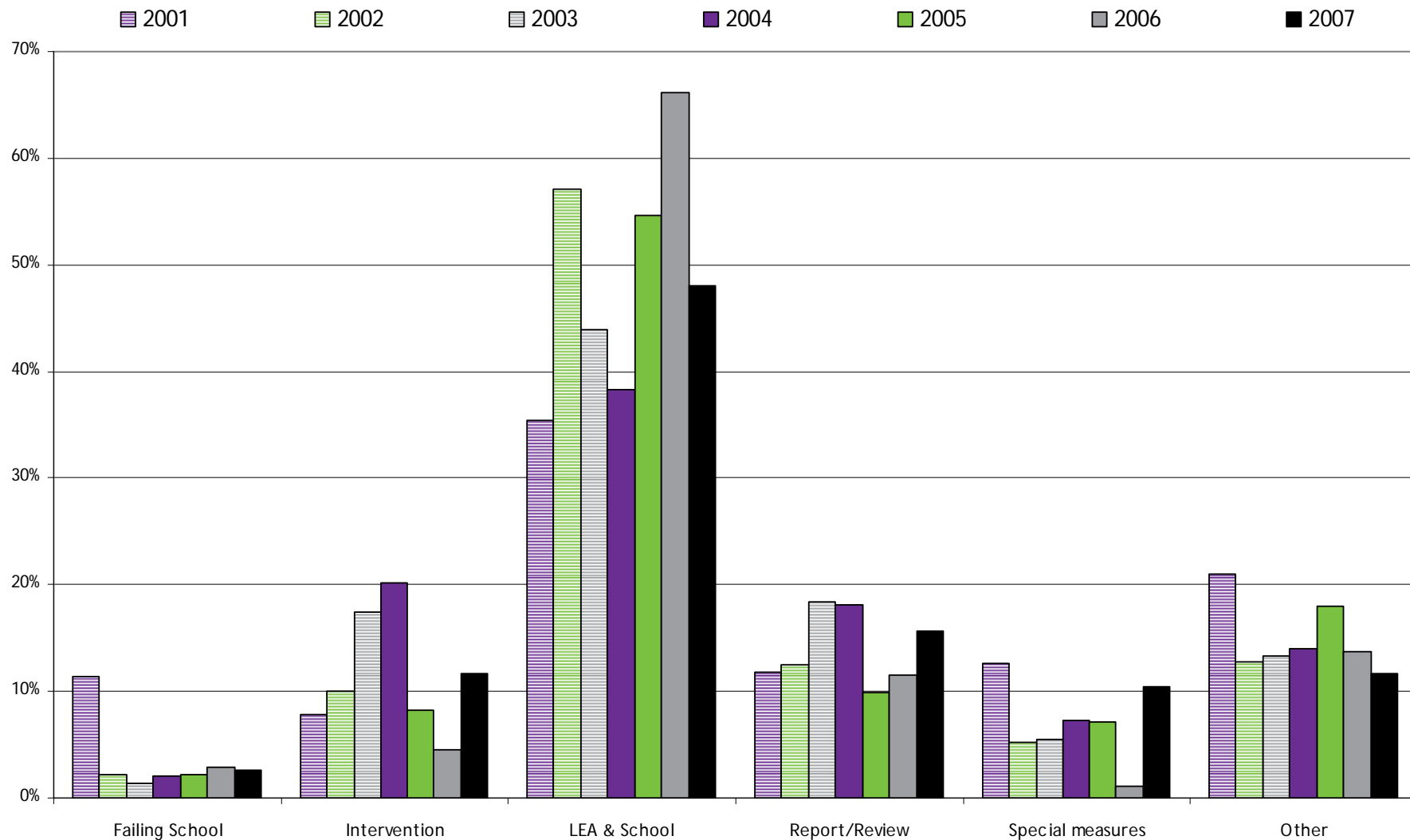


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## 11. Contacts within the LEA/Ofsted category 2001-2007

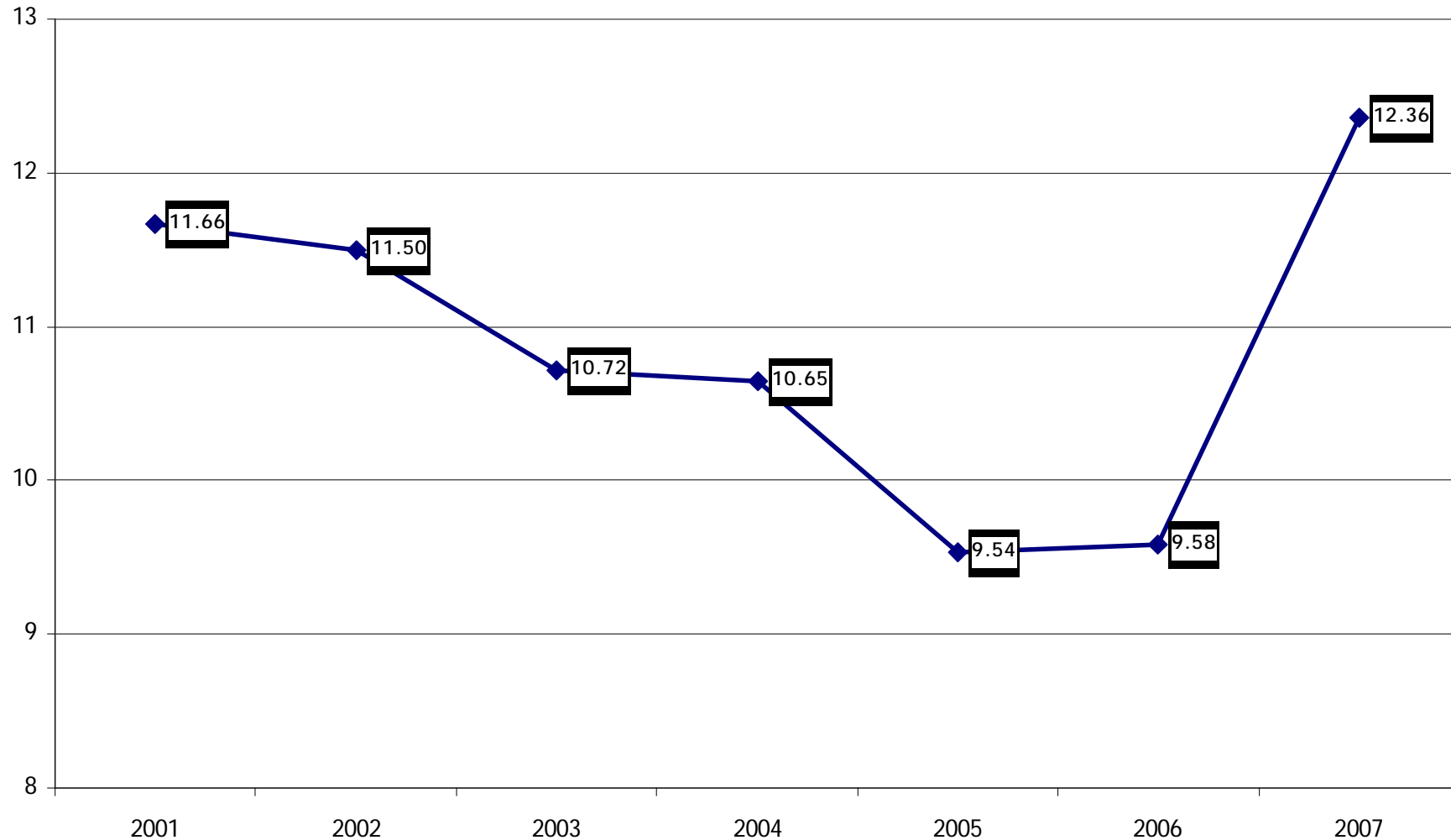


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## 12. Average Duration of Contacts 2001-2007

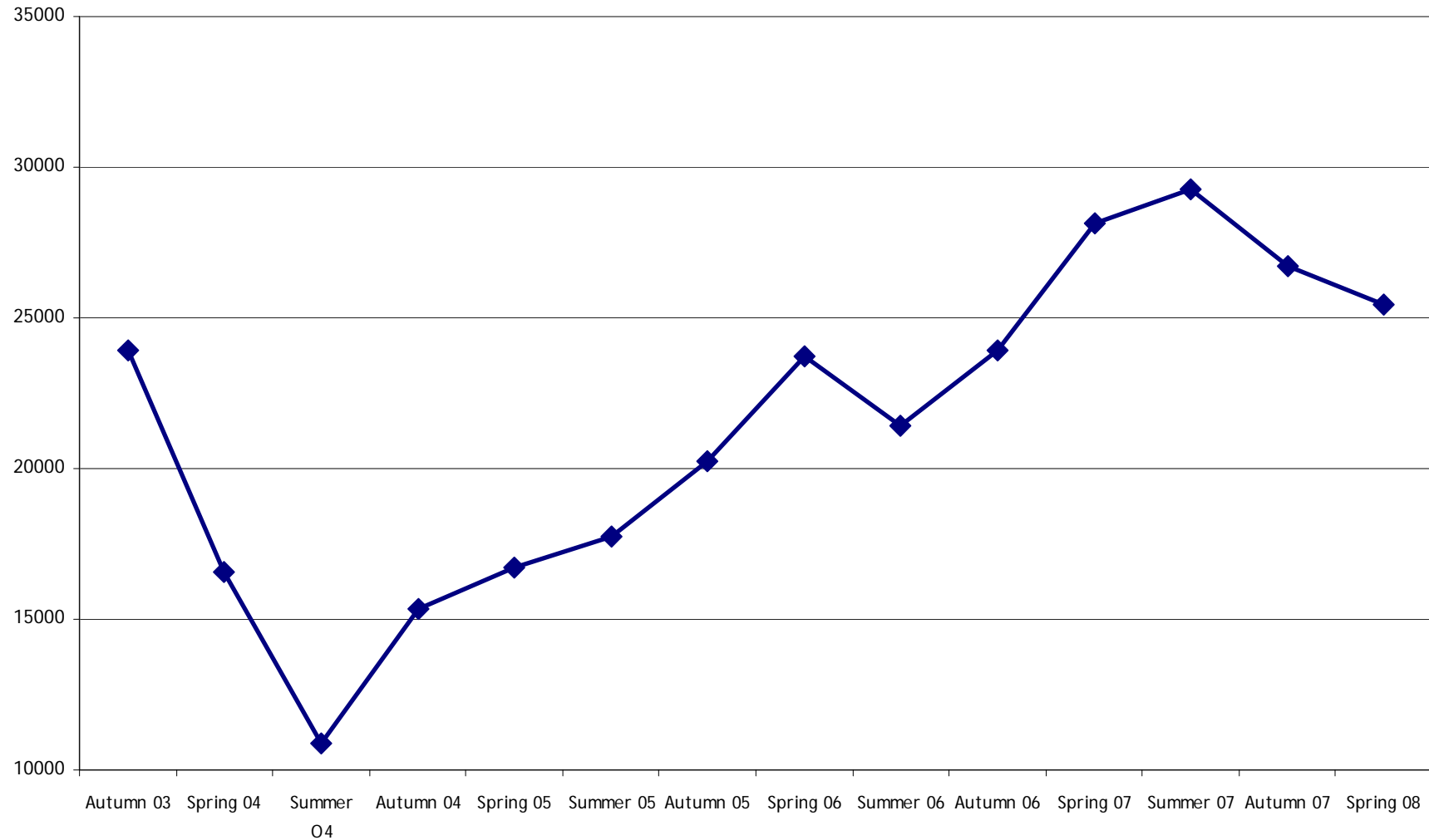


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### 13. Web Site visits 2004-2007



Site was launched September 2003 - this chart shows active site visits 2004: 2007.

GovernorLine offers free confidential e-mail and telephone advice, information and support to School Governors, clerks and individuals involved directly in the governance of maintained schools in England.

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