



DAG Annual Assembly 2002

Record of the meeting held in the Main Council Chamber, County Hall, Exeter on Sat. March 23rd

The Chairman, **Martin Weiler**, gave a warm welcome to all those present at the end of what has been another demanding year for governors. He asked delegates to observe a brief silence to mark the sad loss of two former Executive members during the past year, Honora Broad and John Sedgman. He also paid tribute to the work of all governors over the past year and, in particular, to the County Secretary, who had done much to raise further the profile of governance across the county and within the LEA.

The **County Secretary** then presented his summary of what he perceived to be the main activities of DAG over the past year (**copy circulated**)

Ian Rogers, DAG Treasurer, presented the **verified accounts for the Year ending December 31st 2001**. Copies were circulated and available for all present. DAG finances are supported by all schools who subscribe to Devon Governor Services at the rate of £1 per member of each Governing body. In addition the LEA has given a further grant to DAG in acknowledgement of the enhanced role it plays in supporting education within Devon. In response to a question about the current surplus he pointed out that this would enable DAG to expand further its current work in a county with a large number of schools spread over a wide area. In addition membership costs of NGC have doubled. He explained that an annual budget was now being produced and that forward planning for the next few years was being undertaken because of possible future changes to funding sources. The accounts were adopted unanimously and the Chairman thanked Ian for his efficient and thorough work throughout the past year. It was further agreed unanimously to **reappoint Mr. Michael Steed as Verifier for the accounts** for the coming year. Thanks were recorded to Mr. Steed for his continued work and willingness to support DAG.

Election for the Executive Committee. The Chairman thanked the Executive Committee for their work over the year, in particular those no longer able to continue their role within the Committee. Delegates had a list of proposals for the new committee representing a spread of geographical, educational and nomination backgrounds. Several governors present also offered their services for the Executive. He proposed that the assembly endorse the amended list in its entirety. This was agreed nem com.

There followed a break for coffee.

After the break the Chairman welcomed **Vijay Puri** from the DfES as **Guest Speaker** to talk on the issue of "**Buying Power**" (**copy of notes + comments circulated**) **Vijay Puri** was thanked most warmly by the Chairman for a fascinating and challenging overview and delegates applauded his wide-ranging, comprehensive and authoritative presentation.

The Chairman invited members to raise any **issues of concern** so as to provide the Executive with items of focus for the coming months. The following issues were raised:

- There was widespread and very strongly expressed concern from all sectors, primary and secondary, large and small schools, about the **funding prospects for the current and subsequent years**. The generally held view was that government promises of extra money were not being translated into reality and that some schools were facing reduced budgets and the possibility of redundancies. Specific points made from individual schools included:
 - New post-16 funding arrangements are having a damaging effect on schools with Sixth Forms
 - One school will have to reduce staffing in order to finance essential ICT developments

- One school could not see a safe and secure way through their finances for the next few years
- One medium-sized primary school that had suffered a recent reduction in numbers as a result of families moving from the village was having to face a staff redundancy the year after employing a new member of staff to cope with an influx of new pupils. A very strong plea was made for a return to greater consistency in long-term planning by the use of ' establishment ' over a number of years to allow schools to cope with a sudden influx / loss of pupils. Other schools expressed similar concerns about Planned Admission Numbers
- Many schools expressed concern about the difficulties headteachers would face as a result of insufficient funds for the Upper Pay Spine for experienced staff and, in addition, the lack of clarity for the criteria for advancing such staff up the pay spine
- Anger that Devon's inevitable high transport costs impact upon school budgets
- A feeling that, despite training available, the level of financial expertise being demanded in the running of schools today was too high for the majority of staff and governors
- The Parent Governor Representative, Simon Howes, drew delegates' attention to 2 major consultation exercises being undertaken by the LEA within the coming 12 months:
 - Six-Term year (with a view to implementing any agreed changes in 2004 /05)
 - School Transport Policy (a fresh look at a contentious issue)
 He invited governors to contact him on these or other general educational matters
- Further questions were raised about:
 - the latest proposal that governing bodies should look for opportunities to provide services within the school for the community
 - the implications of possible police checks on volunteers in schools
 - the real (much-hoped-for) likelihood of Academic Councils working together, particularly in the context of Vijay's presentation
- An Exeter governor expressed anxiety about the impact on education in Exeter if the latest PFI bid were to be unsuccessful
- One governor regretted the lack of papers in advance of the meeting
- Judy Burgess explained the rigorous self-evaluation that Devon Governor Services was undertaking in the context of the Best Value Review and the prospect of developing Charitable Trust Status which would have the aim of:
 - Making the service more customer focused
 - Removing the service from direct LEA control
 - Going out into the market
 She invited delegates and other governors to raise concerns / complaints about the operation of DGS openly with her.

The Chairman assured delegates that the issues raised would be pursued by the Executive. There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.00 p.m. precisely.

Ivan Godfrey 22/04/02