



DAG Annual Assembly 2006

Record of the meeting held in the Main Council Chamber, County Hall, Exeter on Saturday March 18th 2006.

The Chairman, **Leon Winston**, gave a warm welcome to all those present and emphasised the importance of people being prepared to give their free time to governance.

David Gravell proposed that the **Minutes of the 2005 AGM** be approved. This was seconded by Roger Adcock and agreed unanimously. **The County Secretary**, Ivan Godfrey, reflected on the growth of DAG. He reviewed the changes in Governance during his six years as County Secretary for DAG Executive and also the deliverables from DAG. He felt that, whilst there were some negatives for schools, most notably the inequity of funding for Devon school children compared with the rest of England, these were greatly outweighed by the large number of positives. For the present, Ivan said that he felt today's Governors were much more professional than six years ago and took on much more responsibility. Looking to the future, Ivan talked about his own reducing involvement in DAG and the resulting changes in organisation and operation of DAG. (A copy of his report was circulated separately). The Chairman thanked Ivan for his efforts during his time as County Secretary for DAG and this was endorsed by all delegates. Leon wished Ivan well in the changes he is making in his future life.

Ian Rogers, DAG Treasurer, presented the **verified accounts for the Year ending December 31st 2005**. Copies were circulated and available for all present. DAG finances are in a healthy state. DAG income derives from a contribution per Governor for each Governing Body subscribing to Devon Governor Services. Bob Martin asked about the £4000 increase in 2005. Ian replied that the standard grant was augmented by two additional grants of £2000. This is not guaranteed annually. David Key asked why DAG kept over 6 months income in hand. Ian explained that these had been held for projects which had not been undertaken due to Government actions intervening. Rob Shilvock moved and Malcolm Mitchell seconded a proposal that the Accounts be adopted and this was passed unanimously. It was further agreed unanimously to **reappoint Michael Steed as Verifier for the accounts** for the coming year. Thanks were recorded to Michael Steed for his continued work and willingness to support DAG. The Chairman thanked Ian for his efficient and thorough work throughout the year.

The Chair invited volunteers to stand for the Executive. Delegates had a list of proposed names for **Election to the New Executive Committee** representing a spread of geographical, educational and nomination backgrounds. The list was proposed by Sue Robinson and seconded by Maggie Butt and agreed unanimously. (List available separately).

Ivan then introduced the purpose of the Schools' Forum, particularly with regards to Finance for Devon Schools. He introduced the process for nominating representatives to the Forum and delegates were asked to approve the process. In response to a question, Ivan told delegates that the Forum meets five times per year on Friday mornings and that the process will lead to completed nominations by the end of 2006. Julia Barker proposed and Sylvia Martin seconded adoption of this process. This was agreed unanimously.

The Chair then introduced Jo Frith who has volunteered as the Executive Officer for DAG in the new collegiate organisation of responsibility for activities in the Executive.

There followed a break for tea/coffee. After the break the Chairman welcomed Jean McEntire

(JM), Chief Executive of the newly formed National Governors Association who spoke on 'A New Era for Governance'. At the end of the presentation and subsequent question and answer session the Chair thanked Ms McEntire and the delegates for their informative and challenging and contributions. (See separate report)

In the final **Open Forum** session the following issues were raised.

New OFSTED Framework and self-evaluation

Ivan told Governors that Okehampton Primary had offered to share their experiences and Governors should get in touch with them.

Education Bill and its implications

Sue Robinson said her main concern was the purpose of giving schools autonomy on admissions. Jean McEntire (JM) said that this is a hot topic and expected further discussion on this at the Committee stage. Alex Wood commented that he believed that this was not the main threat to Governance, rather he felt it was the change to Trusts rather than Governing Bodies who run schools. Roger Adcock felt that grant-aided schools were the model for Trust schools. JM responded that the change to Foundation schools is in existence and can be followed now. She felt that the Trust School proposal is a different agenda driven by political ideology whereby people can virtually buy control of a school. She cited the Trust school in NE England which teaches creationism as a cause for concern in breadth of education being provided. Ivan referred to feedback from Area Meetings and in particular from Fiona Millar (FM) with comments on the Bill. Both FM and JM feel that the Bill will significantly affect Devon. FM had emphasised that the Bill includes Primary and Special schools and is not just limited to Secondary schools

Federation of Schools

Gordon Holmes observed that Debbie Clapshaw (DC) had arranged a discussion for the Holdsworthy Learning Community about Federation of schools. He felt that schools in rural Devon needed to co-operate, collaborate and ultimately federate to manage the impact of falling or uneven rolls. Federation may help, but it also brings some issues of funding as the Headteacher might need to be non-teaching and high up the leadership scale. The alternative for small schools is closure. DC said that there is no policy on closure of small schools. JM saw federation as a positive way to increase schools' reach and range in terms of community and services. She did not necessarily see it as linked with Trusts.

Alternative Portfolio for Schools

Sue Robinson drew people's attention to this because they are organisations which have been fully vetted. Governor training will be available on using them. Ray Beale is the contact ray.beale@devon.gov.uk It is expected that it is the larger secondary schools that will be first to take advantage of this

Governor Work-life Balance

Mike Cannon thanked JM for view on what Governance is about now and will be about in the future. He felt that strength in the school leadership team is a key and also the support of DGS. He also sees a huge gulf between the theory and practise of Governance. Mary Jacob said that she feels it is all about concentrating on the key strategic roles. JM supported this and said that Governing Bodies should pick out their few key priorities to work on. DC promoted a course on this to be run in the summer 2006

Governor expenses

John Gale asked for this to be discussed. All Governing Bodies can set a governor expenses policy. All DAG representatives on council groups can claim expenses. It was suggested that the

DAG Executive could meet in different locations around the county. There was also discussion about payment for governors because this had been in the Labour Party manifesto. JM observed that payment of expenses could be viewed as an inclusion issue for poorer governor and asked delegates to be aware of this. Ian Rogers said that DCC is an equal opportunities authority and that Governing Bodies' policies should reflect this in their expenses policy. Jane Lucas said that professional development of Governors is very important and should be properly funded. Pat Backler made the point that stakeholders have a very broad viewpoint and professionalism may work against this.

Communications

Julie Barker commented that she really values the communication from DAG. Ivan said that he hoped that the NGA would also do this. Jane Lucas promoted the DCC Gold Sheets as a good source of information. This goes to Clerks but Chairs and possibly other governors can contact jacqui.heard@devon.gov.uk to go on the email distribution list for Gold sheets.

Planning for emergencies

Jo Frith advised that schools plan for how they can ensure continuity of education for their children in the event of a school having to undergo an extended closure, due, for example, to the Norwalk virus or Avian Flu.

14-19 curriculum delivery through partnership work

May Jacob asked who has responsibility for partnerships between FE colleges and schools. JM said the learning and skills council might have a view on this

Roger Adcock then reviewed Ivan Godfrey's service to DAG and thanked him for his energy, thoughtful approach and commitment. He told the meeting that he had made an enormous impact on DAG. Debbie Clapshaw also thanked him on behalf of Devon Governor Services for the huge contribution to education in Devon. She told delegates that he was largely responsible for the high regard in which DAG is held in DCC. Roger Adcock then read an ode about Ivan. He also quoted a Committee minute on 'smaller mice were recommended for KS1 with appropriate-sized chairs'. Leon Winston made a presentation to Ivan as thanks.

The meeting closed at 13.04 pm.

Jo Frith
Executive Officer

Jean McEntire presentation 'A New Era for Governance'

The Chair introduced Jean McEntire who is the new Chief Executive of the NGA (which was formed from the merger of the previous two governor organisations (NGC and NAG). She made it clear that her main aim is to ensure that Governors' voices are heard nationally.

She reviewed a selection of recent changes that had huge impact for Governors' roles and workloads.

She picked out three future trends that Governors need to think about.

1. Autonomy results from the changes in the current Schools Bill. The claim is that autonomy will lead to raised standards in schools. Even though there appears to be little evidence that this is so. However it will be the expected outcome from autonomy, along with more dynamic governance. This also mirrors the changing role of Local Authorities to becoming commissioners of Services.
2. Extendedness is also now formally on the agenda for all schools. It is integral to the 'Every Child Matters' agenda and Governors will be expected to plan jointly with other agencies for children. This also mirrors the changes in Local Authorities in forming the CYPP Directorate. The whole extension of schools can be expected to become much more formalised than in the past and will lead to more formalised Governance. The expected outcome will undoubtedly be broader achievement of skills and qualifications by children.
3. Recruitment and Retention of Governors. The increased Governor responsibilities are bound to lead to issues of Governor recruitment and retention unless the model of governance is changed as well.

Governors are expected to share strategic leadership of the school with the Headteacher. Often this is not currently the case. JM felt that it was basically covered by three actions: Set Policy - Monitor - Review. She felt it important that governors view this strategic role within the context of the needs of the Community, whereas it is important that the Headteacher views leadership within the education needs of the children. Governors can delegate far more to a Headteacher, by joint discussions about strategy, questioning about plans and then holding them to account.

In Academies, Governing Bodies are often completely different, having a consultative role, instead of a decision-making role.

In dealing with Barriers to Change in Governance, the Headteacher may also need to learn to work more strategically with more delegation to the senior management team. She said that potential Governors need to be encouraged to think carefully about why they are volunteering to be a Governor.

She then went on to discuss the role for NGA in the future. Although a very small organisation, she said that she intends that the NGA will consult Governors, represent Governors, inform Governors and network with other organisations. She illustrated how this would be done by looking at the Food Standards Policy document.

She then outlined her view of the role of Governors Associations alongside the NGA and the Local Authority and contrasted DAG with other Local Authorities and the Governors.

In answer to questions, JM told delegates:

1. Town/Parish Councillors can be co-opted onto Governing Bodies

2. NGA asked for funding for their guidance on extended schools governance. The first booklet is now published. NGA doesn't believe governors have been sufficiently involved in the planning for CCs.
3. A Governor commented that change is a way of life and barriers could be made springboards to implement change. JM responded that it was often a question of the workload resulting from national changes. The NGA welcomes change where the benefits for children are clear. However, enforced change that is concerned with the details of how schools and Governing Bodies work can be very distracting. Governors can be very distracted and constrained by concerns as to whether they are operating within the law. The NGA will help to resist such changes.

Ken Parr presentation on Devon Music Service (separate leaflet in packs).

Ken told Governors that the Devon Music Service had changed to be a free strategic service about 18 months ago rather than a teaching service. He referred to the document 'This is our music' which has been circulated to all schools. Contact ken.parr@devon.gov.uk for further copies. He also referred to the 'Wider Opportunities' programme whereby whole classes learn to play musical instruments. He promoted the Devon Festival for Music, which has been publicised to all schools and played a CD from last year's festival. The Chair thanked Ken for his presentation