

Devon Association of Governors

Issues raised at Area Meetings Spring 2008

This report is a summary of points raised by governors at the Area Meetings held earlier this term in the following Local Learning Communities: Dartmouth, Ivybridge, Kingsbridge, South Dartmoor and Totnes : Dawlish, Newton Abbot, Teign Valley and Teignmouth : Holsworthy, Okehampton and Tavistock : Chulmleigh, Crediton and South Molton. These meetings were attended by governors, clerks and headteachers from many schools in these areas. Discussion focused initially on the termly 'Checklist' of current issues sent to all Devon schools at the beginning of each term and also available on the Devon Governor Services web site:

www.devon.gov.uk/governors . Further discussion embraced other issues of current concern raised by those present. The sections

- in normal type indicate points from the Checklist or made by me at the meetings
- in italics indicate comments made by governors at the meetings
- in bold indicate the questions with responses in red (where received) from LA officers, NGA and others to the points raised.

This is a very detailed report which will almost certainly have items of immediate relevance to your school / GB. It offers answers to questions that may have been concerning your GB as well as providing an insight in to what fellow governors are thinking about topics of current concern. Please share this report with your GB, in particular committee chairs. There are also cross-references to the Devon Governor and a parallel document sent to GBs of all schools in November which covered further aspects of some of these issues.

Although there were not many really contentious issues a recurring theme at all 4 meetings was that of the demands placed on governors to deliver, as volunteers, yet more and more ... combined with increasing pressures on head teachers at a time when leadership succession is becoming a major issue.

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New DAG website www.dag.gb.com

List of main topics:

Leadership Succession	Services to Schools
Gender and Disability Equality Duty	Primary Capital Programme
Health & Safety Training	FMSiS
Governance Issues (Size / Mandatory Training)	Extended Schools Services
DAG Issues (Conference / Website etc.)	Schools' Forum
Exeter's Unitary Bid	School Profile
SATs and League Tables	Other topics

1. Leadership Succession

This is a topic exciting considerable interest amongst governors. They welcomed the opportunity for CoGs and Vice Chairs to meet at the ' Chairs Around a Table ' sessions this term where there is a particular focus on succession planning with regard to headteachers (Wed. 5 Mar Barnstaple Hotel, Barnstaple and Tue 11 Mar, The Isca Centre, Whipton, Exeter – both from 10.00 to 12.30 followed by lunch). Representatives from the National College of School Leadership who have been working in Devon on a range of projects will be giving input - as will LA officers. The sessions offer a chance to look at succession planning in Devon and different options around school leadership beginning to emerge.

Governor comment

- *At all meetings there were lengthy discussions about the issue of replacing retiring headteachers and the opportunities associated with what might appear, initially, to be a problem*
- *It was felt that governors need to start talking about federation for all the right reasons and not to leave it until schools reach a point of weakness*
- *Various options were mentioned of existing Devon practice and positive experiences*
- ❖ *' All through schools '- CATS (Consortium for All-Through Schools) has given presentations in Devon. The new school in Sherford will be an All Through School. Dartmouth Primary and Dartmouth CC have now formed an all-through Federation with 2 HTs, 1 GB but each school keeping its own identity*

- ❖ Federations – examples of these in South Devon and North Devon were quoted. It is clear there are considerable variations in practice with solutions responding to perceived local needs
- ❖ Collaboration – a group of small South Devon primaries across 4 LLCs (including Newton Ferrers, Widecombe, Ermington and Ilsington) are developing ways of shared working such as exchanging Deputy HTs, encouraging governors to meet up to share ideas, making it viable to run joint school trips etc.
- ❖ A governor from a different part of the county said that HTs should be encouraged to look into federation / partnerships / collaboration. His school was very keen to talk to and work with other schools. They were attracted by the idea of sharing resources. By working with other schools it would enable them to put together enough children for, e.g, a football team and trips abroad
- All types of schools can federate – VA / Church / CP – it is not a problem
- Federated schools keep their own budgets as if they are still separate, i.e. this saves the LA nothing.
- LLCs can provide the basis for collaboration – though this need not be the only way of doing so
- It is important that there is a perceived equality when schools unite in federation / collaboration otherwise it can be perceived as bigger schools ‘ taking over ’ smaller ones particularly if they make the first approach
- Whilst one governor quoted the sentence ‘ federation will not stop small schools being closed ’ it was felt by others that, at a time of falling rolls, a degree of rationalisation of resources would enable such schools to act from a position of greater strength. Resources can be used to a better effect when small schools get involved with one another. There is more scope for the teaching staff and for schools to keep good staff.
- There can be special circumstances which make it very hard for individual schools to plan ahead:
 - ❖ One school which shares a boundary with Cornwall has its intake from both counties and cannot rely on the register from one or the other to predict its numbers. This creates problems with setting the PAN
 - ❖ The movement of the Armed Forces personnel

Governor questions

1. How can governors be encouraged to welcome approaches from other schools in their area interested in looking at collaboration and / or federation?

Sue Clarke (Strategic Lead for Achievement through Collaboration, DCC): Many schools have already approached the Local Authority requesting facilitation of formal partnerships and we have developed a good working knowledge of different partnership models e.g. forming federations, setting up Management Partnerships and acquiring Trust status. Devon’s work to give support for school to school partnership is recognised nationally.

Interest in formalised school partnerships and new leadership models is growing rapidly right across Devon. We have a number of schools that have registered their interest in working more closely with other schools but for some no suitable partners have come forward.

I was pleased to read in your notes that governors felt that partnership work should be considered for the right reasons and before schools reach a point of weakness. This is a positive and confident approach which the Local Authority would strongly support.

If governors are interested in formal partnerships with other schools they could:

- Find out about partnerships their school is already working within and further develop informal partnerships
- Find out as much as they can about different models of partnership by asking for copies of our publications from sue.newson@devon.gov.uk or by visiting Just 4 Schools website
- Register interest in formal partnership work with Sue Clarke sue.clarke@devon.gov.uk
- Invite a speaker to a governors’ meeting to talk about school to school partnership and new models of leadership
- Visit schools already working in partnerships and meet staff and governors to find out how each partnership works. Here is a list of current and proposed collaborative arrangements in Devon
- Established Federations
 - ❖ Devon's First Federation (Blackpool and Chudleigh Knighton Primary Schools)
 - ❖ West Exmoor Federation (Lynton, Parracombe and Kentisbury primary schools)
 - ❖ Dartmouth Learning Campus (Dartmouth Community College and Dartmouth Community Primary School)
- Currently out to formal consultation (proposed start dates September 2008)
 - ❖ Chulmleigh Community College and Chulmleigh Primary School
 - ❖ Tavistock St Rumon’s Infants and St Peter’s Junior School
- Management Partnership
 - ❖ Cornwood Primary and Malborough and South Huish Primary
- Collaborative working (soft federation)

- ❖ In addition, there are many different examples of informal partnerships where schools work together on specific projects to raise standards and enrich learning. Such projects can draw together schools in the same learning community, across phases, mainstream and special schools and even the maintained and independent sector. A report from our recent leadership conference tells the story of one such partnership between five small schools in South Devon. The Totnes Federation (Dartington Primary, Bidwell Brook and King Edward VI CC) provides another example of collaborative practice across schools with a website to share their learning journey and outcomes (<http://www.totnes-federation.org.uk/index.html>).

2. When looking at very small schools, what number on roll gives a ' whole learning experience '?

David Chaplin (Lead Primary Adviser: Primary SIP Manager): If governors consider evidence such as Ofsted inspection reports, which report on the quality of provision and its impact on outcomes for children in terms of personal development as well achievement and standards, then it would be very difficult to draw any correlation between number on roll and the learning experiences for pupils. For example, the quality of curriculum provision and outcomes, including personal development, are often judged to be strengths in small schools. However, a challenge for some very small schools might be to consider social experiences for pupils when individual Year groups in the school are very small. In such cases, schools often collaborate with other schools locally to ensure a range of high quality experiences is offered to pupils.

3. Do small schools have problems recruiting HTs because it is not seen as a good career move?

DCh: There is no generic answer to this. People are attracted to small school headship, and particular schools, for a variety of reasons. For some, it may be a conscious career move in terms of commitment to small schools and the retention of a class teaching commitment alongside the role of leadership. For others, that may be seen as a disadvantage of the role. It might be part of a planned journey to other posts, providing an opportunity to learn more about aspects of leadership and demonstrate success in the role. There are many examples of headteachers of small schools being successfully appointed to other posts.

4. Can schools access the predictions of births?

SC: Yes schools can access data about births in their area. Information for each school is via the forecast module accessible via link at <http://www.devon.gov.uk/schoolplaceplanning.htm> General information on births in Devon is also available on our website at http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/developmentcommunities/improving_our_services/facts_figures_and_statistics/facts_and_figures/thepeople/thepeoplebirthsanddeaths/thepeoplebirthsanddeathsbirths.htm

Fran Butler (Early Years Development Officer : Schools): Within the Early Years and Childcare Team we can provide audits that include predictions of births. We generally offer this if we are looking at developing early years or childcare provision. It may also be helpful for governors to contact Keith Lewis about school place planning (keith.lewis@devon.gov.uk).

David Tall Please note that Leadership Succession Planning is one of the Workshops being provided at the Governors' Conference on 29 March. See www.dag.gb.com for details

2. Services to Schools

Schools will be responding this term to the new Portfolio of Services and deciding which services to purchase from Devon and / or other providers. For the future the LA is seeking to modernise the way it operates and is looking specifically at school improvement services to schools such as inclusive education, Governor Services, headteacher recruitment, music and library services and support for good use of resources.

Under the title **Project Stratcom** the LA is promoting a radical look at how school improvement and associated services are commissioned and provided in the future. It is not looking to ' externalise ' curriculum services but at an entirely new organisation which will pull together a number of services which currently operate separately. There is a commitment to inclusive education which must be central to school improvement. Enjoy and Achieve cannot be seen in isolation from the whole of Every Child Matters, and this includes a focus on vulnerable young people. There is also an expectation of ' narrowing the (achievement) gap '.

More details about this project can be accessed from Sarah Aggett, Lead Officer, Business Reengineering (01392-383089 or sarah.aggett@devon.gov.uk or John Barnard, Steering Group Chair (01392-383261 or john.barnard@devon.gov.uk).

Governor comment

- *The move to commissioning services is progressing rapidly and the change in the old paternalistic role adopted by the LA in the past is significant*
- *There seemed little evidence of primary schools using ' outside ' services and only a small number of secondary schools where, for example outside catering services are used. One school buys Teacher Absence Insurance elsewhere*
- *Whatever their choice all schools should continue to buy into PR and Legal Services*
- *If schools buy out of HR they will still need to buy into Occupational Health.*

- A number of schools were disappointed with the end of PROMIS and the new arrangements
- One school had a problem with the comparison criteria

Governor questions

1. What are governor views about the support mechanisms that will be needed in the future to help governors cope with commissioning?

John Barnard (Head of Resource Strategies, CYPS): The new Commissioning Forum, a sub group of the Schools Forum that will include Head Teacher and Governor representation, will reflect school needs, in terms of services and support, to the Authority.

2. What evidence is there that schools go elsewhere and buy from external providers?

JB: Schools themselves report where they buy services other than DCC which can be from external suppliers or from other schools for curriculum support.

3. Is Project Stratcom a true consultation or a done deal?

JB: At its meeting on 26 February, Executive agreed that firm project proposals should be developed, taking into account the concerns and issues raised by staff and schools. The identified services also need to work together to develop options for different delivery models. To date, briefings have been held to establish stakeholders' views. Once firm proposals have been developed, formal consultation will be undertaken with stakeholders which will be reported to the Executive who will then decide on the way forward.

In response to concerns expressed by DAG about the tight deadline for the return of the Portfolio Choices Ray Beale (Head of Business Strategies) has sent out the following note to schools: " I have received a number of emails from schools and Devon Association of Governors about the difficulty of returning the schedule of service requirements before the 29 February 2008. I recognise this has been a challenging timeline and for those schools who will not have Governors' meetings until March, impossible. With this in mind I am very happy to extend the closing date until Thursday 20 March 2008. "

This is much appreciated and in return the importance of meeting this deadline is stressed to all schools!!

3. Gender and Disability Equality Duty

By 3rd December 2007, primary schools, special schools and PRUs were required to meet their Disability Equality Duty by scrutinising the general and specific duties, and then drawing up a scheme which details areas that the school needs to address, and actions that will be taken. Schools are then required to implement the actions in their scheme within three years. Guidance is available at www.devon.gov.uk/dgs-ddaguidance.pdf

A template is available at www.devon.gov.uk/dgs-ddatemplate.pdf A useful national link is www.equalityhumanrights.com following 'For businesses and organisations' - 'Education and Training providers'. A useful Devon link is www.deseducation.org following 'School Improvement' - 'SEN' - 'SENCO Handbook' - 'Disability Equality Duty'.

Governor comment

- Some governors commented that they had ' not got their heads around this yet ', feeling that it was a huge policy needing considerable time to develop
- On the other hand some felt it was not nearly as difficult as it at first seemed. The essential was to prioritise the things that need to be done and to develop a strategy plan. In many ways it was just an extension of current good practice
- In some schools the response from parents to the consultation had been poor
- There were some governors still anxious to have a template and annoyed that no Model Policy could be adopted
- Others felt exposed from a legal point of view – who is to say that what GBs put in place is right?
- One school pointed out that the key clause was the one about taking ' every reasonable ' step
- Okehampton Learning Community had dealt with developing this policy at a LLC group inset session. It needed now to be personalised in each school but the groundwork was done with SENCOs of all schools – governors were not involved at this stage

Jo Hooper (Corporate Equality Officer, DCC): As I commented last term, DCC should not produce a model scheme for schools. DCC has produced a template and that is as far as it can go. The law requires schools to give due regard to disability equality and consult with stakeholders to develop their scheme. Each school will have different issues to address and therefore their schemes will, inevitably, look different.

IG: Please note that there are much fuller comments from Jo in the DAG Area Meeting Feedback document for the Autumn Term 2007, Item 3

4. The Primary Capital Programme

A new government initiative due to run, subject to future government spending decisions, for the next 14 years, sets out to radically refurbish or replace a significant proportion of the primary school estate. The criteria set out by the DCSF require the Local Authority to submit a 'strategy for change' document for the department's approval. The LA has been consulting schools, stakeholder groups as well as partner providers prior to submitting its strategy for change submission to DCSF in April 08. Further information is available from www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=12292 or by contacting Chris Dyer on 01392 382531 or chris.dyer@devon.gov.uk

Chris is very keen to have agreement on a set of priorities for inclusion re the Primary Capital Programme (PCP) Strategy for Change. He is keen for governors to give any feedback they may wish to offer on how the LA should approach its PCP Strategy for Change submission, together with views regarding the prioritisation, as well as the delivery of the programme. Initial feedback will be presented to the Schools Organisation Forum on 27 February 2008. It is intended that the LA's consultation process will also include a round of consultation meetings.

Governor comment

- *There was considerable scepticism expressed about the consultation process. A number of those present at meetings felt that any planning for capital projects was pre-determined and that this exercise was a waste of time*
- *There were others who welcomed an opportunity for their voice to be heard and understood that the purpose of the exercise is a consultation to start setting priorities*
- *One governor had issues with the way capital monies were spent in Devon and questioned the necessity for 'space-age projects' when basic provision was often more important*
- *Another governor identified 2 very different issues*
 - ❖ *design and provision of buildings*
 - ❖ *rationalisation of building stock as a result of falling roles*

Governor questions

1. Is energy efficiency really going to be a priority?

Chris Dyer (Capital Programme Manager, Strategic Planning Group CYPS): Yes, the government is promoting energy efficiency as a key target for capital building projects, with the view that all new schools will in future be designed to be carbon neutral. In addition to this County Council members are committed to sustainability and have set a target for Devon to become the greenest county in the country. The emerging CYPS capital programme paper for 2008-09 specifically sets out to:

- a) encourage the design of new school buildings in accordance with best practice
- b) identify matched funding specifically targeted at reducing energy costs
- c) where possible set out to pursue BREEAM excellent for all new school buildings
- d) support research and development of carbon neutral schools and renewable energy solutions

2. Is this funding linked to building schools for the future?

CD: The Primary Capital Programme funding is a separate DCSF initiative from that of the secondary schools building schools for the future initiative.

3. When is the money likely to be released and what sort of funding levels are being talked about?

CD: Subject to DCSF's approval of Devon's Primary Capital Programme strategy for change (date for submission 16th June 2008) Devon is set to receive £5.840m in 2009-10 and £8.218m in 2010-11.

4. How transparent will the procedure for deciding priorities be?

CD: The process aims to be as transparent as possible. Governors are encouraged to take an active part in the current consultation, the outcome of which will help influence the LA's strategy for change. Consultation on progress as well as emerging priorities will be presented to the School Organisation Forum as part of this process.

5. Health & Safety Training for Governors, Headteachers and Premises Managers

The County Council's Business Transformation Unit (BTU) is facilitating training for governors and staff who are responsible for managing Asbestos, Legionella and the Construction and Design Regulations 2007 within schools. The training will be provided by an independent consultant.

A detailed letter about this has been sent to schools in both hard copy and electronic version (this can be found in the weekly distribution list for Feb. 5th in the Administrator section as DCC premises related Health & Safety Training - various courses <http://www.devon.gov.uk/sc-feb0747029.doc>) There will be training for governors, head teachers and members of the school with responsibility for specific health and safety issues. All schools should have made a return indicating when they will be taking up their allocation of the 1200 free training places on offer. There are training venues across the county and training will start early in the summer term.

For further details contact Jon Williams within the Business Transformation Unit on 01392 382444 or jon.williams@devon.gov.uk

The LA is providing a substantial amount of training for this and governors are encouraged to go on training to get a fuller understanding of the matter. This is very important for governors as it brings together a range of Health & Safety issues and seeks to identify where responsibility lies.

Governor comment

- *This is exactly the kind of issue that discourages people from becoming governors and headteachers... and this at a time when the LA is worried about where new headteachers are going to be found!*
- *It was suggested that this is, in essence, a 'paper trail' exercise – having to name a person who ultimately has to make sure everything is covered. The requirement exists by law already with the demand that there is a named person who is responsible (HT or Governor).*
- *Several governors at different meetings had a very clear understanding of aspects of this work as a result of their own jobs:*
 - ❖ *One commented that Asbestos and Legionella issues are very onerous. The LA needs to provide a standard contract for all schools as HTs and Governors are in no way qualified to deal with this and there is no protection for HTs / Governors. If the LA were to have a contract to cover itself it should also apply to schools in particular because they close for long holiday periods*
 - ❖ *Another (a plumber) commented that to his knowledge not one case of Legionella in schools has yet been found and that Legionella is a very rare occurrence anywhere.*

Nigel Coleman (Compliance Management [Legionella & Asbestos] NPS South West Ltd): Regarding this comment, it is the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations that require we conduct Risk Assessments on our water systems. The Health Protection Agency identify between 7000 and 8000 cases of legionella infection each year with 10 - 15% of these being fatal (over 1000 deaths per year). Only last year a 15 yr old in Dorset had a lung transplant following infection believed to be from his boarding school (another boy was also infected). He lost 96% of his lung function. 80% of these infections will come from hot and cold water systems. Air conditioning hits the news because it infects large quantities - such as the Barrow in Furness case in 2002 where 182 people were infected and 7 people died. The LA was fined £125,000 and the Officer £15,000. If it were today then Corporate Manslaughter would have been the likely charge.

With ever more inclusive policies for our schools we will have many children joining the school community who live with long term illness and also those with compromised immune systems following cancer treatment and other diseases. In addition Teachers and Parents with similar conditions or who have compromised immune or respiratory function through social behaviour may also attend our schools. These highly susceptible groups along with the risks to other general populace groups must be managed. This is why DCC have implemented the requirements of Approved Code of Practice L8 - the control of legionella bacteria in water systems. The requirements are not difficult but must be managed with a day to day consistency to maintain good levels of water hygiene and minimise the risk of bacterial colonisation.

- *Governors from one school in South Devon had been impressed by an offer from a company who would take on responsibility and offered a complete package at £20 per pupil. However, others raised serious concerns and suggested schools should be very wary of such offers as the question needs to be asked about what is NOT covered and where responsibility ultimately lies*
- *The end of the current PROMIS agreement on 31st March 2008 does not help!*
- *The new DAG website could provide a useful hub for discussion on this subject.*

Governor questions

1. Surely schools / governors are not deemed liable unless negligent?

Ray Beale (Head of Business Strategies CYPS): I think that is absolutely the case. That is why we would encourage Governors to ensure their Heads attend our training events

2. Can the LA make use of governor expertise in some of these areas?

RB: I am sure that is so and we would welcome input from Governors with the appropriate expertise

3. Can DAG help in finding ways of supporting governors with advice on these requirements?

RB: Could the answer to 2 give us those who could mentor less knowledgeable Governors?

6. FMSiS for primary/special school governors

Schools should be aiming to meet these standards by 31st March 2008 and have completed or be in the process of completing a self-evaluation form. The FMSiS training programme for governors and staff is near completion with over 30 free events provided around the County. Very good feedback has been received from these events. For governors and staff unable to attend the introduction training on FMSiS, a video training package is available on the internet at <http://www.devon.gov.uk/fmsisvideotraining> The video clips are presented like " frequently asked questions " so that governors can select any clip or work through them all. There is no plan to put on more free introduction training events but if a school has a strong need then please contact David Curnow (david.curnow@devon.gov.uk)

Governor comment

- *Nationally FMSiS does not have to be in place until 2010. The LA is doing it now so that Audit can help those schools who cannot meet the standard at this time*
- *Feedback from the training for governors was, in general, very positive – in practice the task is not as onerous as it might have seemed initially. If governors tackle FMSiS as a self-assessment process that will help. One governor commented: ‘ The Audit team are really helpful if you are stuck ‘*
David Curnow (Senior Audit Manager, Devon Audit Services): *Thank you, this is our aim.*
- *It can be off-putting for potential new governors and this fact needs to be flagged up. As one governor said: ‘This is all getting a bit much for amateurs ‘. In particular some felt that the competency chart is off-putting for governors – someone suggested the matrices need a 14 page glossary!*
- *It was felt that this exercise has been easier for secondary schools as they have finance teams in place*
- *Problems arise for small schools when key staff leave. They are especially vulnerable as it is often difficult within a small school to find people to be governors who have sufficient financial interest / expertise*
- *Those who have been audited for FMSiS told the meeting that the Audit team leaves a helpful ‘action plan’ as a guide for things to be worked on. The Audit process is very thorough (some commented more demanding than OfSTED!). The recording of decisions in accurate governor minutes is really vital.*
- *Governors were advised to contact other schools that have been through the process for guidance. One piece of advice was to keep a running box file for the three yearly cycle*
- *One governor felt the video clip now available was rather long and boring!*

Governor questions

1. **What sort of support, if any, will be available for those schools unable to meet the standard by March 31st?**

DCu: We offer support in the following ways

- *our website is always available*
- *we are about to issue another audit bulletin*
- *advice can be sought to specific enquiries through our email and phone contact*
- *audits completed will take schools through the FMSiS*
- *the Finance Officer / Support Officers can provide guidance.*

In addition, we are planning to produce some training materials for Risk Management and Development Plan Finance.

2. **We are being put through this now. Who is to say what change there might be in two years time?**

DCu: *DCSF will be the ones who make changes. They are proposing to update the Standard this April, although if like last year, this is likely to be superficial. Ofsted has now put the FMSiS into the School SEF to be part of the inspection process and it will increase in significance during inspection over the coming yrs. We are not expecting to be dropped!*

7. Role of governance / cutting size of GBs / introduction of mandatory induction training

Judith Bennett (Chair of the National Governors’ Association) has contacted DAG to say that there is to be a DCSF consultation out this spring on the future of governance. The NGA Board has been thinking about this and had discussions with various partners - in the case of DCSF to have them listen to governor views (a novel experience BEFORE consultation!). There will be something out to members soon from NGA. The consultation will include questions about how governance models may need to change - and what must be retained and so on. It also seems clear that the issue of size will be part of the coming consultation as there is a feeling at DCSF that 20/21 is too large a group and that some reduction in the size of GBs would be sensible.

A selection of governor comments:

- *It may be good to have small GBs when all is running smoothly, but once there is a serious issue (e.g. staff disciplinary matter) there may not be enough Governors for committees and / or to share the workload*
- *The fewer governors you have the smaller the potential pool and level of expertise*
- *Interim Boards may work well but they have a limited agenda*
- *Governors also have a right to work/life balance. This would be a retrograde step as the workload gets more, never less ... and efficiency is hard enough to come by as it is*
- *There is already too much work for too few people*
- *It would be too difficult to cover committee work properly if the size of GBs were to be reduced*
- *A bad move – this would load too much responsibility on to too few people*
- *I can see no advantage and no logic in this!!*

An additional point from several governors

- *We are not happy with the proportion of parent governors getting onto GBs as LA or Community Governors. Some parents come with their own agenda and, having too many parents, can offset the balance of the GB. Governors were advised to use the Code of Conduct for Governors available from DGS Effective Governing Bodies folder to counter such difficulties*

A further item on the table is the issue of mandatory induction training for governors. For a long time NGA has argued that Induction Training for governors should be mandatory. If governors are to carry out duties and bear considerable responsibilities, and if we want all governing bodies to be fit for purpose, then to be well trained should be a given. Various Schools' Ministers have disputed this on the grounds that governors are volunteers. The Schools' Minister, Jim Knight, has, however, shown a glimmer of interest but wants to know if the belief in mandatory training is held by most governors across the country.

Governor comment

- *Mandatory training sounds OK, but it is how you promote it that counts. If it sounds too difficult or too demanding it might put people off becoming governors. In a rural county such as Devon geography also comes into this as it takes time and money to travel to training and could be logistically impossible for some*
- *A small number had mixed feelings about mandatory training, feeling that some governors were not committed enough as it is and would probably leave if they were forced to attend training. Others felt that schools were well rid of such governors if their only purpose was to make up the numbers!*
- *Various additional support mechanisms for new governors were suggested:*
 - ❖ *Schools should give out their own induction packs*
 - ❖ *Online training could be considered – e.g. E-learning with a timeline of one year (others, though, stressed the value of face-to-face interaction at training events)*
 - ❖ *Networking with other GBs*
 - ❖ *In-house training for the **whole** GB as currently provided by DGS was highly recommended*
 - ❖ *Using an existing governor as a mentor*

Governor questions

1. What is the objective in reducing the size of GBs?

Debbie Clapshaw (DGS): One of the stated objectives in looking to reduce the size of governing bodies is to encourage governing bodies to focus on their strategic role. Governors have raised concerns here about workload, but what the government is saying is that we need to be looking at doing things very differently. This links to schools working differently with different models of leadership and groups of schools coming together to share resources perhaps through a federation. The message is that larger schools (or groups of schools), should be putting resources in to funding a business manager whose role would include responsibility for issues like finance, personnel management, health and safety, grounds and premises maintenance. The intention being that this would free up both the headteacher and the governing body to focus on strategic matters and most importantly school improvement.

It is likely though that the governing body will still carry overall strategic responsibility for these areas, so lines of delegation and accountability must be made absolutely clear. We already have some different models beginning to emerge through our federations where the governing body is having to become more strategic, shaping a vision and monitoring progress, becoming 'leaner and sharper' as a governing body with a better developed and resourced school Senior Management Structure.

2. Is this a cost cutting exercise because of the training, or a response to difficulties experienced in finding sufficient numbers of governors?

DCI: There is no doubt that the argument is driven in part by experience in other areas of the country where it is harder to recruit governors. One of my concerns is that we will be forced to move away from our traditional stakeholder model, and away from the argument that 'anyone can be a governor'. Generally the stakeholder model has worked well, but already we can see from the government's arguments put forward for Trust school and Academy governance that they are looking for a much more 'professionalised' model and a model that is much less likely to be able to accommodate 'all the talents'. The drive is on for all schools to become 'self-governing' (Foundation/VA/Trust) within the next five years, the move to reduce the size and re-think the make-up of governing bodies is linked to this.

3. Is it possible to use recently retired governors from other schools in a crisis?

DCI: When a school goes into crisis, usually as the result of an Ofsted category, we are invariably asked by the School Improvement Officer to find at least one additional LEA governor. This should be an experienced governor who is able to give time and support to helping the governing body move forward. Our experiences have been very positive and I am very grateful to those governors who have already responded to a request to help out in this way – currently about eight people. In all cases these individuals have made/are making a huge contribution and many of these governors are then asked to stay on by the governing body in another category of governorship having built an excellent relationship with the school.

4. What online training, if any, exists for new governors?

DCI: Whilst we continue to investigate the possibilities offered through on-line training or 'e-learning', we are of the view that there really is no substitute for face-to-face training, although it would be a challenge to reach all of our 900 or so newly appointed governors each year in this way. We are due to meet with an e-learning provider later this month and there are companies already in the market so we are exploring the idea, but remain to be convinced as to the quality!

After these discussions 2 questions were asked at each meeting (in total 100+ governors from across Devon):

1. Thinking about the size of your current GB, would you want a reduction in the number of governors?
At 3 of the 4 meetings ALL present were opposed to reducing the size of their GB. At the fourth meeting the overwhelming majority were opposed.
2. Are you in favour of mandatory training for governors?
At all of the meetings a substantial majority was in favour of such training. Some felt, however, that such training should be 'expected but not compulsory'. There was also a view that this would have to lead to an increase in the number and availability of courses

DCI: As a Service we would welcome the move to introduce mandatory training. We still reach less than half of newly appointed new governors, although we know that when governors attend our induction day they find it invaluable. Many of the potential difficulties created within a governing body and between a governing body and its headteacher can be avoided by governors having a good understanding of their role and their responsibilities.

8. Community Cohesion / Extended Schools / Extended Services

Governors need to be aware that the Extended School Services agenda is about maximising learning potential for all children, and is borne out of Every Child Matters. The self review forms that went to schools for return last term will inform the implementation of ESS in Devon schools. How support will be rolled out to schools is in the final planning stages at the moment, but all schools are expected to be 'extended' by 2010. Lots of schools are already offering these services but may not realise it and so the training in the second half of this term should help to allay fears and give a good general overview.

In addition in the summer of 2007 schools were issued with a document 'Guidance on the duty to promote Community Cohesion' and were required to comply with this from September. Ofsted will report on this from September 2008. Jim Knight, Minister for Schools, has announced a £3 million pound project to help schools from different communities to link up. For further help watch out for a 'Community Cohesion Information Pack for Schools' produced by The Institute of Community Cohesion and available on the ICoCo and DCSF websites. A new toolkit from the DCSF is due out around Easter – see also www.schoolslinkingnetwork.org.uk

Governor comment

- *There were anxieties expressed particularly by small schools who felt it was difficult for them to provide services in rural areas and simply not viable as the take-up would be poor. Others felt it involved too much work and that the consultation was too complicated and onerous. Some governors remain under the impression that their school MUST provide before and after school clubs. Others talked about 'yet another pressure on HTs and governors'.*
 - *Others, however, were more positive and stressed that the key was in identifying what was needed within a community. Schools should look at what is already available in the community and look at addressing gaps in provision. This can involve 'sign posting' i.e. it can be information led, pointing people in the right direction rather than providing wraparound care. There is no 'one size fits all'.*
 - *One governor felt strongly that it was not for schools to provide breakfast and that this was a social services matter, not an education issue*
 - *There are 3 area co-ordinators for Extended Services supported by others to give advice to schools*
- Fran Butler: Governors can contact their District Co-ordinator about developing childcare (details on the Early Years and Childcare section of DCC website). The DC can help to put governors in touch with existing childcare providers and explain a bit more about how schools can make the core offer by 2010.**
- *One senior governor who has undertaken countywide work on ESS suggested these links to the TDA website which is very user friendly <http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/extendedschools/introduction.aspx> Information about rural schools and extended services is also available at http://www.tda.gov.uk/upload/resources/pdf/r/rural_schoolschecklist.pdf and there is an Extended Schools toolkit at <http://www.tda.gov.uk/about/publicationslisting/TDA279.aspx?keywords=governors+toolkit>*
 - *The cost of transport limits activities in Devon with funding issues for out of school hours activities*
 - *Children's Centres will also have a role to play*
 - *A number of schools gave examples of what they felt was good practice*
 - ❖ *In one school a parent had set up a business and leased space in the school to run out of school activities*
 - ❖ *At another primary the after school club takes in children from other schools in the area*
 - ❖ *Another had chosen to use the funding for a website that parents can access for useful advice*

- ❖ *One rural secondary school runs a lot of activities with buses laid on free of charge to the pupils*

Governor questions

1. Does every school have to have everything - for example, do schools HAVE to run a breakfast club?

Sue Turner (Childcare Development Manager, Early Years and Childcare Service, CYPS): No, schools should assess the needs of children and parents and can consider a number of possible options dependent on the need. If the school is providing access to services which currently meets parents' needs, then the school is providing full access. If an outstanding need is established, schools can consider linking in with current provision, through signposting e.g. local childminders, local voluntary or private group providers, provision at other schools with transport provided e.g. walking bus if practicable. If there is no other provision available to meet need and the demand is sufficiently great enough, a breakfast club may be an option to consider or recruiting a number of childminders. To discuss further schools can contact the Early Years and Childcare Service District Co-ordinators. Contact details in the Extended Services prospectus.

2. Does an extra budget allocation come with this?

ST: If the need is sufficient for a new breakfast club or childminders to be sustainable, the Early Years and Childcare Service will support new childcare places with a start-up grant.

3. What, exactly, do schools have to do by 2010 to demonstrate they have met the requirements?

ST: By 2010, all primary schools should be providing access to childcare / varied menu of activities according to parental need.

4. Until how late at night should clubs be run? Are they run by volunteers? Should there be a charge?

ST: The time depends on parents' needs, e.g. if 4.30 pm meets parents' needs then that is OK. Who runs the childcare / varied menu of activities depends whether it is governor run or a private / voluntary organisation, or a childminder who is self employed. Please see Extended Services prospectus for different options of governance.

5. Who bears the cost of the transport?

ST: Childminders would bear the cost of transporting children to and from their care. For other forms of care this would need to be worked out with parents.

6. Does the provision of Extended Services also cover the school holiday period?

ST: Yes, but again the school can provide access to childcare through signposting to provision that is already running – childminders, holiday play-schemes.

Please contact the Early Years and Childcare Service District Co-ordinators. Contact details in the Extended Services prospectus for queries on the above.

9. DAG Issues

A number of issues were drawn to governors' attention:

- There is a proposal to include clerks within DAG membership. This stems from problems during the Job Evaluation process when clerks did not appear to have a ' voice ' to represent them. Clerks are already invited to attend Area Meetings. No cost or commitment would be involved but it could lead, for example, to the possibility of a clerk joining the DAG Executive or a clerk's discussion forum on the DAG website.

Governor comment

- *There was overwhelming support from both governors and clerks present at meetings for clerks to be offered membership of DAG*

Governor questions

1. What has happened with regard to Clerks in the JE process?

David Tall: 50 Governors have volunteered to assist with the process for all JE appeals and training is already underway

2. What decisions are being made with regard to the JE process for Church Schools?

If any information is received in response to this query it will be added to the website document

A Job Evaluation Joint Update by the Corporate Management Board / Joint Trade Unions for February 2008 (Issue 12) can be found at: <http://www.devon.gov.uk/sc-feb0751006.pdf>

- GBs have been invited to nominate a governor to be the DAG contact for their school. This would involve ensuring that relevant governors received the relevant information for their role within the GB. Anyone interested is asked to contact David Tall. At the same time DGS would like to know how best to communicate with governors – by paper or electronically. They are coming to a fairly strong view that new materials will not be routinely sent out as hard copy in the schools' post as so many seem to fail to reach governors. This is very

costly and frustrating for all concerned. They are also still considering the option of setting up an e-mail system so that they can e-mail directly all governors who want to be on it.

Governor comment

- *There was a general welcome for the DAG initiative. However, in response, one governor asked why everybody should not be e-mailed, another felt a couple of contacts per school was enough and another suggested the Clerk as the best point of contact*
- *The preferred means of communication for governors present at meetings was e-mail, but it was dependent on what the communication is, as there are issues with printing costs and the time taken to download items. These costs are an issue for volunteers expected to print out long documents at their own expense. Governors need to be alerted if hard copies are to follow.*
- *E-mail communication often depends on the Clerk to each GB – there is no one case fits all*
- *Paperless meetings are becoming more popular*

- DAG is developing an initiative to provide mentors for new CoGs. This has provoked a lot of interest both from those who would like such mentoring and others prepared to offer it. Anyone interested should contact David Tall.

Governor comment

- *All those present welcomed this initiative*

- The new DAG website (www.dag.gb.com) went live on January 31st. It includes:
 - ❖ A governor discussion board in which governors can raise issues / express opinions for fellow governors to respond to / comment upon
 - ❖ Individual web pages for key DAG documents so that each document has its own form of search engine
 - ❖ A Glossary / Jargon Buster section
It is very comprehensive, but if anyone notices any notable absences please forward their comments through the website (preferred method) or to David Tall.
- The DAG Conference will take place from 10.00 – 3.30 on Sat. March 29th at County Hall. This replaces the former Annual Assembly. The theme for the day will be " Tomorrow's Schools ". There will be a short period of business during the day, but, more importantly, Conference will receive addresses from 2 VIP speakers - Anne Whiteley (Devon CYPS Director) and Phil Revell (CEO of NGA). There will also be 3 workshops looking at:
 - ❖ SEN Framework Provision and GBs' responsibilities
 - ❖ Leadership Planning Succession (50% of Devon's HTs are likely to retire within a few years)
 - ❖ The value the new School Improvement Partners should bring to school improvement (SIPs will be in place in primary schools from 1 April 2008)
With the financial support of NPS SW, DAG can provide lunch and during this break the Devon Youth Choral Experience will entertain delegates. In addition there will be displays illustrating how Devon's children see their schools and Governing Bodies. Ample parking is available. Formal calling notices have gone out to all schools.
Part of the business side of the day will be devoted to the election and appointment of Officers and proposed ratification of Constitution. **DAG is always looking to strengthen the Executive so if any governor is interested in joining the Executive please contact David without prejudice and he will be delighted to outline what is involved.**

10. Schools' Forum

The Schools' Forum continues to play a major role in giving advice to decision makers in Devon on educational issues. Governors play a significant role on this body. Recent issues dealt with by the Forum include:

- Recommendations to the LA on the distribution of the 2008 – 11 budget
- A challenge to councillors NOT to fund the overspend (as a way of protesting at Devon's position as 146th out of 149 in the funding table)
- Welcoming the fact that John Smith (Portfolio Holder for CYPS) has bid for £25 million from sale of Exeter airport for CYPS. This would be a one-off bonus
- Receipt of a thorough and independent review of the JE process
DAG is looking for governors to act as ' substitute ' members of the Forum in the first place. It will be seeking new governor members in the summer. Anyone interested contact David Tall.
Details of the school budget will be in schools by the end of February / early March. The need to agree and approve this will dominate much of the work of the governing body this term.

Governor comment

- *This time the budget will indicate what schools will receive for the next three years. In general it was felt that this would help schools as it allows the potential to plan ahead.*

John Barnard: Since the start of LMS schools have always been issued with 3 year budgets, based on projected pupil numbers. However, 2009/10 and 2010/11 only include funding increases based on the minimum funding guarantee as the Schools Forum took the view that there were unknown spending pressures which may need to be funded from headroom. It is hoped that additional funding will be allocated to schools from the available headroom in these two years, meaning budgets issues are at the minimum level of likely funds

- *Some governors asked whether other schools were facing problems with falling rolls as this involves some painful decision making.*

John Barnard: Many schools have 'managed' falling rolls by not replacing staff - as they have left, for example. There are some schools that have needed to make formal redundancies because of falling rolls and this will continue if the current demographic projections hold true.

11. Exeter's unitary bid - latest update from DCC

Since the decision rejecting the proposal for a new unitary authority based on the narrow confines of Exeter City Council's boundaries, the Government has asked the independent Boundary Committee to conduct a thorough review of local government arrangements throughout Devon and make recommendations. The terms of reference for the review were announced in early February. The Committee is a statutory committee of the Electoral Commission and is responsible for reviewing the structure, boundaries and electoral arrangements of local government in England. Phil Norrey, the Chief Executive of Devon County Council, has made a detailed commentary on the background to this which will be placed on the web pages as indicated below.

Peter Doyle (Head of Corporate Communications DCC): The Boundary Committee of England has confirmed that it will be carrying out a review of local government in Devon. Max Caller, Chair of the Boundary Committee, said the Committee would be visiting Devon to discuss the review process and likely timescales.

Further details can be found both at the Boundary Committee's news centre:

<http://www.boundarycommittee.org.uk/news-centre/news/gr.cfm/news/696> and at

<http://www.boundarycommittee.org.uk/our-work/structuralreviews.cfm>

The leader of DCC, Brian Greenslade, has commented: "Devon County Council welcomes this healthy opportunity to take part in an independent and serious public policy review. We look forward to the chance to work with the Boundary Committee and stakeholders to ensure that any future local government structure proposed for Devon is well thought through, financially viable and produces real benefits for public services and taxpayers. The County Council will certainly want to consult widely with stakeholders and the communities we all serve and we will continue to keep you informed of developments as the process unfolds."

DCC will publish its own web pages shortly where it will put the latest information about the review including links to the Boundary Committee's website, any commentary from DCC and an online facility for anyone who wants to contribute their thoughts and views about the future structure of Devon.

12. Other issues

a) **'Succession Breeds Success'** is a new publication from the National Coordinators of Governor Services which has been sent to schools. It gives practical advice on developing new governors, helping them to take on responsibilities and ultimately preparing governors to take on areas of leadership within the governing body.

Governor comment

- *Governors who had seen the publication commented that the SBS document lays out the issues very well*
- *Many governors also praised both the Effective Governing Body folder and the Finding and Keeping Effective School Governors booklet and CD ... though a substantial minority were unaware of the existence of these vital publications for governors*

b) School Profile - updates

There have been some changes to the way schools can update their school profile. The profile is no longer a locked document and school / governors can update it at any time they wish. Schools will be alerted by e-mail when the validated statistical data for the academic year ending in July has been posted on their profile.

Schools can enter their own unvalidated results in the interim if they wish. Contact the National Support Line with any further queries at: school.profile@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk To complete the profile you need to use the correct login at <https://schoolprofile.teachernet.gov.uk/> . Profiles can be accessed at <http://schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk/>

c) SATs and League Tables

NGA sought governor comments on the value of SATs and league tables.

Governor comment

- *Assessment should definitely be kept in some form but it would be better to have a 'roll-over average' of, say, 5 years and yardsticks reflecting the wider curriculum should also be used*

- *The majority of governors across the meetings were in favour of getting rid of league tables, though some were unsure*
- *This is not a black and white issue - the problem lies more with how to interpret league tables. Although value-added information is now presented the general public does not seem to understand this*
- *Most criticism was made against the use made of the information by the media, reducing complex statistics to simplistic popularity charts that indicate mainly where schools are situated rather than what they achieve.*

d) NGA membership

Although all GBs affiliated to DAG are basic members of NGA, individual GBs are encouraged to consider taking out full standard NGA membership in order to enjoy all the benefits of the organisation such as

- Copies of the NGA magazine delivered to the home address of three members of your governing body and one to the school. The NGA magazine will be produced six times a year from April 2008 (with additional copies delivered to the school address for other members of the governing body if requested)
- Members' log-in access to the members' area of the NGA website. The members* area will include back-copies of the NGA magazine and the full text of other NGA publications.
- Discounts off other NGA publications such as 'Welcome to Governance'.
- Three free places at NGA conferences

The brand new NGA magazine, in full colour, to be launched in April will have 32 pages of information, guidance and comment. As part of the reformed NGA membership package (see above) the magazine will be sent direct to members' homes, cutting distribution costs considerably, and also saving on paper and wastage. DAG has negotiated an initial reduction in the standard membership fee of £50 for the current year only.

e) Successor to PROMIS

The Strategic Planning Group, in conjunction with NPS (South West) Ltd, have produced a draft copy of the proposed replacement maintenance buy back scheme called The Devon Maintenance Partnership (DMP) See: <http://www.devon.gov.uk/sc-feb0748027.pdf>

f) Teaching Awards

March 1st was the deadline for this year's nominations. However, do not panic at the thought of missing this year's deadline - just start to think about next year!! You can find all the information you will need about this wonderful process at <http://www.teachingawards.com/nominations/> . Making a nomination is a unique opportunity to give teachers, teaching assistants, governors and schools the recognition they deserve. Nominating is a quick and easy process which only takes a few minutes. If you have any queries about making a nomination call 020 7776 2340 or e-mail nominations@teachingawards.com

g) Training:

The spring term edition of the Devon Governor (sent out to clerks on 26th February) contains summer 2008 training dates on the centre pages.

Governor comment

- *Governors were encouraged to claim their mileage rate for attendance at training and many felt that the rate should be increased. Colleen Arnold (a Torbay governor and Vice-Chair of NGA) will raise this as a nationwide issue with NGA. Devon is one of the few authorities that offers governors travel expenses*
- *Governors were also encouraged to go back to their schools and consider their own expenses policies*

h) Toxic Childhood – Sue Palmer

Visit her website at <http://www.suepalmer.co.uk:80/toxic.php> Her book is a 'must read' recommendation to all governors from IG.

Ivan Godfrey 10.03.08