



Devon Association of Governors

Minutes of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 21st September 2004 at 5.30pm at the West of England School, Exeter.

Present: Roger Adcock, Mike Billington, Laurie Burbridge, Judy Burgess, Faith Butler, Ivan Godfrey, Don Paterson, Ian Rogers, Rob Shillock, Claire Tod, Leon Winston, Jenny Currie, Joan Hammond (Torbay).

Apologies: Debbie Clapshaw, John Gale, David Gravell, Richard Haysom, Margaret Hosford, Simon Howes, Jane Lucas, Helen Morrison, Carol Robinson, Iris Watson, Martin Weiler.

04.36 Appointment of New Chair Mike Billington (Vice-Chair) chaired this part of the meeting. Douglas Lomax has resigned from the DAG Executive for personal reasons. The Executive asked the Secretary to pass on their thanks for his contribution to DAG and for his work as Chair. Mike Billington nominated Leon Winston as Chair, and his nomination was accepted and approved by those present. Leon Winston took the chair for the meeting

04.37 Debates

04.37.1 Achieving Excellence : A vision for learning in Devon (consultation document June 2004)

Executive members split into 4 groups to discuss each key note and respond to the action points in the consultation section. Their comments were then shared with the whole Executive to allow others to make additional comments. The points below will be forwarded to the LEA.

Key note 1: Opportunity and achievement for every child. All action points were supported with points 1.1 - 1.3 and 1.6 - 1.11 strongly supported. It was felt that, on the whole, there was a good balance between inclusion and achievement but that, in emphasizing inclusion, the needs of ALL pupils must not be forgotten.

Key note 2: Entitlements for learners and those supporting them. All action points were supported and all but point 2.5 strongly supported. It was felt that consideration could be given to a separate statement of entitlement for Early Years' Education. It was also requested that action point 2.8 be written in full consultation with Governors.

Key note 3: Building capacity in schools to collaborate and to learn from each other. Action points 3.2, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.7 were strongly supported and points 3.1 and 3.9 were supported. Governors were undecided about points 3.3, 3.6 and 3.8. This reflected a degree of concern that the proposals would need to be well managed and that their success may rely heavily on individuals' participation, leading to the possibility of considerable variety in the level and quality of support and work undertaken across Devon LLCs.

Key note 4: Giving children the best possible start. All action points were strongly supported and it was felt that this section was very positive and well written.

Key note 5: Fostering innovation. All action points were supported and 5.5, 5.15 and 5.16 were strongly supported. It was felt very important that staff who were innovative should be supported.

Key note 6: Promoting discussions on patterns of school provision in Devon. All action points were supported with points 6.5 & 6.6 were strongly supported. With regard to point 6.4 it was pointed out, however, that ICT must not be seen as the sole solution and that many rural areas cannot access broadband at the moment so that more time will be needed before this area can develop.

Key note 7: A close partnership with Health. All action points apart from 7.1 were supported and 7.2 - 7.3, 7.5 - 7.6 and 7.8 - 7.11 strongly supported. It was felt that 7.1 was insufficiently clear in its intention with regard to the number of posts to be created.

Key Note 8. Giving the best possible support to learning. All action points were strongly supported and felt to be an excellent and challenging list by which to hold the LEA to account!!.

General comments on the document:

It was felt that the document was positive, challenging, courageous and, in most points, sharp. Some felt that some of the statements were a little ambiguous (reflected in the ' Undecideds ' and ' Support ' as opposed to ' Strongly Support ').

With support from all involved, the implementation of the action points will improve the learning environment for children in Devon. Governors believe they can play an important role in this implementation of the 'vision' by being a positive link between schools, the LEA and the wider community. DAG has appreciated the opportunity to be involved in this consultation from the outset and looks forward to playing a continuing role in the development of Devon's Vision for Learning.

Members split into groups and discussed two issues raised recently:

04.37.2a) Sharing Good Practice: The first group tried to respond to the following query raised by the DAG representative on the LEA working party looking at the promotion of good practice " How do we identify best practice and, as Governors, ensure this best practice is shared with as many people as possible? " It was felt that the principle of sharing good practice was a good one and one enshrined in the DAG constitution. There are no easy answers to the questions " What is good practice? How can it be judged? What criteria can be used to say that one school is better than another? " For governors, a starting point may be for them to share perceived good practice (i.e. ' what works for us ') within their own Local Learning Community. Reference was made to recent developments in the Crediton LLC where governors are sharing ideas and training and have developed good communication links. It would be a positive move if governors saw the practical application of good practice by visiting schools and seeing the process in action. This is an area where schools' Link Governors can play a major role at the twice a year DGS Link Governor meetings. Examples of good practice for governors will also be included in a new teachers' TV channel due to be launched shortly. The Secretary offered to frame this term's DG article around this topic.

04.37.2b) SATS: The second group tried to respond to concerns raised by members about their perceived negative impact of SATs' tests in primary schools. It was felt that some form of testing was necessary, but that, currently, too much emphasis was still placed on raw SATs' results. It would be a positive move if the 'value added' data were given a higher priority. It was also felt that this was another area where sharing good practice might help. It would be good to hear, for example, from those schools who have managed SATs without impacting too heavily on the rest of the school. Another suggestion was that smaller schools could join together and have one central place for children to go to during the tests. This topic would benefit from being discussed widely - leading to the suggestion that DAG / DGS consider the possibility of developing a Web forum.

04.38 Minutes of the meeting of 15th July 2004 were agreed and signed as a true record.

04.39 Matters arising:

- Annual Assembly has been confirmed for 16th April 2005. **Discuss theme and speaker at the next meeting.**
- DAG/DGS conference. - a provisional booking has been made for 14th & 15th October 2005 at the Crossmead Centre, Exeter. Judy Burgess, Jane Lucas, Mike Billington and Ivan Godfrey will meet to discuss arrangements. Theme - The Children Bill, The Child Matters.
- Purchase of computers . Still under discussion.
- Extended Schools. Jon Bell, LEA officer with responsibility for Extended Schools will attend the DAG meeting in November.
- Links with Torbay. Torbay Governors invite Devon Governors to their meeting on November 11th at Oldway Mansion, Paignton. The speaker will be Dr Vince Stroud on "Workforce Remodelling".

- Headteacher Appointments. Ivan Godfrey will be meeting with Roger Fetherston shortly. Responses from Executive members have been forwarded.

Leon Winston left the meeting. Mike Billington took the Chair

04.40 Two items from Judy Burgess (DGS)

- **Police Community Support Officers** DAG had received a letter from Deborah Booth seeking governor views on the proposal to place PCSOs in some Devon secondary schools before proceeding with a detailed submission. Joan Hammond reported that Paignton CC's experience with a full-time police officer had been a good one. The committee felt that this idea should be endorsed, but that the following points were essential if the scheme were to be successful:
 - a) The Headteacher 's agreement together with the recorded approval of the governing body must be sought before agreeing to the allocation of an officer to a school
 - b) The officer's role in the school should be defined and agreed in advance by the Head and Governing Body.
 - c) Appropriate training should be carried out prior to appointment to ensure consistency.
 It was felt that the success of individual PCSOs would depend almost entirely on their ability to relate to young people in a positive way .. and accepted that no amount of training could necessarily guarantee this!
- **Presentation on quality of DGS provision** Judy Burgess circulated the draft 'Annual Report 2003-2004', 'Successes of the Year' and 'PANDA' reports. Vacancies compared to similar LEAs were generally average. Resignations have fallen and 94% of schools have received some training. The PANDA figures show that the % of GBs receiving Very Good and Good judgments by OfSTED increased in 2003: 69% of GBs were satisfactory or above, and 50% good, very good or excellent. Judy Burgess was thanked for her presentation and her team was congratulated on providing an invaluable service.

04.41 Committee representatives

Reports Back

- It was confirmed that Dr. Norrey will attend the January DAG meeting to speak about the links between Devon's Vision for Learning and the government's 5-Year Education Plan
- Further to the SOC meeting held on 14/07/04, from February 2005 the governor group will require a rep from the nursery school sector. As there is only one Nursery school in the LEA there are likely to be recruitment problems so the issue is being reviewed.

Area Reports

- Crediton DAG group. A useful pro-forma sheet has been circulated by the Crediton Local Learning Partnership titled 'Audit of governors' interests, skills and personal qualities'. The group is also sharing policies and the way they review policies.

Update of DAG representation The following nominations were agreed:

- LEA management team self-evaluation meetings: Ivan Godfrey
- SOC - Middle School Rep: Margaret Hosford (replacing Andy Holbrook).
- NGC SW Area Regional Meeting: Ivan Godfrey.
- NGC AGM: Saturday, 13 November 2004, London: Voting Rep: Ivan Godfrey. Other delegates: Faith Butler, Roger Adcock, Leon Winston (if available)
- Nominations for National Executive: none. It was agreed that DAG would raise the issue of the new system for updating the "Guide to the Law".
- NGC Chairs' Conference, Saturday, 22 January 2005. Birmingham. Leon Winston (if available)
- NGC Spring Council and Conference, Bristol. Saturday, 23 April 2005: none as yet
- Link Governor Meetings: 18 October - Exeter: Ivan Godfrey : 20 October - Buckfast: Mike Billington and Rob Shilvock : 3 November - Barnstaple: Faith Butler

04.42 Officers' Reports

Finance An update on the financial situation was circulated with thanks given to Ian Rogers.

- It was noted that new regulations mean governors can no longer borrow money for schools, and there were restrictions on leasing.
- The County is running a useful loan scheme for IT equipment. More information on the Devon website.

Secretary reported on the following:

- NGC has been invited to join a newly formed sub-group of SFIG, the School Funding Group, which has been set up to explore the impact of the fall in the school population, already being felt in primary schools. The project will analyse the scale of the issues, look at the impact on school standards, financial issues, community issues, workforce reform and school re-organisation and transport issues.
- Numerous documents on 5-Year Education Strategy are on the website. DAG has given further responses to NASG draft manifesto (+ received thanks and promise of inclusion)
- The LEA has requested governor responses by Monday 1st November 2004 on the consultation on Excellence for All Children: The Development of An Inclusive Education System in Devon.
- NASG's belief that schools should have a duty to work within the Children's Act appears to have put it at odds with NASUWT. NASG has added its voice to those requesting that schools should be included in the duty to co-operate within the Children Act.
- There is concern over the way in which Updates to the Guide to the Law are now being circulated. They are only available electronically and it is a very time consuming process. (See DAG resolution for NGC AGM)

04.43 Review of meeting It was felt that the experiment of having debates in the first half of the meeting, and dealing with business in the second half had been most successful. Once again the facilities offered by the West of England School had been excellent.

04.44 Date and time of next meeting: Tuesday November 9th, 5.30 pm. West of England School, Topsham Road, Exeter. Refreshments served at 5pm. Claire Tod offered apologies for this meeting. The meeting closed at 7.35p.m.

Action Points

Secretary	To inform others of new DAG Chair (04.36) To write letter of thanks to Douglas Lomax for his work as Chair (04.36) To send DAG response to Achieving Excellence Document to LEA (04.37) To write DG article on ' Sharing Good Practice ' (04.37) To investigate with Chair + DGS the possibility of a Web Forum (04.37) To meet with Roger Fetherston (Head of DCS) (04.39) To forward DAG views on PCSOs to Deborah Booth (04.40) To forward info. on DAG nominations as appropriate (04.41) To forward info. on DAG representatives to NGC meetings (04.41)
Chair	To investigate with Secretary + DGS the possibility of a Web Forum (04.37)
All	To discuss / decide theme for 2005 Annual Assembly at next meeting (04.39)

Meeting with Phil Norrey

Date of Meeting 16/07/04

Representative

Ivan Godfrey

Issues to discuss at Executive

Invite Phil to meeting in January + consider inviting other governors

Nominate DAG representative for LEA self-evaluation meetings

Issues for Information

- Phil will welcome feedback from governors individually and collectively to the draft document 'Achieving Excellence - A Vision for Learning in Devon' circulated to all schools
- The government's 5-Year Education Strategy provides an interesting counter view / challenge to emerging elements of the Devon strategy. Phil would welcome the opportunity to explore these issues with Executive members (+ a wider group of governors?) at our planned January meeting.
- He welcomed the Crediton governor group's suggestions on how such area groups might be able to work together in the future within ' Local Learning Communities '. The LEA has also been pump-priming similar activity in South Devon (Kingsbridge area) and North Devon (Bideford area). Collaborative work underpins much of the Vision for Learning strategy. He would welcome an emphasis on this next term.
- The LEA management team has begun a termly series of self-evaluation meetings aimed at identifying progress (or lack of!) in meeting its goals. Representatives from DAPH, DASH and SHAD are being invited and DAG is also asked to nominate someone.
- Phil expressed his continued appreciation of DAG's work across the county and gave an assurance that LEA financial support for DAG would be maintained