

Meeting With Dudley Property Consultancy (DPC)

Following on from the Survey conducted earlier in the year, a meeting took place in September between Brian Gordon, Head of DPC and Assistant Director, Law and Property accompanied by Andrew James, Head of DPC's Business and Support Unit and the Chair and Vice-Chair of DAGB.

The DPC team had already received a full copy of the Survey findings and the purpose of the meeting was to identify a way forward, leading to an improvement of the service which would benefit schools and which would improve the effectiveness of DPC.

The meeting was conducted in a very positive manner and with much goodwill. It was self-evident that DPC genuinely wanted to build on the positives which were contained within the results of the survey and to address the negatives so as to improve the perception that many governors had of them. For their part the DAGB team made it quite clear that they were not interested in focussing on the critical comments made within the survey other than for the purpose of seeking to make improvements.

Points which emerged from the discussion included:-

- The need to review, comprehensively, the financial administration of the DPC provision, so that schools were made fully aware of the total costs involved in every project undertaken and of the effects of any subsequent modifications to the specifications. They needed to know at what point payments became due so that there was a clear audit trail.
- The issues concerning increasingly complex regulatory practice – which were sufficiently involved sometimes as to challenge the wit of the professionals – and to convert this into layman's terms.
- The need for better communications channels – the audit trail referred to earlier was clearly intended to improve financial communications. Schools needed to be made better aware of what was due to happen, where and when and for milestones to be created which ensured a more transparent project management function.
- The importance of supporting the local economy – using locally sourced materials and expertise wherever possible.
- The improvement of the dialogue between education and finance – and the provision of training to support this.
- A general lack of awareness of the effects that modifications to a project specification can have upon the costs and the timing of that project – the general principle being that the later any changes are introduced the greater their impact upon the “measureables” of the project, notably upon the schedule for completion and upon the agreed budget.
- Finding a way to *fully* identify exactly what is required in any project, so that everyone involved knows precisely what is happening and what is scheduled to happen next for the duration of the project.

Having set the “wheels” in motion, further meetings are proposed but extending the range of participation to include Children's Services and Finance.

Jim Conway
Vice-Chair