

Norfolk Governance Network

Chair's Report for the year 2020-21

About NGN

Norfolk Governance Network (NGN) is the representative organisation for state school governors and trustees from local authority-maintained schools, academies and free schools in Norfolk. NGN receives funding from Norfolk County Council and is a corporate member of the National Governors Association (NGA).

NGN is run by governors for governors and aims to:

- Provide information to help governors in their role
- Represent the views of governors to the local authority (LA), Department for Education (DfE) and other national and local bodies when required.
- Create networking opportunities for governors to share knowledge and ideas.
- Hold conferences and events involving local and national speakers.
- Work with the officers of the LA, Regional Schools Commissioner and Norfolk Governor Services as representatives of school and academy governing boards.
- Assist schools in finding independent governors to sit on panels or committees

News and events in 2020-21

When we came together at our first virtual conference in October last year, we were looking back at a year of two halves-before the pandemic and since. Since then, Covid-19 has continued to have a huge impact on school life and on our children and young people. As a country the approach is now to learn to live with Covid. The day-to-day implications of that as well as the cumulative impact of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of our children and young people and on our school teams are considerable.

Building on the success of last year's conference as a virtual event, NGN held a virtual governor's briefing and update event in February 2021. This was a great success with more than 300 governors and trustees attending from across Norfolk. Whilst it is always good to meet in person, virtual meetings and events have helped to bring us all together across the wide geography of Norfolk, which has informed our decision to hold our conference virtually again this year.

A lively virtual "conversation" on SEND was held in September 2021 with governors sharing experiences and views about SEND and hearing about the updated SEND strategy for Norfolk. NGN has had a core role throughout the strategy setting and in the governance of the agreed actions and vision.

The NGN website is an important platform for NGN to communicate with Norfolk governors and trustees. Recently we have worked with colleagues in SEND, Safeguarding and Clerking to develop clear signposting on Safeguarding and on SEND for governors which has been well received. In the year ahead we plan to include more content on Compliance, Finance, Leadership, Disadvantage, and Inclusion.

During the height of the pandemic schools faced many challenges- coming to grips with remote learning, maintaining contact with families and carers, addressing safeguarding concerns and supporting staff and their wellbeing. As we learn to live with the pandemic, the challenges of

maintaining staffing levels, managing the impact of the pandemic on children's and young people's wellbeing and behaviour, as well as the impact of more than a year of "firefighting" on strategic planning are issues that are occupying us all. On top of that there are emerging concerns nationally and locally about Ofsted inspections.

These challenges make it ever more important that as governors and trustees we stay connected with what is happening in Norfolk and nationally so that we can provide the best support and be supported ourselves. How we begin to "build back" and balance the need to continue to address the impact of continuing infection rates with a refreshed focus on strategic planning are challenges that we are all grappling with.

Throughout the year, NGN has continued to work closely with the Norfolk Headteacher Associations, Educate Norfolk and NASSH (Norfolk Association of Special School Heads) to provide responses to national and local issues. The impact of pandemic and its impact on our schools continues to absorb significant amounts of time. Alongside that, we are carving out space to address medium- and longer-term issues.

NGN members contribute actively in a range of areas. Members of the Network represent governors on the Schools Forum and several other boards and consultative groups in conjunction with Norfolk County Council, including the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC).

Norfolk Learning Board

The Norfolk Learning Board is a recently established partnership group which draws together leaders from across the education system in Norfolk, including NGN. Its aim is to provide leadership across Norfolk for the systemic challenges and issues related to learning, especially as a result of the pandemic. The Board, acting as a strategic alliance will look to:

- Understand the greatest challenges and issues
- Work together to map provision and opportunity
- Join forces to promote campaigns and raise issues that need wider solutions
- Focus on outcomes for children and young people

Norfolk Governance Strategy Group

Many of you will know Helen Wardale, who leads on Governance issues at Norfolk County Council, and who has been a passionate champion of governance for many years. Earlier this year, Helen convened a group to work collaboratively on governance issues for Norfolk. The Group includes representation from Educator Solutions, V-Net, and DNEAT as well as NGN. The aim is to focus on the joint challenges facing us collectively around governance; to work collectively on those challenges; to jointly work to raise the profile of governance in Norfolk; and to consider developing a "governance charter" to support strong levels of effective governance consistently in schools across Norfolk. One of the first issues the group will be looking at is governor recruitment.

Norfolk and Suffolk Trustee Network

There are 35 multi-Academy Trusts in Norfolk and a similar number in Suffolk. With the support of the Regional School Commissioner's office, CEON (the Chief Executive Officer group for Academy Trust CEOs in Norfolk and Suffolk) have launched the Norfolk and Suffolk Trustees Network. The aim for the Trustees Network is to provide information, guidance, and optional training for Trustees, as

well as being a place where any questions or concerns can be shared, and hopefully answered. There have been two events so far this year and an invitation to NGN's annual conference this year has been extended to Suffolk governors and trustees.

There is no charge or joining process for the network; any Trustee with responsibility for at least one school which is in either Norfolk or Suffolk is very welcome to attend. Others involved in MAT governance will also be welcome. There will be an update from the RSC office at each session. Details of future Norfolk and Suffolk Trustee Network events will be published on the NGN website.

Joint Chairs Meeting

The Joint Chairs meeting is an important opportunity for the Chairs of NASHH, Educate Norfolk, Schools Forum and NGN to meet with key colleagues from Norfolk County Council, including the Assistant Director, Education at the County Council, Chris Snudden, who chairs the meeting. Pre-pandemic we met regularly, every 6 weeks, to share information and discuss new developments and priorities. That has changed since the pandemic, with many more and frequent meetings. Since the start of the autumn term meetings have been weekly but we are now also making time for monthly, more strategic discussions.

The Director of Children's Services, Sara Tough, and her leadership team meets regularly with the joint Chairs Group and those meetings are a great opportunity to engage directly with senior officers in Children's Services and share views and information affecting schools in Norfolk. This is one of several practical demonstrations of Sara's commitment to engaging with schools and is very encouraging.

NGN County Committee

The County Committee is the engine room of NGN. It consists of representatives from schools and academies across Norfolk, some of whom are elected and some appointed. The Committee appoints the Chair, Vice Chairs and Treasurer. It has met four times this year (all virtually) and we have been delighted to welcome Nania Poulson Operations Director at V-Net and Paul Dunning, Director of Education at Diocese of Norwich and Jill Wakefield, Head of Governance at DONESC at different meetings as invited guests.

County Committee agendas include review and discussion of key issues and challenges facing governors and trustees. The committee discussions inform the input and views that members contribute to other forums and boards.

NGN Communications Sub-Committee

The Communications Sub-Committee is responsible for organising NGN events, conferences and communications. Governor engagement is a continuing challenge, particularly with the demands on governor time in these big voluntary roles, as well as the impact of the pandemic. It has met four times this year.

NGN/Norfolk Governance Service Liaison Sub-Committee

NGN members meets regularly with the Norfolk Governance Service. The group is well established as the channel to communicate key operational and strategic issues affecting governors. The open and supportive exchanges of information and views make these meetings very effective.

Thanks and acknowledgements

As Chair of NGN, I would like to thank all the members of the County Committee and our dedicated Treasurer Susanne Mason, who have given their time freely to manage the business of NGN, to support other governors and to make a difference to children and young people in our schools. I would also like to thank Norfolk County Council for the financial support that is given to NGN and the officers and councillors who make sure that governors' voices are heard. Throughout the year everyone has sustained their commitment while meeting virtually and their energy for supporting our schools continues unabated.

As living with Covid-19 continues to present unprecedented challenges for us all, across all aspects of our lives, a very big "thank you" to all school governors and trustees for your continuing support of our education system in Norfolk, throughout the last year when our education establishments and staff have been, and continue to be, under immense pressure.

Please get involved

NGN is run by governors for governors and the County Committee feels strongly that school governors and trustees in Norfolk benefit from having a representative group. Our collective voice is always stronger than our individual voice and NGN contributes a respected and influential voice to education decision making in our County.

NGN has a "seat at the table" in Norfolk and rightly so given the key role of governors and trustees in leading Norfolk's schools. The continuing challenge is to increase our engagement of our members across Norfolk to ensure their views are well represented.

At the AGM we will be agreeing the re-election of some members of the County Committee. **We also need new members to join us to help run the business of NGN! If you are interested, please speak to me or any of the other County Committee members during the conference or contact our Clerk, Justine Petersen at office@ngn.org.uk**

Look out for dates for future Governor virtual briefing events and conversations which will be published on the NGN website. **Please do all you can to attend and to encourage others to do so!**

**Anne Gibson
Chair of NGN
October 2021**