

# Sustainable Education Services Devon County Council

## Searching for sustainability

In a time of funding and political uncertainty, Devon County Council (DCC), like many other local authorities across England, was faced with delivering existing services within a considerably reduced budget. What set them apart from others is that they embraced this challenge as an opportunity to transform the way things were done and to ensure that they were providing the very best for children, young people and the local community.

In 2010, Devon County Council's cabinet approved a forward thinking proposal to create a Joint Venture Partnership with a private sector company. This would need to deliver education services at greater efficiency, sustainability and at less risk to the local authority. At the same time it should maintain the already high quality of provision, be recognised as a good employer and support events and initiatives that impacted on the well-being and economic activity of the local community.

Following a competitive tender process, Devon County Council selected Babcock's education business as its preferred partner. Babcock was able to demonstrate previous successes in developing and managing Joint Ventures with local authorities, having already partnered with Surrey County Council and Waltham Forest Council. The Surrey partnership in particular has become the most successful partnership of its kind since its conception in 2004, delivering significant cost savings and working with Surrey County Council to improve outcomes and attainment every year.

As the benefits to children, schools, local government and the wider community were clearly recognisable, Devon County Council awarded Babcock Education the £125million, 7-year contract to combine the best of both public and private sector organisations.

“ The Babcock Transition Team committed a huge amount of time and energy to supporting the transfer to our Joint Venture. They engaged fully with staff and did all they could to ensure it was business as usual during the transition. ”

Ella Shorthand, formerly HR Manager  
transferred from DCC to Babcock LDP

## Benefits of the Joint Venture

Outcomes are being sustained and improved:

- In 2016 72% of Devon pupils achieved a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage
- At KS4 there has been strong attainment locally with 64.6% of pupils achieving A\*-C GCSE in both English and maths, nationally headline attainment improved to 62.8% in this measure.
- 90% of learners attend a good or outstanding school (July 2016)

Devon citizens to benefit from:

- £50,000 annual contribution to the Devon Education Fund
- 100 work placements for pupils and 30 apprenticeships provided each year through Babcock Divisions in the locality
- Sponsorship of a Youth Council project each year
- Competitions for young people to attend

## A seamless transition

With a partner in place, the importance of a flawless transfer of staff and services came to the fore; problems here could ultimately impact on the performance and life chances of children and young people. Devon County Council provided school improvement services to nearly 400 schools and outperformed statistical neighbour authorities in attainment and results so it was imperative that delivery and standards were unaffected by the complexities of transition. As Babcock Education had successfully managed the transfer of staff, services and resources from local authority to Joint Venture twice previously, DCC's stakeholders were reassured that the knowledge, expertise and processes were in place for another seamless transition.

“ I would definitely recommend Babcock LDP to anyone. ”

Headteacher from a Devon school

## Engaging stakeholders with the vision for the future

The team overseeing the creation of Babcock LDP (as the Joint Venture was to be known) took an 'appreciative enquiry' approach to build on the successes and good practice that already existed. This helped to foster positive relationships and communication during the transition process and ensured all operational issues were addressed. The establishment of a Joint Partnership Board gave senior management from Devon County Council oversight of the process, allowing them to ensure that service delivery and outcomes were not adversely affected. The outcomes of these practices included:

- **Building and maintaining stakeholder confidence:** Significant cultural changes can cause anxiety and concern in those affected by, but not directly involved in the decision making process. Managers in both organisations worked hard to ensure that staff, schools, the wider community and local media all understood the process, outcomes and benefits of the Joint Venture. The open communication allowed early identification of specific needs and challenges, ensuring they were effectively managed throughout and that the vision was achieved.
- **Seamless 'Day 1' transition of services:** The management team was delighted there was no disruption of support

or provision to schools and children. Customers continue to work with the consultants and colleagues that know them so well whilst business improvements help deliver services to them at even more value for money.

- Ensuring the practicalities and processes were implemented successfully:

The TUPE transfer was completed efficiently with no adverse consequences for pensions, all staff were paid on time in the Joint Venture's first payroll and rigorous forward planning ensured there was no disruption to IT services – right down to provision of lesser known but business critical software.

Babcock LDP came into effect on 1st April 2012 and results are confirming that DCC's belief in a sustainable partnership between public and private sectors has paid off.

## The vision for the future

Devon County Council is committed to moving further from service deliverer to service commissioner over the next few years. Babcock LDP will continue to support this vision by working in close partnership with DCC executives, developing and agreeing strategies that provide substantial cost savings whilst improving outcomes and meeting performance targets. It truly is a long term, sustainable partnership that will improve outcomes for all.



“ Babcock has worked with us as real partners and we are delighted with the successful transfer. ”

Sue Clarke, formerly Head of Education and Learning,  
Devon County Council

## Key Facts About Devon

- 364 schools, 93,900 pupils and 710 children in care
- 2 nursery schools, 306 primary, 39 secondary, 3 all through, 10 special, 4 PRUs
- 106 academies
- 10 teaching schools (7 primary and 3 secondary)
- 16 National Leaders in Education and 25 Local Leaders in Education

Babcock Education, the 2013 Education Partnership of the Year\*, delivers a comprehensive range of expert consultancy, training and management services to over 1,500 education establishments, including schools, academies, early years settings and colleges. Babcock Education's core business is the transformation of local authority education services into a sustainable commercial model that retains public service values and service delivery excellence.



\* Winner of Education Investor's 'Education Partnership of the Year' Award 2013

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