

Devon Association of Governors
DAG Conference 2008 “Tomorrows’ Schools”
Exeter – 29 March 2008

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS TO/FROM GUEST SPEAKERS

Anne Whiteley, Director of Devon Children & Young People’s Services

Phil Revell, Chief Executive of the National Governors Association

Q: Oriana Hosford asked Anne Whiteley (AW) to marry up the idea of STRATCOM and smaller Governing Bodies. There needs to be more commissioning to deliver services.

AW: Basically trying to bring School Improvement, services - DES, Educational Welfare, Educational Psychology ie services that support individual children. Idea being that by being integrated it will be easier for schools to access – streamlining should be make it more efficient to access these services.

Phil Revell (PR) : Smaller Governing Bodies ignores Governors issues with ECM. Where is governance in this?

Q: Bob Alford, Chair, First Federation: Small GBs are affected. Every time we discuss things, delays a year of education. Schools need leadership, not management. Do we have a plan for the number of Headteacher’s retiring in the next few years to match the challenge?

Anne Whiteley: This is a key issue and Devon is actively engaged in working on this. No answers at the moment though. They are working towards not just this problem in isolation, but working towards a plan. The essence is what we want working environments to be. (Chair and EO of DAG sit on the planning board)

Debbie Clapshaw, Devon Governor Services: DGS is writing a leadership strategy with NCSL and other organisations. There IS a plan that is being worked towards.

Q: Jane Williams, Torbay: Paid Governors? Where is the funding coming from when school budgets are already so tight?

PR: Erosion of volume. Who pays? In N Kent there is a paid Chair already – this is not illegal, but difficult. It is unlikely the DCSF will recognise payment of Chairs, but a precedent such as Kent would make it easier to do.

Q: Mitzi Belsher, Wolborough: Federations/Collaborations. There is concern that small school lose their identity when they embark on federation.

AW: Devon has a lot of small schools, however, moving the agenda forward there is a need to ensure that children have enrichment in the future. It is still possible to retain identity within Federation. Schools will still have their local ethos.

Paul Jones, First Federation: Chudleigh Knighton had a great fear of losing their own identity. For testimony now though, talk to Headteachers who will confirm that they have categorically retained their own identity. Talk to parents as well as Headteachers.

Q: Another CofGs asked that with all this talk of change in strategies and policies how does Anne Whiteley plan to work with GBs to effect change for small GBs?

AW: Obviously through, for example Kingsbridge, working with other GBs re such things as training. Not possible to do everything at once – need to do things in bite sized chunks. ProSTRATCOM – Governor Services – by locating DGS within broader services increases capacity. Can support and nurture to meet challenges.

DC: Impossible to say. Need to do more with Local Learning Communities (eg Holsworthy, Kingsbridge working well). Need to provide more resources.

Q: Suzanne Mieczkowska, St Joseph's, Newton Abbot: GB have management role not leadership role. National Curriculum – where would PR ultimately see Governors providing for our schools?

PR: Sceptic about they way the word 'leadership' is used – it should not be the be all and end all. GB role is key for strategic leadership and not management. There is a tendency in our schools to help out in management and this is a mistake. GBs need to look beyond school if the school is unable to provide adequate management.

Q: Vice Chair, Coombeshead College, Newton Abbot: Re the debate about talking with children. How do we rebuild student input? How do we bring students into the heart of the agenda especially when there is talk of reducing the size of GBs?

PR: National School Student Association – having a representative is an excellent idea. Citizenship is about participation and the student voice needs to be heard. NGA will be looking into having a student voice in individual schools.

Cllr John Smith: Cllr Smith stood up to give an update on the Unitary Bid and the Boundary Commission Report.

- Exeter's Unitary Bid was not successful
- The Government has asked the Boundary Commission to look at it and find a solution for Devon.
- John Smith does not want to see Devon cut up.
- GBs should consider what the consequences would be for Devon if the bid were successful. His feeling is that for pupil identity there should be a single Devon – children need a sense of identity.
- He thanked GBs for their input on the previous Unitary application