

CYPE(5)-31-17 – Paper to note 7 - Letter to the Welsh Government – funding for Governors Wales

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Dear Ms Kirsty Williams

Funding for Governor Wales

I have been a governor for nearly 30 years in both primary and secondary schools and have held positions of Chair and Vice Chair of the full governing body and Chair of various committees. I was Clerk to the governors for eight years when a governor could be both posts. In short, I am a ‘professional’ governor, taking my position very seriously, whilst being committed to doing the best job I can as a knowledgeable governor.

Since 1995, I have appreciated the tremendous support given by staff at Governors Wales and also, since 1989, my Local Governor Support officer. Their advice has been invaluable both to myself and to fellow governors, enabling us to react appropriately to changes in legislation and inspection requirements. This strategic overview offered by a national organisation such as Governors Wales ensures all school governors and Headteachers receive the same up-to-date information, which enables them to carry out their duties in a uniform and consistent manner.

I have copied this from the Governor Wales newsletter item I received on 28th October 2017

‘Whilst this news is extremely disappointing and whatever happens to the future of Governors Wales and its services, we must endeavour to ensure that the support needs of school governors across Wales remains at the forefront of any future developments. Our school governors are often referred to the unsung heroes of the education system, if they are to play their part in the Wales’ far reaching education reform agenda they will need to receive high quality support to meet the ever increasing challenges and opportunities that they will undoubtedly face.

Although the overall Welsh Government governor support budget has been cut, governors could argue that they are very much at the forefront of school improvement. As such could it be an option to explore whether Governors Wales could be eligible to receive funding from the School Improvement budget heading.’

I endorse everything stated above and add that I am extremely disappointed about the news of the cuts to Governor Wales support and the probable knock-on effect to local Council Governor Support officers. This is a retrograde step and gives the impression that Welsh Government Ministers have little respect for the vast amount of voluntary work carried out by members of governing bodies throughout Wales and seems totally and utterly counterproductive.

I quote from your 'Education in Wales Our National Mission Action Plan 2017-2021'

'To deliver our reforms across the entire system, we will need a bold commitment to effective collaboration along with integration of services where appropriate. This will include Welsh Government, the teaching profession and the wider education workforce, our key partners in local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional services, Estyn, the Education Workforce Council (EWC), Qualifications Wales, higher education institutions and others. Successful implementation will require effective and honest engagement between all facets of the education system. We are committed to providing the conditions to enable this to happen. In delivery we will also seek to work with the wider public service and third sector where required.'

'Involvement: We have involved and will continue to involve partners with an interest in our reform agenda. We also recognise the need for continued support from effective practitioners and other expert input'

What a pity there is no mention of Governors in either of these statements. How could any school function without governors? The government is putting more responsibility onto governing bodies, making more statutory requirements part of their duties and therefore up to date and accurate advice is essential to them carrying out their duties effectively and in compliance with all government regulations and legislation.

I quote from 'A guide to the law to help you be an effective governor'

'All school governors should know and understand their roles and legal responsibilities and how these fit in with the responsibilities of the head teacher, the local authority and the Welsh Government. They should also know their responsibilities regarding other parties such as diocesan authorities and foundations, where applicable.

Although this is a comprehensive guide, you will need to add to your knowledge through governor training events organised by your LA or Governors Wales. Other guidance and publications are available from your local authority and Governors Wales. Annex 2 to the Guide contains contact details of these organisations. Please note that although this Guide is detailed, it does not replace the law which takes precedence.'

The above statement is taken from the Welsh Government web site and clearly states that governors will need to add to their knowledge through training events put on by the Local Authority or Governor Wales. There is a mandatory requirement for LAs to provide appropriate governor training, free of charge and I appreciate it is up to LAs to decide how to do that using the delegated budget Welsh Government allocate them. I am aware that training across Wales is variable and often does not deliver all the prescribed mandatory content. Governor Wales deliver training for Local Authority colleagues and I am sure this is necessary in some areas.

I am fortunate to be in a Local Authority with an excellent Governor Support Officer who has been a wonderful support for all the years I have been a governor. I am also aware that due to reduced budgets, my LA has relied heavily on Governor Wales to

help fulfil their statutory duties with regards to governor support. **I ask who will train and support the LA officers after April 2018?**

'The Education (Wales) Measure 2011 includes provisions to allow Welsh Ministers to make regulations to make governor training mandatory on specific issues. The Government of Maintained Schools (Training Requirements for Governors) (Wales) Regulations 2013 were made for this purpose and came into force in September 2013.'

This statement is in 'Guide to the Law' Spring 2016. Ministers took the decision to make it law that governors are trained and I agree with this, as the work undertaken and the responsibility of being a governor, require commitment and training. **Again I ask who will undertake this training?**

I can foresee the possibility of private companies offering these services at great expense. The Education budget does not include provision for buying this type of service. **Does that mean that a dedicated volunteer, like me, will have to pay for my own training?**

Only Governor Wales has the national overview of what is happening across the country and, through its network of Associations and its inclusive Management Board, acts as a conduit to ensure national priorities are understood by governors and their response is reflected back to government colleagues, locally and nationally.

How can you uphold a law of statutory training whilst taking away the budget for the company that supports the Local Authority Officers delivering training?

In speaking with a representative from Governor Wales I understand that there is support from Government for a South East Wales School Improvement Consortium (EAS). This is set up as a private organisation for school improvement, including governance, in five Authorities that were 'failing'. They are funded with public money through the five Authorities and they appear to have more resource than in other regions when it comes to supporting governors. I am concerned that a private company will be making money from this and that this model will be hard to replicate in other areas of Wales due to geographical and cultural issues, and possibly lack of skills with some officers. (See my comment above re private companies)

The volume and categories of calls to the Helpline at Governor Wales demonstrates the increasing pressure that governors feel. Many Local Authority Officers are supporting governors but would not have the capacity to field all of the enquires and Governor Wales often takes the 'load' of difficult situations that governors find themselves in. We must not forget governors are volunteers who do their best to deal with the very difficult issues that parents may have, for example accusations against staff, and the issues that staff may face, for example staff redundancy.

Who will take the load of support needed if Governor Wales ceases to exist?

I took part in the recent consultation about the reform of Governance for schools and the changes to the make-up of governing bodies which was to be implemented in

September 2017. **What has happened to the proposed changes to governing body structure and how will the lack of funding impact on this?**

Governor Wales staff have spent a lot of time developing the National Template for Self-Evaluation of school governing bodies and I am proud to say that through one of the schools in which I am a governor we gained both the Bronze and Silver Awards during the pilot of this scheme. Estyn constantly tell us how important self-evaluation is and for governing bodies to test their effectiveness.

Who will maintain and update the self-evaluation document from a national perspective?

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest opportunity.

Yours Sincerely

Mrs Merrill Tanton

Cc

Michelle Brown
Nathan Gill
Mark Isherwood
Llyr Gruffydd

Children young People and Education Committee

Delyn Constituency MP
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