

CORNISH CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

PRESS RELEASE

Council Leader Whalley hints at new partnership and new role for Convention.

“There is something inevitable about the journey to a Cornish Assembly!”

Cornwall county Council Leader, David Whalley, spoke at the annual conference of the Cornish Constitutional Convention, held in Truro on Saturday 1st December.

In a lengthy and wide-ranging speech Mr Whalley spelled out the role played by the Convention in articulating Cornwall’s ambitions for the future. He also said that there is an opportunity to forge new partnerships in Cornwall to respond to signals from the government that it would be interested in radical, positive change.

David Whalley said:

“We are at the beginning of a process, and we have a strategy to achieve our long term ambition to ensure that decisions about Cornwall, which affect Cornwall and shape Cornwall, are made in Cornwall. The Government is beginning to see the light. It is aware that it is too centralised and that change is essential. The government sees Cornwall as a place which can be a test-bed for new ideas and new thinking. We need to persuade the Government that we are not only ambitious but also capable – we need to prove we can do the job.

Just as we are looking for devolution from the Government, so we are preparing to devolve powers and functions to the local level. Devolution is a principle and we are committed to achieving it.

In the medium term, we are looking to completely realign the public sector in Cornwall, and to roll back boundaries between different institutions. The unitary council is one step along the way. We have a long-term strategy. There is something inevitable about the journey to a Cornish Assembly. We see things happening around us – the dissolution of the regional assembly, changes in the way the RDA engages with sub-regions. It is important to note that Cornwall is the only ‘county’ area to be designated a ‘sub-region’. We are moving forward in creating a Cornish Development Agency. We are confident that strategic planning powers will come back to us after the regional assembly goes.

These are signals which we need to convert.

In the longer term we need to respond to the signal from Government that we should not wait to be told what to do – we should prepare to present new proposals. The Convention

has been very influential in shaping thinking in Cornwall, and in shaping the perceptions of ministers and senior civil servants. How will the Convention respond to the new situation which it has contributed to creating? Will it change, and become even more involved in shaping Cornwall's future?"

Also present was **Blair Thomson, Chair of the Cornwall Strategic Partnership**. He agreed that, as work gets under way on forming the unitary authority, more and more people within the process are asking: 'Why don't we go the whole hog, and form a single organisation to run all Cornwall's public services'.

David Whalley said that he thought that by 2009 public services would be ready to move towards a more cohesive approach, and that by 2013 we would be ready to move forward in negotiating a new agreement with Minister about the evolution of future governance in Cornwall.

He concluded, in answer to a question by veteran county councillor Alistair Quinnell, by saying:

"Without the Cornish Constitutional convention, the future ambition for evolving the governance of Cornwall would not have been articulated. It is a shared ambition."

Re-elected **Convention chairman, Bert Biscoe**, said:

"It's been good to hear what David Whalley thinks, and to hear that we have influenced his thinking. I hope that we may be able to discuss changes in the way the Convention might contribute to the evolution of future policy as we build the vital consensus which we need to achieve the best possible governance for tomorrow's Cornwall."

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