

**Pwyllgor Diwylliant, Cyfathrebu, y Gymraeg,
Chwaraeon, a Chysylltiadau Rhyngwladol**

**Culture, Communications, Welsh Language,
Sport, and International Relations Committee**

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Mark Isherwood MS
Chair
Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee

04 March 2025

Will Hayward newsletter

Dear Mark,

At the Committee's meeting on 19 February 2025, we discussed a newsletter published by journalist Will Hayward, detailing a leaked internal report highlighting concerns about the management and governance of the Welsh Government's Culture Division. Members agreed to write to the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership to ask about the actions taken to address the issues identified in the report.

Given the nature of the report, we believe it may also be of interest to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee. We hope your Committee will consider this issue in your future work. I am sharing the Committee's letter to the Minister and the newsletter detailing extracts from the leaked report.

Yours sincerely



Delyth Jewell MS
Committee Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Jack Sargeant MS
Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Welsh Government

4 March 2025

Dear Jack,

At our meeting on 19 February 2025, the Committee considered the Culture Division Review, excerpts of which have recently been published by the journalist, Will Hayward.

The Committee would like to request:

- A copy of the Culture Division Review produced by Resolution at Work Ltd.
- Details of actions that the Welsh Government has taken in response to the issues raised in this review.
- The Minister's assessment of the extent to which the department today resembles the description in the review.
- Whether any issues identified in the review are still outstanding (and, if so, if you could please provide a timescale for addressing them.)

The Committee has raised a number of concerns about the delivery of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government commitments (for example the National Contemporary Art Gallery, the Culture Strategy and the devolution of broadcasting) in reports and correspondence. Against this backdrop, the depiction of the Division in excerpts from the leaked report – that there is “no sense of longer-term strategic planning” and “described as in chaos and survival mode” – is one we find alarming. We are also worried about the effect which such an environment would have on staff.

I look forward to receiving your response by 1 April 2025.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Delyth Jewell'.

Delyth Jewell MS
Committee Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

constituents.

In a statement the councillors said:

“Who in the Welsh Government has authorised this fresh appeal? Which government minister approved it at a time when they should have a laser-like focus on sorting out the NHS, reducing child poverty and pensioners left out in the cold?”

“Our case is simple - we want a plan that meets the needs of Wrexham. We don't agree with the plan inspectors want to impose on us and we have the right to reject it. That was the Court of Appeal's clear ruling.

“The Welsh Government has sided with the developers not local democracy at every step of the way. Why?”

I went to the Welsh Gov and asked them why they were continuing with this legal challenge and how much public money they had spent on it. They replied:

“Ministers have applied to the Supreme Court for permission to appeal the Court of Appeal's judgment. As this is ongoing litigation, we cannot comment further.”

If councillors are forced to vote for something that they don't agree with, it very much begs the question of what the point of them is at all?

A damning leaked report

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL
WELSH GOVERNMENT CULTURE DIVISION REVIEW

Over the years I have had several “strictly confidential” government reports leaked to me. People leak for all sorts of reasons but I have always found the

most common one to be that of principle. A feeling that change is needed but simply isn't going to happen without an external kick up the arse.

As a rule, the person (or persons) leaking them usually overestimates the significance of what they are leaking. They will think it is really explosive when in fact it is more often than not fairly mundane management speak.

This report is not like that. It is, in my view, indicative of a chaotic situation inside a Welsh Government department.

It is a review of the "culture division" within the Welsh Gov which has responsibilities for the arts, museums, libraries and archives. It oversees our nation's cultural heritage organisations. Given the state the Welsh cultural sector is in, you would hope that the culture division would be in a great position to support it - apparently you would be wrong.

According to the report there were "several areas of concern after the 2020/21 staff survey". It then adds that "the 2021/22 survey reinforced these concerns". Therefore the company Resolution at Work Ltd were brought in to look at the issues in the division. I understand this was delivered in early 2024.

So what did the report find?

The report was substantial and wide ranging so I have broken it down into sections.

Lack of direction/ organisation:

The parts in speech marks come directly from the report:

- *"There is no sense of longer term strategic planning."*
- *"The division is consistently described as in chaos and survival mode."*
- *"A perception that there is a real problem with recruitment/resourcing and a lack of joined up thinking on recruitment."*
- Frustration at a lack of succession planning. *"There is a sense that the organisation knows when people are going to retire yet it seems to come as a surprise when they leave and they are not replaced."*
- A lack of contingency planning. *"There is a sticking plaster approach that doesn't work".*

- *There is a widely held perception that within the current Welsh Government processes there is no real performance management taking place. This means that managers who may not wish to have difficult conversations can avoid them and therefore staff who are not performing 'get away' with it.*
- *"Problems are not resolved but are ignored and moved; due to the lack of job descriptions or moving goal posts."*
- *There were: "Multiple areas where streamlining processes, removal of duplication and capturing information and knowledge would be hugely beneficial".*

3.3.4 Performance Management issues

There was a widely held perception that within the current Welsh Government processes, there is no real Performance Management taking place. This means that managers who may not wish to have difficult conversations can avoid them and, as such, staff who are not performing 'get away' with it.

One of the biggest frustrations with covering Welsh politics (and living in Wales) is that while the Welsh Gov have had to absorb major cuts, the things well within their ability to deliver, like effective governance and management, seem to be lacking.

The cuts to Welsh culture have been brutal. These are things that make us who we are. The fact that there was such a seeming lack of direction within the department is really concerning.

Welsh Government ministers not knowing what is really happening

I found this quote particularly damning:

There is no sense of longer-term strategic planning. A widely held view is that Ministers' expectations are not being realistically managed and rather than supporting staff to push back a 'yes' approach is adopted with teams being given more, not less work.

The idea that minister's do not fully understand what is happening in the departments they run is also of deep concern. This reminded me of [Eluned Morgan telling me](#) that she had been "assured" that the Welsh NHS waiting

lists would come down 66% by the spring. How much of this is deliverable and how much is simply civil servants telling her what she wants to hear?

If Welsh Labour are not really across the limitations of the civil service, it explains why the Welsh Government so often talks a good game but falls down when it comes to delivery.

Staff morale

I have read this report from cover to cover and the overwhelming emotion I felt was sympathy for the staff in this division. Yes, everyone moans about their job and I don't think you will find a person in any role who couldn't do with more resources, but the findings were bleak:

- *"There is a critical and unsustainable imbalance between demanding workloads, current resource levels and individual and team capacity."*
- *"The overwhelming view expressed was that both training and development are not priorities for the Welsh Government."*
- *"A long hours culture not helped by back-to-back meetings and excessive screen time."*
- *"An overwhelming sense of fragility across all teams."*
- *Staff "expressed feelings of burnout, stress, emotional shutdown and self-preservation".*
- *"At the time of the review morale was very low."*
- *"There is a real risk of Senior Management losing credibility, trust and respect across the division."*
- *"Staff are sceptical of any change occurring."*

When I went to the Welsh Government they said that "they do not comment on leaks".

It is important to bear in mind that the senior civil service leadership within the division has since changed (we have had three First Ministers since then). Things may have improved in the last 12 months but given that the report itself indicates that issues have been there for the last three years at least, you get a real sense that these issues are entrenched.

Welsh Labour can rail against Tory cuts and Brexit (and without doubt they have made a hard job much harder), but what Wales needs is leaders, not

buck passers. Energy, not lethargy. Ideas, not stagnation.

That's all for this week.

Thanks for reading and if you value this newsletter please share it and encourage other people to sign up. That is how I can afford to keep doing this.

Take care

Will

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