

The Assembly Commission

Meeting Venue: **Conference Room 4B – Ty Hywel**

Meeting date: **Thursday, 16 June 2011**

Meeting time: **13: – 15:00**

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



Minutes: AC(4)2011(1)

Committee Members:

Rosemary Butler (Chair)
Peter Black
Angela Burns
Sandy Mewies
Rhodri Glyn Thomas

Officials present:

Claire Clancy, Chief Executive & Clerk of the Assembly (Official)
Adrian Crompton, Director of Assembly Business (Official)
Dianne Bevan, Chief Operating Officer (Official)
Keith Bush, Director of Legal Services (Official)
Craig Stephenson, Principal Private Secretary to the Presiding Officer (Official)
Helen Finlayson, Secretariat (Official)
Ian Summers (Official)

Others in attendance:

Mair Barnes, Independent Adviser
David Melding, Deputy Presiding Officer

1. Introduction

1(i) Introduction and apologies

No apologies were received. The Presiding Officer welcomed the Commission to its first formal meeting of the Fourth Assembly.

1(ii) Declarations of interest

Angela Burns AM declared an interest in relation to the discussion of arrangements of rental accommodation for Members with children.

1(iii) Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of meeting – 14 March 2011

The minutes were formally agreed.

Matters arising from the meeting on 14 March 2011

There were no matters arising.

2. Assembly Commission Governance and Procedure

Ian Summers introduced paper two. He noted that in 2007, the Commission of the Third Assembly agreed principles of governance, ways of working and instruments of delegation to the Chief Executive. He explained that the principles had been updated to reflect current operational experience from the Third Assembly and best practice set out in the Financial Reporting Council's Corporate Governance Code 2010. The updated principles sought to set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of the Assembly Commission, Management Board, Independent Advisers and the Accounting Officer.

The Commission discussed the legal status of Independent Advisers. It asked about the rationale for the ceiling on the delegation of capital expenditure to the Chief Executive and Clerk being set at £1 million, and noted that this covered all capital projects, but that any novel or contentious expenditure would be outside the delegation. The Commission noted that, as part of the budget setting process and in the course of normal business, Commissioners would have a role in overseeing service delivery and expenditure, particularly within their portfolio areas, and in holding management to account for the delivery of services and use of resources.

The Commission agreed that the principle of collective responsibility should be adhered to, and recognised that a key element in the governance principles was to ensure that all Assembly Members were able to engage with the work of the Commission.

The Commission agreed to undertake a formal evaluation of its effectiveness after twelve months, including a review of the governance principles and ways of working. This would be undertaken as part of the annual report and accounts process, and would take account of feedback from Assembly Members.

The Commission agreed that Commissioners would ensure that their Groups were updated on the work of the Commission, and that portfolio holders would be willing to attend Party Group meetings to provide updates or listen to Members' concerns if invited to do so. The Commission noted that staff would be happy to assist Commissioners in responding to any concerns raised by Members, and that feedback was welcomed as it assisted in the refinement and development of services. This included any representations relating to the work of the Remuneration Board, or the implications of its Determination.

The Commission approved the revised governance and supporting provisions and the revised rules for the conduct of Commission business, subject to a formal review after twelve months. The Commission also approved the amended delegation of Commission functions and arrangements for the exercise of the Clerk's functions.

Action: An annotated version of the 2007 principles of governance to be circulated to Commissioners, highlighting updates to key areas.

3. Assembly Commission Portfolios

The Presiding Officer outlined the proposed portfolio approach, in which each Commissioner would take a particular interest in an area of the Commission's work. The Commission noted that this would give each Commissioner the opportunity to build up their knowledge in particular areas and to work with officials to provide strategic direction on a more regular and thorough basis than Commission meetings alone would allow. Portfolio holders would hold regular meetings with lead officials and have periodic discussions with the Presiding Officer to report to her on progress.

The Commission discussed the composition of each portfolio, and agreed that portfolio responsibilities should be allocated as follows:

Portfolio	Commissioner
Presiding Officer and Commission Chair, with responsibility for Legal Services	Rosemary Butler AM
Budget, governance, including Audit Committee membership, and links with the Remuneration Board. Improvement of services to Members, employment support and professional development for Members and their staff.	Angela Burns AM
ICT, broadcasting and e-democracy, the Assembly estate, facilities and sustainability. The Commission as the employer of Assembly staff.	Peter Black AM
Education services, front of house, catering and security. The Commission's statutory equality functions and Freedom of Information.	Sandy Mewies AM
Citizen engagement and communications, national and international outreach. The Commission's Welsh language functions and policy.	Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM

In addition, the Commission agreed that the Deputy Presiding Officer should focus on areas which complement his other duties, including constitutional affairs, Assembly business, the Pierhead as a centre for Assembly development and debate, and links with the Wales Governance Centre.

The Commission agreed that an email should be sent to Members by the Presiding Officer to publicise Commissioners' portfolio responsibilities.

4. Communicating Effectively with Assembly Members

Claire Clancy introduced paper four, highlighting that successful communications between the Commission and Members needed to be two way, in order to build a better understanding among Members of the work of the Commission and the services it provides, but also to ensure that staff understand more clearly the roles of Members and the pressures they face, in order that services can be designed and focused more effectively.

The Commission noted the communication and engagement activities that were undertaken during the Third Assembly, and the improvements that were planned for the Fourth Assembly. The Chief Executive's monthly update would continue, but would be more forward looking in order to help ensure that Members were informed about issues that the Commission would be considering or upcoming consultations. The Commission noted that the new Head of Member Liaison and Professional Development would be providing support to Commissioners and Members in order to assist with communication and engagement, and that relevant officials would be happy to attend Group meetings to communicate and clarify decisions of the Commission. The Commission decided that a general Assembly Member reference group was not currently the right vehicle for consultation, but that, if needed, functional groups would be set up to consider particular issues or large projects. The Support Staff advisory group, consisting of Party Group managers would continue, as the Commission was of the view that this was a valuable line of communication which drew on Support Staff experience to help to test proposals.

The Commission agreed that the Chief Executive and Clerk should continue to meet with Opposition Party Leaders on a regular basis to discuss current and ongoing issues, and asked that she approach the Government Chief Whip to arrange equivalent meetings.

The Commission discussed the communication of its meeting papers and decisions, and agreed that Member briefing sheets should be made fuller and be distributed in a more accessible format. The Commission agreed that minutes of its meetings should be fuller than those produced in the Third Assembly and should reflect its principle of collective responsibility. Commissioners discussed the production of a brief outcome paper following each of its meetings.

The Commission discussed communications with Assembly staff, and agreed that officials should consider involvement of Commissioners in a future all staff meeting.

5. Assembly Commission Legacy Report

Claire Clancy introduced paper five, and invited the Commission to review the recommendations of the Commission of the Third Assembly, and consider which were priorities that should be reflected in its draft strategy 2011-16.

The Commission discussed public access to the Senedd, and how relationships between Members and the public in the Senedd could be developed, whilst maintaining security and privacy for Members to undertake their roles. It agreed that the location

of the shop and options for provision of wi-fi, accessible to Members and the public, in the Senedd should be considered.

The Commission noted the recommendations relating to the flow of information between the Welsh Government and the Research Service, and the interest that the Remuneration Board had taken in this issue, which it felt was a barrier to Members.

The Commission agreed that consideration should be given to the sustainability of the Assembly estate, and that this should be subject to annual review.

The Commission requested a review of the UNO project, and agreed that the lessons learned from the project should feed into the development of its strategy.

The Commission agreed that it would consider its draft strategy at its next meeting on 30 June, and that any further issues for inclusion should be communicated to officials in the interim.

6. Assembly Case Management System (Electoral Registers)

Peter Black AM introduced paper six, noting that the case management system, which had experienced a number of difficulties in development and implementation, was now up and running. He noted that the database on which the software was intended to run was the unedited electoral register. Under current legislation, Assembly Members are able to request copies of the register from Returning Officers which are then passed to Commission staff to upload the data into the case management system on Members' behalf, but Commission staff are not themselves able to obtain the data direct from electoral registration officers.

The Commission discussed the use of the case management system, and the issues of data protection and security which could arise from use of unrestricted versions of the electoral register, including the involvement of Commission staff in handling it, and the need which would arise for a request to be made to the UK Government for secondary legislation to include the Commission on the list of named bodies if the proposal were to be pursued. Concerns were expressed about the ownership of data, data protection, the potential use of the register for party political purposes, and further investment in software that had already cost more than had been expected. The Commission noted that Members were currently able to request the data, the upload of which onto the system would be facilitated by ICT staff, although the uploading of registers which covered all of Wales was dependent on the requesting of data by relevant Members.

The Commission requested that further information about the number of Members using the case management system, the resource and cost implications of Commission staff involvement in requesting and obtaining the data direct, and the costs of the case management system to date, be provided to a future meeting.