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Comisiynydd y Cynulliad
Assembly Commissioner

Simon Thomas AM
Chair of Finance Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
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5 October 2016

Dear Simon

Following our appearance at your Committee today, I am writing to provide you with further information to add to the responses we provided during the meeting. The information is set out in the attached annex.

We would like to thank the Committee for your scrutiny. The Commission's approach is always to try to operate with openness, transparency and clarity. So if there is anything else that we can provide you with to assist the Committee, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Yours sincerely



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cc Claire Clancy, Nia Morgan

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Assembly Commission: Additional information following 5 October 2016 appearance at Finance Committee

Meeting the needs of Committees of the Fifth Assembly

The Commission is ready to respond to additional resource requests from Committees. We would encourage committee chairs to discuss their requirements with the committee clerk in the first instance and any additional resource requirements e.g. additional expert advice will then be considered as a priority.

Investment in ICT and EFM in 2018-19

Underpinning the budget strategy, we have detailed, rolling plans which allow us to take a long term view of spending requirements. These include a 10 year plan for maintenance and refurbishment of the estate, 3 year plans for ICT investment and annual staff capacity and capability reviews.

The Commission has an annual budget and has no facility to carry over funds from one year to the next. However, having clear plans about work that we know will be required, allows us to prioritise and make considered, well-judged use of our annual budgets.

ICT Expenditure

Investment in ICT focusses enabling users to work in a more agile and flexible way which includes making more use of 'Cloud services'. Investment is also focussed on enabling service improvements and efficiencies through the application of technology as well as improving access to and usability of Assembly information.

EFM Expenditure

In addition to our 10 year plan, where funds allow, we will undertake works to make improvements to the estate. This includes sustainability improvements such as switching to energy efficient lighting and making further efficiency improvements through the building management system.

Siambr Refit

The Siambr computers were installed in early 2016 as part of a planned refresh of the Siambr environment, which had not been significantly changed since the Senedd was built in 2006. The individual Members PCs, screens keyboards and mice were replaced with modern, more ergonomic equipment, designed to be an appropriate fit for the Siambr environment. This has delivered much improved functionality, reliability and simplified support and development. The total cost of the hardware replacement was £196,000. The technology is essential to Plenary, for example giving all members access to meeting papers and providing efficient messaging, speakers' lists and voting arrangements.

ICT 2017–18 Budget Requirements

Finance Committee asked a number of specific questions regarding the ICT budget which are addressed below;

- 1) How was the 12% reduction calculated?

The ICT budget reached its peak in 2014–15 when it was £4.45million made up of £3.02million operational costs and £1.43million of staffing costs. The budget for 2017–18 is £3.89million, made up of £1.86million operational costs and £2.03million of staffing costs.

- 2) What were the ICT costs attributed to the election budget?

Assembly Members are given an allocation for ICT equipment per Assembly term and provision was made for this in the Election Costs Budget for 2016–17. At the start of the Fifth Assembly, Members had the opportunity to discuss their ICT requirements with their ICT Customer Account manager and select the most suitable devices for their needs from a 'catalogue' of items up to a value of £5,250, with any additional cost being met from their Office Costs budget. An additional £20k was approved to cover the cost of desktop PCs and monitors for party group staff.

- 3) Why does the Broadcasting budget increase in 2017–18 then reduce again in 2018–19?

In March 2016 we were notified by S4C that they intended to withdraw the British Sign Language provision from First Minister's Questions due to budgetary pressures. The Commission looked at the options to replace this service, particularly in light of our achievement of the Action on Hearing Loss Cymru's Excellence Wales award.

From the start of the Fifth Assembly, we have provided the service with Wales Council for Deaf People through Bow Tie (our broadcasting contractor). The increase in the broadcasting budget for 2017–18, reflects the agreement to continue this for a period of 2 years at which time the provision will be reviewed.

- 4) Why has the budget for Revenue and Consumable costs increased?

This is to invest in improving our ICT infrastructure, for example, starting a rolling replacement programme of kit for items which have reached or exceeded their useful lives.

Remuneration Board Determination 2018–19

The figure contained within the budget for Assembly Members' Salary and on-costs for 2016–17 is stated as £5,840k; the committee queried why this had decreased to £5,725k in 2017–18.

The majority of this decrease is due to the change to the office holder of the post of Counsel General. The previous holder was not an AM and therefore the budget for 2016–17 reflected costs for 61 post holders. The budget for 2017–18 reflects 60 post holders only as the office holder of the role of Counsel General is an existing Assembly Member.

In addition, when preparing the 2016–17 budget, the Commission made an assumption as to the level of contributions relating to Assembly Members' pensions. This figure was confirmed in April of this year and was lower than expected; this lower figure is reflected in the 2017–18 budget (but not in the 2016–17 budget).

School Engagement

We have outreach officers who are proactively contacting schools to encourage them to either visit or arrange a session at their school.

We also have a Professional Training scheme for teachers and youth workers so we actively promote the service through them. We promote the service in universities by targeting trainee teachers and youth workers.

In addition we also attend the All Wales Participation network meeting which is a chance for all stakeholders to meet and promote their services to young people.

14 secondary schools did not engage with us by the end of the Fourth Assembly. They were:

- Bedwas High School
- Cardinal Newman R.C. Comprehensive
- Corpus Christi Catholic High School
- Cwrt Sart Community Comprehensive School
- Dyffryn School
- Glan Afan Comprehensive School
- Llanwern High School
- Maesteg School
- Mary Immaculate High School
- Sandfields Comprehensive School
- St John Baptist C.I.W. High School
- St Martin's School
- West Monmouth School
- Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn

The AMs for these schools have been contacted for their assistance. The previous Presiding Officer also sent a personal letter to each school.

Procurement Savings – smaller items

The Commission's VfM target increased over the course of the Fourth Assembly, from £350k in 2011–12 to £500k per annum. As with all our KPI targets, we try to make sure they are stretching and relevant to achieving our

strategic goals. We will continue to look to achieve recurring savings in future years through negotiating better contract terms. We have achieved savings within the current year on the catering contract. We are now increasing our focus on organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

At the end of September, the Finance Committee received our report on organisational efficiency and effectiveness, commissioned by the Accounting Officer and the Commission's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. A specific example of an efficiency gain for smaller item is described in the efficiency and effectiveness report on page 19 where, prior to November 2015, 80% of Print Room printing was done on A4 paper. We now print 80% on A3 and then cut to size. The remaining 20% A4 paper is still used to allow for high quality for specific printing requests. As a result, the print paper costs from November 2015 to May 2016 have reduced by £8K and whilst some of this is as a result of less demand (dissolution), there is a clear cost-benefit arising from the change.

Other matters

The Committee might also be interested to note that the Assembly has just been named a Top 10 Employer for Working Families. We are delighted to be back in the Top 10 after being in the Top 30 for the last couple of years.

The Top 10 list (in alphabetical order):

- American Express
- Citi
- Deloitte
- DWF LLP
- EY
- Lloyds Banking Group
- Ministry of Justice
- National Assembly for Wales
- Royal Bank of Scotland
- Southdown Housing Association

For more info: <http://workingfamilies.org.uk/news/the-top-employers-for-working-families-are-announced/>