

Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



NAFWC 2012

Minutes of 8 March 2012 meeting

Date: 8 March 2012

Time: 10:30

Venue: Office of the Presiding Officer

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Present:

Presiding Officer, Chair

Peter Black AM

Angela Burns AM

Sandy Mewies AM

Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM

Officials present:

Claire Clancy, Chief Executive and Clerk

Dianne Bevan, Chief Operating Officer

Keith Bush, Director of Legal Services

Adrian Crompton, Director of Assembly Business

Craig Stephenson, Head of Commission and Member Support Service

Nicola Callow, Head of Finance

John Chick, Head of Members Business Support

Carys Evans, Principal Commission Secretary

Independent Advisers:

Mair Barnes

Others:

David Melding AM, Deputy Presiding Officer

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1. Chair's introduction

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of meeting on 2 February 2012

The minutes were formally agreed.

All other actions were being progressed by officials.

2. ICT Service Improvement Update

Since the Commission's last meeting a number of actions have been taken in response to concerns raised by Members about aspects of the ICT service. A service improvement plan has been agreed with Atos, senior level meetings have been held with Atos and the Welsh Government, and meetings have been held between Assembly Members and Commission officials to identify outstanding service issues and likely future needs.

Additional resources have been put in place to ensure the improvement plan can be implemented. As part of the plan an engineer is visiting every constituency office to address any problems and increased project management and technical design support has been made available to enable improvement projects to happen more quickly and a review of security rules and approach to service provision to better tailor support needs.

Commissioners agreed that the improvements seemed to be addressing the ICT problems and were pleased that robust action had been taken. It was noted that discussions are being held with Atos to explore the extent to which the additional costs incurred as a result of the actions should be shared with Atos.

Action: Officials to circulate the paper directly to Assembly Members.

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3. Framework for the Assembly Commission Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2011–12

The Assembly Commission Annual Report 2011–12 will provide an overview of the strategic priorities of the Assembly Commission, with a strong emphasis on building an Assembly for the future.

The Annual Report will be aimed at the public, but will also address other audiences including Assembly Members, their support staff, the media and other stakeholders. It will cover a number of themes, including preparations for the election and dissolution; the election and new membership; the work of the new Assembly Commission and new arrangements for Assembly business.

The Commission agreed to the proposed content of the Annual Report. It was agreed that a separate report would be produced outlining the achievements of the Commission during the first year of the Fourth Assembly; this will be aimed at Assembly Members.

Action: Officials to proceed with the necessary preparations.

4. Commission Budget Strategy 2013 – 16

The proposed approach to the Commission's 2013–14 budget and indicative figures for the remaining years of the Fourth Assembly term (2014–15 and 2015–16) were discussed. The proposed budget for 2013–14 will be £49.450 million, with £13.700 million for Assembly Members' salaries and costs, and £35.750 for Assembly Services. This represents an increase of 5.3% on the budget for 2012–13.

The proposed approach reflects the agreement by the Commission to phase the increase in the budget as recommended by the Finance Committee. The Commission agreed that the budget for 2013–14 be prepared in line with the indicative figures.

There will be further discussions at the Commission's meetings in the summer term. It is intended that the final budget document will be approved at the Commission's meeting in September, and formally laid by 28 September.

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Commissioners agreed to give consideration to:

- longer term funding requirements for the Fourth Assembly;
- consultation with Members and their support staff regarding these requirements.

Actions: Officials to proceed, in line with the agreed approach.

5. Handling requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Commission considered possible improvements to the way requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are handled in order to streamline the approach and make better use of Assembly resources.

Most requests are manageable, but a small number generate a disproportionate amount of work because of their breadth and complexity.

Increasing the amount of information published proactively would be a means of reducing the need to respond to specific requests, whilst also demonstrating the Commission's continued commitment to openness and transparency.

Commissioners discussed the type of information that could be published proactively. It was stressed that when doing so, care would always be needed in order to balance transparency against proper respect for privacy. It was agreed that Commissioners would be given the opportunity to consider what kind of additional information should be proactively published before reaching a final decision.

It was noted that there are a few cases where the cost of providing the information exceeds the 'appropriate limit'. It was agreed that in such instances the Commission would, in accordance with the Assembly's Code on Public Access to Information, not refuse to provide the information (as it would be entitled to do) but would reserve the right to do so if the likely costs were clearly excessive and there were additional circumstances, consistent with the public interest, which would justify exercising that right.

The Commission also re-iterated that, in accordance with the Code, it will not charge for information, other than in very exceptional cases. It

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was agreed that information on the cost of handling requests would be gathered, with a view to it being included in future Management Board reports to the Commission.

Actions:

Officials to provide further information on:

- proposals for proactively publishing additional information;
- the cost of handling FoI requests.

6. Portfolio Holder Updates

The following items were discussed:

Services to Members

In response to feedback from Assembly Members, Commission officials will be undertaking a survey of the services provided to Members to help identify areas for improvement. John Chick, Head of Members Business Support, will lead on this work.

Audit

The Commission agreed that it would receive regular reports from the Audit Committee so that all Commissioners are aware of the important work being done by the Audit Committee. It was agreed that it would be included on the agenda for appropriate Commission meetings.

Assembly Shop

The Assembly Shop will be moved to the Café area in the Senedd by Easter 2012. Work is underway to improve signage, to make the area comfortable and attractive, and to identify goods to be sold in the shop. It was agreed that training of staff would also be important.

Official Language Bill

The National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill is currently being considered by the Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee.

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Outreach and Events

A number of high profile events have been held on the Assembly estate in recent weeks, which have been very well received.

A presentation on the engagement work being done by the Outreach team will be arranged for a future Commission meeting.

Pay negotiations

Pay negotiations are currently underway for Commission employees.

Commissioner Portfolios

It was agreed that the distribution of work across portfolios would be clarified and, as and where appropriate, adjusted to reflect experiences in the first year.

7. Assembly Commission rolling programme

The rolling programme was noted.

8. Any other business

There was no other business.

Secretariat
March 2012