

The Assembly Commission

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

Meeting date: **Thursday, 14 July 2011**

Meeting time: **Times Not Specified**

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



Minutes: AC(4)2011(3)

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)
Non Gwilym (Official)
Steven O'Donoghue, Head of Assembly Resources (Official)

Others in attendance:

David Melding, Deputy Presiding Officer
Mair Barnes, Independent Adviser

1. Introduction

The Presiding Officer thanked Assembly staff, particularly Claire Clancy, Keith Bush and Adrian Crompton, for the support and advice provided in relation to the election of two

individuals to the Assembly whilst disqualified. The Commission was grateful for officials' support in enabling a complex and unprecedented situation to be resolved as expeditiously as possible, through a fair and legally robust process.

The Presiding Officer noted that the new arrangements for answering Oral Assembly Questions to the Commission had worked well on 6 July, and that feedback from Members had been positive.

The Commission agreed that Member briefing sheets would, in future, be circulated following meetings.

1(i) Introduction and apologies

No apologies were received.

1(ii) Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1(iii) Minutes of meeting - 29 June 2011

Minutes of meeting on 29 June 2011

The minutes were formally agreed.

Matters arising from the meeting on 29 June 2011

There were no matters arising.

2. Revised draft Commission strategy

The draft strategy for 2011-16 had been updated to reflect comments from Commissioners about their priorities and ambitions for the organisation.

The revised draft statement of purpose and strategic goals were agreed, subject to further minor amendments requested by Commissioners to simplify the wording of the strategy.

3. Commission draft budget strategy

Commissioners discussed the services required by the Assembly as a legislature with full law-making powers following the referendum. It was agreed that the Assembly, as a growing institution, required a high standard of appropriately resourced support services to enable Members to undertake their roles. Feedback was provided on the impact on Members of the reductions in the Research Service.

Commissioners' priorities for core service delivery were discussed, including dedicated expert support for Assembly committees, a strong Research Service, legal services, and

specialist ICT resource for the development of the ICT strategy. A steer was provided on the overall approach to the budget strategy for 2011-16, and on the preferred level of balance between improvements/growth and cost. Commissioners felt it was important to present the combined total of the Assembly Services and Members' Budget ambits together.

Detailed budget proposals, highlighting where savings could be made, and the level of resources required for each service, and draft communications strategies, would be brought to the next meeting.

Action: Officials to carry out detailed work over the summer, working with portfolio holders, for consideration by the Commission in September.

4. Bilingual services

The Record of Plenary Proceedings was discussed, taking account of the report by the Welsh Language Board, representations that had been made by Members and stakeholders, the principle of access to Assembly proceedings via the medium of Welsh or English and the need to ensure value for money. The Commission agreed that investigations into the provision of a bilingual record should continue, and requested more detailed information on the likely total costs, including the charging structure of the Google Translate service from December 2011 onwards. They said that any arrangement needed to be sustainable but that, if a long term solution could be found at reasonable cost, then in principle they wanted to provide a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings. In the interim, current arrangements would continue. The Presiding Officer would write to the Welsh Language Board to this effect.

Subject to amendments to reflect these decisions, the draft National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill, the draft Official Languages Scheme and the consultation timetable were agreed. Commissioners requested that the public consultation included stakeholders from all across Wales, including local authorities.

Action: Officials to provide further details on the costs of using Google Translate from December 2011 onwards.

The Presiding Officer to respond to the Welsh Language Board on behalf of the Assembly Commission.

5. Case management system

Information was provided on the number of Members using the system; the costs of the system to date; resource, cost and data protection implications of Commission

staff involvement in requesting and obtaining electoral register data; and the risks of the data being used for party political advantage.

Concerns were raised on the costs of the project to date, and requested that more detailed work was done on similar future projects to establish user requirements, estimate take up, and ensure that cost estimates were robust.

The Commission agreed to make a request for the Commission to become a named body within the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001.

Action: Keith Bush to request a change to the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 to include the Assembly Commission as a named body.

6. Determination and report of the Remuneration Board

The Remuneration Board made its first Determination in March 2011, but was unable at that time to make final decisions in respect of the additional salaries payable to some office holders at the Assembly. The Determination had now been updated to reflect decisions on additional salaries payable to Commissioners, party leaders, committee chairs and business managers, and was formally received at the Commission meeting. Commissioners expressed the view that the additional salary arrangements for party business managers did not sufficiently reflect differences in the number of seats held by each party.

Issues had been raised with the Presiding Officer and other Commissioners about the monthly cap on rented accommodation and on the distance criteria for eligibility for accommodation support based on the constituency or region the Member represented. The Commission agreed that the Presiding Officer would write to the Chair of the Remuneration Board.

Action: Secretariat to arrange laying of Determination and report, and communication of documents to Assembly Members and their staff.

Presiding Officer to write to Chair of Remuneration Board setting out Members' concerns about the restrictions on eligibility for accommodation support.

7. Paper to note - Assembly Commission Audit Committee annual report

The annual report was noted.

8. Paper to note - Schedule of contracts

The schedule of contracts was noted. Commissioners asked that the schedule be updated to reflect the awarding of the catering contract.

9. Assembly Commission rolling programme

The rolling programme was noted.

10. Any other business

There was no other business.