

**MINUTES**

**Date:** 11 March 2004  
**Time:** 9.30am to 12.20pm  
**Venue:** The Elephant and Castle Hotel, Newtown

**Members**

Janet Davies (Chair)  
Mick Bates  
Alun Cairns  
Jocelyn Davies  
Christine Gwyther  
Denise Idris-Jones  
Mark Isherwood  
Val Lloyd  
Carl Sargeant

**Attendance**

South Wales West  
Montgomeryshire  
South Wales West  
South Wales East  
Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire  
Conwy  
North Wales  
Swansea East  
Alyn and Deeside

**Witnesses**

Allison Williams  
Jo Davies

Chief Executive, Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust  
Director, Human Resources, Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust

Martin Turner  
Tracy Myhill

Chief Executive, Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust  
Personnel Director, Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust

**Officials**

Sir John Bourn  
Lew Hughes  
Gillian Body  
Matthew Mortlock  
Ceri Thomas

Auditor General for Wales  
Deputy Auditor General for Wales  
National Audit Office  
National Audit Office  
Assembly Compliance Office

**Secretariat**

Adrian Crompton  
Liz Wilkinson

Committee Clerk  
Deputy Committee Clerk

**Item 1: Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest.**

1.1 The Chair welcomed Members, witnesses and members of the public to the meeting, which was the first Audit Committee meeting to be held outside Cardiff.

1.2 Apologies were received from Leighton Andrews.

## **Item 2: Management of Sickness Absence by NHS Trusts in Wales**

2.1 The Committee took evidence from Allison Williams, Chief Executive of Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust, Jo Davies, Director of Human Resources, Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust, Martin Turner, Chief Executive of Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust and Tracy Myhill, Personnel Director, Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust in connection with the report by the National Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales on 'The Management of Sickness Absence by NHS Trusts in Wales'

2.2 A verbatim transcript will be attached as Annex 1 to these minutes.

### **Action**

Martin Turner and Allison Williams to provide a note to the Committee on the scale of overtime worked by staff to cover sickness absence.

The NHS Wales Department to provide a note to the Committee on the extent to which the Electronic Staff Record would improve the information on the cost of sickness absence, including the cost of replacement staff.

Martin Turner and Allison Williams to provide a note to the Committee on the number and proportion of staff in their Trusts who nominate themselves for ill health retirement, the number and proportion nominated by their Trusts, and the number and proportion of these applications accepted by the Pensions Agency (figures for 2002-03).

*The Committee adjourned from 11.58am until 12.13pm*

## **Item 3: Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Audit Committee report on 'The Finances of NHS Wales 2003'**

3.1 The Auditor General for Wales said that he was currently preparing his 2004 report on the Finances of NHS Wales, which would include an update on issues covered in the Committee's recommendations. The report would be considered by the Committee in due course.

3.2 The Committee agreed to accept the Welsh Assembly Government response to its report.

## **Item 4: Correspondence from the Auditor General for Wales regarding the timing of his Value for Money programme for 2004-05**

4.1 The Committee noted the planned timing of the Auditor General for Wales' Value for Money programme for 2004-05.

## **Item 5: Correspondence from the National Council for Education and Training for Wales on procurement in the further education sector in Wales and the management of the further education estate, and the Auditor General for Wales' advice on the correspondence**

5.1 The Auditor General for Wales said that progress had been made by the National Council for Education and Training for Wales (the Council) in achieving financial savings. He would continue to monitor progress and report to the Committee in due course. In terms of the management of the further education estate, the Auditor General said that further work needed to be done by individual further education institutions and the Council to ensure that institutions were complying with disability legislation. He said that non-compliance was largely due to financial constraints, rather than institutional unwillingness.

5.2 The Auditor General for Wales said he would consider the matter further and discuss with Mr Isherwood the information on this subject that he held from his contacts with certain individual further education institutions. The Auditor General would then prepare a draft letter which the Committee might consider sending to the relevant Ministers and subject committee chairs.

### **Action**

Chair to write to the Ministers for Social Justice and Regeneration and Education and Life-Long Learning, and the respective subject committee chairs requesting that they examine the issue and drawing attention to the financial constraints hindering the implementation of disability legislation.

## **Item 6: Note from the NHS Directorate on progress on the disposal of surplus estate and the Auditor General for Wales' advice on the note**

6.1 The Auditor General for Wales said that, by the end of 2004-05, there would be 27 remaining residual estate properties, some of which may be transferred to health bodies for continued health use. In addition, in terms of under-used and unsuitable properties, the Auditor General said that £2.7 million had been raised in 2002-03 and that £23 million was expected in 2003-04 and 2004-05. He said that he would continue to monitor progress by the NHS in disposing of residual and surplus properties.

6.2 The Committee noted the progress made by NHS Wales on the disposal of surplus estate.

## **Item 7: Minutes of the previous meeting**

7.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the 12 February meeting.

## **Item 8: PRIVATE SESSION - Audit Committee's draft report on 'Late Payments to Farmers in Wales'**

8.1 The Committee resolved to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with

Standing Order 8.21(vi).

8.2 The Committee considered and approved the draft report.