

SPECIAL HOUSE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: 30th September 2004

Time: 9.00am

Venue: Conference Room B, Assembly Building, Cardiff Bay

Members present:

Deputy Presiding Officer (Chair)
Lorraine Barrett, AM Labour
William Graham, AM Conservative
Janice Gregory, AM Labour
Karen Sinclair, AM Labour
Owen John Thomas, AM Plaid Cymru
Presiding Officer (in attendance)

Officials present:

Paul Silk, Clerk to the Assembly
Dianne Bevan, Deputy Clerk to the Assembly and Clerk to the House Committee
Gwen Parry, Director of Assembly Communications Services
Gwyn Griffiths, Legal Division
Nadia Cummins, Freedom of Information and Data Protection Advisor
Wayne Cowley, Head of Fees Office
Sara Lloyd Mackay, House Committee Secretariat
Catherine Morris, Private Secretary to the Deputy Presiding Officer

Apologies: Peter Black, AM Liberal Democrats
John Bowley, Director of Corporate Services Division

The Chair welcomed Owen John Thomas as a new member of the House Committee and Nadia Cummins, the Assembly Parliamentary Service Freedom of Information and Data Protection Advisor.

1 Assembly Parliamentary Services Finance Report HC(2)-06-04(p1)

Members noted that some information contained in the report was commercial in confidence.

Members asked when the recently agreed Civil Service annual pay award would be reflected in the staffing costs. Wayne Cowley said that the additional costs would be included in the figures for October.

2 Publication of Details of Foreign Visits HC(2)-06-04(p2)

Members noted the recent request received from a local Cardiff newspaper for details of visits undertaken by Members (acting other than in a Ministerial capacity), for the financial year 2003/04. It was likely that requests for

disclosure of this type of information would become more common as the statutory requirements came into force in January 2005. The National Assembly for Wales had agreed to a Code of Practice on Public Access to Information, which set out the way it would deal with requests for information in advance of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 coming into force in January 2005.

The Code contained key principles, particularly relevant to the request for information received, including; maximising openness in the business of the National Assembly for Wales; prompt and comprehensive response to requests for information; and respecting personal privacy, commercial confidentiality, the duty of confidence and all laws governing the release of information. Members were mindful of the Code and additionally Data Protection principles. Officials were seeking further advice from the Assistant Information Commissioner for Wales to establish the best approach to the request.

Members asked Officials to draft a template for publishing information on Members' International and Inter-regional visits on an annual basis. Members would consult party groups on the issue. Members requested an item on International and Inter-regional visits to be placed on the agenda at the next House Committee meeting on the 7th October 2004.

Action: Dianne Bevan / Secretariat

Members asked Officials to draft a response to the request from the local Cardiff newspaper. All Assembly Members would be informed of the information likely to be required and would be sent the response before release.

Action: Dianne Bevan

3 Any Other Business

William Graham said that on Sunday the 19th September 2004 he and another Member experienced problems with the swipe card system in the Assembly building. Officials would investigate.

Action: Secretariat

Date of next meeting: 7th October 2004 – Public Meeting
House Committee Secretariat