

## House Committee Minutes

**Date:** 10 November 2005

**Time:** 9.00am

**Venue:** Committee Room 1, Assembly Building, Cardiff Bay

### Members present:

Deputy Presiding Officer (Chair)

Lorraine Barrett, AM Labour

William Graham, AM Conservative

Janice Gregory, AM Labour

Jane Hutt, AM Labour

Owen John Thomas, AM Plaid Cymru

Alun Cairns (for items 2.1 (i) to (iii) and 2.2)

### 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

Karin Phillips, Head of Members' Research and Committee Service

Wayne Cowley, Head of Fees Office

Nerys Evans, Head of Facilities Management

Michael Snook, Head of Human Resources

Catherine Morris, Parliamentary Executive

Gareth Brydon, Deputy Clerk to the House Committee

### Apologies : Presiding Officer

Peter Black, AM Liberal Democrat

### Observing : Brian Davidge, APS

John Grimes, APS

-	<u>Introductions</u>

The Chair welcomed APS staff who were attending as observers. He also welcomed Alun Cairns who was attending for items 2.1 and 2.2.

**1** Minutes of previous meeting and actions arising

Members noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 October were published on 26 October and the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October will be published by 1 December.

**1.1** Actions arising from previous meetings HC(2)-10-05(p1)

**Changes to Members' ICT allocation**

Gwen Parry reported that an inventory of each Member's ICT allocation was still being collated. It was noted that some Members had more non-Merlin procured items than others.

It was reported that the Merlin transformation team had inadvertently removed Health and Safety equipment provided for ergonomic reasons. Merlin had agreed to return the equipment.

**Members' access to the Senedd**

The Chair reported that the side door to the Assembly Building was now open as a passholders' entrance. It was open between 12.00 midday and 2.00pm, Tuesday to Thursday. These hours would be extended once staffing and/or the necessary proximity system became available.

**APS staff uniforms**

Members discussed the quality of the proposed uniforms and the probable cost of higher quality alternatives.

**The House Committee agreed that Gwen Parry should make enquiries with the clothing manufacturer to ascertain whether a better quality**

material was available at reasonable cost. The matter would be further considered out of Committee.

**Action : Gwen Parry**

### **Smoking in Assembly buildings**

Nerys Evans reported that the external smoking shelter to be installed at the rear of the main entrance was being designed and would be installed as soon as possible. She undertook to keep Members informed of progress.

**Action : Nerys Evans**

### **APS Annual Report on Equality**

Karin Phillips reported that the report would go before the Equality of Opportunity Committee on 24 November. Mike Snook said that equality briefings would be made available to Members who would like to attend before the end of the current term. A rolling programme was being planned by Morgan Cole.

### **Lift announcements in the Senedd**

Dianne Bevan reported that lift announcements had been recorded in both English and Welsh. The announcements complied with building regulations.

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Items for decision

**2.1**

**Separation**

i) Separate internet sites HC(2)-10-05(p2)

The Chair of the ICT sub group informed the House Committee of the sub group's recommendation following its meeting of 10 November. The group recommended that a full external tender process should be undertaken.

Members discussed the recommendation and noted or agreed that :

- There should be a new Assembly web site which should be of a high standard, although cost should be controlled.
- The site was unlikely to be ready at the same time as the Welsh Assembly Government site which was currently proposed for completion by April 2006, and in the interim the Assembly site would be of a lower quality.
- A tendering exercise might not produce a cheaper alternative to the Merlin cost proposal.

**The House Committee agreed that a full tendering exercise should be commissioned. Members asked that any time delay should be kept to a minimum.**

**Action : Gwen Parry**

ii) Post separation ICT service for Members & APS HC(2)-10-05(p3)

Gwen Parry informed Members of the background to the proposal to separate from the Merlin contract, post separation of the Assembly. It was recognised that most of the required client expertise was currently held by the Government.

The Chair of the ICT sub group said that further work needed to be commissioned in order to identify all possible options for the future provision of ICT services and the advantages and disadvantages of separate provision needed to be fully explored. Legal advice would also have to be sought on the implications of the Committee deciding to withdraw from the Merlin contract.

**The House Committee agreed to accept the recommendations**

**contained in the report although value for money would be a key consideration. Further legal advice should be sought , although Members agreed the APS should continue to work with Welsh Assembly Government to provide joint services where there were clear advantages in doing so and where sensitivities about provision of independent services did not arise.**

iii) Funding of Senedd ICT, AV and broadcasting HC(2)-10-05(p4)

Members were presented with a paper on proposals for a managed service payment option for the maintenance of the ICT, audio visual and broadcasting equipment in the Senedd. In particular, the paper proposed that broadcasting equipment should not be serviced under the Merlin proposed managed service option, but by Barcud Derwen, the appointed host broadcast contractor. Barcud Derwen had experience of managing this service for the Assembly and the proposed costs of this service were lower.

Alun Cairns advised Members that a further paper would be presented at the next House Committee meeting in December in respect of ownership issues. This would outline proposals for the capital purchase of equipment.

**Members agreed to use the services of the host broadcast company for maintenance of the broadcast equipment and to await the next paper in December before making a final decision in respect of the proposed managed service option for the remaining aspects of ICT in the Senedd.**

iv) Separation : issues HC(2)-10-05(5)

Members were presented with an update on separation issues.

The Clerk to the Assembly reported on the key issues, including the establishment of an Assembly Commission to be responsible for the management of the separate Assembly, which was likely to be based on the Scottish equivalent, the model which had been agreed by the Assembly's White Paper Committee to be the most appropriate. The Chair suggested that it would be more appropriate for the Assembly to be given freedom in terms of its arrangements for an Assembly Commission, especially its size and charring arrangements.

**Members discussed the report. They agreed that it would be appropriate for the Assembly to decide its arrangements for the Commission and that these should not be unduly prescribed by statute. This view should be conveyed to the Government.**

**2.2 ICT sub group meeting HC(2)-10-05(p6)**

Members considered the minutes of the ICT sub group meeting of 1 November. They considered the proposal for the development and operation of the Committee Business Project.

**The House Committee agreed that the introduction of such a system could enable efficient working in support of committees across APS. Reservations were expressed about the cost of installing and running the proposed system. The ICT Sub Group was asked to give further consideration to the issue.**

**Action : Gwen Parry/Karin Phillips**

**2.3 Senedd Update**

i) Senedd update HC(2)-10-05(p7)

The Clerk to the Committee provided an update on progress in the construction of the Senedd. She reported that the construction contract was now largely complete.

#### ICT/Broadcasting fitting out programme

Members were asked to consider approving the transfer of one Committee room's cameras before the Christmas Recess to allow for advance training and testing, although this may result in changes to broadcasting arrangements for some Committees.

#### **The House Committee agreed to the proposal.**

#### Member Familiarisation with Senedd ICT

The House Committee discussed familiarisation for Assembly Members in the Senedd. Members agreed that familiarisation sessions were required before the Senedd could become fully operational, although the Christmas recess would not be a convenient time for many Assembly Members. House Committee expressed the view that all efforts should be made to be ready for a first Plenary meeting in the Senedd immediately after the Christmas Recess.

Brian Davidge reported that a mock up of the Senedd ICT equipment had been established for the purpose of testing equipment and whilst this might not meet all the requirements of Members, arrangements could be made for them to use the facilities if they wished.

The Chair reported that he would be meeting with the Finance Minister and he would raise the matter with her then.

**Members agreed that the Chair should discuss familiarisation requirements with the Finance Minister. The House Committee also agreed that Assembly Members should be invited to use the mock up of the Senedd ICT equipment.**

**Action : Dianne Bevan/Gwen Parry**

#### Access control system

Members were informed that the new access control system for the Senedd had been installed. In view of potential cost savings, the Committee was asked to approve the replacement of the existing swipe access control readers in the Assembly Offices with proximity readers. This would also assist in continuity of operations.

**The House Committee agreed to the proposal but it noted the impact of this on the current number of pass holders and resolved to return to the issue of passes at the next meeting.**

**Action : Dianne Bevan**

#### Land at Wales Millennium Centre

Members were asked to consider taking responsibility for the area of land adjacent to the Wales Millennium Centre, subject to final confirmation of land ownership. Part of the area was subject to ponding and a scheme was proposed to remedy the problem at minimal cost.

**The House Committee agreed to take responsibility for the area, subject to the completion of final ownership checks. The Committee further agreed to proceed with work to remedy the problem of ponding, provided final costs did not exceed £3,000.**

#### Wider use of Senedd

The House Committee briefly discussed the wider use of the Senedd in the context of the existing booking system for the Neuadd. Members were informed that bookings made for the Neuadd were being taken on the basis that they would be automatically transferred to the Senedd.

ii) Royal Opening March 2006 – Wales Millennium Centre Resident Companies' entertainment proposals HC(2)-10-05(p8)



The House Committee's views were sought on proposals submitted by the Wales Millennium Centre and its resident companies to provide entertainment for the public during the afternoon of 1 March 2006 as part of the Senedd opening celebrations.

**Members agreed to the proposals for performances in the Senedd. They also agreed to the production of a DVD and video involving artists working with cerebral palsy for distribution to the public. A further DVD of the official opening should be made for appropriate distribution. Committee agreed the small additional costs involved.**

2.4

**Coverage of external Assembly Committees HC(2)-10-05(p9)**

The House Committee's view was sought on a paper entitled 'Coverage of External Committees' which had been presented to the Panel of Chairs on 4 October 2005.

The Panel had been asked to comment on four options presented for the future broadcast coverage of external Assembly Committee meetings. The Panel supported the principle of providing both audio and visual records of all external subject and standing committees. The views of the Regional Committee Chairs were mixed on this issue and no consensus emerged. The Panel of Chairs sought the views of the House Committee.

Members discussed the paper. They carefully considered all four options and the role of the Panel of Chairs in respect of meetings of Regional Committees. Gwen Parry advised that the broadcaster would have to make a decision as to the suitability of individual venues for broadcasting. However, timely decisions were needed when deciding whether to broadcast a Committee meeting.

**Members agreed to endorse Option 4 and adopt a 'bidding' system similar to that used by Westminster for all external committees that are broadcast. If bids could be agreed by the Panel of Chairs and the Regional Chairs meetings, officials would proceed on the agreed basis. House Committee would resolve any problems that might arise.**

2.5	<b>Senior Salaries Review Body review HC(2)-10-05(p10)</b>
	<p>The House Committee was provided with an update on outstanding issues that arose from the last SSRB review and sought a decision on a course of action in respect of a reference to SSRB of the matter of Committee Chairs, Party Leaders and Deputy Ministers.</p> <p><b>Members agreed to the recommendations contained in the report and that consideration of the issues outstanding from the recent SSRB review should be deferred until the details of the legislation reconstituting the Assembly were clear and the necessary Bill enacted.</b></p>
2.6	<b>Winding up allowance HC(2)-10-05(p11)</b>
	<p>The House Committee was presented with a paper proposing possible changes to the rules relating to the Winding Up Allowance following changes arising from the last SSRB review. Members were asked to consider how the allowance should be calculated in the future and they were presented with a number of options.</p> <p>Members discussed the available options and also a further option based on a division of salary and office costs. They also considered the availability of redundancy payments for AMSS.</p> <p><b>Members agreed that Wayne Cowley should prepare further information on the available options and this should also include advice on a generic system of redundancy payments for AMSS.</b></p> <p><b>Action : Wayne Cowley</b></p>
2.7	<b>Resettlement grant HC(2)-08-05(p12)</b>

The House Committee's view was sought on a possible need to make changes to the rules relating to the Members' Resettlement Grant.

Members discussed the recommendation contained in the report, ie. that Assembly Members who are also Members of Parliament or Members of the European Parliament should have their Resettlement Grant calculated on the basis of their abated salary in the Assembly.

**The House Committee agreed that the matter should be discussed by Committee Members in their party groups and brought back to the next meeting on 1 December.**

2.8

**Bicycle and season ticket advances for Assembly Members Support Staff HC(2)-10-05(p13)**

Members were presented with a paper setting out proposals for introducing a scheme whereby AMSS could request an advance of salary to purchase bicycles and/or season tickets for public transport.

**The House Committee agreed to accept the recommendations contained in the report and that advances of salary should be made available to AMSS for the purchase of bicycles or season tickets.**

2.9

**AMSS recruitment advertisements HC(2)-10-05(p14)**

The House Committee considered proposals for allowing AMs to advertise AMSS vacancies via the National Assembly website.

Members considered allowing the advertisement of AMSS vacancies via a separate link on the website and whether the proposal should be developed further.

**Wayne Cowley was asked to consider further the proposal and report to the Committee.**

**Action : Wayne Cowley**

2.10	<b>Facilities management contracts HC(2)-10-05(p15)</b>
	<p>Members were asked to consider the current status of Facilities Management contracts which were being reviewed as part of the review of contracting arrangements for the APS Separation Project. The House Committee was also asked for its view on future arrangements for the office cleaning contract, due for renewal in May 2006.</p> <p>Members discussed the existing office cleaning contract. They considered :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Safety requirements;</li> <li>• Rates of pay and terms and conditions of service for contractor staff, and</li> <li>• Provision of an in-house cleaning service following formal separation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Committee agreed that the cleaning contract should be retendered for a period of up to two years from May 2006 on the basis of a living wage for the cleaning staff in line with the scheme in place in the Greater London Assembly, but that further work should be done to consider bringing the service in house following separation.</b></p> <p><b>Action : Dianne Bevan</b></p> <p><u>Facilities Management Contracts</u></p> <p><b>The House Committee agreed to extend the existing facilities management contracts until March 2007, including those contracts that are shared across the National Assembly and to which the APS has access under call off of shared contract arrangements, with a view to APS developing its own arrangements from 2007.</b></p>
2.11	<b>Guidance on Use of National Assembly for Wales stationery and resources HC(2)-10-05(p16)</b>

The House Committee reviewed the current guidance on the use of stationery and resources that was approved by the Committee in July 2002, and in particular the interpretation of “unsolicited” in a variety of circumstances.

**Members agreed that the guidance should be revised and clarified, addressing issues that were of most relevance to Members. The Clerk to the Committee was asked to produce a revised document.**

**Action : Dianne Bevan**

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Items for Noting

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3.1

Catering sub group meeting HC(2)-10-05(p17)

Members endorsed the minutes of the meeting held 28 September 2005.

3.2

Paper on indictors against targets HC(2)-10-05(p18)

Members noted the paper.

3.3

Monthly HR report HC(2)-10-05(p19)

Members noted the report. The Clerk to the Assembly reminded the Committee that APS staff would have separate terms and conditions following Separation in 2007.

3.4

Monthly finance report HC(2)-10-05(p20)

Members noted the report. Members briefly discussed the payment of telephone bills at constituency offices. The Chair asked Members to address any issues with the Head of the Fees Office.

3.5	<p><u>Overseas and external relations activities HC(2)-10-05(p21)</u></p> <p>Members noted the paper.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Access to information requests HC(2)-10-05(p22)</u></p> <p>Members noted the paper.</p>
4	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p>
4.1	<p><u>Use of video conference room</u></p> <p>The Chair asked whether it would be possible for the video conference facilities to be used by the contracted Assembly Members Welsh tutor to allow her to give Welsh tuition for Westminster MPs.</p> <p>Advice was given concerning the need to secure priority for the Assembly in the use of its facilities and as to the appropriateness of allowing Assembly facilities to be used to assist the business of a private contractor.</p> <p><b>The Chair asked officials to investigate and report.</b></p>
4.2	<p><b>Action : Diane Bevan/Gwen Parry</b></p> <p><u>Flags</u></p> <p>The Chair expressed concern about the deterioration of the flags outside the Assembly building during periods of wet and inclement weather.</p> <p><b>Members agreed that a supply of flags should be maintained by the APS, especially the white coloured flag of the National Assembly. The flags should be changed if they showed signs of wear and tear or needed cleaning.</b></p>
4.3	<p><b>Action : Nerys Evans</b></p>

Access to basement car park

William Graham asked whether a screen or barrier could be erected at the swipe access to the basement car park to prevent car users and the interior of vehicles from getting wet during periods of driving rain.

**Nerys Evans was asked to investigate.**

**Action : Nerys Evans**

**Date of next meeting: 1 December 2005**  
**House Committee Secretariat**