

# House Committee

## Minutes

**Date: 8 February 2007**

**Time: 9.30am**

**Venue: Committee Room 2, Senedd, Cardiff Bay**

### Members present:

William Graham, AM Conservative (Chair)

Lorraine Barrett, AM Labour

Peter Black, AM Liberal Democrat

Janice Gregory, AM Labour

Jane Hutt, AM Labour

Owen John Thomas, AM Plaid Cymru

### Officials present:

Jon Shortridge, Permanent Secretary

Dianne Bevan, Deputy Clerk to the Assembly

Gwen Parry, Director of Assembly Communications

Adrian Crompton, Acting Head of Members' Research and Committee Service

Andrew George, Head of Chamber Secretariat

Gwyn Griffiths, Legal Adviser

Steven O'Donoghue, APS Finance Manager

Nerys Evans, Facilities Management

### Secretariat :

John Grimes, Clerk to the House Committee

### Apologies :

John Marek, AM Forward Wales

Presiding Officer

	Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed Jon Shortridge to the meeting who was attending as Accounting Officer .

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

1.1 Members noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2007 would be published by 1 March 2007. Janice Gregory noted, for Section 4, that she had raised the issue under 'Access to Members in the Cwrt' and that Lorraine Barrett had raised the one about 'Access to the Siambr'.

1.2 Actions arising from previous meetings HC(2)-02-07(p1)

a. Protocol for Visitors Access to Restricted Areas of the Senedd

Members expressed concern that some members were still not abiding by the protocol and that the police had warned of the security implications. It was agreed that Members should again be reminded of it and that Member access to the Siambr should be prevented, through the pass system, between 12.00 and 1.45 on plenary days. If Members did need to enter the Siambr this could be arranged with staff, but visitors should not be permitted.  
[Action: Clerk, Nerys Evans]

Members discussed the sanctions that could be applied to persistent offenders. It was agreed that the Chair should write to the Chair of the Standards Committee to ask if such breaches could become a matter for them to consider. [Action: Clerk]

b. Road Barriers to Pierhead Street and Harbour Drive

Officials reported that the tenders had now been received and the contract awarded to the lowest bidder. The cost was considerably lower than had previously been estimated.

c. Operation Black Vote

Members noted that the outstanding issue here was a general one arising in relation to tax issues. Lorraine Barrett hoped that the organisers of OBV would work with community leaders in the Cardiff area.

d. Industrial Action on 31 January 2007

Dianne Bevan said she had spoken to the PCS but they had been unwilling to provide a 'dispensation' from the action for Assembly staff, so that the industrial action had affected proceedings in the Assembly on that day.

2.1 Election Project 2007 HC(2)-02-07(p2)

The Committee noted the good progress in preparing for the 2007 elections.

The Committee agreed that facilities would be available for Members to take the oath and receive basic ICT, Fees and accommodation services at the Assembly Offices from 10.00 – 4.00 on the Saturday and Sunday after the election. This would not be available on the Bank Holiday Monday, although pass holders would be able to gain access as usual. Facilities would also be available over the weekend for group meetings if booked in advance. Officials should publicise these arrangements in advance to Members. [Action: Nerys Evans]

2.2 Election 2007 : ICT Provision and Services HC(2)-02-07(p3)

The Committee considered a paper on the ICT element of the Election 2007 project. Members endorsed the proposals in relation to the provision of ICT services during the election period but asked for clarification about the ownership of equipment and, particularly, when it previously been taken into account in Members' tax returns. Officials agreed to clarify the position. [Action: Steve O'Donoghue].

The Committee noted the uncertainty attached to the cost estimates and officials said that a paper giving more detailed information would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee. [Action: Gwen Parry]

2.3 Booking Arrangements for the Media Room HC(2)-02-07(p4)

The Committee considered whether further guidance was needed on the use of the media briefing room. They acknowledged that it was difficult to draw clear guidelines to distinguish between 'Assembly' use of the Room (which was permitted) and 'Political' use (which was not) and that ultimately it was a matter for Members to decide. They agreed that it was not appropriate for officials to make such judgements. Ultimately, in the event of a complaint, it might fall to the Standards Committee to decide if the guidelines had been breached.

Members agreed that the existing guidance on this was adequate but asked the Clerk to issue a reminder about it to Members. [Action: Dianne Bevan]

2.4	Alternative Use of Private Dining Rooms HC(2)-02-07(p5)
	<p>The Committee was asked to consider possible alternative uses for the three private dining rooms on the first floor and endorsed the installation of a moveable partition between Conference Rooms C and D.</p>
2.5	Automated Transaction Machine (Oral Item)
	<p>The Committee confirmed it was essential to have an ATM available for members but acknowledged the security difficulties that would arise if one were to be located in the Atrium. They were content for officials to negotiate a location in the staff restaurant. [Action: Nerys Evans]</p>
2.6	Response to Audit Committee Report on the Management of Sickness Absence HC(2)-02-07(p6)
	<p>The Committee agreed the draft response to the Audit Committee Report.</p>
2.7	APS Budget Report HC(2)-02-07(p7)
	<p>The Committee was provided with an overview of year to date expenditure to the end of December against the financial year budgets for 2006-07. Members agreed the increase in the 2006/7 Main Expenditure Group Budget and to draw down £1.848m of accrued EYF.</p>
2.8	Budget Virement 2006/07 HC(2)-02-07(p8)
	<p>The Committee agreed the proposals for virements within the 2006/07 APS budget as set out in the paper.</p>
2.9	Assembly Offices – Sub Lease HC(2)-02-07(p9)
	<p>The Committee considered a paper on the Heads of Terms for the Assembly Commission sub lease to the Welsh Assembly Government for accommodation in the Assembly Office. Members noted that the proposal was for a lease covering a substantial period of time and that there would be no direct WAG payment for this as provision for these costs would be included in the Assembly Commission’s budget.</p>
	<p>Concern was expressed about the need to ensure a fair allocation of car parking provision between the Commission staff and those of WAG. It was noted also that was likely to become a particular issue towards the end of 2007. Officials agreed to provide a paper on options for the next meeting. [Action : Dianne Bevan]</p>

The Committee agreed that the Chair should be empowered to act on their behalf in further negotiations with the Business Minister and report back to the House Committee at its next meeting. [Action: Chair)

2.10 Media Access to the Members in the Cwrt HC(2)-02-07(p10)

The Committee considered whether a protocol was needed for journalists with access to the Cwrt. Members noted that the behaviour of most journalists was entirely appropriate and concluded that a protocol was not needed at this time.

2.11 Request to Extend ICT Service Downtime in February HC(2)-02-07(p11)

The Committee was provided with details of a proposed change to the agreed period of service disruption in February 2007. Members noted that the request was for a 'one off' change and would replace the routine service disruption in the month. On this basis they agreed the request.

**3 Items for noting**

3.1 ICT Sub Group HC(2)-02-07(p12)

Members noted the minutes of the ICT Sub Group meeting held on 16 January.

3.2 Buildings Sub Group HC(2)-02-07(p13)

Members noted the minutes of the Buildings Sub Group meeting held on 9 January. They discussed the work being done to support education and welcomed the indications that the old chamber would remain available for this purpose in the future. A Member commented that it was valuable for young people to be able to experience a 'debating' environment. There was a brief discussion about the charges involved when Members held events in Assembly premises and Members stressed the importance of organisers being aware of these in advance.

3.4 Monthly HR report HC(2)-02-07(p14)

Members noted the report.

3.5 Indicators Against Targets HC(2)-02-07(p15)

Members commented on the continuing high numbers of visitors to the Senedd and the much smaller number visiting the Pierhead building. It was suggested that locating the

3.6 shop in the Senedd would lead to an increase in sales although it was noted that a large number of the visitors would be school children who would not have money to spend in the shop. A paper was being prepared for the next Shadow Commission meeting and would be brought to the next meeting of the House Committee. [Action: Gwen Parry]

**4** Access to Information HC(2)-02-07(p16)

4.1 Members noted the report and the continuing interest in Members' expenses. A question was raised about an apparent inconsistency in the requirement for Members to provide receipts when claiming different allowances and officials agreed to provide a paper on this for the next meeting. [Action: Steve O'Donoghue]

4.2 Overseas and External Relations Activities HC(2)-02-07(p17)

Members noted the report. They welcomed the various youth events that were planned and hoped these would be well publicised to Assembly Members. [Action : Gwen E Parry]

**Any Other Business**

Jane Hutt referred to a letter about Regulations to be made under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which had sent to the Chair in her capacity as Minister for Assembly Business, Equalities and Children. This had been circulated by e-mail to Members. The Committee supported the proposal.

Officials said that it would be necessary to make some alterations to the smoking shelter in order to comply with the forthcoming ban on smoking in enclosed places. These would be carried out within existing budgets.

Date of next scheduled meeting: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007. Members confirmed that the provisional meeting date of 1 March could now be cancelled.

House Committee Secretariat