

## SPECIAL HOUSE COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Date:** 24<sup>th</sup> February 2005

**Time:** 8.30am

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

### **Members present:**

Deputy Presiding Officer (Chair)

Lorraine Barrett, AM Labour

Alun Cairns, AM Conservative (*for item 4*)

Mike German, AM Liberal Democrat

William Graham, AM Conservative

Janice Gregory, 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

Wayne Cowley, Head of Fees Office

Peter Jones, Legal Division

Adrian Green, Private Secretary to the Presiding Officer

Gwen Parry, Director of Assembly Communications

Brian Davidge, Head, Information & Communication Technology

Gareth Brydon, House Committee Secretariat

**Apologies:** Peter Black, AM Liberal Democrats

Jane Hutt, AM Labour

## 1. Opening Remarks

1. The Chair opened the meeting and confirmed that it was being held in private. He welcomed Alun Cairns, Chair of the ICT Sub Group to the meeting and Mike German who was attending in place of Peter Black. Jane Hutt was unable to attend the meeting due to illness.

## 2. Matters Arising

2.1 The Chair apologised for the early start of the meeting. He informed the Committee that it would not be possible to convene a meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March. He said that the Committee could meet twice a month in the future and suggested holding meetings either on a Monday afternoon or on a Thursday. He asked Members to consider his suggestion.

## 3. AMSS Salary Scales HC(2)-03-05(p1)

3.1 The Chair asked Wayne Cowley to introduce the paper. As agreed at the meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, Wayne Cowley said that he had met with representatives of AMSS trade unions and Equipment and Facilities Liaison Group members to discuss a number of issues arising from the SSRB recommendations.

3.2 The Committee proposed a revised set of standard job descriptions for support staff and proposals for broad pay scales. Suggestions were made for the treatment of the Party Leader's allowance.

## Staff Salaries Allowance

3.3 Members were presented with two options in respect of the Staff Salaries Allowance:

#### Option 1

This would allow Members to employ staff within the cash limit expressed in the report, provided that staff were paid on one of the scales outlined, with increases awarded at the discretion of the Member. This option most closely replicates the existing system, but meets the SSRB's requirement for pay scales.

#### Option 2

This would allow Members to employ 2.5 full-time equivalent staff with no more than 1.0 full-time equivalent being salaried in Band 1; no more than 1.0 full-time equivalent being salaried in Band 2 and the remainder being employed in Band 3. The Member would have the flexibility to recruit the type of staff that best meets his or her needs, whilst giving the support staff a clear salary progression subject, to satisfactory performance.

This option would also require the allocation of a small amount to take account of the costs of overtime, training, travel, bonuses etc. The SSRB figures suggested an amount of about £5,000 per Member.

Allowing for staff turnover, the costs of both options should be broadly similar and in line with the total cost of the SSRB's recommendations.

4. Members explored the merits of both options. The main points of

discussion were:

- The cost differences between each option;
- The number of staff Members would be able to employ;
- Pay scales, progression and experienced staff;
- Staff appraisal and satisfactory performance;
- Employment law and part time staff;
- Virement of funds.

4. Although some Members expressed a degree of reservation, they

agreed that Option 2 presented the best option for Staff Salaries

Allowance. Michael German expressed his dissent from this choice and

asked for this to be recorded in the minutes.

### Party Leader's Allowance

5. Members discussed the options in the paper in respect of the Party Leaders Allowance, which were similar to those in respect of the Staff Salaries Allowance.

6. Dianne Bevan was asked to clarify the position of Party Leaders as

employers with regard to Option 1. Subject to the receipt of

satisfactory advice it was agreed that Option 1 should be

recommended for the Party Leader's Allowance.

### **Action: Dianne Bevan**

### Recommendations

8. Members agreed to recommend the following to the Assembly:

(i) That the broad salary scales be adopted;

(ii) Staff Salaries Allowance should be expressed as set out in Option 2;

(iii) That the incremental scale should have 5 points rather than 7;

(iv) That the Party Leaders' Allowance should be increased as outlined in paragraphs 22-25 of the paper;

(v) That the Party Leaders' Allowance should be expressed as set out in Option 1 above;

(vi) That the recommended transitional arrangements should be implemented.

9. Members agreed to establish a working group to review the Deputy Ministers and Party Leaders allowance. This would be chaired by either the Presiding Officer or the Deputy Presiding Officer (either or both of whom could attend meetings) and would include one Member from each Party plus the Business Minister. It was agreed that the working group would report to House Committee on 21 April. Mike German said that he was nominating Jenny Randerson to sit on the working group, the other parties agreed to consider their nominations and submit them to the Clerk to the Committee as soon as possible.

#### 4. Spouse Travel HC(2)-03-05(p2)

4.1 Members discussed the paper and agreed they were content to recommend the proposals.

#### 5. Support Staff Pensions HC(2)-03-05(p3)

The Committee agreed to recommend death in service cover at a rate of three times salary and also critical illness cover, both for Assembly Member Support Staff. The Committee did not wish to recommend the provision of income protection insurance for Assembly Member Support Staff at this stage.

The Committee recommended that an enabling provision is included in the revised Determination on pay and allowances to allow such insurances as the House Committee wishes to be introduced.

Wayne Cowley was asked to report further to House Committee with more detailed recommendations.

#### **Action: Wayne Cowley**

#### 6. ICT for Members HC(2)-03-05(p4)

6.1 The Chair invited Alun Cairns, Chair of the ICT Sub Group, to address the Committee about ICT for Members.

6.2 Alun Cairns reported that the Merlin Transformation project included a total refresh of all ICT within the Assembly. It would provide users with new computers and the latest version of popular business software applications. However, the timetable of the rollout had been subject to considerable delay and, at the request of the ICT Sub Group, the Chair met with the Senior Responsible Officer of the Merlin Transformation project to express his concern. As a result of this, an accelerated timetable had been agreed. Assembly Members and support staff

based in Cardiff Bay would have their ICT updated over the Easter weekend.

6.3 The ICT sub-group had also agreed that the 'core' application list included as part of the technology refresh would not have met all Members' requirements. One of the problems identified was that the core applications would not enable Members to overcome difficulties when constituents use other software packages.

6.4 The ICT sub-group also formed the opinion that there would be immense benefit if Members were allocated a mobile device that allowed e-mail and diary management away from the office, instead of the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) being provided to Members as part of the Merlin project. This improved service could be delivered with some additional hardware and a monthly service charge. Merlin resources would fund the difference in cost between the previously agreed PDA and the new "BlackBerry".

6.5 The House Committee agreed to the proposals put forward by Alun Cairns on behalf of the ICT Sub Group.

6.6 The Presiding Officer expressed concern about the limited specification of the needs of Assembly Members under the contract. Members agreed that the Presiding Officer should contact the National Audit Office and ask them to examine how Members' needs had been identified and expressed.

### **Action: Presiding Officer**

#### 7. Non Availability of ICT on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> March HC(2)-03-05(p5)

7.1 Members agreed that ICT systems would be shut down over the weekend of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2005 for Merlin engineers to perform essential maintenance.

#### 8. The Replacement of the Official Vehicle HC(2)-03-05(p6)

1. Members agreed to the replacement of the official vehicle.

### Any Other Business

#### 9 House Committee

9.1 Members agreed that the House Committee should continue to meet Thursday mornings as this would suit most Members.

## 10. Model of the Assembly Building

10.1 A model of the new Assembly Building would be on display in the Pierhead Building during the course of the following week.

## 11. No Smoking

11.1 Members agreed that the smoking room in the Assembly Building would be closed on 'No Smoking Day', Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> March.

**Date of next meeting:** 21 April 2005

**House Committee Secretariat**