

House Committee

HC(2) 07-05 (Minutes)

Date:	14 July 2005
Time:	9.00am
Venue:	Committee Room 1, Assembly Building, Cardiff Bay

Members present:

Deputy Presiding Officer (Chair)

Peter Black, AM Liberal Democrat

Lorraine Barrett, AM Labour

David Melding, AM Conservative

Christine Gwyther, AM Labour

Jane Hutt, AM Labour

Owen John Thomas, AM Plaid Cymru

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

Gwyn Griffiths, Legal Adviser

Wayne Cowley, Head of Fees Office

Nerys Evans, Head of Facilities Management

Mike Snook, Head of Human Resources

Catherine Morris, Parliamentary Executive

Gareth Brydon, Deputy Clerk to the House Committee

Apologies:

Presiding Officer

Janice Gregory, AM Labour

William Graham, AM Conservative

The Chair welcomed Christine Gwyther and David Melding to the meeting.	
1.	Minutes of previous meeting and actions arising
	<p>Members noted the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June. In referring to item 2.8, minor new works (HC(2)-06-05(p8)) on page 5, the House Committee agreed that a new sentence should be added to the end of the third paragraph. The third paragraph should thus read :</p> <p>"Members agreed that they should await a more detailed pre-tender estimate and detailed specification for the adaptation and extension of the Members' Tea Room to provide a Senior Dining Room/Restaurant. The Chair asked the Deputy Clerk to investigate the possibility of the private sector assisting with the cost of the redevelopment. However, the House Committee agreed that no decision should be taken until a full and proper assessment had been made of the new building."</p> <p>Members discussed circulation of House Committee minutes. They agreed that House Committee Members' personal support staff should also receive copies of the draft minutes when they were being circulated for comment.</p>

Action : Secretariat**1.1 Actions arising from previous meetings HC(2)-07-05(p1)****Changes to Members' ICT allocation**

It was noted that one Member had not yet had items of ICT properly installed for use at a constituency office. The Chair confirmed that the additional allocation of £3k for each Member must be used for ICT purposes. He asked Gwen Parry to prepare an additional paper to clarify the matter.

Action : Gwen Parry**Chamber loop system**

Gwen Parry reported that there was no loop system operating in the Chamber. There was a failure in the loop system in the public gallery which had now been resolved.

Sale of a meat dish to a vegetarian

Nerys Evans reported that the matter had been taken up with the restaurant manager and the member of catering staff concerned.

Air conditioning in the Chamber

Nerys Evans reported that the vents above seats 4,5 and 16 had been adjusted.

Fire evacuation procedures

The Chair said that a comprehensive fire alarm system was required that was clearly understood by all. There could be no margin for error where fire evacuation was concerned. House Committee noted that the paper on procedures it had asked for would be prepared for the next meeting in the Autumn.

Action : Nerys Evans**Party political broadcasts from the Neuadd**

The House Committee agreed that existing guidance on use of the Neuadd should be circulated to Members.

Action : Dianne Bevan

Visits to general practitioners

Mike Snook reported that advice on access to a GP for Members when staying in Cardiff had been circulated. He confirmed that support staff were included in this arrangement.

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Items for decision

2.1

Car parking HC(2)-07-05(p2)

Members were asked to consider three options for car parking and give guidance to officials in order that a further paper could be considered by the Committee in the Autumn.

Members agreed that any recommendations should include support staff but expressed the view that any costs should not fall to be paid out of Members' Allowances. They noted that there would be difficulties in differentiating between APS staff and other civil servants before separation.

The House Committee agreed that options B and C should be developed for further consideration by the Committee in the Autumn.

Action : Dianne Bevan

2.2

Contracts HC(2)-07-05(p3)

The House Committee was presented with a list of contracts for which it had responsibility. Members' views were sought on the current contractual arrangements and responsibilities in advance of or as part of separation project work.

The Chair asked whether the current cleaning contract provided satisfactory terms and conditions for the cleaners. Members agreed that a more detailed paper was required before they could give any strategic direction to any of the service contracts let by the Assembly. Nerys Evans was asked to provide a further paper for consideration by the Committee in the Autumn.

Action : Nerys Evans

2.3	Survey update (including shuttle bus, childcare and smoking) HC(2)-07-05(p4)
	<p>Members were provided with an initial analysis of the survey of building occupants carried out in July 2005 about childcare facilities, shuttle bus usage and smoking policy.</p> <p>The Chair said that the results of the survey would need to be carefully considered. In reply, Jane Hutt reported that she was in discussion with the Deputy Clerk about the provision of creche facilities. There were key issues still to be considered such as the question of sharing the facilities with neighbouring employers and whether a full nursery should be provided. It was noted that the provision of creche facilities might be a significant incentive for the attraction of new staff.</p> <p>It was agreed that a decision on smoking in the Assembly building would be taken when the results of the survey were fully disseminated and presented to the House Committee at its first meeting in the Autumn.</p> <p>It was also noted that the contract renewal process for the shuttle bus had been stopped as the tenders did not comply with environmental specifications. The current contract had therefore been extended until June 2006.</p> <p>Action : Nerys Evans</p>
2.4	Senedd update HC(2)-06-05(p5)
	<p>The House Committee was given an update on current progress with the construction, fit-out and operational policies of the Senedd. Members were asked to consider proposed arrangements for access and to indicate whether they would like the first floor service link to be available for general use. The Committee agreed that Assembly Members should be able to use both link bridges but visitors would be able to access the second floor link.</p> <p>Members commented upon the route from the existing building to the Senedd. It was noted that the restaurant would require alteration in order to accommodate access to the first floor link.</p> <p>Members discussed corridor access for journalists and visitors. The Chair asked whether it was appropriate to have access control points on the chamber entrance doors. Nerys Evans confirmed that it would be possible to programme the system to allow open access for Members at key times. The House Committee agreed that there were important operational, security and access issues that required further consideration. The Deputy Clerk said that a further paper would be produced for consideration by the Committee.</p>

The House Committee noted that the handover of the Senedd building from the contractors to the Welsh Assembly Government was likely to be in September and a series of familiarisation visits for Assembly Members, support staff and officials would take place throughout mid September/October. The fit-out period would take place during the autumn term and the first use of the new Chamber for Plenary was likely to be early in the New Year.

Action : Dianne Bevan

2.5

Members' ICT services – broadband enhancements HC(2)-07-05(p6)

Members were asked to consider whether they wanted to offer a second data connectivity capability to Assembly Members, using their existing Assembly provided computers and to decide which option to offer :

- a business broadband connection, with high level of pro-active management and support;
- a private broadband connection at 1 Mb, or
- a private broadband connection at 2 Mb.

Members briefly discussed the possibility of adapting existing private connections. It was agreed that there would be security, cost and contract implications. The House Committee agreed to recommend the third option of a private broadband connection at 2 Mb.

Some Members reported that they were experiencing problems with broadband connections in their constituency offices. Gwen Parry was asked to investigate.

Action : Gwen Parry

2.6

Merlin costings for the Senedd HC(2)-07-05(p7)

The House Committee was asked to consider the payment options available for the ICT, audio visual and broadcasting equipment in the Senedd and to give direction on which option to develop over the summer for presentation to the first House Committee in the Autumn. Members were presented with two options :

- A managed service option, spreading the costs of procurement and maintenance costs over a longer period;
- A standard support option, with capital purchase and ongoing service provided accordingly.

Members agreed to select the managed service option as it presented fewer risks and costs were comparable to those of the alternative option.

2.7 Retention of broadcasting facilities in the current Assembly building HC(2)-07-05(p8)

Gwen Parry presented a paper to House Committee seeking its approval to retain the broadcasting facilities in the existing chamber. The paper recommended that the existing Chamber should be retained in operational readiness for contingency purposes. She reported that a detailed specification had been developed with broadcaster input and a revised estimate of £280k had been provided for the procurement, installation and testing of all the equipment required to enable both chambers to be operational at the same time. The work could be funded from existing available sums (End Year Flexibility).

Members discussed the proposals. They expressed concern about spending a large sum of money on what could amount to a rarely used provision. Additionally, Members had previously agreed to defer a decision on use of the residual space in the current building until the Senedd had been in use for a few months. Therefore they considered that the Committee could not make a decision on use of the existing Chamber at the present time. In reply, Gwen Parry said that House Committee would not get an opportunity to debate the matter again until October.

The House Committee agreed that it was minded to reject the recommendations unless officials could present more compelling circumstances. Any new proposal should be presented to Members out of Committee by no later than 10th September 2005.

Action : Gwen Parry

2.8 Proposed budget transfers 2005 – 2006 HC(2)-07-05(p9)

Members agreed that the House Committee should approve the MEG to MEG transfers for 2005 – 2006 and that a motion to this effect should be put to plenary in November in parallel with a complementary motion amending the WAG budget.

2.9 Budget proposals 2006 – 2007 update HC(2)-07-05(p10)

The Deputy Clerk reported that the Chair had met with the Finance Minister the previous day to discuss the APS budget proposals for 2006 – 2007. Following the discussion and subsequent discussions between officials, she reported that the following possible changes to the agreed draft budget were before House Committee for consideration:-

- **Members' pay and allowances** – the June budget paper referred to an additional £0.53m for Members' pay and allowances, to account for the effect of the increases arising from SSRB recommendations. This budget had been underspent in recent years, last year by £1.36m. In the current year, however, the budget was reduced by £0.4m as part of the last budget settlement, and it was agreed that any costs above the budgeted amount would be met from underspends and EYF. It was suggested that the additional costs projected for 2006/7 be met from the accrued underspend. Subject to proper recognition of any resulting overspend for 2006/7 in the following year's budget, this change could be made.
- **Senedd running costs** – it was suggested that the effect of 7-day opening could be absorbed through use of underspends and EYF for the current year and next year, to allow flexibility. The matter would then be considered for the 2007/8 budget in the light of operational experience.
- **Separation** – the additional new posts identified in the APS to deal with predicted needs arising out of the reform of the Assembly could be funded separately through negotiated budget transfers associated with the separation of services.
- **Improved services** – the Committee was asked to look again at the proposals for service improvement to confirm that it wished to proceed.

Members discussed the report in detail. The House Committee agreed or noted :

- I. that it should be frugal in its consideration of the APS budget and any increase should be modest and wholly justifiable;
- II. the additional new posts to deal with the reform of the Assembly should be funded separately;
- III. it was noted that the current high figure for End Year Flexibility (EYF) would be considerably reduced once present agreed programmes had been completed;
- IV. Members agreed that the budget for 2006 – 2007 should be increased by 5% from the

- current year's budget (increased to recognise anticipated MEG to MEG transfers);
- V. a further paper would be produced and circulated to Members outlining how this commitment could be met, and an additional meeting of the Committee would be called in September if necessary to finalise the draft budget;
 - VI. it was agreed that Members pay and allowances would be reduced by £0.53m on the understanding that this sum would be recovered in 2007/8 if expenditure against Members pay and allowances was greater than that provided in the reduced budget.

Action : Dianne Bevan/Wayne Cowley

2.10	Annual Report – Members' allowance and expenses HC(2)-07-05(p11)
	Members agreed that the template used in the previous two years should be published in the 2004/05 Annual Report.
3	Items for Noting
3.1	Paper on performance against targets HC(2)-07-05(p12)
	<p>The House Committee noted the paper. Paul Silk was asked to pass on the Committee's congratulations to the Record of Proceedings for achieving a 100% target rate for publishing the record of proceedings following each committee meeting. It was noted that although research requests had fallen, this could be attributed to the increase in and improved quality of research briefings, which Members appreciated.</p> <p>Action : Paul Silk</p>
3.2	Monthly HR report HC(2)-07-05(p13)
	The House Committee noted the report
3.3	Overseas and external relations activities HC(2)-07-05(p14)
	Members noted the paper.

3.4	Freedom of information requests HC(2)-07-05(p15)
	Members noted the paper.
4	Matters referred including Assembly Questions
4.1	OAQ0006(HC) Members noted that the answer tabled on 29 June had been circulated.
5	Any Other Business
5.1	Postal system David Melding reported that first class mail was taking up to three days to reach recipients in the Assembly. In reply, Nerys Evans said that all mail was sorted and delivered as soon as it was received in the building, but she would make enquiries.
5.2	Management of the Senedd The Deputy Clerk reported that a paper on the management and operation of the Senedd would be put to the House Committee in the Autumn. Action : Dianne Bevan/Nerys Evans/Gwen Parry
5.3	Revised bilingual services statement Karin Phillips reminded Members that comments on the revised paper should be submitted to her. The Chair said that comments should be made by the end of July.
5.4	Committee business project Karin Phillips reported that the Chair had attended a presentation on a computer system for managing the business of Committees. Ideally any new system should be introduced in April 2006. A paper would be presented to the Committee in the Autumn. Action : Karin Phillips

5.5	<p>Official opening of the Senedd</p> <p>Members discussed invitations for the official opening ceremony of the Senedd. Gwen Parry reported that the proposal for each Member to invite an additional guest had been abandoned. Members also agreed that partners of guests need not be invited to attend the ceremony, in view of space considerations.</p> <p>The House Committee discussed international invitees. It was agreed that the Irish Consul in Cardiff should be sent an invitation. Members also agreed that invitations to the people of Wales should include all members of the community, for example. pensioners, young people, voluntary groups, businesses and mayors/chairs of local authorities. It was also agreed that consideration should be given to inviting civil servants who had worked on the project to the ceremony. Members further agreed that consideration should be given to the provision of a screen so that the ceremony could be viewed by as many people as possible.</p>
5.6	<p>The Urdd</p> <p>Members discussed the Urdd Eisteddfod recently held in Cardiff Bay, around the Pierhead Building and Oval Basin. It was reported that the Urdd would be returning to Cardiff Bay in three or four years time and organisers had expressed an interest in using the Assembly buildings. The House Committee agreed that the Assembly buildings belonged to all of the people of Wales. However, formal guidance was required on whether the Assembly estate could be used for such purposes and this should be drafted before any decision was made. The matter would therefore be decided at a future date.</p> <p>Action : Dianne Bevan</p>
5.7	<p>Security status</p> <p>The House Committee endorsed the Clerk's action in raising the security status in the Assembly to amber following the previous week's terrorist attacks in London. The Clerk reminded the House Committee that visitors to the Assembly should be escorted around the building at all times.</p>
	<p>Date of next meeting: 6 October 2005</p> <p>House Committee Secretariat</p>