

## **House Committee Minutes**

**Date:** 9 February 2006

**Time:** 9.00am

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

### **Members present:**

Deputy Presiding Officer (Chair)

Leighton Andrews, AM Labour

Lorraine Barrett, AM Labour

Peter Black, 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

Gwen Parry, Director of Assembly Communications

Karin Phillips, Head of Members' Research and Committee Service

Gwyn Griffiths, Legal Adviser

Steven O'Donoghue, APS Finance Manager

Wayne Cowley, Head of Fees Office

Nerys Evans, Head of Facilities Management

Michael Snook, Head of Human Resources

Louise Hull, Executive Officer to the Deputy Presiding Officer

Gareth Brydon, Deputy Clerk to the House Committee

**In Attendance :** Steve Gibbon, GVA Grimley (for agenda item 2.6)

**Apologies :** Jane Hutt, AM Labour

**Observing :** Aled Eirug, Constitutional Consultant

John Grimes, APS

Daniel Collier, House Committee Secretariat

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Introductions

The Chair welcomed Leighton Andrews, who was attending the meeting on behalf of Jane Hutt. Members agreed that Aled Eirug, Constitutional Consultant, could observe the meeting.

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

Members noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2006 will be published by 9 March 2006.

**1.1 Actions arising from previous meetings HC(2)-02-06(p1)**

**Access to information**

The Clerk to the Assembly reported that a decision by the Information Commissioner on the release of information by the House of Commons was expected shortly.

**Child care facilities in Cardiff Bay**

Members sought an update on progress with the provision of child care facilities.

Dianne Bevan reported that she would be meeting the Business Minister to discuss progress. A feasibility study was currently being made and a timetable for the establishment of childcare arrangements would be presented at the House Committee meeting on 9 March.

**Members agreed that a clear timetable should be provided on 9 March. Consideration should also be given to the differing needs of potential users, such as visitors to the Assembly requiring short term child care and Members or staff requiring all-day care.**

**Action : Dianne Bevan**

**Access to basement car park**

Reference was made to the plan to install a screen 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 reported that the installation of the proximity system had been awaited. It had been anticipated that this might resolve the issue, but it had not. The installation of a screen would now proceed.

**Members asked that they be kept informed of progress.**

2 Items for decision

**2.1** **Senedd Issues**

i) Senedd update (oral update)

Members were asked for feedback following the first week of use of the Senedd.

Members expressed their pleasure with the Senedd and they agreed that the building was a fitting new home for the Assembly. However, they agreed to list 'teething' issues that were a cause for concern or might require resolution or further investigation :

1. the Siambr was too cold for some users;
2. the hard floors and doors adjacent to the Siambr caused noise when people were entering or exiting;
3. there may be issues of privacy regarding the viewing of computer screens;
4. the paper drop off system at fixed intervals during business was not satisfactory;

5. some cameras were noisy when moving along the rails;
6. there was no suitable place in the Cwrt for signing papers;
7. there was insufficient soft seating outside the Siambr;
8. access to the Cwrt should be monitored and there should be signage to advise the public;
9. the non-availability of drinking water near the Siambr;
10. prices in the Members' tea room and the public café were different;
11. a Member questioned the decision to use the name 'Senedd' and other names for areas within the building with no English version;
12. the 'Senedd' e-mail mailbox was a duplication and not really needed;
13. the use of cordless mice in the Chamber may be more appropriate;
14. there were problems with the use of ear pieces, headphones and volume controls.

Members discussed some of the issues raised and agreed the following:

4. Paper delivery during business – Members expressed their preference for the usher system used in the former Chamber. The Presiding Officer said that the system in the Senedd had been adopted to avoid the disruption of movement in the Siambr. **The Committee agreed that ushers should be available on demand but that they should show discretion in delivering papers when a Member was speaking. Appropriate training should be given to the ushers before this system was adopted.**

**Action : Nerys Evans**

5. Noisy cameras – Gwen Parry reported that she was aware of the problem with camera noise and a solution was being sought.

**Action : Gwen Parry**

6. Signing of papers – the Presiding Officer said that six 'hot desking' rooms were available in the Senedd and these could be used for signing papers as well as holding meetings.

**Members agreed to use these rooms for signing papers where**

**necessary and to keep the matter under review, but also to investigate acquisition of a small unit at which papers could be signed whilst the Member was standing.**

7. Soft seating outside the Siambr – the matter could be resolved by adding further occasional tables and chairs from other parts of the building.

**Action : Nerys Evans**

8. Security – Members expressed concern that the public could descend the stairs to the waiting room area unaware that the stairs provided access to the waiting room only and nowhere else.

**The Committee agreed that appropriately placed signs should be erected at the top of the stairs.**

**Action : Dianne Bevan/Nerys Evans**

**The Committee agreed that the remaining issues should be considered by officials and resolved in due course.**

Dianne Bevan reported that Committees would probably be meeting in the Senedd the following week or immediately after February Recess.

ii) Purchase and maintenance of the Senedd ICT equipment HC(2)-02-06(p2)

The Committee again considered the paper on the Merlin Managed Service proposal for the provision and maintenance of information and communication technology (ICT) and audio visual (AV) equipment in the Senedd. The paper was originally presented at the previous Committee meeting on 26 January but a decision was deferred pending receipt of the views of the ICT sub-group.

Gwen Parry reported that the ICT sub-group was minded to recommend that the Managed Service Option was the preferred way forward, provided there was a break clause in 2008 and no financial penalty if it was decided then to

withdraw from the contract. This would enable an alternative provider for the service to be sought.

**The House Committee agreed to accept the recommendation of the ICT sub-group with the proviso that the Managed Service Option included a break clause in 2008 that would not mean a penalty should the Commission decide to withdraw from the contract.**

**Action : Gwen Parry**

**2.2 Security/Buildings sub group HC(2)-02-06(p3)**

Members considered proposals to establish a Sub Group or Sub Committee of the House Committee with responsibility for issues relating to Assembly buildings devolved to the House Committee, their security and possibly the functions of the Arts Sub Group.

**Members discussed security in the new building and the role of the police in this. They agreed that security should be reviewed and the advice of the police should be taken into consideration. Dianne Bevan undertook to invite the relevant Assistant Chief Constable of South Wales Police to attend a future meeting of the Committee.**

**Action : Dianne Bevan**

**Members agreed that discussions should take place with the Chair of the Arts Sub Group and that the matter should be discussed at the next meeting of the Committee on 9 March.**

**Action : Louise Hull**

The Committee discussed security and the legal position with regard to protestors staying on the Assembly estate, especially at night. Members were mindful that the Assembly was a public building and that it would attract protestors. While they did not wish to discourage fair and reasonable protest they were concerned about the potential risks to staff, Assembly property and the protestors themselves. Gwyn Griffiths advised that the

Assembly could take action through the courts if it was deemed necessary although this would take some time. Dianne Bevan reported that to clarify the existing situation signage indicating opening and closing hours was being erected and it was noted that the Senedd would close to the public at 8.00pm. However Members agreed that a protocol was needed in respect of handling protests inside the Assembly.

**Dianne Bevan was asked to prepare a paper for the Committee.**

**Action : Dianne Bevan**

2.3

Separation

i) Separation - issues HC(2)-02-06(p4)

The House Committee was updated on issues arising from the proposed separation between the Assembly and Welsh Assembly Government.

The Clerk to the Assembly reported that the Presiding Officer and First Minister had issued a statement that week regarding the division of Accounting Officer responsibilities between the Clerk to the Assembly and the Permanent Secretary.

**The House Committee noted the report.**

ii) Separation – financial systems HC(2)-02-06(p5)

Members were presented with a report seeking direction in relation to the core financial systems to be used by the Assembly Commission.

**The House Committee agreed in principle to explore option B further, ie to replicate all existing systems and bring them in-house.**

The Chair asked Steven O'Donoghue to return to the Committee with further information when it was available.

**Action : Steven O'Donoghue**

iii) Separation – Provision of an Internal Audit Service APS HC(2)-02-06(p6)

The House Committee was asked to consider the provision of an Internal Audit Service for the Assembly Parliamentary Service.

**Members discussed the paper and agreed that officials should adopt the most appropriate and cost-effective means of providing the Internal Audit service.**

2.4

Review of Assembly Members' pay and allowances HC(2)-02-06(p7)

The Committee's view was sought on the timing of the next review of Members' pay and allowances and associated issues.

Members discussed the relative merits of inviting the SSRB to undertake the review or employing a firm of consultants.

**The Committee agreed to accept the recommendations in the report and invite the SSRB to undertake a limited exercise prior to the next election, to address specific issues likely to arise immediately upon the start of the Third Assembly, and then to undertake a more detailed review afterwards. This would include proposals in respect of Deputy Ministers and the likely introduction of a Counsel General post from May 2007.**

2.5

**Arrangements for monitoring numbers of staff with disabilities HC(2)-02-06(p8)**

The Committee considered a paper outlining arrangements for the appropriate monitoring of numbers of staff with disabilities. An item would be included in the HR report to the Committee in the future.

**Members noted the report.**

2.6

**Assembly Office leases, car parking and road closure HC(2)-02-06(p9)**

The House Committee considered proposals made upon specialist advice to rationalise the basis of the leases in respect of the Assembly Offices. Mr Gibbons of Grimleys attended to advise Members.

**Members agreed to accept the recommendations contained in the proposals and consolidate the lease of the Assembly Offices, extend the term of the new consolidated lease and agreed the proposals for rental and rent review.**

**2.7 Review of use of external translation facility HC(2)-02-06(p10)**

The House Committee's views were sought on the future use of a Members' translation service.

**Members noted the paper and agreed that the service should continue, subject to a further review at an appropriate point. They asked that an e-mail be circulated to Assembly Members to remind them of the service.**

**Action : Gwen Parry**

**3 Items for noting**

**3.1 Paper on indictors against targets HC(2)-02-06(p11)**

Members noted the paper. The Clerk to the Assembly drew attention to the increasing number of Committee meetings. Gwen Parry drew attention to the shorter turn around time for translations.

**3.2 Monthly HR report HC(2)-02-06(p12)**

Members noted the report.

**3.3 APS budget report HC(2)-02-06(p13)**

Members briefly discussed the new format of the report. They also discussed the likely underspend for General Administrative Expenditure and the use of end of year flexibility.

3.4 Overseas and external relations activities HC(2)-02-06(p14)

Members noted the paper.

3.5 Access to information requests HC(2)-02-06(p15)

Members noted the paper.

**4 Matters referred including Assembly Questions**

4.1 Members noted that WAQ 45227 tabled for answer on 24 January 2006 had been circulated previously.

**5 Any Other Business**

Blackberry for Presiding Office driver

The Chair sought the Committee's approval for the provision of a Blackberry for the Presiding Officer's driver, to enable him to have remote access to diaries.

**Members agreed to the request.**

Official Opening of the Senedd

Lorraine Barrett enquired about inviting a number of disabled children from MENCAP to the opening.

Gwen Parry reported that the BBC would be covering the whole event live from 11.00am. A number of portable 'big screens' would be located at venues around Wales.

Gift from the Canadian Parliament

The Clerk to the Assembly said that the Canadian Parliament wished to present the Assembly with an Inuit sculpture.

**The House Committee agreed that it should accept the gift.**

#### Numbering of rooms in the Senedd

The Chair asked Members' for their agreement to number the new rooms in the Senedd 1 – 15.

**Members agreed to the request and that the existing Committee rooms in the Assembly building should also be numbered sequentially once the new rooms were numbered.**

#### Road Barriers

Dianne Bevan asked the Committee to agree an increase from the estimated £60,000 to £100,000 for the expenditure to install raising arm barriers on the Pierhead Street and Harbour Drive access routes to the Senedd. The increase had resulted from detailed estimates which had included the need to install services in the road. Security advice had indicated that vehicular access to these areas needed to be controlled.

**Members agreed to the request.**

#### Opening hours of the Senedd during Bank Holidays

A paper on APS policy for opening hours would be presented at the next Committee meeting.

#### Trustees of the Members' Pension Fund

The Chair sought the agreement of House Committee to retain Peter Law as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Members' Pension Fund and to appoint a sixth Member to the Board. The next meeting of the Trustees would be held in March.

**Members agreed to the proposal.**

**Date of next scheduled meeting: 9 March 2006**

**House Committee Secretariat**