

HOUSE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: 6 April 2006

Time: 9.00am

Venue: Committee Room 1, Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Members present:

Deputy Presiding Officer (Chair)
Lorraine Barrett, AM Labour
Peter Black, AM Liberal Democrat
William Graham, AM Conservative
Jane Hutt, AM Labour
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
Nerys Evans, Head of Facilities Management
Nadia Cummins, Access to Information Adviser
Catherine Morris, Parliamentary Executive
Gareth Brydon, Deputy Clerk to the House Committee

Apologies :

Janice Gregory, AM Labour

Observing :

Daniel Collier, House Committee Secretariat
John Grimes, Structural Change Programme Manager
Aled Eirug, Constitutional Consultant

Introductions

The Chair welcomed APS staff and Aled Eirug, Constitutional Consultant who were observing the meeting.

1 Minutes of previous meeting and actions arising

- 1.1 Members noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2006 would be published once they were cleared by Members and by no later than 4 May 2006.
- 1.2 Actions arising from previous meetings HC(2)-05-06(p1)

Assembly Buildings Sub Group

Lorraine Barrett reported that membership of the sub group was to be Peter Black, William Graham, Owen John Thomas and herself. The group had agreed informally that she would be its Chair. John Grimes would provide the secretariat for meetings. It was expected that the first formal meeting would be held after the Easter recess.

Members agreed that the a system for members of the public to ask to see their constituent Assembly Member at the Senedd should be considered by the sub group.

Nerys Evans reported that queuing problems in the restaurant would be considered by the Catering Sub Group.

2 Items for decision

- 2.1 Business continuity planning – priorities HC(2)-05-06(p2)

The Committee discussed a paper outlining the arrangements in place in the APS to cope with major disruption that might threaten the office's meeting its key objectives. The paper sought the Committee's guidance on priorities in the event of such an emergency.

In the discussion Members noted that County Hall had been selected as an alternative in the event that the Senedd was not available for plenary meetings. A question was asked about how the APS would cope in the event of industrial action by public and Parliamentary staff in both the Assembly and County Hall. The Clerk to the Assembly said that the continuity plans did not account for both of these possibilities occurring simultaneously, although such a possibility would be taken into consideration by officials.

Members agreed the priorities set out in the paper.

2.2 Procurement – departure procedures HC(2)-04-06(p3)

Members were presented with a paper proposing procedures that might be followed within APS when there was a need to depart from normal procurement procedures.

The Committee noted that the APS and the Government had separate procurement manuals although they were almost identical.

Members agreed the procedure set out in the paper and that the APS should depart from ‘normal’ practice only when an individual case warranted departure.

2.3 APS publication scheme HC(2)-04-06(p4)

The Committee was presented with a paper proposing a revision of the existing National Assembly for Wales publication scheme. Members’ views were sought on the draft publication scheme in respect of the APS.

The House Committee noted that the scheme and that it was developed in conjunction with the Welsh Assembly Government, although both APS and WAG would have their own schemes.

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3 Items for noting

3.1 APS budget report HC(2)-05-06(p5)

The Committee noted the report. Members briefly discussed the provision of overtime payments and predicted underspend in the APS against the profiled budget.

Action : Steven O'Donoghue

Monthly HR report HC(2)-05-06(p6)

Members noted the report.

3.2 The Presiding Officer raised an issue in relation to human resources in the APS. He expressed concern about the advertising of job vacancies and existing staffing levels. He said it was important that the APS did not pre-empt possible decisions on recruitment by the Assembly Commission. He proposed a moratorium on further recruitment until 2007.

The Clerk to the Assembly said that proposals to increase staff would have to come to the Committee. He suggested he prepare a paper for the next meeting of the Committee on staffing and recruitment in the APS. The Presiding Officer said that he was content with this response.

Action : Paul Silk

The Chair asked whether Members were content with the advertisement of two grade 7 vacancies in MRS. Members agreed that they should be filled.

The Committee discussed the employment of temporary staff. Members noted that temporary staff employed directly rather than through a recruitment agency were less expensive. They expressed support for this method of securing temporary staff. Members agreed that it would be useful if data on temporary staff employed in the APS could be included in the HR report.

Members discussed best practice in the context of advertising APS vacancies externally. The Clerk to the Assembly said that a paper would be presented at the next meeting of the Committee.

Action : Mike Snook

The Clerk to the Assembly referred to the percentage absence for sickness

among security staff. He said that management action was in place to address the issue.

Indicators against targets HC(2)-05-06(p7)

Members noted the report.

The Clerk to the Assembly reported that the number of visitors to the Assembly who were attending Plenary had increased three fold. He also added that the Wednesday Record of Proceedings was being published ahead of target.

The Presiding Officer said that policy on translating the Record of Proceedings might need to be reconsidered particularly if, after 2007, plenary were to meet more frequently. Gwen Parry was asked to prepare a paper on the policy and cost of providing a verbatim translation of proceedings at Plenary and Committees.

William Graham said that he would like it to be noted that he considered the Record of Proceedings excellent.

Action : Gwen Parry

Access to information HC(2)-05-06(p8)

Members noted the report.

Overseas and external relations activities HC(2)-05-06(p9)

Members noted the paper.

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Matters referred including Assembly Questions

Members noted that WAQ 46375 tabled for answer on 23 March 2006 had been circulated previously.

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Any Other Business

Voting system in the Siamb

The Presiding Officer reported that Jim Maynard the designer of the voting system in the Siambr had offered to make a presentation to the Committee.

Members agreed that a presentation should be made at the start of the next Committee meeting.

House Committee meetings

3.3 The Chair asked Members whether they were content for the Committee to meet routinely once every four weeks and use the second meeting for urgent business only if required.

Members agreed to the proposal.

Lorraine Barrett said that it might be possible to use the dates of any unused second meetings for meetings of the Buildings Sub Group.

Translation services

Members briefly discussed whether to allow the APS translation service to translate Party group meetings rather than contract out the service. A short paper would be presented to the next Committee.

Action: Gwen Parry

Visitor access to the Siambr

The Committee discussed access to the Siambr by visiting public outside the hours of Plenary.

A Member had expressed concern that visitors who had to travel long distances to the Assembly might find it difficult to arrive at the Siambr before 11.00am. However, officials stressed the need to test equipment, such as the voting system and ICT, before Plenary in the afternoon. There were also other matters of concern such as visitors standing on the sculpture or using Members' chairs.

Members agreed that the Buildings Sub group should consider the matter.

Action : Secretariat

Unescorted visitors

The Chair reminded Members that visitors should not be left unescorted in the Senedd or Assembly offices. Dianne Bevan was asked to circulate a further reminder to Assembly Members.

Action : Dianne Bevan

3.4

Assembly web site

Jane Hutt said she would like to extend her thanks and recognition to Gwen Parry, Brian Davidge and their colleagues for the collaborative work on the recent launch of the new Welsh Assembly Government web site.

3.5

Members' Allowances

Peter Black said that support staff were not covered by the temporary staff allowance in cases of maternity or paternity leave. There was also a difference in policy between Assembly staff and support staff. Steven O'Donoghue was asked to investigate and to prepare a paper.

Action : Steven O'Donoghue

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Members' Tea Room

4.1

Nerys Evans reported that the Members tea room in the Assembly offices would be open the following week. The tea room in the Senedd would be closed but a sign would be placed outside the room for Members to contact the caterers if they wished to use it.

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Date of next scheduled meeting: 4 May 2006

House Committee Secretariat

