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Executive Board Report to the Assembly Commission January 2008

1. Assembly Commission's Strategic Goals

1.1 Strategic Goal – Promoting and widening engagement in devolution

(a) Media Coverage

Towards the end of last term there was significant positive coverage of the Finance Committee's scrutiny of the Welsh Government's budget. The Welsh media also continued to cover the introduction of proposed new LCOs and to concentrate on the new legislative process under the 2006 GOWA. There was extensive coverage about the perceived problems with the NHS Redress Measure. A priority in the coming term will be to continue the work of explaining how the new powers are working to counteract some misleading speculation in the media.

There was extensive and negative Welsh media coverage of a case brought by a Welsh Assembly Government employee, consistently referring to the Assembly rather than Government. Both the Presiding Officer and our Chief Legal Adviser have written in robust terms to the media formally seeking corrections.

(b) Media literacy and citizenship conference

A major conference on e-democracy was hosted by the National Assembly in partnership with NIACE Dysgu Cymru and OFCOM on 14 January. Aimed at encouraging debate about the development of an e-democracy strategy in the Welsh context, speakers included Deputy Ministers Leighton Andrews and John Griffiths, Commissioner Peter Black and Assembly Members Alun Cairns, Alun Davies and Bethan Jenkins. Representatives from the Welsh broadcast media, telecommunication managers, the Hansard Society, the Wales Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Welsh Local Government Association contributed to the proceedings. The conference was an opportunity for us to demonstrate what we hope will develop into a world class e-petitions system, and expert feedback informed the further development of our unique system. The conference was



recorded and edited highlights will be available on our website within the next two weeks.

1.2 **Strategic Goal – Unity, leadership and a bold response to constitutional change**

(a) **Conference of Speakers/POs of the Commonwealth and SPG Conference**

Claire Clancy attended the 19th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth, which was a good opportunity to meet other Clerks. The topics debated were: Privilege and the right of reply; Keeping order and fostering decorum; Standards and ethics for parliamentarians; and Parliament's relations with the public. She also attended the Study of Parliament Group annual conference, where the main themes were the devolved legislatures and modernising parliamentary institutions. Adrian Crompton was a speaker at the conference, updating delegates on the work of the Assembly since May 2007, explaining the new powers under the GOWA 2006, and pointing to achievements and consequences so far.

(b) **Legal Education Seminar**

Keith Bush contributed to increased awareness of the developing legislative role of the Assembly by participating in a seminar organised by the UK Centre for Legal Education on "Exploring the implications of the Government of Wales Act 2006" and by delivering the annual Sir Elwyn Jones Memorial Lecture at the University of Bangor on the theme "The Government of Wales Act 2006 - Getting real about devolution".

(c) **Legislative programme update**

Government LCOs

Five government LCOs have been introduced since the start of this Assembly. Of these, committee scrutiny in the Assembly has been completed on two and the third will report by 25 January. Committees for the two most recent LCOs introduced were set up before Christmas. One of these, the committee considering the LCO on Domiciliary Care, is taking evidence jointly with the Welsh Affairs Committee on 17 January.

Government Measures

The committee established for Stage 1 consideration of the NHS Redress Measure is due to report by 25 January.



Private Members' LCOs

Three rounds of ballots for Private Members' legislative proposals have been held. Of the three winning LCO proposals, two have been given leave to proceed by the Assembly and are in the process of being drafted by APS staff, the third has yet to be considered in plenary for leave to proceed.

Private Members' Measures

Of the three winning Measure proposals, one has been given leave to proceed - it is in the process of being drafted by APS and has to be laid before the Assembly by 19 March - one did not gain the Assembly's leave to proceed and the third has yet to be considered in plenary for leave to proceed. Committees will be established to consider all successful proposals when the Members in charge are ready to proceed.

Future Private Members' ballots

Further rounds of ballots will be held on 20 February, 16 April and 11 June.

1.3 Strategic Goal – Respect, probity and good governance

(a) Best Practice for Audit Committees Conference

Craig Stephenson attended this conference, organised by HM Treasury. There was much emphasis on the induction of independent advisers, awareness of the organisational culture and discussions around models of good and bad audit committees. Independent Advisers should be seeking to establish the integrity of internal systems, financial controls and our risk management arrangements in order to provide reassurance to us as an organisation.

(b) First meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee

The Corporate Governance Committee met for the first time on 6 December. The membership consists of three of our Independent Advisers, Richard Calvert (Chair), Tim Knighton and Professor Robert Pickard as well as our Commissioner for Assembly Resources, William Graham AM. The Committee agreed its terms of reference and received presentations from our internal and external auditors on their work programmes. Committee members noted the positive comments regarding past and current audit performance but recognised the challenges that being a body corporate would bring.



Claire Clancy outlined the Statement of Internal Control system which would become an integral part of the organisation's processes throughout the year. Steven O'Donoghue provided an update on work to develop a risk register for the organisation, and to create an environment where staff contribute ideas which might enhance the business of the organisation. An ideas and weakspots line has now been launched.

(c) **Internal Audit Plan - progress**

RSM Bentley Jennison, our internal auditors have completed audits in four areas: Key Financial Controls; Payroll/HR; Follow-Up from last year's audit recommendations; and Procurement. Two final reports have been received and the internal auditors will present their findings at the next meeting of the Corporate Governance Committee in February.

(d) **The Independent Panel on Financial Support for Assembly Members**

The Panel, which is chaired by Sir Michael Wheeler-Booth, met for the first time on 6 December 2007 and again on 16 January 2008.

The Review Panel will prepare a report setting out its findings and recommendations, with reasons, for submission to the Assembly Commission by February 2008 in relation to salaries and pensions, which may be backdated to the date of the Election in May 2007.

The SSRB report on financial support for MPs is to be published on 16 January and considered by the House of Commons soon afterwards. The Commission has indicated that the current link between MP salaries and those of AMs should be applied to the new MP salaries which result. Further information will be available at the meeting.

1.4 **Strategic Goal – Working sustainably**

(a) **Sustainable Development in Government**

Staff attended a *High Performance Sustainable Development in Government* event which complemented the work being done by BDSP to ensure that the Assembly becomes an exemplar for energy consumption in our buildings.

1.5 **Strategic Goal – The best service, provided in the most effective way**

(a) **IT Update**



The Commission's meeting room can now have paperless meetings with monitors available on the table and on screen. The installation of permanent microphones is being run through the Merlin contract, to allow delivery in a shorter period than a full tender would allow.

The project to introduce wireless connectivity for AMs in areas of the Senedd is now on-track for testing by some AMs in January and full roll-out in February. This will enhance the ability to use laptops in Committee meetings. New, improved keyboards will be installed at Assembly Member Siambur desks during January, to replace the black flimsy models currently in use. A test keyboard will be installed on one of the Information Pods.

The website and the project team involved in the design and delivery were Medallists in the British Computer Society Annual Awards in December, in the category of best public sector organisation.

(b) **Equality of Opportunity Committee – 6 December**

The Assembly Commission gave evidence to the Equality of Opportunity Committee on 6 December 2007, represented by Commissioner Lorraine Barrett, Dianne Bevan and Holly Pembridge, to present the Annual Report on Equality. Lorraine highlighted the areas of achievement and those where we can improve e.g. addressing access issues in the Senedd, introducing automatic doors in the Assembly Office on the ground and first floor corridors with public access, improving equality training for staff and Assembly Members, widening the audience for recruitment advertising and exploring the potential of running an in-house shadowing scheme.

The report was well received. Members' questioning covered the timeframe for enhancing the accessibility of the Siambur and Senedd, the approach to building up a critical mass of people from diverse communities and ways in which equality training and awareness-raising could be provided for Members.

(c) **Successful implementation of the pay deal**

Following the conclusion of negotiations with Trade Unions late last year, ballots of union members lead to the acceptance of the Commission's pay offer by members of all three unions (FDA, PROSPECT and PCS). The deal, which is effective from 1 April 2007, will be used as a foundation for further discussions with Trade Unions as we work to develop our pay framework in line with the developing needs of the Commission.



- (d) The Assembly's Legal Service has now reached the establishment level authorised by the Commission for the current financial year, enabling Keith Bush to be confident of its ability to support the Assembly's expanding legislative programme.

2. Key Activities and Events

2.1 Assembly Business

In December, members of the Commission and Business Committee met to discuss the resourcing and organisation of Assembly Business. The key points of agreement were as follows:

- that we should review the effectiveness and operation of Assembly committees identifying, in particular, the desired outcomes of effective committee activity and analysing how committee time is currently used. A proposed methodology and timetable will go to the Business Committee in January and initial work, conducted by APS staff, should be completed in March.
- possible alterations to the size of some committees would be considered - these were put to the Business Committee at the first meeting of this term.
- Members asked for clarification of the various arrangements in place to allow committees to access expert advice and for procurement and appointment arrangements to be as straightforward and rapid as possible. We are close to finalising arrangements for a simple process to obtain expert advice to committees.

Even since the joint meeting in December, further pressures for additional committee activity have arisen - the Finance Committee and Audit Committee have requested a doubling of their number of meeting slots - and the legislative committee workload is set to increase. As was explained at the joint meeting, it will not be possible to accommodate this increasing level of activity without some change in practice, for instance, meeting at times outside the existing envelope for committee business, smaller committees, or an acceptance that the timetable will contain clashing memberships necessitating Members to choose which committees to attend and which to miss. The impact on staff and resourcing is also significant and we are assessing whether the additional resourcing in the Commission's 2008/09 budget, to support Assembly business, is sufficient to meet the emerging pattern.

The Presiding Officer indicated that similar joint meetings would take place in the future, primarily aimed at informing the Commission's budget proposals. A joint meeting has been scheduled for 5 June 2008.



2.2 **Dinner in the Pierhead**

Public Affairs Cymru (PAC) was established in October 2006 to enable networking, organise events and promote good practice among the many organisations that are involved in public affairs or political lobbying in Wales. To celebrate its first birthday, the Assembly received a request from PAC to hold an inaugural Gala Dinner on 20 November 2007 at the Pierhead Building. With an audience of over a hundred public affairs professionals, journalists and Assembly Members (approx 12) in attendance, the guest speaker was Carwyn Jones AM, Counsel General and Leader of the House. The dinner was a resounding success and provided us with an opportunity to test the suitability of the Pierhead as a banqueting venue. Post-event debriefing informed the DCA report on the Pierhead.

2.3 **Recent appointments**

Head of Legislation and Chamber Services

Siwan Davies will rejoin the National Assembly for Wales as the Head of Legislation and Chamber Services in February. Siwan previously worked in APS for Committee Service and for the last three years, she has been living in Australia and working as the Deputy Clerk of the Queensland Parliament.

Security Manager

Following an open competition which attracted a very good range of candidates, Chief Superintendent Kevin Tumelty has been appointed as the new Security Manager for the Assembly. Kevin is a South Wales Police Officer at present and has led the police security operation for the royal opening of the Assembly. He has extensive experience in the field.

3. **Financial report**

The latest monthly report considered by the Executive Board is on the agenda as a paper to note and reflects the current year's position to the end of November 2007.

For four months now, an under spend of 2% against the profiled budget has been reported, but we are currently anticipating a full spend by the year-end.



The three significant areas being monitored by the Executive Board consist of:

- The Members' Pay and Allowances budgets – a current underspend reflects a skewing of claims in the pre and post election periods, and uncertainty remains on the possible costs of any agreed pay increases arising from the MPs and AMs salary review reports;
- A short-term underspend on staff costs in External Communications during a period of restructuring and refocusing to support the Commission's Strategy for the Third Assembly;
- An overspend in security staffing costs within Estates & Facilities Management, partly linked to increased levels of security cover in the Senedd, but mainly resulting from the continued opening of Pierhead as options for its future, and the relocation of the Education Service to the Siambr Fach, take shape.

4. Other information

- 4.1 A list of information disclosed since the last report under the Freedom of Information Act is attached at Annex A. The full disclosure can be provided to Commissioners on request.

Annex A

Information Released Following Access to Information Requests

November - December 2007

- APS organisational chart and salary structure
- The voting record of Kirsty Williams
- Tariff for publicly accessible eating areas in the National Assembly
- Details of car hire contract and the cost of car hire in 2006/2007 for individual Assembly Members

Information Withheld Following Access to Information Requests

November - December 2007

No information was withheld during the period.