

Senedd Commission



Venue: **Conference Room 4B - Tŷ Hywel**

Date: **Monday, 29 April 2024**

Time: **10.00 - 12.45**

Minutes: SC(6)2024(3)

Commission
Members:

Rt. Hon. Elin Jones MS (Chair)
Hefin David MS
Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Adam Price MS
Joyce Watson MS

Officials present:

Manon Antoniazzi, Chief Executive and Clerk
Arwyn Jones, Director of Communications and Engagement
Ed Williams, Director of Senedd Resources
Matthew Richards, Head of the Legal Service
Kate Innes, Chief Finance Officer
Leanne Baker, Acting Chief People Officer
Sulafa Thomas, Head of Commission and Member Support
Gwion Evans, Head of the Llywydd's Private Office
Simon Ball
Anna Daniel, Head of Strategic Transformation
Jan Koziel, Head of Procurement

Others in
attendance:

1 Introduction

1.a Introduction and apologies

No apologies were received.

The Llywydd welcomed Hefin David to his first meeting since being appointed as Commissioner on 17 April. It was confirmed that he would assume the Budget and governance 'portfolio' (including Audit and Risk Assurance Committee membership).

1.b Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1.c Minutes of the previous meeting

Commissioners agreed the Minutes of the meeting on 29 January.

2 Commission Services Insourcing

The Commission agreed, at its meeting on the 6 November 2023, to a broad statement of principle that the Commission's core preference is for services to be delivered in-house wherever practicable.

Commissioners considered the main findings of a scoping exercise and specific issues surrounding insourcing in relation to each of the services concerned, including an estimate of the likely level of complexity and risk associated with insourcing those service areas. They also received the combined estimate for the next stage in an insourcing process, that assumed the work would be undertaken as a single programme covering all in-scope service areas.

Commissioners discussed the information provided and reflected on the complexity and risks identified in the findings set out in the paper. They considered the relationship to existing contracts, capacity and the dynamic of significant programmes of work already in train. Commissioners recognised that proceeding with the project would require investment funds to be budgeted for, and would be a significant undertaking requiring a great deal of management focus and effort. One raised that the approach would be a huge responsibility in an area the Commission wasn't set up for, and this a significant risk.

Advice was also provided that the external report had highlighted the potential risk that future business cases arising from an insourcing project might not pass the Value for Money test; in that scenario, a direction from the Commission to the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer would likely be needed to proceed with the work.

The Commission agreed that their preferred position would be to make a 'hard' commitment in principle to progress the Commission Services Insourcing Project, and that the timing would be to commence this work mid-way through the next Senedd, recognising that it would then involve phased implementation. Some existing contracts will need to be re-procured in the next few years even if the long-term intention is to bring them in-house. Decisions in the interim period would be taken with this objective in mind.

Commissioners agreed to discuss the intended approach with party groups and feedback the following day via the secretariat if any concern were raised.

3 First Supplementary Budget 2024/25

The Commission received proposals for the first Supplementary Budget Request 2024-25.

Commissioners also received an update on the staff 2025-2028 Pay Deal Negotiations.

Reflecting discussions earlier in the meeting, Commissioners agreed to present a supplementary budget which would increase the total budget by £635,000 to £72.830 million, and increase the Cash requirement to be issued by the Welsh Consolidated Fund by £635,000 to £67.999 million. The increase in the total budget would be split across individual budgetary lines that the Commission has responsibility for.

Commissioners approved the Explanatory Memorandum to be laid, and to share information with their groups about the pay award for the lowest Commission payscales.

4 Draft Budget Strategy Considerations (2025-26)

Commissioners were provided with an outline of a number of issues for consideration, which would inform development of the 2025-26 budget to reflect the priorities of the Commission for the final year of the Sixth Senedd.

Commissioners discussed the items that are likely to impact on its finances during 2025-26 and considered the approach to take to address this impact, specifically in the 2025-26 draft budget.

Commissioners agreed that the budget proposals should be further developed and presented in the 2025-26 draft budget as proposed, in particular, in relation to:

- Senedd Reform budgets being reviewed to reflect the most up-to-date position,
- detailed budget projections for the Ways of Working programme ,
- Commission's Pay Strategy budget impacts,
- other non-pay considerations, including project costs and the continued absence of a contingency budget,
- delivery of the Commission's statutory requirements and corporate plan, recognising those ambitions need to be set mindful of the broader public sector funding context, and
- impact of the reviews of the Independent Remuneration Board into the shape of service delivery preparation for the Seventh Senedd.

Commissioners confirmed they were content with the approach to the next stage of budget preparation work.

Commissioners also noted that any budgetary impact of estimated future energy costs, reviewing estates, ICT, and project fund budgets, and the annual review of Determination Costs, would be set out in the 2025-26 Draft Budget.

5 Senedd Reform Matters

Following earlier discussion by the Commission regarding establishing a structured dialogue with the Independent Remuneration Board ("the IRB"), Commissioners agreed the format of the dialogue and that the first area for discussion with the IRB would focus on Member ways of working and support in relation to Members' Constituency Offices and loss of Office.

They noted the next steps on Commission-IRB dialogue in relation to simplification and governance, including the work underway within MBS to improve and simplify the administration of Members' claims processes.

It was agreed that the Commission would not be seeking any legislative changes to the governance framework for decision-making on Members' pay and allowances ahead of the Seventh Senedd, but would reflect on this and Commission - IRB relations as part of its Sixth Senedd legacy report to inform any further deliberations in the Seventh Senedd.

Commissioners also agreed the approach to Member engagement in relation to Senedd Reform as outlined in the paper and to communicate its decisions on these matters above to Members.

Commissioners discussed that the Commission-IRB dialogue was a useful platform to discuss Senedd Reform 'in the round', as the Commission was likely about to be charged to prepare for a different Senedd in 2026. They reflected that it was an opportunity, within a context of needing to be realistic about what would be possible in the time and within the public finances context. Commissioners agreed that an 'away day' session to think about the bigger picture of what it would be doing to support the Senedd in that changed scenario should be arranged.

6 Digital Data

6.a Retention and Disposal policy for MS Teams

Commissioners discussed the Commission's use of *Teams* and proposals to ensure it is used for informal and short-term discussion and that important corporate information is stored on *SharePoint*; and that information on *Teams* is automatically deleted after set time periods.

The Commission agreed in principle Senedd-wide automatic deletion periods for *Teams* Chats, being 28 days from the date created; and *Teams Channel* messages being 13 Months (from the date created).

They also agreed to engage with Members on the application of the policy to all Members of the Senedd and their support staff.

6.b Use of Non-Corporate Communications Channels

Commissioners considered a policy about Commission staff use of NCCCs (Non-Corporate Communication Channels) for business-related activities. NCCCs include messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and private e-mail.

Commissioners agreed, in principle, to prohibit the use of Non-Corporate Communication Channels. This would apply to Commission staff when discussing official business with each other and with Members. It was agreed that an implementation plan would be required before any changes are made, and that this plan would be discussed by Commissioners. Commissioners specified that the plan should anticipate that the shift to a new platform for messaging about Senedd business would be led by Commission Officials, rather than Members.

Commissioners discussed the significance of digital archiving of their records and asked for a paper to be brought to a future meeting about support that could be provided.

The change would not impact Members using WhatsApp to contact other Members, member staff or other people who are not connected to the Senedd (such as constituents), whether they use a personal phone or a Commission provided phone for this purpose.

7 Forward Plan for the Commission

Commissioners noted information which provided detail of anticipated Commission meetings to dissolution 2026 and an indicative programme of work that is foreseen during the period. This would be adjusted further following discussions during the agreed 'away day'.

8 Letter to Finance Committee - Response to consultation on WG Protocol

In March, Commissioners received a letter from Finance Committee requesting views on proposed changes to the Budget Process Protocol to inform ongoing discussions between the Committee and the Minister. Commissioners agreed a response letter.

9 Papers to note:

9.a Commission's Corporate Plan 2024-26

Commissioners noted the plan for the current and next financial year.

9.b Response Llywydd to FC re: financial implications of the Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill

Commissioners noted the response to a letter received from the Finance Committee.

9.c Letter to PAPAC - Response to recommendation 2 (scrutiny of 22-23 accounts)

Commissioners noted information provided to PAPAC by way of an update on Ways of Working programme, specifically Cardiff Bay 2032, Siambr 2026 and Ty Hywel 2026 projects.

9.d Members' Pension Scheme - final valuation report from GAD

Commissioners noted the final valuation report from GAD and as per their letter to the Commission last September, the employer contribution rate has been confirmed as 18% from 1 April 2024. The next valuation will be on 1 April 2026.

9.e ARAC Minutes 27 November 2023

Commissioners noted the minutes of the ARAC meeting on 27 November.

9.f Executive Board update (RAD decisions)

Commissioners noted the summary of recent recruitment decisions.

9.g Notes from Senedd Political contact group meeting 8 Feb 2024

Commissioners noted the notes from the Senedd Political contact group meeting on 8 February.

10 Any other business

- Commissioners briefly discussed a number of Standards related matters and agreed that a more detailed update should be provided later in the summer term.
- Commissioners agreed that Hefin David would be nominated as a Commission representative to the Members' Pension Board at the next occasion of a vacancy arising.

In the period since the last meeting, Commissioners had noted the following:

- Response to LJC inquiry into UK-EU governance
- Response to Equality & Social Justice Committee report
- Response to IRB consultation on the Determination (updated)
- Estate User communications about the farming protest
- Response to Reform Bill Cmt-2023/24 Determination calculations
- A letter from Finance Committee about the Budget Process Protocol

and agreed:

- An update to the Finance Committee about recommendations made in the Report on the Scrutiny of the Commission's Draft Budget
- letters to Finance Committee and Counsel General relating to Senedd Reform
- Member and MSS training and development proposals.