

The Assembly Commission

Meeting Venue: **Presiding Officer's office, 4th floor – Ty Hywel**

Meeting date: **Thursday, 2 February 2012**

Meeting time: **10: – 12:30**

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



Minutes: AC(4)2012(1)

Committee Members:

Rosemary Butler (Chair)
Peter Black
Angela Burns
Sandy Mewies
Rhodri Glyn Thomas

Officials present:

Claire Clancy, Chief Executive & Clerk of the Assembly (Official)
Adrian Crompton, Director of Assembly Business (Official)
Keith Bush, Director of Legal Services (Official)
Craig Stephenson, Principal Private Secretary to the Presiding Officer (Official)
Carys Evans, Principal Commission Secretary (Official)
Ross Davies, Equalities Manager (Official)
Ian Summers (Official)
Mike Snook, National Assembly for Wales (Official)

Others in attendance:

David Melding, Deputy Presiding Officer
Mair Barnes, Independent Adviser

1. Introduction

- 1(i) Introduction and apologies
- 1(ii) Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

1(iii) Minutes of the previous meeting

An update on Item 2 of the minutes was provided. Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM wrote on 13 January 2012 requesting the Presiding Officer's determination of whether the proposed National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill was within the legislative competence of the Assembly. He also wrote to the Chair of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee to give notice of the intended introduction of the Bill. The Bill was introduced on 30 January.

Commissioners thanked officials for their work on the Bill and Scheme and the associated consultation.

All other actions were being progressed by officials.

The minutes were formally agreed.

2. Assembly Commission Equality Plan 2012–16

The Presiding Officer thanked Ross Davies for compiling the submission to Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index and noted that the Assembly's ranking has improved again this year to the 20th gay friendly place to work in the UK, and third in the UK in the Government category. Commissioners expressed their congratulations to all those involved, as well as those involved in the staff network, which also includes Members' support staff, and which won the best Welsh network of the year.

Sandy Mewies AM introduced the paper on the equality plan.

The Equality Act 2012 requires the Commission to publish its equality objectives by April 2012. The Equality Plan 2012–16 has been developed, in consultation with Members, their staff and Assembly staff, as well as external partners and stakeholders, to cover the Commission's legal duties in relation to equality, the Commission's corporate ethos, roles and responsibilities, our priority objectives, consultation methodology and an action plan. While some of the actions represent new areas of work, many of them build on the work that has gone on to date to embed equality in the Assembly's work.

The Plan, once agreed, will be supported and monitored by the Equality Team. An annual report on progress against the Plan will be brought to the Commission each April.

Commissioners commended the rigorous consultation that had been undertaken in developing the plan and noted that it builds on a strong foundation. They discussed

the need to ensure there is sufficient data available to monitor the plan, particularly in relation to the composition of the workforce.

It was agreed that the plan represented a substantial and thorough piece of work. The Equalities team and all those involved in the preparation of the strategy were thanked for their efforts to date.

The Commission formally agreed the Equality Plan 2012–16.

Action: Officials to provide an update on the steps being taken to improve the monitoring of the workforce. A full review of the plan will take place in April 2013.

3. Reviewing the effectiveness of the Assembly Commission

The Commission agreed its Governance Principles and Supporting Provisions in June 2011. This included a commitment to evaluate the effectiveness of the Commission as a body, as opposed to the effectiveness of the organisation as a whole. It was agreed that the first formal evaluation would take place after about twelve months.

From 2011–12 onwards, it is a requirement that the Commission’s annual report and accounts contain a Governance Statement, which, amongst other things, will outline the governance arrangements for the organisation as a whole.

The proposed timescale and methodology for the evaluation was discussed and agreed. In particular, the first review will take place in the autumn of 2012. This will be an iterative process, identifying areas for improvement which will be subject to ongoing monitoring. It will be based on evidence gathered from Members and other stakeholders as well on information provided by the Commissioners themselves.

It was agreed that Ian Summers would undertake the evaluation, working with Mair Barnes, and that the approach will be outlined in the Governance Statement in the Accounts for 2011–12.

4. Update on Wales Legislation Online

The Commission considered the future of its financial support for the Wales Legislation Online website, in the light of: the objectives set by the Commission in 2008 and in particular progress towards a “Welsh statute book”; the fact that the website had not been able to secure sufficient long-term funding from other sources to enable substantial progress in that direction to be made, and; the Welsh Government’s alternative plans for improving the accessibility of Welsh law, as announced by the Counsel General on the 5 October 2011.

The Commission noted the praise which the website had attracted from a wider range of bodies over the years and agreed that it had made a useful contribution to public understanding of devolution over the last four years, with Commission support. However, as far as the future was concerned the Commission felt that its contribution to improving public accessibility to Welsh law could best be achieved by developing the information provided through the Assembly's own website. The Commission asked to be kept informed on progress in this direction.

The Commission decided not to continue its financial support for Wales Legislation Online and authorised the Chief Legal Adviser to take the necessary steps to give effect to this decision as soon as was reasonably possible.

5. Assembly staff reward strategy

The Commission existing pay deal for staff ends on 31 March 2012. The new reward strategy, which will be effective from 1 April 2012, was discussed and Commissioners stressed that it would be important to take account of the adverse economic context and other relevant contextual factors. The strategy will guide negotiations with trade unions and will underpin future reward arrangements.

6. Management Board report to the Commission

Claire Clancy introduced the report from the Management Board.

The paper provided an update on key issues within each of the strategic goals, as well as a finance update and details of the Freedom of Information requests received since the last Management Board report. This month, the minutes from the last meeting of the Assembly Commission Audit Committee were also annexed to the report for information.

The following items were discussed:

Facilities management contract

Following a competitive tendering process, the facilities management contract has been awarded to Norland Managed Services Ltd for five years with effect from 1 April 2012, with an option to extend for one additional year. The contract includes maintenance and management of the Assembly estate, estates advice, professional services and window cleaning, and involves expenditure of about £925,000pa.

Commissioners also discussed the approach to procurement more generally, and agreed that this should be an agenda item at a future meeting.

Severance scheme

A limited voluntary exit scheme is being offered to all Assembly staff. The scheme is designed to ensure that the Commission's staffing complement and structure is capable of supporting the delivery of outstanding parliamentary support during the Fourth Assembly by allowing the organisation to respond to shifts in skill requirements, improving workforce efficiency, facilitating organisational change, and delivering long-term savings where possible. Commissioners stressed the importance of ensuring that the decisions provided effective use of public funds and delivered a pay-back for the organisation.

Commissioners also received an update on the way the ongoing ICT problems were being addressed. Claire Clancy explained that she had written to senior management in Atos expressing serious concern about service standards and continuing problems, including the e-mail system failure on 18 January. Atos immediately started a service improvement plan.

Peter Black AM, along with Commission officials, will be meeting individual members to gather evidence on the ICT problems Members are facing to ensure these are addressed as part of the service improvement plan.

7. Assembly Commission rolling programme

The rolling programme was noted.

8. Any other business

Commissioners asked to have a private meeting with the Chief Executive following the Commission meeting.