

Manon Antoniazzi

Prif Weithredwr a Chlerc y Senedd
Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd

Nick Ramsay MS
Chair of Public Accounts Committee
Senedd Cymru
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

20 October 2020

Dear Nick

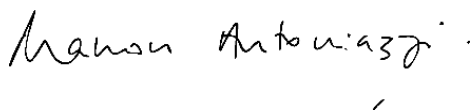
Scrutiny of annual report and accounts 2019-20

I am writing in response to your letter dated 22 September 2020, where you set out the items agreed upon, during the Commission's evidence session on 21 September 2020, that the Commission would provide the Committee. These five items are addressed in Annex 1.

The Committee also requested further information on four additional matters, these are also included in Annex 1.

I hope this provides the information you require and I would like to thank the Committee again for its scrutiny. As ever, if there is any further information your Committee would like, please let me know.

Yours sincerely



Manon Antoniazzi

Prif Weithredwr a Chlerc y Senedd / Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



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Annex 1

1. Confirm that you will send to this Committee a copy of the updated financial reports that you intend to send to the Finance Committee setting out the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Senedd Commission's budget;

Agreed.

2. Confirm the end date of the contract for external legal advice services following the departure of the Chief Legal Advisor under the Voluntary Severance Scheme in 2019, and the process by which that arrangement will be reviewed;

The current Chief Legal Advisor position arrangement is in place until dissolution. This is working well and there is an opportunity to extend the arrangement further as necessary. The options for a longer term solution will be reviewed in the new year based on continuing need for the Sixth Senedd, availability of these rare specialist skills and cost.

3. Confirm when you anticipate that the results of the Senedd Commission's annual staff survey will be made available to the public;

We are in early discussions with our new provider and Commission staff to develop and launch a new staff survey in late November. Results are likely to be made available early in the new year.

4. Provide details about the operation of the air conditioning units on the Senedd estate and any maintenance work to windows to allow for natural ventilation within the context of COVID-19;

Tŷ Hywel uses an air cooling system, not air conditioning. The system works a bit like a refrigerator, with warm internal air being circulated around the refrigerant unit to reduce temperature.



As a precaution during the COVID-19 pandemic these comfort cooling units across the estate have been switched off and the use of natural ventilation through opening windows has been encouraged.

Ty Hywel also has a separate ducted ventilation system which brings in fresh air from outside and a separate ducted system which extracts air to the outside. This system does not recirculate this air to other areas of the building. The Senedd open spaces are naturally ventilated and the system is maintained as part of our planned maintenance arrangements.

During the lockdown period, our maintenance team undertook an audit of all the windows in Ty Hywel to check which windows could be opened and to ensure that within office areas there were sufficient windows that could be opened to provide natural ventilation.

Due to the age and condition of the windows, there are a number of windows that cannot be opened or repaired. The Commission will be considering the feasibility of a future window replacement project for Ty Hywel which will include maximising natural ventilation in support of our carbon neutral strategy to 2030 as well as providing a more comfortable office working environment.

The Pierhead Building has been closed during the pandemic but the windows are maintained and are able to open to provide natural ventilation.

5. Details about the impact of COVID-19 on water use on the Senedd estate, and whether cleaning services use grey or mains water.

The closure of the estate in March and the limited reopening at the start of the current term has significantly reduced the water usage on the estate and, with very low number of staff on the estate and no visitors, the demands for water usage across the estate reduced by 77% between April and August in comparison with the same period last year.

The closure of the catering facilities during this period has also reduced the demand for water in terms of food preparation and dishwashing.

The rainwater harvesting system in the Senedd (grey water) is used for toilet flushing within the Senedd. Cleaning services for the estate use mains water.



6. What steps is the Senedd Commission taking to ensure that a higher proportion of goods and services are procured from Welsh suppliers? In particular, what are the key dates and processes associated with the tendering process for new catering services?

We are committed to taking a proactive approach to engaging with Welsh suppliers and have engaged with organisations such as the South Wales Chamber of Commerce and attended supplier events to raise the profile of the Senedd.

In recognising the importance of this element of work, the Governance and Assurance service (of which the Procurement team is a part) is currently looking to recruit a new member of staff and this added resilience within the service will allow greater capacity within the team to further increase our engagement with Welsh suppliers and to better understand the services that they can provide.

We continue to examine our use of national frameworks as Welsh suppliers aren't always well represented on UK wide frameworks, therefore these are used by exception only.

Our contract opportunities over £25K are advertised on Sell2Wales. Our main contractors, notably, our Facilities Management contractor and our Catering provider, also provide opportunities for Welsh suppliers as part of their supply chains.

Where practicable we break down our contracts into lots to provide greater opportunity for smaller suppliers to bid. The recent retender of the print room equipment is an example of this, one of the lots was awarded to a Welsh based supplier. This is a significant five-year contract with an annual spend of circa £66,000.

In respect of the re-tendering of the Catering contract, specifically, there is considerable uncertainty around the timing of the renewal of this contract due to the pandemic. We need time to consider the future working patterns on the estate and are therefore reviewing the timetable and plans for retendering. At this time, we do not know what the future demand will be for the service and this makes it challenging for us to develop our requirements.

The current contract is due to expire in September 2021. We will need to examine all our options including the possibility of having to extend the existing contract for at least one year.



We will keep this under review as the pandemic progresses because:

- the service has largely been closed since March and the contract catering industry is likely to continue to be affected.
- an important part of the tender specification and data relates to sales information for the previous year and we will not be able to provide meaningful information to assist tenderers to bid.
- it is likely that future flexible working will affect the daily numbers in attendance in the building and therefore the volume and type of services we require in the future.

The process associated with tendering the Catering contract will also change when the Brexit transition period ends on 31 December 2020. At that point we will no longer be required to advertise our high value contracts in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).

We will of course continue to advertise our contracts on Sell2Wales. We will run a formal tender process, which will be in line with the Public Contract Regulations, which set out the rules for awarding Public contracts. We issue our tenders electronically using an e-tendering system, which logs a full audit trail of all actions and correspondence.

7. What specifically is the Senedd Commission doing to improve the socio-economic diversity of its staff?

The Commission has a number of diversity targets in place and recognises that as well as focussing on inclusion of those with protected characteristics, particularly BAME and disability, we are committed to ensuring the socio-economic diversity of our workforce.

In line with the Welsh Government commitment to 'Commencing the Socio-economic Duty', we are seeking new opportunities to diversity and capture information which supports this aim. We have recently agreed a corporate social responsibility framework to support our efforts in this area. In the first instance it will support our efforts as follows:

Our most recent apprenticeship scheme focussed on this area, together with BAME, specifically. This involved targeting our outreach, marketing and partnership opportunities to schools and areas in our target demographic to good effect. This will continue to the next scheme.



A revamped programme of work experience in three parts:

- a. Senedd Service - It comprises a fully-structured offering available to anyone above the age of 16 where each service area hosts two weeks of work experience throughout the year.
- b. Senedd Commitment - A project-based week that is hosted and facilitated by volunteer/nominated members of staff in the spring, summer, and autumn term for 10-15 pupils.
- c. Senedd Partnerships - Working with our Workplace Equality Networks (WEN) to partner with third-sector organisations to provide one week of experience to one person, per partner, per year.

We are currently reviewing opportunities to partner with a Welsh University scheme designed to support eligible students who are less able to fund their university fees through an internship scheme.

We have carried out extensive work to ensure our recruitment processes are inclusive, through our branding, outreach and application and assessment processes. We will shortly launch an online recruitment portal which we believe will support improved data and reporting and guide us further in this area.

8. What specifically is the Senedd Commission doing to engage with, and promote its work to, hard-to-reach members of the public?

Over the past years we have found it difficult to connect with many of those who do not receive their news from Wales-based news organisations. To overcome this, we have invested in improving our social media output, enabling us to communicate and engage directly with the public.

The Coronavirus pandemic, has changed the ways in which we are able to engage people, and changed the nature of who might be hard-to-reach. For example, at our Summer Shows our virtual sessions were accessed (and continue to be accessed) by more people than we would expect to attend the same session in person during an event. However, geography and access times suggest these are not necessarily the same people.



We are seeing similar things in focus groups held on behalf of Senedd Committees. Virtual focus groups remove barriers like distance and travel time that make it easier for some people to take part, but make it more difficult for people who aren't comfortable holding online discussions, or who don't have effective home broadband. As a result of this, one of the focus groups we are arranging as part of a series of events in November will be done by telephone to reach out to people (particularly in deep rural areas) who may not be able to contribute to a virtual session.

Schools have become much harder to reach. But feedback from teachers has meant rather than visiting schools, or hosting classes at the Senedd, we are putting more emphasis on creating materials and lessons that they can use remotely.

The Welsh Youth Parliament team is considering how to offer more support to those WYPMs who might struggle with online sessions, for example, moving sessions from the weekend to a Friday afternoon, might make it easier for schools or partner organisations to support WYPMs.

In developing plans for engagement events around Black History Month in October, and the November events looking at Wales' post-COVID future we are specifically targeting new audiences.

In delivering our social media strategy we have considered how to reach those who don't 'do politics'. Over the summer term we have developed a new "Today at the Senedd" graphic which summarises each plenary session in jargon-free everyday language. This is proving popular on Facebook and Instagram – platforms where many people are not expecting to engage with the work of the Senedd.

9. What challenges has the Senedd Commission faced when considering the widely reported cyber-security risks associated with the Zoom platform whilst acknowledging that, for many members of the public and other stakeholders, Zoom is now a familiar and accessible way to engage with the Senedd's work?

The Coronavirus pandemic has changed the way we work as an organisation, placing a more reliance on technology to deliver essential business. This has been particularly noticeable in the use of video conferencing platforms.



As outlined in our letter sent to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee on 9 September 2020, while Microsoft Teams continues to be used extensively within the Commission to facilitate most video conferencing it does not currently provide for simultaneous translation and the only application to do so alongside all our other required functionality is Zoom.

There are two broad areas of concern relating to Zoom security. Firstly, if the Zoom meeting does not have the appropriate security controls applied, there is a risk that it could be accessed by unauthorised individuals. Secondly, the data associated with a Zoom meeting is not transmitted or stored in a way that complies with UK data security regulations. The Commission has taken steps to address both of these concerns.

The Commission uses licenced versions of the Zoom platform and corporate licences are strictly controlled. All Commission Zoom meetings either require pre-registration, where delegates must pre-register for the meeting, or the meeting is password protected. Both controls rely on an email sent to the delegates email address which itself will be password protected. This greatly reduces the risk of the meeting credentials being intercepted by unauthorised individuals. In addition to these controls, meetings should also use the Zoom lobby facility, where delegates are held until approved and admitted by the host.

Although data security within the Zoom platform has improved in recent months, it still does not fully comply with UK data security standards. As such, the Commission generally only uses Zoom for meetings where the content will be in the public domain, such as Plenary and public Committee meetings, where simultaneous translation is a requirement. There is some limited use of Zoom for private meetings where simultaneous translation is unavoidable. In such cases the meeting organiser is required to undertake a risk assessment to ensure that the information governance issues have been fully considered.

We have developed a good relationship with Zoom UK and continue to work with them to understand if and when further improvements to the systems data security will be delivered.

