

Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair of Finance Committee
Senedd Cymru
Tŷ Hywel
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10 November 2021

Dear Peredur

Thank you for your Committee's **Report on the Scrutiny of the Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2022-2023**, published on 22 October 2021. The Commission's response to the Finance Committee's recommendations is detailed in **Annex 1**.

I am pleased that the Committee supports the overall request for resource in 2022-23 and that it has recognised the dedication and flexibility of Commission staff in successfully supporting the Senedd through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

I would like to thank the Committee for its scrutiny and I look forward to the debate on the Commission's budget motion next week. If there is any further information your Committee would like to have, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Yours sincerely



Ken Skates MS

cc Senedd Commissioners, Manon Antoniazzi, Nia Morgan

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



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Annex 1

Finance Committee Recommendations

Recommendation 1. The Committee notes the 'Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2022-23' and, subject to the comments and recommendations in this report, supports the overall request for resource in 2022-23, and recommends the Senedd supports this budget.

Noted

Recommendation 2. In line with the statement of principles, the Committee recommends that the Commission should fund in-year pressures on the budget it has control over by making in-year savings and efficiencies, rather than through supplementary budgets.

Accepted in principle

The Commission will, of course, look for scope to fund in-year pressures on its operational budget by identifying any in-year savings in the first instance.

The Commission however, does not have a contingency budget and it is difficult for it to respond to in-year pressures, especially those which are out of its control such as the increase in National Insurance contributions, without a reduction in existing services or a Supplementary Budget.

Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that the Commission must clearly demonstrate how it adheres to the statement of principles when formulating future budgets beyond 2022-23, and that, in particular, it should not assume an increase in funding from one year to the next.

Accepted

As noted in our recent scrutiny session, the Commission is conscious and mindful of the Statement of Principles set out by the previous Finance Committee and does not assume an increase in funding from one year to the next.

This was evident in the 2021-22 budget, where a operational budget increase of 1% was presented which included a significant cut to the project fund. This was a cut in real terms.

In line with the Statement of Principles, the Commission's budget is set to provide the minimum level of resources required to meet the anticipated level of demand and to ensure the Senedd can deliver its business.



The increase of 4.4% in the operational budget reflects the increasing pressure on the Commission to deliver its goals and priorities during the Sixth Senedd. An increase of less than 4.4% was considered by the Commission which reviewed a number of budget scenarios and the risks associated with a reduced level of funding. The Commission concluded that a reduced budget would put the Commission's ability to respond to the demands of the Sixth Senedd at risk.

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the Commission provides as much information as possible to the Committee on any additional costs that will feature in the budget for 2023-24 and beyond as soon as the Commission's goals, objectives and priorities for the Sixth Senedd are agreed.

Accepted

We welcome the opportunity to share our goals, objectives and priorities for the Sixth Senedd with the Committee once they are agreed, by the end of February 2022. This will include any additional costs that will feature in the budget for 2023-24 and beyond.

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that the Commission continues to provide periodical reports during the rest of the 2021-22 financial year on in-year costs and savings related to the impact of COVID-19.

Accepted

We will provide the Committee with an interim assessment of the financial implications of Covid-19, as at 31 December 2021, in February 2022. We will also provide a final update for 2021-22 following the external audit for this financial year.

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends that the Commission:

- confirms its leasehold responsibilities in relation to the maintenance and upkeep of the Tŷ Hywel building;
- explains whether it is contractually bound to replace the windows in Tŷ Hywel during the Sixth Senedd as a legal condition of the current lease.

Accepted



The Commission is required, under the terms of the Lease, to 'repair, maintain and clean the Premises and to keep the Premises in repair, maintained and in good condition.'

The Commission is not contractually bound to replace all of the windows specifically as a legal condition of the current lease. However, the Commission is required to maintain the premises in a good condition and therefore there is a legal obligation on the Commission to replace those windows that have failed.

Any decision to replace all of the windows is dependent on the Commission's long term requirement for Tŷ Hywel and the wider accommodation strategy for both the Senedd and the Welsh Government. Until the long term future of Tŷ Hywel is determined, no decision will be taken to proceed with the replacement of all of the windows.

Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends that the Commission provides updates on how the new ways of working and requirements for office space by the Welsh Government, as well as any proposals for Senedd reform, are impacting on the Commission's estate plans and needs for office space, particularly where this may have resource implications.

Accepted

This information is being gathered and will be incorporated within the Commission's Accommodation Strategy. We will provide the Committee with an update in February 2022

Recommendation 8. The Committee recommends that the Commission prioritises and implements changes associated with its Carbon Neutral Strategy 2021-2030 that are simple and cost-effective at the earliest opportunity.

Accepted

The Carbon Neutral Strategy identified a number of simple and cost-effective actions that can be implemented in the short term and our 10 year forward maintenance plan has been updated to include these. For the current and next financial year we will continue with further LED lighting replacement for Tŷ Hywel and will introduce new metering capability to target areas where we can reduce energy consumption.

The Commission has also agreed to join the Cardiff District Heating Scheme which is expected to become operational during 2023 and which is an important medium term Strategy target and will deliver a significant reduction in our Carbon emissions.

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends that the Commission reports on its success or otherwise in engaging with hard to reach cohorts, particularly those in lower



socioeconomic groups, to ensure that its engagement and outreach activities are effective and provides value for money.

Accepted

On 19 October 2021 we wrote to the Finance Committee to provide further information on the Commission's plans to reach out to cohorts that do not traditionally engage with the Senedd. A copy of the Annex contained in this letter is included below.

We will be reporting on the success or otherwise of these initiatives, and whether they are effective and provide value for money, in future Annual Report and Accounts documents, within the Performance Analysis section.

Annex included in the letter dated 19 October 2021

Engaging with those who do not usually take an interest in our work is one of the main priorities for our communications and engagement teams. During the pandemic we have had to move much of our engagement work online and turn to virtual meetings and education sessions.

The number of people taking part in each engagement session has increased from an average of 34 per session pre pandemic, to 72 per session from April 2021. As we increasingly return to face-to-face engagement we will also ensure we maintain the quality of the virtual engagement work, which has already reached more people who would not normally be interested in our work.

We will shortly be holding our second set of Welsh Youth Parliament elections in November 2021, where 285 young people will be standing for election. Those elected will work with other young people across Wales to discuss and debate issues important to them.

We know that social media offers great opportunities to reach out to younger, as well as more disengaged, voters and we have strengthened our teams to improve our work in this area. Over the past year we've seen a 20% increase in followers across our social media platforms and we will be placing more emphasis on reflecting the lived experience of those who give evidence to committees. This "case-study" approach will improve engagement as well as increase interest in our work.

We will also be investing in online engagement tools which will make it far easier for the public to take part in committee inquiries, which we see as the driver to much of our engagement and communications work. Officials are also actively involved in working with committees to look for opportunities to involve young people in their work.

