



Committee Chairs
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay

30 January 2013

Dear Chair

The Business Committee has discussed the timetabling of committee meetings on several occasions over the past year. At our last meeting we discussed the attached paper which is a proposal to include the Public Accounts and Finance Committees in a rotation with the five scrutiny committees who meet weekly. This would mean that each committee would meet for half a day each week - either Wednesday morning, Thursday morning or Thursday afternoon. Tuesday morning would be available if any of the six committees who meet weekly plus the Finance Committee needed to have any additional meeting time.

Before we reach a decision on this, the Business Committee would like to hear your views on the proposals. I would also like to invite you to discuss the issue with your committee members as well.

So that we can make a decision in good time for the timetable for the summer term to be agreed, please could you let me have your response by Wednesday 13 February.

Rosemary

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To: Business Committee

From: Business Committee Secretariat

Date: January 2013

Committee Timetable

Introduction

1. Following the attendance of the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee last week, the Business Committee requested information on the practical implications of the proposal he put forward.

The Chair's proposal

2. Darren Millar's proposal is that the PAC and the other principal scrutiny committees should be treated equally in terms of timetabling. Specifically, he proposes that there should be three main slots - Wednesday mornings, Thursday mornings, and Thursday afternoons - through which the PAC and the five subject committees would rotate in groups.
3. Tuesday mornings would be available for any committee to use should their workload make this necessary.

Current arrangements

4. The current committee timetable allows the PAC to meet weekly on Monday afternoons and Tuesday mornings.
5. Following discussion at the start of this term, the Business Committee considered an alternative arrangement, to be put to the Chair of the PAC, which would timetable the committee for weekly meetings on Tuesday mornings and fortnightly on Thursday afternoons.¹ This would generate a timetabling clash for the Chair on those Thursday afternoons as he is also a member of the Health and Social Care Committee.
6. All other options for accommodating additional time for PAC within the current Wednesday/Thursday timetable of committee business result in multiple membership clashes.

¹ This would mean PAC met at the same time every other Thursday afternoon as the Health & Social Care Committee and the Enterprise & Business Committee

The impact of the proposal on the committee timetable

7. Implementing the proposal would reduce the scheduled meeting time available to each of the five large scrutiny committees by a third, to 1 day per fortnight, compared to 1½ days per fortnight at present.
8. To compensate in part for this loss of time, the proposal is that Tuesday mornings would be available for any committee to use as needed. The only committee meeting routinely on a Tuesday morning would be the Petitions Committee (which meets fortnightly). Membership clashes exist between the Petitions Committee and Health & Social Care (1 member), Environment & Sustainability (2 members), Communities, Equalities & Local Government (1 member) and Enterprise & Business (1 member). The two committees which do not have membership clashes with Petitions (PAC and Children and Young People Committee) cannot meet at the same time as each other because of membership clashes.
9. Taking these factors into account, Annex 1 includes a possible rota for Tuesday mornings that would avoid any membership clashes. For most committees this would make a slot available every 4 weeks. Most committees would, therefore, have access to less time overall than at present.
10. Alternatively, time on Tuesdays could be made available on a 'first come, first served' basis. How workable such an arrangement would be would depend on how often and widely the slot was used. If relatively limited, membership clashes and competition for the time would be infrequent. If there were high demand for the slot, clashes would be more frequent and, conceivably, some committees could find the slot unavailable altogether.
11. Provided that the Finance Committee is included in the cycle along with the PAC and five subject committees, a rotation system around the three slots on Wednesdays and Thursdays can be done without generating any membership clashes. There are two possible permutations which are shown in Annex 1.

Current use of scheduled time by committees

12. Reliable data on the time actually used by committees for all formal and informal activity² undertaken by committees in their timetabled slots are not available. It is possible to obtain information on the number of slots that have been utilised in some way. Looking back, during the 2012

² visits, offsite events, briefing meetings, networking events etc

autumn term, there were 15 available slots for each subject committee³. Of the 75 in total, 63 were used for committee business. This varied between committees with Enterprise & Business, Environment & Sustainability and Health & Social Care undertaking formal or informal committee business in 14 of their 15 slots. The equivalent figure for the Children & Young People and Communities, Equalities & Local Government Committees was 10 out of 15. The PAC met 13 times out of a potential 20.⁴

13. How significant the impact of the reduction in time would be clearly depends on the future workload and priorities of those committees. It is always going to be difficult for committees to control the level of legislative activity since this lies with the Government and the Business Committee.

Other implications

14. The model proposed would impact on committees' ability to carry out informal activities such as meetings outside Cardiff and visits. A regular Thursday slot enables committee activity to be planned with minimal impact on other Assembly business and constituency time.
15. Similarly, the proposal would largely prohibit committees from conducting 'an inquiry in a day⁵,' whereby a large number of evidence sessions are scheduled in a morning and afternoon on the same inquiry.
16. The model might also have an impact on legislative timetables depending on how frequently committees rotate their slot.
17. It is assumed that the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee would continue to meet in its Monday afternoon slot. Given the nature of the deadlines on legislation it would be disruptive for CLA to take part in any rotation which means them meeting on different days.

Summary and next steps

18. Business Managers are invited to consider:

- The proposal would reduce the scheduled time available for the five large subject committees;

³ taking Wednesday AM, Thursday AM, Thursday PM as separate slots. Thursday meetings which started before 12:00 and finished after 13:00 are considered to have required use of two separate slots.

⁴ 10 of PAC's potential 20 meeting slots took place on Monday afternoons.

⁵ For example, the Health and Social Care Committee has done one-day inquiries into venous thrombo-embolism prevention (on 24 May 2012) and Still Births (on 28 June 2012).

- Use of Tuesday mornings would compensate partially, but not entirely, for that loss of time;
- How efficiently Tuesday mornings could be utilised would depend on the level of take-up;
- The impact of the reduction in scheduled time would vary from committee to committee. Some committees currently use nearly all of their scheduled slots but others do not;
- The proposal could be put into practice without any membership clashes occurring on Wednesdays or Thursdays.

19. Should the Business Committee wish to pursue the proposal, our advice would be to consult with all other committee Chairs and Members generally.

Annex 1

There are two arrangements by which membership clashes can be avoided within the PAC Chair's proposals.

Arrangement 1:

- Group 1- Enterprise & Business Committee; Health & Social Care Committee; Finance Committee
- Group 2- Public Accounts Committee; Environment and Sustainability Committee⁶
- Group 3- Children and Young People Committee; Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee

Arrangement 2:

- Group 1- Children and Young People Committee; Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee; Environment and Sustainability Committee
- Group 2- Enterprise and Business Committee⁷, Public Accounts Committee
- Group 3- Health and Social Care Committee; Finance Committee

In both arrangements, groups would rotate between Wednesday mornings, Thursday mornings and Thursday afternoons. The frequency of rotations is not critical to the effectiveness of the model- i.e. it could be weekly, termly, or any other period of time considered appropriate by the Business Committee, but a weekly rotation could affect legislative timetables and Members ability to plan other activities.

Example timetable for either arrangement:

| | Wednesday AM | Thursday AM | Thursday PM |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Spring Term (or Week 1) | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
| Summer Term (or Week 2) | Group 3 | Group 1 | Group 2 |
| Autumn Term (or Week 3) | Group 2 | Group 3 | Group 1 |

Committees would also be able to make use of Tuesday mornings. Most committees have membership clashes with the Petitions Committee, which meets fortnightly on a Tuesday morning. The two committees which do not have membership clashes with Petitions (PAC and Children and Young People

⁶ Under arrangement 1, the Environment and Sustainability Committee could additionally meet in group 3's scheduled slot

⁷ Under arrangement 2, the Enterprise and Business Committee could additionally meet in group 3's scheduled slot

Committee) cannot meet at the same time as each other because of membership clashes. On average, most committees⁸ could guarantee being able to use one Tuesday morning every 4 weeks without any membership clashes.

Example arrangement for using Tuesday mornings:

| | |
|--------|---|
| Week 1 | Petitions Committee, Children and Young People Committee |
| Week 2 | Enterprise and Business Committee, Health and Social Care Committee |
| Week 3 | Petitions Committee, PAC |
| Week 4 | Children and Young People Committee; Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee; Environment and Sustainability Committee |

⁸ An exception to this is the Children and Young People Committee, which could potentially meet on a Tuesday morning every 2 weeks, under this model.