

Welsh Assembly Finance Committee Inquiry into Asset Management

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Process of Asset Management:

- Now well known, reasonably understood and established processes and working practices.
- Non prescriptive, intuitive approach encourages innovation, lateral thinking, creativity and thinking outside the box.
- Still largely a process of property professionals talking to property professionals.
- Process needs to reflect the inherent dynamics of property and the linkages with operational Service delivery; i.e. property is predominantly a support facility. LAs educate children, care for the vulnerable etc. To do this, under current technology and working practices, they need buildings to operate from. Property management is not, therefore, a means to an end in itself.
- Property management is still a relatively Cinderella support function with a low profile, and very few “top table” directors / managers to promote the cause.
- Property management is still largely reactive, with limited proactivism, robust challenge of property utilisation or efficiencies.
- Property Databases are still disparate across LAs with limited networking capabilities, thereby making information analyses difficult.
- Whole process can be mystifying and made complex to lay practioners
- Clarity of objectives and linkages with LA Corporate Plans are not well established.
- The term “asset management “itself is confusing (assets can include staff, IT equipment, vehicles, finance etc). I believe this has always been a major and fundamental weakness and impedes Service buy in.

Improvements:

- Greater emphasis placed on asset management planning as a defined dynamic discipline, rather than on annual plans per se which are only statements at a given point in time.
- Best Practice Case Studies to be collated, extolling both the Service benefits and the benefits to the customer/ general public/ building users; i.e. what has been achieved by implementation of effective asset management
- Master Class initiatives to be initiated to discuss and disseminate best practice.
- Asset Management should be re branded to “Property Management”. Passes the Ronseal test of doing what it says on the tin.

- National Assets Working Group to develop a focus on best practice.
- Concepts of Service Property Planning and Fitness for Purpose Assessments to be rolled out as examples of best practice.
- Central Database should be established to collate Asset Management Plans from all LAs on an annual basis as a means of disseminating best practice.

- Major promotional initiative to be launched, directed primarily at Councillors with Cabinet responsibility for Finance and Property, Chief Executives, Senior Council Directors, extolling the practical benefits of implementing effective asset management and the positive impact this can have on front line service delivery.. This should include invitations to short, focused Briefings.

Role of Welsh Govt:

The WG has been particularly prominent in assisting the roll out of effective asset management already. However, key messages warrant regular repetition, particularly to non property managers and councillors, as this whole activity is still not sufficiently mainstream or built into LAs DNAs. All the suggested improvements set out above would benefit from continuing WG sponsorship and leadership.