

Christopher Catling, Chief Executive
Hayley Roberts, Deputy Chair
Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

Annual Scrutiny of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

Dear Christopher and Hayley,

Thank you for attending the Committee's meeting on 25 September 2025 as part of our Annual Scrutiny of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. We would like to thank you for your time and the for the evidence that you shared with the Committee. As we mentioned during the session, there are one or two further issues we wanted to raise with you, which we didn't have time to raise during the session, and these are dealt with below.

Budget considerations

We are very conscious of the effect of the Welsh Government's historic budget cuts on the Royal Commission.

Once adjusted for inflation, Welsh Government revenue grant-in-aid funding of the Royal Commission has reduced by about 40 per cent between 2015 and 2025. You explained that the Welsh Government does not fund the Royal Commission adequately for the work it is expected to undertake on the Welsh Government's behalf:

"We have a set of key performance indicators that we report on every quarter and we're scrutinised by our sponsor division in Welsh Government on our performance in relation to those. And increasingly we're having to say in relation to some of the KPIs, 'We cannot deliver this because we don't have the capacity to do anything.'"

You explained that, as a result of these cuts, the structure of the Royal Commission is "cut to the bone at the moment" with no spare capacity. We heard that you have seen a reduction from 54 members of staff ten years ago, to just 21. You explained that:

"What has helped us, however, to continue operating effectively is that we're not creating substantive jobs, permanent jobs, any longer, but we are taking on people on a short-term contract of nine months or a year in order to do specific tasks."

You told us that particular activities are the preserve of individual posts within the Commission, and that if that member of staff leaves, the activity ceases. We are concerned that these cuts have left the Royal Commission unacceptably fragile. The Royal Commission carries out valuable work for the historic environment, including a

number of statutory functions. We are concerned that this long-term reduction in the Commission's funding places the historic environment, and our understanding of it, at risk.

We will raise these matters as part of our scrutiny of the Welsh Government draft budget in the coming weeks.

Ongoing review

You also updated us about the status of the Welsh Government's review of the relationship between Cadw and the Royal Commission. You said that after nine months of monthly meetings a decision is yet to be made:

"The position is that we haven't made a decision yet. That's what the report that we've sent to the Minister says. It's finely balanced. He is now seeking advice from his officials."

In 2014 a previous Welsh Government abandoned plans to merge the Royal Commission with Cadw. You described the combined effects of the reduction in the Royal Commission's funding and the continual uncertainty about the organisation's future, saying that:

"We've learnt to live with uncertainty. It's a fact of life for the royal commission, and it's partly where this discussion began. The gradual erosion of our income year on year means that we're constantly having to flex. It is disturbing for staff."

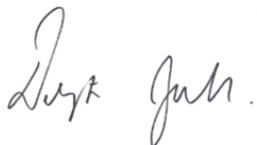
We are concerned about the effect of the continued uncertainty about the Commission's future on the Commission's staff and its ability to plan strategically. It is our belief that the government needs to consider the evidence provided to them and act decisively, providing a long-term vision for the historic environment, in whatever structure they decide upon. The current position of deferring decisions whilst reducing the Commission's real-terms funding is not sustainable.

The Committee will continue to pursue these points with the Welsh Government.

Thank you once again for your attendance at Committee and for your valuable insights.

I am copying this letter to the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS
Committee Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.