



Angela Burns AC/AM

**Comisiynydd y Cynulliad
Assembly Commissioner**

Jocelyn Davies AM
Chair of the Finance Committee
National Assembly of Wales
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

24 October 2013

Dear Jocelyn

Thank you for the Committee's report published 22 October 2013. I am attaching our response to each of your recommendations. However, there is an underlying theme in your recommendations that I would like to address. First and foremost, I would like to reassure the Committee that the Commission is always happy to provide additional information to meet the Committee's requests. Individual Commissioners would also be perfectly prepared to come and give evidence to the Committee on our key strategic priorities for ICT and Official Languages at an appropriate time if you would like them to do so. However, I hope that your Committee members will recognise that it is Assembly Commissioners and the staff of the Commission who are formally responsible, and accountable, under the Government of Wales Act 2006, for providing the services required for the Assembly's purposes.

In support of our commitment to transparency, financial probity, stewardship and value for money for the service we provide, the Commission has a comprehensive approach to its governance. This includes clarity around powers of delegation, accountability and

Bae Caerdydd
Caerdydd
CF99 1NA

Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Ffôn • Tel: 029 2089 8598

Ffacs • Fax: 029 2089 8117

Ebost • Email: Carys.Evans@wales.gov.uk

Ysgrifenyddiaeth Comisiwn y Cynulliad/Assembly Commission Secretariat



decision-making, and ensuring we have independent advice and assurance to strengthen and continually improve our approach.

We use independent advisers, our Audit Committee, external and internal Audit services as well as the internal decision making boards - Investment Board and Management Board - to check, challenge and hold us to account. Specifically for projects such as the ICT Future Service project, there is a Project Delivery and Implementation Team and Project Board reporting to the Investment Board, Audit Committee and Commissioners at regular intervals. We have also made use of external, independent advisers and external and internal audit assurance at key stages through the project's life. Specialists within the organisation (legal, procurement, HR and Finance, for example) join project boards for key decisions and review, helping to keep implementation in budget, in scope and delivered to time and quality.

Finally, the Committee asked us about the salary that is paid to apprentices in the Assembly Commission. I hope that the Committee will be pleased to hear that we have decided that in the future apprentices recruited by the Assembly Commission will be paid the Living Wage.

I reiterate my thanks to you and the members of the Finance Committee for your scrutiny of our budget and for your support for the strategic direction that we have taken.

Yours sincerely

Angela Burns
Comisiynydd y Cynulliad
Assembly Commissioner

Response to Finance Committee's report on its scrutiny of the Draft 2014-15 Budget

1. Official Languages Scheme

Finance Committee recommendation: We recommend that a Member of the Committee (Paul Davies AM) works closely with the Commission to scrutinise expenditure and reports back to Finance Committee in the run up to next year's budget.

RESPONSE:

Rhodri Glyn Thomas is the Commissioner leading our work on official languages and he already liaises closely with nominated representatives from each party group. While we are sure it was not the Committee's intention, we would be concerned at any additional new arrangement that would cut across proper lines of accountability. Rhodri Glyn Thomas would be happy to give evidence to the Committee at an appropriate point and we believe that would be a more appropriate arrangement.

The Commission has an absolute commitment to providing services in its official languages. The Scheme published in July 2013, sets out our current services and our aims for the next 12 months. These include some ambitious targets and annual accountability to the Assembly. The Commission has several key work streams to deliver our ambition, our progress in using ICT (Machine Translation), supporting the learning environment and integrating our approach to the official languages into all services we deliver. As part of our internal governance arrangements we produce regular updates on our progress which we are happy to share with the Finance Committee. Part of this governance work ensures we highlight changes and risks around resources and their impact on the Commission's budget. We plan on a multiple year horizon and ensure we have flexibility in project plans to respond to changing risks and demands in meeting our priorities.

2. ICT Strategy

Finance Committee recommendation: We recommend that a Member of the Committee (Mike Hedges AM) works closely with the Commission to scrutinise expenditure and reports back to Finance Committee in the run up to next year's budget.

RESPONSE:

Peter Black is the Commissioner leading the work on our ICT strategy and his practice has always been to welcome discussion with any Assembly Member. While we are sure it was not the Committee's intention, we would be concerned at any additional new arrangement that would cut across proper lines of accountability. Peter Black would be happy to give evidence to the Committee on the ICT Strategy at an appropriate point and we believe that would be a more appropriate arrangement.

The transition of our ICT services, which brings into the Commission the services previously contracted out, is a major project for the Commission so we appreciate the Committee's concern to see it successfully delivered. The project's overarching aim is to put the Commission in a position to be able to improve the quality, flexibility and range of services provided to the Assembly, Members, and the people of Wales over the next five to ten years, without increasing the annual budgets for ICT service delivery. The project has a comprehensive governance arrangement that includes specific input from independent advisors, external audit review in addition to Commission's own internal governance structure, all of which give us the assurances we need that it will be delivered successfully. We will be adding the detailed information already provided to the Finance Committee into the Commission's Final Budget.

3. Engaging with young people

Finance Committee recommendation: We recommend that the Commission continues to monitor the geographical spread of visitors, and new schools visiting the Assembly, in line with its aim of giving every child in Wales the opportunity to visit the Assembly. We also recommend the Commission reviews the travel subsidy for schools in North and West Wales, to ensure that cost and distance are not insurmountable barriers to access.

RESPONSE:

Our education service is already the envy of other parliaments. The Commission is taking steps to build on this tremendous foundation in order to raise the awareness of the Assembly's work among young people across Wales, and to ensure there are opportunities for young people to contribute to the future shape of Wales and Welsh democracy. This is a shift away from primarily aiming to raise

awareness and understanding amongst young people through the national curriculum, to more extensive youth participation and engagement directly linked to the work of the Assembly itself. We are therefore currently undertaking a youth engagement consultation, "Your Assembly – your say, your way", and will respond to the outcomes of that consultation early next year. We have also recently refocused the Education Service and launched a new online education site. Data is already collected so that we can measure the effectiveness of the services that we offer to young people and schools, including visits to the Senedd. We will continue to monitor take-up carefully, and adjust the arrangements we offer as and when necessary to ensure that we are meeting the needs of schools in all parts of Wales.

4. Performance Indicators and 5. Transparency vs accessibility.

Finance Committee recommendation: We recommend that where changes are proposed to the performance indicators which mean that the previous year or quarter's figures are no-longer comparable these should be reported to the Chair of Finance Committee for approval.

Finance Committee recommendation: We recommend that the Commission considers whether and how it could improve transparency and offer extra detail about new programmes and emerging risks in future budgets, while retaining the high level of accessibility in its budget documents. For our part, Finance Committee will write to the Commission ahead of next year's draft budget publication setting out any more detailed information we feel may be useful to aid the committee's scrutiny

RESPONSE:

The Commission is committed to operating in an open and transparent manner. It is entirely appropriate that our plans and performance are subject to rigorous scrutiny. Our aim is to provide measurable evidence of our achievements and all the information necessary to enable that scrutiny to take place.

The Corporate Performance Report is the first time we have pulled together this degree of performance information and we welcome the fact that the Finance Committee recognises that it is an iterative process which will develop over time. As and when we decide to make improvements to the report, we will ensure that we provide

comparable figures so that it is possible to track the direction of travel.

Specifically on the recommendations for emerging risks and details for new/changing programmes, we will ensure these are separately identified in future budget proposals.

24 October 2013.