

National Assembly for Wales
Assembly Commission

Review of support for committees

December 2013



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

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Foreword from the Presiding Officer

The Assembly's committees are at the heart of the democratic process, holding the Government to account and playing a vital role in making laws for Wales. The Assembly Commission is responsible for ensuring that property, staff and services are provided for the Assembly. It is in this context that the Commission initiated a review of the support we provide for committees and I am delighted to present this report which articulates our ambition for Assembly committees to be world class.

Staff from across the Commission are involved in supporting committees with clerking, research, media and legal support; security and visitor services; simultaneous interpretation and translation; IT and broadcasting. We support committees in meetings and visits across Wales, arrange outreach programmes and provide continuing professional development for Members and their staff.

For a small institution support for committees is well resourced. Committee support accounts for a substantial proportion of the Commission's budget each year so it is incumbent on us to review that support and to make sure the services we provide are directed to have the most effect and to be of the highest possible quality.

This report describes the kind of highly effective parliamentary committee system to which we aspire as well as the key areas where we should focus our resources. But the Assembly Commission cannot deliver world class committees simply by declaring it so. It requires all those involved to play their part. I hope that anyone interested in making our committee system effective and influential will recognise the commitment of the Assembly Commission and find this report a valuable basis for the future development of our national legislature.



**Rosemary Butler,
Presiding Officer and Chair of the Assembly Commission**



**Angela Burns,
Commissioner**



**Peter Black,
Commissioner**



**Sandy Mewies,
Commissioner**



**Rhodri Glyn Thomas,
Commissioner**

01. Introduction

The Commission's ambition is for Assembly committees to be the very best that they can be – world class. That is why we resource them well and why we want the support that Commission funding provides to be of the highest quality. This report describes how we can achieve such high performing, world class committees. In arriving at this, we have drawn on academic research, best parliamentary practice elsewhere, the knowledge and experience of our own staff and the direct advice and input of several of the UK's most authoritative experts in the field.

What that research, review and external advice tells us is that much of what the Assembly's committees do already is exceptional. For example, our work in respect of committee outreach and continuous professional development is seen by other parliaments as exemplary and our integrated system for policy and legislative committee scrutiny is recognised as encouraging a holistic approach and exploiting the policy expertise of Members to best effect. So, whilst we can, and must, learn from elsewhere, there is no model parliament to which we should aspire. Rather, we should build on this strong foundation to evolve a committee operation that reflects the particular context of the Assembly as a small, modern, bilingual, devolved legislature.

In December 2012, the National Assembly Commission initiated a review of the support it provides to Assembly committees. Our aim was to give assurance – to ourselves, the Assembly and to the general public - that the resources the Commission provides to support committees are being used to the best effect. In part, this reflected the spur of scrutiny provided by the Finance Committee when reporting on the Commission's budgetary plans for 2013-14.¹ They said:

“So, in return for this generous allowance, we put the Commission on notice – we expect to see results. We will be vigilant monitors of the delivery of the Commission's vision of an exemplar organisation, providing world class support both to the democracy it serves and the staff who enable it to do so”.

The methodology and detail of the review is at Annex 1

¹ Letter from the Chair of the National Assembly for Wales Finance Committee, October 2012
<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/documents/s10854/Assembly%20Commission%20Draft%20Budget%202013-14%20-%20October%202012.pdf>

02. A vision for world class parliamentary committees

The Commission wants the services that it provides to support high performing parliamentary committees that are the equal of any elsewhere.

The Commission's vision is that the committees of the Assembly should demonstrably improve the quality of policy outcomes, legislation, public services and government spending for society as a whole in Wales. They should be respected, influential and accessible, acting with integrity and independence. Their work should be strategic and rigorous.

This means that Assembly committees will:

- i.** have a clear, agreed, strategic plan for their work that prioritises their activities and focuses their use of time and resource;
- ii.** be a top priority for the Members who serve on them;
- iii.** be guided by Chairs who fulfil all of the expectations set for them by the Assembly;
- iv.** be respected and listened to by the Welsh Government because of the quality of their inquiries and scrutiny, the rigour of their questioning, the depth of their analysis and the value of their legislative amendment. The Government will be mindful of the reaction of committees as it formulates its policy, spending and legislative plans;
- v.** scrutinise policy, spending and legislation within their portfolio in the round, not as isolated aspects of their responsibilities;
- vi.** offer and expect constructive engagement with the Welsh Government but retain their detachment and ability to offer objective criticism;
- vii.** not be limited by constraints on access to Ministers, information or witnesses and will be able to draw on the expert advice and support they require;
- viii.** engage with a wide diversity of people, be seen by stakeholder groups as important, influential players and as the natural place to go to with concerns and ideas, and undertake work that enhances the public reputation of the Assembly. Their outputs will be accessible to as wide an audience as possible;
- ix.** ensure that those who contribute to their work see the value of their participation; and
- x.** seek critical analysis and evaluation to improve their performance.

The delivery of world class parliamentary support to Members in committee is critical. Given the quality and scale of the resource available to committees, we believe that we can provide Commission services that will be the envy of any parliamentary body. And the very thing that is our greatest difficulty – our small size – is also the thing that offers the most potential for our committee support to be different from, and better than, that provided elsewhere.

In the Commission's view, the key is to find ways to guarantee that Members genuinely influence, drive and own the services provided. Taking that as the base, we believe our services can exploit the advantages of our size, to be tailored much more to individual Member and committee needs and flex our delivery to reflect the work patterns and pressures particular to the Assembly.

Through this review, therefore, we set out to shift the dynamic between committees and our support so that:

- chairs and committees always drive the support we give so that Members recognise and feel that they own what we provide ; and
- increasingly, we tailor the nature and means of delivery of our support to individual Members and committees.

We are conscious that delivering performance that matches our vision of excellence is not in the Commission's gift alone. Our role is to ensure that the right resources and services are in place but there are many others whose contribution is vital: individual Members, Chairs, the Welsh Government, the Business Committee, party groups, the Remuneration Board and the external stakeholders on whom we rely so much, all have critical roles to play if our committees are to maximise their influence and effectiveness.

We trust that the vision and proposals we set out in this report will, therefore, be the starting point for a great deal of further work with those colleagues.

03. Size and resources

The Assembly has 12 committees through which it exercises its key functions of scrutiny of government legislation, policy and finance. Our committees also provide a key point of focus for engagement with the Assembly by the public. Around 80 full time equivalent members of Commission staff support these committees in the shape of logistical, administrative, procedural, drafting, legal, research, communications, interpretation, translation and reporting services. This broad range of services, with the exception of the Assembly's bilingual operation, is present in all parliamentary bodies in the UK.

Of the Commission's staffing budget of around £16 million, almost £4 million can be directly attributed to the support of committees. In addition, of course, many generic costs (security, accommodation, ICT, externally procured translation etc.) are essential to their operation.

This level of resourcing is undeniably significant but the committees are the core of the Assembly's parliamentary operation. The substantial resource dedicated to their support forms a key part of delivering the Commission's goal of outstanding parliamentary support. We therefore believe that the devotion of around a quarter of our staff resources to supporting committees is entirely appropriate. A detailed description of the support provided to committees is included in Annex 2.

The work of the committees is undertaken by 42 Members, most of whom are on more than one committee. Most Assembly committees have very broad remits; certainly stretching beyond the portfolio of a single Minister. Many Assembly committees scrutinise legislation as well as policy and finance. In addition to their committee duties, the majority of Members will be active every week in plenary. As a result, committee members in the Assembly find themselves in an almost relentless weekly cycle of meetings timetabled around two plenary sessions where a high level of attendance is the norm.

04. The Commission's view of the key areas to focus on

Excellence in Commission services

Without excellence in the services the Commission provides, committees will struggle to meet their potential. The Commission does not believe there are any glaring gaps in our service provision - the basic building blocks are all in place. For a small institution, support is well resourced and feedback from other parliaments and outside experts tells us that we have much that is excellent.

For the performance of Commission services to be 'world class', we will ensure:

- tight alignment of the support we provide with the priorities identified by Members;
- flexible, tailored services and delivery that reflect the demands on Members and enable them to make most efficient and effective use of their time;
- bilingual service delivery;
- high levels of confident, professional expertise; and
- integration of the services we provide and a complete absence of silos or unhelpful internal practice.

Member and Chair performance

The Assembly recognises that the performance of Chairs in leading outstanding committee performance is critical - they receive additional financial allowances and are elected to their positions by the Assembly as a whole. Consequently, both the Remuneration Board and the Business Committee have published role descriptions for a Chair (Annex 3) that spell out their expectations of how the role should be fulfilled.

Many of the same high expectations fall on individual Members if committees are to maximise their impact. Effective Members must possess a range of knowledge and skills, including have mastery of a policy brief, expertise in scrutiny techniques of both policy and legislation, independence from government, and a commitment to personal development, and so on.

'World class' committees and their support are owned and directed by Members who view committee work as one of, if not the most important aspect of their parliamentary role. Members and staff alike approach every aspect of committee activity – every inquiry, bill, session, witness – in the context of clear objectives and so are always able to answer the question, 'why are we doing this?'. Questioning is then more likely to be coherent and penetrating; Ministers and others find it harder to fudge or avoid scrutiny; time is best used and committees maximise their influence.

Size

Members on committees are stretched and our size constrains the work that committees can undertake. More positively, it has driven us to the integrated committee system that makes the most of Member expertise and allows the scrutiny of policy thinking, expenditure, legislation and implementation to be taken in the round. It allows our staff to work in tight, multi-disciplinary teams around each committee.

Cultural factors

External experts comment on the eagerness of Assembly Members to learn and experiment and the pragmatic, often collegiate style with which they approach committee work. Though the Assembly is still relatively inexperienced in aspects of its parliamentary work, and in some cases has not yet established practice at all, its newness undeniably allows a flexibility in approach and culture that is a positive feature.

The party group system is powerful in the Assembly. It influences operation not only through accepted informal channels, ways of working and behaviour in committee but in explicit procedures such as the existence of the Business Committee, the allocation of plenary time and decisions over committee membership and chairing. Often the impact is positive, bringing order and efficiency. But the flipside can be restriction of the independence that is needed for a world class committee system.

As our vision describes, effective committee scrutiny requires the co-operation of Government – respecting and listening to committees and being mindful of their reaction when formulating policy, spending and legislative plans. A positive feature in the Assembly is certainly the proximity of Government and relative ease and frequency with which committees can engage directly with Ministers and their officials. However, Members are constrained by practical matters such as the timetabling of legislation or the prompt, early availability of written submissions.

Language

Bilingualism is at the Assembly's heart and the Commission has set out its ambitions and commitments to improve our bilingual service delivery in our Official Languages Scheme. Just as the size of the Assembly means that we must tailor our support services in the light of the demands on committee Members, so we need to design what we provide and how we provide it to ensure that Members can operate in the language of their choice.

Public engagement and civic society

Our committees must be able to demonstrate that they improve the operation of government for the people of Wales. We can be rightly proud of our success in drawing into committees the views and expertise of groups and individuals from across society. We must be conscious, though, that resources are thinly spread across the third sector in Wales and, without its input, the quality of committee performance will be limited.

05. Strategic direction for further improvement

Taking all of this into account, and having set out our vision for world class performance, we intend to address the following aspects of our approach.

Dialogue with Government

Good parliamentary scrutiny is an essential component of good government. In managing the relationship between the Welsh Government and committees, Commission staff use a protocol that covers practical issues such as notice periods for attendance, lines of communication and so on. Whilst this is a satisfactory means of managing day to day operational issues, the spirit behind our vision for high performing committees requires considerably more – in particular, a mature political relationship between legislature and executive that recognises the need for openness, respect and a balance of constructive engagement and independence. The Commission hopes that the Welsh Government will engage positively with us, the Business Committee and the committees themselves to this end.

The Commission will engage directly with the Remuneration Board to ensure that the Board fully understands the Commission's objectives when taking decisions over the financial support available to Members.

Tailoring services and delivery

The Commission believes that the single most effective way of improving our services to committees remains the ethos of tailoring and flexibility that has run through our review. We intend to continue to exploit the opportunities presented by our size to tailor services to individual Member and committee needs and to flex our delivery to reflect the work patterns and pressures particular to the Assembly.

Our high expectations in this regard have been made clear to all of our staff - it is central to one of the Commission's five corporate priorities for change and innovation and is now explicitly reflected in the planning and performance management of Commission services.

Better integration

The bulk of Commission staff supporting committees are co-located and clerks, researchers, lawyers and outreach staff routinely plan and deliver committee support as an identifiable 'integrated team'. The feedback we receive from other parliaments when they visit is that this degree of integration is something they envy. Nonetheless, we need to be looking constantly for ways to improve behind the scenes and to make the efforts of staff and Members complementary at all times. Again, the Commission's expectation is ingrained in all aspects of service management and planning – our services to committees must be integrated across service areas so that Members don't have to worry about the 'wiring'.

Bilingual services

The Commission is aware that the most frequently demanded improvement in our bilingual service provision for committees is the delivery of written briefing material in Welsh. The steps that the Commission is taking to develop machine translation technology will give us a tool to help deliver this kind of improvement, but technology alone is not the answer. We need to plan and integrate our services better still, toughen our stance towards the timely receipt of papers from government and others and adjust the content and production of the material we provide.

Expert research, briefing and advice

The Commission will ensure that committees are able to draw in expert advice in creative ways – through the appointment of expert advisors and more innovative devices as well such as client reference groups, stakeholder events and exploitation of our link with the Wales Governance Centre (WGC) in the Pierhead.

The Research Service is the main source of in-house expertise providing written and oral briefing and research advice to the Assembly's committees. It draws on a wide range of external contacts with specific areas of expertise, and remains the bedrock of our analytical support for Committees.

Feedback from Members indicates that most are content with the Research Service briefing provided for committees. However, a few Members consider that the briefing is too lengthy, prescriptive or bland. The Commission wishes the Service to continue its direction of travel towards more expert, incisive, sharper briefing but we know that this will not necessarily be welcomed by all Members or Chairs. At present, our research briefings are tailored to the requirements of each committee, as agreed with the Chair, and individual Members are offered the option of additional briefing if they wish. The Commission wishes the Research Service to continue to develop this bespoke service in terms of content and delivery.

In addition, the Commission is happy to work with committees and Chairs to explore the potential for committees to commission their own original research to inform their work.

Strategic approach

In the Commission's view, committees can extend their influence if inquiries are strategic and focused. A key role for Chairs and Commission staff, therefore, is to remind committees of the power of selectivity and coherence in their choice of inquiries if they are to maximise their influence.

Exploiting technology to work smarter

The Commission will promote the use of technology to improve the effectiveness of our support and to make committee life easier for Members. The use of tablet devices is an early example of how we can exploit technology in this way and the significance of mobile devices as the 'information centre' will increase. Key is the need to implement effective information management services, which will provide a seamless system for the production and presentation of committee papers and will allow us to explore the benefits of individual committee 'portals'. This technology will provide the means to deliver a 'one

stop shop' for individual Members' information needs, including papers, email, calendar, social media feeds, current work and interests etc. The growing use of tablet and mobile devices in society as a whole also means we need to keep adapting our committee outputs to ensure they are as accessible as possible to the people of Wales.

Outreach and communication in a digital world

Our committee outreach work is one of our strengths. The Commission's recent decision to change the focus of our education team, our youth engagement project (Your Assembly - your say, your way) and the success of our outreach team in drawing in external input and expertise are all at the forefront of such work.

We could improve still further by giving better feedback to those who take part, to demonstrate the value of their participation and the influence of committees. Committee outputs should be jargon-free and accessible to the widest possible audience, shaped from the outset to take account of how the target audience might like to receive conclusions. Our communication of committee work needs to evolve from the traditional report style to embrace social, mobile and local communication trends.

Committees have the potential to position themselves as authoritative, trusted sources of high quality political and policy information – increasing public engagement with the Assembly and the influence of committees as they do so. But to achieve this we will need a fundamental shift in the way we package and disseminate information.

This is a hugely challenging area in its own right and one to which the Commission will return as it considers its approach to technology, information management, the record of proceedings, broadcasting and so on.

Chair and Member CPD

The Commission's work on continuous professional development (CPD) has been seen as an exemplar by other legislatures and we have led the way on this work for some time. Other parliaments in the UK are following suit but we continue to set the bar, for example, in the breadth of our programme, the inclusion of AMSS as well as Members and in specific areas such as financial scrutiny. We applaud the example set by a number of committee Chairs in seeking to improve their performance in the role by obtaining feedback from their colleagues and external experts. We encourage all other Chairs to follow suit.

Two thirds of Members participated in some CPD activity last year and there are around 15 particularly keen, repeat customers. But as one of the providers of specialised CPD to our committees put it to us, 'a world class organisation would not make personal development optional'. The Commission, therefore, wishes to encourage more systematic CPD activity and invites dialogue with committees, Chairs, party groups and the Business Committee to gain consensus for regular CPD and strategic planning activities.

External review and appraisal

Linked to the theme of development is the need for objective assessment and appraisal for staff, Members, Chairs and committees alike. If we are serious about aspiring to 'world

class' we must have means of assessing and appraising performance against accepted criteria.

Whilst our review has provided a perspective from inside, the Commission believes that there would be value in some external scrutiny of the Assembly committees' work to date. This could also provide a vehicle to develop and test metrics relevant to committee effectiveness to guide future improvements.

The Commission also wishes the Assembly to have access to 'blue sky thinking' on our performance as a legislature. We have already put in place an arrangement with the Wales Governance Centre (WGC) in the Pierhead and intend to work with them and others to examine how best to catalyse innovation and change in any aspect of our work as a legislature.

Conclusion

The committee system is fundamental to our performance as a legislature. The Commission's review of support for committees began as an exercise to ensure value for money and effectiveness in the services that we provide to assist that crucial component of the Assembly's work. We believe that the practical steps that Members and Commission staff have taken as a result have already led to improvement.

But we have ambition to do more. We want our committees to be the very best that they can be. So in this report we describe our vision for high performing committees and how the Commission can help in their delivery. The support we provide is important but we are conscious that individual Members, Chairs, the Welsh Government, the Business Committee, party groups, the Remuneration Board and external stakeholders all have critical roles to play. We hope that the vision and proposals we set out in this report will be the catalyst for the further work and discussion needed if we are to make our committees truly world class.

The Commission's aspiration

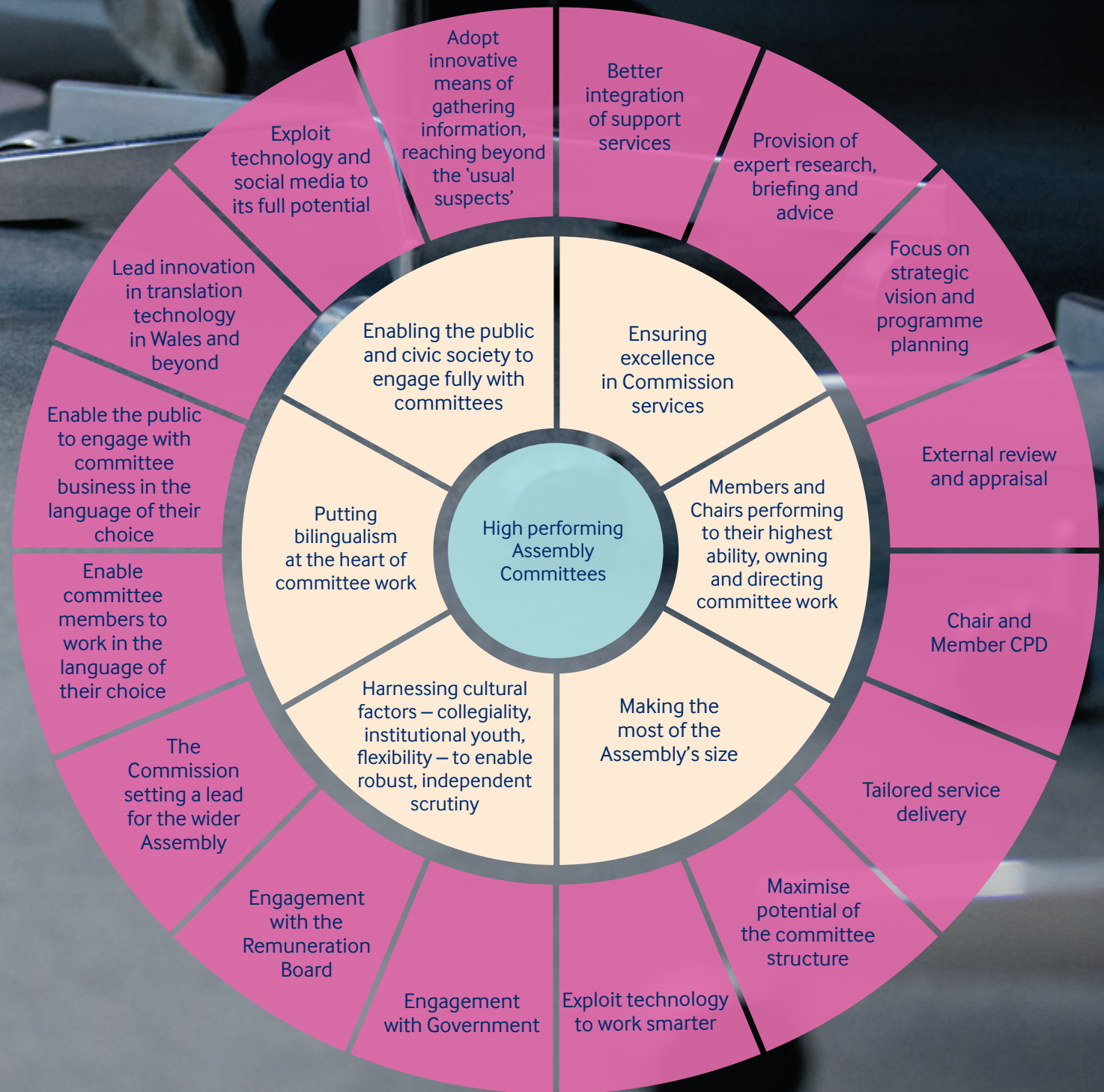
Committees of the Assembly should demonstrably improve the quality of policy outcomes, legislation and public services for society as a whole in Wales. They should be respected, influential, and accessible, acting with integrity and independence. Their work should be strategic and rigorous.

The Commission's focus

The areas that need our attention in order to deliver our aspiration with the tools at our disposal.

The Commission's tools

The things that can be improved to make our committees, and their support, as good as they can be.



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Annex 1: Review of committee support

Methodology

Following our decision to undertake the review, the Presiding Officer wrote to all Members and separately to committee Chairs. A senior member of Commission staff then met every Chair individually to identify their priorities for change. In many cases Chairs also led discussions with their committee members. In March, the review was the main item for discussion at one of the regular meetings between the Presiding Officer and committee chairs.

From then on, each committee responded in its own way ranging from group discussions, both with and without Assembly staff present, to committee clerks meeting individual Members to discuss their preferences. Committee teams and service areas consulted Assembly Members' Support Staff in order for us to better understand what they need to help them support their Members with committee work.

The consultation

The consultation elicited a host of very practical suggestions for improvement which are outlined below. It also clearly confirmed two areas that emerged as particularly important to Members.

The first centred around the degree to which Members and Chairs feel that they have ownership of the work of committees and the lead they give in shaping the service provided. This ranged from their views on briefing and questions, through the selection of witnesses, to the timings of meetings. The dialogue between committee members and officials created as a result of this review, and the incremental improvements that have already been made are starting to address, this issue but we continue to receive feedback that indicates that more needs to be done.

Second was the issue of tailoring support. Feedback from many Members was that they are satisfied with what is provided, with some actively enthusiastic and very clear that they wish to see no change. Others, we know, do wish to see change but vary in what this means in practice. For instance, some Members prefer to receive papers earlier and in less final/up to date form, others do not read them until the day before a meeting and so would prefer officials to spend longer working on them before sending them out. Clearly we cannot meet every individual preference in relation to every aspect of our service within existing resource but we will aim to tailor our support where it is practical.

Specific areas for change

Specific areas for change consistently identified in the consultations were:

- papers – the timing and method of distribution of committee papers;
- briefing – the length, content, depth of analysis and timeliness of briefings and the use of questions;
- support to work in Welsh – briefing, timeliness of the translated questions and additional support for individual Members and Chairs;
- consistency of support – and the role and number of Commission staff supporting a committee;
- AM support staff – their relationship with the clerking teams and researchers, their role in supporting Members in committee work;
- external expertise – how and when committees use external expertise; and
- external communications – the need for high profile media coverage for committee work, better use of email and Twitter alerts, the accessibility of the information we have on our website.

Action taken during the review

We reorganised the clerking services before the summer 2013, in part prompted by feedback from the review indicating a preference for greater staffing consistency in clerking teams. The restructure has allowed us to provide both policy and legislative scrutiny expertise in single teams to those committees that carry out a dual policy and legislative function. This has also allowed us to enhance the support provided to other committees. Clerks, researchers, lawyers and outreach staff routinely plan and deliver committee support as an identifiable 'integrated team'.

Staffing efficiencies created by the restructure have been reinvested in a newly created Strategic Transformation Service. This team will drive the transformation of critical elements of Assembly services as we respond to the continuing evolution of the Assembly and today's constitutional developments.

At its core is responsibility for:

- proactive planning and influence in respect of constitutional change and the role of the Assembly (eg the work of the Silk Commission and wider constitutional change within the UK);
- management of significant projects and work streams directly related to the development of Assembly business (eg the procurement of a bespoke machine translation system, work on the Youth Engagement project, an integrated, searchable audio visual/written Record of Proceedings and transformation of the ICT services available in the Senedd); and
- secretariat support for the National Assembly for Wales Remuneration Board.

Since the consultation with Members in the spring of 2013 there has been much activity focussed on addressing the key areas for improvement that were identified. Many of these were specific to practices in individual committees demonstrating our response to the need for bespoke and tailored services.

Some of the enhancements made:

- More tailored bilingual support for Members in committee, including: provision of glossaries of specific Welsh terms for Bills – this is now being extended to some policy inquiries; when committee work programmes allow, more frequent provision of bilingual briefing, where possible produced with the aid of machine translation; an increase in bilingual papers presented by those organisations with a Welsh Language Scheme; TRS also work closely with the Welsh language tutor to encourage Members who are less confident in their Welsh language skills to speak in Welsh.
- First drafts of Committee Transcripts are now published within the shorter time span of three working days.
- Tighter control of written evidence including: gathering written evidence much earlier in the committee process; introduction of rules on length, format and timing of papers; enhanced protocol with Welsh Ministers for earlier receipt of papers.
- The availability of both public and private papers through the ModGov app, which gives access to committee packs on tablets and other devices.
- Tailored approaches to questions in Members’ briefing depending on both the subject matter and Members’ preferences.
- Piloting the use of subject-specific Twitter feeds to promote the work of committees.
- Embedding consideration of Communications at the start of inquiries to ensure that we are able to provide an integrated multi-platform communications package for the media and other stakeholders at the end of, and increasingly during, inquiries.
- CPD for committees has continued with leaders in their field providing support in general scrutiny techniques and specific sessions continue in financial and legislative scrutiny. The Deputy Presiding Officer has recently undergone 360 degree feedback on his performance as Chair of the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee.

Future improvements

While there has been a clear focus over the past year on specific and often very practical enhancements, we are now at a point where we need to drill down further to ensure we are delivering support to committees as efficiently as we can, while constantly improving the quality of that support. To that end we are modelling the end to end processes around committee activity, with a particular focus on the flow of information.

Through this we aim to identify practical changes to ensure our resources are delivering value for money and are as effective as they can be. It will also identify areas where more significant changes might be needed. The initial phase of this work is due to conclude before Christmas with more detailed work on specific areas being taken forward in the New Year. Initial meetings have identified some of the key issues being around end to end planning for each piece of committee work, how we bring greater consistency and quality to the information provided to committees, and the need to challenge existing practices.

Annex 2: The committee system and activity

This information was provided to the Assembly Commission in June 2012. All figures for committee activity cover the period 1 September 2011 to 30 August 2012. Since that time, staff in the Committee, Services and the Legislation Office have been restructured so as to provide both policy and legislative scrutiny expertise in single teams.

The core strategic functions of the Assembly's committee system can be summarised as follows:

- Scrutinising Bills and other legislative proposals, reporting to the Assembly with recommendations for their improvement, and considering and making amendments to Bills.
- Examining the finance and performance of relevant parts of the Welsh Government, associated public bodies and others of relevance to Wales.
- Examining and reporting on the implementation of Welsh Government policy, legislation and other commitments, including identifying and scrutinising areas of Welsh Government policy, or areas where existing policy is deficient, and making proposals for improvement.²

The Business Committee is responsible for proposing the remits of committees and ensuring that the strategic functions outlined above, and any other functions required by Standing Orders, can be delivered.

It is the Commission's role to ensure that the Assembly and its members have the resources and support to undertake their duties effectively.

Committee chairs play a vital role in the delivery of the strategic objectives of the Assembly and its committees. In particular, chairs are responsible for the strategic direction of committees and to ensure the delivery of a balanced, comprehensive and effective programme of legislative, policy and financial scrutiny. Both the Business Committee and the Remuneration Board have identified the responsibilities that they believe Committee Chairs should fulfil (see Annex A).

The committee structure

The Assembly has decided on a committee structure which gives committees the responsibility to both scrutinise the government and associated public bodies and to scrutinise legislation, within a subject remit. Although there are fewer committees than in the Third Assembly, this does not reduce the amount of work needed to deliver all of their responsibilities.

The structure allows for more efficient use of Member time given the unpredictability of the legislative workload and for the specific policy knowledge of Members to be brought to bear on the scrutiny of legislation. The five subject-based committees were established with sufficiently large memberships to enable them to undertake multiple streams of work in formal sub-committees and informal or rapporteur groups as well as continued

² Business Committee Report – "Committee Portfolios and Responsibilities in the 4th Assembly", July 2012

operation in full committee. This is to allow policy and legislative work to take place simultaneously and for committees to be able to respond quickly to events.

The Assembly has also established a number of other committees, to carry out functions specified in Standing Orders. They are:

- Finance Committee (Standing Order 19);
- Public Accounts Committee (Standing Order 18 and required by GoWA);
- Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee (Standing Order 21);
- Standards of Conduct (Standing Order 22); and
- Petitions Committee (Standing Order 23).

Establishing the Business Committee is required under Standing Order 11.

On 2 May 2012, the Assembly agreed to establish an additional Committee, the Committee for the scrutiny of the First Minister.

The committee timetable

To accommodate the workload generated by broad portfolios and joint responsibility for scrutiny of legislation and policy each of the five “subject” committees has been allocated one and a half days every fortnight in which it can schedule its activity.

The schedule accommodates weekly meetings of the Business Committee, Constitutional and Legislative Affairs and Public Accounts committees; fortnightly meetings of the Finance and Petitions committees, with additional slots available for budget consideration; and the Standards of Conduct Committee meets as necessary. The Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister meets once per term.

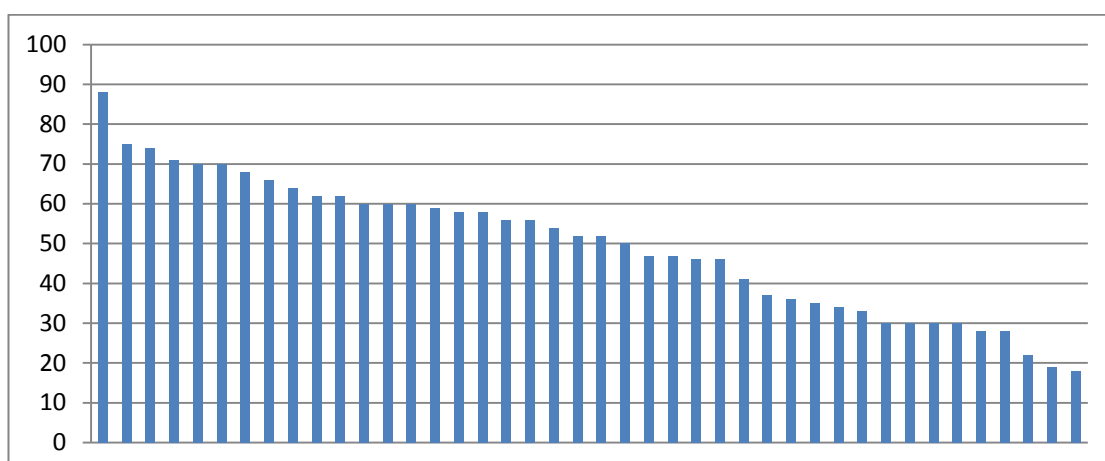
Committee activity

A committee’s level of activity is dependent on a number of factors:

- The committee’s remit;
- The committee’s Chair and Members; and
- How the committee chooses to use the time available to it.

The committee workload of the 42 members who currently sit on Assembly committees varies considerably. Seven Members sit on three committees, for instance, a further 25 on two, and the remainder on just one. In the period from September 2011 to August 2012, the number of formal meetings attended by Members ranged from 18 to 88.

Figure 1 – Number of meetings for each member for the period 1 September 2011 – 30 August 2012



The table below shows that approximately 80 per cent of the slots available to committees were used for **formal** business in the year between 1 September and 30 August. The table is intended to give a broad indication of the level of committee activity. Slots not taken up by formal business were used for committee visits, briefings, training and other committee activities.

Figure 2- Committees for the period 1 September 2011 - 30 August 2012

	Number of meetings
	269
Timetabled slots	340
Unused	71
% used	79%

There were, on average, 15 hours of formal committee meetings in each week that the Assembly was sitting during this period. This does not include informal activity such as visits, briefings and engagement activity.

Committee outputs and outcomes

In the year between 1 September and 30 August 2011-2012, committees produced 50 reports and considered 78 petitions. Committees also produced a substantial number of letters to Ministers on issues arising from their scrutiny work.

In that same period, committees scrutinised and reported on two Bills and six Legislative Consent Memoranda. It is important to note that the legislative workload was light during the early period of this Assembly but had, at the time of writing, increased substantially.

In terms of outreach and engagement activity, committees have used the time available to them to collect evidence and information in innovative ways. Recent examples of this type of work include:

- Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee: round-table evidence gathering at football clubs with supporters for the Welsh Premier League inquiry;
- Health and Social Care Committee: series of informal visits to local authorities/care homes/extra care services; and a series of reference group meetings;
- Children and Young People Committee: informal evidence gathering meetings with parents for the adoption inquiry and their work on the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill;
- Enterprise and Business Committee: visit to Glyndwr University for Horizon 2020 inquiry, World Café event in Swansea to hear the views of public transport user groups;
- Petitions Committee: Cardiff Mela – Petitions Stand; Royal Welsh Show – Petition ‘drop in’ sessions; Eisteddfod – Petition ‘drop in’ sessions; and
- Public Accounts Committee: visit to Belfast to share best practice/gather information to inform scrutiny of Public Audit (Wales) Bill.

Measuring direct outcomes of committee work is not as straight-forward as measuring outputs. However policy scrutiny work has added significantly to the public debate about key areas of policy and can often influence government thinking and future policy development, but this influence is not always directly recognised and may only be apparent over a substantial period of time. The Welsh Government usually accepts a high proportion of the recommendations in committee reports and their implementation over time can be monitored and be the subject of follow-up scrutiny.

The scrutiny of legislation by committees, at Stages 1 and 2, is also very important to improve the quality of legislation and to enable the engagement of stakeholders.

A few examples of ‘outcomes’ achieved by committees include:

- The need for a separate Planning Act for Wales originally emerged from the scrutiny of planning policy by the Sustainability Committee of the Third Assembly. The recommendation was accepted in principle by the previous Welsh Government and a White Paper on a Planning Bill is now being prepared.
- The level of detail produced by the Welsh Government for the draft budget 2013-14 was much greater than in previous budget rounds allowing for more transparency and a better understanding of the government’s spending plans. This has come about as a result of pressure of budget scrutiny over successive years by the Finance Committee and other committees.
- The level of financial information provided in explanatory memoranda has improved in the Fourth Assembly, with more detail being provided and fewer parts of legislation being uncosted. This has partly been driven by the Finance Committee and other committees’ legislative scrutiny reports during the latter part of the Third Assembly, leading to changes in the Standing Orders and also how these changes have been implemented by the Table Office.

The types of support provided for committees

Committees have access to a range of different types of support to fulfil their strategic functions. The main types of support can be categorised as follows:

- Administrative and secretariat support;
- Scrutiny support; and
- Public engagement.

Other types of support are also provided, and include:

- AMSS Support for individual committee members;
- External advice; and
- Continuous Professional Development.

Administrative, logistical and secretarial support

Officials provide core support to the day to day work of the Assembly's committees, including planning and organising the business of each committee. The type of support provided to committees is mainly practical and includes:

- managing inquiries (liaising with witnesses, commissioning and publication of papers);
- preparation of committee documents (including agendas, minutes, correspondence);
- arrangements for on-site meetings and events and off-site visits or meetings; and
- procedural advice.

Committees, and any individuals participating in committee proceedings, have access to interpretation from Welsh to English for all formal committee, sub-committee and ad-hoc committee meetings and events, and informal meetings as requested (e.g. rapporteur groups, report launches etc).

Translation of relevant committee papers, include: Agendas; committee minutes; legal and procedural briefings; Stage 1 and Stage 2 documentation (reports, amendments, daily and marshalled lists, summary of consultation responses, 'as amended' bill); committee correspondence; committee media coverage; and Welsh > English translation of written evidence.

Transcripts are prepared for committee meetings and proceedings are streamed on Senedd TV.

The Front of House team facilitates the public's involvement in committees by taking bookings for the gallery in advance and welcoming and ushering visitors and witnesses attending. They also provide information, agendas and papers as required and advise visitors of the committee structure and proceedings during their visit to the Senedd.

Support for the Committee Chair

Committee chairs receive specific support including:

- policy briefings;
- advice on the committee’s strategic direction and timetabling;
- advice on management of committee business;
- support for committee business in Plenary e.g. speeches;
- support for media commitments arising from the committee’s work; and
- support in any other aspects of the Chair’s work, as required.

Support for committee scrutiny work

Support for policy scrutiny

When undertaking scrutiny of policy, committees have access to the following support:

- briefing for oral evidence sessions with background and suggested lines of questions.
- analysis of evidence, key issues and the drafting of reports.
- legal briefing.
- procedural advice.
- advice on European Issues.

Support for legislation

In addition to the scrutiny support indicated above, committees undertaking scrutiny of legislation have access to a number of different aspects of support, including:

- advising on the consideration of amendments to Bills at Stage 2, including legal advice as to the admissibility and meaning of amendments;
- drafting of amendments and advising Members on the drafting of amendments;
- tabling of all amendments to Bills, including Government amendments;
- production and publication of daily and marshalled lists of amendments; and
- advising the Chair on the grouping of amendments for debate and procedural advice on voting.

In addition to the general support all committees receive, the Constitution and Legislative Affairs Committee is provided with specialist legal and research support on the technical aspects of subordinate legislation, the merits of such legislation and detailed procedural advice on a range of other forms of legislation that require examination e.g. Orders made jointly with the UK Parliament, Legislative Consent Memoranda (which are also considered by other committees) and subsidiarity issues relating to EU legislation.

Support for financial scrutiny

All committees have access to researchers with specific expertise in financial matters. In the case of the Public Accounts Committee, it has access to a dedicated internal adviser with expertise in matters relating to audit.

Public engagement

Committees are provided with support to publicise and to promote their work, and to engage with the public. This engagement activity is increasingly being used to inform the scrutiny work of committees e.g. in the stakeholder events held around this year's budget scrutiny process.

Outreach activities in support of committees' work include:

- Arranging and carrying out consultation activity such as focus groups, video interviews etc
- Arranging and promoting events to support engagement activity
- Promoting consultations during school visits on and off the estate, and via the Education Newsletter

Media support for committees includes:

- management of all dealings with the media;
- identifying opportunities for further media coverage, for example, through thought pieces to specialised media;
- preparing and executing communications strategy for report launches, ranging from a press release to a full event; and
- aligning media activity with social media, producing video content to post online.

Online support for committees includes:

- an petitions system
- identifying stakeholders to work with and partner with (for example, the Welsh Football Fans Facebook group for the inquiry into the Welsh Premier League);
- promoting the committees' work via blogs, Facebook and Twitter (including stakeholder events, invitations to take part in consultations, reports); and
- a dedicated Twitter page for the Petitions Committee.

Other sources of support

AMSS Support

Following the recommendation of the Remuneration Board, all Assembly Members employ a member of staff dedicated to providing support for committee work in terms of administrative and research support.

External Advice

Committees have access to external advice and a number of committees have taken advantage of this support during this Assembly:

- The Children and Young People Committee appointed an expert adviser for the Adoption inquiry.
- The Environment and Sustainability Committee appointed external advisers for the inquiry into a single environmental body.

- The Health and Social Care Committee appointed an external advisers to assist with the inquiry on residential care and was assisted by Age Cymru and Carers Trust in engaging with service users.
- The Finance Committee appointed an expert adviser for the inquiry into Devolved Funding: Borrowing powers and capital and to assist all committees during the draft budget process.

How Commission resources are allocated to deliver support

Support is provided by teams from a number of departments within the Assembly Commission. The following table shows the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff supporting committees in each service area.

Figure 3: FTEs

	Total FTE
Committee Service	22
Legislation	17
Chamber Service	1
Communications	3
Research Service	12
Legal Service	7
Translation & Reporting Service	22
<i>Editors</i>	(12)
<i>Text Translators</i>	(8)
<i>Interpreters</i>	(2)
Total	84

The salary cost of this resource, excluding NI and pensions, is between £2.7 and £3.4 million, depending on where each staff member is situated on the payscale. The total salary costs, including NI and pensions, amounts to between £3.4m and £4.4million.

Committee Service, Legislation Office and Chamber Service

The bulk of secretariat support for committees is provided by Committee Service and Legislation Office. These staff provide core support to the day to day work of the Assembly's committees, including planning and organising the business of each committee.

Committee Service

Committee Service provides support for the policy work the Assembly's committees, with the exception of the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs and Business Committees. The service is structured in small teams, each of which is responsible for the delivery of support for at least two committees.

Legislation Office

The Legislation Office supports the scrutiny of legislation in the Assembly, including Bills, Legislative Consent Memoranda, Subordinate Legislation and European legislation. Clerks in the Legislation Office also support Members' Private Bills through the scrutiny process.

Clerks in the Legislation Office do not act as a 'permanent' clerk to a particular committee but will work with the relevant committee on a Bill from the pre-introduction stage, Stages 1 and 2 in committee, Stages 3 and 4 in plenary and then supervise the process for Royal Assent and archiving of the Act.

Along with colleagues in the Research Service and Legal Services, clerks in the Legislation Office also provide comprehensive support to Members with their proposals to introduce Bills. Progress of a Members' Bill through the Assembly requires double the level of resources for a Government Bill since separate teams will then support the committee scrutiny of the Bill as well as the individual Member.

Chamber Secretariat

The day to day management of the Business Committee is the responsibility of Chamber Secretariat. This team is responsible for clerking any reviews of Standing Orders undertaken by the Business Committee.

Research Service

Researchers input to the work of committees in collaboration with their clerking colleagues in a wide variety of ways including: briefing members on possible policy inquiry topics; advising on aspects of Bills to concentrate on; acting as the point of contact with committee appointed 'expert' advisers; analysing written and oral evidence to identify key issues and briefing Committee Chairs prior to meetings.

The most obvious and visible part of the support provided to committees by the Research Service is the production of written briefings (often with suggested lines/areas of questioning) for committee members to assist them with policy or legislative scrutiny. The service produces eight to ten such briefings each week during term-time. Currently, where suggested lines/areas of questioning are provided, these are produced bilingually. However the rest of the briefing is provided in English only.

The Research Service (excluding the Library) currently has a staffing complement of 26 FTE staff. Almost all of the Committee support work is carried out by 17 FTE senior researchers and team leaders. It is estimated that committee support work covering all the activities listed above takes about 60-70 per cent of the total time of these staff.

The Research Service staff who work supporting committees have particular knowledge and expertise in public policy or other specialist skills and knowledge. For example, one Team Leader has a background in finance and statistics and supports the Finance and Public Accounts Committees as well as working with other committees when they are dealing with the financial scrutiny of policy and legislation. Typically, a single researcher will have responsibility for all briefing on a wide range of policy areas – for example, one

researcher is responsible for agriculture, rural development, biodiversity, forestry, marine and fisheries; another for social care, mental health and adult social services.

Legal Service

One lawyer from Legal Services is assigned to lead legal support to each Committee. Normally the same lawyer will service the Committee both when it is conducting an inquiry and when it is scrutinising draft Bills. In relation to Bills, however, at least one other lawyer will also be assigned to support a Committee (the exact number will depend on the size and complexity of the Bill). Additional lawyers may also be assigned to support a Committee on an inquiry. While the principal driver in allocating lawyers is to ensure comprehensive Committee support, including in case of unforeseen lawyer absence, the need to develop skills is also taken into account.

In the case of Member, committee or Commission-proposed Bills, normally two Legal Services lawyers will support the Member in charge and two will support the scrutinising committee. The lawyers are drawn from different Legal Services teams, to spread workload evenly and also to establish a 'Chinese Wall' between advisers to the Member and advisers to the committee. The Director of Legal Services stands above the "Chinese Wall" so as to protect the interests of the Assembly itself. A lead lawyer is also assigned to each of the committees that have special roles: Public Accounts, Finance, Standards, Petitions and Constitutional and Legislative Affairs.

Translation and Reporting Service

This Service is responsible for the production of the bilingual Record of Proceedings, committee transcripts, translation of all official Assembly documentation and Welsh into English interpretation in all Assembly proceedings. Of the work undertaken by the service, approximately 60 per cent of transcription/editing work is in support of committees; 85 per cent of text translation supports the work of committees; and 60 per cent of TRS' interpretation work supports committees.

Communications Service

The equivalent of three FTE staff in this team are focused on social and traditional media work in relation to the committees and, increasingly, helping to gather evidence for committee inquiries through engagement and outreach work.

Annex 3: The key responsibilities of Committee Chairs

The key responsibilities of the Committee Chairs are to:

- set the strategic direction of the committee and ensure the transparent prioritisation of its activity so as to deliver a balanced, comprehensive and effective programme of legislative, policy and financial scrutiny;
- maximise the relevance and influence of the committee whilst maintaining its clear independence from the Welsh Government;
- act impartially at all times, decisively, fairly and in a manner that maintains the confidence of the committee;
- command the confidence of Members, witnesses and the public at large through knowledge of the subject matter of the committee’s remit; demonstration of effective legislative, policy and financial scrutiny techniques; maintenance of order; and the application of all relevant legal and procedural requirements on the committee;
- secure the commitment and engagement of all committee members and build cross-party consensus wherever possible;
- build the culture and skills mix within the committee required to maximise its effectiveness as a scrutiny body;
- ensure that the committee receives the expert advice, information and other support it requires to fulfil its objectives effectively;
- drive the delivery of all aspects of the committee’s work with pace and quality;
- represent the committee publicly, in the media and in formal Assembly business; and
- ensure critical analysis and evaluation of the committee’s work and drive innovation in its operation so as to increase effectiveness, public engagement and impact.