

Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru
National
Assembly for
Wales

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Communicating effectively with Assembly Members



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1.0 Purpose and summary of issues

1.1. This paper seeks the Assembly Commission's views on the actions proposed to communicate the work of the Assembly Commission to Assembly Members more effectively in the Fourth Assembly. The proposals set out in this paper enhance the role of the secretariat in this respect, allowing Commissioners to concentrate on the strategic and decision making elements of their role.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1. The Assembly Commission is asked to agree the proposals set out at paragraphs 5.1 – 5.4.

3.0 Discussion

3.1. In 2009–10, an Assembly Member satisfaction survey was undertaken. Thirty-one Members, sometimes also accompanied by their support staff, provided feedback on the services we provide to them. During those discussions it became apparent that a number of Members were dissatisfied with the level of feedback and pre-decision consultation on the work of the Assembly Commission. The Chief Executive and Clerk also met party leaders periodically and similar feedback was provided during those discussions.

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3.2. A number of actions were in place already to keep Members informed and these were strengthened as a result of the feedback. We now have an opportunity to engage Members more proactively on the work of the Assembly Commission and the following paragraphs detail those proposals.

4.0 Approaches taken to date

4.1. The following bullet points summarise the approaches taken in the Third Assembly and it is proposed that these should continue:

- the Chief Executive met with opposition Party Leaders to discuss a number of current and on-going issues. Regular meetings were also undertaken with individual Assembly Commissioners;
- Assembly Commission papers were supplemented with briefing sheets which were made available prior to Commission meetings and were designed specifically to engage Members on the Commission's work;
- a few days after each Commission meeting, a summary of the discussions was published on the Members' homepage;
- Commission papers were also published bilingually one week after a meeting and a link to the published papers is provided in an email to Members;
- Chief Executive monthly update was introduced and well received;
- Chief Executive and other staff discussed specific issues with Members at party group meetings;
- Senedd drop-in sessions were arranged so that Members could meet key staff in the margins of Plenary sessions. These were largely related to Members' Business Support and ICT work;
- an Assembly Member Reference Group was established for consultation purposes on the work of the Fourth Assembly

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Programme to facilitate pre-decision consultation with Members and Groups; and

- a Members' support staff advisory group was also established and worked well.

5.0 Opportunities for the Fourth Assembly

- 5.1. In addition to maintaining the communication strands listed above, we also suggest the following actions to enhance engagement with Members:
- 5.2. The Chief Executive's monthly update could be used to signpost forthcoming consultations to encourage engagement from the outset. There might also be opportunities for senior officials to attend party group meetings periodically, upon invitation, to discuss particular issues. Subject to the Commissioners' views, this could commence before the summer recess so that the role of the Commission can be explained, in particular, to new Members.
- 5.3. The Head of Member Liaison and Professional Development has a pivotal role in engaging Members on the work of the Commission and would take forward the following initiatives as part of her duties:
 - re-establish the Assembly Member Reference Group which provided valuable intelligence on corporate services in the lead up to the Fourth Assembly elections. Using the Reference Group as a mechanism for consultation would allow Commissioners to be the decision makers who receive the product of consultation. We would need to ensure that it was specific and focused with involvement being fluid and picking up on special interests that Members may have;
 - take a proactive role in capitalising on the partnership approach that has developed with Group Managers through the Members' Support Staff Advisory Group and make arrangements for that to continue;
 - use to best effect the Members' pages on the Intranet to communicate the work of the Commission; and

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- communicate and clarify decisions taken by the Assembly Commission when she meets with individual or groups of Members.
- 5.4. Operationally, the secretariat could continue to advise Members that Commission papers have been published but this could be done by using the Presiding Officer's mailbox which would have the effect of raising the status of the communication. To help ensure that all Members receive the Assembly Member Briefing Sheet at the same time prior to Commission meetings, the secretariat could also provide these directly to Members, or publish the briefing on the Members' Intranet, on behalf of the Commissioners.