



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

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[The Public Accounts Committee](#)

01/03/2016

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn
ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in
the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation
is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Mohammad Asghar Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Jocelyn Davies Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Mike Hedges Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Sandy Mewies Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Darren Millar Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair)
Julie Morgan Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Aled Roberts Bywgraffiad Biography	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Matthew Mortlock	Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Wales Audit Office
Huw Vaughan Thomas	Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru Auditor General for Wales

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Gemma Gifford	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
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Meriel Singleton Clerc
 Clerk

Joanest Varney– Uwch–gynghorydd Cyfreithiol
Jackson Senior Legal Adviser

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:02.
The meeting began at 09:02.*

Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Darren Millar:** Good morning, everybody. Welcome to today’s meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. First, the usual housekeeping notices to remind Members and anybody else who participates in today’s meeting that the National Assembly for Wales is a bilingual institution and that we should feel free to contribute to its proceedings through either English or Welsh as we see fit. There are, of course, headsets available for sound amplification, and these can be used for translation services as well. In the event of a fire alarm, we should follow the instructions of the ushers.

[2] In terms of oral declarations of interest, we did receive these at the start of our Cardiff Airport inquiry, and I will assume that those still stand. Indeed, we also received one in respect of our scrutiny of accounts work, so I’ll take it that those are carried forward.

[3] **Sandy Mewies:** Would you like me to leave for that, Chair?

[4] **Darren Millar:** We’ll get to it later, Sandy, if that’s okay. If there aren’t any others, we’ll move on to item 2.

09:03

Papurau i’w Nodi Papers to Note

[5] **Darren Millar:** We’ve got a number of papers to note—lots of correspondence coming in. We’ve got the minutes of our meeting held on 23 February. I’ll take it that those are noted. We’ve had some correspondence from Simon Jones in his capacity as chair of Holdco with some additional information for our Cardiff Airport inquiry. I’ll take it that that is noted. We’ve

also had a response from the Welsh Government in advance of our final evidence session with them to the auditor general's report on Cardiff Airport, but James Price, in that letter, also refers to the fact that he's discussed the report with Holdco and, effectively, it's a joint response. I'm sure we'll be discussing that in due course.

[6] We've had a letter from the Football Association of Wales regarding their relationship with Cardiff Airport. I'll take it that that is also noted. We've also had one of those from the Welsh Rugby Union, so, again, we'll take it that that's noted. We've got a little note from Chris Cain, following his evidence on Cardiff Airport. He was one of the aviation experts, and he's referred to three similar airports of a similar sort of scale and size to Cardiff.

[7] Then we've got, obviously, some additional information, which was sent to you in a separate pack, in relation to Cardiff Airport as well. There's some information on anchor companies within that additional pack of information. I'll take it that that is noted. Okay.

09:05

Craffu ar Gyfrifon 2014–15: Ystyried Ymatebion i Adroddiad y Pwyllgor Scrutiny of Accounts 2014–15: Consideration of Responses to the Committee's Report

[8] **Darren Millar:** Item 3: scrutiny of accounts and consideration of responses to our report. So, we've had lots of correspondence in, further to our piece of work this year on the scrutiny of accounts, from the national library, the national museum, the Assembly Commission, from Sport Wales, the Welsh Government, and from the Auditor General for Wales. So, if we take each item in turn, if that's okay. So, we've had a piece of advice, I should say, also from the Wales Audit Office.

[9] **Mr Thomas:** It's my letter.

[10] **Darren Millar:** Huw, do you want to take us through your advice, or—?

[11] **Mr Thomas:** Well, I think that the advice stands and it might be useful if you actually looked at the letters you've received against the letter I sent you, commenting on them.

[12] **Darren Millar:** So, the first piece of correspondence, then, is from the

National Library of Wales. If you remember, the committee had some concerns about the insurance aspects following the fire, which are referred to in the correspondence from the national library. Does any Member want to open any discussion on this? Effectively, there's a suggestion that we might want to write to the Welsh Government seeking a view on the insurance arrangements, further to the letter, because it does appear that there may be some frustration in terms of the leadership on that issue from the Welsh Government. Certainly, that's the impression I get when reading the letter from the national library. Are Members content for us to do that?

[13] **Jenny Rathbone:** Well, I'm delighted to see they've—. Sorry, am I jumping in?

[14] **Darren Millar:** Yes. Jenny.

[15] **Jenny Rathbone:** They've got a fully funded pension arrangement. That's excellent. Not all organisations can say that. I just thought that it was a bit thin in terms of—. You know, they're going to continue to monitor the board—the effectiveness of the library's work. It's easy to put that on paper, but there's really little evidence of how they're addressing the gaps that we found when we scrutinised them.

[16] **Darren Millar:** What does any other Member think? They've referred, of course, to their severance arrangements as well, haven't they, in terms of the ongoing work that they've been doing on that? They're talking about changing their policies. We had some concerns about the way that they've been dealing with severance.

[17] **Mr Thomas:** They did get Welsh Government invest-to-save in order to help with that.

[18] **Darren Millar:** In order to reduce their staff numbers. Yes.

[19] **Jocelyn Davies:** Chair, there's just one thing, on the litigation. I'm still not quite clear whether—because we know that the Welsh Government provided them with the grant for the repair that needed to be done—that grant was dependent on them pursuing the litigation; whether the Welsh Government was insisting, 'We'll only give you the grant if you pursue the litigation'. I know it says here that the Welsh Government said that they had to consider options, but that doesn't mean that they had to do it. I'm still not clear as to whether they felt that they had to do it in order to comply with the

requirements of the grant.

[20] **Darren Millar:** It's quite clear that the national library don't know whether the Welsh Government wants them to proceed to undertake further legal action in respect of that either.

[21] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, because the legal costs were quite considerable.

[22] **Darren Millar:** Significant sums, yes. Would you like us to write to the Welsh Government specifically on this item? Yes?

[23] **Jocelyn Davies:** Because it seemed to be their justification for pursuing, but I'm not sure that that—. You know, we haven't been definitely told, 'Yes, we had to do it'.

[24] **Darren Millar:** Yes. And in terms of the other items—in terms of mopping up other items—the advice of the auditor general, of course, is that we consider those in the future at some other point. Are we happy to take those forward, then? So, we'll seek specific information in relation to the Welsh Government's position on litigation in respect of the work following the fire? Yes? Happy with that? Excellent.

[25] The Assembly Commission's response.

[26] **Sandy Mewies:** Do you want me to leave?

[27] **Darren Millar:** Well, are Members content for Sandy just to sit at the side of the room, or not participate in the discussion?

[28] **Sandy Mewies:** I don't mind going out there, as long as you remember to call me back in when you're finished. [*Laughter.*]

[29] **Darren Millar:** Obviously, this is quite a fulsome response to our piece of work. There is an acceptance of the recommendations that we have made. The auditor general's advice is that the accessibility issues on the Assembly website might be an action for us to follow up, particularly in terms of its accessibility for those with disabilities, such as the visually impaired. Are there any other matters that Members want to touch on? Mike.

[30] **Mike Hedges:** Talking about the accessibility, I think it is something that needs to be looked at, perhaps putting it on next year's list, because the

website is wonderful if you know exactly what you're looking for and where it is. If you're visiting it and not sure what you're looking for or not sure where it is, it's almost impenetrable. I think that's a problem. It's almost written as an insider's website, rather than a website for the public, because when I first came here and was trying to find my way around the website without knowing my way around, it was very, very difficult. Now I know what I'm looking for, it's not too bad at all, but I think that, for outside organisations and individuals with an interest, it really does need to be made simpler. It needs better menus and simple word searches that can be undertaken from the beginning.

[31] **Darren Millar:** If we drop a note to the Presiding Officer, just thanking them for the response, but saying that we are concerned about the accessibility and the navigability of the Assembly's website and that this is something that we want to explore with them further, if they could provide a response to us with the changes that they're proposing making in the meantime for our successor committee to consider—.

[32] **Mike Hedges:** If one of your constituents, Darren, wanted to look you up on the website and find out what you'd been doing, it would not be very easy for them. They'd have to go through the—

[33] **Darren Millar:** What do you mean?

[34] **Aled Roberts:** Thankfully. [*Laughter.*]

[35] **Mike Hedges:** I use you as an example, as the Chair, but any one of us—. We are accountable to the electorate, and they should be up to check what we've been doing. It can be done, but you have to go to a whole range of different places first. You can't just, say, type in 'What has Darren Millar been doing?' and it all comes up.

[36] **Darren Millar:** It's not as intuitive as it could be, is it? Jocelyn, did you want to come in?

[37] **Jocelyn Davies:** I agree with that, because it's easier to search the Assembly website with another search engine from outside, so you go to Google or something and Google something rather than use the Assembly website and navigate yourself around. So, it's how they test the accessibility I'd be interested in—whether they just have an ordinary, normal person trying to find something without knowing the exact title of something and

the date that it was done.

[38] **Darren Millar:** Why don't we ask that question, then? How are they testing the suitability of their website for different groups of users? Happy with that, yes?

[39] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, I think that would be useful.

[40] **Darren Millar:** So, we'll follow that up with a letter, then.

[41] The next piece of correspondence we've had is from the Welsh Government, I think—

[42] **Jocelyn Davies:** Shall we wait for Sandy?

[43] **Darren Millar:**—the Welsh Government. So, it's their response to our scrutiny of accounts report. If you remember, when we had a discussion on this, we were talking about the ease of deciphering the—sorry. Thanks, Sandy. We're just talking about the Welsh Government's response now. So, Welsh Government have written to us about the recommendations that pertain to them. We've had a response from Sir Derek and, again, the recommendations have been accepted. The Wales Audit Office have suggested that we can follow some of the items up through our grants management work, but also they've drawn attention to the fact that, obviously, there are going to be these links in the report that will, effectively, drill down to further information as well. That's the suggestion from the Welsh Government in relation to our thoughts that the accounts themselves are perhaps not that easy to decipher and the back-up information isn't always there. Huw, did you want to—?

[44] **Mr Thomas:** Yes, I'll start with that one and then just confirm another point. We are continuing to make what I describe as slow progress in terms of trying to get accounts into a more accessible format. I think that my aim, really, is to try and push the Welsh Government into having a budget and accounts that actually can be very easily compared by department as well as en bloc. So, I think that there is further work that we are continuing to do on this side. I do confirm there is progress, but it is slow progress.

[45] **Darren Millar:** Okay.

[46] **Mr Thomas:** The other point I just wanted to confirm is that we will be

picking up the procurement issues as part of the report that the next Assembly will be receiving.

09:15

[47] **Darren Millar:** Do Members want to get back to the Welsh Government on this? Obviously, they've given us their thoughts as to how they want to take things forward with the links in the report. Obviously, that's handy if you're reading them online; it's less handy if you're reading them in a paper format and you just want access to something that is important to you. Do we want to ask for further information as to how they intend to deal with the accessibility? Are Members content for us to write just asking about how they intend to make them more digestible by department, and also in terms of the links and their suitability for people wanting to drill down to information who may not be computer users? Yes?

[48] **Jocelyn Davies:** It might save them some FOI requests.

[49] **Darren Millar:** Absolutely. Are Members content with that? Anything else we want to follow up?

[50] **Jocelyn Davies:** No, that's fine.

[51] **Darren Millar:** Okay. Item 4, then, motion under Standing Order 17.42 to—.

[52] **Mr Thomas:** Sorry; one other point. Looking ahead, I wonder if you would like to include in your legacy recommendations that the new committee should add Natural Resources Wales in terms of the bodies that will have their accounts scrutinised by the PAC.

[53] **Darren Millar:** This is for next year, so we always try and select, don't we, each year a number of different organisations. Are we content to make that recommendation to our successor committee for next year? *lawn*—okay. Thank you, Huw.

09:16

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd
o'r Cyfarfod**

**Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public
from the Meeting**

Cynnig:

Motion:

*bod y pwyllgor yn penderfynu that the committee resolves to
gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y exclude the public from the
cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog remainder of the meeting in
17.42(vi).*

*accordance with Standing Order
17.42(vi).*

Cynigiwyd y cynnig.

Motion moved.

[54] **Darren Millar:** Excellent. Item 4, then: motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of our meeting. Does any Member object? There are no objections, so we'll clear the hordes in the public gallery.

[55] **Aled Roberts:** Again.

[56] **Darren Millar:** Again, yes.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.

Motion agreed.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 09:16.

The public part of the meeting ended at 09:16.