

Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru
National
Assembly for
Wales



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Reviewing the effectiveness of the Commission

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Reviewing the effectiveness of the Assembly Commission

1.0 Purpose and summary of issues

- 1.1 The new Governance Principles and Supporting Provisions, agreed by the Commission last June, commit the Commission to evaluating its own effectiveness from time to time (that is the effectiveness of the Commission as a body as opposed to the organisation which the Commission oversees). The Commission agreed to undertake the first formal evaluation after about twelve months.
- 1.2 The purpose of this paper is to seek the Commission's agreement for the timescale of the first evaluation and to initiate a discussion on the proposed methodology.
- 1.3 From the current financial year (2011–12), the Commission's annual report and accounts will have to contain a "Governance Statement" which, amongst other things, will describe the work of the Commission and senior management. It will also need to provide information on the effectiveness of the Commission itself.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Commission is invited to:
 - i. agree that its first evaluation should take place in November or December 2012;
 - ii. agree the outline methodology for the evaluation stated in this paper (paragraphs 3.4 to 3.8 below) and ask officials to work up more detailed proposals in collaboration with the independent advisers; and

- iii. note that (i) and (ii) above will need to be summarised in the Governance Statement to be published with the 2011–12 accounts.

3.0 Discussion

Timing

- 3.1 The Commission will almost certainly need to devote time in the late summer and early autumn of 2012 to its 2013–14 budget. It might therefore be most productive for a substantive discussion on the evaluation of effectiveness to take place in November or December 2012. This timetable would mean that the Assembly's reaction to the Commission's budget could be taken into account as part of the evaluation.

Methodology

- 3.2 The evaluation would focus on the role and responsibilities of the Assembly Commission as the governing board for the organisation and on the interface between the Commission and Assembly Members and staff.
- 3.3 The key responsibilities of the Commission as a board are to:
 - i. provide the organisation with leadership and clear strategic direction, acting corporately in the interest of the Assembly as a whole;
 - ii. request appropriate financial resources from the Assembly to discharge the Commission's statutory functions and deliver its strategic objectives¹;
 - iii. hold the Chief Executive and senior management to account for delivery of the strategy and the running of the organisation;

¹ Once the resources have been authorised by the Assembly, it is the Chief Executive's duty, as the Commission's Principal Accounting Officer, to ensure that they are used in a regular and proper manner and having regard to the need to secure value for money. She is personally accountable to the Assembly and to the PAC in particular in respect of this duty.

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- iv. ensure that clear lines of communication between the Commission and Assembly Members exist and are operating effectively – Members are the Commission’s key stakeholders and therefore should be made aware of the Commission’s key decisions and the reasons for them, and should also have a clear route for expressing their views and concerns; and
- v. account to the Assembly for their stewardship of the organisation.

3.4 Annex A gives some examples of questions that could be addressed as part of the evaluation of the Commission’s discharge of the above responsibilities. The list is not exhaustive, and will require consideration by the Commission and officials. It is probable that different questions will be appropriate for different stakeholders.

3.5 In terms of methodology, it is suggested that the Commission undertake a self-analysis, drawing evidence from the following sources:

- i. a short questionnaire completed by Commissioners, independent advisers, and a sample of Members and other stakeholders, including the Remuneration Board and staff (with questions tailored to each audience);
- ii. review of correspondence with Members, Commission communications to and from Members, and oral and written Assembly questions to the Commission; and
- iii. review of relevant media coverage, correspondence from the public and Freedom of Information requests.

3.6 To be credible, the evaluation would need to be objective. One way of achieving this would be to engage external consultants to devise the questionnaire, collate the evidence and write a short evaluation report. However, in the present financial climate, this may not be seen as a good use of resources. An alternative would be to ask Ian Summers to agree the specific approach, review the evidence and present the findings and conclusions to the Commission.

Examples of questions that could be addressed as part of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Commission

- (i) Has the Commission agreed a strategy that includes clear strategic aims and objectives?
- (ii) Is it clear how “success” against those aims and objectives will be measured?
- (iii) Have the Commissioners acted corporately in the interests of the Assembly as a whole, including supporting collective decisions?
- (iv) Has the Commission contributed to the identification and management of key strategic risks for the organisation including giving its views on “risk appetite”?
- (v) Has the Commission provided clear direction and effective challenge to senior management?
- (vi) Has the Commission fully examined and considered spending plans submitted by senior management as a prelude to agreeing the budget to be submitted to the Assembly?
- (vii) Does the Commission receive and question reports on financial outturn compared with budget?
- (viii) Have the independent advisers effectively supported the Commission by providing robust, objective and constructive challenge?
- (ix) Has the Commission been effective in focusing its attention on key strategic issues rather than getting tied up with relatively minor operational matters?
- (x) Have Commissioners responded appropriately and effectively to queries from Assembly Members, including written and oral Assembly questions and other correspondence?
- (xi) To what extent has the work and approach of Assembly staff been successfully aligned with the objectives of the Commission?
- (xii) Do Assembly Members have a clear view of the Commission’s strategic direction and the reasons for key decisions affecting them as stakeholders?

- (xiii) Have the channels of communication between the Commission/senior management and Assembly Members operated effectively?
- (xiv) Is the Commission properly supported in its work by the senior management, the Principal Clerk to the Commission, and the Commission and Member Support Service?