

Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee PAC(5)-03-16 P14

Delivery and transition

National Assembly for Wales annual report and accounts 2015–16

Llywydd's foreword

I am delighted to present this annual report. It is a great honour and a real privilege to have been elected to this role by my fellow Assembly Members.

But of course the achievements described in this annual report predate my appointment. So the credit properly belongs to others. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, Dame Rosemary Butler, who broke down barriers to participation in the democratic process in Wales, particularly amongst women through her Women in Public Life campaign and by placing young people firmly at the centre of Assembly business.

Rosemary was ably supported by Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding, whose insightful and diligent contribution both within and beyond the debating Chamber, including as a committee chair, enhanced the work of the Assembly in numerous ways. Together with Commissioners - Sandy Mewies, Angela Burns, Rhodri Glyn Thomas and Peter Black - they formed an effective leadership team which drove continuous improvement throughout all aspects of the Assembly Commission's strategic goals.

In doing so, Commissioners drew on the expertise, passion and commitment of Assembly Commission staff, led by Claire Clancy, the Chief Executive and Clerk. I know from my own experience of working with Commission staff in previous Assemblies that I can rely on the highest quality advice, responsive services and effective delivery in my new role. I am extremely grateful to Claire and her staff for their support at the start of my tenure.

It is important that the services provided by the Assembly Commission support my priorities for how this Fifth Assembly will operate. The first of these is to be fair, safeguarding the rights of all Members and treating every Member equally. Second, promoting and protecting the good reputation of this Assembly, in the Chamber and beyond, in every community within Wales. Third, ensuring lively, healthy, democratic debate supported by transparency about our procedures. Finally, I want the Assembly to play a constructive, collaborative role working with other Parliaments within the United Kingdom and beyond.

I am looking forward to working with the Deputy Presiding Officer, Ann Jones, and my fellow Commissioners, Joyce Watson, Dai Lloyd, Suzy Davies and Caroline Jones, to build on the successes of the Fourth Assembly. I intend to emulate the approach taken by our predecessors in setting out a clear strategy, underpinned by robust financial planning and effective governance. We will do this against a background of continuing change in Wales and internationally: constitutional, political, socio-economic and environmental. The Assembly will acquire new powers and responsibilities as well as new challenges, and we must be ready to serve the people of Wales fittingly.

Our purpose and activities

This report sets out Assembly Commission achievements against our strategic goals between April 2015 and March 2016.

Context

Wales receives around £16 billion per year to provide essential public services, such as schools and hospitals, for the people of Wales. This is known as the "Welsh Block".

Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee PAC(5)-03-16 P14

The Commission is allocated a small proportion of the Welsh Block (0.3 per cent) to cover the costs of the National Assembly for Wales. This money allows the 60 Assembly Members to represent the people of Wales, make laws and scrutinise the policies and spending decisions of the Welsh Government.

Our budget

During 2015-16, the Commission had responsibility for a budget of £52.3 million, which comprised:

- £15.7 million for the remuneration of our 60 Assembly Members, that of their support staff, pension finance costs and the costs of running their constituency and regional offices all over Wales; and
- £36.6 million for the Commission to provide the property, staff and services for the Assembly to function.

At the start of the Fourth Assembly, the Commission agreed a budget strategy to set out the framework for our annual budget. The Commission publishes Key Performance Indicators to demonstrate corporate performance across all areas of activity. We obtain external assurance on our expenditure from the Auditor General for Wales as well as scrutiny by the Assembly's Public Accounts and Finance Committees.

Our plan to achieve the Commission's strategy

Our strategic plan for the final two years of the Fourth Assembly, published in May 2014, identified five priority areas for change, innovation and investment:

- enabling the Assembly to be as effective as possible through the support we provide, including through the impact of the next stages of our ICT Strategy;
- enhanced bilingual services;
- increased engagement with people in Wales;
- making the most of our estate; and
- complete readiness for the transition to, and new challenges of, the Fifth Assembly.

Commission staff used these priorities and the strategic goals to develop their service plans and their own performance objectives.

Our strategic goals

1. Providing outstanding parliamentary support

This year, the Commission provided a range of support for Members to complete the Assembly's heavy programme of legislative scrutiny (including the first tax Bill); examine proposals for further constitutional change; undertake committee work; use both our official languages; consider procedural and process changes; transform the way we create, use and share information; and reflect on the work of the Fourth Assembly. All these activities informed detailed preparations for the Fifth Assembly.

Learning and improving through engagement

The complex and technical nature of the Tax Collection and Management (Wales) Bill led the Finance Committee to hold an informal stakeholder event before formally considering the Bill. The event was

Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee PAC(5)-03-16 P14

designed to give participants the opportunity to share their views and provide scope for more open discussion. The Committee was keen to hear from tax specialists and representatives of the legal and accounting sector, and secured continuous professional development accreditation for the event as an added incentive for people to attend. Following the event, participants gave positive feedback that they welcomed a full and frank discussion of the issues and wanted to attend similar events to discuss future devolved tax Bills.

As part of our mission to increase engagement in committee work, Commission staff, in partnership with Chwarae Teg, developed a training programme aimed at encouraging more women, particularly those from underrepresented groups, to take part in committee activities. The programme was designed to de-mystify the experience of giving evidence to a committee and build confidence in speaking in front of an audience. As well as receiving presentations on the committee process from Assembly Members and Commission staff, participants were asked to produce a written submission, in advance of presenting it to a mock committee meeting. The programme has been running for two years and has received very positive feedback from participants.

The Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee used an expert panel of three legal practitioners to consider a first draft of a report on making laws in Wales. The Committee was able to test initial findings and recommendations with the panel, which was extremely useful in helping to ensure a high-quality and well-received report.

2. Engaging with the people of Wales and promoting Wales

We continued to increase the breadth and depth of the Assembly's engagement with the people of Wales. We ensured that the Assembly has attended, hosted and delivered national events. We continued to prioritise youth engagement and the Presiding Officer's Women in Public Life campaign. We also maintained strong working relationships with EU institutions and Welsh MEPs, and forged new connections across the world.

Senedd10

In March 2016 we ran the Senedd10 campaign to mark the 10-year anniversary of the Senedd and raise awareness of the Assembly, its Members and their work. The campaign also formed part of a wider programme of activity to promote the Assembly election.

The Presiding Officer held a lunchtime reception on St David's Day to celebrate the achievements of the Fourth Assembly and thank those individuals and organisations that helped the Assembly over the past five years. In the evening, the 'Building for Democracy' event saw the Senedd's architects, Lord Richard Rogers and Ivan Harbour, discuss their thoughts about the Senedd a decade after its opening. Menna Richards OBE, former controller of BBC Wales, chaired the event which was delivered in partnership with the Royal Society of Architects Wales.

The Senedd also hosted a weekend of family fun, attracting over 3,000 visitors, and including performances by S4C's Sioe Cyw, Britain's Got Talent finalists Ysgol Glanaethwy and local groups City Voices Choir and No Fit State circus.

The Senedd10 campaign attracted significant media coverage, including live broadcasts from the Senedd on St David's Day by BBC Radio 2, Radio Wales and Radio Cymru.

3. Using resources wisely

Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee PAC(5)-03-16 P14

The accountability and financial statements sections of this report include detailed descriptions of the many ways in which we use resources wisely. In this section, we highlight some of the key areas of activity and the benefits realised and present our sustainability report for the year.

Modernising the debating chamber

The conferencing, voting and audio technology systems used in the Senedd Siambr, our debating chamber for Plenary meetings, were installed in 2006. At that time they were innovative and ground-breaking. This technology served successive Assemblies well. However, ten years on, we began to experience significant reliability and support issues and Members began to query its continuing suitability.

In response, the Commission undertook a complex project to select, procure and install new systems within the Siambr. We took the opportunity to improve the ergonomics of the desk-working space for Members and to improve accessibility. As a result, Members now have a new flat desk. We have installed a new voting/translation panel within the desks, as well as facilities to charge mobile devices. We have also upgraded the speaker system and microphones for each desk to provide clearer audio across the Siambr.

Members and staff now have high definition wide screens. The screens on the front desk, where the Presiding Officer and officials sit, can be retracted to provide an unrestricted view for special events such as the Royal Opening.

We have also installed a new conferencing software system to manage the business of Plenary. This includes the agenda, the speakers list, procedural information, voting and messaging.

Message from the Chief Executive and Clerk

This was certainly a year of delivery and important transition.

We continued to deliver with pace and professionalism. Assembly Commission staff successfully completed the programme of investment and service improvement driven by the strategic goals set out by our Commissioners at the start of the Fourth Assembly. We supported the final, and busiest, phase of legislative scrutiny in this first Assembly with full law-making powers, including the first tax legislation. We continued to extend the breadth and depth of our engagement with the people of Wales, using new techniques. We confirmed the Senedd's role as a focus for public life, and celebrated its tenth birthday – many of the photographs in this report are from those celebrations.

We also continued to strengthen our approach to planning and delivery, and were recognised in a number of ways for how we nurture and get the best from our staff. Our governance framework enabled us to provide robust assurance about the appropriate use of resources, for which I have personal responsibility as Principal Accounting Officer.

As the end of the Fourth Assembly approached, our thoughts and indeed our work inevitably turned to the transition to the next Assembly. Commission staff supported Members to reflect on and record the legacy of the Fourth Assembly. They also put in place a range of projects and work streams to prepare to give the best possible experience to incoming Members and help them take the decisions required to establish the Fifth Assembly. Although events after the election in May will no doubt be covered in the next annual report, I cannot resist mentioning here that our induction was a fantastic success, complimented by new and returning Members alike.

Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee
PAC(5)-03-16 P14

I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to all Assembly Members and their staff, Commission Directors, Heads of Service and their staff, contractors and colleagues from other organisations who have all contributed to the Assembly's success.

I consider myself very fortunate indeed to have the opportunity to lead the organisation during such an important period in the history of devolution. I am very proud of what we have achieved together. Together as a team, we have tackled, with relish and panache, increasing responsibilities and other challenges. At the same time we have built a modern parliamentary democracy fit for a strong and confident Wales.