



Comisiwn y Cynulliad

Assembly Commission

NAFWC 2007 (Paper 1)

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Venue: Conference Room 4B,

Author name and contact number: Adrian Crompton, Director of Assembly Business, x8264.

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Resourcing and organisation of Assembly Business



Purpose and summary of issues

1. In last month's Executive Board report, we drew attention to the high and growing level of committee and plenary activity now taking place. The Commission agreed that its December meeting should be used for a joint meeting with the Business Committee to consider the resource and practical/procedural implications of this pattern.

2. The proposed work with the Business Committee should ensure that clear direction on prioritisation is given by Members so that these resources are applied in the most effective manner possible and an accurate assessment of any further resource requirements is made.

3. The purpose of this paper is to invite Commissioners to consider their priorities for that joint meeting.

Recommendations (including priority deadline)

4. The Commission is invited to note the background information provided on the emerging pattern of activity and to indicate its priorities for the joint meeting with the Business Committee.

Discussion

5. At the last Commission meeting, the Presiding Officer proposed that its December meeting should be used for a joint meeting with the Business/Procedure Committee. The purpose of the meeting would be for Members to consider and reconcile the resource and the procedural/practical implications of the emerging pattern of high, and increasing, volumes of Assembly Business.

6. The high level of committee and plenary activity now taking place is creating particular pressure points in the following areas:



Legislation

7. As detailed in the accompanying paper on legal services, 3 Government LCOs and one Government Measure are currently being considered by the Assembly (although Assembly proceedings on two of the LCOs are scheduled to be completed by January). We understand that two more LCOs and a second Government Measure may be introduced before Christmas, with another LCO to follow in the spring.

8. In addition, as result of the 2 rounds of Private Members' legislation ballots that have taken place, 2 LCOs and one Measure have received plenary support to continue to more detailed development and scrutiny.

9. Private Members' ballots are held every 2 months and so it is anticipated that a further 2 ballots will be held before Christmas and another round 2 months after that, by which point it is unlikely that any existing proposals will have completed their passage . Though is its unlikely that all will be undergoing their committee stages by this point, by February of next year, therefore, there may be as many as 7 pieces of Private Members' legislation under development or consideration by the Assembly along with 5 pieces of Government legislation. Though none has yet been introduced, committees also have the potential to initiate LCOs and Measures.

10. Private Members' legislation is a particularly hungry consumer of legal, research and clerking resource as Assembly staff provide intensive support to the Members in charge of the proposals throughout the process.

Scrutiny and other committees

11. In addition to the committees established to consider legislation, 13 permanent committees and one sub-committee have now been established (excluding the Business Committee). In addition to those required by Standing Orders, this total includes 3 other committees – Petitions, Children & Young People, and the North Wales Regional – that the Assembly has established since May. By and large, committees meetings are shorter than in the previous Assemblies but are being held more frequently.

Plenary

12. In the period from the summer recess to half term, meetings lasted, on average, just under one hour per week more than the timings originally envisaged.



13. There are a number of constraints on the Assembly's capacity to deal with high and increasing demand, most obviously:

- the number and availability of Members;
- staffing – clerks, research, Record of Proceedings, interpretation and translation, legal, administrative and technical support etc
- bought-in support services, such as ICT and broadcasting;
- the length of the 'Assembly week' – all main business is scheduled between Tuesdays and Thursdays;
- the number of committee rooms.

14. In advance of the meeting, we will provide Members with information on the maximum capacity of the current system under various assumptions and the resource and practical consequences of those. One obvious issue that will need to be considered will be how the committee stages of the Government, Private Members and Committee legislative programme are accommodated and prioritised alongside the work of the scrutiny and other committees.

Governance Matters

Financial implications

15. The Commission has already endorsed an increase in the procedural, administrative, research and record/interpretation resource available in next year's budget to support this activity. Subject to the outcome of the Commission's consideration with the Business Committee, we will review whether this additional resource is sufficient to meet demand.

Risk Assessment

16. Failure to provide the required support to the Assembly's legislative and scrutiny functions, or to manage Assembly business in an informed and controlled way, would carry a high reputational risk as well as undermining several of the Commission's goals - to secure scrutiny and legislation of the best quality; to support Members in all that they do and to ensure that the Assembly has the best service, provided in the most effective way.



17. These risks have already been mitigated to an extent by the steps taken to strengthen and increase the resources available to Members. The proposed work with the Business Committee should ensure that clear direction on prioritisation is given by Members so that these resources are applied in the most effective manner possible and an accurate assessment of any further resource requirements is made.



Compliance

18. The Commission is empowered by the Government of Wales Act 2006 to provide, or ensure the provision, of the staff and services required for the Assembly's purposes.

Publication

19. This paper is suitable for publication after it has been considered by the Commission.