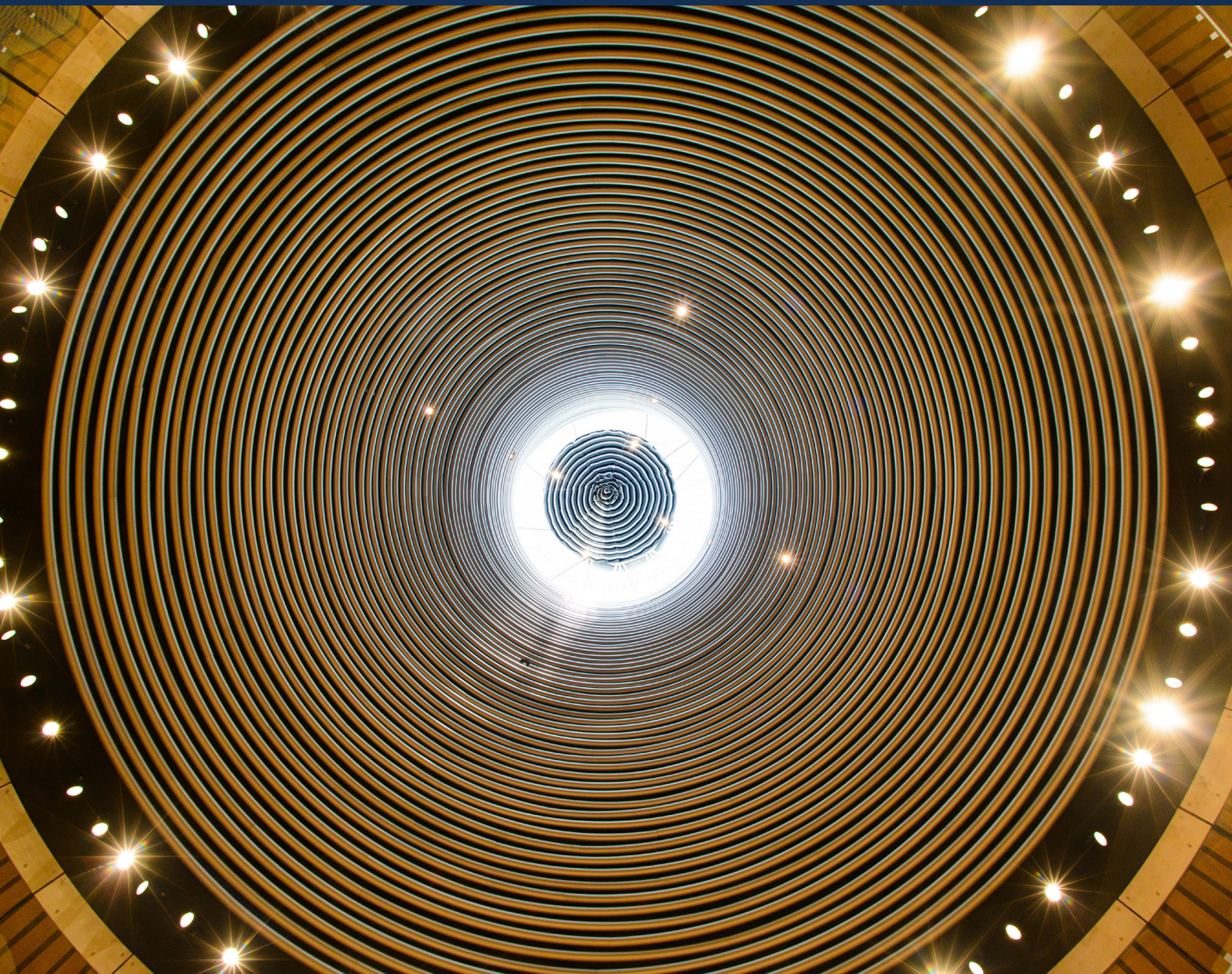


Accounts Scrutiny 2023-24: Senedd Commission

November 2024



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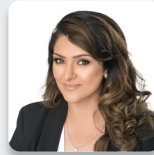
About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddPAPA

Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:
Mark Isherwood MS**
Welsh Conservatives



Natasha Asghar MS
Welsh Conservatives



Mike Hedges MS
Welsh Labour



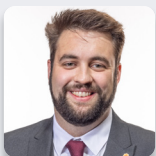
Rhianon Passmore MS
Welsh Labour



Adam Price MS *
Plaid Cymru

* As a Senedd Commissioner, Adam Price recused himself from this inquiry.

The following Member attended as a substitute during this inquiry:



Luke Fletcher MS
Plaid Cymru

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1. Introduction

- 1.** The Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee (“the Committee”) scrutinises the Senedd Commission’s Annual Report and Accounts (“the Accounts”) annually. The Commission’s Accounts for 2023-24¹ were subject to external audit by the Auditor General for Wales, who signed his Audit Certificate and Report on 17 July 2024, providing unqualified “true and fair” and regularity opinions².
- 2.** The financial statements accompanying the report have been audited, along with specified tables in the Remuneration Report and Staff Report. The rest of the Annual Report was not subject to audit.
- 3.** As part of the Committee’s scrutiny of the 2022-23 Accounts, 7 recommendations were made to the Commission³. The Commission responded on 29 January 2024, accepting all of the recommendations made⁴. The Commission wrote to the Committee to provide further information on 21 June 2024⁵. The contents of these letters are reflected in this report.

¹ Senedd Commission, Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24, July 2024

² Senedd Commission, Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24, July 2024, p164

³ Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, Scrutiny of Senedd Commission Accounts 2022-23, December 2023

⁴ Letter from the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair, 29 January 2024

⁵ Letter from the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair, 21 June 2024

2. Financial performance

Commission Budget 2023-24

4. The Commission's budget for 2023-24 was scrutinised and reported on by the Finance Committee in October 2022⁶. The debate on the budget was held on 23 November 2022. During the debate, the then Commissioner for Finance, Ken Skates MS, told Plenary:

"The Commission therefore now considers that its 2023-24 4 per cent budget increase will require revision to reflect the additional pressures facing the entire wider public sector in Wales.

In light of this, I will commit to an in-year review by the Commission, as a responsible public body, to find savings and to accelerate efficiencies. This will reflect the reality that we face today, rather than that which existed during the budget-setting process over the summer. It is an exercise in responsible and agile pragmatism"⁷.

5. As a consequence of this commitment, the Commission laid a Supplementary Budget for 2023-24 in June 2023, with a reduction in their budget of £435,000⁸. This comprised of the following cuts⁹:

- Accommodation and Facilities - £208,000;
- The Project Fund - £120,000;
- ICT Budget - £107,000.

6. Later in the year, in line with actions taken by the UK Government and the Welsh Government, a pro-rated payment of £1,500 was made to Commission staff below the Director grade, to help address cost-of-living pressures¹⁰. This figure was met from the existing budget.

7. When asked about the actions taken to achieve these savings, the Chief Executive and Clerk stated:

⁶ Finance Committee, [Scrutiny of the Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2023-24](#), October 2022

⁷ RoP, Plenary, [23 November 2022](#), p167-168

⁸ Senedd Commission, [Supplementary Budget 2023-24](#), June 2023

⁹ Senedd Commission, [Supplementary Budget 2023-24](#), June 2023, p6

¹⁰ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p156

“... it was indeed challenging having those two tranches of savings to make in year, as you describe. We knew from the beginning of the financial year that we had to make the first tranche of savings, the £435,000, and we challenged our heads of service to submit budget reduction proposals. So, through that, we were able to stress test the allocation of budgets to various parts of the organisation, and encourage them to undertake forensic reviews of all of the budgetary requirements”¹¹.

- 8.** She confirmed that this was to be achieved without redundancies¹².
- 9.** To make the second set of savings, to fund the cost-of-living payment, the Chief Executive and Clerk explained that careful consideration of all discretionary budgets was required¹³. She went on to explain:

“... the bulk of the saving had to come from our staffing budget, and so what we did was to start pausing recruitment. So, recruitments that were then in flight or were subsequently introduced for the rest of the financial year after September 2023 were given target start dates that were a bit further away than we would normally have had them, so that we could accrue savings in between the departure of staff through churn and the arrival of their successors”¹⁴.

- 10.** There were also savings made from the Project Fund, which will be covered later in this report.

Outturn

- 11.** Net resource outturn relating to Commission-only expenditure, excluding Members’ costs and AME, was £46.4m¹⁵ compared with £43.9m in 2022-23¹⁶, an increase of 5.7%. The underspend was £1.2m, or 2.6% of the revised budget of £47.6m.

¹¹ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p210

¹² RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p211

¹³ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p213

¹⁴ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p214

¹⁵ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p156

¹⁶ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2022-23](#), p150

Table 1: Commission year-end position (£'000)

Resources	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
For use by the Senedd Commission:							
Budget (£'000)	37,013	37,887	40,291	41,953	41,695	45,326	47,574
Outturn (£'000)	37,748	38,216	39,818	41,574	40,954	43,862	43,360
Under/(over)spend (£'000)	(735)	(329)	473	379	741	1,464	1,214
Under/(over)spend (%)	(2.0%)	(0.9%)	1.2%	0.9%	1.8%	3.2%	26%
In respect of Remuneration Board decisions:							
Budget (£'000)	15,532	15,701	15,697	16,172	15,619	16,802	17,834
Outturn (£'000)	14,408	14,731	14,956	15,595	15,450	16,529	17,364
Under/(over)spend (£'000)	1,124	970	741	577	169	273	470
Under/(over)spend (%)	7.2%	6.2%	4.7%	3.6%	1.1%	1.6%	26%

Source: Commission Annual Report and Accounts, [2017-18](#), [2018-19](#), [2019-20](#), [2020-21](#), [2021-22](#), [2022-23](#) and [2023-24](#).

12. The Commission also includes an analysis of the net outturn, outlined below, with separate lines included for the administrative resources to support the Independent Remuneration Board and Office of the Standards Commissioners¹⁷.

¹⁷ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p155

Table 2: Analysis of net resource outturn 2023-24 (£'000)

	Outturn	Analysis of approved budget	Outturn compared with approved budget	Analysis of revised budget	Outturn compared with revised budget	Outturn 2022-23
Revenue expenditure	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Staff salaries and related costs	28,585	28,357	(228)	28,357	(228)	27,171
Non staff costs	11,028	12,402	1,374	11,967	939	10,810
Capital charges - non cash	5,297	6,272	975	6,272	975	5,224
Gross revenue expenditure	44,910	47,031	2,121	46,596	1,686	43,205
Gross revenue income applied	(102)	(170)	(68)	(170)	(68)	(73)
Net revenue expenditure	44,808	46,861	2,053	46,426	1,618	43,132
Capital expenditure*	933	500	(433)	500	(433)	380
Net resource outturn (Commission expenditure)	45,741	47,361	1,620	46,926	1,185	43,512
Members' salaries allowances and related costs	17,364	17,834	470	17,834	470	16,529
Support for Remuneration Board	539	547	8	547	8	274
Office of the Standards Commissioners	80	101	21	101	21	76
Resource outturn	63,724	65,843	2,119	65,408	1,684	60,391
Members' Pension finance costs	136	1,800	1,664	1,800	1,664	1,822
Total net resource outturn	63,860	67,643	3,783	67,208	3,348	62,213

13. The capital expenditure of £933,000 compares with £380,000 in 2022-23¹⁸.

¹⁸ Senedd Commission, Annual Report and Accounts: 2022-23, p152

Difference between outturn and budget

Commission resources

14. Table 2 shows the following on the resources for the Commission's own use:

- £939,000 underspend on non-staff costs (7.8% of the revised budget).
- £975,000 underspend on capital charges – noncash (15.5% of revised budget).
- £68,000 less income than budgeted (40.0% of revised budget).
- £433,000 overspend on capital (86.6% of revised budget).

15. The Commission says in the Accounts that the underspend against the budget for its own use “falls outside the Commission's target range of 0.0 per cent to 1.5 per cent of budget”¹⁹. It says this is “primarily” because of larger than anticipated underspends against the amounts budgeted for IFRS 16 Leases, specifically depreciation and notional interest charges. Excluding non-cash items, the Commission suggest the underspend is 0.51%.

Support for the Independent Remuneration Board

16. The outturn for the administrative support for the Independent Remuneration Board was £539,000, which was £8,000 under the revised budget, a 96.7% increase in outturn in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23.

Resources in respect of Independent Remuneration Board decisions

17. The underspend from the Members' Salaries and Allowances budget was £470,000 against the approved budget of £17.8m, or 2.6%. The Commission explains that the Independent Remuneration Board approved a pro-rated £1,200 payment to all Support Staff funded by the Determination, paid during 2023-24²⁰.

Office of the Commissioner for Standards

18. Outturn is £80,000 or £21,000 less than the approved budget (or 20.8%). This covers support staff employment costs plus legal and professional support costs.

19. Note 2 to the Accounts shows that the Commissioner's hours rose to 626 in 2023-24 from 429 in 2022-23, leading to increased charges to the Welsh

¹⁹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p156

²⁰ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p157

Consolidated Fund (WCF) of £54.6k in 2023-24 from £38.7k in 2022-23²¹. The payments reflected a small gross underpayment of £216 in October 2022, corrected in April 2023.

Welsh Consolidated Fund

20. Overall, the Commission did not draw £460,000 from the Welsh Consolidated Fund, compared with £71,000 in 2022-23²².

Project Fund and in-year savings

21. The Commission's Supplementary Budget for 2023-24, published in June 2023, included cuts to the Accommodation and Facilities budget (£208,000), Project Fund (£120,000) and ICT budget (£107,000)²³. At their meeting on 30 January 2023, the Commission noted that potential savings were emerging from energy-saving measures and through robust renegotiation of ICT contracts²⁴.

22. The aforementioned pro-rata payment of £1,200 to staff, made due to cost of living pressures, required £794,000 of funding²⁵. In a letter to the Finance Committee, the Commission provided a summary of the potential impact of making savings in 2023-24, totalling £1.229 million.

23. They amounted to £737,500 of one-off savings, with £491,500 of savings continuing to impact in 2024-25, subject to "managed impact mitigation". Costs falling under managed impact, noted to be totalling £237,250, included target recruitment dates (£200,000), Member training (£30,000), literary publications (£5,000), committee refreshments (£2,250) and expert witnesses/advisers (£5,000)²⁶. This appears to total £242,250.

24. £247,250 of the savings made in 2023-24 will continue to 2024-25, with no impact on services or capacity. This includes savings on the ICT contract (£107,000) and estimated Estate Facility costs (£125,000 of the total £208,000 estimated in 2023-24)²⁷.

²¹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p191

²² Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p202

²³ Senedd Commission, [Supplementary Budget 2023-24: Explanatory Memorandum](#), June 2023

²⁴ Senedd Commission, [Meeting](#), 30 January 2023

²⁵ [Letter from Senedd Commission to the Chair of the Finance Committee](#), 19 March 2024

²⁶ [Letter from Senedd Commission to the Chair of the Finance Committee](#), 19 March 2024

²⁷ [Letter from Senedd Commission to the Chair of the Finance Committee](#), 19 March 2024, p7

25. Of the in-year savings of £737,500 were one-off and will not continue to 2024-25²⁸. Of this, staff savings accounted for £388,000 and non-staff savings of £349,500 were made across 14 budget headings including Member International Engagement, Events, and Engagement and Outreach. The budgets for these have reverted back to their previous levels.

26. The Draft Budget 2023-24 included a Project Fund of £1.5m, of which £500,000 was capital funding²⁹. The Commission provided an extract showing the medium-term project schedule to the Finance Committee on 6 October 2023³⁰. The letter notes that the reduction of £120,000 in the Project Fund at the start of the financial year meant “projects such as flagpoles, CCTV replacement, maintenance and sustainability projects were delayed or reduced”. The Commission’s Executive Board decided to allocate any remaining funds available to maintenance projects in quarter 4 of 2023-24 and to protect the 2024-25 Project Funding budget of £1.5 million from reductions.

27. The Accounts state that project delivery was “significantly impacted” by the decision to make a cost of living payment to Commission staff in quarters two and three, particularly on Estates and Facilities management and ICT³¹.

28. The Commission’s letter of 19 March 2024 to the Finance Committee provided a list of projects for 2024-25, noting that the list is “overprogrammed”³². Essentially, this means that not all projects will be delivered during 2024-25, but allows for individual programmes to be identified if funding becomes available.

29. The Chief Executive and Clerk explained that in-year savings were challenging because:

“... the projects that make it onto the project fund list are all important projects that have been deemed priorities and they’ve been deemed important to the business. But we had to define a new level of critical projects in terms of those required by law or health and safety or

²⁸ Letter from the Senedd Commission to the Chair of the Finance Committee, 19 March 2024, p8

²⁹ Senedd Commission, Draft Budget: 2023-24, September 2022, p25

³⁰ Letter from the Senedd Commission to the Chair of the Finance Committee, 10 October 2023

³¹ Senedd Commission, Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24, July 2024, p156

³² Letter from the Senedd Commission to the Chair of the Finance Committee, 19 March 2024

business continuity, and we did manage to release about £120,000 from the project fund for those purposes”³³.

30. When asked about the prioritisation of projects, the Director of Resources explained:

“... the executive board, led by the chief executive, has established a group to manage our project fund and to undertake the prioritisation of possible projects against that fund”³⁴.

Our view

31. The Committee is sympathetic to the challenges facing the Commission, as a result of the in-year need for savings for the reasons outlined earlier in the report. The Committee acknowledges that this challenge was exacerbated by the need to deliver projects associated with Senedd reform and caused understandable pressure for Commission staff.

32. The Committee considers that the Commission’s inability to carry reserves exacerbates some of these issues, meaning that in-year unexpected exceptional costs, such as those incurred, have a disproportionate impact on the organisation as a whole. It is welcomed that savings were able to be made that did not lead to redundancy.

33. Whilst noting these difficulties, we were pleased to see that the Commission is taking forward medium-term planning on a rolling basis and look forward to seeing the results of this policy, particularly how efficiencies and savings are being realised. The Committee believes that the culture of continually improving processes and making efficiency savings needs to be reinforced within the Commission, and would like to see evidence of this before annual accounts scrutiny is undertaken by the Committee.

Recommendation 1. The Commission should set out clearly in future Accounts where in-year savings have been identified, as well as setting out the impact of these efficiency savings on processes and efficiency.

³³ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p212

³⁴ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p220

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

34. The Accounts include a Corporate KPI Report for 2023-24³⁵. The 2022-23 Accounts said:

“During the Covid-19 pandemic the Senedd Commission adapted to the changing situation and some of our ways of working adjusted as a result. This should be borne in mind when making direct comparisons year on year”³⁶.

35. The report sets out 15 indicators, set alongside the Commission’s three strategic goals. This compares The report shows:

- 5 KPIs show improved performance;
- 6 KPIs show unchanged or similar performance;
- 2 KPIs show worse performance; and
- 2 KPIs relating to financial targets are met.

36. In response to a question about the efficacy of KPIs in driving the delivery of Commission objectives, the Chief Executive and Clerk stated:

“We think our KPIs are useful for us. We judge them to be effective in assessing our performance in the areas that they measure. Obviously, they’re as effective as we make them in terms of reporting fully on the results and allowing those to be scrutinised and be accountable for them. And, as with any organisation, a KPI will provide us with clarity around where activity and resourcing should be focused. But I think they tell some interesting stories”³⁷.

37. In relation to the evolution of the KPIs, she explained:

“We keep them under review as part of our service planning protocol every year, and of course we will, going into the seventh Senedd, have

³⁵ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p34

³⁶ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p34

³⁷ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p245

*a more root-and-branch radical review... It will be a time for us to look again at what the organisation might require for its new term*³⁸.

KPIs 5-7 Engagement

38. The Commission is halfway through its Communications and Engagement Strategy for the Sixth Senedd³⁹. The Commission has three KPIs listed under its strategic goal to have citizens at the heart of all it does:

- KPI5⁴⁰ combines all of the activities delivered by the Engagement Service, including events, tours, education sessions, Welsh Youth Parliament, citizen engagement support for committees and visitors to the Senedd. No target is set and results are similar to last year.
- KPI6⁴¹ is to increase the number of followers on the main corporate social media channels, albeit no target is set for this. Overall, this has increased by around 4,000 in 2023-24, compared to 2022-23 (or 3.5%).
- KPI7⁴² relates to the media distribution platforms with which the Commission engages, as a result of the promotion of Committee inquiry and report launches. There is a significant increase reported in 2023-24, compared with the previous two financial years.

KPI11 Average number of Welsh language learners enrolled across all levels (L1 to L5) are maintained or increased

39. There are increases reported in the number of learners in most categories of Welsh courses, with plans in place for enhancing the oral skills of staff lacking confidence⁴³.

KPI14 Carbon Neutral Strategy

40. The Committee recommended that the Commission provide an update on their progress in implementing projects as part of the Carbon Neutral Strategy ahead of this year's accounts scrutiny, including spend by project, progress to date

³⁸ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p246

³⁹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p78

⁴⁰ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p36

⁴¹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p37

⁴² Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p38

⁴³ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p40

and indication of any overspends or underspends⁴⁴. As part of its response, the Commission stated:

“We will ensure that the Committee receives a report covering spend by project, progress to date and any indications that we have of over or underspends by project before the scrutiny of the 2023-24 Financial Accounts”⁴⁵.

41. The Sustainability report for 2023-24 was published in June 2024, which noted that resources were “slightly more limited this year”, which meant some capital works planned for the mid-term period of the Carbon Neutral Strategy would be awaiting available funding⁴⁶. They describe a focus on “behavioural change and efficiency savings”. There are plans to link with the Cardiff district heat network, which will “eventually supply our two largest buildings with low-carbon heat”.

42. The KPI⁴⁷ target is to reduce the Commission’s carbon footprint from 1150t in 2019-20, the baseline year, to 500t by 2030. Emissions for 2023-24 fell slightly to 817t from 827t in 2022-23, meeting the target of less than 890t by March 2024.

43. The Commission’s Carbon Neutral Strategy⁴⁸ includes financial investment of £925,000, a target of 582t of carbon saved by 2030 and financial savings of £360,000 over the period. Of these totals for the period covered by the strategy, £130,000 was planned to be invested, with a carbon saving of 241t and a financial saving of £150,000 over the three years to 2023.

44. The Accounts show:

- Gas use reduced by 5.6% and electricity use reduced by 5%⁴⁹; and
- Total waste (in tonnes) is the same as last year and no waste has been sent to landfill⁵⁰.

⁴⁴ Senedd Commission, [Accounts Scrutiny 2022-23: Senedd Commission](#), December 2023, p20

⁴⁵ [Letter from the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair](#), 29 January 2024

⁴⁶ Senedd Commission, [Sustainability: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024

⁴⁷ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p43

⁴⁸ Senedd Commission, [Carbon Neutral Strategy: 2021-2030](#), February 2021

⁴⁹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p105

⁵⁰ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p106

45. The impact of increased energy costs was felt in 2023-24, with total energy expenditure increasing to £1.2m, up from £437,974 in 2022-23⁵¹.

46. When asked whether the impact of costs pressures had affected carbon reduction projects, the Chief Executive and Clerk explained:

“We have made good progress with many of the improvement measures in the strategy, but it's true to say that some requiring more significant investment have been postponed until resources allow for their procurement. For example, most of Tŷ Hywel and the Senedd buildings are now lit by LED lights, but other items, such as air handling unit upgrades are capital projects that we're working on now, and trying to work out when they're going to be affordable on that prioritised list. And we're also planning life-cycle replacement of the building management system as a whole, and so that's a chunky item for us to accommodate”⁵².

KPI15 Spend with Welsh Suppliers

47. The Commission report that, over the last twelve months, a decrease in its spending with Welsh suppliers, from 47% in 2022-23 to 44% in 2023-24⁵³, against a target of 50% by the end of the Sixth Senedd. They say this is partly due to one-off contracts, for digital archiving and an HR project with Midland HR. These two contacts accounted for 2.5% of spend.

48. Despite this decrease, the Director of Resources explained that the figures for 2024-25 were looking encouraging, stating:

“... we've hit our highest ever target of 49 per cent, so the stretch target is 50 per cent... It is volatile, we are affected by some individual contract decisions, so I can't guarantee that it is a smooth incline quarter by quarter, but certainly the trend is positive at the moment”⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p105

⁵² RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p239

⁵³ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p44

⁵⁴ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p275

Our view

49. Whilst we are concerned by the decrease in spending with Welsh suppliers reported during this year, we acknowledge the explanation about the vulnerability of the figures and that the figures so far for 2024-25 are proving to be encouraging. The Commission must continue to monitor progress in this area and continue to push for the 50% target, as the Committee considers it crucial that as much public money as possible is reinvested in the Welsh economy.

50. The Committee noted the savings exercises necessitated the reprioritisation of projects that had led to the delay of some projects linked to the Carbon Neutral Strategy. The Commission was still ahead of target in reaching emissions reductions at the end of 2023-24, which is commendable given the financial pressures faced by the organisation.

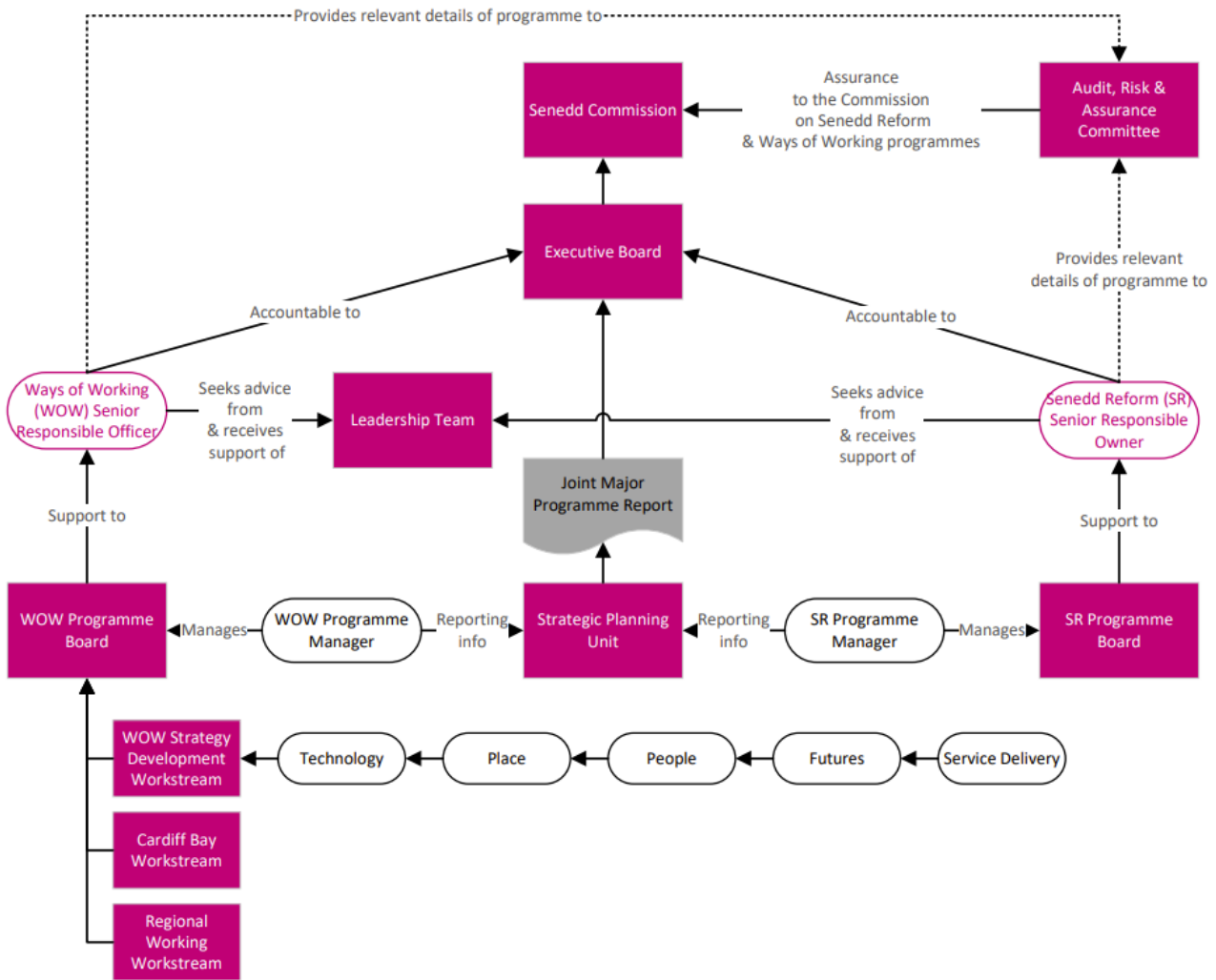
Recommendation 2. The Commission, in their next Accounts, should set out how delayed projects associated with the Carbon Neutral Strategy have been reprioritised during the year and set out a plan for future years if projects remain uncompleted in 2024-25 that were originally anticipated to be concluded.

3. Governance and internal controls

Governance structure

51. In its 2022-23 Annual Report and Accounts, the Commission provided a diagram outlining the formal governance structure in place, which is reproduced below.

Figure 1: Senedd Commission Governance Structures⁵⁵



52. There have not been any changes of staff at Chief Executive and Director level in 2023-24, however, the Remuneration and Staff Report for 2023-24 does include information about the salary and pension benefits for the Chief Legal Adviser, along with the Chief Executive and Directors⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ Senedd Commission, *Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23*, June 2023, p120

⁵⁶ Senedd Commission, *Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24*, July 2024, p140

53. There governance structure includes two independent advisory bodies, namely:

- The Audit Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC), the role of which is to “review the comprehensiveness, reliability and integrity of assurances and whether they meet the Commission and Accounting Officer needs”⁵⁷.
- The Remuneration Committee, which makes recommendations on matters relating to the remuneration and terms of service of the Senedd Clerk and other senior posts⁵⁸.

54. The Commission’s website includes information on the ARAC, including its Terms of Reference, meeting agenda and summary minutes, as well as other reports such as the Annual Report, Internal Audit Plan and ARAC Forward Work Programme. Since February 2023, formal ARAC meetings have changed format with an agenda and minutes split into two parts, with one on regular assurance and committee business items, and one on a strategic discussion.

Effectiveness reviews

55. In the Accounts, the Commission notes ongoing reviews of internal control and governance arrangements⁵⁹. The Commission Explains that the review in 2023-24, which included challenge by the Independent Advisers and Members of the Executive Board, concluded the process for gathering and reporting on assurances remained effective. The review recommended that the “structure of Director assurance statements should be adapted to ensure the capture cross-cutting assurance issues”.

56. Specific areas of focus and development for 2024-25 include:

- Ensuring effective change management during the transition to the Senedd;
- Continuing to evolve the strategic planning framework; and
- Maintaining strong information governance.

57. The internal auditor’s Audit Plan 2023-24 highlighted the risk of a “record number of contracts and procurement activities are now taking place, placing

⁵⁷ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p115

⁵⁸ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p116

⁵⁹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p133

significant capacity pressures on the Procurement team leading to heightened risks of gaps in controls". A full system review of procurement and contract managements across the Commission was due to be completed by February 2023, which considered compliance with procurement rules and evaluated the effectiveness of contract management arrangements.

58. When asked to reflect on the review of procurement and contract management, the Director of Resources said that they have now enacted the main recommendation associated with the review⁶⁰.

59. The Accounts also state:

"During the year, the outcome of a review into the effectiveness of the Independent Remuneration Board was considered alongside the completion of the review of the effectiveness of the Executive Board which reported in June 2023"⁶¹.

60. When asked to reflect on the outcome of the review into the effectiveness of the Independent Remuneration Board, the Chief Executive and Clerk said:

"... there is now a structured dialogue under way, because the matters considered by the Commission and the matters considered by the independent remuneration board have so many interdependencies in them that, in the run-up to 2026, we need to make sure that each side has sight of the decision-making timetable of the other, so that we can make sure that decisions are being taken in the right context"⁶².

61. The Chief Executive told the Committee last year that the effectiveness review had highlighted that there had been *"possibly a loss of confidence and trust in the board from some sections of the Members and support staff"⁶³*. When asked to clarify how Members could be assured that the Independent Remuneration Board was subject to the appropriate level of external oversight regarding their performance, the Chief Executive and Clerk said:

"... the effectiveness review was not done by them; it was done by a source external to the board. So, to that extent, they don't report to

⁶⁰ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p261

⁶¹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p131

⁶² RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p268

⁶³ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 12 October 2023, p81

the Senedd Commission, because the Senedd Commission would be the wrong body to have oversight—any political body would be the wrong—. It wouldn't be appropriate for them to have oversight of their work. But they do have these opportunities to reflect on their performance, and I know they have made a big effort over the last years to have feedback from Members, and they have drop-in sessions and so on. But the action plan for the IRB is something for the board itself to answer to. I wouldn't put myself in the position of answering to that. But there is that functional oversight by me of the process of putting them in place.”⁶⁴

Change programmes and governance

62. The Committee's report on the Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 made two recommendations regarding the Ways of Working Strategy. This included a recommendation that the Commission should provide six-monthly updates to the Committee, starting in Spring 2024, on the strategy's progress and the resources allocated to projects associated with delivering it⁶⁵.

63. In their response to the recommendation, the Commission agreed to provide biannual updates, with a first planned in Spring 2024⁶⁶. An update was provided in June, which stated:

- The Commission had approved a Strategic Outline Case for the Bay 2032 project, enabling the development of an outline business case for approval in late autumn 2024;
- That approval was being sought for the Tŷ Hywel 2026 plan to commence in summer 2024, following consultation with Members, party groups, Welsh Government and staff;
- That the detailed design of Siambr 2026 was due to be completed during summer 2024, with the aim of moving the debating chamber from Easter 2025 for the duration of the work.

64. The Committee also recommended that the Commission should set out how it intended to reflect the views of Members and their staff as part of the “future

⁶⁴ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p268

⁶⁵ Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, [Accounts Scrutiny 2022-23: Senedd Commission](#), December 2023

⁶⁶ [Letter from Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair](#), 29 January 2024

planning under the Ways of Working Strategy and any other stream of work that addresses the implications of Senedd Reform”⁶⁷.

65. In their response to this recommendation⁶⁸, the Commission set out the following engagement plans and agreed to provide updates on the outputs, as and when they arise, ahead of the Committee’s scrutiny of these Accounts:

- Engagement and views to be sought for the Siambr 2026 project through a Member reference group (plus Commission). Commissioners had a role as observers during the procurement process for architectural services.
- Engagement and views to be sought through a Member user group and a Chief of Staff user group for the Ty Hywel 2026 project. Commissioners would also engage with their parties to understand views and bring those views to the Project Board.
- The Llywydd / Group Leader bilaterals will be the main engagement point with Members and their staff for the Cardiff Bay 2032 Project. Commissioners were to engage with their parties to understand views and provide the outcome to the Project Board.

66. It also notes that engagement levels and methods will change as each of the projects moves through their delivery stages.

67. During scrutiny last year, the Committee heard about the role of a new Strategic Planning Unit, which comprised of “repurposed posts”⁶⁹. The Commission said its:

“... functions are to assist the executive board with the corporate planning, so it leads on the corporate delivery plan for the organisation, it leads on programme co-ordination between the Senedd reform and the ways of working programmes, and under the corporate planning banner it leads on service planning and the development of the medium-term resourcing framework as well”⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, [Accounts Scrutiny 2022-23: Senedd Commission](#), December 2023

⁶⁸ [Letter from Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair](#), 29 January 2024

⁶⁹ Senedd Commission Audit Risk and Assurance Committee, [21 November 2022](#)

⁷⁰ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 12 October 2023, p121

68. When asked about the role of the Unit, the Director of Resources said it:

“... does the work on behalf of the executive board to pull together the annual corporate plan, setting all the priorities and all of the work streams and then managing the systems and processes that flow from that, including the change boards and making sure that we’ve got a change strategy and a change implementation plan, and then also the service planning area, where every single service feeds into the overall corporate plan”⁷¹.

69. On the resources devoted to the Unit, he explained it was staffed by skilled and capable staff as part of a small team, albeit the size of the team would be kept under review⁷².

Governance of the Senedd Reform and Ways of Working programmes

70. The Programme Management Group met during the year and “has made recommendations to the Executive Board on the project portfolio”⁷³.

71. The Head of Internal Audit conducted an advisory exercise into the governance framework of the two main change programmes (Senedd Reform and Ways of Working). This resulted in a small number of advisory recommendations at the start of 2024-25, outside of the relevant accounting year for this report⁷⁴.

72. During the year, the Senedd Reform Programme Board considered and agreed on the scope of the Senedd Reform programme, as well as advisory audit recommendations⁷⁵. The Ways of Working Programme Board met monthly during 2023-24 and developed and approved a refreshed terms of reference and programme strategy⁷⁶.

73. The Cardiff Bay 2032 project, focussed on considering options for a building to support the Senedd, was “formally initiated” during 2023-24⁷⁷. A project board has been established and the Commission has commissioned professional

⁷¹ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p289

⁷² RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p291

⁷³ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p121

⁷⁴ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p121-122

⁷⁵ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p122

⁷⁶ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p123

⁷⁷ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p123

services and expertise to ensure “a robust basis for launching a procurement exercise”.

74. In relation to Internal Audit’s conclusions on these programmes, the Chief Executive and Clerk said:

“Given the scale of the task that we faced in setting up the two new programme management boards... to prepare for 2026, we did take a lot of advice from our audit and risk committee, who involved themselves thoroughly in these arrangements, and the Commissioner is a member of that committee and so might want to comment later. But we agreed that there would be an advisory audit to help us make sure that we were going in the right direction on that”⁷⁸.

75. She went on to provide further information about the governance arrangements in place, noting that each of the “significant change projects and programmes are managed by a senior responsible officer”⁷⁹. She went on to say:

“The challenge for the seventh Senedd transformation programme was to move from a mode of overseeing the delivery of legislation, which it was doing originally, into the mode of delivering the results of the legislation and the transition to the seventh Senedd. So, both those resets are under way now, so the audit was an advisory one as opposed to one that was looking back for that reason—it was to help the arrangements bed in”⁸⁰.

76. When asked about how the Commission was ensuring there were no conflicts between the Commission and the Welsh Government in delivering Senedd reform, the Chief Executive and Clerk said:

“... we have something called the joint assurance board, which is chaired jointly by senior officials from the Senedd Commission and Welsh Government. That isn't a decision-making body, but that has oversight of the key dependencies and makes sure that, when

⁷⁸ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p277

⁷⁹ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p278

⁸⁰ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p278

*decisions are taken, they're taken in full knowledge of what's happening on the other side*⁸¹.

Internal audit

77. The Head of Governance and Assurance left in July 2023, with the Audit Engagement Director responsible for Internal Audit under interim arrangements⁸². The Chief Finance Officer assumed the Designated Senior Sponsor role, with those arrangements now made permanent.

78. The Audit Risk and Assurance Committee reviewed four formal internal audit reports on business continuity, Members' expenses, public appointments and procurement cards⁸³. They also reviewed a follow-up audit report on cyber security.

79. Some planned audits were deferred to 2024-25, partly due to changes in audit structure⁸⁴.

80. When asked to reflect on the change in responsibilities for Internal Audit, the Director of Resources explained:

*"... we had an external service provider for internal audit working to an internal head of internal audit... With bringing in a new chief finance officer with the requisite skills, we moved to a situation where the chief finance officer oversaw an external service that was fully provided by an external service provide... we believe it complies ever more strongly with the public service internal audit standards, where you need a clear definition of roles and objectivity, and also we believe that it gives us, as a relatively small public body, access to a head of internal audit and a service provider that works across the sector, so has best practice and can bring best practice in this area to us"*⁸⁵.

⁸¹ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p299

⁸² Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p130

⁸³ Senedd Commission, [Audit and Risk Assurance Committee: Annual Report](#), June 2024, p17

⁸⁴ Senedd Commission, [Audit and Risk Assurance Committee: Annual Report](#), June 2024, p17

⁸⁵ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p257

Our view

81. The Committee notes that significant decisions that will have an impact on the costs of the estate over the next 50 years are to be taken during 2025. We are keen to ensure that committees and Members of the Senedd, apart from Commissioners, have the opportunity to meaningfully engage in these significant decisions that are being made.

82. Similarly, the Committee recommends that the Commission takes steps to ensure that the opportunities offered by Senedd Reform allow for staff to be actively involved and take ownership of the coming changes. This will help the change programmes to have a positive rather than negative impact on staff wellbeing.

Recommendation 3. The Commission should ensure that staff voices are reflected in all of the projects associated with Senedd reform. It should ensure that there is staff representation as part of the process of both implementing and devising the change programmes associated with Senedd reform.

83. The Committee welcomes that a structured dialogue is underway where matters considered by the Commission and the Independent Remuneration Board have interdependencies. Despite this, we remain seriously concerned that overall Members' confidence in the decisions and actions of the Board does not appear to have improved. Concerns remain about the limited opportunity to scrutinise the actions and decision-making of the Board in a public setting, whilst acknowledging that the Board has to operate free from the influence of Members. To maintain confidence in the Board, more must be done to ensure its activities are scrutinised robustly and transparently.

Recommendation 4. The Commission should review how the work of the Independent Remuneration Board is scrutinised; and set out in writing to the Committee any new ways that assurance can be provided to the public and Members about how the Board operates. This scrutiny should occur regularly and be robust and transparent.

4. Risk profile

Risk profile

84. The Commission's Accounts identify their risk profile, with the "most significant risks" listed on its Corporate Risk Register⁸⁶. It identified the following as being included during 2023-24:

- Cyber-security;
- Compliance with Data Protection legislation (Commission);
- Senedd Reform;
- UK-related Constitutional Change;
- Regulatory Framework;
- Corporate Capacity and Capability (added in 2022-23)
- Dignity and respect;
- HR/Payroll system (new for 2023-24);
- Failure of the Bay 2032 project(new for 2023-24); and
- Senedd reform-driven estate projects (new for 2023-24).

85. This Committee has previously recommended that the Commission should include an estimate of the likelihood of a risk occurring as part of the Accounts⁸⁷, to better inform future consideration of the Commission's risk profile. The Commission accepted this recommendation⁸⁸ and the Accounts for this year include a note on whether each risk has a medium or low residual likelihood of occurring⁸⁹.

⁸⁶ Senedd Commission, Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24, July 2024, p46

⁸⁷ Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, Accounts Scrutiny 2022-23: Senedd Commission, December 2023

⁸⁸ Letter from Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair, 29 January 2024

⁸⁹ Senedd Commission, Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24, July 2024, p46

Cyber security and Artificial Intelligence

86. Following the Committee’s scrutiny session for the previous year’s Accounts, the Commission provided a supplementary note on the number of cyber-attacks experienced by the Senedd ICT system⁹⁰.

87. In the Accounts, the Commission described cyber security as one of the “most significant risks”⁹¹, with regular updates and assurance reports provided to the Executive Board and ARAC. They go on to say that “additional resources have been allocated to mitigating this risk, with continuous activity to improve our resilience”.

Corporate capacity and capability risk

88. In 2022-23, the Commission added the following to its Corporate Risk Register:

“... in recognition of the need for robust mechanisms to help ensure the right people, with the right skills, are available, to support the resilient and adaptable workforce in delivering the significant transformational changes”⁹².

89. The Commission says it has closely monitored risks around corporate capacity and capability, particularly as they “plan for major transformational change in terms of Senedd Reform and new ways of working”⁹³.

Senedd reform risk

90. In the Accounts, the Commission reports progress relating to this risk as:

“Prudent preparations made for Senedd Reform estates projects to reconfigure the estate to meet the needs of a larger Senedd and its statutory duties, including close working with Members, Welsh Government and Commission staff, and the procurement of specialist design services to ensure the Siambr meets Senedd needs”⁹⁴.

⁹⁰ Letter from Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair, 3 November 2023

⁹¹ Senedd Commission, *Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24*, July 2024, p46

⁹² Senedd Commission, *Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23*, June 2023, p42

⁹³ Senedd Commission, *Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24*, July 2024, p128

⁹⁴ Senedd Commission, *Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24*, July 2024, p25

91. The Accounts include new risks relating to the Cardiff Bay 2032 and Senedd Reform-driven estate projects⁹⁵.

Mitigation of risk

92. When asked about the actions taken to mitigate the risks posed by a lack of capacity and resources, particularly in delivering Senedd reform, the Chief Executive and Clerk explained that the Medium Term Framework played a part in addressing these issues⁹⁶. The Framework will be considered in further detail later in this report.

Our view

93. The committee noted that the Commission has added risks relating to the Bay 2032 project and Senedd Reform-driven estate projects to their risk register. The Committee is pleased that the Commission is putting in place management and governance arrangements to mitigate these risks, along with bringing in relevant expertise. The Committee would appreciate updates on how emerging risks relating to these projects are managed.

Recommendation 5. The Commission should write to the Committee to update us on the work being done to mitigate the risks posed by these large reform projects and set out how their risk profile is changing, as those programmes develop, ahead of the Committee's scrutiny of their 2024-25 Accounts.

⁹⁵ Senedd Commission, *Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24*, July 2024, p25

⁹⁶ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p295

5. Staff

Staff numbers

94. Total staff numbers (full-time equivalent or 'FTE') increased by 13 FTE to 473 FTE in the year to 31 March 2023, and by 13 FTE to 486 FTE in the year to 31 March 2024, after remaining fairly static over the three year period between 31 March 2019 and 31 March 2022.

95. The average FTE over the year has been restated in this year's annual report, making time series comparisons more difficult.

Table 3: Trend in FTE staffing⁹⁷

	31-March-19	31-March-20	31-March-21	31-March-22	31-March-23	31-March-24	
Total FTE	454.1	459	461	460	473	486	
							Restated
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2022-23*	2023-24*
Average FTE	442.8	453.4	461.3	457.6	473.4	495.9	502.9

96. As show in the table below, the pay of employees on the 50th (median) and 75th percentiles for 2023-24 each increased by 2.4% compared to 2022-23. Pay for an employee on the 25th percentile in 2022-23 increased by 14.2% compared to 2021-22.

Table 4: Trend in median pay (£)⁹⁸

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2023-24 v 2022-23
Pay of an employee on the 25th percentile ¹			£25,459	£27,271	£31,137	£31,884	2.4%
Pay of an employee on the 50th percentile (median pay)	£34,315	£37,647	£38,362	£39,360	£40,422	£41,393	2.4%
Pay of an employee on the 75th percentile ¹			£48,531	£49,793	£51,137	£52,364	2.4%

Note: ¹ Prior to 2020-21, disclosure was required for median pay only.

⁹⁷ Senedd Commission, [Commission Accounts 2017-18 to 2023-24](#)

⁹⁸ Senedd Commission, [Commission Accounts 2017-18 to 2023-24](#)

97. In line with UK and Welsh Government policy, a cost of living payment of £1,500 (pro-rated) was made to the Commission staff below the Director grade⁹⁹. All staff received at least the Living Wage¹⁰⁰.

Staff sickness, mental health and menopause support

98. Sickness rates increased to an average of 8.6 days lost per person¹⁰¹, which is above the civil service's reported benchmark of 7.9 days¹⁰².

99. Absence related to mental health accounts for 1,512 days lost, or 40.6% of total absence, up from 1,076 days, or 30% of total absence, in 2022-23¹⁰³. The 2022-23 Accounts stated that 30% of total absences represented pre-pandemic levels.

100. The Accounts show a high number of long-term sickness cases, peaking in October 2023. Progress has been made with employees either leaving the organisation or returning to work. A new long-term sickness policy was intended to be published in summer recess, with absence management training being developed to launch by the end of 2024¹⁰⁴. When asked what this policy would comprise of, the Chief Executive and Clerk told the Committee:

"... it is very much a combination of providing well-being support to staff in terms of their physical and mental health, and so there'll be a suite of resources there, but it is also about training managers in the handling of both short- and long-term sickness, going forward. So, I'm hoping that there will be further benefits from that as the system beds in"¹⁰⁵.

101. The Commission's Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2023-24 sets out the health and wellbeing support offered by the Commission, with results of the biannual pulse surveys also provided¹⁰⁶. The results fluctuate between surveys, with the statistics for October 2023 showing more decline than improvement, compared with April 2023. This includes:

⁹⁹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p156

¹⁰⁰ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p142

¹⁰¹ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p149

¹⁰² Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p42

¹⁰³ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23](#), June 2023, p146

¹⁰⁴ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p42

¹⁰⁵ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p345

¹⁰⁶ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024

- 8% of the people surveyed say they have poor or very poor mental wellbeing, an increase of 5% compared with March 2023¹⁰⁷.
- 50% of employees experienced work-related stress between April 2023 and September 2023, an increase of 10% from March 2023. The percentage of respondents saying they have experienced stress of any kind has increased from 58% to 66%¹⁰⁸.
- 73% of staff agreed that the organisation does a good job of embedding wellbeing into workplace culture, down from 79%¹⁰⁹.
- 81% of staff feel able to bring their whole self to work, down from 83%¹¹⁰.
- 93% of staff feel supported and connected to their team, down from 95%¹¹¹.
- 89% of leavers who submitted exit interviews say that they would recommend the Senedd Commission as an employer, down from 90%¹¹².

102. In response, the report sets out the work being done to improve wellbeing¹¹³, including:

- Clearer information for staff and managers about what an organisational commitment to wellbeing means in practice and how this will be met.
- Further analysis of multiple wellbeing factors, to present a full picture of wellbeing across the Commission and at service level.
- Continue to develop and promote cohesive package of materials, support and training around wellbeing for staff and managers.

103. The Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report notes that the Commission is the first organisation in Wales to adopt the British Standards Institution's (BSI) standard entitled BS 30416 Menstruation, Menstrual Health and Menopause in the Workplace¹¹⁴.

¹⁰⁷ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024, p37

¹⁰⁸ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024, p38

¹⁰⁹ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024, p38

¹¹⁰ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024, p38

¹¹¹ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024, p38

¹¹² Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024, p38

¹¹³ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024, p38

¹¹⁴ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Annual Report 2023-24](#), June 2024, p42

104. The Chief Executive and Clerk told the Committee that the Executive Board monitored data relating to sickness absence on a quarterly basis, alongside “other contextual data and insights”¹¹⁵. In terms of the data from the Accounts, she noted:

“... the headline in terms of staff absence generally is that we overcame that spike last year. We’re now at a rate in August this year of 7.1 days lost per full-time equivalent post. That is below the civil service benchmark, which is 8.1 days. There are still some points of concern, though. By far the greatest element within the reported absence is mental health issues”¹¹⁶.

105. In relation to efforts to mitigate these issues, she explained:

“We try and provide as much support as we can around each of our staff to promote their well-being, and I think that’s where we are on that. Now, we are encouraged, as I say, by the general direction that our sickness absence statistics are going in, but it’s something we have to be ever mindful of, because it is going to be extremely difficult few years ahead, in terms of challenge”¹¹⁷.

Staff turnover

106. The Commission reports a decrease in its staff turnover for 2023-24 to 6% from 8.3% in 2022-23. This is lower than in recent years and compared to the UK average of 11.7%¹¹⁸.

107. The Commission’s Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-24 states that 30 people left the organisation during the financial year. Less than half of these, 14, undertook a formal exit interview¹¹⁹.

108. The reasons listed for leaving included lack of promotion opportunities, lack of training opportunities, transfer to another Government department, location or

¹¹⁵ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p324

¹¹⁶ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p325

¹¹⁷ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p326

¹¹⁸ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p149

¹¹⁹ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p36

travel reasons, workload, management style, temporary contract, family or domestic reasons, nature of work, dissatisfaction with pay, and retirement¹²⁰.

Diversity of the workforce

109. The Commission publishes the aforementioned Annual Diversity and Inclusion Report, which includes detailed policies, actions and figures, alongside the Accounts, along with the Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-24.

110. When asked about what the Commission was doing to improve the picture outlined below, the Chief Executive and Clerk told the Committee:

“The indicators suggest that we’re going in the right direction, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t an awful lot still to do. Obviously, we publish a lot of diversity data every year, so we can be held to account on that. This year, I think I would pick out the launch of our diversity and inclusion steering group, which includes members of our workplace equality networks and representatives from trade unions as well as human resources”¹²¹.

111. She went on to say:

“We’re seeing an encouraging growth in representation of people from ethnic minorities at more senior levels of the organisation. Obviously, we are keen to increase diversity not just at entry level but build a pipeline for people to progress to senior leadership positions as well”¹²².

112. In relation to the capturing of data to better inform the Commission, she explained:

“There is a good deal of work happening to encourage everybody on the staff to engage with reporting data for the surveys that we’re doing. It’s not easy. We have to communicate quite frequently with colleagues about why we’re asking for this data, because it is quite personal data; we’re asking about people’s family backgrounds. But

¹²⁰ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p38

¹²¹ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p316

¹²² RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p317

at the moment just under half the staff have contributed to the data set. We're hoping that that will increase in future years, so that we can pinpoint the issues that we can address, but we have made definite progress on all those fronts in the course of the year"¹²³.

Gender

113. Women represent 52.1% of the workforce and 52.4% of the three most senior pay bands¹²⁴. There is no reported pay gap when looking at median pay, but mean salaries are 5.3% higher for women than men.

Ethnicity

114. 90.1% of the workforce identify as white, compared with 91.6% in 2022-23¹²⁵, with 5.2% identifying as an ethnic minority and 4.8% preferring not to say¹²⁶. According to 2021 Census data, the Commission notes that 15.7% of people in Cardiff and 5.1% of people in Wales identified from an ethnic minority community¹²⁷.

115. The proportion of external applications from ethnic minority candidates increased to 16.2% in 2023-24 (up from 13.0% in 2022-23 and 11.0% in 2021-22). 11.5% of external jobs (up from 4.9% in 2022-23) were offered to ethnic minority candidates¹²⁸.

116. The ethnicity pay gap is significant and, after successive years of reduction, there was little change compared to last year. The mean pay gap for 2023-24 is 23.2%, down from 23.5% in 2022-23¹²⁹. The median gap has increased to 26.4%, from 23.6% in 2022-23.

117. The Commission notes the two main reasons for the ethnicity pay gap¹³⁰ are:

¹²³ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p318

¹²⁴ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p9

¹²⁵ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2022-2023](#), June 2024, p14

¹²⁶ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p16

¹²⁷ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p26

¹²⁸ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p16

¹²⁹ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p79

¹³⁰ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p71

- A limited number of ethnic minority staff employed by the Commission as an overall percentage of the overall workforce; and
- The uneven distribution of ethnic minority staff, who are mainly employed at lower bands on the pay scale.

118. In relation to the median pay gap, the Commission explains in the Accounts:

“This is partly due to the additional 17 white staff within the reporting group, and also due to fact that 96.6% of internal promotions were filled by staff who are white, compared with 3.4% of ethnic minority staff”¹³¹.

119. The Commission also reports on the progress of its Ethnic Minority Graduate Internship scheme (Ymlaen), operated in partnership with the Windsor Fellowship¹³². It’s noted that as members of the scheme are interns and not staff, they are not counted in the figures reported. The Chief Executive and Clerk talked positively about this programme, stating:

“This has been a fantastic way for us to get really brilliant, talented people into the organisation and spend time with us in various departments. They are learning skills themselves, and we’re learning a lot from them, I have to say. The graduates of that have all gone on to fantastic things...”¹³³.

Lower socio-economic background

120. Candidates from professional backgrounds dominated external and internal recruitment, as well as the Commission’s existing staff¹³⁴.

121. 17.3% of external job offers went to candidates from a working-class background, 25.0% to those from intermediate backgrounds¹³⁵. 18.8% of internal job offers went to working-class candidates and 25% to those from intermediate

¹³¹ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p71

¹³² Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p27

¹³³ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p317

¹³⁴ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p32

¹³⁵ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p61

backgrounds. Workforce monitoring data shows that 55% of staff are from professional backgrounds¹³⁶.

Disability

122. The Commission reports that 7.4% of the workforce have declared that they identify as having a disability¹³⁷, the same figure as 2022-23¹³⁸. There is no median pay gap for people identifying with a disability¹³⁹.

LGBTQ+

123. 5.4% of staff identify as LGBTQ+, compared with 4.7% in 2022-23, and 81.3% identify as heterosexual/straight, compared with 82.8% in 2022-23¹⁴⁰. There was a 13.3% non-disclosure rate, compared with 12.5% in 2022-23. The LGBTQ+ median pay gap was 0.0%¹⁴¹.

Dignity and respect

124. Dignity and respect training is offered to all Members and their staff and is mandatory for Commission staff. As of March 2024, training had been attended by 95% of Commission staff, 92% of Members and over 29% of Member Support staff¹⁴².

125. The Commission sets out the following actions, that are either planned or ongoing, to support the aims of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy¹⁴³:

- Through the newly established Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group, identify key priorities and develop associated implementation plans;

¹³⁶ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p32

¹³⁷ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p15

¹³⁸ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2022-2023](#), June 2023, p13

¹³⁹ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p79

¹⁴⁰ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p31

¹⁴¹ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p79

¹⁴² Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p86

¹⁴³ Senedd Commission, [Diversity and Inclusion: Workforce, Recruitment, Pay Gap Reporting and Equal Pay Audit Report 2023-2024](#), June 2024, p84

- Design mandatory Diversity and Inclusion training module to complement mandatory Dignity and Respect training rolled out in 2024-25;
- Attain Disability Confident Leader status;
- Continue to improve and cross reference our approach to collecting and analysing diversity and inclusion data, including presenting these quarterly at Executive Board. Use information from people and wellbeing surveys and cross reference these to workforce and recruitment demographic data;
- As part of the Senedd Commission's Medium-Term Resourcing Framework, implement the Workforce Plan which include designing a talent management strategy which supports the development of our existing and future workforce;
- Through our ongoing Attraction Plan, pilot different advertising strategies through targeted outreach and link employer brand with communications and engagement activities where required;
- Review the workplace equality networks to identify maximise engagement and effectiveness;
- Monitor diversity of hiring panels and increase the number and diversity of panel members;
- Continue to encourage staff to self-report against protected characteristics and socio economic status;
- Conduct an Equality Impact Assessment for pay discussions and settlements reached for the 2025 and onwards pay framework;
- Consider opportunities through the Ways of Working programme to continue to champion and drive diversity and inclusion, including geographical location of staff and applicants.

Surveys

126. The most recent people survey was undertaken in March 2023, with the result reported and scrutinised as part of the Committee’s scrutiny of the 2022-23 Accounts¹⁴⁴.

127. The Commission has continued to conduct Wellbeing Pulse Surveys, two of which were undertaken during this accounting year. The surveys include questions intended to “monitor the well-being of our staff” and to “enable responsive interventions, and monitor the overall effectiveness of the Wellbeing Strategy”¹⁴⁵.

Medium-Term Resourcing Framework

128. The Committee has previously recommended that the Workforce Plan and any outputs from the Medium-Term Resourcing Framework should be shared with the Committee as soon as they are available to ensure Members are updated on the Commission’s future planning around Senedd Reform and under the Ways of Working Strategy¹⁴⁶.

129. The Commission’s letter to the Committee stated that the Framework was a critical part of the 2025-26 draft budget development and it would share it with the Committee once the 2025-26 draft budget is laid before the Senedd¹⁴⁷.

130. The Framework covers a three-year rolling period. It was approved on 6 November 2023, to cover 2024-25 to 2026-27. The letter says the Framework¹⁴⁸:

- A Planning Assumption for developing budget requests, balancing the need to deliver priorities with budget restraint, taking account of Welsh Block Grant growth.
- A Ringfencing approach to ensure priority growth requirements, Senedd Reform and Ways of Working programmes, along with managing resourcing of business as usual.
- A Medium-Term Financial Plan, setting out forecast budget and resourcing needs, identifying budget pressures and gaps.

¹⁴⁴ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23](#), June 2023

¹⁴⁵ Senedd Commission, [Annual Report and Accounts: 2023-24](#), July 2024, p149

¹⁴⁶ Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, [Accounts Scrutiny 2022-23: Senedd Commission](#), December 2023

¹⁴⁷ [Letter from the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair](#), 21 June 2024

¹⁴⁸ [Letter from the Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd to the Chair](#), 21 June 2024, p3

- A Workforce Plan to ensure resourcing and workforce are aligned to Commission priorities.

131. The Workforce Plan will introduce a “core Target Establishment”, a talent strategy to develop staff and a recruitment plan.

132. When asked about the Framework and its role in mitigating the risks faced by the Commission, the Chief Executive and Clerk explained:

“I think that the main thing to talk about there is our medium-term resourcing framework, and within that is a workforce plan. We were talking about this last year. We’ve been operating it now for a year, and it’s proved an invaluable tool for us in formalising our planning horizon on a rolling three-year basis and drawing in all the information that we have about our resourcing needs and the sources of resourcing then so that we can give visibility to this committee and all our stakeholders of our best estimates of what’s coming at us down the track, and that includes recruitment and the staffing needs that we need for the different parts of our organisation”¹⁴⁹.

Our view

133. The Committee was concerned by the increase in both sickness absences for Commission staff in 2023-24 and especially the increase in the proportion of these absences due to mental health. The Committee notes the suggestion that this increase may have been impacted by increased workloads and pressures linked to two cost-savings exercises during the 2023-24 financial year.

134. The Committee notes the importance of the Commission continuing to monitor staff mental well-being, and monitor and take action to address issues raised in ongoing and future staff surveys.

135. We note that a new long-term sickness policy is currently being drafted. We would appreciate a copy of this policy, alongside how its aims are likely to improve staff wellbeing in the future.

Recommendation 6. The Commission should send the Committee a copy of its new long-term sickness policy, once it’s available, with a summary of its contents and aims alongside it.

¹⁴⁹ RoP, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, 2 October 2024, p295

Annex 1: List of oral evidence sessions.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the date noted below. A transcript of the oral evidence session can be viewed on the [Committee's website](#).

Date	Name and Organisation
2 October 2024	<p>Manon Antoniazzi, Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd, Senedd Commission</p> <p>Hefin David MS, Senedd Commissioner with responsibility for Budget and Governance, Senedd Commission</p> <p>Ed Williams, Director of Senedd Resources, Senedd Commission</p> <p>Simon Hart, Interim Chief Financial Officer, Senedd Commission</p> <p>Leanne Baker, Chief People Officer, Senedd Commission</p>