

# Scrutiny of the Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22

October 2020



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# Scrutiny of the Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22

October 2020



# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 22 June 2016. Its remit can be found at:  
[www.senedd.wales/SeneddFinance](http://www.senedd.wales/SeneddFinance)

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## Committee Chair:



**Llyr Gruffydd MS**  
Plaid Cymru

## Current Committee membership:



**Alun Davies MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Siân Gwenllïan MS**  
Plaid Cymru



**Mike Hedges MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Rhianon Passmore MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Nick Ramsay MS**  
Welsh Conservatives

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The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry.



**Mark Reckless MS**  
Abolish the Welsh Assembly Party

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# 1. Introduction

## Background

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1. The Senedd's Standing Order 20.13 sets out that:

“Not later than 1 October in each financial year, a member of the Commission must lay before the Senedd a draft budget for the Commission setting out the amounts of resources and cash which the Commission proposes to use for the following financial year and provisional amounts for the subsequent two years or for such other period as the Commission has agreed with the Welsh Ministers.”<sup>1</sup>

2. The Finance Committee (the Committee) is responsible for reporting on this draft budget. Standing Order 20.14 details that:

“The responsible committee's report may recommend variations in the amounts proposed in the draft budget provided that the net effect of those variations would not increase the aggregate amounts of resources or cash proposed in the draft budget for the Commission.”<sup>2</sup>

3. The Committee considered the Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22 at its meeting on 5 October 2020, taking evidence from:

- Suzy Davies MS, Commissioner for Budget and Governance;
- Manon Antoniazzi, Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd;
- Nia Morgan, Director of Finance, Welsh Parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> Standing Orders of the Welsh Parliament

<sup>2</sup> Standing Orders of the Welsh Parliament

## 2. Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22

### Context

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4. In May 2019, the Committee issued a Statement of Principles to bodies directly funded from the Welsh Consolidated Fund (directly funded bodies (DFB)) to consider when formulating budget requests:

#### Statement of Principles for directly funded bodies:

- Budget requests should be set in the context of the long term financial funding situation in Wales and funding pressures in the wider public sector.
- Requests should show how annual and multi-annual objectives will be prioritised, monitored and achieved.
- DFBs should not assume an increase in funding, regardless of the block grant change as any increase to their funding reduces resources available to other devolved public bodies.
- DFBs should continually seek to improve processes and accrue efficiencies.
- Where any increases in funding are requested, these should be backed by evidence both of the need, benefit and attempts that have been made to reduce such costs. Also, the consequences of not obtaining the requested increase in resource should be made clear and quantified.

### The Senedd Commission's Draft Budget

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5. The Senedd Commission's draft Budget (the draft Budget) for 2021-22 is £62.914 million, (£3.339 million, or 5.6 per cent higher than the First Supplementary Budget 2020-21). Table 1 below provides high level detail of the draft Budget, with the headline figures being:

- Commission related expenditure (excluding depreciation), over which the Commission has control, is £39.445 million,
- Members' salaries and related costs of £16.819 million,

- Ring fenced elections expenditure of £2.6 million. (This compares to the 2016-17 budget of £2.5 million, when all but £9,000 of this was spent<sup>3</sup>),
- Depreciation remaining at £2.25 million,
- Members' pension finance costs of £1.8 million.

| Budget Heading                              | 2020-21*       | 2021-22        | Change        | Change       |
|---|----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>Commission Related Expenditure</b>       | <b>£'000</b>   | <b>£'000</b>   | <b>£'000</b>  | <b>%</b>     |
| Staff salaries and related costs            | £25,358        | £26,325        | £967          | 3.8%         |
| Accommodation and facilities                | £7,727         | £7,798         | £71           | 0.9%         |
| ICT costs                                   | £2,310         | £2,380         | £70           | 3.0%         |
| Other costs                                 | £2,363         | £2,202         | -£161         | -6.8%        |
| <b>Total revenue expenditure</b>            | <b>£37,758</b> | <b>£38,705</b> | <b>£947</b>   | <b>2.5%</b>  |
| Total income                                | -£220          | -£220          | £0            | 0.0%         |
| Capital expenditure                         | £500           | £500           | £0            | 0.0%         |
| Project fund                                | £1,015         | £460           | -£555         | -54.7%       |
| Total operational resource (excluding)      | £39,053        | £39,445        | £392          | 1.0%         |
| Depreciation and amortisation               | £2,250         | £2,250         | £0            | 0.0%         |
| <b>Total Commission related expenditure</b> | <b>£41,303</b> | <b>£41,695</b> | <b>£392</b>   | <b>0.9%</b>  |
| Member related expenditure                  |                |                |               |              |
| Members' salaries and related costs         | £16,172        | £16,819        | £647          | 4.0%         |
| Election related expenditure                | £500           | £2,600         | £2,100        | 420.0%       |
| Members' pension finance costs              | £1,600         | £1,800         | £200          | 12.5%        |
| <b>Total Member related expenditure</b>     | <b>£18,272</b> | <b>£21,219</b> | <b>£2,947</b> | <b>16.1%</b> |
| <b>Total Commission Budget</b>              | <b>£59,575</b> | <b>£62,914</b> | <b>£3,339</b> | <b>5.6%</b>  |

6. In relation to this draft Budget, the Commissioner detailed work that has been undertaken to streamline the budget in this Senedd term and said

“We kept the overall increase of the operational budget at just 1 per cent, which is pretty amazing considering all those things we were talking about earlier that we've got—not only completing this Senedd,

<sup>3</sup> National Assembly for Wales. Annual report and accounts 2016-2017. July 2017.

but Senedd reform and the transition period and so forth—which will flip over into the next Senedd term as well.”<sup>4</sup>

## Committee view

**7.** The Committee has undertaken two pieces of work to give direction in terms of increasing transparency and demonstrating prudent financial planning for directly funded bodies. This has included publishing a Statement of Principles that directly funded bodies must follow when making budget proposals and providing direction on the Commission’s use of the Remuneration Board’s Determination underspend. The Committee hopes that this work will be built on in the next Senedd.

**8.** The Committee recognises that year-on-year improvements have been made to the transparency of financial information in successive Commission budgets during this Senedd term. The Committee welcomes the open approach that the Commission and the Chief Executive have shown when working with the Committee.

**Conclusion 1.** The Committee welcomes the approach taken by the Commission and Chief Executive in working with the Committee to produce transparent financial information. The Committee hopes that this effective working relationship will continue between the Senedd Commission and the Finance Committee in the Sixth Senedd.

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<sup>4</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 29

### 3. Impact of Covid-19

**9.** Following a request from the Committee, the Commission provided an estimate of the impact of Covid-19 on the 2020-21 budget. The Commission estimated an overall increase of £280,000 up to the end of June 2020, with the main areas likely to be impacted being:

- Engagement and Outreach activities – reduction of £50,000.
- Physical security (delay project) – increase of £208,000, with expenditure brought forward from 2021-22.
- Delay to 2019-20 activity (fire door installation) – increase of £92,000 in 2021-22.
- Additional COVID-19 requirements for Plenary – increase of £30,000.

**10.** The draft Budget details that working practices will change positively and negatively in a post Covid-19 world:

“For example, the period of lockdown has identified that it is feasible and indeed preferable in some cases to meet virtually. This brings benefits such as saving travel time and costs, freeing up time for more constructive use. However, this has also resulted in additional costs such as software licences and ICT hardware as well as pressure on staff resources and equipment for homeworking.

The resilience shown during the lockdown period has demonstrated that we are able to continue to provide exemplary support to Senedd business as well as highlighting the benefits and opportunities this provides for our future model of working. This will also open up possibilities in terms of office space utilisation as well as helping to reduce the carbon footprint of the estate.”<sup>5</sup>

**11.** On the impact of Covid-19, the Commissioner explained:

“...the demands on the public purse are changing all the time. We know for a fact that we've saved some money in travel costs, but that's started to change now as people are coming back into the Assembly—into the Senedd, sorry. So, while there are items such as some utilities, some printing and stationery, the demand for those are actually on the rise.

<sup>5</sup> Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22

And whatever we may have saved from maybe not coming into the Senedd—certainly members of staff, as well as ourselves, of course, all know what this looks like—we're spending more on equipment for 'at home'. So, how that's affected how we've looked at the budget for next year, which I guess is part of the reason for this question, you'll see in some of the budget lines. For example, travel and subsistence for staff has gone down a little bit, but you can expect to see rises in some of the kit that we need in the ICT lines of the budget.”<sup>6</sup>

**12.** The draft Budget details that the Commission has undertaken a “zero based budgeting exercise to fully analyse the non-staff budget and the impact of Covid-19, as well as the anticipated decrease in activity during the election period.”<sup>7</sup>

**13.** In relation to zero based budgeting, the Commissioner said this was a rolling programme throughout the Senedd term, but the purpose is:

“...to give the accounting officer complete reassurance that budgets are appropriate for the tasks that are required in those service areas, and those service areas, of course, ultimately meeting the strategic goals of the Senedd

...I wouldn't have expected a huge amount of change in some of these lines because they're there as 'business as usual', in one sense, and all departments are affected by zero-based budgeting throughout the year.”<sup>8</sup>

**14.** The Commissioner raised a specific consequence of Covid-19, which relates to the accrual of annual leave, explaining:

“...this isn't a cash item but it will actually affect what's on the face of the budget, as we go forward in this. And it's looking, at this stage, as if we may have about £0.5 million-worth of accrued leave, which will need to be reflected on the face of, probably, a supplementary budget, I would think. But I would just reinforce the point that, of course, there's no cash effect on this.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 8

<sup>7</sup> [Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22](#)

<sup>8</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 20

<sup>9</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 9

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**15.** The Director of Finance further clarified that the provision is required under International Accounting Standard 19, she continued:

“...we're looking at quite a significant increase in the amount of annual leave that staff have accrued...we've just run the figures now, at 30 September, and the figures have come out at about £0.5 million. But, obviously, between now and the end of the financial year, we're looking at staff accruing an additional 15 days of leave, and it's looking to see if staff have the opportunity to take that leave within this time, considering that it's a busy calendar of Senedd business. We've got the exit from the European Union coming along, also COVID has impacted on us, and we've also got the transition to the sixth Senedd. So, it's quite a burden on staff and them having the ability to take annual leave, when there isn't that large period of recess, before 31 March. So, we're monitoring it very closely.”<sup>10</sup>

### Committee view

**16.** The Committee welcomes the update provided by the Commission in June 2020 on Covid-19 related costs and savings and recognises that the information provided at that time was early into the Covid-19 pandemic and that savings would be difficult to quantify. The Committee would welcome receiving more comprehensive information to understand where net costs or savings are being realised.

**17.** The Committee notes staff accrual of additional annual leave and that this may be an end of year technical adjustment, via a supplementary budget, if required. However, the Committee is concerned about the impact this will have on staff wellbeing and this is covered further in Chapter 5.

**Recommendation 1.** The Committee recommends that additional information is provided on the costs and savings identified as a result of Covid-19, for the period up until the end of September. Additionally, the Committee would welcome a final update on the position at the end of this financial year.

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<sup>10</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 13

## 4. Long term planning

**18.** Following the draft Budget scrutiny session in October 2019, the Committee recommended that the Commission provides details around June 2020, of the long term project planning being undertaken, with a view to holding a scrutiny session of the Commission’s medium to long term planning in 2020.<sup>11</sup>

**19.** The Commission accepted this recommendation, but stated that it would provide more detail to the Committee on its long term project planning alongside its budget proposals for 2021-22, by 1 October 2020.<sup>12</sup>

### Maintaining the estate

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**20.** The Commission states in its draft Budget that “mindful of the need for economy, the Commission has reduced the project fund from an anticipated £1.055 million to £0.450 million. This reduction will limit our planned investment in ICT and the estate, but the impact will be managed through robust prioritisation”.<sup>13</sup>

**21.** Replacement of the windows in Tŷ Hywel has been referred to in successive Commission budgets and the Committee has previously stated:

“The Commission allocated £345,000 towards the new window replacement project in 2019-20. This funding has not been used, although the budget documentation refers to a detailed feasibility study being commissioned in 2019- 20 and a further £50,000 is requested for 2020-21 to undertake additional feasibility studies. It is not clear why the Commission requested £345,000 in 2019- 20 if feasibility studies had not been undertaken.”<sup>14</sup>

**22.** The draft Budget 2021-22 details that the feasibility survey has been undertaken, the result of which will be considered by the Commission at a future meeting, to “further consider options and costs and look at how this project could either be phased, or funded as a one-off exceptional item within the Commission’s Budget in the Sixth Senedd”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [Finance Committee Scrutiny of the Assembly Commission Draft Budget 2020-21](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Assembly Commission response to the Finance Committee report](#) – 5 November 2019

<sup>13</sup> [Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Finance Committee Scrutiny of the Assembly Commission Draft Budget 2020-21](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22](#)



**23.** The Commissioner explained that the window feasibility study report was expected in December 2020 and that the “overall project would be expensive”<sup>16</sup>:

“This is something that will have to be considered by the next Commission, almost whether they like it or not. I would be reluctant—and I'm sure you'd be as well—if suddenly it was seen as an issue that the next set of Commissioners would think was not important. It's important, because this is about health and safety, let alone the sustainability of the building and the energy of the building and so forth.”<sup>17</sup>

#### Legislation Software Project

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**24.** The Commission provided an update on the costs of the legislation software project in July 2020. The draft Budget confirms that the final contract costs, which are shared with the Welsh Government, were lower than anticipated and the budget requirement in the 2021-22 Project Fund has been reduced from £600,000 to £240,000.

#### Sustainability and future working

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**25.** The draft Budget notes that home working as a result of Covid-19 will enable the Commission to reassess future space requirements.

“If 20% of the pre-lockdown daily attendance of Tŷ Hywel continued to work from home, then this would provide a significant increase in future capacity. It would also provide the opportunity to reconsider how we use Tŷ Hywel and potentially to provide new facilities.”<sup>18</sup>

**26.** When asked what flexibility will be available to the Commission in the Sixth Senedd, the Commissioner indicated that there was little flexibility:

“The project budget: that's just under £1 million in total. Some of that is, effectively, earmarked for the legislative workbench, which means that we're talking, perhaps, about £600,000 or £700,000 that Commissioners will genuinely have available to them in the next Senedd for meeting their own priorities ... So, they haven't got a lot of

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<sup>16</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 39

<sup>17</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 32

<sup>18</sup> [Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22](#)

money to be flexible with, but what they've got, they can be as flexible as they like with. I think that's probably the best way of putting it.”<sup>19</sup>

## Committee view

**27.** The Committee welcomes the news that the legislation software project is progressing to timescale and is well within the cost originally budgeted for, and would welcome an update on final costs being provided to the Finance Committee in the Sixth Senedd.

**28.** The Committee notes the need to maintain the building in a good state of repair. However, there are concerns that the overall funding required for replacement windows, and the phasing of the project, has not yet been resolved, despite being considered as part of annual budget scrutiny since September 2018. A feasibility study has now been undertaken, but the draft Budget does not include any costs for undertaking this work in the first year of the Sixth Senedd. Whilst recognising that these costs may be met from operational budgets, the Committee believes that projects of this magnitude should be subjected to public scrutiny.

**29.** The Committee notes that the Commission has highlighted a need to phase essential maintenance projects over the coming years and supports that approach in principle. However, the Committee would welcome an update on how the current Commission intends to pass on its legacy to the next Commission. Prior to the end of this Senedd, the Committee will invite the Commission to provide evidence in order to understand how its long term project planning could be phased and funded.

**Recommendation 2.** The Committee recommends that the Commission attends an evidence session with the Finance Committee in February 2021 to consider how long term projects have been prioritised and planned, including whether the new Sustainability plan and targets that are due to be in place from 2021 onwards will be implemented and how they are intended to influence decision making and funding.

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<sup>19</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 29

## 5. Commission staffing

**30.** The main cost for the Commission is “staffing and related costs”. This draft Budget increases by 3.8 per cent, which reflects a 2.6 per cent pay award from April 2021. This includes £129,000 for staff to support the Standards Commissioner (down £7,000 in 2020-21 to reflect the break for an election) and £1 million “vacancy / churn” provision, which is presented separately in the breakdown of the headline figure for 2021-22.

**31.** In relation to staffing, the draft Budget details:

“During the Fifth Senedd, and following a comprehensive capacity review and a Voluntary Exit Scheme, a cap on the staffing establishment was introduced until 2020-21. This has enabled us to ensure we have the disciplines in place to match resources and requirements.”<sup>20</sup>

**32.** In Autumn 2017, the Committee recommended that full-time equivalent posts should remain static<sup>21</sup>, subsequently, in May 2019 the Commission notified the Committee of its intention to increase staffing capacity in order to respond to Brexit and Constitutional reform<sup>22</sup>.

**33.** The Commission’s Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20<sup>23</sup> states that total staff numbers (full-time equivalent) increased from 454.1 at the end of March 2019 to 459.0 at the end of March 2020 – the average number over the 12-month period was 453.4 compared to 442.8 for 2018-19.

### Voluntary Exit Scheme

**34.** In October 2019 the Committee recommended:

“The Committee recommends that an annual financial report on the long term benefits, including ongoing savings, of the Voluntary Exit Scheme is provided to the Committee identifying how the scheme has met the stated aims, specifically “Delivering long-term savings where possible and/or avoiding additional costs in meeting skill shortages”.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22

<sup>21</sup> Finance Committee report on the Assembly Commission draft Budget 2018-19

<sup>22</sup> Letter from the Assembly Commission to the Chair of Finance Committee – 3 May 2019

<sup>23</sup> Senedd Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20, June 2020

<sup>24</sup> Finance Committee Scrutiny of the Assembly Commission Draft Budget 2020-21

**35.** In response to the Committee’s report, the Commission said that “A report on the benefits of the VES and how it has met its stated aims will be provided to the Committee by September 2020.”<sup>25</sup>

**36.** The Chief Executive detailed that the report on the VES was currently being drafted and she hoped to:

“...have been able to put a body of evidence together that will provide you with assurances as to how that worked and how it's been something that's contributed to the flexibility that we, as a body of staff, have been able to show over the past six months.”<sup>26</sup>

**37.** The Committee questioned how the appointment of the Communications Director and the appointment of senior staff in that directorate linked to the VES scheme. The Chief Executive explained:

“We did envisage a reorganisation of the communications and engagement team, although the details of that, as you would expect, were not finalised until the director had been appointed. So, obviously, we wanted him to have input into the final new arrangements. Those proposals were presented in February, ... all of these have been costed into next year's budget.”<sup>27</sup>

**38.** During its scrutiny session on ~~21 September 2020~~ the Public Accounts Committee asked whether the two largest senior pay settlements from the VES were realising the expected benefits. The Director of Finance clarified that “the VES was never intended to save money; it was to allow the Commission to look at the staff complement and reskill in those areas that were required”<sup>28</sup>.

## Staff wellbeing

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**39.** Reflecting on changes to working practices as a result of Covid-19, the Chief Executive detailed that work was being undertaken to consider how future work patterns will change and “on developing options to enable people to have a better pattern in terms of work-life balance.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> [Assembly Commission's response - 5 November 2019](#)

<sup>26</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 81

<sup>27</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 115

<sup>28</sup> Public Accounts Committee, Record of Proceedings, 21 September 2020, paragraph 60

<sup>29</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 83

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**40.** The Commissioner indicated that absence levels have reduced during this period<sup>30</sup>, and staff churn has reduced also.<sup>31</sup>

**41.** Expanding on the accrual of annual leave referred to earlier in this report, the Commissioner said that:

“...staff have been working very hard during this period. There will be certain departments that have found it quite difficult to take any leave”.<sup>32</sup>

**42.** The Chief Executive said it had been made clear that people were expected to take leave, as the issue is not just a financial issue but one of:

“...people's health and safety; they need to take their leave in order to maintain well-being, although perhaps they wouldn't have been able to travel as they had planned to. But what we have seen is, because we didn't have the usual lengthy break over the summer months, there has been additional pressure on certain departments. ... it is a particular matter for management focus, to ensure that everyone is able to take leave, and that we do keep this under the spotlight for the rest of the financial year and into the next financial year.”<sup>33</sup>

## Committee View

**43.** The Committee welcomes the changes made to the way the costs of staff supporting the Commissioner for Standards have been presented in this draft Budget following a previous Committee recommendation.

**44.** The Committee is disappointed that the requested report on VES has not been provided in time for the annual scrutiny session, but acknowledges that the impact of Covid-19 means priorities have been elsewhere. While the Committee recognises that the VES was not simply a cost saving exercise, the Committee expects the report to provide detail on how the aim of “Delivering long-term savings where possible and/or avoiding additional costs in meeting skill shortages”<sup>34</sup> has been achieved.

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<sup>30</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 51

<sup>31</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 128

<sup>32</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 11

<sup>33</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 17

<sup>34</sup> [Letter from the Assembly Commission to the Chair of Finance Committee - 3 May 2019](#)

**45.** The period from March 2020 has been a very difficult period, and the Committee recognises the achievements of the Commission and Commission staff, in successfully running Senedd business, moving staff to home working and supporting staff wellbeing throughout the pandemic.

**46.** The Committee notes that in-year staff sickness and staff churn are reported to have fallen, but there has been an overall increase in the accrual of leave. If the Commission does need to bring forward a supplementary budget as a result of annual leave accrual, the Committee would expect a commentary assessing whether there are any risks of additional costs being carried forward into 2021-22, alongside an update on sickness levels and other absences, specifically special leave.

**Recommendation 3.** The Committee recommends that an annual report on the Voluntary Exit Scheme is provided to the Finance Committee in the Sixth Senedd and for the next financial year, to enable the Commission to demonstrate the value for money of this scheme.

**Recommendation 4.** The Committee recommends that, if a supplementary budget is required to reflect annual leave accrual, it should be accompanied by an assessment of any additional costs, alongside an update on sickness absence levels and the impact of the pandemic on staff welfare.

## 6. Engagement

**47.** The draft Budget details that “Putting people at the heart of their parliament is a major theme of our engagement work...the Senedd has focused increasingly on using platforms”<sup>35</sup>.

**48.** The draft Budget continues to explain that the impact of the 2020 lockdown has seen an acceleration in digital engagement, detailing that the:

“Commission’s new website will promote a higher level of understanding about the Senedd and its work. In addition, the new site will enable more people to participate in the work of the Senedd and will support our open data strategy. By making it easier for people to participate in and share the work of the Senedd, we hope to engage more often and more meaningfully with the people of Wales.”<sup>36</sup>

**49.** Referring to the impact of Covid-19 on the planned work to promote votes at 16, the Commissioner said:

“The effect has been, as you would expect, quite serious. The estate has been closed. The ability for outreach work has—well, it's stopped. Everything, more or less, has moved online. But it's moved online pretty successfully, I think, particularly as we're talking to a cohort of people who live more online than perhaps many of us do. So, the materials, certainly, that are being used for, or were designed for, school outreach, they've been reconfigured so that they can be used online; they're appropriate for home-schooling, rather than by teachers in the classroom, for example. And there's a range of virtual events that are making up for the lack of face-to-face activity. The Youth Parliament, of course—the Members of that Parliament have themselves been doing some awareness-raising work on this.”<sup>37</sup>

**50.** In terms of the impact that Covid-19 has had on engagement more widely, the Commissioner said:

“...I suppose one of the things that I think has been a happy accident from this would be that it has accelerated the work that the Commission has done, with the blessing of the Commissioners,

<sup>35</sup> [Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22](#)

<sup>37</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 90

actually, to reach out to parties who have not particularly taken an interest in what happens in our place of work in a way that we would all have liked them to. There's a real emphasis now on reaching those parts of Wales that we haven't reached before.”<sup>38</sup>

**51.** When questioned on the engagement strategy of the Senedd, the Chief Executive outlined that investment was being made in senior staff to support the new Director of Communications and Engagement. She explained:

“...that will build on the work of the current team in terms of using analytics in the digital sphere more effectively in order to evaluate events.”<sup>39</sup>

**52.** The Chief Executive indicated that work was being undertaken to target the digitally excluded:

“...we are developing that work, and it's going to be a major focus for the director and his staff over the next year, and we do hope to enhance awareness of democracy and of the work of the Senedd, and the work of the committees is at the heart of that.”<sup>40</sup>

## Committee View

**53.** The Committee recognises that the Commission needed to rapidly change the focus of its engagement work, moving away from face-to-face interactions to digital engagement in light of Covid-19, and commends the Commission on its engagement efforts during the pandemic.

**54.** However, the Committee urges the Commission to ensure that the needs of those who may not engage digitally are not forgotten when looking at the successes of digital engagement.

**55.** The Committee looks forward to the launch of the new Senedd website and hopes the site will make it easier for the public to engage with the work of Committees and Plenary.

**Recommendation 5.** The Committee recommends that the Commission's communication plan clearly explains how priorities are set, how these will be

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<sup>38</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 90

<sup>39</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 103

<sup>40</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 104



measured and achieved, and how the plan seeks to raise the profile of work in Committees and the Senedd.

**Recommendation 6.** The Committee recommends that the Commission pays particular attention to ensuring that engagement with those who are digitally excluded, difficult to reach, or unlikely to interact with the Senedd are at the forefront of its communication plan.

**Recommendation 7.** The Committee recommends that the report on the Voluntary Exit Scheme should include additional details as to how the restructure of the Communications Directorate fits in with the aims of the scheme.

## 7. EU Transition

**56.** The draft Budget details that the Senedd is facing significant pressure during the transition period:

“Members will need, as a minimum, to scrutinise and pass all relevant legislation in relation to the end of the transition period. The Senedd will also need to consider all Legislative Consent Memoranda in relation to Brexit legislation including the Internal Market Bill which is likely to significantly alter the functioning of the devolved institutions. The Senedd has reached an agreement with the Welsh Government to scrutinise all outline common frameworks.”<sup>41</sup>

**57.** The draft Budget notes the reputational risk of the Senedd failing to complete this work, alongside the need to plan for all scenarios, and ensuring the “skills, knowledge and resources are in place to support Members”.<sup>42</sup>

**58.** When asked how different EU transition scenarios could potentially impact on Commission services and budgets, the Commissioner said:

“...the main risk is, and always has been, that we don't have enough people with the right expertise to guide us as Members in particular through the changes that Brexit will bring, whether there's a deal or whether there isn't a deal. Members will remember that, for the last two or maybe three years, we've raised with you the need for the legal expertise as much as anything to get us through all the secondary legislation that the Commission's had to deal with without the great cohort of staff that Welsh Government has had.”<sup>43</sup>

**59.** The Chief Executive expanded:

“Then it is the access to academic expertise through our Brexit academic framework, which has already paid dividends and which we'll continue to call upon.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> [Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Senedd Commission Draft Budget 2021-22](#)

<sup>43</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 122

<sup>44</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 123

**60.** The Commission has previously notified the Committee of the need to relax the establishment cap of 491 posts, to provide additional resources, principally to meet the challenges of Brexit.<sup>45</sup>

**61.** However, the Chief Executive told the Committee that specialist resources were still required:

“Looking to next year, we will need some specialist resources towards the end of this year and the beginning of next year to deal with exiting the European Union and the work arising from that”<sup>46</sup>

## Committee view

**62.** The Committee notes that the Commission has invested in building capability in recent years to support additional pressures due to Brexit and EU transition. This has included re-purposing existing posts, additional staffing and building support arrangements with academics. The Committee supports how this is now mainstreamed within the budget, but queries what additional resources the Chief Executive is referring to needing, at this late stage in the transition period.

**63.** In the Committee’s report on the Commission’s draft Budget 2020-21, Members acknowledged the work of Commission staff in responding to the work generated by Brexit. The Committee would again reiterate this sentiment, and notes that the work carried out by Commission staff during 2020 has been undertaken whilst working under the constraints and limitations experienced as a result of Covid-19.

**Recommendation 8.** The Committee recommends additional detail is provided to clarify the resources the Commission currently has available to support the Senedd in the EU transition period, the additional specialist resources referred to in evidence and how these resources will be accessed.

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<sup>45</sup> [Letter from the Assembly Commission to the Chair of Finance Committee – 3 May 2019](#)

<sup>46</sup> Finance Committee, Record of Proceedings, 5 October 2020, paragraph 87