

# Assembly Commission strategy **2016–2021**

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July 2016



**National Assembly for Wales**  
Assembly Commission

The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

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# The Assembly Commission's Purpose and Strategic Goals

At the beginning of the Third Assembly, when the Welsh Government and Assembly Commission became separate bodies, the Commission agreed aims and defined goals for the years ahead. This approach continued in the Fourth Assembly, where the Purpose and Strategic Goals for the Fourth Assembly worked effectively over the course of the five year period. They were framed in relatively short, simple and crisp terms. Their scope and ambition proved to be a suitable framework for the Commission's priorities. They remain as relevant today to provide a focus for the ambitions for the Fifth Assembly.

The "Purpose" statement helps clearly communicate the purpose of the Assembly and the Commission. This is at the heart of why the Commission and its staff exist.

Given that the new tax raising powers will provide a new, more direct and accountable relationship between the Assembly and its taxpayers, the Commission has revised the "purpose" statement to reflect this.

## OUR PURPOSE

**The National Assembly for Wales is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people, makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.**

**The Assembly Commission serves the National Assembly to help facilitate its long-term success as a strong, accessible, inclusive and forward looking democratic institution and legislature that delivers effectively for the people of Wales.**

Together the strategic goals set the framework for an ambitious set of priorities, building on the investment and momentum that has been achieved in the Fourth Assembly, particularly in the light of the changing constitutional situation, including the outcome of the EU referendum, and the continued need for stronger engagement.

## OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

**To provide outstanding parliamentary support.**

**To engage with all the people of Wales and champion the Assembly.**

**To use resources wisely.**

# The purpose of the Commission's strategy

The Commission's strategy is intended to build on the success of the Commission's achievements and direction of travel set in the Fourth Assembly. The strategy will:

- provide strategic direction to the Chief Executive and through her to the staff of the Commission, from which all planning and delivery will flow;
- be the basis for the Commission's budget strategy;
- enable the Commission to communicate its priorities and engender understanding and support for the priorities across all Assembly Members;
- communicate outwardly the work of the Commission; and
- provide a basis on which the Commission's performance and expenditure will be judged.

The strategy and priorities will need to be reviewed periodically by the Commission to ensure that its priorities adapt to the changing context and Assembly needs.

## Experience from the Fourth Assembly

At the end of each Assembly, the Commission has published a Legacy Report to capture the significant achievements and lessons from their period in office. In March 2016, the outgoing Commissioners provided recommendations to assist the Commission for the Fifth Assembly. The following diagram summarises those recommendations.



### OUTSTANDING PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT

- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR MEMBERS:** continue to develop innovative, needs-based support.
- **REMUNERATION BOARD RELATIONS:** share strategic thinking on emerging priorities.
- **CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE:** provide leadership in responding to change to ensure that resources and services are ready to deliver an effective institution.
- **TRANSFORMING SERVICES:** make the best use of Assembly information through digital technology to achieve excellence in service provision and democratic engagement to be a leading open digital parliament.



## ENGAGE WITH THE PEOPLE OF WALES AND PROMOTE WALES

- **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:** reaffirm commitment to youth engagement and consider the merits of a Youth Parliament.
- **GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD:** future communications strategy includes week-long event focused on Welsh towns and cities e.g. "Senedd@Swansea".
- **WELSH MEDIA:** continue to build the capability of Welsh media to understand and report on the Assembly to address the democratic deficit.
- **INNOVATION IN COMMUNICATIONS:** be responsive to new technologies and online platforms, make the best use of Assembly information to be a leading open, digital parliament.



## USE RESOURCES WISELY

- **OPENNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** consider openness and accountability in budget planning and corporate priorities.
- **COMMISSION EFFECTIVENESS:** consider the recommendations of the Review of Effectiveness to support the Commission to be a high-performing 'governing body' and exemplify best practice.
- **VALUE FOR MONEY:** ensure that value for money, efficiency and procurement development work continues to exemplify good practice.
- **REDUCE CARBON FOOTPRINT:** commit to achieving the further energy emissions reduction set out in the 'route map' by 2021.

# Horizon scanning – 2016-2021 and beyond

The Commission's strategy takes account of drivers and external influences that will shape the Commission's services. The key ones anticipated are set out here.

## Constitutional change

The Assembly will be under the spotlight as new tax raising powers are used (including, potentially, income tax powers), creating a direct link for the first time between the money in people's pockets and the Assembly. Other powers will be devolved via the Wales Bill. Ensuring that Members and Commission support services are ready to exercise these new powers is an area where further small-scale investment may be required, for example, to deal with any additional work or bring in specialist expertise.

It is difficult to determine fully the potential impact of the EU Referendum in terms of Members and Committee work for the longer term, however, increasing their breadth of responsibilities is likely to escalate pressure on Members and the need to increase the capacity of the Assembly may become more important. The removal of representation in Europe and redrawing of Westminster parliamentary boundaries will also reduce the overall number of elected representatives for Wales.

The decision on whether and how to increase the size of the Assembly in 2021 will be a matter for the Assembly to consider if the Wales Bill is agreed. This would have a significant impact on the Commission's investment priorities and would require considerable forward planning and re-thinking of Commission services to deliver support to a larger Assembly. Most significantly, additional accommodation to allow more Members to be housed and the reconfiguration of the Siambr would need to be addressed.

A number of key constitutional challenges are likely to need to be addressed alongside the EU negotiations, and there may be an impact on the UK's constitutional structures (particularly with the possibility of a second independence referendum in Scotland).

## Implications of the outcome of the EU Referendum to Wales and the work of the Assembly.

The Assembly has engaged with EU affairs in a number of ways since it was established in 1999. The Assembly has a role in promoting Welsh interests amongst the EU institutions. It also has a role in indirectly influencing the position of the UK Government and in scrutinising the Welsh Government's strategic priorities in relation to the EU.

The engagement activities are supported by the Commission through the provision of resources. The Commission established an office in Brussels in 2004 at the request of Members. The EU Office acts as the 'eyes and ears' of the Assembly in Brussels, providing specialist advice and overall co-ordination to the EU activities of the Assembly. The EU Office works closely with other Assembly services and departments, in particular, Research Service, Committees, Legal Service, the Llywydd Private Office, the International Relations team and the Strategic Transformation Service.

There is likely to be an impact, following the referendum outcome, in terms of workload for Members and committees in the short and longer term. Some areas of work may reduce or take on a lower level of priority, such as work to support Assembly activity in relation to the Committee of Regions and CALRE. However, there will also be a need to engage more on constitutional issues with both the UK Government and Welsh Government directly to ensure that the Assembly's interests are represented.

Given the importance of the devolved parliaments being involved and having oversight of inter-governmental relations on this issue, it is likely that whatever processes/structures are put in place for inter-governmental negotiations, similar arrangements will likely be required for legislatures. Key areas of policy where EU law are applied are within devolved areas and, therefore, are likely to fall to the Assembly rather than Westminster.

The core strengths of the committee system include cross-party working, policy expertise and engagement with the electorate. All of these issues have been raised in the political debates and media coverage following the referendum, and the potential for committees to combine the three, in innovative ways as well as building on the best practice from the Fourth Assembly, to respond to the challenges arising from the vote is significant.

It will be increasingly important to continue to engage innovatively during this period of uncertainty and complex negotiation. Communications requirements are changing, the media landscape in Wales is changing, therefore, it is crucial for the future of a healthy Welsh democracy that flexible technological solutions are available to enable the public to engage with us wherever, whenever and however they prefer. Plans are already in place to invest, but the pace of change may require acceleration and resources to match.

### **Capacity – supporting Members to respond to business demands**

Pressures on Members and Commission services are likely to increase during the Fifth Assembly. The Welsh Government's legislative programme and the new powers as devolved in the Wales Act 2014 and anticipated in the Wales Bill are likely to increase Members' workload. The public policy challenges facing Wales will also require ever closer scrutiny, exacerbated by the current economic climate.

Faced with the continuing pressures of a 60-Member Assembly, the Commission will wish to consider how best to focus its support to Members. The Remuneration Board and the Commission respectively decide the services and financial support Members require to undertake their roles effectively. Members' needs should be central to both and the balance of resources within the respective remits could be an area to explore further with the Remuneration Board as it prepares its strategic work programme.

### **Changing digital world, public engagement and demands for greater transparency**

The other key challenge is the rapidly changing digital social world in which people consume information and interact with others on issues that matter to them. People's increasingly sophisticated digital experiences are shaping their expectations of the Assembly's services. How people engage with the political environment is changing, including demands for transparency and accessibility of information about Members and their work. This creates a driver for improvements, such as to the provisions currently made through senedd.tv, developing our own TV content on the work of the Assembly and to creating a coherent archive of the Assembly's records, so that we safeguard and control those records for the public good.

Positively, the 2016 Assembly election saw the highest voter turnout at an Assembly election since 1999, with 45.4% turnout. Nonetheless, this does not compare favourably with the 2015 UK General Election where turnout was 65.7% and the EU referendum when turnout was 71.1%. Voter participation amongst the young and black and minority ethnic population is weak. The number of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who voted at the 2015 UK General Election fell significantly compared to 2010. The new powers being devolved to the Assembly provide

opportunities for new electoral arrangements if the political will is there. Alongside this, there is an opportunity to build on the excellent outreach and youth engagement foundations of the Fourth Assembly.

Media coverage in Wales of Assembly business is likely to continue to be weak. It is not yet known what impact the BBC Charter Review may have on its focus on Welsh political debate. Continuing to support the media to facilitate coverage of the work of the Assembly in the Welsh national and local media will be crucial. We could also explore the possibility of developing our own online channel or TV content on the work of the Assembly. Successive media consumption surveys continue to stress the Welsh public's dependency on UK media as a primary source of news. There may be an opportunity to improve the Assembly's relationship with these outlets, increase their understanding and appetite for Assembly news and help them make connections between UK wide issues and the Welsh perspective.

Great strides were made in the Fourth Assembly around innovation in online engagement. However, it will require more radical steps and investment over the next few years to transform services. Better analysis of the wealth of data available in the public sector will offer unparalleled opportunities to improve tailoring and targeting of services to make the best use of limited funds. A step change is required in how we produce, manage and use Assembly business information if the Commission wishes the Assembly to be regarded as a world class digital parliament that is open, inclusive and easy to engage with, leading to better laws and scrutiny outcomes.

## **Budget Strategy**

The Commission's strategy for the Fifth Assembly and the budget that it asks the Assembly to approve are clearly closely related. The budget must be sufficient to allow the Commission to deliver its ambitions and meet the challenge of increased responsibilities within the capacity constraints that are a feature of the UK's smallest legislature. At the same time the ambitions are set with regard to the broader public sector funding context.

The Commission has agreed a budget strategy that modestly increases the Commission's overall resourcing levels to maintain the delivery of excellent services to Assembly Members. In turn, that will enable Members to fulfil their responsibilities to undertake effective scrutiny of the Welsh Government, to make good laws for Wales and to represent the people of Wales. The strategy provides an increase in line with inflation, plus an additional 1% increase in 2017-18 and in 2018-19, followed by reductions of 0.8% below inflation in 2019-20 and 2020-21 (i.e. in line with currently projected cuts to the Welsh Block). Commissioners were conscious of the Commission's budget being set within the broader public sector funding context and clear that budget issues would need to be revisited if the Commission faces an exceptional change in circumstances.

## **Using resources wisely**

As a publicly funded organisation, the Commission must consistently demonstrate that it uses its resources efficiently and effectively and that it operates effective governance and assurance processes. It is also critical that we maintain the delivery of excellent services to Assembly Members so that they are able to undertake their elected role to provide effective scrutiny of the Welsh Government, to make good laws for Wales and to represent the people of Wales.

We have developed a number of guiding objectives to provide assurance that we treat the efficient and effective use of resources as a priority in both our daily operations and also when we introduce changes to the organisation. They are to:

- challenge ourselves and our suppliers continuously to increase efficiency and effectiveness and to measure and report on improvement;
- provide clear evidence that we do operate efficiently and effectively and that we are right to use our allocated budget in the way we do;
- ensure that everything we do aligns to the Commission’s Strategy, goals and priorities, is fit for purpose and is the result of an assessment of costs versus benefits;
- subject ourselves to both internal and external scrutiny and to be clear and open about our plans and achievements; and
- capture examples of good practice, distil the essence of what makes it so and ensure that this good practice is adopted. Similarly, where things do not go well, we will show what we have learnt and done, to prevent a reoccurrence.

The public sector is increasingly looking to exploit digital transformation opportunities to yield efficiency savings and to innovate in public services to deliver improved experience to their customers. Having invested in bringing in-house ICT services, we have a strong, resilient and flexible foundation to build on for the future and take advantage of these opportunities and emerging technologies for the benefit of Members, the people of Wales and staff. In order to maximise those opportunities we need to upgrade and enhance current services, such as Senedd.tv, and plan to do so through short term, tangible improvements as well as new, customer-focused services delivered during the course of the Fifth Assembly.

A new archiving strategy would enable us to manage and search growing volumes of information efficiently, giving effective access now and for future generations.

Terrorism and security threats will continue to be of major concern to people and our safeguards will need to be under constant review. As a result of tragic events in 2016, we have reviewed the existing security arrangements, advice and guidance for Assembly Members and their staff and a number of actions to further enhance security away from the Assembly estate were taken.

Given a level of determination, it is impossible to completely protect against a random attack, short of denying the public any access to politicians outside of a controlled environment. We have evidence that our Assembly Members and their staff do come into contact with potentially dangerous individuals, usually with little or no prior knowledge of the risk. Whilst it will be very difficult to provide assurance that Members and their staff will be safe in all situations, we consider that there are practical measures that can be implemented that may help to mitigate the risk, raise awareness and provide reassurance and future plans will reflect this.

## Strategic Priorities to guide delivery for first 1 – 2 years

The strategic priorities are ambitious and build on the investment and momentum that has been achieved, particularly in the light of the changing constitutional situation and the key challenges highlighted above. For each strategic goal, the Commission's aim is to set and maintain high standards as a Welsh public service leader during a time of closer public scrutiny and enhance our international reputation as an effective, open, world class parliamentary institution.

Challenging public spending settlements will result in even closer scrutiny of performance and budgets, as the recent recommendations of the Finance Committee and Public Accounts Committee reflect. It will be important for the Commission to be assured that its budget strategy reflects the level of its ambition and provides improved transparency and accountability.

A key theme running throughout these priorities is a focus on building capability to ensure the longer term success of the organisation. This applies to:

- the Assembly and Commission: through having the right constitutional and procedural framework in place;
- Members: through shaping our services and professional development offer to their needs;
- staff: ensuring that our people are well equipped, drawn from the widest pool of talent, are aligned with our business priorities, and that we have the flexibility to respond to changing needs;
- an agile culture: continuously seeking opportunities for all to create value by working differently, making best use of advancing technological capabilities and embracing change; and
- enhancing the engagement value offered by the Assembly estate, in particular, the Senedd.

Our ability to respond to business demands in the Fifth Assembly, such as bilingual services, constitutional change, the outcome of the EU referendum or committee activities, will need to be managed alongside investment in improvement and innovation.

Investing additional resources in supporting change and building our capability to deliver more and in a better way will pay dividends in the longer term. Small amounts of investment in the right places can be a catalyst for gaining a step change in the quality of our service and avoid the risk that we fall behind and become less flexible and effective in supporting Members. This approach worked well when we brought ICT in house, where we are now reaping the dividends. Particular areas for future investment include:

- making a step change in the digital provision of Commission services to Members and the public, including improving services such as Senedd.tv;
- strengthening the youth engagement strategy to invest in the future of Welsh democracy;
- creating a coherent, publicly accessible archive for the long-term preservation of the Assembly's records;
- the 10 year estates investment programme and Energy Reduction Route Map anticipate delivering financial savings; and
- investing in purchasing Tŷ Hywel, should the opportunity arise, would be a major investment decision but would be worth considering as it would save us a significant amount of money in the longer term.

The strategic priorities also reflect the fact that the Government of Wales Act 2006 requires the Commission to have regard to the principles of equality of opportunity, sustainability and equal treatment of the English and Welsh languages when carrying out its functions. This is reinforced by the National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Act 2012 and the public sector equality duties prescribed by the Equality Act 2010, which applies to the Commission. Language, sustainability, diversity and inclusion considerations must be integrated into decision-making, service design, planning and change and should add value to the strategic work of service areas. These principles are pertinent to how we recruit and develop a diverse workforce and in ensuring that, in every interaction with the Assembly, an individual's preferences and needs are respected and met.

The following sections show the Commission's key priorities and provides an indication of likely activities in relation to each of the three strategic goals.

## **Outstanding parliamentary support**

### **Innovate and tailor our services to best support Members, exploiting technology**

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- Needs-led professional development for new Members and Office holders.
- Provide the leadership to deliver world-class support for Members in their scrutiny role responding to and working with the Business Committee.
- Design our services with the diverse needs of Members, their staff and the groups at their core through closer collaboration.
- Maximise the opportunities of technology to benefit Members, increasing offer of on-line services.
- Engage with the Remuneration Board to ensure that Members needs are met in the most effective way.
- Leverage external expertise where necessary, including continued collaboration with Wales Governance Centre.
- Provide an effective and efficient system for retaining, retrieving, searching and making the most of the Assembly's historical and future information.

### **Enabling a strong institutional response to constitutional change and the outcome of the EU referendum**

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- Support the effective scrutiny of Wales Bill.
- Ensure the Assembly responds to wider UK constitutional matters.
- Strengthen inter-parliamentary relations.
- Readiness to exercise new Wales Bill powers.
- Readiness to exercise the new tax-raising powers.

### **Deliver exemplary bilingual services**

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- Set the ambitions and priorities for the Commission's new Official Languages Scheme.
- Provide the right level of resources to respond to business demands.
- Publish the fully bilingual Record of Proceedings earlier.
- Enhance support to Welsh learners and improvers.

## **Engage all the people of Wales and champion the Assembly**

### **Engage strategically to make an impact on Assembly business through people visiting our estate, across Wales and online**

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- Understand and collaborate with our users to give them the best engagement experience and make improvements in the areas of greatest impact to benefit Assembly business.
- Wales-wide local engagement.
- Focus on reaching the disengaged, face to face and through improved targeting.
- Support the capability of the media consumed in Wales to report the Assembly and develop our own TV content on the work of the Assembly.
- Improve the visitor experience to the Senedd and our estate to enable engagement with Assembly business.

### **Commit strongly to the young people of Wales**

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- Reaffirm commitment to provide opportunities for young people to engage with Assembly business.
- Refresh strategy, including considering with young people and representative organisations whether there is merit in establishing a Youth Assembly.
- Broaden the reach of our engagement with young people from all our communities.

### **Make trusted information easy to find, use and share in a digital world**

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- Provide trusted information suitable for a diverse range of audiences.
- Make our information and laws – past and present – easy for users to find, share and re-use through the Assembly's website and other digital channels.
- Increase the number and diversity of visitors to our digital channels.
- Improve Senedd.tv, for example, to introduce new features, further integration of captioning and moving the website into the 'cloud' to improve business continuity and the stability of the service.

### **Share our learning in Wales and beyond**

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- Champion our reputation as a distinct and progressive legislature from which others can learn.
- Learn from others, within the UK, Europe and beyond.

## **Use resources wisely**

### **Continuously increase efficiency and effectiveness and measure and report on improvement**

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- Invest strategically to support the improvement of services, including new technology opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness.
- Improve the management information available to clearly evidence where we are making improvements.
- Renew the Key Performance Indicators in light of the Commission's priorities.

### **Be completely transparent and accountable in the financial management of our budget**

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- Demonstrate value for money.
- Invest to ensure readiness for constitutional change.
- Consider the merits of purchasing Tŷ Hywel.

### **Reduce our environmental impact**

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- Progress the Energy Reduction Route Map.

### **Build our people capability**

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- Build our people capability to be adaptable to meet current and future challenges.
- Further improve capacity planning.
- Provide effective support for change.
- Support wellbeing.
- Take further steps to be an inclusive employer of choice, including strengthening the workplace equality networks and senior champions.

### **Integrate diversity and inclusion into decision-making, service design and delivery**

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- Develop Fifth Assembly Diversity Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan.
- Further integrate diversity and inclusion considerations into service area planning.
- Embed equality impact assessments in the organisation, in particular, in improvement and transformation initiatives focusing on the needs of users.