

Minutes – Business Committee

Meeting Venue:

Presiding Officer's office, 4th floor – Tŷ

Hywel

Meeting date: 15 June 2016

Meeting time: 09.01 – 10.41

Private

Attendance

Category	Names
Committee Members:	Elin Jones AM (Chair) Simon Thomas AM Jane Hutt AM Paul Davies AM Mark Reckless AM
Committee Staff:	Aled Elwyn Jones (Clerk)
Others in attendance	Ann Jones AM, Deputy Presiding Officer Siân Wilkins, Head of Chamber and Committee Service Christopher Warner, Head of Policy and Legislation Committee Service Peter Greening, Welsh Government



1 Introductions, apologies and substitutions

2 Committees

At the meeting of 8 June, Business Managers considered a paper setting out the role of Business Committee in establishing a committee system. At that meeting, The Committee requested the Secretariat bring forward further options for committee sizes and remits based on Business Managers' suggestions.

Business Managers also requested the Secretariat to bring forward a paper outlining a possible procedure for electing committee chairs, and to provide various options within that procedure, for Business Managers to consider.

Number of committees

There was a general consensus that six specialist and six policy and legislation committees should be established, with one reserve committee to undertake additional pressures from other committees. Jane Hutt proposed that the reserve committee should be able to assume both policy and legislative scrutiny and Simon Thomas suggested that the committee could also scrutinise matters that might arise that are of public importance, but are not necessarily devolved. Business Managers also noted that the reserve committee may decide to carry out initial work based on the outcome of the EU referendum.

Mark Reckless suggested that the committee may want to return to the matter of the number of committees should there be disagreement around the allocation of committee chairs to political groups.

The Presiding Officer suggested the Committee consider the practicalities of timetabling slots for the reserve committee to meet. The Committee agreed that some flexibility should be built in to the timetable to allow the committee to meet depending

on its workload and that its membership should be taken into consideration when agreeing the timetable.

Remits

The Committee considered and agreed the remits of the policy and legislation committees, as set out in the paper.

Business Managers agreed that the membership of the Scrutiny of the First Minister Committee should comprise of the committee chairs of the 6 policy and legislation committees, PAC, Finance and CLA and would consider its operation at a later date when a decision had been made whether to introduce a procedure to elect committee chairs. It was suggested that the Scrutiny of the First Minister Committee sit outside the allocation of chairs to political groups and be chaired by the Deputy Presiding Officer.

Business Managers commented that the fourth Assembly Business Committee's role to review Assembly procedures had worked well and as such should be retained in the fifth Assembly.

The Committee also agreed to retain the Standards of Conduct Committee with its current remit. They also agreed to review the scrutiny of public appointments in due course.

Size of Committees

Jane Hutt conveyed the Labour group's view that policy and legislation committees should comprise of eight members, with the exception of Finance and Public Accounts Committees which should have seven members and be chaired by opposition parties.

Paul Davies and Simon Thomas commented that as political balance could not be achieved without unreasonably large committee sizes, they would be content to establish committees of 8 members but would expect the Labour group to compromise on its membership, and allocation of chairs, to better reflect the Assembly's political make-up.

Mark Reckless expressed concerns that committee membership comprising of 8 members contradicts the Committee's previous discussions about trying to achieve political balance. He also stated that should the two largest opposition parties chair the Finance and Public Accounts Committees, and if some committees comprise of 8 members with a 3:2:1 split of opposition chairs, the UKIP group would be disadvantaged and the overall arrangements might not reflect political balance.

All Business Managers agreed that attempting to reach a compromise of committee membership would be preferable to the application of D'hondt. The Presiding Officer encouraged Business Managers to meet outside of committee to reach an agreement on the size of committees and to return to the matter at the following meeting with the expectation of making a decision.

In light of the letter by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government setting out his intention to lay the Supplementary Budget on 21 June, Business Managers agreed to table a motion to establish permanent Finance and Public Accounts Committees and agreed to confirm the membership of the Finance committee by the following meeting.

Procedures for electing committee chairs

Business Managers considered and agreed in principle to introduce a procedure for electing committee chairs.

Jane Hutt prompted a discussion around the minimum threshold required for nominations. Business Managers agreed that a nomination by one Member would be a reasonable threshold for an institution of the Assembly's size. The Committee agreed in principle that candidates should be nominated by a member of their own group, and that no seconder would be required. Jane Hutt, however, commented that she would need to give further consideration to the minimum threshold required for nominations on account of the size of the Labour group.

Business Managers all agreed that should there be only one nomination, that Member would be declared elected as is the case for the election of the Presiding and Deputy Presiding Officer. If there is more than one nomination, the Committee agreed that a secret ballot should take place whereby Members vote in order of preference for their preferred candidate, avoiding multiple rounds of secret ballots. The successful candidate would be the first to secure more than half the votes.

Business Managers decided that no Member should be a candidate for multiple chairs, where more than one chair is being elected at the same time.

The Committee agreed that a motion to remove a committee chair should be supported by the majority of the committee, have cross-party support and that the Chair should not be able to participate in any vote on their removal.

Paper to note – Letter from the National Union of Journalists

Business Managers noted the letter.