

Agenda – Finance Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 1 – Senedd

Meeting date: Thursday, 1 December
2016

Meeting time: 09.15

For further information contact:

Bethan Davies

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6372

SeneddFinance@assembly.wales

Private

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(09.15)

2 Paper(s) to note

(09.15)

**Letter from Universities Wales to the Chair – Welsh Government Draft Budget
2017–18 – 23 November 2016**

(Pages 1 – 2)

**Letter from the Wales Audit Office and Auditor General for Wales to the Chair –
Estimate 2017–18 – 24 November 2016**

(Page 3)

3 Landfill Disposals Tax (Wales) Bill: Technical briefing

(09.15–11.00)

Georgina Haarhoff – Head of Tax Policy & Legislation Development, Welsh
Government

Emma Cordingley – Lawyer, Welsh Government

Sarah Tully – Devolved Tax Policy Project Manager, Welsh Government

11.00–11.15 Break



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4 Landfill Disposals Tax (Wales) Bill: Approach to scrutiny

(11.15–11.45)

(Pages 4 – 15)

Paper 1 – Landfill Disposals Tax (Wales) Bill – Approach to scrutiny

5 Land Transaction Tax and Anti-avoidance of Devolved Taxes (Wales) Bill: Consideration of draft report

(11.45–12.45)

(Pages 16 – 67)

Paper 2 – Land Transaction Tax and Anti-avoidance of Devolved Taxes (Wales) Bill
– Draft report

6 Legislative Consent Memorandum – Criminal Finances Bill: Consideration of draft report

(12.45–13.00)

(Pages 68 – 70)

Paper 3 – Legislative Consent Memorandum – Criminal Finances Bill – Draft report



Simon Thomas AM,
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

By email: Simon.Thomas@assembly.wales

23 November 2016

Dear Simon,

As the Director of Universities Wales I am writing on behalf of our members – the Vice Chancellors of the eight universities in Wales and the Director of the Open University in Wales.

I am writing to you in your role as Chair of the Finance Committee with some brief but important comments on the Welsh Government draft budget for 2017/18. These are additional to those in our original budget consultation response of 9 September 2016 (enclosed) as since submitting our consultation response, the sector has seen the publication of the recommendations, and Welsh Government response to the Diamond Review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements for Wales. This has significant implications on the sector's position regarding future funding, and therefore our response to the proposed 2017/18 HE budget.

Universities Wales believes the previous government was right to look to an independent cross-party panel to make recommendations for the long-term success and sustainability of the sector and we welcome its findings: offering means-tested maintenance grants for Welsh students will give many more talented people the opportunity to transform their life-chances through going to university, and alongside this support to students, university funding for key priorities – quality research, part-time provision and expensive subjects such as medicine – is crucial if our universities are to continue to be a positive force for good for the people and economy of Wales.

As we look to the future, universities, and the growing proportion of people studying at them, will be the key drivers of economic and social transformation in Wales. We therefore welcome Welsh Government's commitment to implement the Diamond Review's recommendations from 2018/19.

However, as we have not yet reached the point of implementation, it is crucial that the HE budget for 2017/18 is sufficient to provide a bridge to this point for our universities. The upcoming year presents a time of exceptional circumstances for universities in Wales due to the result of the vote to leave the EU, potential UK immigration policy changes and significant shifts in the global political landscape. This creates very high uncertainty and

volatility in student recruitment, on which universities are highly dependent on for income. Furthermore, in order to continue to attract students, universities need sufficient funds to cover the cost of borrowing and future repayments for the significant capital investment needed to maintain a competitive position. This combination of challenges gives an uncertain short-term outlook.

Whilst universities in Wales are positive about the long-term funding outlook post-Diamond, a clear path to a funding solution so that our universities can be resilient enough to see through this period of particularly high uncertainty is crucial. The 2017/18 HE budget must not place universities in the position where they are required to make decisions that would take many years to reverse and could have detrimental consequences for Wales. Certain activities are particularly vulnerable in the short-term including, part-time provision, high cost subjects and research. These areas are vital to Wales' economy and society and are covered in more detail in our enclosed original submission.

We would like to note that capital funding could form part of the solution to reducing the short-term risks above and enable joint work towards Welsh Government's priority in their Programme for Government: to better utilise their existing relationships with Welsh universities to help sell Wales to the world following the Brexit vote – and work with the sector to ensure protection for students, and important research grants. Capital funds support the development and improvement of higher education infrastructure to create and sustain the conditions for a world leading HE system.

This ability to remain competitive should be a major issue for Wales, since the economy is so dependent on the strength of its universities and their ability to compete successfully in a global knowledge economy. Universities in Wales are national assets – not simply resources to deliver programmes of study but major generators of investment and income for the wider Welsh economy and society. We therefore ask that our comments are seriously considered by the Committee and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

With best wishes



Amanda Wilkinson
Director, Universities Wales



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Wales Audit Office / Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru

24 Cathedral Road / 24 Heol y Gadeirlan
Cardiff / Caerdydd
CF11 9LJ

Tel / Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Fax / Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Textphone / Ffôn testun: 029 2032 0660

info@audit.wales / post@archwilio.cymru

www.audit.wales / www.archwilio.cymru

Mr Simon Thomas AM
Chair
Finance Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Date: 24 November 2016
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Dear Simon

ESTIMATE 2017-18

Many thanks for your Committee's positive report on our Estimate for 2017-18 and suite of other statutory reports.

We are pleased to note that the Committee is content with our Estimate and other reports and that the Committee welcomed the openness provided during the scrutiny process. We will now proceed in laying the Fee Scheme (a draft of which was included in the Estimate) for the Committee's formal approval.

We accept the recommendation made regarding IT investment and we will provide that additional detail in our future Annual Reports. We also note that the Committee would like further information in the New Year regarding the Auditor General's obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. We will provide that in liaison with your Clerk.

We found the scrutiny process to be very constructive and would like to thank you and your clerking team for the effective planning and engagement.

Yours sincerely

HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES

ISOBEL GARNER
CHAIR, WAO BOARD

Agenda Item 4

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

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Agenda Item 5

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Agenda Item 6

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