

**DEMOCRACY AND BOUNDARY COMMISSION CYMRU MEETING  
HELD AT 10:00 AM ON 26 FEBRUARY 2025 AT CP2**

**Present:** Bev Smith (Chair), Michael Imperato (Deputy Chair), Dianne Bevan, Frank Cuthbert, Ginger Wiegand, Bethan Williams Price, Karen Jones.

**DBCC Officers attending:** Chief Executive; Head of Policy and Programmes; Head of Democratic Health; Finance Manager; Senior Democratic Health Policy Manager; Democratic Health Policy Officer

**Guests:** Frances Duffy (IRP); Sarah Ling (Elections Consultant)

**Apologies:**

**Time Started: 10:00**

**Time Finished: 12:05**

**1. Declarations of Interest**

1.1. No Declarations of Interest were made.

**2. Chair's Briefing**

- 2.1. The Chair briefed that Sarah Ling would be joining later in the meeting to discuss her feasibility report on the WEIP.
- 2.2. The Chair briefed that the Commission is still awaiting its remit letter from WG.
- 2.3. The Chair briefed that the final IRP meeting will be held next month and that Frances Duffy will be joining the DBCC as a Commissioner for a fixed term of 1 year.

**3. Minutes of the Commission meeting held on 29 January**

- 3.1. Discussion was held regarding the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2025, notably item 12. Senedd Review (Options and Comms update). It was **noted** and **agreed** that in the interest of transparency, a more thorough record of the decision-making process behind the Senedd Review pairings should be kept.

3.2. It was **agreed** that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2025 will be approved over email once the record of the Senedd decision making process has been updated and recorded in more detail.

3.3. **Action:** DHPO to draft Decision Making Standards for Senedd Review decisions for approval by the Commission.

#### 4. Issues Arising

4.1. It was **Resolved** to accept the Report noting any issues for later discussion in the meeting, and updated progress was noted on the following issues:

4.2. **(Issue 1)** It was **noted** that the Commission received 1 FOI request between 23 January 2025 and 19 February 2025.

4.3. **(Issue 2)** It was **noted** that shortlisting for the GAC Chair vacancy was undertaken by the Chair of the Commission and the Chair of ARAC. 4 candidates have been invited to interview. The interviews will take place on 17 March 2025. It was **noted** the additional advertisement undertaken during this recruitment exercise has been successful in attracting a good number of applicants.

#### 5. EMB

5.1. Consideration was given to the Electoral Management Board update paper dated 19 February 2025.

5.2. Karen Jones (EMB Chair) briefed on the EMB work that has happened thus far. The EMB Chair briefed that she attended the AEA conference this month and met with key stakeholders. Work with the secretariat and working groups has already begun to establish the EMB.

5.3. It was **noted** that a meeting was held last week between the EMB Chair, Colin Everett, Michael Kay and Secretariat members to discuss future EMB work and EMB membership. It was **noted** EMB membership has been agreed and that 5 Regional Returning Officers will be invited to join the EMB. Commissioner Bethan Williams Price will also be joining the Board. It was **noted** that Deputy RROs will need to deputise.

5.4. Discussion was held regarding the establishment of the EMB. It was **noted** that collaborative relationships between the EMB and Returning Officers will be important moving forward. It was **noted** that letters inviting board members to the EMB will be sent out on Friday. It was **noted** that some future work will be required to ensure that there are sufficient resources for the EMB moving forward.

- 5.5. It was **agreed** that there is a need to create a Risk Register for the EMB. The importance of mitigating risk to the 2026 Senedd election was **noted**.
- 5.6. Sarah Ling joined the Commission. Discussion was held on the feasibility paper on the WEIP that Sarah has drafted for the Commission. Discussion was held on the appointment of constituency Returning Officers for the new Senedd constituencies. Discussion was held on the significant recent changes in Returning Officers in Wales. Discussion was held on the need for diversity on the EMB.
- 5.7. Sarah briefed on her career background. It was **noted** that Sarah will be working alongside the Commission on the WEIP. It was **noted** that the timescale in which to deliver the WEIP is very tight.
- 5.8. Discussion was held on the 3 components of the feasibility paper. It was **noted** that component 3 is where the most difficulty lies. It was **noted** that the relationship between the EMB and Returning Officers will be very important to the candidate statement verification process in order to ensure that statements are submitted from validly nominated candidates. Discussion was held on the need for a verification process for candidate statements.
- 5.9. Discussion was held on the Senedd election process. It was **noted** that a benefit of Senedd elections is the relatively low number of candidate statements compared to other national elections.
- 5.10. Discussion was held on existing similar platforms to the WEIP. It was **noted** that the only such website in Wales is the 'Choose my PCC' site.
- 5.11. Discussion was held on the publication language of candidate statements.
- 5.12. Discussion was held on the guidelines for the content of candidate statements and the scope for regulating these. It was **agreed** that there will be a need for internal guidance for how the EMB regulate these.
- 5.13. It was **noted** that the Royal Mail will be checking Senedd candidate statements and that there will be a need for an exercise on how to check principal area election statements. Discussion was held on the scope for using Royal Mail to carry out mail verification on principal area election candidate statements due to the tight timeframe on this process.
- 5.14. Discussion was held on the assumptions laid out in the feasibility paper. It was **agreed** that the online platform will be a website. The need to limit the impact of the WEIP on electoral administrators as much as possible was **agreed**. It

was **agreed** that the range of information on the WEIP is unlikely to be published elsewhere. The need for accessibility on the WEIP was **agreed**.

- 5.15. Discussion was held on the deadline for publishing candidate statements. It was **noted** that although the regulations state that statements should be published 4 working days before the election it would be preferable to publish these as soon as possible to benefit all voters, particularly postal voters.
- 5.16. Sarah briefed on the delivery options for the WEIP. Consideration was given to delivery option 1. Consideration was given to the candidate verification process and the need for 4 software contracts. It was **noted** that this delivery process would require APIs and would use telephone numbers and email addresses to verify candidates.
- 5.17. Consideration was given to delivery option 2. It was **noted** that this delivery option would utilise a secure login in order for electoral administrators to input information into the WEIP.
- 5.18. Consideration was given to delivery option 3. It was **noted** that this delivery option would be entirely manual. It was **noted** that regardless of decisions on delivery options 1 and 2 there would be a need for a manual option in order to deliver on accepting physical candidate statements and to provide a contingency plan in the case of issues with APIs or secure logins.
- 5.19. Consideration was given to delivery option 4 which would be non-delivery of the WEIP.
- 5.20. Discussion was held on the different delivery options including that of non-delivery. It was **agreed** that the possibility of offering delivery option 1 within the prescribed timeframe is low. It was **agreed** that option 2 might be the most feasible in terms of delivery whereas option 3 would pose the lowest level of risk to delivering within the timeframe. It was **agreed** that any decision on non-delivery (delivery option 4) should be made as late as possible.
- 5.21. Discussion was held on resource. It was **agreed** that decisions on resource should be made as soon as possible so that resources can be drawn down from WG.
- 5.22. Discussion was held on APIs with the 3 EMS companies operating in Wales and the need for market testing moving forward.
- 5.23. Discussion was held on the scope of building delivery option 3 ready for the 2026 Senedd election with the process of building APIs carrying on in the

background so that delivery option 1 can be delivered for the 2027 principal area elections. It was **agreed** that this would be the preferable delivery option.

**5.24.** It was **noted** that procurement for the WEIP should be carried out by August 2025 in order to provide 6 months of development work.

**5.25.** The Commission thanked Sarah for her work on the feasibility paper.

**5.26.** Discussion was held on the scope for future work on the organisation of responsibility between the DBCC, GAC and EMB. It was **noted** that the legal responsibility for the WEIP lies with the DBCC.

## **6. Remuneration**

**6.1.** The update on Item 6 was given verbally.

**6.2.** It was **noted** that the IRP legacy report was published on Monday.

**6.3.** It was **noted** that the transfer of IRP information to the DBCC is taking place.

**6.4.** It was **noted** that work to include IRP information on the DBCC website is currently ongoing.

## **7. Budget Monitoring Report 2024-25**

**7.1.** Consideration was given to the Budget Monitoring Report dated 26 February 2025 by the FM which showed the budget position to the end of January 2025. The Commission noted the transfer of funds between several budget categories to address some estimated overspends.

**7.2.** It was **noted** that after the Commission's January meeting £50,000 has been surrendered back to WG due to an underspend on the 2026 Senedd Review Programme.

**7.3.** The main areas of underspend and overspends, and the explanations for them were **noted**.

**7.4.** It was **noted** that at the time of writing the report it was estimated that the total yearly underspend by the end of the 2024-25 financial year would be £1,400 however due to some overestimation of costs this underspend is now expected to be higher. It was **noted** that the Commission can carry over up to £20,000 of underspend to the next financial year.

## **8. Risk Management**

**8.1.** Consideration was given to the DBCC Risk Management Report dated 26 February 2025.

- 8.2. It was **noted** that since agreement at the January meeting, Risk CR8 was increased from amber to red.
- 8.3. The current Corporate Risk Register was **agreed**.
- 8.4. It was **noted** that the Remuneration Risk Register will be considered at next month's meeting.

## 9. Budget 2025-26

- 9.1. Consideration was given to the Budget 2025-26 Report dated 26 February 2025.
- 9.2. It was **noted** that the Commission's budget for 2025-26 has been agreed by Welsh Government as £1,507.00. It was **noted** that this does not include the budget for the WEIP.
- 9.3. It was **noted** that the BCW budget for 2025-26 of £125,000 has been agreed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) plus 20% of the Head of Policy and Programmes' and 50% of the Senior Democratic Health Policy Manager's estimated salary cost making a total BCW budget of £180,390.
- 9.4. Discussion was held on the scope for additional resource for the EMB in the future. It was **noted** that a meeting between UK Government, WG and the EMB will need to take place to discuss future resource implication. It was **noted** that this has already been flagged to WG colleagues.
- 9.5. It was **noted** that there will also likely be DBCC funds carried over from 2024-25 which are likely to be in the region of £10,000.
- 9.6. It was **noted** that the total amount of cash funding available to the Commission for 2025-26 is £1,687,390 plus any carry over.

## 10. Reviews Progress Report

- 10.1. Consideration was given to the Reviews Progress Report dated 18 February 2025 by the HoPP.
- 10.2. It was **noted** that the Pembrokeshire Community Review has been completed. The Final Report was published 29 January 2025.
- 10.3. It was **noted** that the Carmarthenshire Community Review has been completed by Carmarthenshire County Council and the final recommendations were submitted to the Commission on 17 September 2024. The Commission agreed the recommendations at the January meeting. The Commission published its decision on the recommendations 12 February 2025 and an implementation Order is to be drafted, published and submitted to OS, WG and

Carmarthenshire County Council. The changes will come into force at the next local government elections.

- 10.4. It was **noted** that the Bridgend review is currently being carried out by the council, Draft Proposals were published in January with the consultation now open until April. The Commission expects to receive the final recommendations in the Autumn/Winter of 2025.
- 10.5. It was **noted** that the Rhondda Cynon Taff Community Review is currently being carried out by the council, the Commission expects to receive the final recommendations in Spring/Summer 2025.
- 10.6. It was **noted** that the Torfaen Community Review is currently being carried out by the council, the Commission expects to receive the final recommendations in Spring/Summer 2025.
- 10.7. Consideration was given to the status of the 2026 Senedd Review.
- 10.8. It was **noted** that the policy and practice for the 2025 Electoral Review Programme was published on 11 February and the consultation on the document is now live. The Consultation will close on the 24 March. Representations will be considered, and a final version of the document will be considered in due course. The Commission will aim to start the first tranche of electoral reviews in April 2025. Each individual review will be allocated a Reviewer and Lead Commissioner. Individual risk registers will be included in the reviews progress update in due course.
- 10.9. It was **noted** that concern has been expressed by WG colleagues on the scope and resource available for completing 8 electoral reviews. It was **agreed** that the planned number of electoral reviews for the first tranche of reviews has been reduced to 5.
- 10.10. It was **noted** that the Commission is still awaiting orders from WG on all community reviews completed so far.
- 10.11. Discussion was held on the scope of legal resource for the Senedd Review.
- 10.12. It was **noted** that Wrexham and Flintshire Councils are completing their own community reviews. It was **noted** that Conwy is also planning to commence its own community review in the coming months. It was **noted** that this will have an impact on capacity for electoral reviews.
- 10.13. Discussion was held on the risk for delays in receiving orders from WG on future reviews.
- 10.14. **Action** HoPP to circulate revised ERP plan.

## **11. Senedd Review**

- 11.1.** Consideration was given to the Senedd Review Report dated February 2025.
- 11.2.** It was **noted** that the Commission has finalised its final determinations report, the report is currently with translation and is due to be returned on 3 March 2025.
- 11.3.** It was **noted** that once returned the secretariat will put all relevant information together and prepare documentation for publication and submission on 11 March ahead of the 1 April deadline to Welsh Government Ministers as per the Act.

## **12. Calendar of Events**

- 12.1.** Consideration was given to the Calendar of Events and it was **agreed**.
- 12.2.** It was **noted** that the first EMB meeting has been organised for 4<sup>th</sup> April and dates for future meetings will be agreed soon.
- 12.3.** It was **noted** that Commissioners Ginger Wiegand and Bethan Williams Price will be attending the inter-commission meeting in London on Friday alongside members of the secretariat.

## **13. Any Other Relevant Business**

- 18.1** It was **noted** that the training with the IRPW Chair will take place after the meeting.

**Date of Next Meeting:** 26 March 2025