

## **'Star Chamber': terms of reference**

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Responding to the COVID-19 crisis will place unprecedented pressure on the Welsh Government's budget for 2020-21. In order to maximise the impact of available resources to respond to COVID-19, strategic oversight of all major spending decisions is required.

### **2. Remit**

- 2.1 The Star Chamber ('the group') has been established by the First Minister to oversee and coordinate the Welsh Government's overall fiscal response to the crisis. The group acts in an advisory capacity to the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd in relation to the deployment of available resources held centrally to address the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis.

- 2.2 The remit of the group is to:

- i. Undertake an initial reprioritisation exercise to identify areas of Welsh Government spending (both revenue and capital) which can be repurposed, in order to contribute to a centrally held COVID-19 Response Reserve. This exercise may need to be repeated at regular intervals throughout the response phase and moving into the recovery stage.
- ii. Agree revised MEG budgets for 2020-21 based on the reprioritisation exercise.
- iii. Review the deployment of the COVID-19 Response Reserve, by approving all MAs which seek to draw upon it, and receiving reports on the progress of implementation.<sup>1</sup>
- iv. View all MAs proposing new COVID-19 spending commitments within MEGs, in order to consider the interface with the reprioritisation exercise, the COVID-19 Response Reserve, and the reporting mechanism to HMT.
- v. View any MAs proposing changes to spending plans within the revised MEG budgets above a threshold of £5m or 1% of the revenue budget, in order to consider any implications for the Welsh Government's ability to respond to the critical COVID-19 priorities.
- vi. The Minister for Finance and Trefnydd will provide regular updates to Cabinet on the work of the group

### **3. Membership**

- 3.1 The group comprises:

*Core members (must attend for meetings to be quorate)*

- Chair - Minister Finance & Trefnydd, Rebecca Evans AM
- Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language, Eluned Morgan AM
- Damien O'Brien, Non-executive Director (former Chief Executive of WEFO)

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<sup>1</sup> A de minimus threshold of £5m applies in the case of the delegation to Health and Social Services.

*Supported by:*

- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser (Andrew Johnson during Alex Bevan's I&S leave)
- Gareth Williams, Special Adviser
- Andrew Jeffreys, Director, Welsh Treasury
- Margaret Davies, Deputy Director, Strategic Budgeting
- NR Head of Public Spending Policy, Strategic Budgeting
- Secretariat - NR Strategic Budgeting

#### **4. Working arrangements**

4.1 The group met for the first time on 25 March 2020. The frequency of meetings will vary in response to need but is expected to be twice weekly as a minimum. The group is currently meeting daily. In exceptional occasions, to ensure matters are dealt with in timely fashion, business will be conducted in correspondence.

4.2 MAs relating directly to the portfolios of the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd, or the Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language, will be considered in correspondence by the other members of the group (excluding the Minister in question). If required, an additional meeting of the group (excluding the Minister in question) will be arranged to discuss the MA.

4.23 Other Ministers and/or Special Advisers may attend meetings at the request of the group to discuss specific measures.

4.34 The advice of the group will be communicated to policy teams by officials in Strategic Budgeting Division.

4.45 Strategic Budgeting Division, which should be sighted on all MAs as part of the usual clearance process, may identify MAs which fall within the group's remit but which have not been presented to the group formally for consideration.

4.56 Guidance is available for officials and Private Offices on the Star Chamber process. In particular, this clarifies that all MAs forwarded to the group for consideration under point 2.2 iii above, should have the endorsement of the portfolio Minister, and other Ministers with a direct interest, but should only be submitted formally for approval after the final version has been cleared by Strategic Budgeting following incorporation of the group's comments.