DESIGN COMMISSION FOR WALES
COMISIWN DYLUNIO CYMRU

- Minutes & Resolutions of the Meeting of Tuesday 20th January 2026

Present	
Chair	Ewan Jones
Directors	Cora Kwiatkowski
	Barny Evans
	Simon Power
	Simon Jones
	Jon James
DCFW TEAM	Jen Heal, Chief Executive
	Lauran Jenkins, Office Manager

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS NOTED

All DCFW Directors, Staff and Panel members are reminded at all times that they are required to declare, in advance, any interests they may have in relation to any agenda item/s that may represent a material conflict of interest, or the perception thereof. In the event of material conflict that cannot be resolved, persons involved must absent themselves from the meeting whilst the relevant agenda item is considered.

All Directors understand and observe full confidentiality of DCFW reports and business at Board meetings and the need to focus on their primary duties as Directors of DCFW Ltd.

1. The Chair opened the meeting at 11.16am.

2. Apologies were received from Jo Rees and Mike Biddulph.

3. There were no items of Any Other Business raised outside the agenda.

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4. The Minutes of the October meeting were approved as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising, noting that an RSAW meeting was scheduled to take place later that day.

5. Chair's Report

The Chair's Report was taken as read. No additional comments were made.

6. Chief Executive's Report

6.1 Pensions

The Chief Executive confirmed that DCFW's scheduled body status within the pension scheme was formally approved in December 2025. This represents a significant improvement in stability and risk profile for the organisation. Following re-evaluation of the scheme, employer contribution rates have been revised to 0% for a three-year period commencing in the 2026/27 financial year.

Welsh Government has been advised of the revised status and reduction in employer contributions.

6.2 Budget Position and Proposed Allocation

The Chief Executive outlined the current budget position, noting that payroll changes, including revised salaries and pension contributions, are expected to result in an annual saving of approximately £120k. This represents a "relief of pressure" in the budget and the ability to sufficiently resource DCFW activity, rather than a surplus.

The Board discussed proposed allocation of available funding, with priorities identified as:

- Cyber security
- Translation services
- Core organisational resources
- Training and development
- Events and workshops

The Board emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear narrative explaining why additional funding is required and precisely how it will be deployed to support delivery.

Additional investment in PR and communications was discussed, including provision for one day per week of content creation (PAYE or Contractor) and increased translation capacity.

Options for strengthening regional representation, particularly in North Wales (including potential opportunities in Wrexham linked to TfW activity), were explored, subject to available funding.

The need for additional funding to support policy updates from Welsh Government that require additional resources was also discussed.

The Board approved proceeding with recruitment for new roles, subject to funding and process.

6.3 Cyber Security

Cyber security costs were discussed in detail. £3k had been allocated for 2025/26, although £5k has already been spent on Cyber Essentials Plus. WG has indicated a requirement for a higher level of assurance, with AISME accreditation estimated at £9k–£15k annually, representing a significant increase in cost.

The Board again questioned the need for additional security given the additional cost and limited threat/impact of a cyber-attack. The cost of an alternative insurance option and process for overcoming an attack should be explored and substantially increased costs resisted.

ACTION: *SP to assist with SIRO resource.*

6.4 Recruitment and Organisational Capacity

The Board noted recent appointments, including:

- Jen Heal appointed as Chief Executive in January 2026
- Lauran Jenkins appointed as Office Manager in November 2025

Amanda Spence has been engaged as a temporary freelancer for 14 weeks to support Transforming Towns activity, funded through the Transforming Towns fund from the Place Division.

Recruitment to the Design Lead role has commenced. This role differs from the existing Design Advisor position. An initial open recruitment process attracted five applications, with four candidates interviewed. No appointment was made. The next proposed route is to engage Public Practice and utilise their Associate Programme to fill the position, at a cost of £3k plus VAT.

The Board also discussed the potential future need for an additional role focused on content, PR and networking, noting that this proposal remains under development.

6.5 Welsh Government Critical Friend Review

The Board discussed the forthcoming WG Critical Friend Review scheduled for 23–25 March. The review will be short and focused, comprising structured interviews over two days with a limited number of stakeholders.

Potential interviewees were discussed to put forward to WG, including planning advisors, client support recipients, representatives from North Wales, architects and RSAW, in addition to local authority perspectives.

The expected outputs are:

- A narrative report
- Recommendations

6.6 Impact and Evidence

The Board discussed the importance of evidencing impact, particularly through qualitative measures. Suggestions included:

- Capturing quotes and feedback from events
- Using Design Review data, including scale and type of organisations engaged (e.g. TfW, NHS)
- Tracking follow-up outcomes where projects return after Design Review
- Demonstrating the value of early involvement in shaping briefs and influencing investment decisions

6.7 Pre-Election Period Guidance

The Chief Executive will circulate updated pre-election period guidance.

ACTION: *JH to finalise the "What does Wales need?" report in advance of the pre-election period.*

6.8 Strategic Development and Strategy Day Feedback

Feedback from the recent strategy day (Oct 25) was discussed. The Board confirmed that the overall vision was not challenged and welcomed the emphasis on place and regeneration rather than buildings alone.

Key themes included:

- Concerns around organisational resilience and scale
- The need to raise DCFW's profile
- The importance of earlier engagement
- Refinement of target audiences
- Opportunities to strengthen regional presence, potentially in partnership with Public Practice

ACTION: *JH to develop the strategy day feedback into a five-year plan, to be reviewed annually by the Board.*

The Board discussed the opportunity presented by the appointment of new Chief Executive to signal change and renewal, potentially through events or conferences later in the year, subject to the election timetable.

7. Budget & Framework 2025–26 and 2026–27

The budget framework for 2026/27 was agreed. An underspend of £14k on salaries was noted and approved for reallocation.

The Board agreed to engage auditors earlier than usual this year, reflecting the appointment of a new Chief Executive and Office Manager.

8. Activity Report

The Activity Report was noted, including:

- Progress on TAN18 updates
- Ongoing Transforming Towns work, including a conference scheduled for 12th March, with David Engwicht attending
- The importance of improving visibility of events and conferences on the website, including video content

ACTION: *Add events and conference materials to the website.*

- Earlier intervention in Affordable Housing schemes as a priority
- Continued delivery of the quarterly newsletter

9. Board Membership

The Board discussed the position of ZA who has stepped back from Board activity while on a candidate list in the forthcoming Senedd election. It was noted that if appointed as a candidate she would be required to step down. The Board discussed options for recruiting a new Board member.

10. Any Other Business

None.

11. The meeting closed at 13.13pm.

.... 17 /5 / 26 ....

Chair **Date**

.... 20/01/26 ....

Chief Executive **Date**

End of Minutes & Resolutions of the Board of Directors meeting of 20th January 2026