

Senedd

Business Committee

October 2020



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

Amending Standing Orders: Suspension of proceedings before remote electronic votes

Purpose

1. In accordance with Standing Order 11.7(iv), the Business Committee is responsible for making recommendations on the general practice and procedures of the Senedd, including any proposals for the re-making or revision of Standing Orders.
2. This report proposes an amendment to Standing Orders, to remove the requirement for a break of at least five minutes before any remote electronic vote and insert a requirement for a five minute break at the request of three Members.

Background

3. Standing Order 34.14D states that where votes are conducted by electronic means from any location, 'before any vote is taken, the Presiding Officer must suspend proceedings for at least five minutes. If votes are to be taken immediately after one another, only one suspension of proceedings is necessary.'

4. Remote electronic voting is undertaken via an App. It was first used during the first hybrid plenary meeting on 8 July 2020 and has been used during each voting time since.
5. The break has been used to allow Members to log into a system which was initially unfamiliar to them, and for the Llywydd to run a test vote.
6. Stage 3 of the Wild Animals in Circuses (Wales) Bill took place on 8 July 2020. There was a five minute break prior to each vote, i.e. after the debate on each group, in line with the requirements of Standing Order 34.13D. There were two groups, which meant two breaks of five minutes and some feedback from Members that breaking twice was unnecessary.
7. Stage 3 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill is scheduled for 10 November 2020. Stage 2 of the Bill attracted 297 amendments in 25 groups. It is therefore likely that Stage 3 will attract a similarly high level of amendments, and more importantly in this context – a large number of groups. A five minute break before each group would result in an additional two hours and five minutes of business, if there were the same number of groups in Stage 3 as Stage 2.

Proposed changes

8. Now that Members have had time to master the remote voting app, and there is a high likelihood of Stage 3 proceedings will have a substantial number of groups, it is proposed that Standing Orders are amended so that a break before voting is optional.
9. It is proposed that Standing Order 34.14D is amended to remove the requirement for a five minute break before a vote and insert a requirement for a suspension of five minutes at the request of at least three Members. This is similar to the provision in Standing Order 12.44 for voting in the Chamber (but without reference to the bell):

Where votes are conducted in accordance with Standing Order 34.14A, Standing Order 12.44 does not apply, but before any vote is taken, when at least three Members so request, the Presiding Officer must suspend proceedings for at least five minutes. If votes are to be taken immediately after one another, only one suspension of proceedings is necessary.

10. Standing Order 12.18 provides that, in circumstances where he or she considers it appropriate to do so, the Llywydd may suspend proceedings for a specified time.
The Llywydd has indicated her intention to schedule a short break before each voting time and before the first set of votes during Stage 3 proceedings.

Action

11. The Business Committee formally agreed the changes to Standing Orders on 20 October 2020 and the Senedd is invited to approve the proposals at Annex A.

Annex A

Voting in Plenary

- 34.11 Where the Presiding Officer, having consulted Business Committee, determines that it is required for the protection of public health, each political group (or grouping formed for the purposes of Standing Order 11) may nominate one Member of the group or grouping to carry the same number of votes as there are members of the group or in the case of a political group with an executive role, the members of that group plus any other members of the government.
- 34.12 Subject to Standing Order 34.13 Standing Order 34.11 applies to all business in Plenary.
- 34.13 Standing Order 34.11 does not apply where legislation requires a resolution or motion to be passed on a vote in which the number of Members voting in favour is at least two-thirds of the total number of Senedd seats.
- 34.13 Votes cast under the terms of Standing Order 34.11 must be clearly indicated as such in the report of plenary proceedings.
- 34.14A Where the Presiding Officer, having consulted Business Committee, determines that it is required for the protection of public health, arrangements may be made for Members to vote from any location by electronic means.
- 34.14B Subject to Standing Orders 12.41A–H, Members must cast their vote individually (but are not obliged to vote).
- 34.14C Standing Orders 34.14A and 34.14B apply to all business in Plenary.
- 34.14D Where votes are conducted in accordance with Standing Order 34.14A, Standing Order 12.44 does not apply, but before any vote is taken, when at least three Members so request, the

Presiding Officer must suspend proceedings for at least five minutes. If votes are to be taken immediately after one another, only one suspension of proceedings is necessary.