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Llywydd

Chair, Business Committee

16 August 2021

Dear Llywydd

Sixth Senedd committee timetable

Thank you for your letter of 14 July 2021 regarding the Sixth Senedd committee timetable. As Business Committee intends to keep the timetable under review, I am writing to outline the initial views of Health and Social Care Committee members. We will, of course, be happy to provide further feedback in due course to inform Business Committee's review.

I am copying this letter to Jayne Bryant MS in her capacity as Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee.

Fortnightly meeting slots and 'protected weeks'

We plan to devote some time early in the autumn to developing a strategic approach to our remit; this will include considering how we will prioritise the formal meeting time available to us.

Nevertheless, we have some initial concerns about the potential impact of the timetable on our ability to organise our work flexibly, to move swiftly, and to work with agility to respond to emerging issues or undertake time critical activity.

For example, we note that the combination of fortnightly meetings and protected weeks means that we will have significantly fewer meetings and less total meeting time than our predecessor committee would have had in the 1.5 meetings per fortnight pre-pandemic Fifth Senedd committee timetable. Similarly, while the total meeting time available to us will be broadly similar to the time available to our predecessor within the pandemic timetable, the move to fortnightly meetings may constrain the flexibility of our work programme, our ability to respond to emerging issues, and the potential to accommodate stakeholder availability without detriment to the pace of our work or the rigour of our evidence-gathering and scrutiny.



All day meetings

The majority of Health and Social Care Committee members represent constituencies or regions in North Wales or Mid and West Wales. At our first meeting, we discussed some of the practical issues arising from the allocation of all day meeting slots, including potential fatigue and wellbeing issues associated with lengthy virtual or hybrid meetings, and the travel time associated with hybrid or physical meetings for Members who represent constituencies and regions some distance from Cardiff Bay.

While we intend to be flexible in our meeting times according to the requirements of the Committee's business, we do not believe that it will be viable routinely to meet beyond 15.00 on Thursday afternoons.

Potential to request additional formal meeting slots

We welcome the indication that the Business Committee intends to look favourably on requests from committees for additional formal meeting slots to accommodate peaks in workloads or new tasks. We consider that this would be appropriate to accommodate work in respect of the timescales or completion of which committees have limited discretion, for example pre-appointment hearings or referrals by Business Committee of Bills or LCMs. We also note that we have flexibility, subject to Members' availability and Commission resources, to undertake informal activity outside of the formal timetable; although it would not be appropriate or transparent for all activity that would otherwise take place in formal meetings to be conducted informally.

In addition, we note that there is limited scope in the weekly timetable for such additional Health and Social Care Committee activity to be scheduled. This reflects Members' other committee, Commission and Plenary commitments, and the need for time to be available for preparation for formal business and for Members' other important responsibilities. For example, we note with particular concern the proposal that Fridays—which have traditionally been reserved for Members' constituency and regional commitments—should routinely become part of the formal Senedd business timetable to accommodate legislative scrutiny.

Sharing a meeting slot with the Children, Young People and Education Committee

We welcome the potential opportunities that sharing a meeting slot with the CYPE Committee provides in terms of joint working on areas of mutual interest. However, while the two committees will try where possible to avoid placing conflicting demands on our shared stakeholders, the increased rigidity in our work programmes as a result of the fortnightly timetable may make this more difficult.

We anticipate that the shared meeting slot may have a particularly acute impact on the Minister for Health and Social Services and her two Deputy Ministers, especially during peak times such as the annual scrutiny of the Welsh Government's draft budget. However, the Ministers are accountable to both committees, and I would expect them to take account of the constraints of the committee

timetable, to be flexible in accommodating requests to give evidence, and to prioritise committee requests over other activities.

Notwithstanding the issues outlined above, I welcome the confirmation in your letter that the Business Committee intends to keep flexibility and responsiveness at the heart of its decisions around timetabling for committees. I hope that the reflections of Health and Social Care Committee members are of assistance in this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Russell George". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Russell George MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.