

7 January 2022

To: Chairs of Senedd committees, via email

Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

You will recall that, on 16 December 2021, the Chairs' Forum considered, and endorsed, the Business Committee's suggested approach to conducting a review of the committee timetable and committee remits.

Chairs expressed a range of different views at the 21 December meeting, with some Chairs finding the current timetable challenging, whilst others expressed concerns about changing the current approach. There were no concerns raised about committee remits, although it is proposed that remits will continue to fall within the scope of this review.

To build on this, I invite you to discuss the review with your committees and to provide a written response to the review. The focus of this aspect of the review is to gather the agreed view of each committee.

In doing so, I would be grateful if you would consider the terms of reference for the review, and a number of specific questions. Whilst addressing the questions will be helpful, they are not intended to be prescriptive.

The terms of reference, and questions, are enclosed with this letter.

I also enclose a copy of the paper considered by the Business Committee and the Chairs' Forum.

Whilst you might wish to refer to feedback you have received from external stakeholders in your response, the Business Committee does not expect committees to consult with stakeholders in the time available for this review.

The timescale for this review is tight, as the Business Committee is aiming to implement any changes arising from the review at the start of the summer term 2022.

Consequently, as agreed at the Chairs' Forum meeting on 16 December 2021, the review will need to be completed in early March in order to provide committees with sufficient time to plan for any changes made.

To enable this, please submit your written response by 12pm on Friday 4 February 2022. This is a week later than the original deadline proposed in the suggested approach.

Alongside this consultation with committees, Business Managers will be discussing the review with their Groups, and individual committee members will be surveyed too.

Draft proposals, based on the evidence gathered, will be discussed at the Chairs' Forum meeting on 17 February 2022. The Business Committee will then make decisions about the future timetable and committee remits in the light of that discussion.

If you require any further information, please contact the Clerk to the Chairs' Forum, Alun Davidson, who is supporting the Business Committee with this review.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elin Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Elin Jones MS

Llywydd

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Business Committee: Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

Terms of reference and consultation questions

Terms of reference

To review the current approach to the committee timetable, and committee remits, with a view to identifying any changes to the approach that could improve committee effectiveness, whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between the time committee members spend on committee work (in and outside committee meetings) and their wider responsibilities.

Consultation questions

Timetable – status quo

To what extent does the current approach to the committee timetable provide:

sufficient time for committees to undertake their work effectively?

sufficient flexibility to meet peaks in committee workloads and/or future business requirements for additional committee capacity?

an appropriate balance between the time Members spend on committee work (in and outside committee meetings) and their wider responsibilities?

Timetable – alternatives to the status quo

What changes could be made to the committee timetable to improve committee effectiveness, whilst maintaining flexibility to accommodate additional committee business, and an appropriate balance between the time Members spend on committee work (in and outside committee meetings) and their wider responsibilities?

If changes are to be made to the timetable, when should these changes be implemented?

Remits

Do you believe there is a need to adjust the remit of your committee? For example, to balance work across committees, and/or to improve lines of accountability.

Has your committee established a means of assessing the effectiveness of its work?

This question is posed in order to determine whether any changes made as a consequence of this review can be monitored in this context.

[Enclosure 2 – Business Committee paper]

Review of the committee timetable, and committee remits: Draft approach

Purpose

1. To provide a draft approach to the review of the committee timetable, and committee remits, for consideration by the Business Committee.

Background

2. The Business Committee agreed a fortnightly committee timetable at the start of the Sixth Senedd, on the basis that it would provide:
 - sufficient meeting time for committees to perform their roles;
 - a fair balance between the time members are expected to spend on committee work and their wider responsibilities;
 - flexibility for committees to hold additional meetings when there is a need to complete time-limited work, and/or address peaks in workload; and
 - sufficient flexibility to accommodate an additional committee in the system, if needed (currently the Special Purpose Committee).
3. In addition to a fortnightly timetable, the Business Committee increased the amount of time available during the week within which committees could meet – this includes Monday mornings and the occasional use of Fridays for Stage 2 consideration of Bills.
4. Protected weeks were retained, to provide dedicated time for the Chairs' Forum, Scrutiny of the First Minister Committee, and further additional meeting time for committees to request if needed.
5. A secondary objective, expressed at the time the timetable was agreed, was to encourage committees to make efficient use of their meeting time. For example, to hold one-off stakeholder roundtables to gather a range of evidence at once, rather than deploying the more traditional “panel after panel” approach to evidence gathering over a number of weeks.

6. The Business Committee previously agreed to review the committee timetable, and the remits of committees, at Easter 2022 i.e. after two terms of operation.
7. However, the volume of requests from committees for additional meetings, and the concerns expressed by some committees with the current timetable, have led to this review being brought forward.
8. The Llywydd has also indicated that the Chairs' Forum would be consulted on the review at its 17 February meeting.
9. Most concerns raised to date have been in relation to timetabling, rather than remits, though concerns have been raised about the breadth of the remit set for the Legislation, Justice, and Constitution Committee.
10. The proposals in this paper suggest reviewing both timetabling and remits at the same time, due to the possible interdependency between the two i.e. if a review of remits resulted in the creation of a new committee, the timetable would need to take account of this.
11. It would be possible to separate these reviews, should that be the Business Committee's preference, though a review of remits that took place at a later date might necessitate further changes to the timetable.

Draft terms of reference

12. Draft terms of reference are suggested in the box below:

Draft terms of reference

To review the current approach to the committee timetable, and committee remits, with a view to identifying any changes to the approach that could improve committee effectiveness, whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between the time committee members spend on committee work (in and outside committee meetings) and their wider responsibilities.

13. The review will consider the status quo and options for the future operation of the timetable.
14. Under the headings below are questions that expand on the terms of reference, and could be addressed during the course of the review:

Timetable – status quo

Does the current approach to the committee timetable provide:

- sufficient time for committees to undertake their work effectively?

- sufficient flexibility to meet peaks in committee workloads and/or future business requirements for additional committee capacity?
- an appropriate balance between the time Members spend on committee work (in and outside committee meetings) and their wider responsibilities?

Timetable – alternatives to the status quo

- What changes could be made to the committee timetable to improve committee effectiveness, whilst maintaining flexibility to accommodate additional committee business, and an appropriate balance between the time Members spend on committee work (in and outside committee meetings) and their wider responsibilities?
- If changes are to be made to the timetable, when should these changes be implemented?

Remits

- To consider whether committee remits should be adjusted. For example, to balance work across committees, and/or to improve lines of accountability.

Interdependencies

15. The review will need to consider:

- the resourcing and/or technological constraints on timetabling, and how this should be managed in the future e.g. the number (and type) of committee meetings that can be held concurrently; and
- the impact on Senedd Commission resources, including staffing, of any changes proposed as a consequence of this review (or maintaining the status quo, should that be the preferred option).

Committee effectiveness

16. The review could consider the extent to which Committees have established means of assessing the effectiveness of their work, so that any changes made as a consequence of this review can be monitored in this context.

17. This could be extended to capture any committee innovation that has arisen in response to a fortnightly (and more flexible) timetable e.g. alternative approaches to evidence gathering, work conducted outside meetings etc.

Evidence gathering

18. The following approach to evidence gathering is proposed:

- **Committees** – the Business Committee invites each committee to provide a written response to the questions posed by the review.

- **Committee members** – committee members will be invited to complete a survey to obtain their views on the time currently allocated for committee work, their view on what the correct balance should be between time spent on committee work and their wider responsibilities, and the level of priority they are able to dedicate to committee work.
- **Chairs** – the Chairs’ Forum is consulted on any proposals for change that arise from the review, prior to proposals being finalised.
- **Party Groups** – Business Managers invite a view from their party groups.
- **Data** – data on the usage of allocated time, additional meeting time, and types of committee activity, can be provided.

Timescales

December 2021

- Consult the Chairs’ Forum on the terms of reference and approach to the review (16 December).

January 2022

- Three-week period of evidence gathering (10 – 28 January).

February 2022

- The Business Committee considers draft proposals, based on the evidence received (8 February)
- The Chairs’ Forum considers the draft proposals and the timing of the introduction of any changes to the timetable (17 February)).

March 2022

- The Business Committee confirms proposals (1 March).
The Business Committee publishes a report and tables any motions needed to give effect to remit changes (should there be a need for any) (to be made in Plenary on 9 March).

April 2022

- Timetable changes to be implemented at the start of the summer term.

Consulting the Chairs’ Forum

19. Whilst there is an appetite to resolve perceived issues with the timetable quickly, there is a tension between this and the lead-in time needed for committees to plan their work.

20. The Business Committee might wish to consult the Chairs’ Forum, at its meeting on 16 December, on the scope and timescale for the review before taking a final decision.