

**Pwyllgor yr Economi,
Masnach a Materion Gwledig**

—
**Economy, Trade and
Rural Affairs Committee**

Senedd Cymru

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Elin Jones MS
Chair, Business Committee
Senedd Cymru

26 January 2022

Dear Llywydd,

Thank you for your letter regarding the review of the committee timetable and committee remits. The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee discussed your letter and the review at our meeting on the 20th of January.

Members were unanimous in their view that the current timetable works well as it gives Members the time to prepare and engage with each Committee they sit on and as such allows them and the committee to be very effective. Whilst fortnightly meetings may not be ideal Members were concerned if the number of meetings were increased their ability to engage with them would be negatively affected.

One Member told the Committee if they were to attend both the committees they sit on every week that alongside their constituency and other pressing work as a Senedd Member they would not be able to give both sufficient time and would need to prioritise one Committee. The rest of the Committee agreed with this.

Members are content with the remit of the Committee. They are also happy with the meeting slot we currently occupy.

Regarding assessing the effectiveness of Committee work, in our first meeting last term the Committee set strategic aims and goals. As part of our meeting on the 20th of January we held a short review of these and will continue to review through the life of the Committee.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Davies". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Paul Davies MS

Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

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



**Y Pwyllgor Diben Arbennig
ar Ddiwygio'r Senedd**

**Special Purpose Committee
on Senedd Reform**

Llywydd,
Chair
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Dyddiad | Date: 31 January 2022

Pwnc | Subject: Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

Dear Llywydd,

The Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform has considered your letter dated 7 January 2022 on the review of the committee timetable and committee remits.

The Committee would like to thank you for the opportunity to feed comments into the timetable and remit of the committee. However, as we expect our work to cease shortly after any new timetable comes into effect, it is our view that we do not need to comment on the review.

In the meantime, we are satisfied with the flexibility that has been offered to the committee and our intention is to continue to meet in the available Wednesday morning slots up to the end of the committee's work, unless business demands otherwise.

Yours sincerely,

Huw Irranca-Davies

Huw Irranca-Davies MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Elin Jones MS,
Llywydd

31 January 2022

Annwyl Lywydd,

Business Committee Review of Committee Timetable and Remits

Thank you for your letter dated 7 January 2022 and for the opportunity to provide views as part of the Business Committee's consultation on the current committee timetable and committee remits.

Current Timetable

Unlike most committees, the Finance Committee is required to produce reports by strict deadlines stipulated in Standing Orders. This means that the Committee has little discretion to plan its work programme at certain times of the year, particularly the autumn term, during the budget round.

The Committee's ability to plan its work around the fortnightly timetable has been further impacted since September by the consideration of a number of additional time-sensitive pieces of work. This includes the nomination of the next Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and the undertaking of Stage 1 scrutiny of the Welsh Tax Acts etc. (Power to Modify) Bill.

As a result, the Committee has had to rely extensively on additional meetings during the autumn and spring terms in order to complete its core scrutiny



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functions, and these have become regular features of our schedule, rather than used sporadically to cope with peaks in demand.

For example, during the autumn term, the Committee met 10 times over the 13 week term, utilising five of the six scheduled meeting slots and holding an additional five meetings, including one meeting during the protected week at the end of term and an additional meeting during Christmas recess.

A similar pattern has emerged in the spring term, where the Committee is currently scheduled to meet 11 times; during the 12 week term, equating to a meeting a week on average. This includes using the four timetabled slots and holding an additional seven meetings, including a meeting slot during the protected week before half-term.

Proposed Changes to the Committee Timetable

The Committee believes that its distinct workload requires distinct timetabling arrangements. We therefore ask the Business Committee to consider the following changes:

- The Committee would like a weekly meeting slot during the autumn term as a minimum, (and during the spring term in years when the publication of the Welsh Government's draft budget is delayed). The Committee would also like to see protected weeks scrapped to maximise the time available for committees to meet.
- If the fortnightly timetable is retained, the Committee asks the Business Committee to allocate regular reserve slots in the timetable to enable Committees to hold additional meetings, when required.
- We ask the Business Committee to avoid using constituency days for allocating reserve meeting slots. We are concerned that the continued use of Fridays for additional meetings may not be feasible in the long-term as the easing of restrictions is likely to place further diary pressures on Members on those days.

We believe these changes should be made as soon as possible to provide the Committee and its stakeholders with certainty ahead of the next budget round.

If current arrangements continue, there is a high risk that the Committee will not be able to fulfil its obligations and may struggle to meet its Standing Order responsibilities. Members, as well as the public at large, rightly have high expectations that the Committee is able to undertake robust parliamentary scrutiny of financial and budgetary matters, and we ask the Business Committee to ensure that it has sufficient time available to carry out its tasks effectively.

Yours sincerely





Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair of the Finance Committee

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



Llywydd

Chair, Business Committee

31 January 2022

Dear Llywydd

Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Business Committee's review of the committee timetable and committee remits. The Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee (PAPAC) discussed this at our meetings on 12 and 26 January 2022 and have set out our views below.

Timetable – Status Quo

At present the current approach to the committee timetable is providing PAPAC with sufficient time to undertake its work effectively. However, the Committee discussed in detail its concerns that it is too early in the Sixth Senedd to assess whether this will remain the case. PAPAC is very early into its work programme and so far has been undertaking work to clear a backlog of Audit Wales reports that were published during the dissolution period and the summer 2021 recess. We are also in the infancy of exploring the new part of our remit that will consider public administration but have identified a wide range of important issues that we will need to consider in the future to ensure we fulfil this area of our remit effectively.

We have operated at full capacity within the current committee timetable and do not know whether we will be able to accommodate future workload as this increases in the future. It is highly likely that in the future the Committee will need to request additional meeting slots particularly once we start undertaking inquiry work.

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



That said, provided the current timetable continues to provide flexibility and meet requests for additional meetings, we believe it could meet peaks in committee workload. However, if all committees were operating at full capacity at any one time, the current timetable may become less able to accommodate these requests. We understand that, to date, no such request has been rejected but this could change in the future should there be an increase in requests.

In terms of the balance between the time Members spend on committee work (in and outside committee meetings) and our wider responsibilities, we believe the status quo is currently appropriate. The current timetable has reduced the amount of time per week spent in committee enabling Members to focus on other responsibilities including preparing for and contributing to issues in plenary.

To date we have not utilised the week where no formal committee meeting is held for PAPAC committee work but we stress that this is due to us being in the early stages of a new Senedd term. However, it is highly likely that in the future, as we develop our work plan, and start detailed inquiry work we will need to utilise this time.

We agree that the status quo has the potential to provide the time and space to undertake our work creatively and also to engage with stakeholders beyond the traditional ways of formal committee sessions. It has been too early to give much thought to how this may be undertaken and more time would be needed to fully consider and scope how we could effectively use 'less formal' weeks.

We discussed in detail the importance of strategically planning committee work and ensuring that the work of committees is focused on areas that 'add value'. There is a risk that measuring the effectiveness of committees based on time spent on committee work is not going to provide an accurate assessment. Committees could easily fill each day of the week with work if they so wanted but that may not equate to effective outputs. We agreed that the focus of any approach to timetabling and how committee time is planned should include how topics are selected for scrutiny. It is not only about how much time committees have to meet but how they use that time and ensuring it is used effectively.

It would be remiss of us not to refer to the ongoing pandemic which has clearly impacted on the ways committees have been able to work in more recent times. We believe that any assessment of the current timetabling arrangements need to bear this in mind. For example, the work committees have been able undertake in engaging face to face with stakeholders has been significantly curtailed including visits and events which by their nature require more time. The current timetable seems able to adapt to enable this type of work more so than the previous timetable for when restrictions ease. In a similar way an increase in virtual and hybrid meetings will impact on committee timetabling as these enable us to meet more flexibly and in many instances increase efficiency in the use of time and resources.



Timetable – alternatives to the status quo

At present the Committee is content with the status quo as it enables flexibility in how often Committees can meet and we do not propose any alternatives.

Remits

We very much welcomed the addition of public administration to the Public Accounts Committee remit. We are in the early stages of exploring this new area of work but strongly believe linking public administration to public accounts is appropriate given the crossover of issues and that we are best placed to undertake scrutiny of public administration.

In terms of the remits of other committees we don't think there is a need to adjust remits as these seem sufficiently broad to balance work across committees. However, to ensure lines of accountability are strong, improvements could be made to how committees work jointly. This is particularly important when scrutinising cross cutting issues that may fall between the remits of committees. Most notably for example scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which by its nature underpins all aspects of public services in Wales and does not sit neatly within the remit of any one committee. Although the remit of the Equalities & Social Justice (ESJ) Committee now includes the Act, it cannot be scrutinised in isolation, and we are pleased to be working jointly with the ESJ Committee in its future work. We were delighted to have jointly led with the ESJ Committee, the first committee debate, not emanating from a committee's report, on implementation of the Act in November 2021.

It is imperative that mechanisms for joint working are identified including use of the Chairs Forum to discuss and co-ordinate committee work planning.

Assessing the effectiveness of our work

Since we are still relatively early into the sixth Senedd term we have not yet undertaken any assessment of our effectiveness. However, we do track all of our reports recommendations and responses to them which enables us to assess the impact we have made. The Clerking team also keep a running list of outputs arising from our work including any changes that are made to the way Welsh Government Officials operate, changes to internal Welsh Government processes or procedures and any changes that are directly attributable to our work. In previous years these have been detailed in our predecessors Legacy Reports.

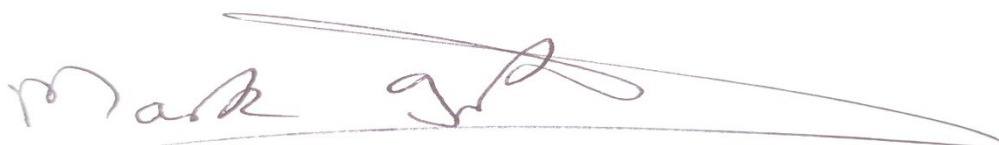
We believe that the current approach to timetabling, which does not schedule a weekly formal committee meeting, has improved the overall effectiveness of the Committee. The current arrangement has enabled us to meet informally on Monday afternoons during weeks where we have a formal meeting on the Wednesday. The purpose of this informal meeting is to prepare for the formal meeting later that week and the current timetable arrangements mean we have more time to

use this opportunity to have a detailed pre-meeting, and to 'think creatively', without the time constraints of having to conduct this during a formal meeting slot which is time limited.

Our informal meetings are not rushed and we have the opportunity in a private, informal setting to receive briefings from Commission and Audit Wales staff and ask questions. We also use the time to discuss the focus of our forthcoming formal session and identify areas of priority. These pre-meetings are supporting more effective lines of questioning and more efficient use of committee time as we are able to agree the areas of scrutiny that we think can 'add value' enabling us to approach our work more strategically. It also provides us with time and space to develop our dynamic as committee and work together in undertaking our role. This innovative way of working has benefitted the work of this committee and we suggest that other committees may wish to consider this as a constructive practice.

Thank you

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Isherwood', is written over a long, thin, horizontal line that tapers at both ends.

Mark Isherwood MS
Committee Chair



Elin Jones MS

Llywydd

Dyddiad | Date: 2 February 2022

Pwnc | Subject: Response to the review of committee timetable and remits

Dear Llywydd,

Thank you for your letter of 22 January 2022 inviting written responses to the Business Committee's review of the committee timetable and committee remits.

This response reflects the discussion held during a private session of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee on 19 January 2022. Whilst we did not actively seek input from external stakeholders due to the limited time available, we have included comments made by stakeholders in passing, as we feel these are relevant to the terms of reference of the review.

Members responded to the following 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.

Timetable

There was no overall agreement on the question of continuing to meet on a fortnightly basis, or moving to weekly meetings.

Comments in favour of maintaining a form of current arrangements

Those in favour of continuing with the current fortnightly schedule stressed that the change from weekly meetings had been brought in as a result of pressure from Members to their Business Managers because the Fifth Senedd timetable was not working. Members said that those with childcare commitments simply did not have the time to attend weekly meetings of more than one committee.



Members also argued that they are able to spend more time on preparation for committee meetings within the current timetable. That is, reading time for published papers and briefing, and time to discuss the issues with stakeholders.

Members felt there is more room for slack in the system with fortnightly meetings. It has meant that it is easier to substitute for Members' sickness or absence across their political parties.

Members serving on two Committees felt that meeting more often would result in poorer preparation and increased absences, they felt that 'doing the job properly is impossible' with weekly meetings, especially when attending more than one committee.

Members also wanted to stress the importance of the need for more Members in the Senedd, and wanted this to be fed into the work of the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform.

As previously outlined to Business Committee, with an increased remit and less time for meeting, Members would like more time to undertake their work. As such, Members would like the option of holding longer meetings and organising committee visits during their meeting slot. Currently, meeting on Wednesdays precludes this. Members would like to alternate with meetings on Wednesdays and Thursdays to allow for a longer meeting time, every other meeting.

Comments in favour of returning to weekly meetings

Most Members were in favour of holding fortnightly meetings, but there was a feeling from some Members that the current timetable does not allow for sufficient scrutiny of the Welsh Government, and that the effect of this is magnified in this particular committee due to the size of its remit.

Those Members agreed on the need to balance work and family life, but said that the current way of working has resulted in more insular and superficial committee work. For instance, due to the restricted time, there is no opportunity to go "beyond the Bay" at the moment.

Those Members also commented that timetabling has been overcomplicated in this Senedd. This has resulted in a less open way of working which could diminish the impact and standing of the Committee.

Conclusions:

- The Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee (CCWLSIR) would welcome a change to the committee timetable which would facilitate an all-day meeting, for instance, a meeting slot on a Monday or Thursday.
- If there is no scope for the CCWLSIR Committee to move to an all-day slot, the Business Committee should consider alternating committee meetings for committees that meet on Wednesdays with Thursday slots so that there is scope for extending meetings into the afternoon and organising visits.

- The Business Committee should feed in to the work of the Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform on the need for more Members to deal with the committee workload.

Remit

Two subject areas have been added to the 'predecessor' committee in the Fifth Senedd: sport and international relations.

Members felt that the current remit did not allow for sufficient scrutiny of Ministerial responsibilities. The broader remit and the reduced timetable may give rise to a lack of sufficient oversight of policy implementation in all areas, but Members wished to highlight international relations in particular.

The international relations remit was under the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee in the previous Senedd term. This allowed for regular scrutiny of the then Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language.

This Senedd term it comes under the First Minister's portfolio. The First Minister is understandably busy dealing with the need to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. This has meant that his first appearance before Committee was for Budget scrutiny in the Spring Term of 2022. It should be noted that the Committee did receive a private briefing from Welsh Government officials, but this does not amount to scrutiny of ministerial responsibility.

The Committee are concerned that the fortnightly timetable and the pressing demands on the First Minister's time mean that this area, which is crucial in raising Wales' standing internationally following Brexit, will not be sufficiently covered.

In reply to a request for annual scrutiny sessions with the Committee, the First Minister said that he is scrutinised on all areas of his responsibility in the Scrutiny of the First Minister Committee. However, the Chair of our Committee does not attend that Committee. The scrutiny in those meetings is also organised thematically, making it harder to ensure the international relations remit receives the attention it deserves.

Conclusion:

- The Business Committee should urge the First Minister to agree to an annual scrutiny session with the CCWLSIR Committee.

Ways of working

Again, there was no agreed view concerning ways of working. There was support for more flexible working, including use of hybrid (in person and Zoom video conference) meetings. Members commented that virtual meetings allowed them to do far more with their limited time.

However, there was also a view that virtual meetings do not allow for a diversity of voices and have far less impact, and that this could be mitigated by holding more meetings outside of the

Senedd building. Those Members expressing that view said that effective scrutiny, particularly of Ministers, is best done in person, in a Senedd Committee room.

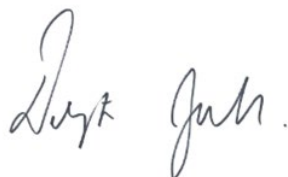
Stakeholders have commented, in passing, that holding virtual meetings is a 'game-changer' and that 'there is no going back'. The stakeholders were based in north Wales and wanted to highlight the cost saving in terms of travel time and back filling of the work of representatives who travel to Cardiff for committee appearances. They also stressed that there was a considerable impact on their organisations even if representatives from south Wales attended meetings in person, which results in the absence of a staff member for the minimum of a whole morning.

Conclusion:

- The Business Committee should seek the views of stakeholders on the committee timetable, committee remits and ways of working.

I would be grateful if you could keep the Committee informed of any changes to the timetable and remit in good time. I am concerned that implementing changes before the Summer term would not allow sufficient lead-in time for organising witness appearances and committee visits.

Yours sincerely,



Delyth Jewell MS

Chair of the Culture, Communication, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

Elin Jones MS

Llywydd and Chair of the Business Committee

2 February 2022

Dear Elin,

Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

Thank you for your letter regarding the above review. We considered our response on 24 January 2022 and wish to set out the following views and observations.

The committee timetable

From the outset we have sought to manage peaks and troughs in our workload pragmatically through a combination of additional meetings, alternative evidence-gathering methods, and informal meetings. Furthermore, we have operated on the basis that Members of the Committee will keep Monday afternoons in the “off-weeks” provisionally free for committee activities as and when business requires. In the last term and the current term to date, the Committee sought two additional meetings, and scheduled a further four informal meetings to supplement our timetabled allocation. The Business Committee has been sighted on the additional formal meetings and the reasons for them but to aid the evidence base for your review, further details of these can be found in Annex A.

In terms of ‘protected weeks’ we would highlight that these are creating unnecessary and unhelpful gaps in the scheduling of committee work. These gaps can be particularly challenging in the context of the timetables for legislative scrutiny, particularly scrutiny of Legislative Consent Memoranda. Furthermore, it should be noted, for example, that our first request for an additional meeting was based solely on the gap created between the 4 October and 1 November 2021 meetings by the ‘protected week’. We therefore request that consideration be given either to discontinuing the practice of ‘protected weeks’ and instead have “protected Thursdays” so that our Committee can be allocated a routine Monday afternoon slot in the protected weeks.

We agree that the current fortnightly pattern of meetings works adequately as long as Members are willing to agree to the pragmatic approach that we have adopted and subject to the Business Committee continuing its cooperative approach to agreeing additional meetings as and when

required. We would like to see the current fortnightly pattern of Monday afternoons for meetings of the Equality and Social Justice Committee retained, provided that our request regarding 'protected weeks' is addressed as part of the review.

More broadly as the Senedd committee with responsibility for equality, we believe that it is important to emphasise the principle of flexibility within the timetable while also ensuring a balance between Members committee; Plenary; and constituency commitments. If we are to meet our aspirations to being a truly "family-friendly" Parliament then this review should as a minimum emphasise not only the need for striking an appropriate balance between Member commitments but also protect Fridays and Recess as non-business days other than in exceptional circumstances.

Remits

Finally, we agree that our remit is working well, although we would like to reiterate that equality, social justice, and the well-being of future generations are not the preserve of one committee alone, but are the responsibility of all. With regards to the well-being of future generations in particular, we have already begun to raise these issues up the agenda via a joint-debate with the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee; and an introductory briefing session, open to and attended by the Chairs of other Senedd committees with the Future Generations Commissioner in December. We will continue to champion these issues in the Sixth Senedd and look forward to working with colleagues in that regard.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Rathbone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'J'.

Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

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



Annex A

A summary is provided below of the date, type and purpose of any meetings held by the Equality and Social Justice Committee which are additional to the Committee's timetabled allocation.

Date	Type	Purpose
15 September 2021	Informal meeting	Strategic planning session.
20 October 2021	Additional formal meeting	Ministerial evidence session to conclude the inquiry into debt and the pandemic necessitated by the gap created between the Committee's meeting on 4 October and 1 November.
22 November 2021	Informal meeting	To hold roundtable discussions with stakeholders as part of the childcare and parental employment inquiry.
6 December 2021	Informal meeting	Introductory briefing session with Future Generations Commissioner.
17 January 2022	Informal meeting	Forward work programme and planning session.
14 February 2022	Additional formal meeting	To accommodate additional evidence-gathering sessions as part of the Committee's inquiry into fuel poverty necessitated by the gap created between the Committee's meeting on 7 February and 7 March.

Llywydd
Chair, Business Committee

02 February 2022

Dear Elin

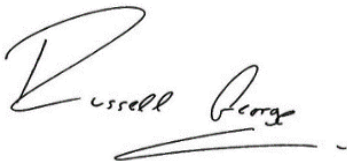
Business Committee review of committee timetable and remits

Thank you for your letter of 7 January 2022 seeking the views of the Health and Social Care Committee to inform Business Committee's review of the committee timetable and remits.

The HSC Committee discussed the review on 27 January 2022. Our views are summarised in annex 1.

In addition, as you will recall I wrote to you on 16 August 2021 setting out the HSC Committee's initial views on the committee timetable (annex 2). HSC members still hold these views, and I would be grateful if they could be taken into account during your review.

Yours sincerely



Russell George MS

Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

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

Annex 1: response to the Business Committee review

Committee timetable

Fortnightly slots and protected weeks

1. The impact of the combination of fortnightly meetings and two protected weeks per term has been significant. For example, the allocation to the HSC Committee of just four meeting slots between April and July 2022 severely limits our capacity to hold more than one inquiry during the summer term.
2. While we use our meeting time as efficiently as possible—for example we repurposed time within a pre-arranged budget scrutiny evidence session on 13 January 2022 to ask topical questions of the Minister about the evolving public health situation—the allocation of fortnightly meeting slots constrains our ability to respond quickly to fast-moving events by limiting the flexibility available to us to rearrange scheduled business without a significant impact on its timeliness.
3. With fewer slots and gaps of up to four weeks between meetings,¹ we have been less able to accommodate stakeholder availability or other factors when planning our work. For example:
 - The health and social care sectors are under significant pressure, and we would have liked to be accommodating when scheduling oral evidence sessions and setting deadlines for written evidence. However, the current timetable has limited the flexibility we have been able to offer without affecting the timeliness and relevance of our scrutiny activity.
 - We issued an invitation to Ministers in December 2021 for an evidence session on 10 March 2022, but were told the Ministers had pre-existing diary commitments. With weekly meetings, we would have had a number of alternatives to offer. Within the fortnightly cycle we have had to delay the session by two weeks, with corresponding implications for the timing of our report and the business previously scheduled for that date.
 - We have discretion over whether to hold pre-appointment hearings for a number of important senior leadership roles in the health and social care sector. However, the Welsh Government's recruitment timescales for such hearings do not take account of the committee timetable or our work programme. With fewer meetings allocated to us, the

¹ For example the combination of a non-meeting week, a protected week and half term recess meant that we had no scheduled meeting between 7 October and 4 November. To avoid unnecessary delay in the development of our strategic plan we agreed to hold an informal planning session during the protected week. However, this was only possible because the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister decided not to meet in its slot on 21 October. Otherwise there would not have been a suitable time available during the protected week that all Committee members were available.

potential to hold these important hearings without disruption to our work programme or seeking additional meeting slots is limited.

- It is not clear to what extent the Business Committee takes account of the committee timetable when setting LCM reporting deadlines. We have had to request extensions to the deadline for two LCMs with original deadlines set for committee meeting dates, which severely limited the time available to gather and consider evidence before reporting. We are grateful that our requests were agreed, but the initial uncertainty about the time available to us is not helpful when we are planning our scrutiny approach, and it takes administrative time to resolve.

4. Members aim to prioritise Committee work. However, there are times when missing a meeting is unavoidable, for example because of illness. In a fortnightly timetable, missing a single meeting can mean that for that Member there is a month or more between formal committee meetings.

Additional meeting slots

5. We welcome the Business Committee's willingness to consider and accommodate requests for additional committee slots. However, the need to revert to the Business Committee to make such requests, and wait for a decision to be made, hinders our ability to plan our work effectively. This is because at the time that we consider the potential scope of our work, and how to prioritise our time and the resources available to us, we do not have certainty about the formal meeting time that we have available. This is further exacerbated by the fortnightly timetable and number of protected weeks, as even if the Business Committee considers and agrees any requests the week following our meeting, the earliest opportunity that we have to discuss at a meeting the implications of the decision will be, at best, the week after that.

6. In addition, the extent to which the flexibility the Business Committee has intended to provide can be realised is limited by the specific pattern of Members' other commitments. We are aware that the members of some committees have no other formal commitments in their committees' non-meeting weeks, creating significant flexibility to undertake additional activity should it be required. Such flexibility is not available to HSC members. Our members include two Commissioners, the chair of a committee that meets on Mondays, members of committees meeting in almost all other meeting slots in the standard timetable, and members of committees that meet in protected weeks, including the Llywydd's Committee and the Scrutiny of the First Minister Committee.

Pacing of inquiry work

7. The fortnightly timetable has had a mixed impact on the pacing of our work. On the positive side, we and our researchers are more able to reflect evidence from one meeting (whether a formal evidence session or other committee activity) at the next meeting (although we note that this can also

be achieved within a weekly timetable through appropriate programming of work on concurrent inquiries).

8. On the other hand, inquiries for which formal oral evidence sessions are the most appropriate evidence-gathering mechanism can take much longer to complete. For some inquiries this will be beneficial, as there may be opportunities for complementary engagement activity or other work to be conducted alongside oral evidence sessions. However, it may also risk evidence gathered at the start of an inquiry becoming outdated. This would be particularly problematic for work that is intended to be topical, or which takes place in a fast-moving policy or legislative context.

Preparation for meetings

9. The effective conduct of our business requires time for Members to prepare. In addition to Members' own reading, research and discussions with stakeholders, Members need time to read and reflect on the evidence papers, correspondence, papers for formally noting, and briefings circulated by Committee officials in advance of each meeting. With less frequent and longer meetings, even if the overall volume of business were to stay the same, the volume for each individual meeting may be greater. The result is that preparation has to be concentrated into the week ahead of the single fortnightly meeting, rather than being spaced out over two weeks.

Private committee business

10. To date during the Sixth Senedd, in addition to developing our strategic approach and establishing a robust and impactful work programme, we have scrutinised two LCMs, a supplementary LCM and three common frameworks, as well as beginning several inquiries and holding a number of one-off sessions.

11. The majority of our allocated committee slots have been used to gather evidence or conduct scrutiny. However, to be effective, we also need sufficient time to discuss and agree matters relating to the internal business of the Committee, such as developing our forward work programme, agreeing the scope and approach to committee work, reflecting on the evidence we have heard, and deliberating on potential conclusions and recommendations.

12. With fewer allocated meetings, there is greater pressure on the time available for such business. On more than one occasion, to avoid a delay of up to two weeks before the next formal meeting, we have had to consider and agree matters circulated by email outside of formal meetings. This limits opportunities for discussion, and has implications for the transparency of our work.

Conclusions

The HSC Committee should be allocated weekly slots within the committee timetable. Our preference would be to adopt a model similar to that used during the Fifth Senedd i.e. alternating weekly allocations of a half day and a full day meeting slot, providing one and a half days of meeting time

per fortnight. We believe this model worked well, giving flexibility to committees to decide how best to make use of allocated meeting slots for formal or informal activity as required by the work they are undertaking.

Should this model be adopted, we do not necessarily object to the retention of two protected weeks per term. However, if the current fortnightly timetable is retained, protected weeks should either be removed from the timetable, or reduced to a maximum of one per term.

The review should recognise that the flexibility available to different committees in respect of additional formal or informal committee activity varies across committees depending on their memberships.

When setting the reporting deadlines for LCM scrutiny, the Business Committee should take greater account of the interaction of reporting deadlines with the committee timetable. If the current fortnightly timetable is retained, the Business Committee should avoid, as far as possible, setting LCM reporting deadlines during weeks in which the relevant committee is meeting.

Committee remits

13. We are content with our remit as agreed by the Senedd in July 2021.

14. There are overlaps with the remits of other committees, most notably the Children, Young People and Education Committee in respect of children and young people's physical and mental health and social care, although also with other Senedd committees in respect of matters such as the wider determinants of health inequalities. For this reason we have been proactive in identifying opportunities for coordination and collaboration with other committees. To date, this has included:

- Periodic meetings between the Chairs of the HSC and CYPE Committees.
- For our scrutiny of the Welsh Government's draft budget, agreeing with the CYPE Committee to coordinate the timing of our oral evidence session invitations for Ministers, and to share information and briefings with one another.
- Sharing information with the CYPE and Equality and Social Justice Committee about our inquiry into mental health inequalities, and committing to identifying opportunities for joint working throughout the inquiry.
- Issuing a joint targeted call for evidence with the CYPE Committee on the LCM for the Nationality and Borders Bill.

15. We recognise that the intention of allocating the same meeting slot to the HSC and CYPE Committees was to facilitate joint working. However, our view is that within the context of a fortnightly timetable sharing a slot actually hinders joint working. Holding full joint meetings of the two

Committees is challenging as a result of the lack of flexibility in work programmes and the pressure on meeting times, and may also not always be a proportionate approach. For example, if participation in formal meetings is required, it may be more proportionate for a small number of Members to attend the other Committee in a rapporteur capacity under Standing Order 17.49, but this is not possible when the two Committees share slots.

16. We are also aware that the shared slot can present challenges for our integrated teams, as there have been occasions when we and the CYPE Committee have made competing calls on the expertise of particular researchers to support sessions taking place on the same day.

Conclusions

Committees with significantly overlapping remits, such as HSC and CYPE, should not be allocated the same slot within the committee timetable.

Evaluation and effectiveness of scrutiny

Impact and effectiveness of Senedd committees

17. We note that in your letter you state that:

"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".

18. Our view is that to deliver high quality and effective scrutiny, the approach we take to evidence gathering and conducting our business must be shaped by and tailored to the nature of the business we are conducting, and the most appropriate methods for the people or organisations from whom we are gathering evidence.

19. For some committee business and witnesses, formal oral evidence will be the most appropriate approach; for others, informal activity will be more suitable. For this reason, our work programme during the Sixth Senedd will continue to include a blend of formal and informal activity. Already in this Senedd we have:

- Held formal evidence gathering and scrutiny sessions with a wide range of stakeholders and the Welsh Government.
- Used formal meeting slots to receive a public update from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Chief Scientific Adviser for Health and the Welsh Government's Technical Advisory Cell, and to hold private discussions with academics with expertise in COVID-19 recovery.

- Held an informal Committee strategy development and planning meeting, and agreed that once the public health situation allows we will build visits into our work programme.
- Issued a number of general and targeted calls for written evidence, including a rolling call for evidence relating to COVID-19 and a proforma for views on key priorities for the Sixth Senedd.
- Commissioned in depth interviews and focus groups with people affected by the NHS waiting times backlog, and focus groups with people and communities most likely to be affected by mental health inequalities and least likely to respond to formal calls for evidence.
- Developed social media and digital engagement campaigns to raise awareness of our work on mental health inequalities, and reach beyond our usual audiences.

20. However, whether we use them for formal oral evidence sessions or to conduct other types of activity, timetabled committee slots are fundamental in ensuring that Members have sufficient time and opportunity to gather evidence and hold the Welsh Government to account transparently.

Approach to evaluating the impact of committee work

21. As we state in our strategy for the Sixth Senedd, “our role is to drive change through influencing the Welsh Government and the health and social care sector”.² In addition to highlighting key priority areas of focus over the next five years, our strategy sets out our shared vision for health and social care in the next five years, and identifies how we will approach our role in driving the change we want to see.

22. Our strategy will guide and shape our work, without constraining our ability to be flexible and respond to emerging issues. When taking decisions on our forward work programme, or on the scope and approach to specific pieces of work, we consider how individual proposals align with and contribute to achieving our objectives. We have also committed to put time aside periodically to reflect on the progress that has been made towards achieving our overarching vision, the contribution that we have made, and what further actions we could take to drive progress.

23. We look forward during the Sixth Senedd to sharing innovation and good practice across committees, via the Chairs’ Forum and other mechanisms, and to working jointly with other committees where it is possible and adds value.

24. We are aware that the Chairs’ Forum is considering the recommendations made by Professor Stirbu, including her proposed theory of change model for assessing the impact and effectiveness of

² Health and Social Care Committee, *Sixth Senedd strategy*, December 2021, p.3

committee work, and her recommendation that hearing lived experience should become more central to the work of committees. We look forward to hearing more on the response to the recommendations via the Chairs' Forum in due course, including what steps will be taken to ensure that committees are able to access the right resources, skills and capacity.

Review methodology and implementation of review outcomes

25. We welcome the review of the timetable, and the assurance that the Chairs' Forum will be consulted on Business Committee's proposals before they are finalised. The approach to the review is a matter for the Business Committee. However, we offer some observations:

- Statistical data relating to the autumn term about the number or length of meetings, or the use to which specific meetings have been put, may not necessarily be representative of the level or nature of Sixth Senedd committee business. For example, as we had only one meeting before the summer recess, much of our business during the early part of the autumn term was preparatory in nature, informing the identification of our priorities and the development of our strategy.
- Statistical data on formal activity may not reflect either informal committee activity, for example the strategic planning session we held on 21 October 2021 or time spent considering and agreeing matters outside of committee where this has been required. It will also not reflect the time Members spend preparing for or reflecting on committee activity, including reading meeting papers, conducting their own wider research and reading, preparing their own questions or reflecting on evidence they have heard.
- The Business Committee envisages implementing any changes resulting from the review with effect from the start of the summer term. The feasibility of these timescales will need to be assessed once the nature of any changes has been identified.
- To date, there is limited information in the public domain about the Business Committee's review of the committee timetable and remits.

Conclusions

While a useful part of the evidence base, statistical data about committee activity must be considered within the context of the phase of committee activity to which it relates.

The approach to implementing any changes resulting from the review should be discussed by the Business Committee and the Chairs' Forum in order to mitigate and minimise the disruption associated with any transition period.

Business Committee should ensure that, following the review, it clearly and effectively communicates the outcome both within and outwith the Senedd. This should include explaining how the review has been conducted and the rationale for either maintaining the status quo or making any changes. It should also include the publication of the evidence upon which decisions have been based.

Annex 2: letter from Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee to the Business Committee, 16 August 2021

**Y Pwyllgor Iechyd a
Gofal Cymdeithasol**

**Health and Social Care
Committee**

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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



**Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament**

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

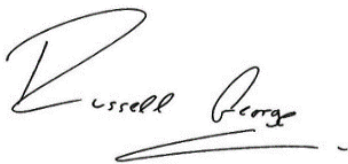
We welcome the potential opportunities that sharing a meeting slot with the CYPE Committee provides in terms of joint working on areas of mutual interest. However, while the two committees will

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 that reads "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.

**Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd,
yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith**

—
**Climate Change, Environment,
and Infrastructure Committee**

Elin Jones MS
Llywydd

3 February 2022

Dear Llywydd

Thank you for your letter of 7 January in which you request feedback to inform the Business Committee's review of Senedd committee remits and the timetable of meetings. The Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee considered your letter in its meeting on 20 January and agreed that I should respond as follows.

The Senedd is a small parliament with approximately 45 Senedd members to populate its committee system. Inevitably, there will be challenges in striking the right balance between bolstering the capacity of the committee system and ensuring the members who make up that system can contribute in a meaningful way. Ideally, there might be more committees meeting more frequently. However, this would compromise individual members' capacity. There is a limit to what can be achieved realistically with the current number of Senedd members.

As a Committee, we believe that despite the constraints under which we and the system are operating, we have been able to prioritise our work to ensure that the matters that fall within our remit can be considered in the time that is available to us.

We believe the current timetable offers some advantages, including the ability for the Committee to use a whole day of meetings to immerse itself in a policy area. We recognise, however, that not all committees meet in this pattern. We also believe that the flexible approach taken by the Business Committee to additional meetings has been positive. It will need to continue to respond to business, such as Senedd Bills. We would be grateful if the Business Committee could consider its approach to setting deadlines for the work it remits to committees. It should ensure that the time available reflects the limitations of the overall timetable, such as the frequency of meetings.

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In terms of committee remits, we note there is an overlap in aspects of the remits of several committees, which risks some policy areas "falling through the gaps". The Business Committee should consider how better coordination of committee work programmes can be ensured to identify not only gaps but also potential synergies. In a similar vein, we believe the Business Committee should consider how to embed joint-working in the work of Senedd Committees – currently, arrangements are ad hoc and not as efficient as they could be.

Overall, we believe it is too soon to make fundamental changes to the committee timetable or committee remits. We have just started the third term of this Senedd; the committee system has been in place for less than two of them. Moreover, the system has mainly existed in a virtual world – it will face new challenges as committees transition to meeting in hybrid formats more regularly or in-person. It would be prudent for the Business Committee to delay any fundamental changes until it has a greater understanding of the nature of these challenges.

Yours sincerely,



Llyr Gruffydd MS,
Chair, Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Elin Jones MS
Llywydd

03 February 2022

Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

Dear Elin,

Thank you for your letter dated 7 January 2022 seeking our views on the review of committee timetable and remits. We discussed this letter at our meeting on 20 January.

We note that you do not expect committees to consult with stakeholders. As part of our consultation on the Committee's priorities over the summer recess, the FSB provided their views on the timetable, which is enclosed.

Timetable – status quo

To what extent does the current approach to the committee timetable provide sufficient time for committees to undertake their work effectively?

As the Committee tasked with the first Stage 1 scrutiny of the 6th Senedd, we believe we bring an important perspective on how effectively the current timetable can accommodate work with timeframes which are outside of the Committee's control.

It is worth noting that the introduction of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill came at the same time as other core activity, where we had limited discretion on when it could be done:

- Annual scrutiny of Estyn;
- Annual scrutiny of the Children's Commissioner for Wales;
- Annual scrutiny of Qualifications Wales;
- Scrutiny of the Skills and Education LCM;
- Pre-appointment hearing for the preferred candidate for the next Children's Commissioner for Wales; and

- Scrutiny of the Welsh Government's draft budget.

This meant that we have had to request a number of additional meetings (five in total since October). All of our requests for have been agreed by Business Committee. Two of these requests were for meetings in one of the "protected" weeks.

In December, the volume of work meant that we had three meetings within the space of 10 days, two of which were lengthy, starting with pre-meetings before 9am and not finishing until later in the afternoon. They all had extensive Committee papers to accompany the meeting.

The current timetable therefore has provided us with the opportunity to undertake our work. However, this has only been because Business Committee agreed our requests for additional meetings and because we have used the maximum capacity of the slot allocated to us.

[To what extent does the current approach to the committee timetable provide sufficient flexibility to meet peaks in committee workloads and / or future business requirements for additional committee capacity?](#)

As noted above, there has been flexibility, but it has been dependent on Business Committee agreeing individual requests. The time involved that approval process can cause delays to finalising the forward work programme. Our current experience is that this has been manageable as it has been to accommodate business where we have advance notice (for example Bill scrutiny). However, we are aware that it could cause potential issues if we needed to meet urgently.

Additionally, if the meetings are outside the Committee's scheduled slot that can cause issues with members being able to attend, and general diary management. This is less of an issue when we know far enough in advance, but if issues arise unexpectedly, that could cause challenges. It is important for us to have certainty about committee meetings dates, to ensure we can plan and manage our workloads and diaries accordingly. (This also relates to the next question.)

[To what extent does the current approach to the committee timetable provide an appropriate balance between the time Members spend on committee work \(in and outside committee meetings\) and their wider responsibilities?](#)

Some of us sit on multiple committees, others only sit on this Committee. Therefore we have a range of experiences. As the question notes, it is important to consider that as well as the time spent in a Committee meeting, there is also the time spent preparing (which depending on the items being considered can be extensive) and time following up on matters after meetings.

In our discussions, we reflected on the challenges of long virtual meetings, and the impact that can have. We have primarily met virtually, although two of our meetings have been in a hybrid format. At the moment, we have been using the maximum of our slot more often than not, with most meetings starting with pre-meetings before 9, and usually running until at least 2:30pm, and on occasion past 3pm. We all noted the challenges that come with long virtual meetings, however, we acknowledged that the amount of core business meant that sometimes there was no other option.

We discussed that the challenges of long Committee meetings are different to long Plenary meetings, where Members may not attend or contribute to all items. However, the size of committees means that all members need to attend and actively engage in all business. This can be challenging, and due

to the wider responsibilities on Members, has meant that there have been times towards the end of meetings where we are only just quorate.

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?

On balance, after discussion, our preference would be to keep fortnightly committee meetings, but with the option to meet in the “off” weeks in the same scheduled slot, without the need to seek Business Committee agreement. We believe this would give us greater flexibility in how we schedule business, for example being able to adjust our business at a meeting, with short notice, which would enable us to respond to urgent or pressing business, or to ensure a better balance across our committee meetings and avoiding the challenges which can stem from meetings which can be up to six hours or longer.

Whatever changes are made to the timetable, we would want to ensure that it does not result in any reduction in time available to our Committee to undertake our work.

[If changes are to be made to the timetable, when should these changes be implemented?](#)

We note the challenges of deciding when best to implement any changes, and how that can take account of committees’ forward work programmes. There is a specific issue for us, as arrangements need to be made for Stage 2 proceedings for the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill. The dates need to be agreed before the Stage 1 debate in early March. We will be writing separately to the Business Committee on this matter, but we note that the current preferred dates both for the Committee and the Welsh Government is in line with our preferred model of working.

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.](#)

We are satisfied with the remit. One of our strategic priorities is to work with other Senedd committees, and so far, we have taken up opportunities to do this, even if it has not involved holding joint meetings.

We note that in the last Senedd, the previous Chair of the CYPE Committee sat on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. We understand that this was felt to be a particularly effective way of managing the shared areas of interest across the two committees. As we share the same Committee slot with the Health and Social Care Committee, this means there is no shared membership. Whilst we understand that putting both committees in the same slot was done with the intention of helping to facilitate more joint working across committees, in this instance, we note that it has actually made this more difficult. It has also caused logistical issues at certain points when both committees have been calling upon the same ministers at the same time (such as for budget scrutiny.)

I hope this information is helpful for the review, and we look forward to the findings.

Yours sincerely,

Jayne Bryant

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair

Enc: Letter from FSB, 25 August 2021

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Arbenigwyr mewn Busnes
Experts in Business

25 August 2021

Children, Education and Young People Committee
Senedd
Pierhead St,
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Dear Ms. Bryant

RE: Priorities for the Committee

FSB Wales is the authoritative voice of businesses in Wales, with around 10,000 members. It campaigns for a better social, political, and economic environment in which to work and do business. With a strong grassroots structure, a Wales Policy Unit and dedicated Welsh staff to deal with Welsh institutions, media and politicians, FSB Wales makes its members' voices heard at the heart of the decision-making process.

FSB welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's call for views on its priorities. Committees serve a vital role in providing scrutiny of the government, in providing a key role in influencing policy development, and as a constructive engagement point for evidence and understanding between the legislature and civil society, including our role in representing small businesses.

With continuing issues arising from Covid-19, the possibility of further disruptions, and the legacy of the damage the pandemic has wrought alongside the impetus to build an economic recovery, the role of committees will be of even more importance this term.

As such, insofar as possible, it is important that the Senedd's capacity and abilities are used to the full in this process, and that the structure allows committees – and their Chairs - to be agile and able to respond quickly to events this Winter, as well as in providing scrutiny and policy development for the challenges ahead. It is in the spirit of supporting this democratic process and committees as the engine room of Welsh democracy that we respond to this consultation.

The Committee covers areas of priority for FSB Wales and we look forward to working with you over the coming term.

Ways of Working

We note that the new Committees structure includes the following:

- The Sixth Senedd has for the moment opted for smaller membership in committees (4-6).
- This should allow members to build more specialism, but at the cost of more diverse voices in each committee (as was the case with larger committees).
- It is important to push for the advantages of building focused specialism is nurtured and maximised, but the diversity and small pool is mitigated (e.g., through cross-committee working).



Arbenigwyr mewn Busnes
Experts in Business

Potentially, this structure could allow for more agility which as there may well remain issues arising requiring quick reaction, policy response and scrutiny over the next period, could be extremely useful. This would require significant autonomy for committees to pursue their own path and ways of working.

However, the decision has also been taken to cut the number of committee meetings to be fortnightly rather than weekly.

- Smaller committees should allow MSs being able to populate across them better, but fewer meetings do not seem to add value in this respect.
- There are also dangers to scrutiny and policy development – the role of scrutiny (legislative and non-legislative) as we open up after Covid is important, with myriad issues across all policy areas important. Committees have an important role in this respect and halving the time for scrutiny in a stroke makes little sense. This is a particular issue for small business issues, as we are concerned that vital areas of economic recovery may not be properly addressed or scrutinised.
- There is a danger that the pressure will force committees to focus on necessary legislative scrutiny alone, while relegating wider scrutiny and policy inquiries to the margins (including on business issues and day to day issues around Covid, for example).
- Some committees have wide and disparate subject areas, and there is a danger that whole policy areas will be relegated to the side-lines.
- As well as being the engine room of democratic scrutiny of Government, committees are a vital interface for contact and policy evidence from civil society – there is a danger that the pool of evidence is further narrowed, and a focus is on the narrower ‘usual suspects’ providing evidence posing a danger of group-think and less diverse views being taken in oral evidence.
- As noted above, committees will need to be agile in continuing to respond to Covid and the various issues raised by the pandemic will continue to impact for the Senedd term. These limits on their work may mitigate against that and undermine responsive policy development and scrutiny. As such, it makes sense to allow autonomy for Committees to pursue their own ways of working, including additional meeting and inquiries. As such, the two-week meetings should be seen as a baseline rather than a ceiling for activity and scrutiny.

Cross-committee working will be vital to mitigate against small committees meaning a greater focus but a danger of silo working and loss of diverse offices bringing in a range of policy field lenses and understanding how they intersect. We therefore encourage cross committee inquiries as a minimum (and suggestions later in paper on subjects that span committees).

It is also possible to look at ways as a regular way of working and ensuring policy span through MSs from different committees could sit as non-voting ‘guests’ or bringing committee expertise and lens to particular meetings (e.g., climate change members sitting in on discussions on housing capital spending policy).

This way of working will also be important in terms of scrutiny of the substance and operation of Welsh Government – through the Climate Change Ministry as a central organising department looking to ensure cross departmental and holistic working, it is important that Senedd is able to mirror this and provide adequate scrutiny across policy areas accordingly.



Arbenigwyr mewn Busnes
Experts in Business

Business concerns sit across many departments, and within intersecting policy subjects so cross-committee working is important for FSB and our members.

Recommendations

- *That committees are allowed freedom (as decided unanimously by all their members) to look at the fortnightly meetings as a baseline and so can organise more meetings as suits them or for specific inquiries.*
- *We would urge a view to cross committee working on intersecting subject areas and inquiries – and that these can be on top of the fortnightly meetings.*
- *To mitigate against small committees being a small pool we would urge that committees can co-opt other MSs (including possibly spokespeople retain a right to attend and question) as non-voting members for individual sessions, and to be encouraged and incentivised to do so. These could also be as members of other committees to encourage cross sectoral views.*
- *It is vital, with continuing uncertainty on Covid over the Winter months (as well as ongoing issues and its legacy) that Committees are able to react with agility to raise issues, conduct inquiries and scrutinise reactively and quickly as needed. Committees and their Chairs should be able to do this with as much autonomy as possible over their schedules and ways of working (with necessary checks of unanimity in committee as appropriate).*

FSB's key policy areas of work for the Committee

A key area of work here is scrutiny and policy development around the *Guarantee of Offer for Education, Employment or Training to under 25s* in the Programme for Government. Currently we are not aware of greater detail. It is important for our members to understand if this is to be a meaningful offer how it relates to training and apprenticeships and how any scheme would be easily accessed and used by SMEs across the whole of Wales, in order to ensure that opportunities are available to young people and to businesses with proper support.

The role of entrepreneurship in education, how it aligns with the wider curriculum and its aims of making 'informed and critical citizens' is an ongoing interest, as well as how we understand the changing needs of the next generation of young entrepreneurs and business support mechanisms required to help provide opportunities for them. The role of work-related experiences and the practical experiential side of education, as well as the fostering of key skills is also a key concern for SMEs, and in future entrepreneurship.

FSB have upcoming work on Generation Z entrepreneurship, which we will share with the committee when available.

Subject areas for Joint working with other committees

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Arbenigwyr mewn Busnes
Experts in Business

Our suggestions above advocate a dynamic and agile role in co-working and cross committee working, utilising all the backbench capacity and capabilities as much as possible, and reducing possible silos in policy scrutiny and development. The following list gives some indications of possible areas of work, although this is not exhaustive list, and priorities will be necessarily shaped by wider issues of Welsh Government priorities and external factors such as Covid-19 and Brexit. Working iteratively with other committees will also shape framing of subject areas, and we believe this would generally be positive for inquiries and scrutiny.

Subject area	Possible partner committee(s)
<i>Implications and opportunities of Guarantee of Offer for Education, Employment or Training to under 25s</i>	Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee
Entrepreneurship and Young People – including Business Support, Entrepreneurship in Education and next generation of entrepreneurs	Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

FSB Wales would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue with your officials, should you deem it useful.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Cottam
Head of Wales
FSB

Elin Jones MS
Y Llywydd
Chair, Business Committee

1 February 2022

Annwyl Lywydd,

Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

Thank you for your letter of 7 January inviting the Committee to respond to the Business Committee review, which we discussed at our meeting on 21 January.

Current arrangements

The current timetable allocates our Committee a fortnightly meeting slot on a Wednesday morning. We have been allocated and made use of 10 meeting slots between September 2021 and Easter recess 2022, and business has been scheduled for the full duration of each. To date, we have also held two additional meetings in that timeframe. If the current model continues into the summer term, we will have four scheduled meetings between Easter and summer recess: 4 May, 18 May, 15 June and 29 June.

There was general agreement among Members that the current timetable does not enable us to allocate sufficient time for each workstream. Members commented that our sessions seem rushed as we need to fit a heavy workload of public and private business into a short amount of meeting time. To date, we have only been able to begin one policy inquiry alongside scrutiny of LCMs and the draft budget. We are concerned that the fortnightly meeting cycle will result in us being able to complete fewer policy inquiries, particularly as we will always need to factor in budget and legislative scrutiny.

Recurring Wednesday meetings

We feel that our meeting time is particularly constrained by the fact we meet on Wednesday mornings, which means we have no flexibility to meet beyond 12:30 due to Plenary commitments. We are also concerned that meeting on Wednesday mornings will restrict our ability to undertake external

engagement activities, such as visits or off-site formal meetings. Whilst we appreciate that such activities have been suspended due to Covid restrictions, we are concerned that, even when restrictions are lifted, our options will be limited to visiting areas that are close enough to Cardiff Bay to enable Members to attend Plenary. This is not an issue for policy and legislation committees that meet on a Thursday and have longer meeting slots. A possible solution would be to alternate the meeting slots of all policy and legislation committees between Wednesdays and Thursdays; giving each committee an opportunity to hold longer meetings when necessary and ensure equality across all remits. Although we do not believe it would be necessary to meet every Thursday, we would welcome the additional options and flexibility this option would bring. We would be grateful if the Business Committee could consider an alternate Wednesday/Thursday model for all policy and legislation committees, regardless of whether we move to a weekly cycle or remain fortnightly.

Standing Order obligations

To date, we have been able to fulfil our standing order responsibilities within the current timetable. We have reported on three LCMs, although on one occasion it was necessary to request an additional meeting and an extension from Business Committee. Despite fulfilling our responsibilities, the fortnightly meeting cycle has sometimes been extremely challenging with the deadlines and meeting dates not being aligned. We believe that the amount of time we have been able to allocate to each LCM is insufficient to undertake effective scrutiny. Should the fortnightly meeting cycle continue, we believe that when remitting LCMs to committees, the Business Committee should consider the number of meetings available to those committees to meaningfully scrutinise the LCM and to agree their reports. If a committee has only two meetings to consider an LCM, it would be helpful to avoid the reporting deadline falling on the day after the second meeting in order to allow sufficient time to finalise the report and factor in time for translation etc.

Scrutiny of primary legislation

We have not yet been remitted any primary legislation for scrutiny, however we expect multiple Bills to be remitted to our Committee during this Senedd term. We are mindful there are normally tight timescales for each scrutiny stage of a Bill, therefore it is likely that several additional meetings would be required at stages 1 and 2. We are aware that committees who have been remitted primary legislation for scrutiny in this Senedd have been granted additional meeting slots by the Business Committee. We therefore expect, should the current arrangements of fortnightly meetings continue, that the Business Committee would look favourably on requests for additional meetings.

Protected weeks

The scheduling of "protected weeks" immediately prior to recesses has further reduced our meeting time, having twice resulted in a gap of four weeks between committee meetings. Should the pattern of fortnightly meetings and protected weeks continue into the summer term, we would have a gap of

six weeks between our scheduled meetings. We believe that such a large gap between meetings is uncondusive to the effectiveness of committees. Whilst we appreciate that routinely scheduling more time for each committee may cause difficulties for Members who sit on multiple committees, a compromise could be the removal of the protected weeks to avoid long periods between meetings. We would be grateful if this option could be considered by the Business Committee.

Additional meetings

Our ability to hold additional meetings has been constrained by membership clashes with other committees and a restriction on the maximum number of virtual/hybrid meetings that can be held simultaneously. The only realistic times available to us to hold additional meetings are Monday mornings and Fridays, which impact on Members' constituency time. We have therefore only held additional meetings when it has been absolutely necessary to do so.

Hybrid meetings

The use of Zoom has demonstrated the ability of committees to meet even when the strictest restrictions were in place. The benefits of using this technology are clear in enabling greater flexibility and convenience for Members and stakeholders to participate in proceedings, and we would support the continuation of this approach. We appreciate there are currently technological constraints preventing more than two hybrid committee meeting happening at the same time, however given the likelihood of remote participation continuing even when restrictions are eased, we would like to see an increase in the number of simultaneous meetings the Senedd Commission can support. We understand that during the Fifth Senedd, up to four committees would routinely meet simultaneously; whilst we welcome the flexibility brought by hybrid meetings, we are concerned that this should not be an obstacle to providing committees with sufficient time to undertake their work.

Conclusion

To conclude, the general feeling among Members of our Committee is that the current timetable does not enable us to discharge our functions as effectively as we would like. We strongly believe that we need a greater amount of meeting time in order to do justice to the varied policy areas within our remit and to be able to undertake meaningful legislative and financial scrutiny. We are grateful for the opportunity to feed into the review and hope the points we have raised are helpful.

Yours sincerely



John Griffiths MS
Chair

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



Elin Jones MS
Llywydd
Chair, Business Committee

4 February 12022

Dear Llywydd

Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

Thank you for your letter of 7 January 2022, which we considered at our meeting on 24 January 2022.

You will know that the Committee's remit is broad, essentially representing a merger between the Fifth Senedd's Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee and the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee, with the additional responsibility for scrutinising Consolidation Bills.

Since our establishment, we have spent the bulk of our time scrutinising subordinate legislation and legislative consent memoranda for UK Bills. On the former, it is worth noting that the Counsel General, in a letter to the Committee on 17 January 2021, noted that there were 384 statutory instruments made in 2021, compared to an average of 310 in the preceding 10 years. On the latter, we have been surprised at the volume of legislative consent memoranda being laid and, in a letter to you on 29 October 2021, we drew attention to some of our concerns on our ability to scrutinise these efficiently.

Even though we have a weekly meeting slot, we recognised at the outset that our remit would be demanding and adopted a way of working to accommodate the challenges we faced as a result. For example, we have been considering and then publishing regular monitoring reports to provide an assurance to stakeholders that we are routinely considering all aspects of our remit, and holding one-off evidence sessions (including with the Counsel General on a regular basis) to scrutinise specific issues of importance. These sessions are also being used to help inform possible future inquiries.

You will again be aware that the volume of legislative activity is not reducing and, in order to scrutinise all the legislation arising, we will continue to prioritise our consideration of other matters within the range of our remit.

Despite the challenges we face, and those more widely in the Senedd, we consider that our Committee is working well and that the various elements of our remit fit together logically.

We would however like to highlight that there may, on occasion, be the need to meet for longer, extending into Monday mornings or, subject to legislative pressures, on rare occasions meet more than once a week.

We would be happy to participate in future discussions should that be necessary.

Yours sincerely,

Huw Irranca-Davies

Huw Irranca-Davies
Chair

Llywydd, Chair Business Committee
Bv E-mail

Dyddiad | Date: 4 February 2022

Dear Llywydd,

The Standards of Conduct Committee considered your letter asking for view on the Committee timetable. The Committee agreed that its view remained the same as set out in our correspondence of 17 September (attached at annex A)

In our previous correspondence we expressed a concern about the practicality of the Monday morning Committee slot, as it appears to disproportionately impact on those Members not within a commuting distance to Cardiff when physical meetings are being held. We would welcome some assurance from the review therefore that the provision for virtual/hybrid meetings will continue for the foreseeable future and that if a decision was taken to only support in person meetings that further consideration be given to the use of Monday mornings.

Your Sincerely,



Vikki Howells MS
Chair

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



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Llywydd, Chair Business Committee

Bv E-mail

Dyddiad | Date: 17 September 2021

Dear Llywydd,

The Standards of Conduct Committee met on 13 September and discussed how we may like to meet in the future. We agreed that, where the consideration of a report from the Commissioner for Standards is required, we would like to be able to meet in person whenever possible. This is to accommodate the potentially complex and sensitive nature of these conversations.

The experience of the fifth Senedd Standards of Conduct Committee highlighted the need to for flexibility when dealing with complaint reports to ensure that matters are dealt with in a timely fashion. We would like to establish this position at the start of the Senedd to maintain maximum confidentiality in the process, rather than having to submit a request on a case by case basis.

As a general point, we do not consider the Monday morning Committee slot is particularly inclusive as it appears to disproportionately impact on those Members not within a commuting distance to Cardiff when physical meetings are being held.

When considering reports from the Commissioner for Standards in particular, we do not consider it appropriate to ask a Member who is subject to such a complaint and located outside of commuting distance from Cardiff, to attend on a Monday morning. This meeting slot would involve either travelling down the night before or very early on Monday, which would add additional pressure to an already stressful situation for the Member.

The Committee would therefore like to request permission to meet either on a Monday afternoon or Tuesday morning as necessary when considering these reports..

Your Sincerely,





Vikki Howells MS
Chair

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



Elin Jones MS
Chair, Business Committee
Senedd Cymru
CF99 1SN

Dyddiad | Date: 7 February 2022

Dear Business Committee

Response to consultation on the Committee timetable

Petitions Committee discussed our response to the consultation on 24 January.

The fortnightly schedule works well for formal meetings of the Petitions Committee. This has traditionally been the pattern for the committee, and is well suited to the high levels of incoming and outgoing correspondence.

We are grateful to Business Committee for granting our request earlier this year to move to a Monday afternoon slot. This slot has worked well for the Committee allowing us to meet in person when permitted, and virtually when necessary. Our strong preference would be to continue in this slot.

While the consideration of petitions forms the bedrock of the Committee's work, we have been keen to add value wherever possible. In addition to taking formal evidence, we have also captured the experience of petitioners through less formal means, and undertaken site-visits to see for ourselves the change petitioners are arguing for. We have also adapted our working practices to ensure that the Committee can focus its attention on petitions with public support, and where we feel we can make a difference.

It is the Committee's intention to visit petitioners – when circumstances allow – and some flexibility in any new schedule that would accommodate this would be welcome.

Yours sincerely



Jack Sargeant MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament