

# Inquiry into Dignity and Respect Consultation

November 2023

The Standards of Conduct Committee (the Committee) is undertaking an inquiry into Dignity and Respect.

The Senedd agreed dignity and respect policies in 2018 which set out the right for everyone to feel safe and protected when interacting with the Senedd. These policies applied to Members of the Senedd, their support staff and Commission staff. Alongside this, the Fifth Senedd Standards of Conduct Committee undertook an inquiry into 'Creating the Right Culture' which sought to make sure the culture in the Senedd was one which was positive and open.

Five years on from the work, the Committee is keen to review the progress made in this area, ensure the conversation in this area continues and consider whether further steps could be taken.

The Committee would welcome your views on the questions posed in this consultation and anything else on the topic that you consider relevant. Please submit your response by 22 January 2024 to [Seneddstandards@Senedd.wales](mailto:Seneddstandards@Senedd.wales).



## How to Respond

### Providing Written Evidence

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The Senedd has two official languages, Welsh and English.

In line with the [Senedd's Official Languages Scheme](#), the Committee welcomes contributions in both or either of our official languages, and we ask organisations that are subject to Welsh Language standards or schemes to respond in line with their own obligations. Please inform the Committee when submitting responses if you intend to provide a translation at a later date.

Please see [guidance for those providing evidence for committees](#).

If you wish to submit evidence, please submit a single document (preferably as a Word document) with any tables, spreadsheets and annexes incorporated into the paper of your submission to [Seneddstandards@Senedd.Wales](mailto:Seneddstandards@Senedd.Wales). Submissions should be no longer than five sides of A4, with numbered paragraphs.

Further guidance on preparing written evidence can be found on the [Senedd website](#).

If you wish your response to be treated anonymously or privately, please indicate in your accompanying email/letter.

The deadline for submissions is 5.00pm on **Monday 22 January 2024**.

### Disclosure of Information

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Before submitting information to the Committee, please ensure that you have considered the [Senedd's policy on disclosure of information](#). Alternatively, a hard copy of this policy can be requested by contacting the Committee Clerk (0300 200 6565) or [Seneddstandards@senedd.wales](mailto:Seneddstandards@senedd.wales)

# Inquiry into Dignity and Respect – Consultation

## Background

1. Dignity and Respect was last considered in detail by the Fifth Senedd Standards of Conduct Committee in its inquiry 'Creating the Right Culture: Ensuring the National Assembly is an exemplary place to work' in 2018. This inquiry was a result of a commitment signed by the Llywydd, political Party group leaders and the Standards of Conduct Committee to ensure an inclusive, positive and open working environment.
2. Alongside this inquiry, a dignity and respect policy<sup>1</sup> with accompanying guidance and processes was put in place, and it was agreed that the policy would be reviewed regularly.
3. The Senedd Commission (the Commission) has recently undertaken an internal review of the policy and produced a report (Annex A) which sets out the actions undertaken and makes a number of recommendations around enhancing the provisions for dignity and respect within the Senedd. The Committee has taken these recommendations as the starting point for this consultation.

## The Principle of Respect

4. The Dignity and Respect policy was based on a tri-partite approach which aimed to ensure that Members of the Senedd, Member support staff and Senedd Commission staff could be held to the same standards and by one policy.
5. The revision of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd saw the mainstreaming of the principles of dignity and respect into the standards expected of Members, through the inclusion of a principle of respect. This principle states:

*"Members must not behave in ways that reduce equality of opportunity, must always respect the dignity of other persons and must not engage in discriminatory or unwanted behaviour."*

6. The consultation undertaken by the Commission indicated the current tri-partite nature of the approach can be complicated and a source of duplication with other relevant policies and processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Senedd Dignity and Respect Policy.

**7.** It is therefore suggested to replace the current policy with an overarching declaration restating the commitment to uphold dignity and respect for Members, Member support staff, Commission staff and all other visitors.

**8.** The intention of this would be to make sure the expectations are clear and the routes of complaints are simplified e.g. a complaint against a Member would just be made against the expectations in the Code of Conduct without having to also refer to a different policy.

### **Reporting Mechanisms**

**9.** The information gathered by the Commission highlighted that the majority of respondents were aware of the policy, and how to access it, but the review found that signposting to the help and support available is not sufficient. Amongst Member support staff, 61.7% of respondees said that they would feel comfortable raising concerns using the existing process. This compares to 71.2% amongst Commission staff and to 81% amongst Members. Contact officers reported that the nature of their conversations are often about navigating the dignity and respect 'system'.

**10.** The Commission also found that the current formal mechanism provided by the Senedd to raise an issue involving a Member (to the Standards Commissioner) is seen by some as too consequential a process. Some support staff suggested that it would help to have clearer reporting mechanisms and support for staff who raise concerns. Several suggested that the system for reporting concerns about dignity and respect should be administered and run by an independent body.

The Committee is keen to know whether these views are reflected more widely about the policies and systems in place in the Senedd.

The Committee would like to hear your views on the following questions:

- Would you feel comfortable making a complaint about a Member of the Senedd or somebody who works on the Senedd estate? If not, why?
- Do you know how to make a complaint about a Member of the Senedd or somebody who works on the Senedd estate?
- Do you feel there are any barriers to you raising concerns about the inappropriate behaviour of a Member of the Senedd or somebody who works on the Senedd estate?

- Do you have any suggestions regarding how the complaints procedure could be improved?
  - Is the guidance clear? Is the language used simple to understand?
  - Does the document help you understand who you should contact about different types of complaints?
  - If you were a victim of inappropriate behaviour, would you feel confident in using the procedure as it currently stands?