

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y
Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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09 September 2025

Dear Elin,

Thank you for your letter of 8 July 2025 to the First Minister regarding the Chairs' Forum review of Committee Effectiveness in the Sixth Senedd and inviting the Welsh Government's views on the questions in the consultation document, as well as any other reflections that we may consider relevant, by 12 September 2025.

In my capacity as Trefnydd, I am pleased to provide a contribution on behalf of the Welsh Government. Our response, annexed to this letter, is focused on the three overarching areas (committee culture, organisation of business and interactions with Senedd business) and the six main questions which were highlighted in the Forum's consultation document, and draws on the experiences of Ministers (including Ministers with experience as Chairs or Members of committees) and civil servants from across government.

This response builds upon views already expressed by the Counsel General and Minister for Delivery in her capacity as government representative and Member of the Future Senedd Committee, which were subsequently reflected in the recommendations of the Future Senedd Committee Report on [Parliamentary Business in the Seventh Senedd](#). It also follows on from the Government's response to the Business Committee review of the Public Bill and Member Bill processes earlier in the year.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

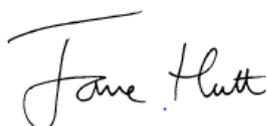
We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

This Government response should also be read in the context of the Counsel General and Minister for Delivery's [letter](#) of 7 February to the Chair of the Future Senedd Committee, which includes reflections on Senedd Committees at Annex A. In addition, the Counsel General wrote on 22 July to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee regarding how the Government and the Senedd can work collaboratively to improve the scrutiny process for subordinate legislation. Furthermore, the First Minister's letter of 23 July also highlighted the case for fewer recommendations from committees, with a stronger focus on specific and clearly defined recommendations which will have the greatest impact on the matter under consideration.

The Welsh Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation and recognises the fundamental constitutional role that Senedd committees play in delivering robust scrutiny, shaping legislation, and ensuring transparency and accountability in public life. We hope our response will help support the Forum's ambition to strengthen committee culture, improve organisational practices and enhance interactions between committees and stakeholders. We very much support efforts to ensure that positive practices and cultures transfer to the Seventh Senedd and that learning from experiences in this and previous Senedd terms can be applied for the benefit of more effective scrutiny.

We look forward to engaging with the Forum's recommendations and contributing to a future committee structure that is inclusive, constructive, effective and strategic.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line above the first few letters.

Jane Hutt AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Chairs' Forum Review of Committee Effectiveness

Government Response

Committee Culture

Question 1: The Forum would like to know your view on how committees focus their time e.g. legislation, policy inquiries, stakeholder engagement, consideration of petitions and the level of strategic focus and evaluation in committees

The Government's view is that Senedd committees are at their most effective when there is a clear strategic plan in place for their overall programme of work as this ensures that policy inquiries and legislative scrutiny remain purposeful and focused, while also providing flexibility to respond to ad hoc or topical issues.

From our experience, it can be useful for there to be early dialogue between government officials and committee clerks when embarking on a large strategic inquiry or exercise as this can help lead to better planning and improved results. Discussions between Welsh Treasury officials and the Finance Committee clerking team, for example, around revisions to the Budget Protocol is one example of how the Government and the Senedd should be working together in the interests of introducing changes that provide adequate time to produce a quality product on the one hand, while ensuring sufficient time is made available for effective scrutiny of the proposals.

We have observed that a number of factors can cause committees to lose their strategic focus. Extended committee remits, for example as seen with the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee for this Senedd term, risks diluting focus and committees either being spread too thinly or spending disproportionate time on lower-risk or less critical areas.

There is a sense that committees appear to focus their time appropriately between legislative scrutiny and policy inquiries, although it is felt that opportunities have sometimes been lost by committees to consider legislative proposals as part of the wider policy context and legislative scrutiny can be more rigorous than policy scrutiny.

Committees' assessment of priority areas of focus based on assessment of risk, impact and potential wider repercussions could be further strengthened to make the most of the limited time available for scrutiny. Committees may wish to consider working informally with government policy officials at the early stages of scoping a policy inquiry, both to discuss aims and objectives and to explore the potential for a technical briefing which may help inform the scope, direction and questions to be asked as part of committees' inquiries. On occasions where technical briefings are

provided, it is important that the parameters of any such briefings are agreed in advance and respected throughout the session.

Public consultation and stakeholder engagement are considered crucial in ensuring that scrutiny is undertaken from a sound knowledge base. The Government would very much welcome open dialogue with committee clerking teams to avoid duplication in terms of consultation exercises and make better use of resources. Broader and more diverse stakeholder engagement, including expert voices, could improve the quality of committee findings and again we would be keen to work with committees in order to ensure that new voices are heard.

As we have said previously, in particular in our response to the Business Committee review of the Public Bill and Member Bill processes earlier in the year, it is imperative that we move away from the expectation that there is a minimum or standard timescale for Stage 1 scrutiny of any Bill, irrespective of size, scope or complexity. For the reasons set out by the Counsel General in the Government's response to that review in April, adopting a tailored approach to agreeing timetables for Government Bills, reflecting the scale and complexity of each proposal, could create more time for other matters including the scrutiny of subordinate legislation and Act implementation. It may also allow for better and additional scrutiny later in the Bill process; for instance if some of that time was used to have a Report Stage more frequently.

The Government intends to publish a draft of each Year 5 Bill on its website at the same time that it is submitted to the Llywydd for determination. This will inform considerations by Chairs and Members of the relevant Senedd committees of the scrutiny time needed that is then proposed to Business Committee. This will also potentially enable other activities to take place during the determination window, such as committees issuing their calls for evidence, identifying stakeholders to invite to committee sessions and technical briefings for committee staff or Members. If this approach proves successful and the post-election government agrees to continue it into the Seventh Senedd, combined with more proactive official level engagement during the pre-introduction period, it will allow the Seventh Senedd's Business Committee to take a more tailored approach to agreeing timetables for Government Bills in future. This is not a diminution of scrutiny but an increase in the effectiveness of scrutiny, enabling committee time to be spent where it adds most value.

Committees should place greater emphasis on the scrutiny of subordinate legislation. The procedure attached to any proposed regulation making powers in Government Bills typically generates considerable debate, with Members often calling for the Senedd to be afforded a greater role in the scrutiny of future regulations and for enhanced scrutiny processes, but the regulations themselves often fail to generate substantive interest when laid and/or debated.

The Petitions system is formulaic by its nature and there is a significant amount of correspondence generated about different Petition topics. The Senedd may wish to consider corraling previous Petitions under certain subject headings so that people can see what Petitions have already been submitted on a particular topic before deciding whether to submit a Petition. This may help reduce duplication, improve efficiency and enhance public engagement.

Question 2: The Forum would like to know whether you have a view on the tone and dynamics of committee meetings and on the role played by the Chair.

The Chair plays a significant role in determining the tone and dynamic of committee meetings and in fostering cross-party collaboration and constructive interactions with witnesses and stakeholders. The approach of the Chair can also have an impact on the ability of the legislature and government to engage and work together constructively on the development of legislation.

Overall, Ministers and officials' experience of committee sessions is that they are marked by professionalism and respect. The Chair's role is considered vital in managing the dynamics amongst committee members, in fostering cross-party collaboration and in setting the tone of committee deliberations. We have found that effective chairs create constructive and respectful environments and balance necessary formality with a welcoming atmosphere.

It is understandable that different committees to some extent adopt different approaches, reflecting the Chair and Members' preferences. Robust scrutiny is to be welcomed but when committees adopt a negative, disrespectful or aggressive tone, or if exchanges become over-personalised or inappropriate towards individuals, this can impact adversely on Ministers and government officials and does not help ensure that the core purpose of scrutiny is achieved. In her recent letter to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, the Counsel General and Minister for Delivery voiced her concerns about some of the regrettable language used at points during the scrutiny of the Senedd Cymru (Representation of the People) Order 2025 and in associated correspondence with the Government.

The Chair is in a strong position to influence how a committee goes about its work, including how it engages with the Government and how it chooses to involve government at various stages. Early and constructive dialogue between committees and the Government in advance of committee evidence sessions can contribute towards more effective debate and deeper discussion and insights. Allowing Ministers and their officials time to consider likely areas of focus in advance, for example, could enable a more substantive and informed exchange with Members at committee meetings. This approach proved valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, when regular informal meetings between officials and the

Health and Social Care Committee facilitated more substantive and informed dialogue, suggesting that advance preparation and flexibility enhances scrutiny.

The Government would support efforts by committees to use the time available as effectively as possible. There are several points which may help in this regard, for example by prioritising questions on key areas and issues during evidence sessions, ensuring that matters of substance are adequately covered within the time available, with any necessary clarifications or specific detail appropriately followed up in correspondence. Benefits could be achieved through greater discipline in how committees use the time available to them to explore a realistic breadth of key issues with Ministers and officials. At the same time, there are perhaps opportunities for scrutiny sessions to be more flexible and agile in exploring issues within a session. At times, by attempting to cover too many areas in a single session, scrutiny can feel a somewhat formulaic experience which skates over the issues. Greater discipline would also be beneficial in relation to follow up letters requesting further information; such letters should not simply be seen as ‘the norm’, and the focus should be on issues arising from the session, rather than long lists of questions spreading out more widely over areas not reached in a session because an unrealistic breadth of issues was attempted to be covered in the original session. More effective use of time during committee sessions should also negate the need for committees to ask Ministers to attend committees for secondary, supplementary evidence sessions.

Additionally, for highly technical or detailed matters, it may be more productive for Senedd officials to engage directly with Welsh Government officials or receive technical briefings. An agreed note summarising the factual information shared in these exchanges could then be reviewed and endorsed by Ministers and Chairs as part of the official scrutiny record. This would help ensure that complex issues are addressed accurately and efficiently, reserving valuable committee time for more strategic considerations.

Challenges can also arise when meetings focus on excessive points of detail at the expense of more strategic issues. Again, while Government recognises the important role the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee plays in the legislative scrutiny process, the Committee’s focus at times on minor drafting and typographical points and minor inconsistencies between the English and Welsh texts at the expense of substantive content diminishes the Committee’s wider and more important scrutiny role and has a detrimental impact on the quality of the debate. We saw this recently during the scrutiny of the Senedd Cymru (Representation of the People) Order 2025.

Organisation of committee business

Question 3: The Forum would welcome views on the effectiveness of policy and legislation scrutiny being led by single committees, and whether committee remits should be cross-cutting or mirror Ministerial portfolios.

Overall, combining policy and legislative scrutiny is widely supported, with specialisation fostering effective and comprehensive oversight and there being increased opportunities with a larger Senedd for Members to develop expertise. Combining the remit of committees in this way also supports the objective of ensuring a manageable number of Senedd committees overall and ensuring that individual Members have greater capacity to undertake their scrutiny role effectively.

The evidence base that supported the passage of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Bill (now the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024) drew on a number of reports and recommendations which identified that greater capacity would allow Members to specialise, leading to better and more effective scrutiny of policy and legislation in their lead areas. Consequently, combined policy and legislation committees allow for such specialism to be applied and for legislation to be seen in the context of the broader policy area.

Under the current model, however, the need for rapid scrutiny or a high volume of legislation can at times restrict the time available to a committee to undertake other valuable work. As we have said previously in our contributions to the work of the Future Senedd Committee, our view is that ad hoc ‘task and finish’ committees can provide a practical solution for providing in-depth scrutiny of legislation not suited to existing committees or where it is infeasible for legislation to be referred to a subject committee for scrutiny. The establishment of the Reform Bill Committee is a good example of how this approach can work well.

The current approach of assigning cross-cutting remits to Senedd committees offers advantages by ensuring policy areas are not overlooked and supports continuity through changes in Ministerial portfolios. It also enables committees to explore connections between policy areas that might otherwise be siloed. From a policy perspective this can challenge government to consider policy from multiple viewpoints which only serves to strengthen the process.

Despite the advantages outlined above, current committee structures can on occasion lead to duplication and coordination challenges. While cross-cutting approaches allow committees to tackle topics that span multiple areas, this sometimes leads to overlapping responsibilities and interests, for example when UK legislation is considered by both the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee and by a subject committee. While such overlap can add value by bringing different perspectives, effective coordination and information sharing between committees is essential in these situations to minimise inefficiency. It has been noted that that there

is a regular flow of information sharing between the Finance Committee and the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, for example, where there may be issues of interest or concern across the work of the two committees. While there is no formal 'process' in terms of specified matters to refer, the two committees supported by their secretariat teams ensure that the work of the two committees transfers and raises matters appropriately.

During Stage 1 of the Bill process, Bills are typically considered by the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, Finance Committee and the relevant subject committee. Each committee produces a report which can sometimes contradict one another and require individual Government responses. The Senedd may wish to consider whether there is a more effective and streamlined approach to reporting.

Committees and Members should ensure that questions are appropriately targeted, aligning with Cabinet Secretaries' roles and responsibilities in order to avoid inefficiencies and follow up correspondence. Focusing scrutiny on areas directly within a Cabinet Secretary's responsibilities would use time more effectively and lead to more meaningful responses. Committees should also generally avoid asking questions of the Welsh Ministers which are clearly related to UK Government reserved areas.

The expansion of the Senedd presents an opportunity to consider the structure and scope of committees, including whether new committees are needed to reflect emerging priorities, for example in the field of Science, Research and Technology and whether there should be a single committee that leads on official statistics and census matters, as well as how best to ensure there is effective scrutiny and oversight of cross-cutting areas of policy. In determining the number of committees, however, the Business Committee of the Seventh Senedd will need to balance the potential benefits of establishing new committees with the overall aim of realising some of the important benefits of Senedd reform. More in-depth and effective scrutiny can arguably be better achieved by limiting the number of committees any individual Member must sit on and allowing Members more time to prepare for scrutiny.

On a practical level, the Government would support measures which uphold effective scrutiny while avoiding disproportionate burdens on Ministers' and officials' time. There are significant demands on the First Minister's time. The First Minister attends the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister on a termly basis and responds to First Minister's Questions in plenary each week during term time, along with other avenues of scrutiny. Other committees could consider seeking information in writing for areas that fall within the First Minister's remit in the first instance, given the demands on the First Minister's schedule, with in person scrutiny requests being a last resort. The Prime Minister does not routinely attend select committee scrutiny in Westminster but does attend the Liaison Committee three times per year.

In terms of managing pressures on Ministers' time more generally, it would be helpful if there were to be greater join up between committees when planning their forward work programmes to avoid, as far as possible, multiple calls on Ministers and officials' time in any given week. Scheduling the attendance of multiple Ministers at committee sessions can also be particularly challenging and it is not always apparent what benefits are to be derived from attendance by more than one Minister.

Question 4: The Forum would welcome views on how committees are constituted such as the size of committees, the membership, and the way in which Committee Chairs and membership is allocated.

The government recognises that regular attendance by Members at committee meetings is a core responsibility in upholding effective and rigorous scrutiny. The Government's Explanatory Memorandum in respect of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Election) Bill recognised the benefits of a larger Senedd being better equipped to hold the Executive to account through more effective scrutiny of policy and legislation, including Budgets and Bills, which can be expected to result in improved legislation and spending plans which in turn would lead to better outcomes for the people of Wales.

In terms of size, the Government recognises that the breadth of a committee's remit will be a key consideration. It can be challenging to strike the right balance between overly large committees which can compromise efficiency and effectiveness, and committees that are so small they lack sufficient expertise and capacity for depth and breadth of scrutiny and reduce scope for diversity of perspectives. While smaller committees can foster constructive cross-party debate, the Government notes that smaller membership could reduce the diversity of perspectives and angles of scrutiny that a committee would bring to bear and hinder a committee's ability to fully examine policy areas, especially when details are complex. Smaller committees would also place even greater weight of responsibility on individual Members in preparing for and delivering scrutiny; make it more challenging for political parties' membership of committees to reflect the overall balance of political groups in the Senedd and in the event of a Member's absence from the committee, there would also be greater risks around a committee being inquorate, or of inconsistencies in the committee's scrutiny.

Going forward, we would support the existing approach to allocating Members to committees, recognising the importance of maintaining an appropriate number and proportionate political representation amongst committee Members in order to ensure that effective scrutiny can be exercised, including during voting. We also support the notion that committees should be balanced (as much as reasonably practicable) on the grounds of gender, ethnicity and other protected characteristics, to ensure equitable access to decision-making and a diverse range of perspectives which is vital for effective scrutiny. Ensuring a range of approaches to scrutiny

amongst committee membership can also be valuable. Diversity of characteristics and perspectives should also be reflected in stakeholders and witnesses invited to give evidence, strengthening committee effectiveness and government accountability.

It is important to reflect on the detailed consideration given by expert fora in previous years to committee effectiveness, for example the Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform which concluded that:

“An increase in the size of the Assembly would increase the capacity of the institution to fulfil its policy, legislative and financial scrutiny roles. Much of this capacity gain would be seen in the work of Members on committees, as the need for Members to sit on multiple committees would be reduced. However, the extent to which this will be realised in practice will depend on how the Assembly deploys the additional resource. It is not our role to prescribe how the Assembly should structure itself, whether in terms of the committees it establishes or the office holders it appoints. We are clear, however, that if the Assembly does not exercise restraint—for example in relation to the maximum size of the Welsh Government, the number of committees and the size of committees—the additional capacity and the subsequent benefits for the quality and quantity of scrutiny may not be realised, and the rationale which underpins our recommendations will be significantly weakened.”¹

The Special Purpose Committee on Senedd Reform further concluded that more Members would provide for better governance, more effective policy, more efficient spending, and to better legislation.

It is the Government’s view that, in order to realise the full benefits of a larger Senedd in terms of effective and efficient scrutiny, Members should serve on no more than one committee as far as is practicable, to promote specialisation and expertise in their subject area. Limiting the number of committees a Member must sit on will also allow committees greater autonomy, avoid membership clashes and provide greater flexibility for committees to schedule their work, which will become increasingly important as the size of the Senedd, and volume of work increases.

¹ [A PARLIAMENT THAT WORKS FOR WALES](#), page 89

Interactions with committees

Question 5: The Forum would like to hear views on your experiences of attending and interacting with committees, including matters such as working in a hybrid way and the ability to engage with the work of the Senedd in your language of choice.

Broadly speaking, officials and Ministers' experience of attending committee meetings have been straightforward and positive, with the majority having had positive experiences of participating in person and remotely.

The Llywydd's guidance sets out the expectations in terms of Ministers attending committees either virtually or in person, although in practice the majority of sessions are conducted in person. There have been occasions, where the Government would deem the circumstances to be exceptional, when the Government has struggled to secure agreement from Committee Chairs for a Minister to attend legislative proceedings remotely. Consideration should be given to how this principle operates alongside current work by the Senedd to explore ways of removing barriers to participation and facilitating family friendly working practices. Ensuring that there is clarity and consistency of practice and expectations around whether officials and Ministers are required to attend committee meetings in person is important, with enough notice given if in-person attendance is required.

While in principle we support committees being able to meet concurrently with Plenary in the Seventh Senedd, it will be important for committees to consider potential impact and conflicting demands on Welsh Ministers and on government officials when timetabling their meetings. As far as practicable, we would argue that committee meetings should be avoided during key items of Plenary business, for example First Minister's Questions, legislation proceedings, voting time and other high-profile items of business.

Although it can be difficult to maintain the 'energy' in hybrid sessions for long periods of time, the Government is of the view that the hybrid working model offers valuable flexibility. It enables wider participation from stakeholders, Ministers and officials wherever they are based, although we believe that Senedd Members should have valid reasons not to attend a session in person, and the same is true for Ministers. Hybrid working has been especially valuable during periods of high demand, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when regular informal meetings between officials and committees supported timely and informed dialogue. Stakeholder feedback would also indicate that hybrid working supports equality and broadens participation.

Flexibility and clarity around the number of supporting officials who may attend committee sessions would be beneficial, especially when committees scrutinise broad or complex issues. Many of the Bills that come before committees, for example, are complex, wide-ranging and cross-cutting, with numerous policy and legal officials involved. Imposing an unnecessarily low limit on how many officials can

accompany Ministers at committee meetings is not always conducive to providing committees with the best and most informed answers and it can be unrealistic to expect any one official (policy or legal) to be able to speak comprehensively to **all** aspects of such Bills.

Committees are also encouraged to consider the practicalities of attendance by Ministers when timetabling committee sessions, particularly on Bills, and avoid more than one meeting on a Bill on any one day. While noting that there have been positive experiences of committees appreciating competing demands on Ministers' diaries and showing welcome flexibility, there has on occasion been a lack of willingness from committees to reconsider the scheduling of legislative evidence sessions where they clash with core, critical Government business.

An appreciation by committees of the different roles of Ministers and officials can also contribute towards better quality exchanges and more effective scrutiny. Officials, for example, while responsible for delivering Ministers' decisions effectively, should not be required at committee meetings to justify Ministerial policy choices. Such questions should be directed at Ministers. Officials, on the other hand, can play an important role in supporting Ministers with answers to technical or detailed questions – where the subject relates to their area of responsibility, and recognising that it is for Ministers to identify the officials they wish to support them in scrutiny sessions. As indicated elsewhere in this response there are also other ways in which factual information from officials can be provided – for example, in writing or through informal briefings or discussions – as well as in committee meetings. An awareness of the different roles of Ministers and officials can lead to more meaningful and accurate scrutiny outcomes, as well as support the Senedd's aim of being open and welcoming by reducing the barriers to effective communication and ensuring that committee work remains focused, inclusive and evidence-led.

The ability to engage in the language of choice is a vital aspect of inclusive scrutiny. The Senedd's commitment to enabling bilingual interaction is strongly supported and should continue to be prioritised. Ensuring that all participants (whether providing evidence or attending in an official capacity) can contribute confidently in their preferred language strengthens the quality and reach of committee work. On a practical level, it has been noted that there is little time to take headphones on and off during a committee session, which in practice can mean that the start of contributions in Welsh can occasionally be missed by Ministers or officials wishing to use headphones. Committees may wish to consider if there are further steps that can be taken during committee proceedings to make the experience of bilingual working more seamless for all participants.

Private offices report generally good relationships with committee teams when handling administrative issues on behalf of Ministers.

Question 6: The Forum would also welcome examples of committee scrutiny or work which you consider has been effective or was not as effective and any suggestions for how effectiveness could be improved.

What has been effective

In our response to the earlier and more specific consultation questions, we have identified several areas where the Government considers committees have worked effectively, while providing reflections on aspects where, in our view, effectiveness could be further improved. To a large extent, our response to this last question reinforces points made in the earlier sections.

The Government's overarching message relates to the importance of productive working relationships. There are a number of examples of constructive and collegiate working relationships between government officials and committee clerks which have been found to be effective in supporting planning and prioritisation of work.

Several examples of such approaches have been highlighted, including when the Health and Social Care Committee held regular meetings with Welsh Government officials during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling timely, informed exchanges and supporting agile decision-making during a period of significant public health challenges. In a similar vein, Welsh Government officials and the Finance Committee clerking team meet regularly to discuss and share information in relation to Budget preparations, tax and intergovernmental matters. This has involved facilitating early engagement sessions with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language and Chief Economist and has proved helpful in preparing for scrutiny of both budget and tax legislation. Welsh Government UK Legislation Team officials also meet on a weekly basis with the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee clerks, which is valuable in sharing the latest information and assisting the planning of Senedd scrutiny on UK legislation relating to devolved matters. Linked to this, we would like to record our appreciation for the flexibility and pace with which committees have had to work at times to consider UK legislation where the time available for Senedd consideration has been tight and / or fluid.

Similarly, Welsh Government officials have a positive and constructive relationship with the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee and clerking team, and with Business Committee clerks. While these are often informal relationships at official level that have evolved organically, they can be invaluable in developing a shared understanding of priorities, processes and pressures on both sides and aid effectiveness. They can also be useful in resolving administrative or technical points, avoiding the need for such points to take up valuable time in committee sessions or having to be addressed in formal correspondence between the Chair and Welsh Ministers.

Early technical briefings from government officials have proven to be effective in facilitating a deeper understanding of complex subjects. The technical briefing

meetings with the Finance Committee, for example, are a good medium for detailed discussion and provision of factual information. With regard to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, Welsh Government has appreciated the way the committee has been receptive to arranging private sessions, enabling key witnesses to provide open and constructive responses to scrutiny without compromising matters of commercial or legal privilege or confidentiality.

We consider it important that committees continue to engage in fora which provide an opportunity for dialogue on issues of common interest and concern to the devolved nations. The Interparliamentary Finance Committee is a valuable cross-devolved committee forum, particularly where it has facilitated constructive dialogue and shared learning across administrations. We support such collaborative endeavours and recognise their role in strengthening intergovernmental relations.

What has not been so effective and ideas for improvement

Below are some reflections on areas where we consider improvements could be made in light of Government experience.

Effective joint working, clear and timely communication and realistic timescales

Officials and Ministers face significant pressures when preparing for committee attendance and it is important that there is some recognition of this. For committee exchanges to be useful and productive, it is always helpful to understand as early as possible the focus of the discussion so that Ministers and officials can prepare appropriately. Similarly, clear and timely communication from the Chair and clerking team is essential in relation to committees' forward work schedules, including government being alerted early to any changes in plans in order to prepare effectively for scrutiny sessions and avoid any potentially nugatory work.

Where a committee invites a Minister for general scrutiny covering a wider range of potential topics, it would be helpful to have specific areas of focus outlined in advance. This would enable Ministers and officials to adopt a more streamlined approach to briefings and contribute towards scrutiny sessions which are more effective where individual topics can be discussed in appropriate depth. In a similar vein, ensuring that officials and Ministers are adequately informed of the likely lines of questioning by committees as early as possible can significantly contribute towards ensuring that Ministers and officials are able to provide answers which are relevant, clear and useful. It would also be helpful if committees could adopt a more consistent approach to sharing information with Government in advance of committee meetings. Such steps would facilitate more effective and thorough scrutiny and, in some cases, could avoid the need for follow-up correspondence which can be both administratively burdensome and time consuming.

The sharing of information relating to topics and points of interest in advance of committee meetings to assist preparation on very wide responsibilities and portfolios should not compromise the inevitable moments when there will be topical issues or points arising during the course of exploring issues within a session which committee members may wish to raise. Government takes the preparation and attendance at committees very seriously and is supportive of practices and cultures which enable more informed exchanges between those attending committees.

With regard to legislation specifically, early discussions between Government and Senedd officials and pre-scrutiny of subordinate legislation can be effective and useful. The Counsel General has recently written to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, welcoming a meeting with the Chair and the Llywydd to consider how we can work together to improve the scrutiny process. In that letter the Counsel General notes that in UK Parliament for example, the Joint Committee for Statutory Instruments undertakes pre-scrutiny of some statutory instruments which provides the Government and the legislature with an opportunity to identify and resolve minor points before the legislature formally considers the item. If we were to adopt a similar process, this would have a significant impact on the quality of scrutiny and debate in the Senedd on subordinate legislation.

We note that requests from committees for information to support scrutiny evidence papers can sometimes lack clarity or specificity. A more direct and detailed request would enable officials to provide the most relevant information, thereby supporting more effective scrutiny by the committee.

The timing of committee requests can also at times pose challenges for Government, particularly those submitted just before summer or Christmas recess periods when staffing levels are reduced. Providing more advance notice would enable officials to prepare the best possible responses.

Approach to Committee inquiries

Effective informal collaboration between committee clerks and policy officials—such as technical briefings and exploratory conversations—can enhance policy inquiries and the impact of committee work.

We would argue that pre-engagement between Welsh Government officials and committee clerks can help build a clear approach to Committee inquiries, for example by providing technical briefings, identifying areas where calls for evidence would genuinely add value (avoiding duplication of previous consultations) and sharing ideas about stakeholder and expert engagement to ensure that a diverse range of perspectives are sought in relation to the inquiry and that the timescale allows for appropriate variation in methods for gathering evidence and maximising reach.

We would support comprehensive research into subject areas before inquiries commence to ensure that inquiries are grounded in fact and evidence and issues

properly understood and communicated. There have been examples such as Flying Start, the Basic Income Pilot and inequalities during COVID-19 where analysts have attended committee meetings and these have proved useful opportunities to present and understand the evidence base. We believe there could be further opportunities for briefings by Welsh Government policy officials and analysts to aid understanding of the evidence base in relation to committee inquiries. This could help avoid misconceptions being established at the start of an inquiry, which risks permeating later stages of a committee inquiry, leading to misdirected questions and recommendations that are difficult to properly address.

It has been noted that committees sometimes revisit the same issues and ask the same questions repeatedly (even when the current policy or funding landscape has moved on), with diminishing returns and little new insight, which in turn reduces the time available for other subjects that could benefit from scrutiny. An area for future consideration may be to have more thematic items on the agenda that have arisen from systemic and/or recurring issues identified by committees. This may help committees in terms of maximising impact from the necessarily limited time available to explore issues.

Committee reports and recommendations

The First Minister wrote to the Llywydd on 23 July on the issue of committee recommendations, arguing for fewer recommendations from committees, with a focus on specific and clearly defined recommendations which will have the greatest impact on the matter under consideration.

While committee recommendations are generally robust, there is scope in our view for bringing more criticality of thought and appropriate weighting to bear on all evidence submitted and synthesising it to produce thoughtful recommendations which provide a fuller reflection of the breadth of stakeholder views rather than a single perspective, and which are focused on genuinely adding value rather than duplicating government work.

We have also seen some examples of unnecessarily detailed and overly operational recommendations, prescribing how things must change in practice or methodology, rather than focusing on outcome. The Government has to properly consider how best to achieve outcomes within the overall legislative and governance framework, and there have been instances where the Government has declined some committee recommendations because they are overly operational.

There is variation from our experience in how recommendations are followed up too, with some committee inquiries requesting that Government provide frequent updates against recommendations. While we recognise the importance of review and follow up, we would encourage committees to give careful consideration in determining which inquiries might benefit from such rigorous follow up exercises and to adopt a flexible approach that enables the Welsh Government to fulfil reporting through

existing mechanisms whilst remaining meaningful and proportionate to avoid diverting resource away from delivery and implementation. It is important for committees considering returning to topics and recommendations already completed to make conscious decisions in a disciplined way on overall priorities, and in particular whether their scrutiny function could be more effectively deployed pursuing more critical or current issues.

When reporting, it would be helpful if committees could distinguish between matters that fall within the competence of the Welsh Government and those that are reserved to the UK Government. This clarity would support transparency and ensures that scrutiny is appropriately directed.

The Welsh Government also notes the increased use of 'Conclusions' in committee reports, which often resemble 'Recommendations' and risk blurring the clarity of findings. We would encourage committees to consider whether this is a beneficial way to report on findings, or whether better alternatives exist.

Administrative matters

The Government considers there to be scope for further streamlining of processes for handling correspondence and notifications on matters such as UK legislation and Intergovernmental meetings which may reduce administrative demands on the Welsh Government and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee and focus on the reporting of intergovernmental meetings in ways that add the greatest value.

It has also been suggested that it might be helpful if Senedd committees could keep a tracker of all their recommendations over each government term to avoid duplicating any previous recommendations and/or making any requests that have already been dealt with by the Welsh Government.

A further observation relates to the Senedd Commission website and challenges some have experienced in using the 'search' tool to locate information with ease and speed. We feel that there are therefore opportunities to increase the accessibility of information on the work of committees, which could also include supporting adoption of best practices on sharing latest information and future work programmes.

Conclusion

The Government values and welcomes the role committees play in shaping, scrutinising, and influencing Welsh Government policy and legislation. From our experience, committees' effectiveness depends on clear committee remits, strategic planning, purposeful and balanced scrutiny, targeted questioning, meaningful stakeholder engagement and early and trusted engagement at official level. Continued focus on these areas will strengthen committee influence and policy outcomes.