

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People  
and Education Committee**

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## **Consultation: Reviewing Committee Effectiveness in the Sixth Senedd**

Dear Elin,

Thank you for your letter dated 8 July seeking our views on committee operations in the sixth Senedd. We considered the consultation questions at our meeting on 17 September. Annex 1 outlines our responses to these questions.

I look forward to further discussions about these issues in Chairs' Forum and more widely across the Senedd, as preparations are made for the seventh Senedd.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS  
Chair  
Children, Young People and Education Committee

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

# Annex A: Consultation response

## Committee culture

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.

We believe we have managed to balance the various competing calls on our time effectively. We have scrutinised three Bills, two of which went through the full legislative process, and one that fell following Stage 1 consideration. This has been manageable because we did not have to deal with curtailed timetables, and had sufficient notice to enable us to plan our forward work programme accordingly. We have had a small number of LCMs during that time, which we are aware is far fewer than other committees. This has meant we have been able to balance our various responsibilities in such a way that we could deliver on our aims and objectives set out in our strategic plan.

At the outset of this Senedd we developed a strategic plan (Full and Simple). Following the significant turnover of committee membership in 2024, we revisited this plan and decided that it was still appropriate and relevant.

As can be seen in our plan, a key commitment is to put the voices of children and young people at the heart of all our work.

We have done this by going out and talking to children, young people, and their families where they live. We have supplemented these visits and other engagement activity with stakeholder events held in the Senedd. Such events provide a more informal opportunity for either children and young people (as in our work on children and young people in care) or professionals (for work such as children and young people on the margins; routes into post 16 education and training; or school improvement and learner attainment) to talk to us on the Senedd estate.

We have endeavoured to ensure that these experiences and opinions meaningfully impact our decision making and recommendations. It is important that committees in the next Senedd continue to identify ways of working which enable the voices of those most affected by a particular issue to be at the forefront of their work.

More generally, we have found that having regular conversations within committee about our long-term forward work programme has helped us to juggle our workload in the most efficient way. Having good and open lines of communication with the Welsh Government is particularly helpful for managing our work programme.

We do sometimes struggle with the length of meeting papers, and think more consideration should be given to try and reduce this. Obviously, this should not be done in such a way that it impedes a committee to do its job effectively.

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

We think it is important that committee Chairs are inclusive, ensuring that all Members, witnesses and others contributing to business have the opportunity to speak. Our current Chair has always done this throughout her tenure.

The Chair indicated that her preference was to try and ensure that formal proceedings were as informal as possible, in order to put witnesses at ease. This, she believes, enables anyone participating to give the best account of themselves.

## **Organisation of committee business**

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.

We reflected on our recent experience of scrutinising the then Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill. Due to the cross-cutting nature of the Bill, we formally invited members of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee to participate in our Stage 1 scrutiny under SO 17.49. Two of their Members joined us for all aspects of our Stage 1 scrutiny. We believe this really enriched our scrutiny. We think that the current model where one policy committee is the “lead” committee for scrutiny of a Bill should continue, with this model enabling other committees to be involved.

We think that even with an increase of Members, having separate Bill committees would be a challenge. We also believe that the current model helps develop expertise which enables us to draw critical links between legislation, policy and financial scrutiny. For example, our current inquiry into teacher recruitment and retention directly flowed from our work on the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill.

Earlier on in this term, following our scrutiny of the then Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill, we decided to look at mental health support in higher education.

Both these policy inquiries were important, but might not have been undertaken without the issues being highlighted through the legislative scrutiny.

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.

There were a range of views about the optimum number of members on a committee. However, we are in agreement that having more members would be beneficial. We are aware that for committees with smaller memberships, there can be real issues with quorum. However, the benefits of more Members goes beyond issues of quorum. Larger committees ensure a wider range of perspectives and views informing committee work. Broadly speaking, we think committees should have eight members.

We all agree that one of the biggest issues is when Members sit on multiple committees. We think this should be avoided as much as possible.

Having committee Chairs elected by the whole Senedd is a real strength of the committee system. It helps support cross-party and consensual working, which is an important feature of effective scrutiny committees.

In our discussions on the importance of elected Chairs, a suggestion was made that in addition to an election at the start of the Senedd, there could be a re-election mid-way through a Senedd term. This could provide opportunities for those who may not be in a position to stand for such a position at the outset of a Senedd term (for example someone who is newly elected). This would also help ensure that chairs had to maintain confidence of the whole Senedd throughout the term, and not just at the outset. Such re-elections would be open to any Senedd member from the political group to which the Chair was allocated to stand against the existing Chair, and the vote would be of the whole Senedd not just of the individual committee.

## **Interactions with Committees**

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.

The flexibility that hybrid proceedings provide is very important, both for Members and those who are giving evidence or engaging with committee business in other ways. However, we all agree that when people are coming to give evidence in person, Members should make the effort to also be in person unless there are exceptional circumstances.

We would highlight that both of our Stage 2 proceedings were held as fully in-person meetings.

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

As highlighted above, we have prioritised speaking to people with direct experiences of the issues we are considering. As part of this, we have found stakeholder events particularly effective. We bring together a range of people, usually professionals but not always, to discuss issues in private and under Chatham House rules. We have found this has enabled more people with “on the ground” experience to share their insights, and can often result in more candid evidence than in public session. We have published unattributed, summary reports of our stakeholder events, which can then be drawn on when preparing reports, conclusions and recommendations. It therefore strikes a balance between getting the evidence we need with and being as transparent as much as possible. We have been able to offer these as hybrid events, enabling participants to take part in a format that works best for them.