

The Rt Hon Elin Jones MS/AS

Llywydd

Chair of the Chairs' Forum

15 October 2025

Dear Llywydd

Consultation: Reviewing Committee Effectiveness in the Sixth Senedd

Thank you for your letter of **8 July 2025**. We discussed the consultation at our meeting on **22 September** and agreed this submission at our meeting of 13 October.

## Remit

As you will be aware, the Committee's remit is exceptionally wide. The consequence of this broad remit is that we do not think as currently constituted the approach works, because it is not possible to give due consideration to the policy areas that fall within the Committee's remit and at the same time properly fulfil our standing order obligations. The amount of documentation, legislation and associated papers considered by the Committee is vast and the volume of this work impacts upon the decisions that we have to take.

The requirement on the Committee to focus on legislation, including the increasing volume of Welsh Government legislative consent memoranda for Bills introduced to the UK Parliament, has impacted on our ability to have the necessary capacity to most effectively hold the Welsh Government to account in the policy areas of justice, external affairs, and the broad spectrum of issues relating to the constitution.

The Committee is frequently required to work to short deadlines, and in the case of supplementary legislative consent memoranda within a matter of days of those memoranda being laid. At the time of writing the Committee has laid 172 reports during the Sixth Senedd. These reports mainly relate to our Bill scrutiny and scrutiny of legislative consent memoranda, but the figure also includes our



reports on non-trade international agreements, our annual reporting, and the limited inquiry work we have been able to undertake on common frameworks and matters in relation to UK-EU governance. The figure does not include the reports we produce on individual items of, to date, over 600 items of subordinate legislation.

We believe that the legislative workload of the Committee has impacted on our ability to engage with citizens. Constitutional issues are integral to understanding the functions of the Senedd, its purpose and how it operates. The greater the understanding of the Senedd, the more likely citizens are to have confidence in engaging with the Senedd and participating in the democratic process.

For example, our predecessor committee developed its own citizen engagement strategy and involved a citizen panel on its UK Governance post-Brexit inquiry. While this could not be built on at the end of the Fifth Senedd because of that committee's increased workload scrutinising legislation related to the UK's exit from the EU and the Covid-19 pandemic, opportunities to take similar work forward in the Sixth Senedd have been limited as a consequence of the Committee's wide remit and legislative workload.

As a result, we believe that in the Seventh Senedd there would be merit in considering a different approach to how matters within our current remit are distributed to more than one Senedd committee in order to maximise the effectiveness of Committee scrutiny. For context, the remit of the Committee is dealt with by the following committees in other UK parliaments; as 'justice' is not fully devolved to the Senedd, we have not included committees that cover the justice functions. These parliamentary committees may provide models to consider in the Seventh Senedd:

- i. Scottish Parliament: Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee and the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee
- ii. House of Lords: Constitution Committee, the European Affairs Committee, the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, the International Agreements Committee, and the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee
- iii. House of Commons: Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs and the Statutory Instruments (Select Committee).
- iv. UK Parliament Joint Committees: Statutory Instruments and Consolidation, &c., Bills

## Size

The Committee considers that a membership of four is too small and, in certain circumstances, can impact on its effectiveness.

The quorum for a committee of four is three members; this can make things very challenging when a member is unable to attend a meeting and a substitute is not available. For example, given the

specialist nature of the Committee's work, conducting evidence sessions when one substantive committee member's specific perspective and knowledge of the wide remit is lost can lessen the Committee's effectiveness, particularly the need to probe on certain issues. It can also be problematic in a hybrid setting if only three members are present and technical issues arise for one or more members.

Our preference would be for a minimum membership of six members, which would mitigate some of the points referred to above but also have the advantage of allowing the diversity of elected Members of the Senedd to be better reflected in the Committee's membership.

### Meeting slots

The majority of committee members consider that the nature of the Committee's work has benefitted from having a Monday meeting slot in the weekly Senedd Business calendar. However, Senedd committees meeting on a Monday have to contend with clashes with Welsh Government Cabinet meetings, which has impacted on how the Committee has been able to conduct its business. While the Committee has always sought to accommodate those attending Cabinet, it has proved problematic at times. The Committee would welcome the Chairs' Forum and the Business Committee establishing an expectation that members of the Welsh Government prioritise requests to attend Senedd committees over other commitments; this is particularly important in the context of the restrictions on time during Bill scrutiny.

Given the deadlines that apply to the scrutiny of subordinate legislation under Standing Orders 21 and 27, the responsible Committee under Standing Order 21 will have to meet on a weekly basis, irrespective of the business operating model chosen in the Seventh Senedd.

### External support for Senedd committees

During our consideration of your letter we discussed what other novel approaches to improving committee effectiveness could be considered by the Chairs' Forum and the Business Committee.

For example, we are aware that, in 2021, the Scottish Parliament's Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee appointed a panel of academic advisers to support the Committee's work in relation to constitutional issues and the future relationship with the EU including the impact on devolution.

While holding the Welsh Government to account is a responsibility that falls to elected Members of the Senedd, we believe there may be merit in exploring what external expert advice could be made more readily available and accessible to committees.

We hope these reflections on our work in the Sixth Senedd are helpful to you as you consider ways of ensuring the committee scrutiny function in the Seventh Senedd is as effective as possible.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Hedges". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Mike Hedges

Chair

