

Annual Report 2022

July 2022



The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people. Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

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About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:
www.senedd.wales/SeneddPetitions

Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:
Jack Sargeant MS**
Welsh Labour



Luke Fletcher MS
Plaid Cymru



Joel James MS
Welsh Conservatives



Buffy Williams MS
Welsh Labour

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Chair's foreword

The creation of a new committee is a moment of reflection and change, and a chance to re-think what the Committee is for, and what it wants to achieve.

Twelve months ago, I was honoured to be elected to chair the new Petitions Committee. Our predecessor committee oversaw a step change in the volume and scale of petitions submitted to the Senedd, gathering over 1 million signatures between 2016 and 2021.

When elected, I was the youngest Senedd Member to ever become a Committee chair and this framed my intentions for the future travel of the Committee. My focus has been ensuring the Petitions Committee continues to be an engine for engaging the people of Wales in the work of their Parliament, and to accelerate that process. And at the same time, I wanted to find ways to ensure that the Committee put its effort and resources behind those petitions with the potential to make a real difference to people's lives.

To achieve those ends we have developed the way the committee works; embraced new technology – both for our meetings, and in enhancing the petitions website; and as conditions have allowed, we have tried to get out and meet petitioners and hear the stories of those with lived experience of the issues raised in petitions.

I'm thrilled that under my leadership, the work of the petitions Committee is more varied than ever. While the government's response to the Coronavirus pandemic has continued to be a strong feature of petitions – there are other recurrent themes. Animal welfare issues, the difficulty of preserving much-loved buildings in our communities, and transport issues have also been popular.

This report highlights some of the achievements of the year – the petitions that led to real change including bereavement support, Universal Basic Income (UBI), protecting Red Squirrels, prosthetic limbs and cervical screening to name a few.

I hope they will inspire others to know that there is a pathway for your issues to be heard at the heart of Welsh democracy; that your Parliament will listen to your concerns, and debate the issues that matter to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JACK SARGEANT." The signature is written in a cursive style. A horizontal line with an arrowhead at the right end is drawn across the bottom of the signature.

Jack Sargeant,

Chair, Petitions Committee

1. Strategic Direction

This chapter sets out the strategic priorities and objectives of the Petitions Committee.

1. The Committee agreed some strategic priorities and objectives at its early meetings to guide its work over the next four years.

Committee remit

2. The remit of this Committee, as agreed by the Senedd on 23 June 2021, is:

"[...] to carry out the functions of the responsible committee set out in Standing Order 23."

3. In our initial discussion Members acknowledged that – uniquely among Senedd Committees – the Petitions Committee's agenda is set by the people of Wales, and the issues they feel passionately about.

4. Standing Order 23 sets out certain functions that the Committee must carry out.

5. The Committee has agreed the following aims:

- We will prioritise work that can bring real change to our communities.
- We will be a visible committee that gets out and about and engages with people across Wales.
- We will encourage higher quality petitions that can shape policy, and promote successful examples of petitions leading to policy change.

Monitoring and evaluation

6. At the end of the Fifth Senedd, academic fellow Prof Diana Stirbu produced a detailed **Report**¹ looking at how the Senedd should evaluate the work of its committees. It puts a great emphasis on Committees reflecting regularly on their own process, and impact. It also notes

¹ Power, influence and Impact of Senedd Committees: Developing a framework for measuring committees' effectiveness, Prof Diana Stirbu, UCL. May 2021.

that measuring impact is complex, and encourages Committees to consider how external voices could be brought to bear on the process. The Committee has adopted a series of mechanisms to reflect on its processes and impact – in line with those recommendations.

7. The Committee has adopted a practice of routinely reviewing its work in a short private session at the end of every meeting, and looks ahead at the pipeline of petitions that are currently gathering signatures. This first annual report is part of a commitment by the Committee to reflect more deeply on a year of work, and will be repeated in future years. It will also be an opportunity to reassess whether the thresholds, conventions and norms involved in the petitions process need further work.

8. This report also includes a full response to the Legacy Report of the predecessor committee. The fifth and final 'annual report' will serve as our legacy report for any future committee to consider.

9. Unlike other committees, the petitions process produces a series of statistics that serve as proxies for performance. For any given period it is possible to measure and compare:

- the number of petitions raised,
- the number that reach the 250 signature threshold for consideration; and
- the number that reach the 10,000 signature threshold, where they are considered for a plenary debate.

10. While the Committee's focus is on improving quality of petitions rather than generating ever greater numbers, if the Committee is meeting its aims, we would not expect these figures to fall.

11. For the year May 2021-April 2022, 263 petitions were created, 138 were rejected (normally because they relate to a subject outside the responsibility of the Senedd or Welsh Government). The Committee has considered 90 new petitions receiving a total of 195,556 signatures. There have been four petition debates, and two other petitions which reached the 10,000 signature threshold are gathering further evidence before being considered for a debate.

Ways of working

12. Members praised the thoroughness of the papers received for their first meeting, but the paper pack ended up at 273 pages. The clerking team noted that this was exceptionally high, and agreed to produce more streamlined papers for future meetings.

13. Since the easing of Coronavirus regulations, Members have sought to use the full range of tools – and to create new ones if necessary – in order to take forward petitions. In addition to correspondence, gathering evidence and writing reports, the Committee has also held site visits, commissioned focus groups and videos, and requested that other Senedd Committees consider petitions in their work. This has proved an effective way to address petitioners concerns, particularly where other Senedd Committees were planning a more detailed piece of work on the subject.

Petition handovers

14. Traditionally, petitioners have submitted petitions to the Committee on the Senedd Steps. This has served as a photo-op for campaigners to promote their cause. This practice was paused during the period of Coronavirus restrictions, but has now resumed.

Innovations

15. The introduction of the new Senedd Petitions Website in 2020 was a game-changer in terms of the Committee's work. The mobile-friendly interface made it easier to create and support a petition, resulting in a notable increase in both petitions created, and total signatures.

16. Over Easter 2021, a mapping function was added to the Senedd petitions website which allows the public to see a 'heat-map' showing where petitions have been signed. This can be viewed by constituency or region, and is easily shared over social media.



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament



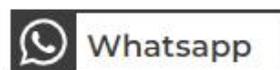
Petitions

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Share the petition map

This is what your post will look like:

petitions.senedd.wales
Petition: Save A&E. Withybush General Hospital must...
Moving care out of county puts adults & children at risk of poor outcomes or even...



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2. Responding to the petitions legacy

The Fifth Senedd's Petitions Committee made a series of recommendations in their legacy report. This chapter sets out how the committee has taken forward those recommendations.

Table 1 The Committee's responses to the recommendations of the Fifth Senedd's Petitions Committee.

Legacy recommendation	Committee Action
<p>Recommendation 1. We recommend that our successor committee should consider at the outset how it intends to identify the petitions on which it wishes to undertake detailed scrutiny, and to resource its work in line with that.</p>	<p>Agreed. The committee discussed and agreed its strategic priorities at the outset.</p> <p>Members regularly review the pipeline of forthcoming petitions and make an assessment of issues where we feel we can make a difference.</p> <p>Members treat all petitions that reach the threshold for consideration equally, but give weight to the scale and potential impact of the actions being requested by petitioners, and whether or not anyone else is doing (or likely to do) this work.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2. Our successor committee should seek to resolve most petitions in a timely manner, both for the benefit of petitioners and to ensure that it has the time and capacity to conduct detailed scrutiny on issues of its choosing. If petition volumes are maintained, this will likely mean agreeing to take no further action on some petitions following their initial consideration.</p>	<p>Agreed. The Committee has attempted to do this in so far as it is possible. However it remains the case that some petitions – particularly those responding to a short term government action – can be out of date by the time they close to signatures. And some, where a consultation or review are key to the final outcome, will always require additional patience.</p> <p>In line with Members' desire to devote more time and effort to those petitions where it is possible to make a difference, many petitions have been closed following their initial consideration.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3. Based on our experience of considering time-sensitive petitions during the Covid-19 pandemic, we recommend that the next committee should give</p>	<p>Agreed. We have made efforts to do this. Eg the petition on Cervical Screening, where a public health announcement on 4 January led to a petition being created, signed by 30,000 people, and a plenary debate held within a fortnight.</p>

Legacy recommendation	Committee Action
<p>consideration to whether or not petitions should be referred to it at the first opportunity, even when they are still collecting signatures. This consideration should include whether this would cause practical difficulties and the impact that such a change would have on the administration of the petitions process.</p>	<p>At most meetings, Members now receive an overview of popular or notable petitions open for signatures in order to inform future work priorities.</p> <p>The clerking team has also advised petitioners to shorten closing dates on petitions, or to close them early, where there is a particular time sensitivity.</p> <p>However, the petitions process is generally best served by research in to the issues, and dialogue with those seeking change, and those with the power to deliver it. It can take time to do these well.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4. More detailed consideration should be given to whether the current 50 signature threshold for the consideration of petition remains appropriate, or whether it should be increased in the early part of the Sixth Senedd.</p>	<p>Agreed. Following an analysis of the data, and noting the marked increase in signatures resulting from the introduction of new mobile-friendly petitions website, Members agreed to request a change to standing orders. Since 1 January 2022, the threshold for consideration has been 250 signatures.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5. We recommend that the threshold for considering debates on petitions should be maintained at 10,000 signatures and that the Petitions Committee should retain its discretion to determine which petitions are referred for a debate. We note that it may be possible for this threshold to be reduced in the future should the volume of petitioning reduce</p>	<p>Agreed. Members agreed this recommendation early in the term. The higher threshold has still resulted in petitions debates being held regularly throughout the year.</p>

3. Petitions of the Year

The Committee is committed to promoting the petitions process, and to showcasing how the people of Wales can generate real change in their communities, and in national policy.

17. The following case studies are our nominations as our inaugural Petition of the Year. Petitions of the Year is a new concept, intended to showcase successful or notable petitions. It is part of the Committee's desire to promote successful examples of petitions leading to policy change.

18. In line with the idea that it is the people of Wales who set the agenda for the Petitions Committee, it only seems fair that the people of Wales should choose which petition has had the greatest impact. We will create a vote to allow followers to vote for which of the nominated petitions they think has had the greatest impact.

Bereavement support

Supporting Families with Sudden and Unexpected Death in Children and Young Adults

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to provide support for a service here in Wales to ensure families who unexpectedly lose their child or young adult aged 25 years and under get the support they require.

In February 2012 my son George died suddenly in an Emergency Unit in Wales. We walked out into the night with nothing, alone and frightened. Nobody came, nobody reached out to support us and it was left to devastated friends and family to support my husband Paul and I. Five days after we lost our son my surviving two young children and I faced more heartache when Paul took his own life. Once again nobody came.

Families require support immediately after such loss. They need to have a point of contact if they have questions and a friendly ear to listen. You never get over the loss of your child and families need to know there is long term support in place for to help them through the grieving process.

There is no planning or preparation prior to a sudden death and the effect of traumatic loss can have a huge impact on the mental health of parents, siblings and other family members. We believe this support is essential and will prevent families walking out into the night with no hope, no support and most importantly without their child.

19. Originally considered in November 2019, the Fifth Senedd Committee agreed to seek a debate following the publication of a review of bereavement services. The debate was requested following a second meeting in February, but as a result of COVID could not take place as anticipated.

20. The new Committee agreed to request a new debate slot in September, and the debate took place on 15 November 2022.

21. Responding to the debate the Minister said:

*"Turning now to the specific ask within the petition we are considering today, I fully recognise the need for a consistent, clear, immediate referral pathway to be available for families who lose a child or young person wherever they are in Wales. I am committed, as Deputy Minister, to ensuring that we in Wales deliver just that. I therefore commit to work with Rhian, her organisation and others on the national steering group to put in place a standard that focuses specifically on the provision of such support. Rhian and other members of the group's experience will be vital in helping us shape this standard so that it is robust enough to capture whether health boards are proactively offering that support in a consistent way across Wales. I also give the Senedd my commitment today that, as Minister, I will drive this work forward with real urgency and pace. I hope that Rhian, who I worked with on the petition before coming into Government, knows me well enough to know that I will be good to my word on this."*²

22. The Minister also announced that she had made "an additional £420,000 available to health boards in 2022-23 and 2023-24 to help with bereavement co-ordination and implementation of the bereavement standards"³. She also announced "a £1 million bereavement support grant for our third sector partners for the next three years"⁴.

² Record of proceedings, 3 November 2021. Para 308

³ Record of proceedings, 3 November 2021. Para 309

⁴ Record of proceedings, 3 November 2021. Para 309

Outcome

23. The petition debate heard a high level of praise for the campaign to support this petition and to ensure greater levels of support for bereaved families. In addition to providing funding, the government also agreed to work with the petitioner and the charity she founded to ensure a consistent level of proactive support is available across Wales.

Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Design a 'Care Leavers Plus' Universal Basic Income pilot that includes a range of people.

24. This petition received 1,051 signatures. Committee agreed to take evidence from groups supporting the petition, in order to produce a short report⁵ in January 2022 which summarised some more detailed research, and contained five recommendations for the Government. During the 2021 Senedd Elections the Labour Party had made a manifesto pledge to introduce a pilot scheme.

25. In its **response to the report**, the Welsh Government accepted three of the recommendations, and accepted in principle the other two.

26. In closing the petition, the Committee welcomed that all recommendations made in their report have been either accepted or accepted in principle. They also congratulated the petitioner on the successful outcome.

Outcome

The petition and mini-inquiry drew attention to the pilot scheme and challenged the Welsh Government to develop a broader, richer trial, which looks set to be delivered.

Protect Red Squirrels

New laws to protect rare red squirrels from habitat loss which causes population decline

It's illegal to kill or injure a red squirrel. Yet a forest containing them is not protected and can be cut down.

Although a felling licence is required to fell woodland, these licences cannot be refused even if they cause habitat loss and red squirrel population decline.

⁵ A UBI Pilot for Wales, January 2022, Petitions Committee

State owned forests do not require a licence but are managed under Plans which last 10 years or more. They don't have to annually assess the cumulative impact of felling on red squirrel populations.

This must change.

27. The red squirrel petition collected 10,553 signatures. The debate took place on 8 December 2021, and featured contributions from Members of all parties.

28. During the debate, the Minister for Climate Change noted the limitations of current legislation and made a commitment to introduce new legislation which is intended to protect red squirrels and other wildlife.

"That's why we've committed to including provisions in the agriculture Bill amending the Forestry Act to allow conditions to be added to felling licences. We will also include provisions to amend, suspend or revoke felling licences after they have been granted. These amendments will help provide better protection for wildlife, ..., and provide better join-up between forestry and other environmental regulations. The relevant legislation to amend the Forestry Act will be brought forward very shortly."⁶

- Julie James, Minister for Climate Change.

Outcome

29. The petition debate secured cross-party support for greater protection for red squirrels in Wales and a commitment from the Welsh Government to bring forward new legislation to deliver that protection.

Prosthetic limbs

Ensure the technology of prosthetic limbs provided within the Welsh NHS is equal to the rest of the UK.

We call upon the Senedd to urge the Welsh Government to ensure that funding is in place to enable limb amputees within Wales to have prosthetic technology at least equal to that which is available within the English and Scottish NHS.

⁶ Record of proceedings, 08 December 2021. Para 230

We ask for the same level of support to be made available to people living in Wales. NHS Scotland has provided microprocessor prosthetics for several years and NHS England since 2016. The Welsh policy review is outstanding since 2017.

30. Although officially started in the Fifth Senedd, this petition was one of a number of legacy petitions considered by the new committee at its first meeting. Members praised the work of the petitioner in raising awareness of the issue, and ensuring a fair deal for amputees in Wales.

31. Petitioner David Bradley praised the work of the Committee in challenging the Welsh Government, and pushing for a better outcome.

"In not accepting weak excuses and arguments and challenging ministerial responses we have now achieved a result that will make a substantial difference for the residents of Wales. ...A great result for all. Thank you to the committee for your hard work and support on behalf of all the signatories to the petition and on behalf of Welsh disabled residents. This success transforms lives."

– David Bradley

Outcome

32. The Minister announced a new £700k fund⁸ providing specialist Microprocessor Controlled Prosthetic Knees (MPK) to eligible patients in Wales: The fund became available from 1 April 2021 to those eligible via the NHS Prosthetic and Amputee Rehabilitation services. This brought provision in Wales in line with the other UK nations.

Cervical Screening debate

Reinstate cervical screening to every 3 years

The announcement from Public Health Wales on January 4th 2022 stating the change from 3 to 5 year intervals for cervical screening is unacceptable. There has been no public consultation and upon release has been met with anger, sadness and serious concern for the cervical health of Welsh women.

⁷ Correspondence from the petitioner 28 June 2021, <https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s116352/Correspondence%20from%20the%20petitioner%2028%20June%202021.pdf>

⁸ <https://gov.wales/new-fund-provide-microprocessor-controlled-prosthetic-knees>

We appreciate the NHS in Wales is under pressure but this is NOT ACCEPTABLE. We the Welsh nation will not stand for this and urge you to reverse this decision immediately.

33. Following the 4 January announcement of a major change to cervical screening procedures in Wales, this petition (the first of six submitted on the issue) secured 30,133 signatures in a matter of days.

34. In response to the unprecedented wave of support for the petition, the Committee made the unusual decision to request a plenary debate at the earliest opportunity. The debate took place on 19 January and provided a platform for a national conversation about the concerns raised by women in response to the announcement by Public Health Wales.

35. During the debate, the Health Minister noted “the calamitous way in which this was communicated” and that Public Health Wales had apologised and was reviewing its communication of public health messages. The Minister was able to explain the reasons underpinning the change and why it should be considered a good news story.

Outcome

36. The petition debate, and the resulting media coverage gave a high profile platform to the messages that the changes were approved by health professionals, and were a result of improved tests which are better able to identify those at higher risk of developing disease.