

Review of the committee timetable and committee remits

March 2022



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About the Committee

The Business Committee is responsible for the organisation of Senedd Business. Its remit can be found at: www.senedd.wales/SeneddBusiness

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The Business Committee conducted a review of the committee timetable and committee remits in order to test whether arrangements made at the start of the Sixth Senedd could be improved.

The Business Committee found that improvements to the committee timetable can be made, whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between the time committee members spend on committee work and their wider responsibilities.

Whilst some committees provided feedback on their remits, the Business Committee concluded that there was no case for changing committee remits at the present time.

1. Summary of our conclusions

- 1.** After considering the responses to the review, and discussing possible outcomes with the Chairs' Forum, we concluded **that improvements to the committee timetable should be made**, whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between the time committee members spend on committee work and their wider responsibilities.
- 2.** We have agreed to revise the committee timetable **in four ways**, to address issues raised in the responses to the review:
 1. **maintain a fortnightly timetable** for most committees;
 2. **provide committees with reserve meeting slots in their non-sitting weeks** that can be used without having to seek permission from the Business Committee (but with committee agreement);
 3. **introduce an alternating Wednesday morning/Thursday afternoon meeting pattern** to provide all policy and legislation committees, Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, and Finance Committee with the same amount of meeting time and flexibility; and
 4. **remove protected weeks**, whilst continuing to provide protected time for committees that meet occasionally.
- 3.** Whilst some feedback was provided on committee remits, **there does not appear to be a case for changing any committee remits** at this point in time

2. Background

4. At our meeting on 14 December 2021, we agreed to review the committee timetable and committee remits, subject to the views of the Chairs' Forum. The Chairs' Forum met on 16 December 2021, and endorsed the Business Committee's approach to the review.

5. The following terms of reference were agreed:

"To review the current approach to the committee timetable, and committee remits, with a view to identifying any changes to the approach that could improve committee effectiveness, whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between the time committee members spend on committee work (in and outside committee meetings) and their wider responsibilities."

6. The Llywydd wrote to committees to seek their views, with responses submitted by 4 February 2022.

7. A survey of committee members was launched on 25 January 2022 and closed on 4 February 2022.

8. Twelve committees provided written responses to the Llywydd's invitation to contribute to the review. Seventeen individual committee members responded to the members' survey.

9. The committee responses have been published on the Senedd's website.

10. We considered the responses to the review on 15 February 2022 and agreed to consult the Chairs' Forum on draft proposals for revising the committee timetable.

11. The Chairs' Forum discussed our draft proposals at its meeting on 17 February 2022. The Chairs' Forum supported our proposed revisions to the timetable whilst providing feedback on the scheduling of some individual committees. Political groups considered the draft proposals on 1 March 2022.

12. In light of feedback from Chairs and political groups, we made some changes to our original proposal and agreed a revised committee timetable at our meeting on 8 March 2022, with the changes to be implemented from the Summer Term.

13. We believe it important to note that the review has been conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and committee activity during the period of the review's focus has been significantly affected by the public health restrictions in place to control the spread of the virus.

3. Responses to the current approach to timetabling

Committee responses

14. Committees varied in their view, from those that found the status quo to be working well, to others that identified significant problems from their perspective. To perhaps emphasise the difference in views, one committee could not reach a view on the frequency of meetings.

15. A number of committees that currently meet fortnightly, including the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, the Equality and Social Justice Committee, and the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee, and the Children, Young People, and Education Committee submitted responses that suggest a continuation of a fortnightly pattern of meetings, for the time being at least.

16. These committees also suggested a number of improvements that could be made to the current timetable, including regularising the timetabling of additional meetings, reducing the need for Business Committee approval of additional meetings, reconsidering the use of Thursday meeting slots, reconsidering the inclusion of protected weeks in the timetable, and avoiding the colocation of certain committees in the same meeting slot.

17. In responding to the review, the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee (“the CCEI Committee”) suggested it was too early to conduct a review, particularly as public health restrictions are still in place, affecting how committee business can be conducted.

18. Two of the committees that currently meet fortnightly, the Health and Social Care Committee (“the HSC Committee”), and the Finance Committee, identified problems with the current approach and proposed the introduction of a weekly timetable and the removal of the protected week.¹

19. The HSC Committee suggested a return to the Fifth Senedd’s pre-pandemic arrangement i.e. a weekly timetable for most committees that alternate between Wednesday morning meetings and all-day Thursday meetings.

¹ Protected weeks were timetabled as the final week of each half term. They were introduced to offer additional flexibility for additional meetings, to provide dedicated meeting time for committees that meet infrequently, and to provide space for joint committee meetings.

- 20.** The Local Government and Housing Committee (“the LGH Committee”) raised concerns about the time it had available, under current arrangements, to conduct its work. The LGH Committee identified its current restriction to a Wednesday meeting slot as potentially problematic as a result of the limit on the time available due to Plenary, and did not believe the current timetable offered it sufficient time to work as effectively as it would like. It suggested a rotation of Wednesday and Thursday meeting slots. It also suggested the removal of the protected week.
- 21.** The Culture, Communities, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee (“the CCWLSIR Committee”) was split in its view on a fortnightly pattern of meetings. As with the LGH Committee, the CCWLSIR Committee has a Wednesday morning slot under the current timetable. The CCWLSIR Committee asked for a full-day slot to be considered for its work, on a Monday or a Thursday.
- 22.** The importance of considering family friendly working practices as part of the review was emphasised by the Equality and Social Justice Committee, and in some of the narrative responses from members.
- 23.** There are committees that meet weekly (or have the option to meet weekly) under the current timetable. The Legislation, Justice, and Constitution Committee is broadly content with current arrangements, whilst noting its heavy workload, and the possible need for additional meetings from time to time. The Standards of Conduct Committee’s response was focused on the use of Monday mornings for its work.

Member responses

- 24.** The responses to the member survey suggested a balance of views, with the 17 members that replied to the survey narrowly split nine to eight in favour of fortnightly meetings. Members’ responses emphasised the need for the committee timetable to recognise the need for them to balance their various responsibilities, such as to committee, Plenary and constituency work.
- 25.** Taken together, the responses identify a range of issues with current timetabling arrangements for us to consider.
- 26.** The responses pointed towards a need to improve the status quo, to meet the issues identified by some committees and committee members, whilst ensuring that any improvements were sensitive to the effect they might have on member capacity.

4. Predictable flexibility

27. The responses received support our previously stated view that there should be a degree of flexibility in the approach to timetabling. It is also clear, from the responses, that this flexibility should come with greater predictability than current arrangements provide i.e. with additional meeting slots following a pattern for committees rather than being allocated on a more ad hoc basis.

28. Of the 17 responses received from committee members, 15 indicated a preference for a fixed pattern of meetings.

29. A number of committees identified the allocation of a Thursday meeting slot as offering greater flexibility compared to only being allocated a Wednesday morning meeting slot.

30. Our willingness to grant additional meetings was acknowledged in the responses, though the process of having to seek permission was seen by some committees as posing a difficulty when planning work.

5. Finding a solution

31. In considering different scenarios, moving committees to a weekly timetable could address the concerns of a number of committees, and the preference of eight of the 17 members that responded to the survey.

32. However, this could approximately double the number of committee places to be filled each week (see Table 1), realising concerns expressed by some committees, and running against the preference of nine of the 17 members that responded to the survey to hold fortnightly meetings.

Table 1: Number of committee places to be filled each week by party group

	Labour	Conservatives	Plaid Cymru	Liberal Democrats
Weekly timetable	32	17	14	1
Current timetable	16	9	7	1

33. This suggested that a simple move towards a weekly timetable would not achieve the balance described in the terms of reference.

34. Experience of operating the current committee timetable has shown that a number of additional meetings have been required by committees to meet the business they have faced i.e. a fortnightly timetable of meetings on its own would not have provided enough time for some committees to undertake their work.

35. We agreed a total of 22 additional meetings in the period between 1 September 2021 and 28 January 2022, of which eight were allocated to the Finance Committee.

36. This suggested that additional slots are likely to be required by committees in the future, with some regularity.

37. In summary:

- Whilst problems were identified with the current fortnightly timetable, moving to a weekly timetable would significantly increase the amount of time members are required to sit in committee meetings.

- If a fortnightly timetable is retained, committees will continue to require additional meeting slots.
- Some committees and committee members would prefer any additional allocation of meetings to be predictably timetabled and accessible without Business Committee approval.
- Some committees, who do not have access to a full-day meeting slot currently, would like to have this option i.e. the policy and legislation committees, the Finance Committee, and the PAPA Committee could be provided with a broadly equal timetable allocation.
- Protected weeks should be removed if a fortnightly timetable is retained.

38. To address the issues identified, we agreed four revisions to the committee timetable:

1. **maintain a fortnightly timetable** for most committees;
2. **provide committees with reserve meeting slots in their non-sitting weeks** that can be used without having to seek permission from the Business Committee (but with committee agreement);
3. **introduce an alternating Wednesday morning/Thursday afternoon meeting pattern** to provide all policy and legislation committees with the same amount of meeting time and flexibility; and
4. **remove protected weeks**, whilst continuing to provide protected time for committees that meet occasionally.

39. We believe that this approach offers committees greater certainty when planning additional meetings and removes the need for us to consider additional meeting request, unless they fall outside the regular pattern of meetings.

40. However, this approach comes with the risk of some committees simply shifting to a weekly timetable which could create problems for a number of committee members, were this to be the case.

41. The responses to the review suggested that decisions to hold additional meetings can have an impact beyond the work of the committee holding additional meetings, as it can affect the capacity of members to prepare for other committees they sit on.

- 42.** This risk can be mitigated, to an extent, if additional meetings are called with the agreement of a committee i.e. if a Chair seeks the agreement of their committee before scheduling additional meetings.
- 43.** As a further safeguard, we suggested that the Chairs' Forum might wish to consider monitoring how this approach develops, and to periodically consider the cumulative effect of committee business on committee member capacity. The Chairs' Forum could then raise this with us, should it consider further changes to the committee timetable are needed in future.
- 44.** The current timetable provides the Children, Young People, and Education, CCEI, Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs, and HSC Committees with twice as much time per fortnight as the other policy and legislation committees, Finance, and the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee. This is because they are currently allocated a fortnightly full-day meeting on a Thursday. In comparison, the other committees in this group are allocated a half day on a Wednesday or a Monday.
- 45.** If these committees are to be allocated the same amount of time, then there will be an increase in the amount of time provided for the committees currently allocated a half-day slot. There will be a reduction in meeting time provided for the committees currently meeting for a full day on Thursdays.
- 46.** The increased flexibility to hold additional meetings in non-sitting weeks enables this change to be managed in way that allows any loss of timetabled time to be made up, if necessary.
- 47.** For committees that might not wish to increase the amount of time they meet, they have the flexibility to maintain the time they spend in meetings at current levels, with the option to expand this if a need arises in the future.
- 48.** For most committees to have access to both Wednesday morning and all-day Thursday meetings, on a fortnightly rotation, a four-week timetable is needed to manage this.
- 49.** In developing a revised timetable, we sought to avoid membership clashes. We have achieved this, though we are aware of one potential membership clash that could occur if additional meeting slots are utilised.
- 50.** Beyond the desire to avoid disruption to the work of committees, we were also mindful of Professor Diana Stirbu's report *Power, Influence and Impact of Senedd Committees*, and

particularly her recommendation that we seek to “*ensure stability in committees’ membership to get all Members fully engaged in committee work*”.²

51. Before finalising a revised timetable, based on the approach described in this section, we consulted the Chairs’ Forum on 17 February 2022, and political groups on 1 March 2022.

52. The Chairs’ Forum endorsed the approach we proposed for improving the timetable.

53. There were a few adjustments to meeting allocations suggested by Chairs, which we addressed, before agreeing a revised timetable on 8 March 2022.

54. A copy of the revised timetable is provided at Annex A: The committee timetable from 25 April 2022.

² Professor Diana Stirbu, *Power, Influence and Impact of Senedd Committees: Developing a framework for measuring committees’ effectiveness*, London Metropolitan University, October 2021, p.76

6. Committees that meet less frequently

55. Under the current timetable, the protected weeks provided dedicated meeting time for:

- the Llywydd's Committee;
- the Chairs' Forum; and
- the Committee for Scrutiny of the First Minister.

56. As we agreed that protected weeks should be removed, time had to be found for these committees and the Forum to meet.

57. The revised timetable enables the **Llywydd's Committee** to meet on any Monday morning.

58. The **Committee for Scrutiny of the First Minister** is provided with a Friday meeting slot (as was the case for its predecessor committee in the Fifth Senedd). We are content for this to fall in the last week of each term, or the penultimate week of each term, according to the needs of that Committee.

59. The **Chairs' Forum** is provided with a 90-minute meeting slot on the morning of the final Thursday of each half term (from 9am until 10:30am). This provides dedicated time for the Chairs' Forum, whilst still allowing committees with a meeting on the same day to meet, albeit with a later start to their business.

7. Modes of meeting

60. In terms of the mode of meeting (in person, hybrid, or virtual), the current Senedd infrastructure can support four virtual or physical meetings at any time. Two hybrid meetings can be supported at any time. Senedd Commission staff are working on options to increase that capacity to four concurrent hybrid meetings. Until that work has been completed, it will be necessary to put arrangements in place to resolve any potential competing demands for hybrid resources.

61. Where the timetable allows scope for more than two committee meetings at any time, the option to hold a hybrid meeting is to be offered to the committees with a timetabled slot first, i.e. ahead of those that have a reserve slot at the same time.

62. In circumstances where three committees have meetings timetabled at the same time, this is to be resolved between the committees involved wherever possible (as would previously have been done in relation to preferences for specific committee meeting rooms). If the allocation of hybrid facilities can not be resolved, then the matter can be referred back to the Business Committee for resolution (as a matter of timetabling).

8. Implementation

63. The revised timetable is to be implemented from the start of the Summer Term i.e. week one of the timetable is the week commencing 25 April 2022.

Annex A: The committee timetable from 25 April 2022

Allwedd:

RED TEXT: Timetabled meeting slot

[COMMITTEE]: Reserve meeting slot (that can be utilised without seeking permission from the BC)

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1		BUSINESS COMMITTEE [STANDARDS] GROUPS	CHILDREN PAPA [CULTURE] [HEALTH]	CLIMATE ECONOMY [FINANCE] [HOUSING]	NO SENEDD BUSINESS
	SENEDD COMMISSION LJC PETITIONS [EQUALITY]	PLENARY	PLENARY		
2	STANDARDS	BUSINESS COMMITTEE GROUPS	[CHILDREN] [PAPA] CULTURE HEALTH	[CLIMATE] [ECONOMY] FINANCE HOUSING	NO SENEDD BUSINESS
	SENEDD COMMISSION LJC EQUALITY	PLENARY	PLENARY		
3	[EQUALITY]	BUSINESS COMMITTEE [STANDARDS] GROUPS	CLIMATE ECONOMY [FINANCE] [HOUSING]	CHILDREN PAPA [CULTURE] [HEALTH]	NO SENEDD BUSINESS
	SENEDD COMMISSION LJC PETITIONS [EQUALITY]	PLENARY	PLENARY		

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
4	EQUALITY STANDARDS	BUSINESS COMMITTEE	[CLIMATE] [ECONOMY] FINANCE HOUSING	[CHILDREN] [PAPA] CULTURE HEALTH	NO SENEDD BUSINESS
	SENEDD COMMISSION LJC EQUALITY	GROUPS PLENARY	PLENARY		