

# Amending Standing Orders: Standing Order 23 – Petitions signature threshold

December 2021

In accordance with Standing Order 11.7(iv), the Business Committee is responsible for making recommendations on the general practice and procedures of the Senedd, including any proposals for the re-making or revision of Standing Orders.

This report recommends a single amendment to Standing Order 23.4(i).

The change agreed by Business Committee is found in Annex A, and the proposal for new Standing Orders is at Annex B.



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## 1. Background

- 1.** 2020 and 2021 have seen a significant growth in the numbers of petitions referred for consideration by the Petitions Committee ('the Committee'). This has been due to a combination of two factors: the introduction of a new petitions website in April 2020, which has made it easier for petitions to be created, shared and signed - particularly from mobile devices; and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the range of topics on which petitions have been submitted.
- 2.** In 2020, 168 petitions were referred to the Committee compared to 70 in 2019 and 62 in 2018. 120 petitions have been referred during 2021 so far.
- 3.** The Petitions Committee of the Fifth Senedd noted in its legacy report that it was unclear, given the unique circumstances of 2020 and the pandemic, whether the increase in numbers would be sustained in the longer term. On this basis, it recommended that its successor committee should consider further the merits of increasing the petition signatures threshold from its current level of 50 signatures once more information was available, noting that "200 or 250 signatures may be justified...to ensure that petitions referred for scrutiny can demonstrate a significant level of public support."<sup>1</sup>
- 4.** The Petitions Committee in the Sixth Senedd wrote to the Business Committee on 16 November 2021 to request that the signature threshold be increased to 250 signatures, with effect on all new petitions submitted from 1 January 2022. The Committee stated that it had considered figures for the first 10 months of 2021, which demonstrate that the increase in the numbers of petitions referred to the Committee has been sustained relative to 2017-2019, in coming to this recommendation.
- 5.** The Petitions Committee believes that consideration of a petition by a committee, and with a response from the Welsh Government, should require that petitions are able to demonstrate some level of popular support. It notes that the current high volume of petitioning impacts upon its ability to focus on detailed scrutiny of petitions that it believes have the potential to benefit from this.

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<sup>1</sup> Petitions Committee, [Fifth Senedd Legacy Report](#), March 2021

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**6.** The Petitions Committee has indicated that it considered a range of options for the threshold, including lower and higher options. The Committee's analysis indicates that, on average, petitions currently collect more than 300 signatures and 56% of petitions submitted over the last year gathered more than 250 signatures. It considers that the proposal for 250 signatures would put the petitions process on a sustainable footing for the whole of the Sixth Senedd. Further information on the options considered are contained within the Committee's letter to the Business Committee.

**7.** The Petitions Committee intends the change to take effect for all new petitions submitted from 1 January 2022.

## **2. Business Committee consideration**

**8.** The Business Committee considered the Petitions Committee's letter requesting the change to the threshold at its meeting of 23 November 2021 and agreed to propose a single change to Standing Orders to facilitate this.

## **3. Decision**

**9.** The Business Committee formally agreed the change to Standing Order 23.4(i) on 7 December 2021. The Senedd is invited to approve the proposal to change the Standing Orders as at Annex A.

## Annex A: Proposed Standing Order 23.4(i), and explanatory notes

| STANDING ORDER 23 – Public Petitions      |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| STANDING ORDER Admissibility of Petitions |   | Retain heading  |
| <b>23.4</b>                               | <p>A petition is not admissible if it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) contains fewer than 250 signatures;</li> <li>(ii) fails to comply with Standing Order 23.2 or is otherwise not in proper form;</li> <li>(iii) contains language which is offensive;</li> <li>(iv) requests the Senedd to do anything which the Senedd clearly has no power to do; or</li> <li>(v) is the same as, or substantially similar to, a petition which was closed less than a year earlier.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Amend Standing Order</b></p> <p>The amendment increases the signature threshold from 50 to 250 signatures in order for the petition to be admissible.</p> |

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## Annex B – Standing Order 23.4, as amended

Standing order 23 – Public Petitions

**Admissibility of Petitions**

23.4 A petition is not admissible if it:

- (i) contains fewer than 250 signatures;
- (ii) fails to comply with Standing Order 23.2 or is otherwise not in proper form;
- (iii) contains language which is offensive;
- (iv) requests the Senedd to do anything which the Senedd clearly has no power to do; or
- (v) is the same as, or substantially similar to, a petition which was closed less than a year earlier.