



11.0 Engagement and Influencing

How to Submit Evidence and Give Oral Evidence

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Senedd Cymru, or the Welsh Parliament has a number of committees whose role involves conducting investigations into policy decisions made by Welsh Government or examining proposed new legislation. As part of this work, they regularly call for evidence from organisations and individuals in order to assist them in their work of better understanding the policy area in focus and its delivery on the ground, or the impact of a proposed new law.

Assembly Committees

Committees are one of the key mechanisms that enable the Senedd to fulfil its duty to scrutinise the Welsh Government.

The committees, which are set up to look at specific subjects, are made up of a small number of Members of the Senedd (MSs) from different party groups to undertake detailed work in defined policy areas.



Image: Person giving oral evidence at a committee meeting.

The Senedd has committees set up to look at specific subjects. The work they do includes conducting an investigation into policy decisions made by the Welsh Government and scrutinising Welsh Government Ministers in their decision-making.

They also play a role in making sure that public money is well spent, and can ask questions of public bodies funded by the Welsh Government. Furthermore, they have an important role in examining proposed new laws and how they could work in Wales.

The day to day administration of each committee is undertaken by a clerking team and they are supported by a number of other officials.

Senedd Subject Committee Inquiries

Subject Committees are focused on certain policy areas. Within those broad fields, committee members can decide to investigate specific topics in some depth, and will usually examine the issue through an inquiry.

They are designed to consider current Welsh Government policy, its delivery, whether it is fulfilling its established objectives and whether any improvements could be made. They can also be into areas of public interest where they believe the government or public bodies should be taking action.

There are many reasons why committees choose certain topics for inquiry. There may be clear issues of national significance such as the inquiries into the impact of Covid-19 on specific sectors. An individual MS may have a specific policy or political interest.

Additionally, ideas and suggestions are frequently raised by external organisations through lobbying an individual MS or the committee as a whole. The Subject Committees will also consider in detail the new laws proposed in the areas that they cover.

These Committees rely on receiving evidence and information from external organisations and individuals to help them fulfil their scrutiny role during committee inquiries and when considering legislation. A key part of their work therefore is calling for evidence, and reviewing the evidence presented to form recommendations to Welsh Government and other bodies.

Normally the Committee will publish a call for written evidence into their chosen topic or legislation months in advance of them holding oral evidence sessions with external organisations or individuals.

Occasionally the committee might be working to a shorter timescale or will be seeking feedback and evidence in response to information presented by others, or by Welsh Government Ministers. In such instances, there would be a shorter period of time for collating evidence from organisations and individuals.

Drafting Written Evidence

In order to be made aware of opportunities to submit evidence to Senedd Committees, it is beneficial to sign up to receive committee news email bulletins through the committee pages on the Senedd website.

The committees also frequently publish a '**Forward Work programme**' of the areas that members have identified for the term ahead, which will include details of inquiries and areas of focus. This is normally done at the start of the term and is available on the committee pages of the Senedd website.

A committee will issue a call for evidence via a direct mailing list that the clerking team would have drawn up, and publicly through the Senedd website and through news outlets.

There will be a dedicated page on the committee site that will outline the background to the inquiry or legislation, the specific areas of focus, the consultation timescale and questions to answer, and how to submit your response.

If you are preparing evidence for a committee inquiry it is always worth checking the timescales involved with the clerking team and to establish the nature of the inquiry they are conducting. Their contact details will be available on the Senedd website committee pages.

When drafting your submission, always focus your answers on the questions provided. If you have additional comments to add or background to provide, you can add this information in at the end of your submission. It is also useful to include a brief overview of your organisation, your work, impact and reach in order to highlight your authority, work or interest in the topic at hand.

Your submission should include facts, evidence and statistics where appropriate and should avoid include personal opinion.



Remember

Members of the Senedd might not be as familiar as you in the policy area under discussion, so it is always worth explaining any terminology or acronyms that you might use in your day to day work.

Your submission will be made public on the committee webpage. If for any reason of confidentiality, you do not wish for it to be made public then please do contact the committee clerk to explain the situation before submitting your evidence. Members of the Senedd are in the main seeking information to establish how Welsh Government policy is being delivered, its impact, and how it can be improved.

If the subject in question is one you feel passionately about and believe that you have more information to share that may benefit the committee in its work, you can follow up your written submission with a contact to the clerking team to offer to give oral evidence. Following advice from the clerking team, it will ultimately be for the committee members to decide who they would like to question further in a committee meeting.

Giving Oral Evidence

After receiving written evidence, the MSs and clerking team discuss the emerging key themes that have been presented in the evidence, and areas for further investigation. They will also decide on which organisations they would like to invite to present evidence to them in a future committee meeting.

If you are asked to give oral evidence, you will be contacted by the clerking team to highlight when and how this will happen. Prior to Covid-19 these sessions would be held at the Senedd in Cardiff Bay, and during the period of lockdown they were held online via zoom. It is likely there will be opportunities to continue to present virtually to committees in the future.

It is important to remember that providing oral evidence is not a test of your ability, nor are committee members trying to catch you out. They are interested in the information you presented in your written submission and understand that you have an expertise in the specific policy area in question and they wish to gain a better understanding of the topic.

You will need to familiarise yourself with the written submission presented on behalf of your organisation to the committee as preparation for your oral evidence session. You are able to have notes and briefing papers at hand to help you with your answers during the session.



Information

If the topic in hand is an area of expertise of another member of staff within your organisation, you can request for that person to join you in the committee session.

As you prepare for the evidence session, it is always worth listening back to previous committee meetings to identify the topics that will likely be raised with you. Previous evidence sessions also provide you with insight on which MS have an interest in which specific issues and their approach to the inquiry.

The committee members may have a good understanding of the topic of inquiry or legislation due to the information provided through the written consultation phase. Furthermore, the clerking team will have identified key areas of focus and provided suggested questions for MSs.

That said, when preparing for your oral evidence session you should consider the key points that you need to get across during the time that you have, rather than how best to answer the questions asked.

If you are asked questions that you are unable to answer, do not be concerned about saying that you don't know. If you don't have the information to hand then offer to write to committee members with further information as a follow up. They appreciate the honesty and would not welcome attempts to bluster or provide inaccurate or misleading information.



Important Information

It is also important to remember that in most instances you will be giving evidence as a representative of your organisation and therefore party political or personal opinions should be avoided.

Committee members generally try and work collectively to really examine and scrutinise policy areas and legislation, and in the vast majority of cases try and build a consensus around recommendations for action by Welsh Government.

It is always worth remembering, however, that there are different political dynamics at play. The committee is made up of MSs from the governing parties and from opposition parties. Occasionally their motivations might differ.

Logistics

The clerking team will contact you ahead of the committee session to confirm the logistical arrangements and to explain the technological elements to the session. Each committee meeting is broadcast live on Senedd.tv, and all Senedd proceedings are bilingual so all participants are able to contribute in either Welsh or English.

If you do not understand Welsh, you will be provided with simultaneous translation facilities. The clerking team are available to answer any questions that you might have ahead of time. In some instances, the clerking team will also share with you the topics of interest, and the likely areas of questioning.

Some MSs do follow the suggested questions set out by the clerking team, and others do not, but always remember that MSs are free to ask any questions they deem appropriate. The Committee Chair will ask you to introduce yourself and your organisation, and may ask you for introductory remarks. It is worth preparing a short introduction to you, your organisation and the top line points that you would like to make as.

In other instances, the Chair will go straight into questions from the committee members. You should assume that all committee members will have read your original written submission and therefore the session will be used to build on the points made and to delve deeper into the issues you present.

Depending on the time pressures on the committee session, you might also be asked for closing remarks or to highlight any other issues that you would like to consider that have not been raised during questions.

The clerking team will contact you a few days after the meeting with a written transcript of the meeting. This is chance for you to check the factual accuracy of the transcript rather than an opportunity to add in additional points or to amend what was said. The transcript will then be public.

Next Steps

After receiving all written and oral evidence and scrutinising the topic in hand, the committee will discuss the emerging themes and the areas for recommendation for action by Welsh Government. In the vast majority of cases, consensus is achieved across the political spectrum on the recommendations.

There have only been a handful of occasions where an individual MS has not supported the majority view and conclusions of a committee inquiry, and have either asked for their objection to be noted to a specific recommendation or whole report, or have drafted and published a 'minority report' to acknowledge that the committee is not united in their response.

The inquiry report and recommendations are then presented to the relevant Welsh Government Minister and are made public. In many instances the report will refer to evidence presented by certain organisations in their final report and will often use quotes from the written and oral evidence presented.

The Welsh Government then will formally respond to the report and its recommendations. The inquiry report and Government response will be subject to a debate in the Senedd. In general, Welsh Government Ministers and officials try and find a way to respond positively to committee recommendations where possible.

They tend to appreciate and value the work of the committee in gathering evidence and taking the time to examine a policy area in detail, as much as possible in a non-partisan way.

The committee might then choose to re-examine the policy area after a set period of time to assess whether Government have acted on the recommendations, and the impact it has made.



Cefnogi Trydydd
Sector **Cymru**

Third Sector
Support **Wales**

Third Sector Support Wales is a network of support organisations for the whole of the third sector in Wales.

It consists of the 19 local and regional support bodies across Wales, the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and the national support body, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

For further information contact
<https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/>

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.