

Amending Standing Orders: Political groups and groupings (Standing Orders 1.3 and 11.3)

February 2026

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 amendments to Standing Orders which will raise the thresholds for the formation of political groups and groupings from a minimum of three Members (where each threshold is set currently) to a minimum of five Members.

These changes are proposed in anticipation of the forthcoming increase in the number of Members of the Senedd, from 60 to 96. If agreed, the proposed changes will come into effect at the beginning of the next Senedd.

The Senedd is invited to approve the proposals to amend the Standing Orders as at Annex A. The amended Standing Orders, if approved, are at Annex B.



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1. Background

1. Section 1 of the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 (“the 2024 Act”) amends the Government of Wales Act 2006 (“the 2006 Act”) to provide for 16 Senedd constituencies, each with six seats. This means that the Senedd will have 96 Members, except in circumstances where one or more seats in the Senedd are vacant.

2. On 16 October 2024, in anticipation of these changes, the Senedd established the Future Senedd Committee¹ to consider and report on (amongst other things):

[...] the thresholds currently set in Standing Orders for the number of Members required for various purposes, including (but not restricted to) the formation of political groups, removal of office holders, and quorum.²

3. The Future Senedd Committee published its ‘Review of Standing Order Thresholds’ report on 28 February 2025. Regarding the thresholds for the formation of political groups and groupings, the Future Senedd Committee recommended that:

- in a 96 Member Senedd, the threshold in Standing Order 1.3, which requires at least three Members to form a political group, should be increased. *[Recommendation 1]*
- the Business Committee should consider the level at which an increased political group threshold should be set as part of wider consideration of the threshold for groupings, the entitlements of Members not in a political group or grouping, and the principle that all Members of the Senedd should be able to participate in determining the business of the Senedd. *[Recommendation 2]*

¹ The Future Senedd Committee was chaired by the Deputy Presiding Officer, and included representatives of the Welsh Government and of each political group in the Senedd. Members who were not members of political groups were offered the opportunity to attend Committee meetings in accordance with Standing Order 17.49.

² Information about the Future Senedd Committee is available on the [Committee’s webpage](#).

2. The Business Committee's consideration

4. This report relates only to recommendations 1 and 2 of the Future Senedd Committee's report; the Business Committee's consideration of recommendations 3 to 14 is covered in a separate report.

5. The Business Committee considered recommendations 1 and 2 of the Future Senedd Committee's report at its meetings on 19 June, 18 September and 16 October.

3. Timing

6. As the proposed changes are intended to reflect the increase in the number of Members, the Business Committee agreed to propose that they should come into effect at start of the Seventh Senedd.

4. Decision

7. The Business Committee proposes that the minimum thresholds for forming a political group in accordance with SO 1.3 and a grouping in accordance with SO 11.3 should remain aligned, and that each should be raised to a minimum of five Members.

Political Groups (Standing Order 1.3)

8. The definition of groups has a wide-ranging bearing upon the operation of the Senedd, including in relation to the membership of the Senedd Commission and the Business Committee, the organisation of Plenary business, the membership of committees, and the legislative scrutiny process. For example:

- groups play a central role in the election, formation and functioning of a number of offices and bodies including the Presiding Officer and Deputy(ies), the Business Committee and the Senedd Commission;
- in Plenary, time must be made available for motions proposed by groups who do not have an executive role, and Leaders and Spokespeople representing groups are called to ask questions without notice during question sessions to the First Minister and Welsh Ministers;

- the allocation of committee chairs to groups, and the remaining membership of committees, must reflect the balance of groups to which Members belong.

9. Were the chosen threshold(s) to result in a significant number and proportion of Members being unable to form a group, they could effectively be excluded from the usual channels of business management, participation and representation. This could have a number of potential consequences, including:

- implications for the size of committees (due to the requirement for all Members who are not in a political group to be offered at least one place on a committee) and quorum (as non-group Members cannot be substituted for in accordance with Standing Order 17.48);
- questioning of the legitimacy of committees if one (or more) political party was not represented on them;
- the potential for challenges to the legitimacy of, and greater opposition to, decisions taken by the Business Committee and the Senedd Commission resulting from their ability to reflect, represent and take decisions for the Senedd as a whole being compromised. This could include Business Committee motions being voted down in Plenary, if Business Committee decisions did not reflect the balance of views in the Senedd as a whole – e.g. if there were a government majority on the Business Committee but not in the Senedd itself.

10. As noted by the Future Senedd Committee, a proportional increase to the current threshold of Members required for the formation of a political group would result in a threshold of five in a 96 Member Senedd. In light of the uncertainty around the potential number and relative size of political parties that will have Members returned by the Senedd's new electoral system, the Business Committee considered that a proportional increase to the threshold for political groups would be less likely to risk unintended consequences at the outset of the Seventh Senedd compared to a higher threshold.

Political Groupings (Standing Order 11.3)

11. The separate threshold for the formation of a grouping relates only to representation on the Business Committee. Its purpose is to ensure that Members who are not members of a group can be represented on the Business Committee. This enables the Business Committee to take decisions on the widest possible basis, whilst also seeking to keep the number of Members

attending the Business Committee's meetings manageable. The Business Committee considered that this threshold should remain aligned to the threshold for the formation of political groups and should, therefore, also be increased on a proportional basis to five.

Attendance at Business Committee (Standing Order 11.5(iii))

12. The Business Committee also considered the current facility for Members, who do not belong to a political group and are unable to form a grouping (for the sole reason that there is an insufficient number of Members to form one), to attend Business Committee meetings and to vote (Standing Order 11.5(iii)).

13. The Business Committee noted that this mechanism—in combination with Standing Order 11.3—provides an important constitutional purpose. Together, these Standing Orders provide the potential for every Member to either be represented on the Business Committee, or to attend Business Committee meetings and to vote as an individual Member (in the event that there are not enough Members to form a grouping). This is important given the Business Committee's functions for things such as: determining the organisation of Senedd business in Plenary; proposing titles and remits of committees; and, recommending revisions to the Senedd's Standing Orders.

14. However, the Business Committee recognised that this Standing Order, depending on the political composition of the Seventh Senedd, could prove problematic in the event that, for instance:

- A significant proportion of Members do not belong to a political group but are unable to form a grouping for the purposes of being represented on the Business Committee; this could result in a Business Committee which does not sufficiently reflect the political composition of the Senedd as a whole; or
- Members who do not belong to a political group become members of the executive, whereby such Members would be counted toward those available to form a grouping, but would—in practical reality—be unavailable to form one. In such an event, it is possible that Members who do not belong to a political group will have no feasible route to Business Committee representation and be unable to attend and vote as individual Members—as the number of Members who do not belong to a political group is on (or above) the required threshold, whilst the

number of Members who are actually available (i.e. who do not have an executive role) is below the threshold.

15. Although the Business Committee does not propose any amendments to Standing Order 11.5(iii) at this time, it recommends that the Seventh Senedd Business Committee keeps this arrangement under review to ensure that Business Committee membership/attendance:

- reflects the political composition of the Senedd, as far as possible; and
- remains manageable and supports effective decision making.

16. On 11 December 2025, the Business Committee formally agreed to propose the changes to Standing Orders outlined in Annex A. The Senedd is invited to approve the proposed new Standing Orders at Annex B.

Annex A: Proposed changes to Standing Orders and explanatory notes

STANDING ORDER 1 – Members		
Political Groups		Retain sub-heading
1.3	For the purposes of the Act, a political group is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) a group of at least <u>five</u> three Members belonging to the same registered political party that won at least one seat at the previous Senedd election; or (ii) <u>five</u> three or more Members not satisfying the criteria in Standing Order 1.3(i), who have notified the Presiding Officer of their wish to be regarded as a political group, and satisfied the Presiding Officer that exceptional circumstances apply. 	Amend Standing Order The proposed change would increase the minimum number of Members required to form a political group. The proposed increase from three to five is broadly proportional to the increase in the Senedd's membership.
STANDING ORDER 11 – Organisation of Business		
Business Committee		Retain sub-heading
11.3	As soon as possible after a Senedd election, the Minister with responsibility for government business must table a motion to appoint as members of the Committee, the Presiding Officer, one Member nominated by each political group represented in the Senedd and (if any <u>five</u> three or more Members who are not members of a political group decide to form a grouping for the purposes of Standing Order 11) a Member nominated by each	Amend Standing Order The proposed change would increase the minimum number of Members required to form a grouping for the purposes of being represented on the



grouping of Members. No amendments may be tabled to a motion under Standing Order 11.3.

Business Committee. The proposed increase from three to five is broadly proportional to the increase in the Senedd's membership.

Annex B: Standing Orders as amended

STANDING ORDER 1 – Members

Political Groups

- 1.3 For the purposes of the Act, a political group is:
- (iii) a group of at least five Members belonging to the same registered political party that won at least one seat at the previous Senedd election; or
 - (iv) five or more Members not satisfying the criteria in Standing Order 1.3(i), who have notified the Presiding Officer of their wish to be regarded as a political group, and satisfied the Presiding Officer that exceptional circumstances apply.

STANDING ORDER 11 – Organisation of Business

Business Committee

- 11.3 As soon as possible after a Senedd election, the Minister with responsibility for government business must table a motion to appoint as members of the Committee, the Presiding Officer, one Member nominated by each political group represented in the Senedd and (if any five or more Members who are not members of a political group decide to form a grouping for the purposes of Standing Order 11) a Member nominated by each grouping of Members. No amendments may be tabled to a motion under Standing Order 11.3.