

# **Inquiry into Dignity and Respect**

Introducing more independence  
and support into the complaints  
process in the Senedd

March 2026



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# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 23 June 2021. Its remit can be found at:  
[www.senedd.wales/SeneddStandards](http://www.senedd.wales/SeneddStandards)

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Current Committee membership:



**Committee Chair:  
Hannah Blythyn MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Mick Antoniw MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Tom Giffard MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Peredur Owen Griffiths MS**  
Plaid Cymru

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The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry.



**Natasha Asghar MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Mark Drakeford MS**  
Welsh Labour



**John Griffiths MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Vikki Howells MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Samuel Kurtz MS**  
Welsh Conservatives

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## Chair's foreword

Everyone has the right to feel safe and secure at work and within their everyday interactions in a workplace. That absolutely should be the case for our devolved democracy and all who come into contact with those who have been elected to serve in the Senedd. We have a responsibility not just as individual employers but also as a consequence of the privilege that comes with the position we hold and platform we have.

The reflections and recommendations in this report are part of an ongoing process aimed at enhancing the Senedd Standards landscape and ensuring greater trust, transparency and support in those processes and our political institution as a whole.

In any institution or walk of life, it is not easy to come forward to raise concerns about bullying and harassment. We are acutely aware that the power imbalances that are so often central to this, can be amplified in a political setting. It is absolutely right that those who make the brave decision to come forward deserve and should expect clear support, and everyone involved in the process should have confidence that the right expertise and independence are in place to handle these matters effectively and with empathy. There should and can be zero tolerance of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviours. That means having both support and sanctions in place.

People need to feel that raising concerns is worthwhile, and that their experiences—especially the everyday interactions that may make someone uncomfortable—are recognised and understood. This work extends far beyond the serious complaints that make headlines; it is about valuing the lived experiences of everyone in our workplace.

This report reflects the Committee's recognition and determination to continue in this work into the next Senedd but also the need to make practical improvements now, within the time we have remaining in this Senedd. These recommendations should not be viewed as the end of the journey, indeed we make clear reference to changes that would potentially best go hand in hand with the start of a new Standard Commissioner's term in 2027.

In carrying out this work, we greatly valued hearing from a wide range of people, including Members of the Youth Parliament, those working across the Senedd and experts in the field. Their real and candid experiences were essential to

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shaping our recommendations. What we heard consistently was the need for greater support and independence in the system, increasing challenges in the online environment, and a particular desire for better mechanisms to enable the voice of support staff to be heard and be able to shape that support and services.

In response, we are recommending immediate steps to strengthen independence and enhance expertise—continuing the Committee’s wider work on ensuring strong and effective mechanisms for individual Member accountability.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** The Committee recommends that the Senedd Commission introduces a semi-independent ‘Guardian’ type role, that can provide signposting advice and support for those wanting to raise concerns about dignity and respect. The person appointed to the role should be empowered to raise concerns and feed into all appropriate channels..... Page 19

**Recommendation 2.** The Committee recommends that a helpline is re-established as an additional mechanism for people to access with concerns and complaints..... Page 19

**Recommendation 3.** The Committee recommends that the Senedd Commission considers developing an anonymous reporting tool to allow people to raise concerns. Such a tool should be subject to evaluation after two years of operation..... Page 19

**Recommendation 4.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the seventh Senedd amend the Procedure for Complaints Against Members of the Senedd to require the Commissioner to consider the use of expertise in each complaint, records the decision taken, and the reasoning for this decision, in each complaint report. The accompanying guidance will be updated to provide further information about the definition of expertise and what expertise should be considered in different circumstances such as sexual harassment or bullying..... Page 25

**Recommendation 5.** The Committee recommends that the Commissioner considers whether additional support is required within their office given the increase in Members of the Senedd. In considering additional support, attention should be given to the required skills mix including skilled capacity to undertake investigations or assess evidence..... Page 25

**Recommendation 6.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the seventh Senedd amend the Procedure for Complaints Against Members of the Senedd to increase the time limit for complaints to twelve months, and for this to sit alongside the current provision for the Commissioner to have discretion in considering older complaints. The Commissioner should also include clear public information on the discretionary power to look at older complaints..... Page 25

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**Recommendation 7.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the Seventh Senedd moves forward at pace with appointing lay members, and that consideration is given for at least one appointee to have relevant expertise on matters relating to dignity and respect.  
..... Page 28

**Recommendation 8.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the Seventh Senedd considers establishing a sub-committee of lay members to consider reports from the Commissioner from Standards which have arisen from support staff complaints..... Page 28

**Recommendation 9.** The Committee recommends that rule 21 of the Code of Conduct is amended to prohibit Members from trying to persuade potential complainants or witnesses not to come forward..... Page 28

**Recommendation 10.** The Committee recommends that the procedure for dealing with complaints against Members of the Senedd is amended so that details relating to Complainants in reports relating to matters of dignity and respect are anonymised, unless requested otherwise by the Complainant.  
..... Page 28

**Recommendation 11.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the Seventh Senedd bring forward an overarching statement reaffirming the commitment to dignity and respect for Members which should be subject to an affirmative vote. This statement should be agreed at the beginning of each Senedd..... Page 32

**Recommendation 12.** The Committee recommends that the Senedd Commission develops a risk based exclusion policy for Members who are subject to serious allegations relating to a violent or sexual offence, which is incorporated into Standing Orders..... Page 35

**Recommendation 13.** The Committee recommends the Welsh Government works with the Secretary of State for Justice to amend the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act to enable Members of the Senedd to request a standard or enhanced DBS check..... Page 35

**Recommendation 14.** The Committee recommends the Senedd Commission develops a training programme, which spans the next Senedd, with particular focus on matters relating to dignity and respect. The programme should cover the broad range of topics captured in this area such as allyship, bystander

intervention, and sexual harassment (as required by the Worker Protection Act 2023). Such training should be offered through varied formats (party group, cross-Senedd, tailored sessions)..... Page 40

**Recommendation 15.** The Committee recommends the Senedd Commission provides specific training modules for roles that provide pastoral care such as Chief whips, Chiefs of Staff, and support staff unions..... Page 40

**Recommendation 16.** The Committee recommends the Senedd Commission works with Commission and support staff trade unions on the development of relevant courses to ensure the necessary concerns are being addressed..... Page 40

**Recommendation 17.** The Committee recommends that the Senedd Commission, alongside South Wales Police, work to develop a social media monitoring process that can be offered to all Members to opt into if they wish. Progress on this, including data collection and a tangible impact assessment, should be reported annually to the Standards of Conduct Committee. ....Page 45

**Recommendation 18.** The Committee recommends the Standards of Conduct Committee in the seventh Senedd ensure that the Code of Conduct and associated documents are produced in a number of formats to ensure that they are clear and accessible for all to engage with.....Page 45

**Recommendation 19.** The Committee recommends that a requirement for Members to be responsible employers is included in the Code of Conduct, with amendments to the Guidance on the Code of Conduct to reflect the expectations on Members in this regard.....Page 48

**Recommendation 20.** The Committee recommends that Party Leaders in the next Senedd consider either jointly or on a party basis, establishing an employers' forum to facilitate open discussion of employment practices between Members and support staff, and to share good practice. This would allow for more structured engagement with the unions representing support staff and could be utilised to agree an approach to potential recognition and facility time for those representing Support Staff unions.....Page 49

# 1. Introduction and Background

As elected politicians, we have a responsibility to set the highest standards for others to follow. This report considers how the Senedd can strengthen a culture of dignity and respect, recognising that this depends on all Members and staff treating one another with courtesy, professionalism and fairness. Ensuring the right culture is not only vital for those who work in and engage with the Senedd, but also for maintaining public confidence and reflecting the values we want to see across Welsh society.

1. In 2018, a dignity and respect policy was agreed by the Senedd as part of a tripartite approach between Senedd Members, Support Staff and Senedd Commission employees to tackling the issues which were prevalent in society at the time such as the #metoo movement and Black Lives Matter. There has been a great deal of change in the Senedd since then, including the introduction of the 'respect' principle in the Code of Conduct for Members of the Senedd.
2. The Standards of Conduct Committee agreed to conduct an inquiry into 'dignity and respect' following the receipt of a report from the Senedd Commission (the Commission) on the existing dignity and respect policy.
3. The Commission made a number of recommendations to the Committee:

- **“Recommendation 2:** *Invite the Standards of Conduct Committee to consider that the Senedd should replace the current tri-partite policy with a joint overarching ‘Declaration on Dignity and Respect’. This will restate the commitment to uphold dignity and respect for Members, Member support staff, Commission staff and all other visitors. It is intended to link to the relevant policies and procedures in each case. It is proposed that*

*this be made by the Llywydd and party leaders and approved by the Senedd in Plenary.*

- **Recommendation 5:** *Invite the Standards of Conduct Committee to consider the findings of the Commission's review, and whether it wishes to identify any further actions or mechanisms in relation to creating a culture within the Senedd which supports the dignity and respect policy framework and whether there is merit in exploring alternative avenues of complaint in particular where the complainant does not wish to report the matter to the Standards Commissioner (or to a political party)."*

4. As a result, the Committee agreed to review the progress made in the area of dignity and respect since the implementation of the 2018 policy, and consider whether further steps could be taken.
5. The Committee issued a consultation in November 2023 and has taken evidence on these matters during the Senedd.
6. Hannah Blythyn MS, Peredur Owen Griffiths MS and Tom Giffard MS each declared an interest of having a spouse/partner working within the Senedd.
7. Based on the evidence gathered, the Committee drafted a number of proposals we believed would improve existing provisions for dignity and respect, but would also go some way to support a more positive culture that cannot be met through rules and procedures alone. We issued a further consultation on those proposals in October 2025.
8. The key themes that emerged from our initial evidence gathering stage, along with views on our draft proposals, are explored further in this report. The recommendations we have made are aimed at introducing changes to enhance independence in the process and improve the support available.

## 2. Complaints Process

Inappropriate behaviour by Members of the Senedd can result in complaints being made to the Commissioner for Standards ('the Commissioner'). As a gateway to complaints, this is a key part of the process to get right in terms of addressing dignity and respect concerns.

**9.** The complaints process is a central pillar of the Senedd's framework for addressing concerns about dignity and respect. As the primary route for raising concerns about Members, it must be accessible, trusted and clearly understood. Evidence submitted to the Committee indicates that low complaint volumes may reflect under-reporting rather than the absence of issues, underscoring the need for clarity, simplicity and confidence in the system.

**10.** Osian Evans, a representative of the Public and Commercial Services Union Plaid Cymru Support Staff Branch told the Committee that the process:

*"...needs to be simple and easier to understand, which is why the PCS branch is quite clear: it needs to be an independent process that sits outside and that manages to treat everyone in the same way, ...and it needs to deliver just outcomes"*

**11.** Making a complaint to the Commissioner for Standards is a significant decision, and not necessarily seen as or felt to be the first port of call in every instance". The Committee heard that a lot of the behaviour experienced was at a low level. Hannah Stevens from Elect Her set out that:

*"...women have to come in and put a thick coat on to protect themselves from all of the small pieces that come at them each day".*

In chapter 3, the Committee explores further how cultural change can be achieved to address these types of interaction. This chapter covers support for

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<sup>1</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 19, 15 July 2025

those wanting to record inappropriate behaviour, or seek support in deciding about what action to take.

## **Prior to making a complaint to the Commissioner for Standards**

**12.** The Committee heard about the need for support around reporting and recording inappropriate behaviour, and deciding whether to make a complaint. The Committee heard the process can be daunting and difficult to understand. Those that have experienced behaviour which has made them feel uncomfortable, often need support to establish whether they wish to complain about this, or whether they would like information recorded without further action taken.

**13.** Witnesses told the Committee that there was a need for good support structures and clear communication *prior* to any complaint being made. In identifying such a contact point, the Committee heard it was important to consider the independence of such a person, particularly to ensure there is confidence in the role/person by those seeking support. Osian Evans told the Committee that:

*"...you can have the nuance at the adjudication end of the system, but I think that the simplicity has to lie at the complainant's end. They have to know who to contact, how it works, have support throughout the process, explaining, if something is taking longer, why it is taking longer."*<sup>2</sup>

**14.** Anthony Cooper, Head of Office, Welsh Labour, set out how difficult it was to know how to access support:

*"Sometimes, from a staff point of view, it's quite difficult to know who to go to, I think, as well, in terms of getting some of that HR advice. I know, within the dignity and respect process, there are the contact officers you could talk to, maybe in the first instance, but on a HR side, Members' business support, for example, is there to service Members. And there is a bit of a gap there, unless you're a member of a trade union—not everybody will be for various reasons. I think the system has to take that into account."*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 30, 15 July 2025

<sup>3</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 39, 12 May 2025

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**15.** The need to ensure support for constituency staff as well as those based on the Senedd estate was emphasised. Frances Ifan, Chief of Staff for Plaid Cymru told the Committee:

*"... specifically in constituency set-ups, there is this case of falling between two stools, if you like, because Members are the employer, and if a member of staff does want to raise a complaint or a concern about that Member, their options are somewhat limited."*<sup>4</sup>

**16.** Anthony Cooper stressed the need for the support to be comprehensive:

*"It's also important that the ongoing support given to complainants and people who are subject to a complaint, through things like the employee assistance programme, I think it's important that that support is fully comprehensive."*<sup>5</sup>

### **Contact Officers**

**17.** At present, the Senedd Commission has a number of Members of staff who act as 'Contact Officers'. Correspondence from the Senedd Commission set out the role of Contact Officers:

- Offer confidential advice to anyone who wants to discuss inappropriate behaviour within the workplace, specifically dignity, respect and inclusion issues.
- Can provide clarity about complaint routes and discuss options available to individuals who have experienced inappropriate behaviour within the workplace.
- Are able to speak confidentially about matters with employees who are more comfortable in doing so than with their line manager.
- Can provide emotional support and signposting to appropriate services.
- Provide anonymised information to a central point to inform reporting on data patterns and to help to identify systemic issues.

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<sup>4</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 34, 12 May 2025

<sup>5</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 9, 12 May 2025

- The role is not to investigate the issue or make a judgement, but to provide information and signpost and to help the individual clarify for themselves what they would like to do and have the confidence to progress it.
- Talking to a Contact Officer is confidential and does not trigger a formal process.
- There is no need for information to be recorded – in doing so it could breach Data Protection Act.

**18.** During the evidence with Chiefs of Staff, concerns were raised with regards to this approach. Contact Officers are known within the Senedd and it was suggested that some people feel uncomfortable approaching them. The difficulties of promoting Contact Officers to constituency staff was also highlighted.

**19.** Officials from the Senedd Commission recognised it was a concern if people feel unable to approach the Contact Officers in confidence but Manon Antoniazzi, the Senedd Commission’s Chief Executive, explained that:

*“The advantage of having contact officers in-house is that they know us as well. Under the aegis of the Commission, they can be continuously trained in evolving standards of dignity and respect, and in the way that the processes work here. So, they’re up to date always on the advice that they need to give staff members.”<sup>6</sup>*

**20.** Leanne Baker, the Senedd Commission’s Chief People Officer, provided the assurance that:

*“They are Commission staff, but they are independent. They don’t report to anybody their findings. There is a form that we ask them to fill in, which says some really basic information. It’s all confidential, but it’s about where individuals are making the complaint from. So, it gives us an idea about where there might be challenges or issues.”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 14, 17 June 2025

<sup>7</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 15, 17 June 2025

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**21.** A number of witnesses called for an independent, confidential helpline to be established and for the resulting data to be collected to help identify patterns of behaviour. In their written consultation, the FDA Trade Union (FDA) suggested that, for example, multiple complaints against the same Member should be easily identified. They also stressed the importance of training those investigating complaints. The Plaid Cymru Group also suggested that previous complaints of a similar nature should be considered against the subject of complaint.

### **Practice Elsewhere**

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**22.** The Committee heard about some examples from other organisations that have developed different support structures to try and tackle issues around dignity and respect, such as those in place in the Ministry of Defence. Jane Runeckles, the FDA's National Officer for Wales, set out that the casework system has been reformed to include a panel for making decisions on complaints and developing an external challenge panel, which the FDA sits on. She said:

*"...this is a completely independent body that scrutinises the work of the MOD in relation to making culture change within the organisation."*<sup>8</sup>

**23.** The Committee took evidence from Angie Lewis, Director of Culture Change, Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust, who outlined the role of the 'Guardian' in the Welsh Ambulance Trust. This is a full time, senior role within the trust which is responsible for providing support to those who have concerns about inappropriate behaviours. The Guardian role is designed to provide support for people to raise concerns and complaints - rather than to solve matters.

**24.** Angie Lewis explained that a core part of the role is to reassure the individual "to help them to take the right formal processes" and that it needed to hold sufficient power and have support from HR and senior managers. She went on to say:

*"What is really good about the role, though, is that they hold us to account –so, has something been closed or resolved; has it been dealt with in a timely manner; are we seeing themes in relation to a particular manager, a particular area, a particular individual?"*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 23, 2 June 2025

<sup>9</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 26, 23 June 2025

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**25.** Building on this, Angie Lewis said:

*“...we have so much intelligence in the organisation about what’s going on. We do have it there. Our job is to bring it all together, triangulate what we’re hearing and see where we need to take action...”<sup>10</sup>*

**26.** The Welsh Ambulance Trust has put resource into ensuring there is understanding about the role, by promoting the role and explaining where it sits in the hierarchy:

*“We really positively promoted the value of it, but also said that it didn’t replace line managers, human resources, et cetera. It was just that additional layer that we wanted to really reassure colleagues with. And then we do roadshows every six months across the country, because, obviously, we’re a national organisation, and, at those roadshows, we were with staff from across the business for two hours, and we had half an hour with them where I and our guardian talked about the role, shared examples of what it was, talked about scenarios where we might use that particular route, and that really helped raise the profile. We also have a dedicated space on our intranet where people can find out about that”<sup>11</sup>*

### **What we proposed in our consultation: Appointing a Guardian type role and increasing support mechanisms for people before making a complaint.**

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**27.** Having considered all the evidence, the Committee proposed in its October 2025 consultation establishing a Guardian type role within the Senedd. Drawing on the NHS model, the Committee proposed establishing a semi-independent advisor role, distinct from Commission staff. This individual would provide confidential advice and guidance on dignity and respect issues to all those engaging with the Senedd –including Members, support staff, Commission staff and the public.

**28.** The Committee set out that the key responsibilities would include:

- Offering impartial guidance on dignity and respect matters.

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<sup>10</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 27, 23 June 2025

<sup>11</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 22, 23 June 2025

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- Collecting and analysing anonymous data on reporting patterns to identify systemic issues.

**29.** The Committee identified a clear need for this role based on recurring concerns about the accessibility and impartiality of current support mechanisms. Introducing this function would improve transparency and make it easier to navigate for all parties.

### **Responses to the Committee's draft proposals**

**30.** In relation to the Guardian role, there was wide support for introducing a role, distinct from Commission staff and the Commissioner for Standards. In developing such a role, respondents emphasised the need for the role to have a clear remit and include powers such as safeguarding and escalation.

**31.** The NHS Speak Up Guardian standards were highlighted as useful for ensuring the guardian role was meaningful rather than merely a symbolic gesture.<sup>12</sup>

**32.** The response from the Senedd's Chief Executive sets out the role of the Contact Officers currently, and flags the potential for a role, such as the one being proposed to deal with matters relating to Dignity and Respect, falling to one of the Independent Advisers.

**33.** A number of responses called for a helpline to be established to provide confidential advice and reduce barriers. However, the Chief Executive explained that there was previously a helpline available in the Senedd, but there was little evidence of its use.

**34.** A number of respondents stressed the need to analyse anonymised and named data to identify systemic issues, and for this to be included as part of the responsibilities of the role.

**35.** There was support for anonymous reporting as it helps to encourage those in a small workplace raise concerns without fear of repercussions.

**36.** Having considered the information gathered through this inquiry, the Committee is recommending improving the accessible avenues available to those seeking support, to ensure they feel comfortable doing so. Although the number

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<sup>12</sup> [www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/freedom-to-speak-up/developing-freedom-to-speak-up-arrangements-in-the-nhs/](https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/freedom-to-speak-up/developing-freedom-to-speak-up-arrangements-in-the-nhs/)

of cases reported has been low to date, the Committee heard that people had concerns reporting matters, and we are keen to reduce any barriers that exist in this area. The Committee considers the best approach to be for the 'Guardian' to help deliver recommendation 2 and 3, however these recommendations are not dependent on the implementation of recommendation 1.

**Recommendation 1.** The Committee recommends that the Senedd Commission introduces a semi-independent 'Guardian' type role, that can provide signposting advice and support for those wanting to raise concerns about dignity and respect. The person appointed to the role should be empowered to raise concerns and feed into all appropriate channels.

**Recommendation 2.** The Committee recommends that a helpline is re-established as an additional mechanism for people to access with concerns and complaints.

**Recommendation 3.** The Committee recommends that the Senedd Commission considers developing an anonymous reporting tool to allow people to raise concerns. Such a tool should be subject to evaluation after two years of operation.

### Commissioner Stage

**37.** The decision to make a complaint to the Commissioner is often a difficult and significant one. The Committee heard a lot of evidence about the concerns of complaining to the Commissioner in terms of the ramifications of such a complaint, but also in terms of whether it is appropriate that the same process is used for the various types of complaints. Some argued that a different process is needed for complaints relating to sexual harassment and bullying to misuse of resources.

**38.** The Houses of Parliament have established 'The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme'. This was cited by witnesses as a good model to follow. However, witnesses who provided oral evidence to the Committee were slightly more nuanced in their consideration of what an independent system may involve.

**39.** The Committee visited Westminster to understand more about the processes in place for dealing with dignity and respect type complaints. The Committee noted that The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme was well established in Westminster and appeared to be utilised by those wanting to raise

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concerns. However, we also noted there were a number of entry points for complaints and numerous decisions makers involved in the process.

**40.** There was support by those providing evidence to the Committee for clearer independence/expertise in the Senedd's processes. Laura Murton, a representative of Unite the Union, suggested complaints should be dealt with by:

*"...independent experts, basically; it would be people who are experts in their field, whether it's violence against women and girls, or, you know, dealing with HR. It would be finding those people. Obviously, Westminster has an independent process for this, there are people out there who are already doing something similar, who are developing further their expertise"*<sup>13</sup>

**41.** Osian Evans set out his view that:

*"...for more complex cases around sexual harassment, bullying in the workplace, power dynamics, there are really complicated and powerful things at play with a lot of these cases, and I think bringing in expertise in whatever ratio you need, as a case-by-case basis—I'm not saying, 'Let's hire 10 members of staff to do this', I'm saying, 'Let's just get people with the knowledge in the building and let's listen to what they have to say'"*<sup>14</sup>

**42.** In terms of what would constitute 'independent', Osian Evans told the Committee that this would be somebody with:

*"... no vested interest in the outcomes of these cases, they have no vested interest in the institution generally, and that they can provide you with independent expert advice on what should be happening. I think those are the three key pillars and what I would mean when I say 'independent'"*<sup>15</sup>

**43.** Shavanah Taj, General Secretary of the Wales Trades Union Congress told the Committee:

*"...it is important then that we have a complaints system that people can actually trust, and it's got to be completely*

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<sup>13</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 73, 15 July 2025

<sup>14</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 70, 15 July 2025

<sup>15</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 78, 15 July 2025

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*independent. It can't be handled internally or influenced by any of the politics.”<sup>16</sup>*

**44.** These views were reflected in the FDA congress motion which Jane Runeckles shared with the Committee:

*“Congress notes that, under current procedures, final decisions on recommended sanctions against the MSs found to have breached standards of conduct must be endorsed by the whole Senedd, a startling example of institutions marking their own homework. Congress recognises that the current procedures fall short of the fully independent process for dealing with complaints put in place at Westminster following Dame Laura Cox’s inquiry into bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff. It is the FDA’s experience from all corners of the UK that only an independent process that is completely free from political interference can work. If there is an opportunity for self-regulation, politics will take precedence over fairness and the victims of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment will be failed. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace.”*

**45.** Shavanah Taj went on to say an effective system should be:

*“...independent. There should be impartiality there in the professionals—no political influence there. It should be specialist led—that’s really important; people who actually understand the stuff and deal with this on a regular basis. The investigators should be selected based on relevant experience, particularly in areas such as sexual misconduct, bullying or harassment. The complainants should have access then to independent sexual violence advisers or equivalent professionals to ensure that they’re protected and empowered throughout the process.”<sup>17</sup>*

**46.** Douglas Bain, the Commissioner for Standards, expressed reservations about introducing a separate code specifically for Dignity and Respect standards. He explained that the number of cases involving Members in Wales is already very small—even accounting for the likelihood of under-reporting—and that

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<sup>16</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 10, 28 April 2025

<sup>17</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 18, 28 April 2025

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establishing an additional process would largely duplicate the existing complaints system. Rather than creating parallel procedures that risk confusing users, he argued that any improvements identified should be incorporated directly into the current complaints framework.

**47.** He also highlighted that:

*“...any revised dignity and respect policy should not apply to Members. The provisions for Members are already in the code of conduct, and there’s a danger, unless whatever is in the dignity and respect policy replicates them, there’ll be very minor differences, which will be exploited by some. If there’s something in the new dignity and respect policy that’s an improvement on what’s in the code of conduct, then I would urge the committee to amend the code of conduct to make sure they’re aligned. But the easiest way is simply to say that any new dignity and respect policy doesn’t apply to Members, although I appreciate there might be presentational difficulties in doing that.”<sup>18</sup>*

**48.** Schedule 6 of The Commissioner for Standards Measure sets out that:

*“6(1)The Commissioner may, on such terms as the Commissioner may determine, appoint such staff or secure the provision of such goods or services as the Commissioner considers necessary for assisting in the exercise of the Commissioner’s functions.*

*(2)The Commissioner may enter into arrangements with any public body or office holder, upon such terms as the Commissioner and such body or office holder may agree, for the provision by that body or office holder of such services as the Commissioner considers necessary for assisting in the exercise of the Commissioner’s functions.”<sup>19</sup>*

**49.** These provisions in the Measure allow the Commissioner to employ staff or expertise as necessary for exercising the functions of the Commissioner. This decision is at the discretion of the Commissioner.

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<sup>18</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 3, 1 April 2025

<sup>19</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2009/4/schedule](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2009/4/schedule)

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**50.** In other parliaments, witness interviews are often carried out by staff of the Commissioner, except for those conducted under the statutory provisions. Whilst that has not been the typical practice in Wales, nothing in the legislation prohibits suitably trained staff from carrying out interviews.

**51.** The Commissioner told the Committee he had been considering these provisions and that this provision could be used:

*“...if it was an investigator, they would carry out the investigation under the direction of the commissioner, as happens in some cases, as I understand it, in the House of Commons, and I believe that that person could quite properly interview witnesses. ...I think, even if it was a formal interview under section 11 of the Measure, that investigator could still ask questions, because if the person refused to answer on the basis that the person wasn’t authorised to ask it, the commissioner would simply ask to repeat the question.”<sup>20</sup>*

### **Timescale for complaints**

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**52.** Alongside the need for more expertise in the system, a number of respondents made representations about the time limit for making complaints.

**53.** At the start of this Senedd, the Procedure for Complaints Against Members of the Senedd (‘the Procedure’) was updated to reduce the time limit for making complaints from a strict 12 months to 6 months, with the option for the Commissioner to look at complaints outside of this timeframe, if they were satisfied with the explanation for the delay. This decision was made to avoid the complaints process being used as a ‘political weapon’ around the timing of complaints.

**54.** The Committee heard from witnesses who thought that the 6 month time cap for making complaints should be extended back to the previous 12 month cap. Deryn Consulting<sup>21</sup> thought that this change had made it more difficult for complainants to come forward. The FDA expressed similar concerns and suggested that this, coupled with the inability to make complaints against former MSs could incentivise a ‘running down the clock’ strategy. The Plaid Cymru group thought that as well as extending the cap back to 12 months, the Commissioner

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<sup>20</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 6, 1 April 2025

<sup>21</sup> Deryn Consulting submitted a response to the consultation issued in November 2023. It has subsequently become part of Cavendish Consulting.

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for Standards should be clear about the extent of his discretion regarding consideration of complaints outside this window.

### **What we proposed in our consultation: Increasing the use of expertise by the Commissioner for Standards**

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**55.** The Committee listened carefully to the points raised about the complaints process. The Committee recognised the need to keep the process for complaining simple and agreed it would be prudent to implement changes to the process as quickly as possible.

**56.** To achieve this, the Committee proposed amending the procedure for dealing with Complaints for Members of the Senedd to require the Commissioner to consider the use of expertise for each complaint received, in particular bullying and harassment, and to note the reasoning for the decision in the final report. This is building on a provision within the measure for the Commissioner to be able to access expertise as required. The Committee would update the guidance for the procedure to make clear the expectation about when advice may be required and that this should be considered particularly important in relation to breaches of the Respect principle, or where those involved in the complaint have diverse needs.

**57.** The current complaints process requires complaints to be made within 6 months. The Committee suggested removing this requirement to make the process as open as possible. While the current provision allows for older complaints to be considered if the Commissioner is persuaded there is good reason for the delay, the Committee indicated it would like to remove the need for complainants to explain why there was a delay. The guidance would need to be amended to reflect that the length of time taken to complain is a relevant consideration for the Commissioner to include in their report to the Committee.

### **Responses to the Committee's draft proposals**

**58.** There was support for these proposals, although it was suggested that more detail on what "expertise" means, and how it will be applied, may be beneficial. It was also suggested that the Commissioner should be required to include meaningful reasons for not accessing expertise.

**59.** The Committee notes that the current Commissioner for Standards non-renewable six year term will end in April 2027. The next Standards of Conduct Committee may wish to consider some of the issues around the need for

expertise in these areas as part of the future recruitment, while balancing the other skills required for this position.

**60.** With regards to the six-month time limit, there was broad agreement in the written responses that time limits deter complaints, especially in cases of harassment or trauma. However, there was recognition that a time limit is important in terms of fairness for those being complained about.

**61.** Having considered the information gathered through this inquiry and consultation on the proposals the Committee firmly believes the use of expertise would be welcomed by complainants and, in some cases, necessary in respect of cases relating to sexual harassment and bullying. The types of expertise should be clearly set out in the procedure so that those involved in a complaint can understand the possible expertise and support available to the Commissioner. To address this, the Committee is recommending the following:

**Recommendation 4.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the seventh Senedd amend the Procedure for Complaints Against Members of the Senedd to require the Commissioner to consider the use of expertise in each complaint, records the decision taken, and the reasoning for this decision, in each complaint report. The accompanying guidance will be updated to provide further information about the definition of expertise and what expertise should be considered in different circumstances such as sexual harassment or bullying.

**Recommendation 5.** The Committee recommends that the Commissioner considers whether additional support is required within their office given the increase in Members of the Senedd. In considering additional support, attention should be given to the required skills mix including skilled capacity to undertake investigations or assess evidence.

**Recommendation 6.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the seventh Senedd amend the Procedure for Complaints Against Members of the Senedd to increase the time limit for complaints to twelve months, and for this to sit alongside the current provision for the Commissioner to have discretion in considering older complaints. The Commissioner should also include clear public information on the discretionary power to look at older complaints.

### Committee Stage

**62.** Once a complaint has been considered by the Commissioner, a report is produced setting out the findings of the Commissioner, and an opinion of whether a breach of the Code of Conduct has occurred. This report is then considered by a cross-party Committee of Senedd Members, who consider whether a breach has occurred.

**63.** There is much public debate about whether a Committee with elected Members should play a role in deciding the outcome of complaints about their peers. Many question whether this results in Members ‘marking their own homework’, while conversely, others recognise the importance of elected Members holding their peers to account and the need to maintain the long-established principle of parliamentary sovereignty.

**64.** Some Parliaments have addressed this concern by appointing lay members onto the relevant committees. This brings additional accountability and independence to the process. The Committee recommended that the power to appoint lay members was given to the Senedd in its report on Deliberate Deception, and this is currently being considered as part of the Senedd Cymru (Member Accountability and Elections) Bill.

**65.** Shavanah Taj set out her view that the current process:

*“... is inhibiting. Staff do not wish to be seen to complain to Members with whom they have an ongoing professional relationship. An independent process would improve confidence and encourage increased early reporting of potential problem behaviour.”<sup>22</sup>*

### What we proposed in our consultation: Appointing Lay Members to the Standards of Conduct Committee

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**66.** The Committee considered the approach of other Parliaments in dealing with complaints, and the concerns raised throughout this inquiry. We proposed in our consultation, in order to introduce more independence into the Standards process, that lay members are appointed to a future Standards of Conduct

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<sup>22</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 17, 28 April 2025

Committee. To maximise the value of lay members' expertise, the Committee suggested:

- Clearly defining the selection criteria, by prioritising experience in dignity and respect, workplace culture, and complaints handling.
- Setting expectations for the active involvement of lay members in relevant cases.

**67.** The Committee understands the desire for having a Committee which is completely independent from Members of the Senedd, but believes there is value in having Members on the Committee. It is important that we hold each other to account, and do not absolve ourselves of responsibility for ensuring the highest standards are maintained.

**68.** However, we noted in particular, the concerns in relation to support staff making complaints and the current Committee make up being a potential barrier. As such we have proposed establishing a sub-Committee of solely lay members for considering reports from the Commissioner on complaints made by Support Staff. The aim would be to preserve anonymity and minimise the impact on working relationships within the Senedd.

### **Responses to the Committee's draft proposals**

**69.** There was support for appointing lay members with relevant expertise on matters relating to dignity and respect. There was agreement with the principle of a sub-committee of lay members for complaints involving support staff, although some concerns were raised about a differentiation of approaches to complaints.

**70.** Some respondents, such as the FDA, proposed an independent panel for appeals and sanctions, similar to Westminster's model.

**71.** The need for better post-complaint support and handling of Non-Disclosure Agreements ("NDAs") were raised as areas needing further consideration.

**72.** The Commissioner made recommendations in his response to address, in part, the handling of NDAs by amending rule 21. He also suggested that anonymising reports for matters relating to dignity and respect (unless requested otherwise by the complainant) may also improve confidence in the Committee system.

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**73.** Having considered the information gathered through this inquiry, and consultation on our draft proposals, the Committee is recommending the following in order to increase confidence in the committee stage of the complaints system, while balancing the need for transparency and collective responsibility of Members:

**Recommendation 7.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the Seventh Senedd moves forward at pace with appointing lay members, and that consideration is given for at least one appointee to have relevant expertise on matters relating to dignity and respect.

**Recommendation 8.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the Seventh Senedd considers establishing a sub-committee of lay members to consider reports from the Commissioner from Standards which have arisen from support staff complaints.

**Recommendation 9.** The Committee recommends that rule 21 of the Code of Conduct is amended to prohibit Members from trying to persuade potential complainants or witnesses not to come forward.

**Recommendation 10.** The Committee recommends that the procedure for dealing with complaints against Members of the Senedd is amended so that details relating to Complainants in reports relating to matters of dignity and respect are anonymised, unless requested otherwise by the Complainant.

## **Political Party Complaints systems and approach**

**74.** Alongside the Senedd's own complaints process, each political party operates its own system for receiving and considering complaints about the conduct of its Members.

**75.** In the ninth report to the Senedd the Committee noted the comments from the Commissioner that he had no power to:

*"...investigate the processes under which the concerns expressed by the Complainant and by Witness A were handled by Plaid Cymru. It was, however, apparent, as was confirmed by the then Chief Executive, that they were very far from satisfactory..*

*123. Lest similarly ineffective processes exist in other political parties, I have written to the Leaders in Wales of all other*

*parties represented in the Senedd asking them to satisfy themselves that appropriate processes are in place and known to all staff employed by their party and by all support staff employed by Members of their party.”<sup>23</sup>*

**76.** The Committee received evidence highlighting the challenges of introducing a political party complaints route alongside the Senedd’s own process. Witnesses noted that operating both systems simultaneously could create confusion and potentially reduce transparency.

**77.** Osian Evans explained:

*“I think once you start interfacing too much with different party processes, and maybe substituting this for party process, you introduce a lot of variability there, and I think that’s probably the opposite of what people want when they’re making a complaint... You add in the extra point then that we’ve got an expanded Senedd coming up; there’s going to be more party representation, not less, most likely, so you’re going to have, again, more parties, more different processes, more different attitudes towards different issues. The variability goes up again. I think the Senedd would be really doing itself a favour in presenting a more uniform process for the next Senedd that insulates it from that variability.”<sup>24</sup>*

**78.** Ed Stubbs supported this view, emphasising:

*“No-one’s saying that political parties shouldn’t have processes, but it’s important in a workplace that there’s a formal, proper process that is conducted in that manner, that’s independent. They do what they have to do, but I think there should be an onus on complaints being pushed towards that formal workplace process as well as a minimum.”<sup>25</sup>*

**79.** The Committee noted that the former Commissioner for Standards engaged with political parties to help align their complaints processes. It was agreed that

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<sup>23</sup> <https://senedd.wales/media/ycnuhjj/cr-ld16383-e.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 65, 15 July 2025

<sup>25</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 64, 15 July 2025

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complainants should be informed of the alternative routes available when submitting a complaint, to ensure they are fully aware of their options.

**80.** Having two systems potentially running concurrently, and whether the political parties will have sufficient support in place for complaints relating to dignity and respect is a matter of concern for the Committee. This is something which should be considered by the Committee early in the Seventh Senedd with the Political parties represented in the Senedd.

### 3. Wider Cultural change

While the complaints process is arguably the most appropriate way to deal with more substantive issues, any system put in place must also recognise the importance of maintaining a positive culture of respect in the Senedd and addressing any issues.

**81.** The Committee heard that creating the right culture is fundamental to a well-functioning workplace and that steps need to be taken to ensure the everyday interactions in the corridors are respectful. When they are not, people should feel empowered to raise concerns before matters reach complaint stage.

**82.** Hannah Stevens from Elect Her told the Committee there are daily “intersectional challenges that are faced that people might not understand are disrespectful in everyday daily interactions”. She said:

*“...sometimes those cultural interactions are tiny, but when you are in engaging in them 40 or 50 times a day, it is exhausting.”<sup>26</sup>*

**83.** Shavanah Taj emphasised the importance of the Senedd being at the forefront of this matter:

*“... the Senedd is a democratic institution and it’s important then that it models the highest standards of behaviour. And of course this inquiry offers a valuable opportunity to reinforce that message about standards and ensure that the culture of the Senedd reflects the values, of course, that it promotes.”<sup>27</sup>*

**84.** Hannah Stevens suggested there is a need to address:

*“...the toxic culture that the working environment presents and a need to examine how we can challenge that, and how we can determine what respect and positive culture really looks at*

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<sup>26</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 60, 2 June 2025

<sup>27</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 9, 28 April 2025

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*without just focusing on one or two documentations that we want to get the language right. Actually, how do you embed that across the whole institution and in all of the daily interactions that the staff and the Members are engaging in”<sup>28</sup>*

**85.** The fifth Senedd agreed to include a principle of respect into its code of conduct in addition to the established ; seven “Nolan” principles, which set out the key standards expected of those in public life. The principle states:

*“Respect*

*Members must not behave in ways that reduce equality of opportunity, must always respect the dignity of other persons and must not engage in discriminatory or unwanted behaviour.”*

**86.** The Senedd agreed to include this provision to make clear that it reflects a core tenet of public life that applies to all Members. Its introduction has superseded the *Dignity and Respect Policy* adopted in 2018. As part of its review of that policy, the Senedd Commission proposed that the Committee consider recommending its replacement with an overarching statement reaffirming the commitment to dignity and respect for Members, Members’ support staff, Commission staff, and all visitors to the Senedd.

**87.** The Committee considers that Members endorsing this statement provides a clear demonstration of our collective commitment to fostering the right culture within the Senedd. We believe this endorsement should take place at the start of each Senedd term, ensuring that all Members explicitly affirm their commitment to treating others with dignity and respect.

**Recommendation 11.** The Committee recommends that the Standards of Conduct Committee in the Seventh Senedd bring forward an overarching statement reaffirming the commitment to dignity and respect for Members which should be subject to an affirmative vote. This statement should be agreed at the beginning of each Senedd.

**88.** The Committee considered a number of areas where changes could be made to improve the wider culture in the Senedd, which are explored further in this chapter.

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<sup>28</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 80, 2 June 2025

## **Increasing protections for the Senedd**

**89.** The Committee heard concerns about Members who had been accused of serious matters being able to access the estate and how uncomfortable and unsafe this made staff feel, particularly as the details of such accusations are often unclear.

**90.** The FDA suggested that the Senedd should “introduce proposals for a risk based exclusion policy for Members who are subject to serious allegations relating to a violent or sexual offence”.

**91.** This approach has been adopted in Westminster. Under this policy:

*“A risk assessment will take place when the Clerk of the House informed by the police that an MP has been arrested on suspicion of committing a violent or sexual offence. The risk assessment will be carried out by a panel of MPs appointed by the Speaker.*

*Taking into account the nature of the alleged misconduct, safeguarding concerns, risks and so on, the panel will decide upon measures to mitigate any risks. Measures could include exclusion from the Parliamentary Estate and exclusion from domestic or foreign travel funded by the House. An MP who is excluded from the estate may apply for a proxy vote.”<sup>29</sup>*

**92.** Section 31(4) of the Government of Wales Act 2006 states that the Senedd Standing Orders may include provision for “withdrawing from a Member of the Senedd any or all of the rights and privileges of membership of the Senedd”. One of these rights is considered to be the Members pass to access areas on the Senedd estate. The Committee considered this could be an appropriate mechanism to replicate the key provision of the Westminster policy, within the legislative parameters governing the Senedd.

**93.** It is not just those working on the estate that have contact with politicians. The Committee has previously received correspondence on the need for MS’s to have enhanced DBS checks. The former Children’s Commissioner Sally Holland said:

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<sup>29</sup> <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9812/CBP-9812.pdf>

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*“Politicians at all levels will, as part of their jobs, come in to contact with individuals including children and young people, for example in constituency ‘surgeries’, visits or events. They can set up youth projects unsupervised. Local Councillors will also have access to personal and sensitive information for children in care through their corporate parenting duties.*

*Members of the public should be able to approach their locally elected representative with any issues or concerns they may have without fear or concern. I was surprised to learn that there is no DBS requirement for elected politicians; it is something that I thought would happen as a matter of course due to the nature of the role they take on.”<sup>30</sup>*

**94.** At present, the ability to request an enhanced DBS check is restricted to certain professions, which does not include elected representatives. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, does not require candidates to disclose any spent convictions when seeking election. Such convictions would show up in an enhanced DBS check. Under Schedule 10 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, the position is extended so there is no requirement to disclose any previous warnings and cautions either.

### **What we proposed in our consultation: Introducing further safeguards for Members of the Senedd**

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**95.** The Committee proposed that the Senedd introduce a risk based exclusion for Members who have been accused of serious offences and are subject to criminal investigation, to help ensure everybody feels safe on the estate. This would bring the Senedd in line with other Parliaments.

**96.** The Committee also proposed that the Secretary for State for Justice amends the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act to enable Members to request a standard or enhanced DBS check. This would allow Members to demonstrate their openness on this matter and provide an additional safeguard.

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<sup>30</sup> Correspondence from Sally Holland

**Responses to the Committee's draft proposals**

**97.** The proposals were welcomed by respondents to the October 2025 consultation, who considered it a positive step towards developing a system with safeguards and assurances built in.

**98.** It was noted this should only be considered one way of addressing the issue, given that not all those that engage in unacceptable behaviour will have a criminal record.<sup>31</sup>

**99.** Having considered the evidence received in this inquiry, the Committee is recommending the following to build on the safeguards around interacting with Members of the Senedd:

**Recommendation 12.** The Committee recommends that the Senedd Commission develops a risk based exclusion policy for Members who are subject to serious allegations relating to a violent or sexual offence, which is incorporated into Standing Orders.

**Recommendation 13.** The Committee recommends the Welsh Government works with the Secretary of State for Justice to amend the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act to enable Members of the Senedd to request a standard or enhanced DBS check.

**Training**

**100.** Since the introduction of the Dignity and Respect policy there has been an increase in the range of training provided by the Senedd Commission for Members, support staff and Commission staff.

**101.** The Committee has previously made a number of recommendations in complaint reports about the importance of training and Members' attendance.

**102.** The Committee received evidence about the need for greater and continuous training in this area to ensure Members are cognisant of their responsibilities. Witnesses advocated for training such as Bystander training and Allyship. Shavanah Taj emphasised the importance of making sure the training took account of intersectional experience of workers, as harassment would not be the same for everybody:

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<sup>31</sup> Natasha Mulvihill response

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*“...because of ... who we are, whether that's our race, our gender, our disability or sexual orientation.”<sup>32</sup>*

**103.** There was clear agreement it should be a continuous programme of training, although there were differing views about whether the training should be mandatory and whether it should be a cross-party mixed group.

**104.** Hannah Stevens advocated for training that focusses on the codes of conduct and how they apply in everyday interactions. She emphasised that these are particularly important during the induction period – especially given the influx of new Members expected after the 2026 elections. She stated that “...there’s a real opportunity now to review how you welcome all of those new Members.” She went on to highlight the importance of repeating training throughout the life of a parliamentarian.

**105.** Angela Lewis explained that, in her experience, it was not only training, but the wider support networks in the Welsh Ambulance Trust which have been instrumental in delivering a cultural change:

*“...so, the training that I just talked about, the allyship training, that speaking up, that idea that we have thriving people networks. I mentioned the Voices network, but we also have our carers network. We have a broad group of networks that are absolutely committed and understand the importance of safety in the workplace. We have cultural champions. I have probably about 250 people in the organisation who want to be part of the culture change we’re trying to deliver.”<sup>33</sup>*

**106.** Alongside direct training, Shavanah Taj told the Committee that the TUC has produced supporting material such as the toolkit on sexual harassment in the workplace which helps:

*“...identify, first and foremost, what workplace sexual harassment actually is, and it offers some very practical and effective support to those who are experiencing it. It gives you an opportunity to understand some of the legalities around workplace sexual harassment. It also then helps you navigate*

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<sup>32</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 12, 28 April 2025

<sup>33</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 23, 23 June 2025

*some of those conversations and negotiations that sometimes people then need to enter into with their employer.”<sup>34</sup>*

**107.** There were a number of views about how training should be delivered. Jane Runeckles fully supported mandatory training but urged caution, stating:

*“...annual mandatory training can often become the same—you know, nobody reviews the training often enough, and the examples aren’t updated. So, I would urge that if there is any look to do mandatory annual training that there is a proper programme of work that is scheduled over the whole of a five-year Senedd term—four-year Senedd term.”<sup>35</sup>*

**108.** Anthony Cooper suggested if training was made compulsory that:

*“...the time to do that is obviously at the start of the Senedd, because it’s really important that that sort of workplace culture is established early on and it’s seen alongside the training for Members as employers, because ..., a lot of Members won’t have had that experience.”<sup>36</sup>*

**109.** David TC Davies, Chief of Staff for the Welsh Conservatives, suggested that providing a clear incentive for attending training rather than mandating it may be more successful:

*“...carrots work better than sticks in any scenario. Forgive me for saying this, and it may sound a bit abstract, but you mentioned earlier on working towards Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development qualifications. I think that would be a really good thing.... If you’re offering training that can actually lead to a qualification, I think you might find a much greater take-up than if you’re simply saying, ‘Right, you must turn up there for eight hours because that’s your training day and it’s part of a compulsory thing.’”<sup>37</sup>*

**110.** In terms of delivering the training, Hannah Stevens told the Committee, that they:

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<sup>34</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 5, 28 April 2025

<sup>35</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 44, 2 June 2025

<sup>36</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 52, 12 May 2025

<sup>37</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 60, 12 May 2025

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*“...would advocate that training doesn't sit within political parties, and induction doesn't, and actually it's something that everybody comes together and does whilst leaving your political colours behind.”<sup>38</sup>*

**111.** Anthony Cooper suggested that an ongoing programme needed to be developed, and that the Labour group experience was:

*“to hold more than one session, so we've been able to adapt it, maybe, to our particular needs and the patterns of our group business. So, I think you have to allow groups some of that flexibility, I think, as the Senedd goes on, just to fit this into lots of the other competing demands that Members and staff face”<sup>39</sup>*

**112.** Francess Ifan echoed the importance of training, and suggested it should be at least once a year and that:

*“...it's really important that we have a programme of training, some of it being continuing professional development training that is done, ... these topics are all really important. So, they should be staggered out, but then we should maybe work with Member learning and Members' business support and yourselves to identify a programme that we expect to be carried out in a specific time frame for new Members and returning Members.”<sup>40</sup>*

**113.** Anthony Cooper, told the Committee that access to training was important and suggested:

*“...there needs to be a bit of thinking around what that looks like, certainly in the seventh Senedd, with more possibly on-demand recorded sessions that you could just make sure that all staff have seen.”<sup>41</sup>*

**114.** In addition to general training, witnesses highlighted the need for targeted training for people who provide the support. Shavanah Taj told the Committee:

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<sup>38</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 99, 2 June 2025

<sup>39</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 52, 12 May 2025

<sup>40</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 50, 12 May 2025

<sup>41</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 12, 12 May 2025

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*“We’ve also produced a course for union reps, because union reps themselves have said, ‘What exactly do I need to do? I’m not confident that this is an issue that I can deal with very quickly. I’m not sure if I’m genned up on all the—. I’m not up to date, necessarily, with what is happening’.”<sup>42</sup>*

### **What we proposed in our consultation: Develop and support a comprehensive Senedd-wide training programme**

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**115.** Building on the current training provided by the Senedd Commission, the Committee proposed setting out a training programme for the length of the whole Senedd including allyship, bystander intervention, and sexual harassment (as required by the Worker Protection Act 2023). Such training should be offered through varied formats (group, cross-Senedd, tailored sessions). There should be specific modules for those who provide pastoral care such as Chief whips, Chiefs of Staff, and support staff unions. The Senedd Commission should consider working with Commission and support staff Trade Unions on the development of relevant courses to ensure the necessary concerns are being addressed.

**116.** The Committee proposed setting out a clear expectation that all Members and their staff should attend such courses, and non-attendance may be considered relevant in matters brought before the Standards of Conduct Committee.

### **Responses to the Committee’s draft proposals**

**117.** There was strong support for comprehensive training for Members and staff on the areas outlined. It was recommended that the training should be trauma-informed and have intersectional approaches.

**118.** It was suggested that there should be greater leadership accountability within parties, which could include enhanced training for party leaders and publication of compliance rates for training.

**119.** The link between non-attendance at training and complaint considerations was welcomed as a key factor to encourage higher rates of attendance.

**120.** The Senedd Commission wrote to the Committee asking it to consider making training mandatory and for Member attendance to be recorded. The Committee considered the correspondence and agreed all Members should

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<sup>42</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 8 28 April 2025

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attend these types of training, however concerns remain as to how enforceable it would be and whether it removes the element of personal responsibility.

**121.** Having considered the evidence gathered through this inquiry and consultation, the Committee is making the following recommendations to ensure that it is clear Members and support staff need to engage in ongoing training in this area.

**Recommendation 14.** The Committee recommends the Senedd Commission develops a training programme, which spans the next Senedd, with particular focus on matters relating to dignity and respect. The programme should cover the broad range of topics captured in this area such as allyship, bystander intervention, and sexual harassment (as required by the Worker Protection Act 2023). Such training should be offered through varied formats (party group, cross-Senedd, tailored sessions).

**Recommendation 15.** The Committee recommends the Senedd Commission provides specific training modules for roles that provide pastoral care such as Chief whips, Chiefs of Staff, and support staff unions.

**Recommendation 16.** The Committee recommends the Senedd Commission works with Commission and support staff trade unions on the development of relevant courses to ensure the necessary concerns are being addressed.

## **Cultural Change**

**122.** The Committee heard that changing the culture at a foundational level was as important as getting the complaints process right. This was particularly true in terms of social media where interactions can often lead to people feeling unsafe and uncomfortable.

**123.** Hannah Stevens suggested that this, in part, can be done by shifting the emphasis away from those making complaints. She said:

*“... The parties and the institutions are improving the reporting mechanisms, so that individuals don't feel so alone when they are, unfortunately, the victims of attack. But it has been an easy focus that that is the problem, and it has taken away any energy that there was in terms of really examining the everyday*

*interactions that people have within the building, and where respect lies across the house.”<sup>43</sup>*

## **Social media**

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**124.** Social media has become an important and useful method of communication for politicians. It has many benefits but has become an increasingly abusive arena to operate in. The Committee heard a lot of support for a change in culture on social media.

**125.** Witnesses highlighted the significant part it has played in the shifting political landscape. Hannah Stevens told the Committee:

*“...in regard to the behaviour of Senedd Members and Senedd staff, I think clear articulation, again, as to what is and isn’t acceptable, is the fundamental level that we find. Again, when you get into the nuance of this conversation, it is that different people find different wording acceptable and not. And there has to be some guidance and clarity around what is and isn’t acceptable for Members in terms of their social media conduct.”<sup>44</sup>*

**126.** She also emphasised that there was a responsibility for Members vis-à-vis:

*“Members on Members targeting each other online. The online situation is much more a bigger thing of just a huge amount of the public being able to have their say. I think what we’re looking at here are more daily interactions with people in their workplace, so that they can feel safe coming to work and doing the really important job that you all do”<sup>45</sup>*

## **Scottish Parliament software**

**127.** The Scottish Parliament has introduced monitoring software which identifies threatening and abusive language across social media towards MSPs – the system also reports messages, which reach a certain threshold, to the Police (461 during the trial period of eight months), rather than this being undertaken by the authority. This has since been offered to all MSPs. The Chief Executive of the

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<sup>43</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 73, 2 June 2025

<sup>44</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 72, 2 June 2025

<sup>45</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of Proceedings, paragraph 74, 2 June 2025

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Scottish Parliament's report to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body ('SCPB') set out that the service delivers:

*"...early warning of potential online threats for the 69 Members currently signed up, and works closely with partner organisations, including Police Scotland, to escalate content that may breach criminal thresholds."*<sup>46</sup>

**128.** There was broad support for the introduction of a similar system to this in the Senedd and in correspondence with the Committee, Manon Antoniazzi confirmed a trial in this area was underway.

### **Data**

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**129.** The Committee heard that a key driver for improvement in culture was the need for accurate data about incidences (not just complaints) to identify areas of concern. Frances Ifan told the Committee it was important that people:

*"...are able to log concerns so that a pattern of behaviour can be identified. That's not currently possible."*<sup>47</sup>

**130.** There were some concerns about quality of responses to the surveys in this area and the interpretation of information. Some of the data, for example, suggested insufficient reporting. Anthony Cooper told the Committee that the Dignity and Respect survey is important to provide a snapshot of where we are and to identify issues, however, he explained:

*"...There's some concern about the fact that perhaps the response rate hasn't been what it might have been; I think it was something like 27 per cent for staff in the last dignity and respect survey."*<sup>48</sup>

**131.** Osian Evans highlighted the statistic that 'Amongst Member support staff, 61.7 per cent of respondents said that they would feel comfortable raising concerns'. He set out that his view that:

*"...that's not a positive statistic. That implies that there is over a third of Member support staff who either don't know how, or*

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<sup>46</sup> [www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/spcb/spcb-minutes/spcb-minutes-2025/ce-report-02--june.pdf](http://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/spcb/spcb-minutes/spcb-minutes-2025/ce-report-02--june.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 65, 12 May 2025

<sup>48</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 13, 12 May 2025

*know exactly how, and are just not comfortable and have no confidence in the process to provide just outcomes”<sup>49</sup>*

**132.** The Committee heard evidence from the Wales Ambulance Trust about a platform they have introduced to encourage people to report concerns:

*“...a working-in-confidence platform, a digital platform, which is an anonymous platform that individuals can also use. We were able, then, with our guardian, to use that to connect with individuals who still didn’t feel safe enough to give us their names, to work with them to build their confidence, to enable them, then, to potentially go through other processes, whether that be a respect and resolution, a grievance policy, et cetera.”*

### **Measuring success**

**133.** Alongside data collection, the Committee also heard the importance of being able to measure success. Angie Lewis said the Wales Ambulance Trust spent:

*“...a lot of time around the country asking people, ‘Well, how is it?’ And what they’ll often say to us is, ‘It feels different. We can feel that you’re trying.”<sup>50</sup>*

**134.** The Committee was told that this information is important as it can be used as an indicator of where policies and approaches are working well.

### **What we proposed in our consultation: Making information clearer and the online space safer**

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**135.** Having heard the need to address everyday interactions as well as the complaints process, the Committee proposed a number of changes to make information more accessible and clear so that low level poor behaviours are not tolerated.

**136.** To better understand these low level behaviours, we proposed better data collection by developing methods of anonymous reporting, which would be overseen by the guardian role, to help provide safeguards (see recommendation 1-3).

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<sup>49</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 19, 15 July 2025

<sup>50</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 35, 23 June 2025

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**137.** We also proposed improving the accessibility of guidance, ensuring the language used is simple and clear.

**138.** The Committee proposed adopting a similar approach to that taken by the Scottish Parliament, and introducing social media software monitoring to identify threatening and abusive language.

### **Responses to the Committee's draft proposals**

**139.** The Committee received a lot of positive support for taking steps to address online harassment.

**140.** Manon Antoniazzi set out in her response that the Commission has been considering the increase in online security threats and abuse on social media targeting elected representatives, and the increase in concerns being raised by Members relating to online abuse. She set out that:

*"They reviewed how the UK and Scottish Parliaments address this and the proposed options for a similar service at the Senedd, and what further steps the Commission could take to support and protect the safety of elected representatives and their staff whilst engaging with constituents in a digital space. Commissioners agreed to undertake a trial, up to six months, using the existing social media monitoring platform PULSAR to monitor social media platforms for a select number of Members (up to 8), focusing entirely on threats and abuse above the criminal threshold."<sup>51</sup>*

**141.** Furthermore, she explained that the Commission had agreed that there should be collaboration between the Members' Security Team, the Senedd Police Unit and Welsh police forces to develop a process for reporting instances of malicious communications directly to the police, when threats and abuse above the criminal threshold are detected.

**142.** The Committee welcomed the work undertaken by the Commission in this area – this represents a positive step forward. The Committee noted in the consultation response from Elect Her, that this was dealt with as a 'workplace safety issue' to ensure it is acted on in the most appropriate way.

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<sup>51</sup> Manon Antoniazzi response

**143.** In our 23<sup>rd</sup> Report to the Senedd we set out that:

*"It is for the Member to decide the autonomy given to their staff in which to act on their behalf. However, when members of staff are acting explicitly in the name of the Member and it appears to the public as if it were the Member themselves (for example posting on a social media account in the Member's name), then ultimately the Member should take responsibility for any such actions being in accordance with the Code. Exonerating Members of responsibility when information is published explicitly under their name goes against the spirit of the Code, and may inadvertently provide Members with a means to by-pass relevant provisions. It is the expectation of this Committee that Members take responsibility for regulating any information put out in their name, as it will be the public's perception that it is published by the Member personally... This is important as elected Members need to lead the way and uphold the highest standards in our conduct online. In our work on refining the Code of Conduct, we are proposing introducing a rule to make it clear that Members are responsible for posts made on Social Media on their accounts. Alongside this recommendation, the Committee is recommending the following to deliver wider cultural change."*

**Recommendation 17.** The Committee recommends that the Senedd Commission, alongside South Wales Police, work to develop a social media monitoring process that can be offered to all Members to opt into if they wish. Progress on this, including data collection and a tangible impact assessment, should be reported annually to the Standards of Conduct Committee.

**Recommendation 18.** The Committee recommends the Standards of Conduct Committee in the seventh Senedd ensure that the Code of Conduct and associated documents are produced in a number of formats to ensure that they are clear and accessible for all to engage with.

### 4. Members as Employers

Each Member of the Senedd is an employer, with each of the offices considered a separate workplace. The role of Members as employers is crucial in ensuring a healthy working environment within the Senedd that centres around dignity and respect.

**144.** Evidence presented to the Committee highlighted that some support staff were worried about being able to raise concerns without fear of repercussions.

**145.** The Committee heard from Chiefs of Staff and support staff union representatives about these challenges. Some of the issues brought to our attention are outside of the responsibility of the Committee but we have tried to represent the views we heard, and make recommendations where possible.

**146.** The Committee heard that staff representation within trade unions has strengthened in recent years, with branches of Unite the Unions and the Public and Commercial Services Union which have provided support staff with advocates in the system, and helped raise awareness of issues”.

**147.** The Committee heard about the need for proper HR processes for Members’ support staff to help address some of their concerns, particularly due the pressures on Members Business Support. Anthony Cooper told the Committee it is about:

*“...making sure we’ve got proper HR processes in place as well, and training around this, at the very start so both Members and staff are clear about where those limits lie and what is appropriate or inappropriate behaviour, for example. Obviously, there will be situations where staff may be challenged over their performance in the workplace, and it’s about where the balance is struck between what’s appropriate and what isn’t.”<sup>52</sup>*

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<sup>52</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 29, 12 May 2025

**148.** The Committee heard support for ensuring that relevant Trade Unions are included in any decision making process as key representatives of building users. Laura Murton said:

*"I think that trade unions, employers and the experts, get them all in a room to get a common framework in place would be the best way to do this, to have meaningful discussions with trade unions and support staff representatives, because we live this place"<sup>53</sup>*

**149.** Ed Stubbs set out the limitation of the current structure in terms of union representation:

*"...if there were a particularly complex case in this workplace, we're volunteers. So, there's no time; it's at the behest of our employers. It's a negotiation, but there is no time allocated to it. So, when you look at building a system, and you're looking at other workplaces and how it happens, I think you've got to consider things like that as well, about how unions can be empowered to represent workers as well. HR support for MSS"<sup>54</sup>*

## **Remuneration Board Correspondence**

**150.** In terms of providing policies for support staff, to date, the Remuneration Board have previously included a requirement within the Determination for Members to have a set Grievance and Disciplinary policy. At the outset of this inquiry the Board wrote to the Committee, setting out that it did not consider it appropriate for this matter to be within the Determination and asked the Committee to consider whether there was another way of addressing this.

## **What we proposed in our consultation: Setting expectations for Members as employers**

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**151.** The Committee recognises the difficult position of support staff in the Senedd, that despite being a group of similar employees they all have different employers. While it is for each Member to decide how to run their own office, which is important to ensure that they are able to carry out their democratic duties in the way they deem fit, it is also important to ensure support staff working for Members of the Senedd are treated equally. To address this issue and bring in

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<sup>53</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 36, 15 July 2025

<sup>54</sup> Standards of Conduct Committee, Record of proceedings, paragraph 44, 15 July 2025

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some consistency amongst offices, the Committee recommended amending the Code of Conduct to require Members to act as responsible employers. This would include:

- Implementing a Code of Conduct that applies to their staff.
- Maintaining a comprehensive Staff Handbook, which should cover key policies such as grievance and disciplinary procedures, and dignity and respect at work.

**152.** These measures would aim to strengthen workplace culture, setting out expectations clearly, and provide safe channels for raising concerns

**153.** In addition to the responsibility of each Member in terms of running an office, the Committee recommended that Party Leaders in the next Senedd should consider either jointly or on a party basis establishing an employers' forum to facilitate open discussion of employment practices between Members and Support Staff, and to share good practice. This would allow for more structured engagement with the unions representing support staff.

**154.** Furthermore, the Committee suggested that the Senedd Commission should engage with support staff unions as stakeholders, and as an additional channel of communication, especially when introducing relevant new policies or guidance.

### **Responses to the Committee's draft proposals**

**155.** There was support for the Committee's proposals to provide more clarity and understanding around the expectations of Members as employers.

**156.** There was also support for the development of an employers' forum, along the social partnership model, and establishing a space for sharing good employment practices and standards – with the example of the Joint Council for Wales being cited as a potential model. It was suggested that full engagement with the support staff unions would be an important factor in this.

**157.** The Committee believes that the following recommendations will help provide safeguards and assurances to Support Staff in terms of their employment.

**Recommendation 19.** The Committee recommends that a requirement for Members to be responsible employers is included in the Code of Conduct, with

amendments to the Guidance on the Code of Conduct to reflect the expectations on Members in this regard.

**Recommendation 20.** The Committee recommends that Party Leaders in the next Senedd consider either jointly or on a party basis, establishing an employers' forum to facilitate open discussion of employment practices between Members and support staff, and to share good practice. This would allow for more structured engagement with the unions representing support staff and could be utilised to agree an approach to potential recognition and facility time for those representing Support Staff unions.

## Annex 1: List of oral evidence sessions.

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed on the Committee’s website.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name and Organisation</b>
<b>1 April 2025 and 19 January 2026</b>	<b>Douglas Bain,</b> Commissioner for Standards
<b>28 April 2025</b>	<b>Shavanah Taj, General Secretary,</b> Wales Trades Union Congress
<b>2 June 2025</b>	<b>Annmarie Brown, Programmes Co-ordinator,</b> Women’s Equality Network <b>Hannah Stevens, Chief Executive,</b> Elect Her <b>Dr Natasha Mulvihill,</b> University of Bristol <b>Jane Runeckles,</b> FDA Union
<b>9 June 2025</b>	<b>Tegan Davies,</b> Former Welsh Youth Parliament Member <b>Roan Goulden,</b> Former Welsh Youth Parliament Member
<b>12 May 2025</b>	<b>Anthony Cooper, Head of Office,</b> Welsh Labour <b>Francess Ifan, Chief of Staff,</b> Plaid Cymru <b>David TC Davies, Chief of Staff,</b> Welsh Conservatives
<b>17 June 2025</b>	<b>Manon Antoniazzi, Chief Executive and Clerk,</b> Senedd Cymru <b>Matthew Richards, Director of Senedd Business,</b> Senedd Cymru

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name and Organisation</b>
	<b>Leanne Baker, Chief People Officer,</b> Senedd Cymru
<b>23 June 2025</b>	<b>Angela Lewis, Director of Culture Change,</b> Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust
<b>15 July 2025</b>	<b>Laura Murton,</b> Unite Union <b>Ed Stubbs,</b> Unite Union <b>Osian Evans,</b> PCS Union

## Annex 2: List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All Consultation responses and additional written information can be viewed on the Committee's website.

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
<b>ICP01</b>	Douglas Bain, Standards Commissioner
<b>ICP02</b>	Elect Her
<b>ICP03</b>	FDA
<b>ICP04</b>	Natasha Mulvihill, Bristol University
<b>ICP05</b>	Plaid Cymru PCS
<b>ICP06</b>	Race Council Cymru
<b>ICP07</b>	Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd
<b>ICP08</b>	Welsh Labour Group Office
<b>ICP09</b>	Unite Union
<b>ICP10</b>	Manon Antoniazzi, Chief Executive and Clerk of the Senedd
<b>ICP11</b>	The Rt. Hon. Elin Jones MS, Llywydd
<b>ICP12</b>	Family-Friendly and Inclusive Parliamentary Review Board, Senedd Cymru
<b>ICP13</b>	Public Service Ombudsman Wales
<b>ICP14</b>	Georgia Miggins, former Youth Parliament Member